

# witches & pagans

Earthwise Spirituality for Today

A Witch at  
Large: the  
Broomstick  
Adventures of  
**M. MACHA  
NIGHTMARE**

## *the* **MAGICK** *of* **AIR**

Making Sense of Magickal Learning · Guide to 22 Online Schools  
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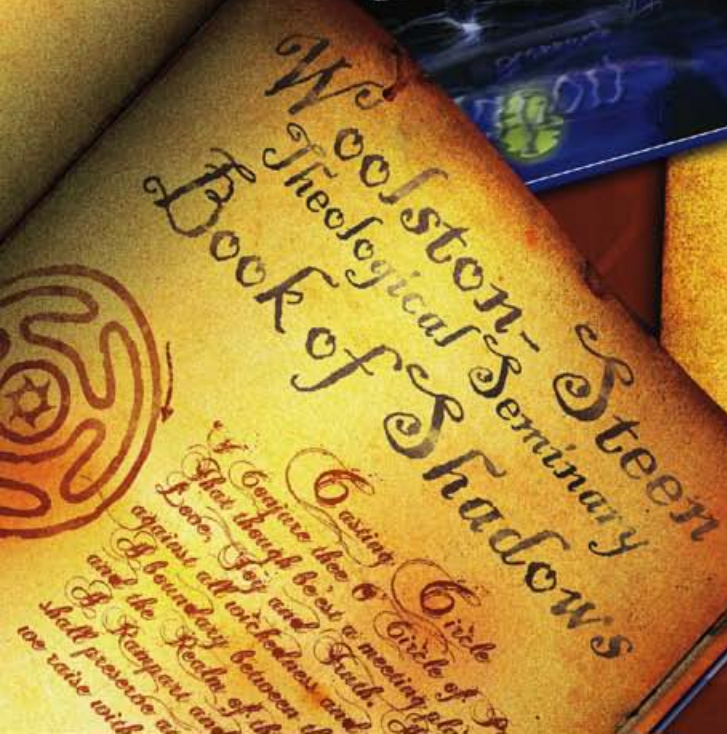
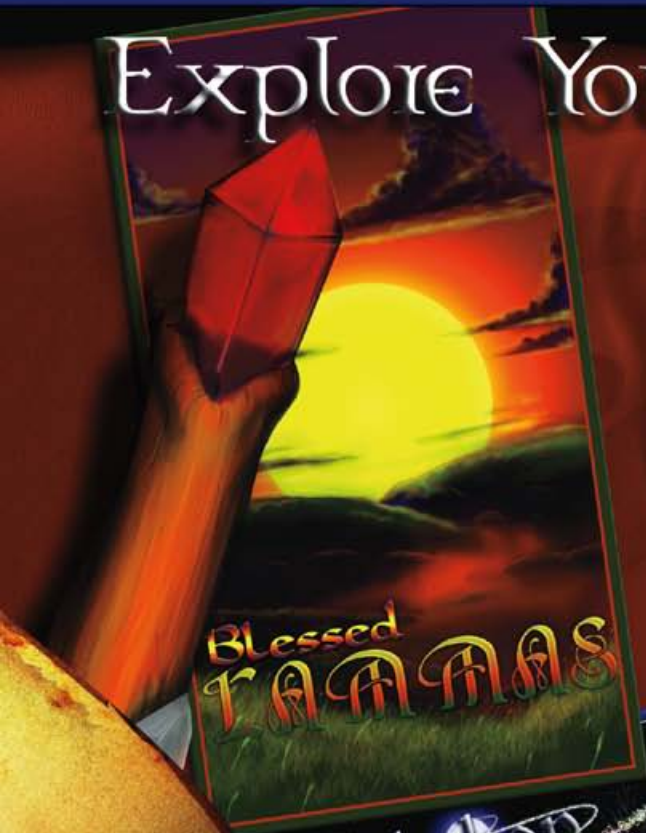
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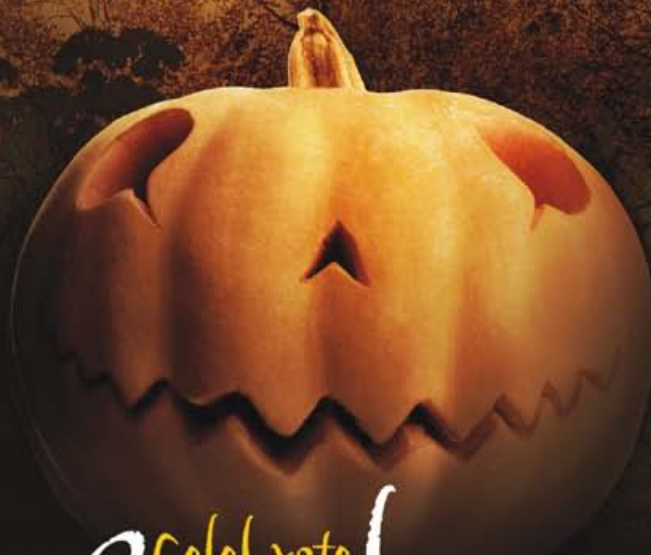


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## witches&pagans

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## An “Airhead” Comes to the Goddess

From the breath in our lungs to the towers of academe, Air affects us all.

The element of Air has a wide range of associations in modern neo-Pagan usage: it is the element of new beginnings, of flying/feathered creatures, and of the mind. In my personal West-Coast eclectic practice, Air is also associated with the direction of the East. Above all, to me, Air represents the qualities of all things ordered and classified by the intellect. Its emblematic tool is the athame — the ceremonial black-handled, double-bladed, unsharpened ritual dagger of Wiccan regalia — which represents the “sharpness” of the well-disciplined mind.

As a native “Airhead” (my sun and Mars are both in Libra, with my moon in Gemini) religion has long been an intellectual obsession. Even as a child, my tendency to argue and joust over points of theology got me into trouble. (In fact, my first skirmish with fundamentalism happened in third grade, when I got my whole family bounced out of a church for arguing theology with my Sunday School teacher.)

This fascination with religion led me on a merry chase from middle-of-the-road Protestantism through C.S. Lewis-influenced Anglicism to the progressive wing of the United Methodist church. That was where the Goddess found me, deep in the bowels of the Graduate Theological Union library on “Holy Hill” in Berkeley in the fall of 1985.

Although I discovered contemporary Paganism while cataloging obscure occult magazines (Fate, thy middle name is Irony), I was swept up into the embrace of the Goddess, not through my mind, but through my senses, emotions, and intuition. The Paganism I encountered, both in literature and face-to-face was rich, juicy, and filled with more “smells and bells” than any High Church Mass. I quickly embraced the trappings of the new convert: daily spellwork, an obsession with divination (which I used for even the most trivial decision), constant listening to Pagan music, and attendance at every ritual I could find. I was, in a word, infatuated.

Like any new lover, eventually my ardor cooled and the relationship mellowed. One of the first things to go was my desire to meet with other Pagans in circle, and as a result I’ve been mostly solitary for the past quarter-century, communicating with the wider Pagan community at a distance. Postal letters and phone calls have gradually given way to email and social media, but the underlying

pattern has remained: I work and play with others at a distance. This self-imposed exile cuts both ways (in true athame-like fashion), and I often worry about whether I’m out-of-touch with the wider Pagan community. Fortunately, the God/dess seems to appreciate my work, and sends us myriads of material that ensures I’m constantly kept in touch with what is bubbling up in our myriad communities.

This issue is a case in point. When I announced a four-issue series based on the classical Wiccan elements, I had a pretty good idea what would comprise the Fire and Earth issues — but was flummoxed about Air and Water. (Hear that, potential contributors? “Water” is still wide open!) But to my delight the offerings that our dedicated contributors offered up for this issue are a wonderful smorgasbord of the myriad aspects of Air, ranging from academic pedagogy to the simple act of breathing. What a delectable feast!

Beginning at the end, **Monte Plaisance** relates the epiphany and initiation that led him to Hellenistic polytheism in “Dying into Life.” His unalloyed joy at finding his true path touches the core of intuitive “rightness” that characterizes the experience of so many of us who convert to Paganism as adults. This same sense of “coming home” is reflected in the loamy, grounded richness that **Sarah Lawless** brings to her account of finding her avocation — collecting feathers and honoring the spirits of the birds that give them — in our first feature article “The Girl Who Found a Feather.” Enthusiasm for the winged denizens of Air likewise fills **Aynia Torres’** tale of how companion birds influence her practice in “Feathered Familiars.”

Moving from the literal aspects of flying to the metaphorical ones, I am thrilled to present **Michael Night Sky’s** interview with **M. Macha NightMare**. Macha, who has been “on the broomstick circuit” for the better part of thirty years, is known for her unmatched networking and organizational skills as well as for her leadership in the progressive, politically-active forms of Paganism characterized by the Reclaiming tradition. I’ve been trying to nail down an interview with Macha since 2007 (!) but until now, the Fates conspired against it. I’m happy to say that They finally relented, and Macha’s piercing intellect and willingness to speak truth to power comes through in this captivating interview.

Also crossed-off my to-do list with this issue is a topic so large it’s taken us seven years to complete: online magickal learning. Tireless reporter **Kira Nuit** contacted dozens of schools, students, and faculty to research “Seeking Wisdom: Making Sense of Online Education.” Kira adroitly outlines the complexities of this ubiquitous form of education, plus offers potential students a directory of almost two-dozen schools, academies, and seminaries.

Moving from the point-of-view of the student to that of the teacher, **Christine Hoff Kraemer** and **Sierra Black** delve deeply into the many modes — personal, coven-based, community, and online — of magical pedagogy with “The Teacher Shall Appear.”

An oft-overlooked way of interacting with the Element of Air is revealed by **Diotima Mantinea’s** discourse (with helpful exercises to put into practice) in “The Power of Air.” We’re also featuring the first of four articles on the elemental magic of cooking by chef **Dawn Hunt**, a rollicking tale of an unusual festival encounter by **Eric O. Scott**, five poetic evocations of Air, a visit with chant mistress and musician **Kelliana**, and an Air “makeover” from **Tess Whitehurst**. Plus **Archer** meditates on the practice of spiritual veiling, **Ashleen O’Gaea** and **Kenaz Filan** advise us to look to children for wisdom, **Galina Krasskova** reminds us of the power of the elemental nations, **Ruby Sara** muses on the magick of weather, and **Deborah Blake** teaches us simple ways to connect with Air.

As Air is the element of new beginnings, I’m very excited to introduce new columns from three of the most captivating people on the Pagan scene. I was introduced to inveterate trickster, Craft pioneer and Pagan scholar **Fritz Muntean** on an e-list. One thing led to another and pretty soon I had roped Fritz out of semi-retirement and into our pages. Fritz is one of West Coast Paganism’s true originals, and we are pleased to share his wisdom with our readers with his column, “The Crafty Curmudgeon.”

Prolific author and lecturer **Raven Grimassi** and I have been working on a column since the days when *PanGaia* and *newWitch* were still separate magazines. Many of our readers tell us that they are looking for a more rooted, earthy spiritual practice: less flash and glitter, and more “dirt” magick. With “Old World Witchcraft” Raven delivers the goods with an uniquely valuable resource in these chaotic times.

I've also been a fan of **Hecate Demetersdatter** for some time; her cogent, lyrical, and level-headed commentary on current events, politics, and earth religions from her perch near the Potomac so charmed me that asked her to write for us.

In response to my request, she not only offered us her new column "Looking for Trouble," but she also became one of the first writers to join our newly-launched network of bloggers at PaganSquare, a gathering place that is part of our newly-reinvigorated *Witches&Pagans* website. At both *WitchesandPagans.com* and *PaganSquare.com* we are hoping to present dozens, even hundreds, of Pagan, Heathen, Wiccan and polytheist voices from around the world. Now *that's* what I call a project worthy of the mercurial, fascinating, element of Air! I hope to see you there. ANNE NEWKIRK NIVEN. ✦



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**WRITERS AND INTERVIEWERS**

**AYNIA** ("Feathered Familiars") lives in Northern California with her Mate and menagerie of animal children. Her Paganism has been a personal journey since she was ten winters, eclectic by her very nature, and she has always embraced being different. Difference makes you who you are, and life would be terribly boring without it.



**SIERRA BLACK** ("The Teacher will Appear") is a Witch, a Priestess, and a teacher in the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft, and participates in magical activism with the Pagan Cluster and in her community near Boston.



A religious studies scholar specializing in contemporary Paganism, sexuality, literature, and popular culture **CHRISTINE HOFF KRAEMER, PH.D.**, ("The Teacher will Appear") chairs the Theology and Religious History department at Cherry Hill Seminary, where she has recently taught courses on Contemporary Global Paganisms and Pagan Theology. Her current project is a book exploring a Pagan theology of touch. Christine lives in the Boston, Massachusetts area.



Chef, writer, and entrepreneur **DAWN HUNT** ("The Witches' Spoon") is the founder of Cucina Aurora Kitchen Witchery in Salem, New Hampshire. She teaches classes on Kitchen Witchery and food Magic locally and gives workshops all along the East Coast. She is the author of the *Cucina Aurora Cookbook* and *Tastes of the Temple*. She and her husband, Justin, live in the Merrimack Valley in Massachusetts. For more information visit Dawn at [www.CucinaAurora.com](http://www.CucinaAurora.com).



"The Witch of Forest Grove," **SARAH LAWLESS**, is an artist, storyteller, wild witch, and amateur ethnobotanist and folklorist living on the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada.



Interviewer **MICHAEL NIGHT SKY** ("A Witch at Large") is a Witch and student of Magick, Red Priest with the Circle of the Heartbeat's Drum, and a longtime contributor to *Witches&Pagans*. He lives near San Diego.

**DIOTIMA MANTINEIA** ("The Power of Breath") is an astrologer with a path rooted in the Western mystery traditions, the principles of Yoga, and a profound connection with the natural world. Find her at [uraniawell.com](http://uraniawell.com) and *PaganSquare.com*.



**KIRA NUIT** ("Seeking Wisdom") is a witch and writer living in the heart of Central Texas. She writes about mindful parenting at *Earth Mama Prime* (<http://earthmamaprime.com/>) and spiritual pregnancy at *Pagan Families* (<http://paganfamilies.com>).

Interviewer **TIM SCHNEIDER** ("Kelliana") is a Northern Tradition shaman and priest. His passions include writing, martial arts, and sustainable living. See his blog at [Sarenth.wordpress.com](http://Sarenth.wordpress.com).



**ERIC O. SCOTT** ("The Snake and the Panda") writes fiction and memoir about second-generation paganism. He is a Contributing Editor to *Killing the Buddha* and blogs for *PaganSquare*. ✦



**FRITZ WANTS THE FIRST WORD**

Dear *Witches & Pagans*,

Your “Heathens & Northern Traditions” (#24) issue is a delight! What an enormous amount of editorial work it must have been, pulling together all the disparate strains of modern Heathenry into so coherent a whole. I’m still working my way through it, and so far I’ve learned something new on nearly every page.

I found the final article, “Why I’m Not Heathen,” by (the intrepid and audacious) Raven Kaldera, especially interesting. It got me thinking about how much we can learn about different cultures — past and present — from the way they regard the gods of their native pantheons, especially those deities known for their cunning and craftiness.

Neal Stephenson, the author of *Cryptonomicon* (1999), *The Baroque Cycle* (2003-04), and *Anathem* (2008), has observed that cunning people have an almost universal tendency to attain power that non-cunning people do not. Cultures find this disparity fascinating, but react to it in different ways. For example, many Native American peoples basically admired their trickster gods, like Coyote and Raven, but regarded them with some hesitancy and suspicion; Tony Hillerman’s novel *Coyote Waits* (1990). In Norse mythology, as Kaldera notes, the trickster god Loki was the closest thing they had to the Christian Devil, and this is one source of his discomfort with modern Heathenry.

Both these examples may depend on these cultures’ attitude toward technology. This is especially obvious in contrast to the high value that Classical Greek culture placed on its own deity of cunning and craftiness, the goddess Athena. As the goddess who supported and advised successful warriors like Heracles and Odysseus (he’s the guy who came up with the idea of the Trojan Horse), she’s the goddess of warfare won by tactical cunning. Today we think of Athena as the goddess of scholarship and technology. In our modern world, you might consider her the patron deity of academics — as well as hackers, techies, nerds, and geeks.

Since our own culture is made up of strains of belief from all these diverse sources, this may help explain our conflicted love-hate relationship with scholars and techies.

Pre-contact Native Americans liked their trickster gods, but they’d never coupled this notion with the idea of technological development. And to judge from their mythology, the Vikings would have instinctively hated academics and geeks. But the Greeks were different — they loved their techies. The Norse identified their own trickster god as a kind of Devil, but the capital city of ancient Greece was (and remains) named for the deity of cunning, and the temple of Athena still dominates the landscape of modern Athens.

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### Heart of the Sun: An Anthology in Exaltation of Sekhmet

By  
Candace Kant  
and Anne Key

This anthology gives an intriguing glimpse of Sekhmet's many guises as seen through multiple ways of knowing. Academic and personal essays, ritual, meditation, art, and poetry, combine to reveal a distinct picture of Sekhmet to each reader.



### Desert Priestess: a memoir By Anne Key

This memoir recounts the three years Anne Key spent as priestess at the Temple of Goddess Spirituality Dedicated to Sekhmet in Nevada. Beginning with her first rituals, the story interweaves the daily duties of the priestess, contact with temple visitors, and appreciation for the natural beauty of the desert. Part spiritual memoir, part nature writing, and part religious philosophical exploration, this book evokes the unique experiences of a 21st century priestess.



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This is one important reason why I, as both a scholar and a geek, am so much more comfortable with those strains of Contemporary Paganism that are inspired by the art and the literature of the Classical Graeco-Romans.

Likewise, I'm not surprised that some of modern Paganism's more popular varieties, especially the Norse and the Celtic, bear toward their clever and cunning deities an attitude quite similar to that of the Christians. Everything we believe we know about Northern European religions has been filtered through the expectations of those Christian monks who wrote down virtually all the source material on which our understanding of these cultures depend.

Fritz Muntean

#### HEATHENS HAVE THEIR SAY

Dear Witches & Pagans,

Firstly, I would like to congratulate you on a job well done with issue #24, *Heathen and Northern Traditions*. It presented a very balanced and well-researched collection of articles and interviews, which is a feat with such a complex and deep topic.

That said, when I came to the article by Raven Kaldera in "My Path", I have to say I was disappointed with a couple of the statements he made, to wit:

*But in the mainstream of the Heathen community, being a dedicant to Hela was considered in poor taste at best, and, at worst, a sign of outright evil.*

*One of the many growing differences between Pagan and Heathen culture was that there were "good" gods and "evil" gods, and Hela was definitely on the "evil" side as far as they were concerned.*

I understand that everyone that comes into contact with Heathenry has a different experience. As a heathen myself however, I have never known our path to have a "Good versus Evil" dichotomy, let alone to have good or evil deities, merely chaos and order. This perception, to me, reeks of monotheistic dogma. Further, any heathen who has done their homework knows that it is inherently impossible for Hel to be considered evil. According to the lore, anyone who dies of sickness, old age etc, goes to Hel's realm. In fact, Odin's own son goes to her halls when he is killed by accident. I doubt Odin would let Hel have dominion over our (and his) beloved dead if he thought her evil!

It is unfortunate that Kaldera seems to have met some rather misinformed members of the heathen community. However, it is equally unfortunate that he doesn't seem to

realize the reality of the situation, or if he does, says nothing to suggest so. Hail Hel!

Kristin Fowler

Dear Anne Niven,

I want to "thank you" for the beautiful issue (#24) that I just received on the Northern Traditions on behalf of myself and my kindred, the Jarnvidur Clan. I have been a Northern Traditions Pagan for 11 years,

before we even had a named Tradition (For our name I have the deepest gratitude for Raven Kaldera, Galina Krasskova, and the other brave souls taking it on). I found my path while in prison, where I've been since age sixteen (convicted of carjacking) and where I'll be for three more years paying off my weregild to society then, Norms willing, I'll be a free man.

I'm openly bisexual, 100% anti-racism, and not just my patron Goddess, but most of the God/esses of my devotion are giants. So I get no acceptance from Prison Heathen Circles or "Nazitruers," nor do I desire any. I often get angry when people assume that because I'm Northern Traditions and in prison, that I'm a skinhead. White supremacists find no friendship among my kindred and I.

Nevertheless, my clan and I remain strong in our devotion, and we are so grateful to see our traditions displayed and explained so fairly and beautifully in your magazine. We look forward to the day when Heathen, N.T.P., and people of all Neo-Pagan faiths can get together, politics aside, and learn from one another. Division always stunts progression.

I welcome all pen-pals from any Pagan demographic. I am truly hoping to find any Elders or fellow Spirit-Workers from this path who are willing to write and help me and my kindred grow. Thank you, Wassail! May the Ancestors sing of the old ways and may we have the courage to listen.

Write to me at:

Crow c/o Julie Scola  
1652 Bamboo Rain Ave  
Las Vegas, NV 89183



Greetings to all enthusiasts of Northern Traditions,

After reading your issue on Heathenism and Northern Traditions, I felt a need to write you and your audience to convey a couple points in regards to the subject.

First, I was surprised by the omission in all the magazine's references to the masterfully-written book *The Well of Remembrance* by Ralph Metzner. This tome is pricey but well worth the cost. Anyone interested in Heathenry or Northern Traditions and all of their aspects need to read it gives a perspective on the subject worth seeing, especially given Dr. Metzner's ideas on the Aesir/Vanir relationship and its interpretation.

Dr. Metzner also brings up a subject that has burdened many of us for a very long time, and that is the involvement of Hitler and the Nazis with these traditions. Another book that I believe can enrich anyone in Heathen Northern Traditions is *The Mission of the Folk-Souls* by Rudolf Steiner.

I would like to conclude by saying *Witches&Pagans* did a fine job with issue #24 for an overall view of a subject that will bring many years of enjoyment and spiritual growth to those who choose to journey on it.

Tomas DeDanaan

#### ASHLEEN O'GAEA, ANARCHY, AND THE "ODINIST" CONTROVERSY

Dear W&P,

This letter is in response to Ashleen O'Gaea's column in issue #23. I had previously noted Mrs. O'Gaea as one of the few Wiccan writers that speaks with sense, but she sort of let me down. Anarchy may be defined as chaos, but anarchists do not pursue Anarchy, they practice *anarchism*. Big difference. Anarchism reaches back far and wide (ahem... further than Wicca), and some of the truest feminists in history were capital-A Anarchists.

I would like to direct Mrs. O'Gaea to some sources for literature on actual anarchism. The easiest and cheapest (anarchists tend to be anti-copyright anyway) access to good literature is through See Sharp Press, P. O. Box 1731, Tucson, AZ 86702 or [seesharppress.com](http://seesharppress.com), which carries Emma Goldman and Voltaireine de Cleyre, both of whom are strong and sensible feminist anarchists. (I personally suggest de Cleyre). Also of use are the publications of the South Chicago ABC, P.O. Box 721, Homewood, IL 60430.

Mrs. O'Gaea's comments on children are on point as always.

Tyler Gallini

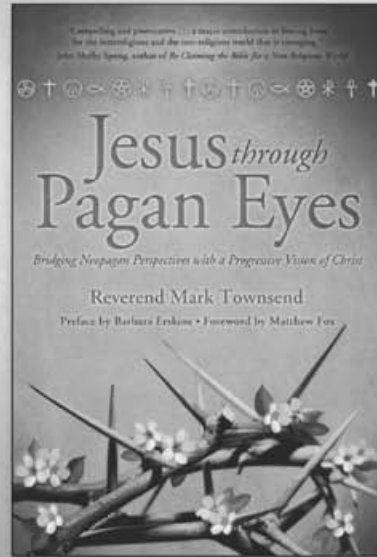
Dear W&P,

I am writing in regard to Ashleen O'Gaea's article "Beyond the Circle" in issue #24. As Lady O'Gaea says, I am "solidly Wiccan." I frequently come into contact with Heathen prisoners who mostly refer to themselves as "Odinist." These people use "Odinism" as a cover for their White Supremacy. Their attitude towards gays, lesbians, transsexuals, and those of another skin color is not only

## "Compelling and provocative ...

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—John Shelby Spong, author of  
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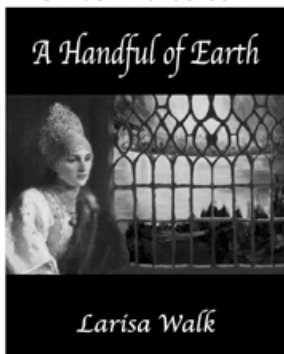
# Traitor or Heroine?



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despicable but also morally wrong. I applaud Lady O'Gaea for her blunt responses to such attitudes.

What can Wiccans do to improve the Wiccan-Heathen relationship? We must propagate tolerance. This means stepping out of our comfort zone and speaking up for what is right and speaking out against discriminatory attitudes and hate. We cannot ignore such a gross perversion of a beautiful religion.

Thank you, Lady O'Gaea, for blazing a trail and standing up for what is right, and thank you, *W&P*, for being a light in our world. Blessed Be!

Michael Dodgers

Dear *W&P*,

Greetings! Let me say at first that I love your magazine and always will. Having said that, let me say that I take high exception to Ashleen O'Gaea's take on "Prison Odinism." It gives the impression that all incarcerated Odinists are racists. That is steadfastly not true! There are many Heathens in our coven inside the razor wire, and they are not racist in the least, and they are accepting of our "minority" members.

Her column also seemed to give the impression that all prisoners are racist. Again, far from the truth! The Gods call who Thy will, and we accept all comers, regardless of any "stigma" others may put on them.

If you are looking for a new term for "Prison Odinists" try an old term: racists! That is what they are, regardless of what they call themselves. Some of the budding fascists in here call themselves "identity Christians" but the mainstream Christians do not accept them; likewise we do not condone or accept racist Pagans, no matter what they call themselves. I do not accept the broad brush as O'Gaea puts forth.

On a side note: I'm looking for mail. I'll answer all letters, positive or negative. My address is:

Don Hensley #1032676, FCC  
1012 W Columbia  
Farmington, MO 63640-2902

Dear *W&P*,

I was recently introduced to your magazine and wished to comment on the Heathen & Northern Tradition issue.

I have witnessed the rise of Odinism in the Florida prison system, which has never been friendly to white supremacists. About fifteen years ago, Odinism began to be adopted by those who wished to be protected by the excuse of religion to justify their racism. I have yet to meet an Odinist in the Florida prison system who isn't racist; Ms. O'Gaea's characterization of them as "racist thugs" is quite accurate.

I also wanted to comment on a couple of other stories. Hats off to Galina Krasskova as profiled in her interview "Claimed by the Gods." I would love to do

rituals with her; she has the fearlessness necessary to invoke the magical forces of the Greater Powers.

I would also like to send my deepest respects to Ruby Sara, author of "Figs and Honey" for spreading news of the plight of the honey bee. Without bees, we will lose a lot more than honey. As Pagans, this is something that should make all of us do all we can to help. I would welcome correspondence on these or other topics.

David Moore #591568, I-1305  
FSP, 7819 NW 228th St  
Raiford, FL 32026

I had the opportunity to read *Witches&Pagans* issue #24, themed "Heathen & Northern Traditions." As an Odinist, I was frustrated and disappointed by the portrayal of Odinism as a racist religion. Odinism is a non-political folk religion of pre-Christian Northern Europe. Odinism is folkish — i.e., the members seek to restrict membership to persons with Northern European backgrounds — but not racist in the sense of preaching that one particular race is superior or inferior to any other.

Diana L. Paxson's article associates Odinism with David Lane's Wotanism. This association of a largely secular, and avowedly racist movement misrepresents Odinism and is highly irresponsible. The former Temple of Wotan — i.e., Lane's Wotanism — categorically refused to consider their movement part of legitimate established movements, such as the Odinic Rite or the Asatru Folk Assembly. Lane himself denied identification with any neopagan religion in his book *Deceived, Damned, and Defiant: The Revolutionary Writings of David Lane* and has identified his religious viewpoint as Deist. Furthermore, Mattias Gardell used the term "ethnic Asatru" in his book *Gods of the Blood: Race, Ethnicity, and the Pagan Revival* to describe the Odinic Rite and the Asatru Folk Assembly and distinguished them from Wotanism. The racial or ethnic principles of Odinism are distinct from those of Wotanism, and it's simply not true that Wotanism is synonymous with Odinism.

Also, contrary to Paxson's misleading portrayal of the three groups she listed in her articles, the racial principles of two of them do in fact correspond with those of Odinism. The Asatru Folk Assembly describes itself as "native spirituality of Western Europe" and calls on "all those of Northern European descent to join it" while the Asatru Alliance states that it is an "ethnic religion of the Northern European peoples and does not welcome people of other backgrounds."

The other article in this issue to mention Odinism, "Beyond the Circle" by Ashleen O'Gaea, speaks against the perversion and demonization of Heathen culture but ironically contributes to this negative and erroneous perception by using the term

"prison Odinism" to describe "racist thugs." O'Gaea herself admits that she "know[s] Odinism is an authentic and proper aspect of Heathenry," yet she still condemns the religion as racist by categorically equating "racist thugs" to Odinism. To her credit, she says the term is imperfect and is open to other ideas. How about call it like it is: a "racist thug" is a "racist thug," rather than demonize an entire religion that does not teach or advocate racism.

Odinism is an authentic revival of pre-Christian Northern European religion which endorses cultural heritage but explicitly rejects racism, acts of violence, or acts which disobey civil authorities. To misrepresent it and perpetuate misconceptions does a real disservice to the Heathen and Pagan community.

With Respect,

Jonathan L. Liebrecht

### LOKI AS A PLUSH TOY?

Dear W&P,

I think your "Heathen and Northern Traditions" issue is the best *Witches & Pagans* so far. Keep up the good work! In view of this, I thought you'd appreciate some notes on how Thor&Co express themselves through pop media other than Marvel.

There is the online comic *Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki* at [www.SGVY.com](http://www.SGVY.com), about a young man obsessed with magic girl anime who gets turned into a valkyrie. In this one Loki is a plush toy. Thor gets to be bearded and red haired in this one; Thor and Frey train Yuuki to fight.

In the online comic *Brat-Halla* ([www.brat-halla.com](http://www.brat-halla.com)), Thor, Sif, Hod, Loki and other Norse gods have overdosed on a pie made from Idunn's apples and have all turned into children. Hod gets some development as the god of darkness, winter and gothic poetry.

The norms Urd, Skuld, and Verdandi are living with a Japanese engineering student in the anime *Ah, My Goddess*. Loki-lovers might enjoy *Mythical Detective Loki: Ragnarok*, in which Loki (exiled to earth) works as a boy detective. The Norse gods also appear in the game *Odin Sphere* and in the *Valkyrie Profile* series. For pencil and dice roleplaying games there's "Viking Age" for *Dungeons & Dragons d20*, while from White-Wolf comes *Scion*, in which the player's characters are the children of the gods. Kind of *Percy Jackson* but not limited to the Greek pantheon.

Speaking of pantheons, I've got the books *Hexcraft* by Silver Ravenwolf; *Hex and Spellwork* by Karl Herr; *American Shamans* by Jack Montgomery; and *The Red Church* by C.R. Bilardi, so I know there is an American folk magic tradition available. Is anyone — Heathen, Neo-Pagan, or Wiccan making use of this tradition?

Anthony Gresham

### WHERE'S WANDERING WITCH?

Dear Anne,

I have been Pagan for fifteen years now, and I have never come across a magazine for our communities that measures up to yours. I love your articles and the topics you cover. I especially love "Wandering Witch" (even though she wasn't in issue #24). Thank you for bringing our community together and making it stronger. Through this magazine, I met two beautiful people who became my penpals, Morainne SilverWolf and her dearly departed husband Rowan. May the gods and goddesses bless each of your contributors and supporters. By the way, new penpals are always welcome.

Lanell Fields #K72891

P O Box 1000

Lincoln, IL 62656

*Editor's note: Wandering Witch is on sabbatical, but she has several installments planned for 2013.*

### THOUGHTS ON THELEMA

I was pleased to see Christian Fitzharris' essay "My Thelema" in *Witches&Pagans* #23. He touched on many important points, made all the more important because the more hermetic paths, especially Thelema, are so rarely visible in mainstream Pagan outlets like *W&P*.

One of the most important comments was the reference to Gardener's plagiarism of *Liber AL vel Legis*, a fact consistently ignored in for-witches-by-witches publications. With full respect for Brother Fitzharris as a star in his own orbit, what type of Thelemite would I be without making the two cents of my own orbit known?

My first bone is with Symonds & Grants "confessions" cited as for further reading for a Crowley biography. I personally suggest the top notch *Perdurabo* by Richard Kaczynski.

My second disagreement is with his comment about the Holy Guardian Angel. One may discover the true will, and complete it without the Angel, and there are different levels of interaction with one's Angel. However, I find that many classify "contact with one's Angel as any interaction."

I would also like to comment on AL I:57, namely "... Love is the law, love under will." Crowley points out in a few different places that "love" is to be taken in the alchemical sense of the natural tendency towards union in a polarized reality. However, for those not pursuant of the hermetic arts (and not all Thelemites are), this may not hold much meaning.

Oh, and the comment that "no one order is accepted by all Thelemites" is true, however I would point out that the OTO has proven beyond a doubt (even in the courts) that as it stands currently, it is directly descendent from Crowley. That fact, in and of

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itself makes the OTO "official," regardless of who may choose to accept it or not. Yet the only thing "official" to a Thelemite when it comes down to it is one's true will and one's Angel.

Love is the law, love under will.

Tyler Gallini

### SHAMANS ARE NOT ADDICTS

Dear W&P,

This letter is in response to the article "Neurotransmitters: A Path to Heaven – or Hell?" by Kenaz Filan in Issue #23. This piece is an unbalanced article that makes little sense. First, there is a huge difference between mystics and shamans, past and present. I was born heathen, I grew up on the warrior's path until I reached a level of maturity in which I could begin serious studies in shamanism.

History has a documented the use of "mind-altering" substances, and these substances were originally natural and plant based; not the cooked-up chemical crap people slam in their veins or shove up their noses. Shamans throughout history were not substance abusers but considered the ecstatic experience sacred to achieve the necessary state of mind to heal or otherwise help their community.

To compare a crackhead selling their body and soul for another hit to the ancient practice of shamanism is deplorable. Chemical manufactured drugs kill people; the instant high produced by such drugs scrambles the brain and negates the primal survival mechanisms and common sense and causes people to act on impulse without thought or regard to their actions. Most drug users possess some sort of anti-social or inferiority complex and use mind-altering substances to avoid reality. Recreational drugs destroy lives because the "recreation" becomes a necessity growing larger and larger until the big crash happens (and it will).

Spiritual drugs (organic-based) can be used in a positive, non-addictive way for two reasons. First, because the action of engaging with these substances is based on a focus (or end) point to achieve a specific result. Second, because shamanic use takes place in a controlled environment which requires some measure of discipline and moderation.

Yes, history is filled with drug users who created works of art, literature, and the like. Most of these individuals were social outcasts, many of whom died in unnatural ways. Bottom line: the unnatural spirits will entice you to join them and then destroy you.

Magick has a power all of its own, and our brains are a natural pharmacy that can meet all of our needs. Taking short-cuts has its rewards, but the losses far outweigh the gains. Egregores are awesome power sources if you need strength to feel

the divine power in a euphoric union. Depression is a state of mind which results when you abuse those little neurotransmitters in the brain — which are nothing more than trillions of emotional filing cabinets.

Each person chooses with his or her will to program what they "want," not the other way around, so be careful what you want or addiction and depression will haunt you. My name is Wolf and I am not an addict.

In Odinn's Name,

Wolf

### RESPONSE TO "HOW TO KNOW A GOOD BOOK"

In response to the letter "How Do I Know a Good Book" by Derak Twyman in *W&P* #24.

Mr. Twyman notes that Buckland states that "Books of Shadows" are green, but that Ravenwolf notes a mention of "Black Books" by witch hunters. Mr. Twyman concludes that this means traditional Books of Shadows were once black but are no more.

This may make sense from Mr. Twyman's current perspective, but it fails because there is a lack of facts underlying the entire premise. "Books of Shadows" are a creation of the last century; there were no "witches" when the so-called witch hunters were getting up to their hunting antics. (They were hunting heretics, not Pagans.) "Black Books" are a reference to the grimoires which were what magical literature consisted of in Europe in that period.

With no disrespect intended, I would like to suggest to Mr. Twyman that ten years of reading books on Wicca by Wiccans might be his problem. Wiccan authors have an appalling trend of weaving fantasy into their narrative to fill their gaps of ignorance, then publishing the resulting hash as fact.

Wicca draws from so many sources that one cannot possibly grasp the contraption that Gardener taped together without studying outside of Wicca. Mr. Twyman is bewildered indeed, thanks to a corps of idiots writing fantasy in order to see their name in print and to the publishers (you know who you are) who encourage them to do so in order to profit from the gullible.

Soror Nipha

**WE LOVE YOUR LETTERS!** Write to: *Witches & Pagans*, P.O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116 or email [www.bbimedia.com/email](http://www.bbimedia.com/email). Letters may be edited for brevity or clarity, and will be published as space permits. Please try to keep letters under 700 words. ✦

## Recipe for a Wind

Calie Voorhis

Should there be a time outside of here,  
A place for the daring and bold to snatch a gale?  
Summer's winds are composed and cavalier,  
Strewn about with the remnants of folktales.

Quiet dragons diminish our love,  
And often winter's ices quench griffin's fires,  
The twisted suitor finds solace in foxglove,  
Amaranthine romance dies in quagmires.

Yet mistral puffs as the muse blows by,  
Myths rise in the spring of hope,  
Frost cannot hold, nor force us to comply,  
When we by our wits refuse to let this die.

Long as we by our heathen side vow,  
Then infinity's breeze we will endow.

*CALIE VOORHIS is a life-long fan of the fantastic. An alumnus of the Odyssey Fantasy Writing Workshop, she is currently completing a MFA degree in Writing Popular Fiction at Seton Hill University.*

## A Summoning Spell

Lorraine Schein

By the howling wind,  
By the restless clouds,  
By the many voices of the air-  
Bring my lover to me.

By the eagle wheeling in the sky,  
By the crow's swift flight,  
By the lark's sweet song-  
Bring my lover to me.

By the bonfire's roaring flames,  
By the candle's small light,  
By the hot fire in my blood  
Bring my lover to me.

*LORRAINE SCHEIN is a New York poet and writer. Her poetry and stories have appeared recently in Melusine, Vallum, Women's Studies Quarterly and the We'Moon calendar. Her poetry chapbook, The Futurist's Mistress, is available from Mayapple Press.*

## Sky Bones

Deborah Walker

Come. With the scent of stone standing  
carved against a sky, edged green,  
fleckered and fast against the ending  
light of the sun, riding hard and small and white in the sky.  
Small bone stones taken from the mountain's age,  
lodged to form our grasping fingers  
emerging from the grass flesh trodden  
with the beat of dancing, hard feet.  
Our hopeful steps.  
Come.

Lady. Sky bones edged in ivy.  
Listen to the plaintive beat of beast,  
the smell on the wind, drifting,  
as smoke from our great prayer pyres.  
Come.

Veiled within the cascade of your green-fingered shine.  
We dance for you, Lady, light to night.

*DEBORAH WALKER lives in London, with her partner, Chris, and her two lovely, yet distracting, young children. It took her almost forty years to start writing, but now she's started she can't seem to stop.*

## Weather-gauge

Hugh Eckert

Will and fate are forces entwined,  
And lay a binding on our lives.  
Call one destiny, or the weight  
Of history, what you will, it  
Seems a whelming, greater power,  
And we helpless before the flood.  
But sailors ken the secrets of such  
Implacable foes, of wind and tide  
Know when to run before the blow,  
Or close-haul and tack, near to the  
Power that would drive them elsewhere.  
Though we may reef sails and fly  
Before the Norns' stormy breath at times,  
We can also carve our lives' courses  
At bold tangent to it, even set  
Our sights on the eye of the wind  
That blows from the Moirae's quarter,  
If we are willing to take the longer,  
Wearier path. We do not always command,  
But we are not always commanded.  
In the tension and the yielding, from sail  
To line to hull to hand on the wheel,  
And the knowledge and the choice we have,  
Lies the lift and the life, lies the Tao.

HUGH ECKERT *is an eclectic Pagan, a minister to his tribe-of-choice, and a student at Cherry Hill Seminary.*

## Elements of Air

Chris Hicks

The final element we lose in life:  
The element lithe, strong when prevailing  
Stalwart bearer of fine golden flour  
The element transforms when unyielding  
Stalwart bearer who wears away land, pain

The final element we lose in life:  
The element first given us at birth  
Pure, but itself an amalgamation

This element alone, no matter where  
we leave this time, or how caparisoned,  
lives closest, equally adorns us all,  
leaves briefly, returning transformation  
This, the final element lost in life:  
Withers us to earth, offers us to the next  
As the first element bestowed in life

CHRIS HICKS *is based in Maryland. His poetry is a gift basket of tones and topics thanks to a Mad sense of humor and an E. A. Poe joie de vivre. Find his work in a variety of publications: A&U Magazine, Witches&Pagans, Andromeda Spaceways, and Lissette's, among others. For more information visit: <https://sites.google.com/site/writeceh/>*

Cooking for magickal purposes is not new; indeed, the very archetype of the “medicine woman” or “wise one” who would boil up a brew in the cauldron to heal a broken heart, or conceive a child describes the essential path of home-style magick. We who call ourselves “Kitchen Witches” today strive to understand both the healing powers of food and the innate magickal properties of our ingredients. It’s no wonder that the cauldron — really, just a cast-iron pot — is a symbol of both cookery and spellwork! We Kitchen Witches (aka Hearth or Cottage Witches) practice creating ritual around cooking preparation as well as staying connected to Mother Earth through food.

## Cooking with the Elements

Cooking with the elements allows a great deal of room for interpretation, and it doesn’t have to be relegated to ritual feasts, either. For example, let’s say you are just rushing around to get dinner prepared before you have to run out and pick up the kids from soccer practice. When adding a dash of salt to your taco meat, take a moment to focus on the element of Earth (which is the element associated with salt) and whisper a quick “Goddess ground me!” With that simple act, a dash of grounding, warming, Earth power as been added to your meal.

Every food has its own elemental correlation. Just like every direction (North, South, East, West) has an element associated with it, so does each ingredient. Hot peppers, for instance, are associated with the element of Fire — which should come as no surprise to anyone who has been brave enough to eat one! A dash of crushed red pepper in your tomato sauce can change the elemental magick from tender loving comfort food to hot and steamy romance in a jiffy. Knowing the elemental associations, and using ingredients with intention are the key. Cooking, preparing, or eating food with the proper mindfulness and intention is how we unlock the power of the elements within.

## Breathe Deep: Connecting to the Power of Air

Let’s begin in the East with the element of Air. The East is where the Sun rises, and the day begins. Air fills our lungs and breathes life into our every movement. Although we cannot see it or hold it in our hands. Air has many essential qualities. Air is the element of communication, wisdom, and the soul. We breathe in and out every moment of every day and never really think too much about it until something, like a cold or cough prevents it from going smoothly.

Air is connected directly to food through the oxygen-

carbon dioxide cycle that unites animal and plant life on Earth. To work with elemental Air energy in the kitchen, the first step is realizing this connection. As with any magickal work, mindfulness is key to cooking with Air energy. Create a space in your kitchen that is meant for sacred objects, an altar of sorts. Make sure you take a few moments to clean the space and clear any clutter before you begin. Bring the Element of Air into that space by placing a small live potted plant there. A culinary herb like Rosemary, Basil or Parsley would be very nice in this case. Take a moment with your plant and meditate on the link of breath between you; inhale its aroma deep in your lungs and then exhale all the air in your lungs; let it flow over the plant, knowing that you are sending life-giving CO<sub>2</sub> from your body, and that the cycle between you is complete.

## What Foods Invoke Air Energy?

All foods connected with communication, and wisdom are ruled by the element of Air. Ingredients that help to carry away strife, enable us to stay strong in our conscious minds, and are conduits for positive energy belong to this element. Although the following foods are associated with Air, it is important to note that is not simply enough to use “airy” ingredients to invoke the Power of Air. You must prepare them

with visualization and intention. As with any magickal work, the importance of intention should always be to “harm none.”

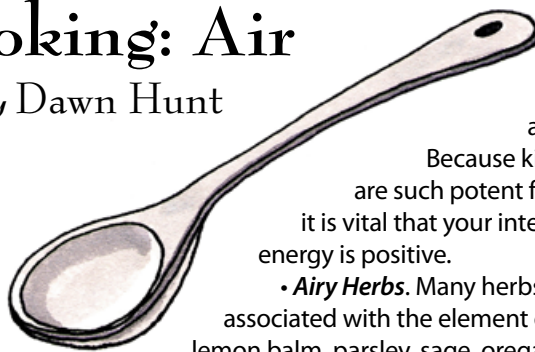
Because kitchen and food magick are such potent forms of energy work, it is vital that your intention is clear and your energy is positive.

• **Airy Herbs.** Many herbs and spices are associated with the element of Air: marjoram, lemon balm, parsley, sage, oregano, and mint, to name a few. These herbs are associated with Air mostly due to their communicative properties. However, sage also carries the power of wisdom as well as opening of the conscious mind. Lemon balm, parsley, and mint are all herbs that are associated with purification, detoxification, and comfort. Oregano and marjoram are energetically similar and useful for promoting a peaceful mind, body, and spirit.

• **Airy Rice and Beans.** Rice is another food associated with Air. Although it comes in a variety of flavors, textures, and breeds, all rice, (from brown to wild to the creamy Italian Risotto) holds the elemental property of Air. This easy-to-cook grain can be tossed in soups, stuffed into chicken or peppers for a main dish, eaten puffed as a breakfast cereal, or rolled and seasoned for sushi. In all its forms, rice carries the

# Kitchen Witchery & Elemental Cooking: Air

by Dawn Hunt



power of prosperity and is money-drawing. Similar to rice energetically, legumes like lentils are also Air foods and good for money magick. One quick suggestion: the next time you do a money spell, make a soup with lentils and brown rice the same day; as you stir the soup draw money symbols (dollar signs or whatever currency you desire!) into the mixture as you repeat the words of your spell. This will unlock the money-drawing characteristics of the rice and lentils to boost the power of your spell!

• **Birds of a Feather.** Chicken, turkey and other fowl such as duck, quail and hen are naturally associated with Air. Birds have a kinship with Air and Wind that we gravity-bound humans rarely, if ever, understand. The magickal properties of birds as food are those of health and well-being. (Think of the association of healing with homemade chicken soup.)

### Bringing Air into Your Kitchen

A great way to bring the Element of Air into your home is to have an "Air" Potluck. Invite your guests to bring a dish made with ingredients associated with the Element of Air (you might want to give them a list.) Use a guided meditation about Air which focuses on breathing (see "The Power of Breath" elsewhere in this issue) to raise energy and direct it into the feast. At the completion of the ritual, enjoy the food and discuss the intention and ingredients in all of the dishes.

When cooking, take a moment to breathe in the scents of these dishes, and to reflect on the magick of open communication between yourself and those who will share this meal with you. Focus on your throat chakra and open up to the Air in your lungs; envisioning blue light at your throat. Face the East and thank the universe for the simple gift of breathing. Here's two Airy recipes to get you on your way!

### Cornish Hens with Apricot Glaze and Wild Rice Pilaf Stuffing

- 4 Cornish game hens
- 2 c. cooked wild rice
- 1 c. cooked brown rice
- 1 c. cooked red lentils
- 2 T. olive oil
- ½ large onion, chopped fine
- 3 cloves garlic minced
- 3 ribs celery, sliced
- 1 T. fresh rosemary
- 1 T. fresh parsley
- 1 T. fresh sage
- 1 c. golden raisins
- 1 c. toasted chopped pecans
- 2 T. apricot preserves
- Sea Salt and Ground Black pepper to taste

For the Glaze:

- 1 cup apricot preserves
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 2 Tablespoons brown sugar
- Dried apricots

Preheat oven to 350°; clean and wash Cornish Hens and set in large baking pan. Heat olive oil in a large sauce pot. Add onions, garlic and celery to the oil and sauté stirring until onions are just tender but not browned. Add the rosemary, parsley, and sage. Add the apricot preserves and let melt. Turn down the heat to very low and add the cooked rice, lentils, raisins, and pecans; add salt and pepper to taste and toss to coat. If the mixture seems dry add a bit more olive oil and remove from heat. Stuff the Cornish hens with the rice mixture (put leftovers aside to serve on the side.)

For sauce: in a small sauce pan, combine 1 cup apricot preserves, orange juice and brown sugar. Stir on medium high heat until the mixture is smooth. Drizzle over the hens and place a few dried apricots on the top of the hens to decorate. Cover with foil and bake for an hour to an hour and a half until hens are cooked through. (Do not overcook.) Serve with the remaining wild rice stuffing and your choice of green vegetable.

### Sage Lentils with Mushrooms over Brown Rice

- 2 T. olive oil
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 t. powdered sage
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lb. fresh button mushrooms, sliced
- 1 c. cooked lentils (Du Puy or French lentils are best)
- 2 T. chopped fresh sage
- 2 T. chopped fresh parsley
- 2 T. dry white wine (optional)
- Sea salt and ground pepper to taste
- 2 c. cooked brown rice

In a large skillet, heat oil; add onions and garlic and sauté until just starting to soften, about 3-5 minutes. Add mushrooms and saute on medium high heat until mushrooms are reduced in size and a watery sauce begins to form. Add lentils, sage, parsley and wine (if using.) Cook, stirring frequently, until most of the liquid evaporates; add salt and pepper to taste, and serve over brown rice. ♦

Recipes © Dawn Hunt, Cucina Aurora Corp 2012



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The air was so thick that even while sitting still, I wanted to wipe my forehead every fifteen seconds. Too bad — that would have ruined my makeup, thick black and white greasepaint. The sweat welled up all over my body, seeping into my black sweater, my black pants, my black socks. Four hundred people came to the Heartland Pagan Festival so they could spend Memorial Day naked, and I chose to wear a sweatsuit.

I sat along a trail in the camp's woods, waiting for my next visitor. At my spot sat a pair of lit tiki torches, a bag of supplies — animal crackers, water bottle, a flashlight that didn't work. I tried to nibble on some grass to get into character, but it didn't take long before I went back to animal crackers.

My name is Eric, and I am a giant panda.

Let me explain: it was my friend Sarah's fault. She became the festival's Rites of Passage chairperson a few years ago, which meant that she found herself in charge of the Vision Quest. She likes to do themed quests: one year everybody was a Tarot card, another year, all the zodiac signs. This year we were animals. My friend Joe sat in a tree a little way down the path in an owl costume made from feathers and PVC-pipe wings. A quarter of the mile past me, his brother Alaric waited, wearing stag's horns. In between? Me, the panda.

I'll be honest: although it's Sarah's pet project, I've always thought Vision Quests and all those kinds of rituals were a little tacky. I only participated because Sarah regularly saved me from starving to death. (Well, also because it got me into the festival for free.) But I didn't think much of it: pagans walking through the woods, running into people in goofy costumes spouting canned insights. It didn't seem terribly magical to me.

I chose Taoism as my schtick — I couldn't think of anything better for a panda to say. I asked people to tell me about the unknowns in their lives, and used that to talk about the importance of mystery. I had strange answers to my questions: people telling me about their frigid wives and their separated husbands and their unrealized dreams. I did my best to support them, but frankly, I wished they had told these things to a psychiatrist instead of a 23-year-old in a bear suit.

I looked up the path and saw a woman in a green sarong enter the grove's torchlight: coppery hair, hips like Innana. Her eyes adjusted to the firelight, and she grinned. "Why hello, Mr. Raccoon."

I recognized her, though it took me a moment, because the last time I saw her, she hadn't been wearing anything but a snake.



## The Snake & the Panda

*memoir by*

Eric O. Scott

You could identify people at the bonfire by their clothes. The clothed drummers pounded hides at the edge of the circle, far enough out that the air stayed cold. The naked dancers spun and twirled around the fire. I saw a black-haired woman spinning veils around her body, while a bald man leapt in the air, his pirouettes mirrored by his comically large penis.

I frowned as I watched them from the edge of the circle. In my family's coven, we were taught to keep quiet about religion. "If they knew" — and "they" could be anybody — "they would take you away," our parents told us. To this day Sarah's family pretends to be Lutheran. Yet here, in the middle of Kansas, home of Westboro Baptist Church, sits Camp Gaea. Unreal.

A new dancer entered the circle, and I found myself unable to do anything but stare. I watched her, transfixed, not because she was beautiful — Heartland does not lack for beautiful women — and not because she was naked, either. I watched her, watched the Willendorf-roundness of her body, half-hidden in fiery chiaroscuro, because she had a snake hanging from her shoulders. She danced with slow rolls of her hips, with unpredictable hand-signals.

I wanted to know her name. I wanted to know everything to know about her. I resolved to jump in next to her and say something. I would do it after she made three cycles around the fire. After six.

I'd do it after twelve.

"Welcome to my grove," I said, in an affected Chinese accent. "We should start with a question. What's something you don't understand?"

"Something I don't understand?" She thought about it for a moment. "My god," she said. "I don't know if I believe the right things about my god."

"Who is your god?"

She pursed her lips. I knew that look; I'd given it myself. *I'm afraid you'll judge me.* I didn't know what she could believe in that she thought I'd be offended by, though; this festival had a featured workshop on "kink magick," for the gods' sake.

"It's okay," I said. "Tell me."

She sighed. "Jesus."

At first, I thought she was cursing.

"You're a Christian?" I remembered the curving sway of her hips before the firelight, and could not picture her kneeling before a cross.

"I've never been to one of these festivals before," she explained. "One of my friends is kind of a Wiccan and she convinced me to go. But... Well." She paused. "I'm not supposed to like it, am I? It's pagan, and I'm not. Does that make sense?"

Pagans have this conversation all the time. Kids read *To Ride a Silver Broomstick* in middle school and think it'll piss off their parents, so they decide to become genuine Witches. And they always want permission. They want somebody to say it's okay to worship the Goddess, whether it's an author, a coven, or another 13-year-old with a pentagram. But this was backwards — the Christian asking the pagan if it was okay that she followed Christ.

Part of me didn't believe it. The panda told that part to shut up.

"Jesus loves you, right?" I said, taking her hand into my gloved paw. "Don't worry about it. Believe what you want to believe."

I meant it. I knew pagans who wore shirts with crossed-out crucifixes, who cheered when Lord Summerisle burned Sergeant Howie to death in *The Wicker Man*. I understood what it was like to be

surrounded by people who said you believed the wrong things. I wanted her to know it didn't matter to me.

"Don't worry about being on the right path," I said. "You make a path by walking it."

She looked at me and leaned in to kiss my black nose. I didn't worry about her smudging the make-up.

"Thank you," she said. "You're a helpful raccoon, you know that?"

She left. A moment later, a Rites of Passage member appeared, carrying a clipboard. "Hey, panda," he said. "I know you're trying to give everybody their spiritual revelation here, but could you pick it up a bit? We're getting backed up at the owl."



Nobody noticed me sitting on the stairs near the shower-house. They walked by, in their jeans or their sarongs, up to the fire or Leather Lane. I didn't say anything to them. My mind was far away, across the ocean, in Kazakhstan, believe it or not.

I had broken up with my girlfriend just a few weeks before. The Peace Corps had sent her across the world to Kazakhstan last November. We counted the time zones: she was on exactly the opposite side of the world. We made phone calls and sent emails, but that kind of distance wears you away. When the break finally came, it happened in one three-hour phone call mostly made of silence.

For the better part of two years I had been in a kind of romantic limbo — all I wanted then was to be free. Now I had my freedom, and the company of hundreds of sexually-liberated women, too.

I'd never felt more alone.

I heard a voice from behind. "What are you doing in the dark, Mr. Raccoon?"

The Snake Dancer still wore the green sarong I'd seen her in while she walked the trail; her kinky, copper hair still dripped from the showers.

"Meditating." Kind of the truth. "What are you doing?"

"Going to Herne's Hollow. Also to meditate, actually."

I nodded. "You know, I wasn't really a raccoon," I said. "I guess it was hard to tell in the dark. I was a giant panda."

She looked horrified. "Oh my God. I didn't — why didn't you say anything?"

"Would you have preferred I mauled you?"

The horror shifted into laughter. "Oh God," she said — and I knew which God she meant. "I'm so sorry." She caught her breath. "Though you really were a helpful raccoon. I meant that."

I'm not sure I've ever received a stranger compliment. "Anything you got out of it came from you, though. I don't think most people would have been brave enough to admit anything about Jesus here."

"I have trouble talking about it to Christians too," she said. "They don't always approve of what I do, either."

"Like the snake dancing?"

She sat down. "Yeah. Like that."

We talked, trading stories of our beliefs. She told me that she thought of Jesus as a trickster, more Dionysus than Apollo; I told her about Thor and the Nine Worlds. She told me about belly dancing in an Afghani restaurant in St. Louis; I told her about graduate school in Kansas City. We passed our lives back and forth like children playing tag.

"So what were you going down to Herne's Hollow for?" I asked, after an hour or so.

"To talk to Jesus." She smiled, self-consciously. "That still sounds strange. Going to a place named for

one of your gods to talk to mine...” She looked off toward the Hollow. “If I’m going to do that, I should go. It’s got to be two in the morning.”

“Could I come with you?” I asked, thinking about Herne’s Hollow, dedicated to Holy Manhood, full of phallic vigor. I pictured entering the Hollow with a beautiful woman, turning to kiss her, more than kiss her, there, under the moonlight —

“No,” she said. “It’s something I need to do myself.”

I called after her before she got far. “Hey,” I said, “I never told you my name.”

She looked back. “Well, not past Mr. Raccoon, anyway,” she lilted.

“Eric,” I said.

“Maria.” Then she put her finger on her chin and reconsidered.

“Mimi.” And then she kept walking.



Late on Sunday night it started to rain. We were lucky this year; usually a tent-destroying rainstorm rolls in on Saturday, but that night a shade-fly sufficed. Mimi and I sat in the campsite called Elysium, eating cantaloupe and warming ourselves by a fire built in a hibachi.

“Are you coming back next year?” I asked her.

“I want to, yes,” she said. She swallowed her cantaloupe. “What about you?”

“I’m pretty much married to it,” I said. “My sister Sarah would drag me here by my hair.”

The drumming had mostly stopped — the rain drove people away from the fire. All around Gaea, people were returning to their campsites, ready to sleep, ready for the morning, when they would pack up and return to their normal lives — wearing work clothes, avoiding any mention of religion, telling their children not to talk

“Hey, Panda,” he said.  
“I know you’re trying to give everybody a revelation here, but can you pick it up a bit? We’re getting backed up at the Owl.”

about the Goddess. Alaric told me that he comes to Heartland for the reprieve from the real world, the world where he has to hide who he is. At Camp Gaea, he can be a pagan among pagans, unafraid.

I wonder what it says about me that the only time I felt that way was in the company of a Christian.

Mimi looked up through the trees. “I don’t think it’s going to let up any time soon. I should go to bed. Long drive in the morning.” She walked over to her tent, a squat thing covered by a brown tarp. I followed her over to say good night.

“It was good to meet you,” said Mimi.

“Good to meet you, too,” I said, and kissed her on the forehead.

“See you next year.”



Alaric was still awake when I got back to camp, trying to keep our little fire going in spite of the rain.

Alaric flashed his imp-grin when he saw me. “Hey, panda-man. What are you doing back here? Where’s that girl you’ve been hanging around all weekend?”

“She had to go to bed,” I said. “Long drive tomorrow.”

He blinked. “And you just let it go at that?” He shook his head and sighed. “I swear, Scott, one of these days you’re going to start liking girls, but I sure as hell don’t know when.”

Alaric went to bed within the hour, but me, I couldn’t sleep. I sat beneath the tarp and listened to the rain and thought about Heartland, and home, and Mimi.

The festival promised thousands of religious experiences: a marketplace full of trinkets and crystals and herbs, divinations, “nine worlds massages,” aura readings. Workshops for your polygamous marriage, workshops for your pagan kids, workshops for your fetishistic sex magick. Rituals designed to take you into the heavens, down into the earth, into yourself. Promises to change your whole world. And none of it meant as much to me as that Christian girl in her green sarong.

I was writing a poem by flashlight when the dawn broke through the remains of the storm clouds. I walked across the road and watched the sun come up, watched the indigo give way to violet, to red. I still had a mind full of thoughts of the girl I’d left sleeping in Elysium. She was like the sunrise: brief and beautiful and ethereal, and exactly what I needed.

I guess this is what I’m trying to say: I usually sleep in. I’m the kind of person who doesn’t see many sunrises. But gods know I love the ones I do. ♦

**ERIC O. SCOTT** writes fiction and memoir about second-generation paganism. Raised by the St. Louis-based Coven Pleiades, he brings a unique perspective to the joys and doubts of being a modern Pagan. He is a Contributing Editor to *Killing the Buddha* and writes the “Family Traditions” column for *Patheos*. His work has also appeared in *Ashé! The Journal of Experimental Spirituality*, *Kerouac’s Dog*, and *Caper Literary Journal*. He used to sing in a Taoist glam rock band and wear a gold lamé jumpsuit.



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# Cherry Hill Seminary

# the Girl who found a feather



“The Staff”

a journey into  
the magic  
of birds

There’s a tribe of very ancient, deeply magical, and powerful spirits flying above our heads. Reptiles who – instead of dying with the rest of the now-extinct dinosaurs – transformed themselves by growing feathers, taking flight, and surviving to become entirely new creatures. These reptiles – which we now call “birds” – seem to be made of air itself with their feathers, hollow bones, and reversed lungs. Feathers are essentially the fur (or hair) of reptiles – who have been around millions of years longer than we humans – who also come with sharp, ancient, reptilian brains. We are only just beginning to comprehend the intricacy and intelligence of their thinking, although I think our ancestors knew better than we how they think. In some Pagan pantheons it can be difficult to separate a god from its accompanying animal avatar, as examples like the pairs of Bran and Raven, Perun and Eagle, Thoth and Ibis demonstrate. I like to think the worship of gods may have started out as animal worship, and over time our concepts about those wild shape-shifting animal deities evolved to seem more human-like as we left hunter-gatherer culture behind for cities and agriculture. If my theory is true, then birds are the oldest of our ancestor’s deities.

The story of Raven stealing the sun was always my favorite as a child. The idea of that great black bird creating humans and stealing fire and light for us made perfect sense to my little head stuck in a book of Native folktales from the Pacific Northwest. There’s no proof, but I suspect that this early love of fairy and folk tales is what led to me becoming an animist and worshipping nature and all its creatures with awe and wonder. (That and my earthy, backwoods parents who like to live away from cities and talk to plants and animals.) Along with the folktales about them, I fell in love with birds at a tender age and quickly claimed my mother’s *Field Guide to North American Birds* as my own. Memorizing their names and the colors and patterns of their feathers, I loved to watch them from my window and out in nature and listen to all their songs from the beautiful one of the robins to the cacophonous croaking of crows and ravens.

## The Feather Collector

I don't dare admit the size of my current feather collection, as it has become a large beast of all colors, stripes, and spots full of long flight feathers, soft breast feathers, and beautiful wings. It all started innocently enough with a large feather I found in the wilds of the North while hunting along riverbanks for bones and stones as a child. I didn't know anything of feathers' history of sacred use back then, but I sensed that they were special and treated my feathers with much care during myriad of moves across province and country, always collecting more along the way. Today, it seems that I am always collecting new feathers: feathers of light, feathers of dark, feathers of song, feathers to carry prayers, feathers to banish, feathers to bless and heal, and feathers to fly between all three realms of earth, sea, and sky. Many of these feathers are found along my walks in the wild forests of impossibly tall cedars and hemlocks along the Pacific Northwest coast; little hints of movement and color against brown earth and dead leaves turn out to be feathers of tail, wing, or down, shed from the many different birds haunting these woods.

The majority of my feathers arrive as gifts; for once you tell your friends, neighbors, and family that you collect feathers, soon everyone they know is informed as well. Feathers arrive spontaneously, slipped into cards or handed over in bundles, the proud collectors beaming and announcing, "I found these for you." It wasn't long after I became known as a collector before people started requesting specific feathers from me, feathers which I usually "just happened" to possess.

My mother, who lives on an 83-acre homestead, sends me feathers from her chickens, from ducks that swim in the marsh, from wild turkeys and grouse of the forest, and from the myriad birds that come daily to devour seed and suet at her bird feeders. My sister donates feathers from her African Grey parrot, which she tucks into birthday cards and I wear in one of my hats. My Pagan friends – many of whom also collect feathers – trade and gift feathers and wings to me as well. As a result, I have become well-known as "the feather collector."



*"The Stang"*

## Keeper of the Dead

Of course it was only natural for people who started out by collecting feathers for me to morph into people who call up to report that they have found a dead bird and to ask, "do you want it?" and (if the answer is "no"), to follow up with, "what should I do with it now?" I was already getting a strange reputation for leaving chicken guts on my roof for the crows of my neighborhood (alongside the usual bird feeders filled with sunflower seeds and beef suet.) Then I started to find dead birds as well as feathers; apparently the gods and spirits heard I was collecting feathers and wanted to provide me with more of a challenge. When life gives you lemons, or dead birds, you had best make something of it, so I decided that I would honor these sacred creatures and do right by them. I became a bone collector: one who collects the bones of creatures already dead and reverences them through respectful burial or by the crafting of sacred tools.

This avocation came naturally to me: I had lived on a farm and was accustomed to burying the bodies of animals that didn't make it; in addition, I was an experienced cook, trained in both butchery and in preservation. Thus prepared by my previous life experience, I made the controversial decision to delve into death work and taxidermy as part of my spiritual practice.

Not all birds are the same in this respect: ones that have been dead too long (and are therefore a danger to health) I reverentially bury whole in the woods or in planters if I plan to eventually harvest their bones. Protected and threatened species are also buried, their bodies left untouched to turn to dust and then to forest earth. Birds that have been dead only a day or two I freeze (to kill mites and other pests) and then process as I would a chicken or turkey on a farm. After performing a ritual for release of the bird's spirit (and smudging the little creature with smoke) I don gloves, mask, and an apron and place the wings, tail fans, and feathers from the body between layers of borax, cornmeal and salt, to dry. I bury the rest of the body (and the skull) in a ritual together with offerings of the species' preferred foods. Months later, I dig up the skull and bones – which are then whitened and sterilized in hydrogen peroxide – for ceremonial use.

I have now met many other collectors of bones and feathers who share my passion for the sacredness of birds; sharing in our rites and practices of cleaning, preservation, and crafting with one another. Spending time with them was, and still is, dear to me, and working together, we have found more birds and amassed even more feathers for our collections.

## The Ritual Tool Maker

What to do with all these feathers? Ever the practical witch, I knew that I had to discover their sacred uses, their magico-religious history, and put them to work. I read every book and article I could get my hands on that described ancient and modern ritual tools and costumes. I looked at endless images of the sacred art of animistic and Pagan cultures, and I found feathers everywhere. There were accounts of feathers buried as offerings to gods and spirits by the Native tribes where I live, as well as my ancestors across the pond in Scotland; feathers painted onto frame drums and cave walls; ancient art and sculptures of winged supernatural beings; and feathers stitched onto the ritual robes, headdresses, and masks of shamans from the British Isles across to the Far East and from the Pacific Northwest down to the jungles of South America. The uses of feathers went on and on; feathers tied to shamans' staffs, wands, drum beaters, and ritual pipes; feathers crafted into fetishes and charms like dream catchers, spirit traps, and the handspun "witches' ladder" curses of English and Italian witches. Wherever I looked, I saw that I was not alone in my desire to surround myself with feathers: I was doing what every other animistic magician across culture and time had done before me.

Thus encouraged, I took up charm and ritual tool making; I trained myself to carve wood and bone; hung feathers from spirit traps, rowan crosses, and other charms of protection; tied feathers to wooden staffs and wands that I carved from sacred woods which I had ritually harvested in the forest. I started crafting fetishes of bird skulls, bones, and feathers for other magicians to tie to their staffs and beloved ritual tools. I hung feathers from ritual masks or painstakingly covered their faces in layers of feathers. I designed smudge fans of feathers and wings attached to handles of bone and wood. Most important, I began using feathers as tools in my own magical and ritual practice. (See sidebar "Feathers as Tools" for more on the many magical tools which can be fashioned with feathers.)

## The Dream Walker: Receiving Messages from the Spirit World

Now that I had my feathered ritual tools and knowledge of the sacred meanings and uses of feathers, it was time to work with them. For me, magic and ritual are mainly internal processes; since I perform the majority of these practices in the Otherworld, the most natural next step for me was dreamwork.

I am a dreamer: I dream of messages and the future and also practice dream walking, using dreams to travel between worlds. I go dream walking to speak to spirits, to shape-shift, and to fly – with feathers aiding in all of these practices. I hang feathers from the dream catchers over my bed and tuck feathers under my pillow. Soon, I started dreaming of birds and feathers, of finding impossibly large and soft Raven feathers, of grooming a family of thrushes, and of being surrounded by a council of owls. One of my most memorable dreams was when three birds native to the forest where I live visited me. The messengers gathered and came to me together, giving me their feathers; the softest silence of Screech Owl feathers, the jewelled blackness of Crow feathers, and the camouflage cloak of Red-Tailed Hawk feathers.



*"The Owl  
Fetiché"*

I am not alone  
in my desire  
to surround  
myself with  
feathers;  
animistic  
magicians  
have been  
doing so for  
millennia  
across many  
cultures.

### Collecting Feathers Legally

Many migratory songbirds, raptors, and endangered species are protected, and the possession of their feathers can be regulated or prohibited with penalties of fines and jail time. Permits for legally scavenging and possessing dead bird parts are given by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. In Canada, permits are dispensed by the Provinces' individual ministries of wildlife and natural resources.

#### U.S. Guide to Protected Migratory Birds:

<http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/RegulationsandPolicies.html>

#### U.S. Endangered Species Permits:

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/permits/index.html>


#### U.S. Migratory Bird Permits:

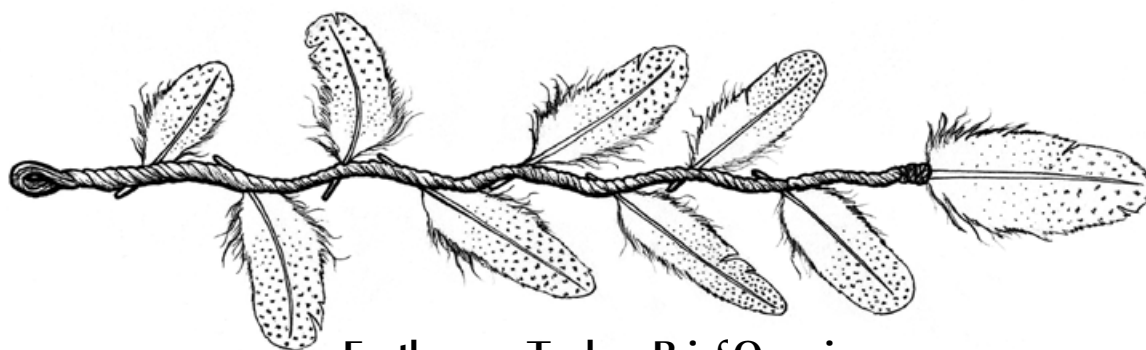
<http://www.fws.gov/permits/Application-Forms/ApplicationLM.html#mbta>

#### Canadian Migratory Birds Convention Act:

<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-7.01/>

#### Canadian Species At Risk Permits:

[http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/sar/permit/permits\\_e.cfm](http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/sar/permit/permits_e.cfm) 



## Feathers as Tools: a Brief Overview

### Pure and Simple: the Feather Itself

I use a feather in my ceremonies to invoke the element of Air in place of the usual athame, sword, or wand. The long and razor-tipped flight feathers are best for casting a circle and cutting it down again, as well as to protect from and banish spirits and to cut energy, as with a ritual blade. Along with a feather, I use earth collected from the forest to invoke the Earth element, local spring or sea water to invoke the Water element, and a candle flame for the Fire element. I find having all the elements physically present in ritual (rather than symbols of them) leads to more powerful experiences which are full of spirits, especially when I perform rituals outdoors.

For a simple prayer, breathe on a feather to charge it, and then whisper your petition or blessing across its surface. Set the feather free into the wind to carry it to the spirits, just as you would blow the down of a dandelion wish into a breeze. A traditional offering to nature spirits is the feather down of a bird covered with red ochre or a juice (such as pomegranate or beet) to mimic blood and left in a shallow pit. This is also an excellent offering to ancestral spirits and underworld deities.

### Cleanse and Heal: the Smudge Fan

A smudge fan can be anything from a single feather to an entire wing or even an elaborate hand-crafted tool embellished with carvings and/or gemstones. Fans are used for directing the smoke of incense and smudging herbs, to cleanse and bless sacred space, or to energetically cleanse and heal a person (or animal) by running feathers over the body to sweep away what needs to be released. Smudging with feathers/wings or fans can also be used to cleanse objects (talismans, tools, statuary, etc), altars and vehicles; even an entire house or an outdoor ritual space can be purified using this versatile magical tool.

### The Axis of the World: the Staff

A primary tool for travelling between worlds, the staff acts as a shaman or spirit-worker's mount during the journey. The element of Air rules transportation and communication, and feathers tied to your staff symbolize wings and flight. (They also just happen to look gorgeous!) Hold on to your staff when you invoke gods and spirits, when you pray, and when you wish to stand between worlds and see and hear spirits. Tap your staff on earth, stone, or water to open doors to the Otherworld.

### Magical Costumes: the Feathered Cloak and Headdress

Shamans of many animistic cultures wear headdresses made of feathers to symbolize their minds' connection to their souls; the attainment of divine wisdom; and to aid in their communication with the supernatural beings of the spirit world. To utilize this practice, tuck a feather in your hair when meditating at your altar, when invoking spirits and gods during ritual, and when travelling between worlds. If you have short (or no) hair hold a feather to your forehead over your third eye instead. Another option is to craft a bird-shaped mask with feathers to use in your rituals of spirit work and shape-shifting.

A similar (but more complex) practice is that of making a hooded feathered cloak. Feathered ritual costumes are common in shamanism around the world; the feathers sewn or tied to clothing symbolizing the shaman's connection to the spirit world. There are ancient Irish legends describing the feathered cloaks of shaman-like magicians, layer upon layer of white and black feathers covering hood and shoulders, and their spotted bird masks which they used to leave their bodies and shape-shift into birds to fly, to spy on their enemies, and to travel to the Otherworld.<sup>1</sup>

### A Fetich Charm: The Witches' Ladder

A witch's ladder, or witches' garland, is a fetich folk charm; examples of its use were found by folklorists in England and Italy during the late 1800s.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally used for cursing, the charm can be also be used to bless and for other spells. The purpose of the charm is to enable the witch's spell to "climb" to the spirit world via the feathers. Creating one involves hand-spinning a thick cord with feathers twisted into it on a drop spindle. Today, it is more common to braid (rather than spin) a witch's ladder.

To use, match the color of the thread/yarn and the feathers to correspond to the purpose of your spell, such as peacock feathers and blue wool to protect from the evil eye or black chicken feathers with black wool for a curse. To dispell the charm's effectiveness, the spinning or braiding must be undone or the charm thrown into running water. ✦

<sup>1</sup>Stuart A. Harris-Logan, *Singing With Blackbirds: The Survival of Primal Celtic Shamanism in Later Folk Traditions*, Grey House in the Woods: United Kingdom, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, St Martin's Press, 1973.

In my dream, **Screech Owl** left its feathers on the stone wall of a cave for me to discover. Messenger of the Underworld, Owl belongs to Old Woman as the White Bone Mother, Guardian of the Gate and Crossroads of the Underworld. Owl serves Her as messenger of death and psychopomp for the spirits of the dead. Owl is silent as a ghost, and revels in the darkness of night and its mysteries. Owl brings messages from her Mistress and from the dead. Owl helps you to travel to and from the Underworld safely and its ability to see in the dark can light your way in the blackest depths.



**Crow** shed its feathers for me on the green grass beneath the trees. Crow is messenger of the Middle World. Crow belongs to Old Woman as the trickster witch-hag in the ancient woods. Crows are creatures of the daytime, scavengers eating the leftovers of hunters and warriors. *Not* associated with death and darkness (though they follow it closely for scraps), Crows are tricksters known for their curiosity, humor, and dedication to their family and fellows. Crows are reflections and shadows of us humans; territorial guardians and watchers of the Earth, they warn of dangers, predators, bad weather, outsiders, bad luck, and misfortune. (This propensity to be the bearer of ill tidings is where their bad reputation comes from, but they're really just trying to help!) Crow is also the messenger of the creatures and spirits of the Middle World: animals, plants, wights, and elemental forces.

**Red-Tailed Hawk** dropped its feathers for me from high in the sunny blue sky and they slowly floated down to my feet. Hawk, always soaring so high, is messenger of the Upperworld and of its deities and spirits. Hawk belongs to the Sun and Mercurial spirits, and delivers messages pertaining



to the larger picture, ones that will affect your life and your spiritual path.

When Hawk brings you a message, it is time to borrow its sharp all-seeing eyes and fly high enough to view your situation from above and comprehend the full picture – the past, present, and future. At other times Hawk delivers messages to and from the gods and spirits of the Upperworld. Belonging to the Upperworld doesn't mean "sweetness and light," however; Hawk is a predator, after all.

All three messengers belong to the Crossroads and to the World Tree. Thanks to this revelatory dream, when one of them comes to me with news of the three realms, I know what kind of message they bring; when one comes to prepare me for a journey, I know for whence we ride.

When you dream of finding a feather, or of a bird gifting you with its feathers, it can mean many things: that you need the medicine of that specific bird in your life right now, or conversely that you've mastered their particular message. It can also portend that the bird is offering to be your spirit guide, or has a message for you from gods or spirits. When you have such dreams, pay attention to the species of bird the feather comes from, where you found the feather, and what you do with the feather in your dream. If you dream of actions, rituals, or the crafting of magical tools, take special note. In order to receive messages in dreams from your spirits or to have prophetic dreams, put a bundle of your spirit guide's feathers under your pillow or mattress at night when you go to sleep. (The feathers of underworld and water birds are the most-suited to this practice, because of their connections to the subconscious and the emotions which are linked to the dream world.)



"The Wing Smudge Fan"

When you dream of finding a feather, or of a bird gifting you with its feathers, be sure to pay attention to the species of bird that the feather comes from.

### Birds & Associated Deities


- **Crow/Raven** – Apollo, Athena, Baba Yaga, Badbh Catha, Baobhan Sith, Bran, Branwen, Lugh/Llew, Macha, Morrigan, Nephthys, Odin, and the Valkyrie.
- **Crane/Heron/Egret/Ibis** – Aoife, Ariadne, Esus, Frigg, Hekate, Manannan mac Lir, and Thoth.
- **Dove** – Aphrodite, Hera, and Yemaya.
- **Eagle** – Lugh/Llew and Zeus.
- **Goose** – Aphrodite, Hathor, Holle/Hulda, and Nicnevin.
- **Hawk** – Freyja and Horus.
- **Owl** – Ares, Athena, Baba Yaga, Blodeuwedd, Ereshkigal, Lakshmi, Lilith, and Santa Muerta.
- **Peacock** – Hera and Yemaya.
- **Robin** – Green Man, Puck, Robin Goodfellow.
- **Swallow** – Aphrodite and Freyja.
- **Swan** – Aphrodite, Brighid, Caer Ibormeith, Norns, Rusalka/Vila, and the Valkyrie.
- **Vulture** – Ares, Athena, Brighid, and Nephthys. ♠

## Feather Handling 101

**SAFETY TIP:** Do not handle dead wildlife with your bare hands, especially if you do not know how long the animal has been dead. Both wild and domestic animals can carry diseases and parasites that may be harmful if touched or breathed in. Educate yourself and children about how to handle dead wildlife to avoid illness and legal issues: at a bare minimum, always use gloves and a mask when handling carcasses from unknown sources.

All feathers found in the wilds, farms, and cities should be cleaned before being put to sacred use. I put feathers and wings new to my collection in the freezer for 2-3 days to kill any mites or other unwanted pests. Some feathers may need a bit of washing to remove dirt and bird droppings; gently wipe them with a soft, warm, damp cloth until clean, and then carefully brush them back into place if disarrayed before leaving to dry.

After they have been frozen and cleaned, put your feathers into a mix of borax and salt to sterilize and completely dry them; start with a layer then lay down the feathers on top and gently add a layer of the mixture without harming or deforming the feathers. Wing feathers should be fanned out before drying. Some people pin the wings open on a wooden board and others weigh them down, once spread open, with borax, salt, or cornmeal or a mixture thereof. After a couple weeks for individual feathers or 1-2 months for wings, remove them from the mixture and carefully shake out and brush off all remaining particulates. Now your feathers are ready to use for magic and ritual.

Feathers can be stored in a vase or lidless jar of a suitable height. When storing your most sacred feathered tools, wrap them in a cloth of a natural fibre such as linen, silk, cotton, or wool and place them in a wooden box or drawer, laying down. Cedar is an excellent wood for feather storage as it naturally repels insect pests, but you can also craft a sachet of cedar wood chips as well as other insect repellent herbs like mugwort and yarrow to store with your feathers and protect them. With proper care and storage, your feathers might even outlast you. 


## The Psychopomp: Walker between the Worlds

The psychopomp is a shape-shifting magician who acts as a guide of the souls of the dead. Psychopomps are a very ancient archetype, one found in many different mythologies, and portrayed variously as human magicians and as supernatural beings, often accompanied by birds or taking their form. Birds also commonly enact the role of messenger between our world and the spirit world; folklore often describes birds as being the spirits of the dead visiting this world or travelling on their way to the underworld. Birds were thus held sacred because any bird could possibly be housing the spirit of one's ancestor. Their role as psychopomps gives them an association with the ancestors as well as with the deities of both the Under and Upper Worlds. Ravens, owls, and swans are birds who are most often assigned this role.

Myths of "bird women" harvesting the souls of the dead abound, including such figures as the Valkyrie of the Norse, the Russian Rusalka, the Slavic Vila, and the Greek Harpies and Sirens. Likewise, the Baobhan Sith, Bodbh, and the Morrigan of the Gaels are female crow/raven spirits associated with death and soul-harvesting. These supernatural psychopomps can often be found serving chthonic goddesses like the Norns, Persephone, and Baba Yaga.

In the course of my magical work with birds, I have myself become a psychopomp of their dead, as my rites aid in the release of their souls to their underworld journey. By treating them with love and reverence, I connect to one of their deepest mysteries; when I collect the small light bodies of dead birds and carry out my funerary rites for them, I swear that I can hear the flapping of wings following me.

## The Bird Woman

So, here I am, still on my journey with birds; surrounded by feathers, learning their languages, behaviors, omens, and messages; working with them to strengthen my practices of bone collecting, spirit-flight, dream walking, shape-shifting, psychopompery, and the creation of sacred ritual tools. My feather collection never dwindles; even though I may gift some and turn others into tools for my fellow magical practitioners, the birds always lay more feathers across my path. So I pose this question to you: the next time you pick up a feather on your journey through this life, where will it take you? 

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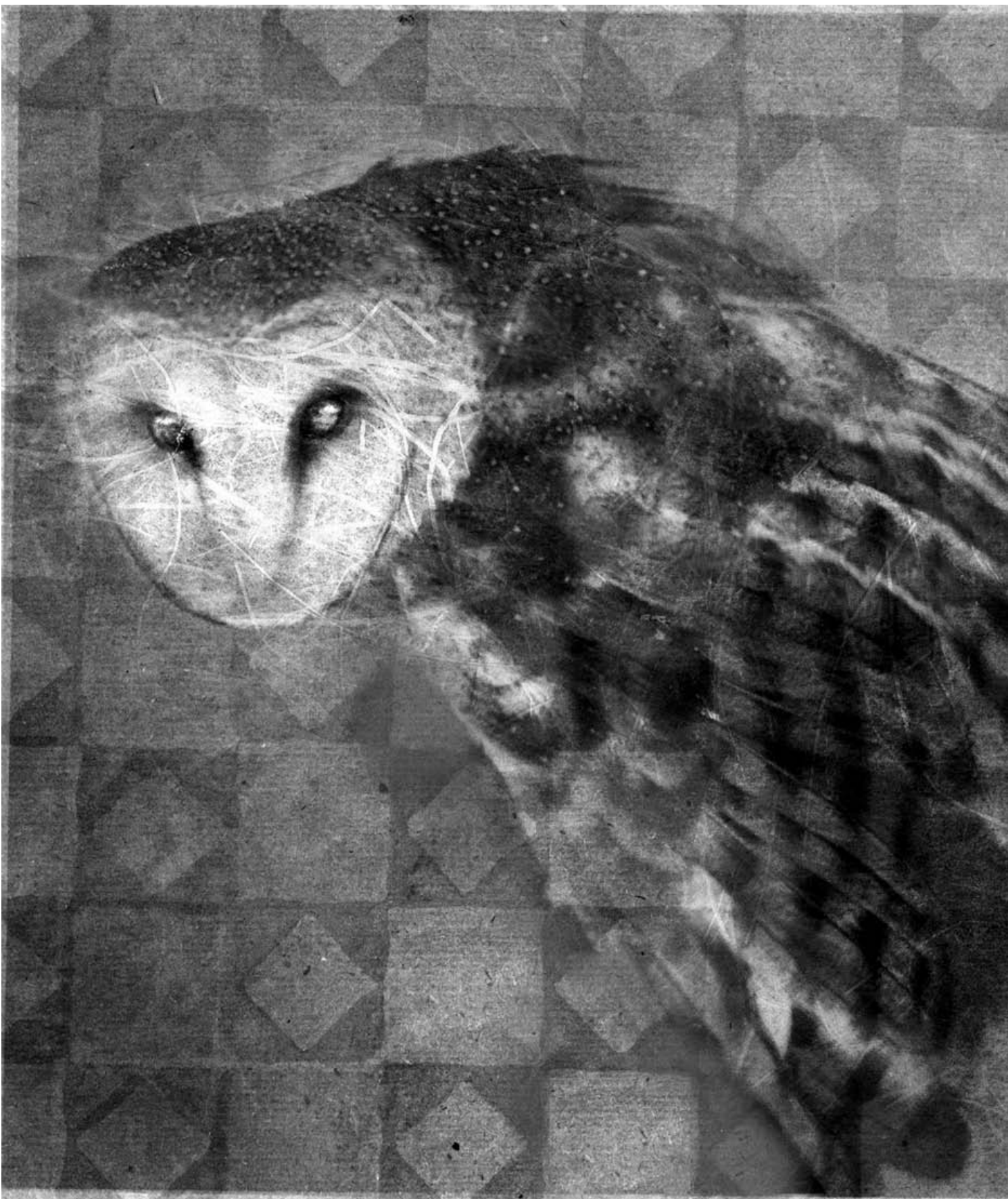
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**SARAH LAWLESS**, aka the "Witch of Forest Grove," is an artist, storyteller, wild witch, and amateur ethnobotanist and folklorist living on the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada where she wildcrafts native plants, brews mead, runs two herbal apothecaries (*Forest Grove Botanica* and *Stang & Cauldron*), crafts artisan ritual tools, illustrates, and writes. She can often be found wandering in the woods talking to birds and trees. You may find her at <http://witchofforestgrove.com> and <http://stangandcauldron.com>.





# Feathered Familiars

Share the Magic with  
your Companion Birds

**D**espite the name, few practitioners have firsthand knowledge of working with a magickal familiar. At its most basic, a familiar is a non-human being (usually an animal) that assists a human magick-worker with his or her craft. This is not a master-and-servant relationship, but an equal relationship between two partners.

Since I am both a Witch and a bird-lover, my Familiars are often birds. Many of my magickal relationships are with long-term companion birds, but wild birds can also be a source of omens and even spellcasting help upon occasion. My favorite birds for magickal work are parakeets, because they are smart enough to be great helpers and small enough to be able to physically maneuver easily. (Parrots are also quite intelligent, but they have very high maintenance personalities, require a great deal of praise, and have a tendency to interrupt the working if they don't think they have your full attention.) It's also important to understand the species you wish to work with, and to be experienced in working with them on a mundane level before trying to do magick.

## How to Train Your Familiar

So, let's say you already have a companion bird with whom you have a good relationship, and you'd like to train it as your familiar. If this bird has already been living with you for awhile, it may already be accustomed to the feel of magick. (Most Witches just can't help expressing themselves energetically even when not spellcasting.) However, start training your friend with simple energy-raising exercises and see how they react.

One of the simplest things to do is simply cast a circle in the room where your bird normally lives, and watch its behavior. It's a good sign if they look interested, move closer to you, or make noises at you. (Best still, if your bird is free-range, if it flies right to you and stays on your body while you cast.)

If, however, your bird friend acts distressed or overwhelmed by your actions, release the energy at once and try again later but with something simpler and less high-powered, like grounding and centering, or saying a simple prayer.)

If your avian companion shows interest in your circle-casting, the next step is to ask them to participate in the circle-casting with you. Respect your

Avian companions can be great magickal partners, if you know how to work with them. Here's how to bring them into your circle.



## Just a few of my favorite birds

- **Parakeets** come in a wide assortment of colors and personalities and can learn to talk. My first parakeet, Rainstorm, was gentle and intuitive; I trained him to speak, but he only did so when my circle was active. Parakeets are fun-loving, quick-witted, and honest, but they can be impatient, and prefer workings they can attend and leave at will.

- **Parrots** are well known for being able to mimic human speech, but not all talk. (Our African Grey made his displeasure known loudly whenever we tried to teach him.) Parrots are highly intelligent, and love to teach you what they know. My parrot became familiar with my regular circle workings and would bring me items if I forgot them when setting up my altar, and then give me a resounding squawk. I like to use parrot feathers in spells to help me learn something new.

- **Cockatoos** are about the same size as your average parrot; they are the ones with the large yellow or pink crest feathers on their head. They live up to their regal appearance and don't like to be bothered with matters they feel are beneath them. Cockatoos are good to consult with about large material decisions like purchasing a home or other large expenses.

- **Cockatiels** are a smaller version of a cockatoo, much like a parakeet to a parrot. The cockatiels that I have known were shy, loving, loyal, and very attached once I earned their trust. They are wonderful judges of character; if they take a instant dislike to someone, it's wise to look deeper.

- **Finches** are small, fast-moving, and carry a tremendous amount of energy. They boost your personal energy, and are good at freshening the atmosphere in your home, but they love change for its own sake, so they are also chaos bringers!

- **Doves** are well-known as symbols of peace, and I agree with that attribution. Their soft cooing brings a smile to even the most dour face. Doves are generous, and very protective of their home and family. Doves will emit a loud squawk if they believe someone they care about is in danger, and defending their family is the only instance that I have ever seen a dove become aggressive. ✦

bird's boundaries and request permission to include them before proceeding. (Remember, this relationship is intended to be a partnership, never coerce your bird to participate in an activity it is not comfortable with.)

Teaching a bird a magickal skill is a lot like working with a child; remember to take it slow and be gentle. If your budding Familiar wants to walk with you, sit on your shoulder, or even fly, then by all means, let them. Once they have the feel of the first step, move on to the next. You'll probably need to go through the steps several times until your companion is thoroughly familiar with the ritual and comfortable with it all the way through. Once you've done that, teach your bird the steps of dismissing the circle, which is a reversal of the casting sequence. When you've done the entire casting and dismissing procedure several times, give your companion a challenge. Stop moving in the middle of a ritual casting, and see where your feathered friend stops. Do they try to show you where to go? Do they remind you with a noise that you haven't finished? Or do they just send you a funny birdy look of exasperation?

## Magical Talents of Bird Familiars

Birds, just like humans, are quite individual, and each bird is likely to have its own talents. One primary job that many seem to be good at is as a magical mentor, useful for advice as you are studying or preparing a spell. Feel free to ask for their input; if you are reading, let them show you a few pages they are thinking about. There was a time when I asked for Rainstorm's thoughts on a particular spell and he paged through the book and showed me an alternative I hadn't thought of!

Although most domestic avians are quite vocal, your familiar may not always communicate with you in that specific way. While some Familiars can communicate while you are awake – most commonly with hunches, sounds in your mind, and sometimes a visual mental image, stating, many can only reach you while you are not fully conscious, such as while you are dreaming, meditating, or in trance. Birds are especially good at dream communication, so if you are asking your companion's advice about something and don't seem to be getting a response, ask again before you put your bird to bed that night, and pay

attention to your dreams. If you have a revelatory dream that night, especially one that is strange or uncharacteristic for you, be sure and write it down when you wake up. Discuss it with your Familiar and see if they had anything to do with the dream. Does your parakeet send you delightful dreams about flying with them when they want to be let free to roam the house? Perhaps you hear your cockatoo sing their “feed me” whistle in your head while you are on your way home. However your partner in feathers likes to tell you what is on their mind, respond to them, even if it’s just to say, “be patient, please.”

Birds are also natural oracles, and this quality is just as true with wild birds as domestic ones. Bird-watching in your neighborhood is one of the best ways to receive messages from Spirit. For example, a couple of months ago, a pair of ringneck doves appeared near my home. Every morning, the first one of the pair sat on the streetlight outside my bedroom window, calling and calling, until I looked out at it. Then the second one repeated the behavior. After I looked at them, they stopped vocalizing. At first I had thought that they were just there because they were lost and confused, but after the second day, I started to wonder. For two days they stayed there on the streetlight, asking me to look at them, and on the third morning I went outside and asked the doves why they were still there. Suddenly, I was overcome by a very strong feeling of calm and harmony, and I received the message that a problem I was having with a close friend would soon be peacefully resolved. Sure enough, my friend and I made our peace shortly thereafter. A word to the wise: species matters (doves are well-known symbols of peace), so if you are going to observe birds for omens, it’s a good step to become familiar with the habits, names, and behavior of your local avian neighbors. It will help you interpret their everyday activities, and is also very useful at pointing out unusual behaviors of special significance.

### **Magical Flight with Your Familiar**

Another activity that bird familiars are especially adept at is travel between the worlds. Since astral/inter-world journeying often includes an element of magical flight, birds are natural guides and guardians in these realms. This is more advanced work, so it requires a good deal of preparation. One caveat: if you are not already adept with this practice, please enlist the aid of an experienced practitioner to teach and guide before you begin. (No, just “reading a book” doesn’t cut it, and neither does the assistance of your untrained avian familiar.)

Assuming that you are an experienced astral traveler, finding a safe realm to travel to and practicing that particular skill with your Familiar is a wonderful activity. They can act as a guide and guardian to help keep you safe and on the right road, so be sure that you have a strong, bonded and trustworthy relationship with your familiar before you journey together.

Astral travel can have its dangers, so I strongly suggest that you put up a stable circle and reinforce it before you go off on your magical journey. Just like you wouldn’t leave your house unlocked and all of the doors open while you are away, you would not do the same with your body. Also ensure that your bird is appropriately contained; if you normally keep your bird in a cage while you sleep, for example, this is a wise precaution while you are in trance.

Next, tell your Familiar what you plan to do and receive its assent to join you, then, using your usual shamanic/meditative techniques (drumming is a common method), enter your meditative state, meeting them on the other side. I like to use the following spell:

#### ***Astral Flight Spell***

With a bit of incense burning (I recommend using a sandalwood/sandalwood-based one) grab your favorite yellow or purple stone (citrine and amethyst are good ones for this) and hold it while you say this on your way into trance to meet with your Familiar:

*Sunlight by day  
Moonlight by night  
Flying is the way  
We travel outright.*

Repeat this three times, each time speaking more softly. Say it twice more when you meet up with your Familiar on the astral plane and will yourself to be weightless as you repeat the charm. The first time I used this spell, I jumped up as high as I could and then flapped my wings like a bird; on the astral this was highly successful, and I stayed aloft. (I was twelve when I did this, so don’t feel bound to use my method!)

If you do not know how to fly or gain wings of your own while in the astral realms, it is entirely possible that your Familiar can carry you (this is where trust and bonding help out) wherever you two decide to go. This is a place where your familiar is likely to know more than you do, so if you feel up for an adventure, let them take the lead and show you new territory. The astral realms are places where any familiars (but especially birds) are often able to communicate better with you than in ordinary reality; sometimes they are even able to speak in full sentences!

## Spells for Your Avian Familiar

### Clearing Communication Spell

Sometimes, when you are new to working with familiars (or to working with a specific bird) it can be difficult to understand the messages your Familiar is trying to give you. I use this simple chant to help unblock those channels of communication. Ansuz is pronounced ahn-sooz.

While tracing the rune Ansuz in the air with your finger or a feather given willingly and painlessly from your Familiar, chant:



*Ansuz! Ansuz! Ansuz!  
All obstacles we do remove!  
Ansuz! Ansuz! Ansuz!  
The way is clear, now we share!  
Ansuz! Ansuz! Ansuz!*

To involve your familiar, bob your torso up and down, and side-to-side while looking at your birdie friend, and they will follow along and dance some extra energy into the spell with you.

### Intelligence/Study Spell

This spell is designed to help you retain and understand information. You can perform it with your Familiar at home or, if you travel to school, with the willingly-given feather from them when you arrive. For a bit of a crystal boost, keep your favorite agate stone with you while you say:

*Information swirling 'round my mind  
Memories to keep and find.  
With (Familiar's name) by my side  
By our Will these thoughts abide.  
What we learn today  
Is here to stay;  
With harm to none  
We pronounce this done!*

### Mimicry Spell

This spell allows you to acquire some of the traits that your Familiar carries, such as being lighter, having faster reflexes, better vision (including the "inner sight") and an increased understanding of subtle communication modalities such as vocal pitch.



If you haven't already done so, ask your Familiar for a feather and watch the next few days to see if they drop one for you. (If you have built a positive bond with your companion, it's possible that you already possess such a feather. If not, birds shed their feathers frequently, so wait for that to happen and use this new-to-you feather.) Tell your familiar what it is you are trying to accomplish, and then, as you closely watch their movements and study their gait, chant:

*We are birds of a feather  
Birds of a feather...  
Birds of a feather..."*

Now spend some time with your companion; talk with them and interact, watch them fly about, and observe their habits. Watch especially acutely for demonstrations of the trait you wish to acquire. After about a half hour, thank your Familiar for their assistance, and repeat the previous chant. Repeat this spell once each morning and evening for a week. Then, whenever you need the traits that they offer, say "Birds of a feather" (either out loud or in your mind) while you touch that feather, to bring that trait to you.



### Speech/Language Spell

This is intended to improve communication between you and your familiar. For this spell you need a wide-brimmed cup or bowl. Fill it with water, and, with your Familiar nearby, bespell it with these words:

*O winged friend  
Come to me  
I've brought a drink  
To share with thee  
We each partake  
And merry make  
To understand  
Without mistake.*

Now, drink from the cup, and then offer it to your Familiar. A note: most of the time, we humans are the ones who have difficulty understanding our birds; they usually know perfectly well what we are saying! ♦

## Birds in Ritual

Your new Familiar might also enjoy helping out with more formal rituals. I once had a parakeet by the name of The Pastel Princess who only wanted to assist with formal ritual, not ad hoc ones. She was very energetically aware and always spot on for sensing when to release energy for a spell or the ritual purpose. She also loved to sing when I cast a circle and was adept at communication through dreams.

Of course, you can use your companion's feathers in your rituals to invoke the Element of Air. Just be certain that any feathers you use from your bird for this purpose come willingly. Even if a feather is dropped naturally, if the bird is crying in anger or fear, don't use that feather for magick. That unhappy energy can easily infuse the feather and disrupt your spell.

Your companion bird can invoke Air directly, too. My parakeet Rainstorm flapped his wings vigorously whenever it was his turn to invoke Air, chirping once or twice for added effect. If and when your Familiar joins you in ritual, I recommend a perch of some sort for them to sit on within the ritual space; it's more restful for the bird and makes it easy for others to avoid running into your feathered companion.

**Caveats and suggestions:** always be very careful about using fire in any form around your birds. All birds have delicate respiratory systems and are quite sensitive to smoke. For this reason, if you use candles or incense, be certain you know precisely what ingredients are present in your candles/incense; I usually feel it's better to invoke with sound, instead of lighting candles.

If your ritual will be outdoors, kept your feathered friend secured in a carrying cage. You don't want to have them fly off on you! My advice is to work mostly indoors, in a controlled environment you are both comfortable in. You can still have a touch of the outdoors by being next to a (well-screened) window; I use fresh herbs often in my workings, and our African Grey, Buddy, had a habit of bringing them to me so that I could use them at the right time during ritual.

Now that you have a working knowledge of avian Familiars, use these techniques to create a lasting and bond with your birdie friend. The main thing to remember is to work with their strengths and listen to what they want to do. Don't be afraid to take a leap of faith and let them make the decision; they're very smart and know their capacities better than you! ✧



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# a Witch at large

## The broomstick adventures of M. Macha NightMare

*M. Macha NightMare is an author, teacher, and ritualist. She is among the founders of Reclaiming Tradition Witchcraft, and an initiate of both Reclaiming and (Anderson) Faery/Feri. As a Witch-at-Large, she teaches on what she calls “the broomstick circuit,” and has circled with Witches of myriad traditions as well as with people of other Pagan paths throughout the U.S., Canada, and Brazil. The author of Witchcraft and the Web: Weaving Pagan Traditions Online (ECW Press, 2001) and Pagan Pride: Honoring the Craft and Culture of Earth and Goddess (Citadel, 2004), Macha is best known as a author for co-writing (with Starhawk) the pre-eminent Pagan resource on end of life issues, The Pagan Book of Living and Dying (Harper San Francisco, 1997). Macha has also contributed to a vast array of anthologies, periodicals, textbooks, and encyclopedias.*

*But Macha is even better known for her tireless organizational work. A member of the American Academy of Religion, the Marin Interfaith Council, and the Nature Religion Scholars Network, Macha also serves as a national interfaith representative for the Covenant of the Goddess and is on the Advisory Board of the Sacred Dying Foundation. Last, but certainly not least, Macha has spent much of the past decade helping develop the public ministry training program at Cherry Hill Seminary, and serves on its Board of Directors.*

***You know that I have to ask about your name. Where did it come from? Is it your magickal or mundane name? Is it difficult to live with?***

Yes, it is my magical name, or my “Craft name,” as I’m more likely to call it. I took that name at a time when we practitioners of alternative Pagan religions kept separate magickal and mundane identities, but I’ve been publicly known by that name for so long that many don’t recognize me when I use the name (Aline O’Brien) on my driver’s license. Macha is an Irish goddess, one of the triad called the Morrigan, or “phantom queen.” NightMare, with a capital “M” in the middle is the mare who rides through your dreams. I’m well aware of how outrageous it is; believe me, it’s not easy to wear, but there you are.

There’s another reason behind my name: I came to Craft during Second Wave Feminism in the 1970s. My generation grew up under the thumb of a patriarchal society that limited women’s rights when it didn’t downright oppress them. So for me, and many of my contemporaries, finding a religion with female images of the divine, one that honored the feminine, was refreshing, appealing and empowering.

But Pagans in those days commonly practiced in secret. One of our conventions back then, and for many still today, was to use a Craft name. The concept was that if a time of persecution came, no one in a coven could betray the identities of other members under questioning or even torture.

***Your Craft name references a specific goddess. Is this common in your tradition?***

There's no requirement in my traditions that one must use a Craft name, but it is quite common. Naming is a significant part of initiation, and not to be taken lightly. Sometimes a name is given to the initiate during ritual, and in other cases, the person chooses her or his own magical name.

Many Witches include a connection to deity in their magickal names. In some cases, a deity can reveal Him/Herself directly, or the person may feel an affinity for a particular deity or wish to emulate or take on the deity's qualities and/or characteristics. Many of us choose, or are given, the name of a particular goddess as our magical name.

***Why Macha? What does She mean to you?***

Macha is a Irish dark goddess, and I am of Irish descent. She reveals Herself in the form of a crow or a raven, and is associated with horses. There's a wonderful story in the Ulster Saga about Macha, heavily pregnant, is challenged to run a race against King Conchobar's fastest horses. She pleaded to be excused from racing due to her gravid state, but receives no mercy. So she runs, wins, and gives birth to twins right there on Armagh, "the field of Macha." Then she proceeds to curse the men of Ulster who had forced this race upon her, that in the hour of their land's greatest need they would stricken in pain as a woman in labor, and thus incapacitated. This curse later manifests in the tales.

I feel a close kinship with crows and ravens; especially with crows because they live around people, fly from perch to perch observing the same scenes and activities from different perspectives, and then gossip and talk with one another about what they've seen. I have all these characteristics.



My connection with horses goes back a long way. I remember as a child galloping down hills and across meadows, my hair flying behind me like a mane, my ankles and legs feeling like those of a horse.

I have always been drawn to shadow, a quality associated with dark goddesses. The goddess who has affected me most strongly and who has called me as Her priestess is Kali Ma, She Who wears a necklace of skulls. In Irish lore, victorious champions took the heads of their slain enemies and brought them back from the battlefield to hang on the ridgepoles of their lodges. They believed the soul resided in the head,

so to take the head honored the slain as well as the slayer. The heads were called "Macha's acorn crop."

One of our Holy Terrors coven members, Bone Blossom, wove a beautiful rainbow-hued mat that we called the magic carpet. We used it for healings, placing the person who was being healed upon it when we worked for her recovery. One night I arrived in a cranky state. I had just had a fight with my husband and the others told me to sit on the magic carpet, so I did. The conversation turned to magical names — at that point only a few of us used them — and when I was asked, I responded, "I feel like Macha tonight!" From that moment, I was Macha. (I didn't figure out all this other stuff about crows and horses and acorn crops until afterwards.)

I never took this name with any idea that it would be used publicly; in fact I think it's a bit over the top and would probably look askance at someone who introduced herself as Macha NightMare. Nonetheless, that is name under which I became known in the Pagan community, and the one used when publishing my writing, so there you are.

### ***How did your interest in Witchcraft begin?***

Like most Pagans of my vintage, I was brought up in a Christian home, but not a typical one. My parents had what was then known as a “mixed marriage,” the mixture being between the Protestant (Methodism) faith of my mother and the Catholicism of my Irish American father. They were not permitted to be married in the Catholic church because my mother refused to agree to bring up their children as Catholics. So they were married by the parish priest in the parish house, my mother wearing a beige suit with a lace collar instead of a bridal gown. Most of their family members on both sides opposed the marriage and boycotted the ceremony, so there were no relatives present.

As a child, I was immersed in the world of Christianity – quite literally. As soon as I was born, my father arranged with my Catholic godparents to take me to the church for baptism. But my mother snuck her local Methodist minister into our house and had him baptize me in the Methodist faith first. My father never knew what she had done, but my mother told me about it much later. I’m fond of saying that neither one of these duelling Christian baptisms “took.”

My mother took us to Sunday School every week, followed by the morning service. We sang in the choir, attended choir rehearsals, went to youth fellowship, vacation Bible school and church summer camps. I could also go to morning Mass with my dad, and when my sister and I stayed with my paternal cousins, we trooped to Mass along with them.

### ***How did you come from that childhood to the Craft?***

The seeds of my love of the Craft were planted through connection with the Earth. When I was about seven my father, a seedsman in the agriculture business, gave me an entire acre to plant, which I filled with zinnias and marigolds. Their glorious colors – plus the fact that I had planted them from little packets of seeds – thrilled me immensely. When I was a little older, I learned to drive a tractor and helped my father in the fields. We’d come in from working as burnt and as grimy as can be. I remember the sublime taste when I bit into one of those fat Jersey tomatoes warmed by the sun and dripping juice down your chin.

I searched for years for a spirituality that made sense, and encountered Witchcraft at the meeting point of three paths in my life, at the sacred *Trivium* of the goddess Hekate. The first path was Second Wave Feminism; the second was my concerns for the environment; and the third was my desire to explore intuitive ways of knowing.

### ***How did Second Wave Feminism influence you?***

I discovered Second Wave Feminism around 1969 or 1970, when I became a part of a woman-only “consciousness raising groups.” Women were making all sorts of wonderful art and music; scholarship about women’s history and women’s issues was spreading; and many women like me were finding our identities. The confluence of this explosion of feminism – together with my discovery of feminine images of the divine, goddesses who had been worshipped in one way or another by peoples around the globe – was the single most compelling draw towards a Neo-Pagan spiritual path. I explored astrology and Tarot, mythology and folklore, and as I learned about egalitarian, matrifocal, matrilineal, and matriarchal cultures, I began to put it all together.

### ***Where did ecology come in?***

It was intuitive for a person like me to be drawn to Paganism. Nearly all kinds of Neo-Paganism respect Nature’s laws and cycles. We see ourselves as part of Nature, part of the interwoven, interdependent Web of Life, and we commit ourselves to care for this common trust and treasure. In my personal spiritual practice, I seek to remain attuned to Nature’s forces, the ebbing and flowing of the tides, the waning and waxing of the Moon and Sun, the migrations of birds, the seasons of birth and death.

**M**y Catholic father had me baptised by the parish priest, but my mother snuck her local Methodist minister into the house to baptize me first. I like to say that neither one of these Christian baptisms “took.”

### ***Did the practical aspects of Witchcraft – like spellcasting and divination – attract you?***

Oh yes. I’ve always had respect for what I call intuitive ways of knowing. Rationality and logic are wonderful things, but they’re only part of the picture. We also apprehend and learn through our bodies, get messages from dreams, and can learn from other species, from weather phenomena, from music, dance, poetry, and hunches. Intuition is not fantasy, imagination, wishful thinking, or even desire. In the process of learning our Craft, we learn to discern the difference between true intuition and wishful thinking.

Another attraction was the stories. We have such a wonderful array of stories, from all times and cultures, that we can draw upon. Tales about how the seasons came about, like the story of Demeter and the kidnapping of her daughter Persephone. Tales about animals – dogs, monkeys, ravens, elephants, mosquitoes. Tales about hubris: Icarus flying too close to the sun and melting the wax that held his wings. Tales of creation and birth, of changes, of loss and death.

### *How did you come to find the Pagan community?*

In 1971, I took a class about Witchcraft I found through *Heliotrope, the Free University*, a street sheet of sorts listing classes in all manner of things from pottery to poetry. The class was taught by priest and priestess of the NROOGD (New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn) – a West Coast Pagan tradition. I did not pursue the path formally after the class ended, but continued to read about topics we had covered: women’s history, mythology and folklore, ceremonial magic, astrology, and so forth. Then I started attending open sabbats, called Witches’ Balls, in Berkeley.

In 1975, my late friend Ann Turner (Anna Mystic from Music from the Hearts of Space) and I went to a talk at a local metaphysical book store about goddess spirituality. The teacher was a young woman named Starhawk who’d recently relocated from Los Angeles. Starhawk and I became friends, and she invited me to several private sabbats over the next couple of years.

### *What was that early Witchcraft scene like?*

Back then, we all considered ourselves just “Witches” more than we identified with specific traditions. By the time I took my vows, CoG (Covenant of the Goddess) had been functioning for a while, and my coven, Holy Terrors, joined CoG as soon as we were eligible. We functioned as a group priestesshood, an uncommon arrangement in covens of the day.

I participated in CoG actively from the time our coven first joined, meeting all kinds of wonderful Witches – and few who were not so wonderful. As CoG expanded, so did my understanding that the members came from very different traditions. I felt strange about these distinctions, although I could see and appreciate them. I was an initiate of the Craft, completely sure of my identity as Priestess and Witch, and I had been presented to the guardians and the gods that way, and they had acknowledged me. Yet I knew that the tradition I was practicing wasn’t strictly Faery, that we were changing and growing.

Soon it became obvious to me as well as others, that Reclaiming Collective, and the people who’d worked with it over the years, had created a distinctive and identifiable Craft tradition. I first identified Reclaiming as a tradition when I sat on a multi-tradition panel at CoG Grand Council. Later I said it at a meeting of Reclaiming Collective (which dissolved as a collective in 1997). Today, Reclaiming is a strong, diverse tradition with communities throughout the U.S. and Canada and in several other countries.

### *How do you feel now about lineage and tradition?*

As I mentioned earlier, my first training in the Craft was with NROOGD, and I have continued to circle with NROOGD covens ever since. I’ve also taken every opportunity to circle with Witches of any tradition. I love ritual of all kinds – Wiccan, Druid, generic NeoPagan, Hindu, Buddhist, Santeria, and others. I recommend doing this, because it keeps us fresh and on our spiritual toes. Tradition and lineage seems less important these days, because there are more bootstrap and “eclectic” traditions. Such groups cannot trace a clear initiatory lineage back beyond themselves. Which is fine, although I do get upset when such trads try to pass themselves off as something ancient, occult, and continuous in spite of clearly being recently created.

### *What institutions do you see as most important for the Craft today?*

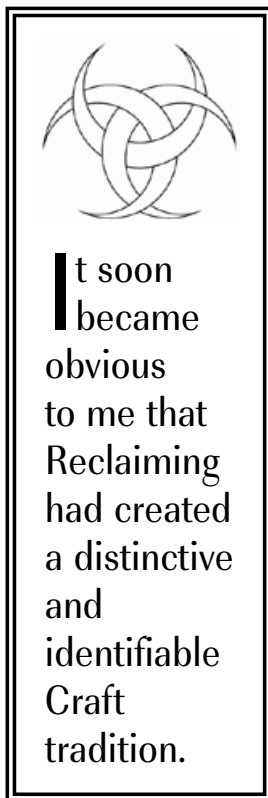
Much of our movement arose out of the counter-culture of the 1960s and ’70s, with all of that period’s disillusionment with the status quo. As a result, we tend to distrust institutional structures. However, now that Paganism has moved so far in the direction of acceptability, I’m coming to see the value of institutions which endure past our individual lifetimes.

An example of the type of institution I believe is very important for our community is that of training for leadership, which is why I’ve worked so hard to help grow Cherry Hill Seminary.

CHS was the inspiration of Kirk White, arising from discussions among folks in COSE (Church of the Sacred Earth) in New England. It was Kirk’s dream to have a seminary that would give Pagan ministers† training of equal quality as that received by religious leaders and spiritual advisors of other spiritual traditions. Our leaders tend to be good at one skill – for example, leading ritual or writing books – but due to our increased visibility, Pagans in leadership are now called upon to perform

roles which the overculture (my word for “mainstream society”) assigned to be performed by clergypeople, and for which we, as sacred priest/esses may not have traditionally been prepared.

†I would like to make it clear that I am uncomfortable using the word “clergy” to describe what we do because I think it comes burdened with heavy connotations that we may not necessarily wish to cultivate. I prefer the word “minister” for what we do when we set out to be of service to our communities.



## ***How did you become involved with Cherry Hill Seminary?***

In 2001, I took a Boundaries & Ethics course designed by Cat Chapin-Bishop, and I found it to be one of the most valuable courses I've ever taken. Among other assignments, we read many statements of ethics produced by psychological, spiritual, counseling, and healing arts professional organizations. At the end of the class we each wrote our own personal code of ethics, which I thought was an extremely valuable experience for all of us.

After the class finished, Cat invited me to design a course on death and dying, related to the work Starhawk and I did in co-writing *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*. The course was very well received, and I've been asked to offer it again almost every year.

Over time, I have served CHS as Public Information Officer, faculty, Board member, Department Chair, and as President of the Board of Directors. I would say that my primary role at Cherry Hill has been as a recruiter — of volunteers, faculty, students, and support.

***Reclaiming has become known in the wider Pagan community as an explicitly political tradition. Do you think this perception reflects the vision of Reclaiming accurately, and if so, why is Reclaiming this way? How do you believe our faith as Pagans should influence our politics, and vice-versa?"***

Yes, direct involvement in creating constructive change in the mundane world is part and parcel of being a Reclaiming Witch. We don't separate the spiritual from the political because we see that everything we do has political implications. It's not enough to do a spell to elect a particular individual; you also have to go out and vote, not to mention doing other work to foster that election, like campaigning. Many see Reclaiming as comprised of people who do a lot of street action and other direct protests, no doubt because that's [Reclaiming co-founder] Starhawk's personal form of activism, and that kind of action gets a lot of press, as well it should. Seekers already deep into the tradition often ask if they can be a Reclaiming Witch if they don't want to (or can't) participate in street activism.

However, street action is hardly the only form of political involvement recognized by the Reclaiming tradition. I am a living proof of the fact that activism has many faces. I personally tend to do work to create change within existing institutions. For example, my political action has included:

- creating a Reclaiming donor account at the local blood bank;
- working with the homeless chaplaincy here in Marin County;
- participating in helping to create a Pagan Studies area in the American Academy of Religion;
- contributing to interfaith celebrations and campaigns
- educating hospital and hospice staff about Pagan approaches to dying and death, as well as speaking to funeral directors about Pagan needs; and
- fostering alliances with other Pagan organizations.

We all have our gifts and interests; one Reclaiming Witch I know works exclusively on anti-smoking efforts while another works with abused women and rape victims. Still others do AIDS education and activism; in fact, the San Francisco needle exchange program was originally initiated by Reclaiming Witches (among others) back when this life-saving practice was still illegal and done covertly. Others do habitat restoration, permaculture training, or create community gardens with inner city youth. There's a lot to be done!



## **Why Interfaith?**

by M. Macha NightMare, 2011

When I first became aware of the interfaith movement, I didn't have much interest. Paganism (specifically the style of feminist Witchcraft in which I am involved) arose from the counter-culture in opposition to mainstream religions. We Pagans remained quietly in the shadows; we felt safer there, and as counter-culture folks, that seemed to be our place.

By 1981, I had become active in the Covenant of the Goddess and one of the venues in which CoG sought to have a presence was in interfaith relations, and we were active in the Berkeley Area Interfaith Council. I soon learned that interfaith activities relied on "appreciative inquiry," a technique wherein individuals talk one-on-one about their own experiences. This didn't seem like a promising approach to me: like most Pagans of my generation, I grew up in a Christian family and I was already well versed in Christian history, viewpoints, and practice. So I didn't feel that listening to Abrahamic monotheists had much to offer me.

(continued next page)

(Interfaith, cont. from p. 37)

In 1997, a bill in the California legislature to allow physician-assisted suicide, a topic of great interest to me. I learned that the Marin Interfaith Council was sponsoring a panel discussion featuring this topic and I decided to attend.

All was well at first, we sat at round tables and discussed some pre-selected questions. Megory and I both experienced these conversations as thoughtful and genuinely useful. Then came the panel, which was a whole different matter. It was comprised of a Presbyterian minister, a Catholic priest, a rabbi, an imam, and a Jewish medical doctor, all privileged white males representing the dominant patriarchal structure.

Every one of them came out strongly against the proposed legislation, and the lack of any differences between their perspectives seemed to belie the entire concept of interfaith dialogue. I was mightily annoyed, and did not attend any more interfaith events for a long time.

Time passed, and eventually I agreed to join MIC on behalf of CoG. At first I attended monthly clergy luncheons. I'm not exactly "clergy" as the term might be generally understood, but I went to each meeting, listening and watching and occasionally putting forth a question or comment. Soon I was asked to join a smaller subgroup, the Justice Advocacy Team (JAT), and I found that this smaller group was much more to my liking.

In the decade-plus since, I have participated in many, probably most, of Marin Interfaith Council's activities, all to my benefit. These

activities include such things as:

- sacred music concerts;
- actions in support of immigrants, the homeless, and worker justice;
- actions in opposition to war and capital punishment; and
- the annual Interfaith Prayer Day Breakfast.

I have also participated regularly with Marin Interfaith Street Chaplaincy and with the annual celebration of International Day of Peace presented by the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, as well as in other events. The invitations from outside the Pagan community keep coming; one I particularly enjoyed was leading a chant and spiral dance at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony of Carol Hovis and Chris Highland at Green Gulch Zen Center.

These are just a few of my personal experiences. From my participation in these multi-faith forums, I have learned a great deal about how congregations are organized, how they may be dysfunctional or healthy, and how they may regain equilibrium after internal disruptions. In addition, social and personal issues (teen suicide, LGBT acceptance, drugs, illness, death) know no sectarian boundaries, and thus the forums, workshops, and discussions of these topics have also been extremely helpful.

I have approached my involvement in interfaith work carefully and with respect towards my colleagues, gradually making friends and strengthening my distinctly Pagan presence. In return, I have been treated with respect and affection. I believe that participating in such activities builds useful connections among people of goodwill, and I highly recommend it. ♦

Street activism is what it is, and it's true that the popular image of a Reclaiming Witch is of one who demonstrates in the streets. Some would argue that it's not necessarily the most effective action in a given situation. I would argue that it's not necessarily the best use of each person's unique talents. Certainly not mine. I'm an older woman with a severely arthritic lumbar spine, a condition invisible to anyone looking at me. I can't stand on concrete pavement for long periods of time, as my older body lacks the resilience of a younger body were I to be roughly cuffed and carried off in a police van. Yet I'm a Reclaiming Witch by vow, temperament, and practice.

Having said all this, I want to emphasize that we all have different talents, and for some, organizing or participating in street activism is their forte. Another person will have a different gift; one who deals with the money needs a different set of skills than the one who sings. The numbers need to be accurate, and the song needs to be sung on key. Loudly or quietly, in groups or alone, we need everyone to work, each in her own unique way, towards bringing about a just and peaceful world.

***You've been involved in Paganism for several decades. What changes have you seen in that time?***

The biggest change is that we're better understood by society at large. One example is the fact that the State of New Jersey Department of Education has recently added the eight Wiccan/Pagan sabbats to its list of religious holidays, indicating that they recognize that there are Pagans in their student bodies and among faculty and staff. This recognition is reflected in the interfaith activities I see Pagans involved in. (See sidebar for more on Macha's interest in interfaith work.) Another example is that Pagan Studies is now an official field, recognized by the American Academy of Religion.

However, I'm uncomfortable when Pagans, in pursuit of mainstream cred-

ibility, call themselves “reverend” and wear Roman collars. To mimic overculture ecclesiastical forms and structures is to risk compromising our uniqueness in favor of convention. We are better served simply by being open about who we are in our day-to-day relations. If and when the subject of religion comes up, we can say we’re Pagans. If the people in our lives know us as good neighbors, coworkers, classmates, customers, clients, then they already know we’re okay.

I would like to see more programs for children and youth; there are some flourishing Spiral Scout troops. Reclaiming offers many multi-day, youth-friendly Witch camps, and many other festivals incorporate coming-of-age rites of passages. These practices, to me, point to a culture that is growing and consciously looking to the future.

I also believe that we need to look intensely into the question of caring for our elders. Whether we establish retirement communities and senior services of our own or work with established secular organizations that provide services to elders, we do need to consider how we care for our aging population because it is expanding and will continue to do so.

### ***What are you really excited about right now?***

In collaboration, I’ve been working to make Cherry Hill Seminary a respected institution for both academic studies of Paganism and the learning of ministerial skills. I do not believe we can survive beyond our first few generations unless we establish some institutions. This work is what I’ve put heart and soul into for the last thirteen years.

We Pagans often speak of ourselves as belonging to a tribe, and in the broadest sense I feel that way, too. But Pagan groupings are not like the clans of the Celts or the tribes along the Rhine; not like the villagers in Tuscany or Malta. We lack a common familial ethnicity, mores, lore, culture, foods, songs. We contemporary Pagans do, of course, share lore, music, customs, and a language, but not nearly to the degree that indigenous tribes did and do.

We were seeking connection in a rapidly modernizing, culturally diverse, and frequently socially fragmented world. In essence, we sought a tribal identity and we found it – only the state in which our tribes find themselves is inchoate, rudimentary, immature, not fully formed. We lack the cohesion of a tribe.

We need to look at the roles played by elders in tribal societies, and to have a way to hold each other accountable to our communities for our behavior, and our teaching. I see this as another way in which having elders can be helpful

### ***What would you like to be remembered for?***

Wow, this is not something I’ve thought about. I’d like to see our descendants continue to live by the values of life we espouse, in whatever way they may manifest that life. I’d like to see more people of every religion sharing values of love of this world and all beings and a “green” awareness of our interconnection with all life on this planet. It doesn’t matter to me if our religion gains more practitioners. Rather, it matters that people of all religious persuasions can recognize and respect our collective responsibility for the impact of

human activity on this Earth. They can pray, sing, dance, meditate, study, express their spirituality in whatever ways give them comfort and satisfaction, as long as those practices don’t impinge on others who don’t share their perspectives

### ***Any closing words of inspiration in these challenging times?***

It is clear to me that our Earth is changing in ways that make life as we know it precarious. I think the deep recognition of our reliance upon the health of the entire planet is something we Pagans can

bring to the fore in the conduct of our lives, our spiritual practices, and our plans for the future.

### ***Where can we go to find out about you and your work?***

My personal website at [www.machanightmare.com](http://www.machanightmare.com) and that of Cherry Hill Seminary at [www.cherryhillseminary.org](http://www.cherryhillseminary.org).



Image ©2012 [www.directaction.org](http://www.directaction.org)

## **Macha resigns from Reclaiming**

(August 7, 2012) Macha posted a public notice to her website at [www.machanightmare.com](http://www.machanightmare.com) today, formally resigning from the Reclaiming tradition. Her statement read, in part, “I withdraw from the organization known as Reclaiming Tradition Witchcraft and hereby dissociate myself from further involvement with the tradition ... I have long felt alienated, estranged, and out of sync with how I’ve seen the tradition devolving.” We have arranged to conduct a follow-up interview with Macha about this shocking turn of events to appear in *Witches&Pagans* #26 “Element of Fire” in spring 2013.



*the* Teacher  
*will appear*

**D**iscover how the challenging – but rewarding – world of Pagan education is evolving to keep up with a changing world.

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” This Buddhist saying, quoted frequently within the Pagan community, articulates the sense of destiny and intuitive recognition with which many Pagan seekers approach their first teacher. But Pagan teachers face many question on their way to creating the best experiences for their students. What pedagogical techniques to use? What and when to teach their students? Teach directly, or as part of a larger organization? Online or in-person? A new student may joyfully affirm that the right teacher has appeared, but when the student appears, does that mean the teacher is ready? What are the responsibilities, challenges, and delights of teaching a Pagan tradition?

### Pick Your Format

Pagan education is usually delivered through one of four common delivery methods: classes, workshops, coven teaching, and apprenticeships.

• **Classes.** A formal academic environment, such as a seminary or university, as well as bookstores or occult shops are common venues for the most orthodox form of teaching: the class. Whether or not classes are taken for academic credit, they tend to involve a combination of readings, lecture, and discussion, with an emphasis on communicating and analyzing intellectual knowledge *about* Paganism. Classes such as these are usually open to the public or to all members of the institution involved.

• **Workshops.** Although the communication of information is also an important component of the workshop format, this teaching style focuses more heavily on experiential components – literally on “the work.” Participants gather for a series of meetings or for a several-days-long intensive that may include lecture and discussion, but more frequently focuses on dancing and chanting, going on trance journeys, sharing personal experiences, doing divination, and more. Workshops are most frequently open to the public, but may be restricted to those practicing or interested in a particular tradition.

Grant Potts and Suzanne McAnna have much in common when it comes to teaching philosophy. Intimately familiar with the classroom, **Grant Potts** teaches religious studies at several Texas colleges and universities, offers classes in hermetic practice through the Scarlet Woman Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis, and facilitates online distance classes in Pagan ministry through Cherry Hill Seminary. For Grant, teaching within an institution means teaching the ethics of the institution; whether in an academic course for Cherry Hill or a more esoteric program for Scarlet Woman, he looks to uphold the framework of the program he’s teaching in. For Grant, an institution’s mission statement functions as a magical statement of intention, and an organization is made strong by its members’ ability to come together effectively around that mission.

He also favors a collaborative approach to learning. Instead of simply lecturing, Grant engages his students with activities and discussion, and he particularly likes to “get them up and moving” every half hour to refresh both their bodies and minds. He sees his role as providing a framework in which students take control of their own learning. Of one his academic classes, he says: “[T]he more I just gave them a structure to play around in... the better the results.”



“The more I just gave them a structure to play around in ... the better the results.”

*A religious studies scholar specializing in contemporary Paganism, sexuality, literature, and popular culture, CHRISTINE HOFF KRAEMER, PH.D., chairs the Theology and Religious History department at Cherry Hill Seminary, where she has recently taught courses on Contemporary Global Paganisms and Pagan Theology. Her current project is a book exploring a Pagan theology of touch. Christine lives in the Boston, Massachusetts area.*

*SIERRA BLACK is a Witch, a Priestess, and a teacher in the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft and participates in magical activism with the Pagan Cluster and in her home community near Boston.*

Since 1998, **Suzanne McAnna** has taught workshops in witchcraft and Tarot for the TejasWeb Reclaiming collective in Austin, Texas, and has also taught at a number of week-long Reclaiming tradition retreats, (commonly known as “Witchcamps.”) In the Reclaiming tradition – influenced as much by the political activism of the 1970s as by traditional witchcraft – shared leadership and community are key concepts. Suzanne’s teaching approach echoes Grant’s: she emphasizes power-sharing among multiple teachers so that no one person plays the role of the “expert.”



**“We team teach, which is very rich and creative. I’ve had experience teaching with people who have more experience than I had, and with people who had less, and I’ve learned something every time.”**

“We team teach. That makes it very rich and very creative,” she says. “I’ve had experience teaching with people who have more experience than I had and with people who had less, and I’ve learned something every time.”

Grant credits much of his teaching style to his early aikido teacher, sensei Chuck Clark. “He was very good at seizing the center and then letting it go and letting everyone scramble, and find their way to the principles he was trying to teach,” he recalls. When the teacher gets out of the students’ way, “people aren’t turning to you for your expertise or your guidance but [are] turning to each other or turning to themselves to open their own channels of knowledge.” Suzanne agrees. In her workshops, “The whole group has a role in how things go and in what the outcome

is of a given class... when you teach, you learn as much as anybody in your class.”

Grant also favors peer teaching, in which students take turns facilitating study groups on topics of interest. He speaks most admiringly of those people who have been able to remove their own egos from the student-teacher relationship to open up a space of sacred learning. “Those are the people who’ve taught me,” he says. “That to me is the divine, that’s when God steps in and is teaching you, [taking] on the face of this person who’s teaching you.”

• **Coven teaching.** Academic classrooms are a good vehicle for teaching about Paganism, agree **Kate and Jim Wolf-Pizor**. When training students in their tradition, however, they use a coven-teaching approach. Used by many in the Gardnerian tradition and in British Traditional Wicca, this method begins with public classes, then moves into extended training for students who approach their instructor for private teaching. Such seekers are encouraged to study “outer court” material while they and the existing coven members consider whether the newcomer will be a

good fit with the group. If the group clicks, the students may then study material geared towards initiation in the coven.

Many formal covens have significant amounts of information that are not revealed until a student has been initiated into a particular degree (rank) of the tradition. Such material is considered “oathbound,” or secret. Teaching in a coven teaching setting can be formal, involving assigned readings, written homework, and even memorization, or concentrate on experiential activities and ritual skills; each coven/tradition chooses its own teaching style and materials. Coven teaching generally takes place in member’s homes, and while students contribute food and ritual supplies to the group, usually no money changes hands.

Though students may be taught individually or in a small group, Kate considers a group of four students to be ideal. “In larger groups, people become spectators,” she remarks. She and Jim consider training within their tradition to be an “exquisitely personal” process that bears some resemblance to counseling in its intense focus on the student’s interior landscape.



Unlike in classes and workshops, where students can enter and leave training as they please, training in the Gardnerian tradition requires a commitment that is familial.

“We learn this as an ancestral line,” says Kate. She believes that students are drawn to the Craft through past life memories or an ancestral affinity. Accordingly, she and Jim understand their teaching less as a process of communicating information than of facilitating the process of remembering. The strong container of such a teaching relationship, says Jim, prepares students for advanced ritual practices such as drawing down:

**“To be adept, a student needs to be mature enough and established enough in the Craft for learning these skills to be a useful transfer. When it comes to advanced techniques, we try not to lay eggs until we’ve built a nest.”**

“To be adept, they need to be safe, which is going to be a function of adeptness... they need to be mature enough and established in the Craft enough for [learning these skills] to be a useful transfer.” Like Grant and Suzanne, however, the Wolf-Pizors see themselves as providing an environment for a student to develop, not primarily as conveying information or technique. When it comes to advanced skills, Kate quips, “We try to not lay eggs until we’ve built a nest” – a phrase that echoes the idea that their tradition is born and reborn through the individual experience of each student.

• **Apprenticeship.** The Wolf-Pizors' teaching style is similar to that of Sarsen, who trains students in the Feri tradition in Georgia and also offers workshops in psychic development and Tarot around the southeastern United States. Sarsen teaches Feri in an apprenticeship model. In an apprenticeship, individual students work closely with a single teacher or couple to study a tradition. Although the teacher may have his or her students work together from time to time, each student is studying at his or her own pace, and the training is primarily one-on-one and highly individualized. Although some teachers using this model may have formal curricula, teaching can take the form of relatively unstructured conversation and participation with the teacher in daily activities. Simply soaking up the atmosphere and energy of the teacher's life and practice is considered a key element of training. Teachers who train using this model sometimes ask their students to keep their training very private, as they feel that the mysteries of their tradition can only be communicated in a close, personal student-teacher relationship where there is a high degree of understanding and trust. Although the student may offer the teacher assistance with a variety of practical matters as an exchange for the training, the relationship is usually understood as familial, and no money is charged for training.

"Feri is so visceral and intimate, plus a lot of it is supremely non-verbal," Sarsen says. "So much of it is conveyed by body language and energetic connection that I feel that one-on-one works better for that. There's a real temptation in a group situation to talk too much." Kate Wolf-Pizor agrees with the importance of modeling in teaching the Craft; she, Jim, and Sarsen all emphasized the impossibility of conveying the essence of their tradition with words and the importance of the teacher's physical presence. "I get to model for you what I do while you're learning what you do," Kate says. Sarsen's approach also has resonances with Grant's love of giving his students space to "scramble." Sarsen sees her students as peers and future colleagues, and she tries to treat them accordingly. "Some people need more encouragement or guidance," she says, "but I think ultimately the practice should be self-directed and the teacher is more of a spotter."

Sarsen meets with her students anywhere from once a week to a few times a year depending on the strength of their individual practices and the distance they have to travel to see her. She comments, "Magic is intense, and it's very hard for me to deal with emotional or energetic intensity if I don't have a solid personal relationship with those involved. One-on-one felt much more grounded," she says. "As a teacher, I find that in group situations people are much, much more likely to project their shadow stuff onto me than they are in situations where we have a more organic and personal relationship."



**"Feri is so visceral and intimate and supremely non-verbal. One-on-one works better for that. There's a real temptation in a group to talk too much."**

## The Question of Money

Regardless of his or her style or method, every Pagan teacher must grapple with ethical questions about the work. One of the most contentious issues facing Pagan teachers today is whether or not to charge money for training.

Suzanne charges for her workshops, as is common in Reclaiming communities. "Teaching is an offering of energy and experience, and there should be some kind of compensation," she said. "I also buy the argument that teaching should be available to everyone, and [a lack of] money should not stop anyone from having the experience that they really want to have."

Currently Suzanne is offering a private series of classes on Tarot on a donation basis. "It's meant a lot to me to be able to offer it. I've worked for a number of years with a group of women, and we've collected a lot of spreads," she said. "I dreamed this up, and all these fabulous people

are helping me make it a reality. Maybe I should pay *them*," she jokes, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the study. According to her, people have been generous with donations; still, she sees a downside to teaching for free. "If you don't ask for money, then you have to make your living another way, and you don't have as much energy for this work."

Following the conventions of the OTO, Grant does not charge for his hermetic practice classes. "I have gained so much from the Order that this is the service I owe them for what I've gained," he said. (He does receive a small stipend for teaching at Cherry Hill.) Grant has concerns about how money influences the work teachers do with students. A teacher who is dependent on being directly paid by a student may be less able to embrace controversial positions or hew to an unpopular tenet of the tradition she teaches. "Teaching magic as a livelihood gets tricky... It's the same space you get into with adjunct faculty," he notes, commenting on the tendency of adjuncts to go easy on their students, lest too many students drop the class and the teacher lose his or her (*per diem*) income. Grant would prefer that magickal traditions create foundations to provide institutional security for teachers and students by negotiating the financial aspects for them. Teachers would receive a salary and students would pay tuition; no money would directly change hands.

Sarsen and the Wolf-Pizors do not charge for coven nor apprenticeship teaching, and although Kate is paid for her academic classes, she and Jim do not charge for classes offered at bookstores. Although charging for teaching is a hotly-debated issue in the Feri tradition, in Gardnerian Wicca it is clearly prohibited. Kate sees energy exchange as part of the teaching relationship itself: "My commitment is to teach you; your commitment is to do the work," she says. To learn the tradition puts an obligation on the student to "pay it forward" and eventually teach others: "If you finish this, then you are required to give it to someone else who asks you earnestly."

## Becoming a Teacher

As the Pagan movement continues to grow, the demand for teachers has steadily increased. This sometimes drives smart and capable practitioners to begin teaching when they have only been practicing for a few years. Although some Pagan teachers bring pedagogical skills learned elsewhere to their work, it is relatively rare for Pagan teachers to have been formally trained in pedagogical technique or in teaching boundaries and ethics. (Problematic practices around training in the Pagan community led Druid Isaac Bonewits to develop the “Advanced Bonewits Cult Danger Evaluation Frame,” first published in his book *Real Magic* in 1979 and now widely available on the Internet.) Accordingly, we asked our interviewees for their advice for new teachers of Pagan and magickal traditions. “Pay more attention to the dynamic of the group than to the material,” Grant suggests. He also counsels teachers to bring their lives into alignment with their teaching: “I tend to look at what we do [...] in OTO as a microcosm, as a prototype for the kinds of skills that we can then use in our lives outside the order.” For Grant, teaching becomes just one expression of an integrated life.

Suzanne looks to her co-teachers for guidance and inspiration. “I’ve taught with people who have more experience or different skills. I try to pay attention to what the people I am teaching with are doing that’s working well and see if I can’t try to incorporate that,” she said. She also encourages teachers to teach the things they are passionate about and to be open to new teaching methods as they learn and grow. “Don’t be completely attached to how you teach it,” she said. “Leave openings for other ways to teach it and present it. I feel like it’s worked for me.”

Sarsen offered advice on choosing students. She begins by talking to students about Feri practice and doing guided meditations with them. A week or so later, they talk again. “If they’re all... fizzy... I know I’ve got a live one,” she says. “The Feri work is transformative. If there’s an immediate reaction, then the person is ready. If they don’t feel anything, or it makes them uncomfortable, then they’re not.”

Finally, the Wolf-Pizors speak admiringly of the time that they started their first coven and their teacher, acknowledging them as full peers, asked to become a member. Kate says, “Part of being a mentor is knowing when to stop,” so that students can make the tradition their own.

## Where is Teaching Going Now?

In today’s Pagan culture, there are not enough trained teachers to accommodate students, and those who do teach are largely concentrated in major urban areas. Accordingly, most Pagans start their practice from books or among their equally-inexperienced peers. But this method – while sometimes producing good results – is frequently frustrating and inefficient. The emotional and spiritual impact of ritual cannot be learned from a book, and seekers may spend years in painstaking experimentation, trying to discover basics that a good teacher might be able to demonstrate

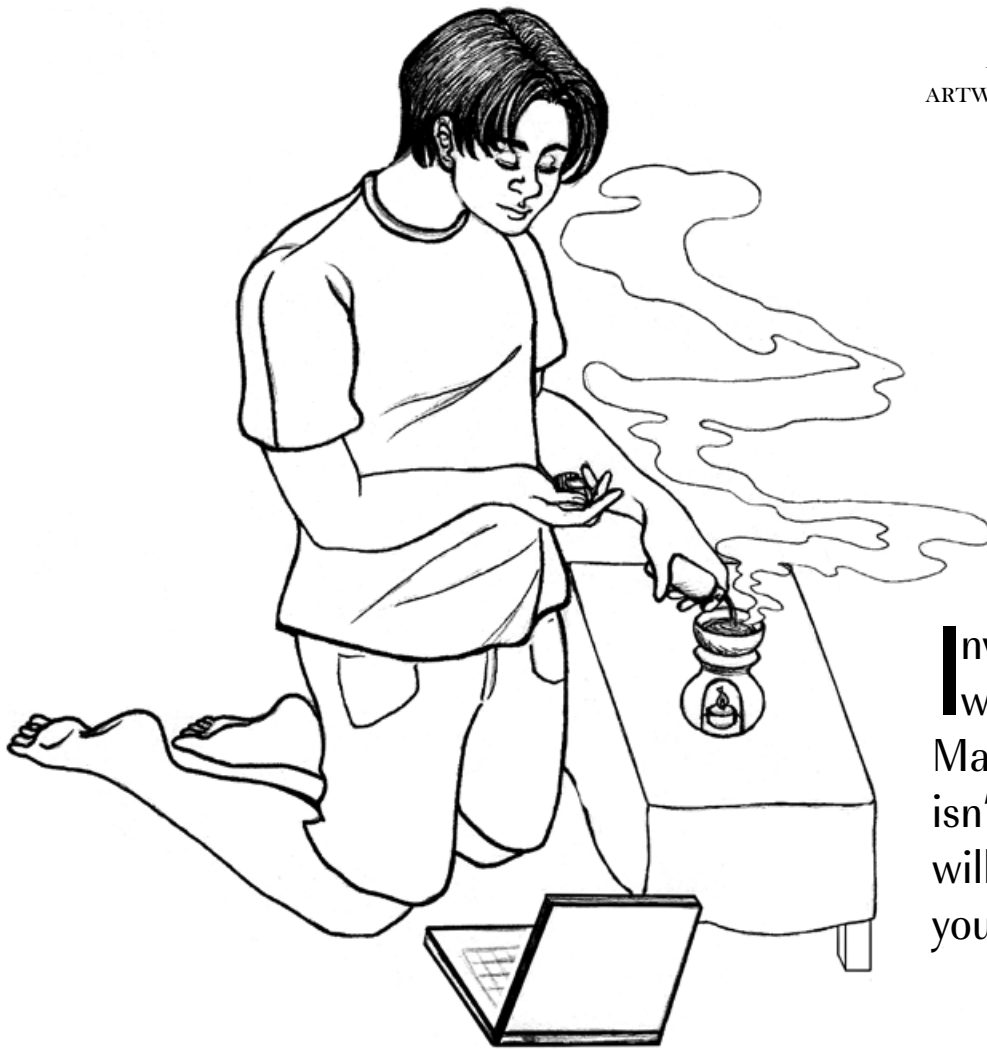
in a weekend. For example, Christine notes, “I wondered for years what it meant to ‘vibrate a divine name’ until I attended a ritual in which it was done. Although hearing it demonstrated didn’t mean instant mastery, I finally knew how it *felt*, and it was easier to improve the skill on my own.”

• **Distance learning** offers an alternative that can be pursued almost anywhere. Although this form of teaching has blossomed with the spread of the Internet, it has deep roots in Pagan and occult circles. For example, Aleister Crowley’s well-known book *Magick Without Tears* is a collection of letters that Crowley wrote instructing a student in his order, and ceremonial magick orders such as the Golden Dawn have long offered training by correspondence course. Today, students come together on e-mailing lists, in chat rooms, or in virtual environments to share experiences or maintain contact between in-person meetings; group trance journeys can be led using Skype, and one-on-one spiritual direction is given using video chat.

From his experiences at Cherry Hill Seminary, Grant feels that distance learning offers many advantages. However, “it requires... a very motivated student.” He believes the ideal distance learning situation would involve a group of students who are geographically close and can meet in person, while also working with a teacher who visits a few times a year and maintains contact on-line. Such an approach might mitigate Jim Wolf-Pizor’s concern that magickal training cannot succeed without an in-person component. “I can’t tell you what I do; I need you to be able to see and hear and speak and smell [it],” Jim asserts.

Is distance training the way of the future? The publication of hundreds of books on Paganism and magick has already radically changed contemporary Paganism. Instead of tightly unified groups organized around traditions, loosely knit networks of eclectic Pagans who pick and choose their practices have become the norm. As teachers seek to serve more students, most often remotely using the tools of the Internet age, it seems likely that this move toward eclecticism and individual creativity will continue. Kate warns against the dangers of changing a set of practices before fully understanding them: “My experience with those who improvise first is that they often don’t learn to integrate.” Perhaps the failure to integrate eclectic practices into a coherent, functional whole can be ameliorated, however, by the fact that it is so much easier for beginning Pagans to interact with experienced teachers. Even a single workshop or class with a teacher whose practice has genuinely brought her life into a stable, joyful balance can provide a real-life model toward which new students can strive.

As Sarsen says, the teaching (and learning!) of Paganism is not ultimately about information: “What you know is less important than who you are and how you practice.” As Pagan teachers navigate these thorny issues, we will do well as a community to remember that the mark of a trained practitioner is not a degree, an initiation, or an encyclopedic knowledge of a subject, but rather a life well-lived. ♠



Investigating the world of Online Magickal Schools isn't easy. Our guide will help you find your way.

# Seeking Wisdom

## Making Sense of Online Magickal Education

*KIRA NUIT is a witch and writer living in the heart of Central Texas. She writes about magic, food, and mindful parenting at Earth Mama Prime (<http://earthmamaprime.com/>) and about spiritual pregnancy at Pagan Families (<http://paganfamilies.com/>).*

**W**e Pagans are seekers. For many of us, finding our spiritual path is the culmination of a deep desire, and the first step on a spiritual journey that enriches our entire lives. We often turn our seeking nature towards knowledge: we learn everything we can about our tradition, our world, and ourselves. We browse grimoires, absorb vast quantities of mythology and correspondences, memorize rituals and liturgy, and even study the science and technology of magick.

Distance education allows those unable to follow the schedule of or travel to a brick-and-mortar institution to learn asynchronously; it allows learners to move at their own pace; and, in times of economic struggle, its less-expensive costs are sometimes all a student can afford. Students who prefer self-study and those who wish to be guided by their elders can each find teachers. Curricula exist for students that wish to deepen

## Accreditation and Online Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Institutions and/or programs that request an agency's evaluation and that meet an agency's criteria are then 'accredited' by that agency." Here's more about the process of accreditation, from their online guidelines:

*The United States has no federal Ministry of Education exercising single national control over postsecondary educational institutions. The states assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs.*

*In order to insure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope have adopted criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and have developed procedures for evaluating institutions or programs to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality. (Source: [http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation\\_pg2.html#U.S.](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg2.html#U.S.))*

Accreditation is intended to ensure the basic quality of a school's programs; that credit hours at one school are equal in quality to those of another to enable a fair transfer of degrees or credits; and that a school is eligible to receive federal aid money for students. Private associations develop the criteria for accreditation and then perform the inspections and evaluations involved. These associations grant the accreditation. The U.S. Department of Education oversees the whole process and evaluates the accreditation institutions, but does not itself issue accreditations.

To date, there are no accredited Pagan schools. This is not due to prejudice, but a lack of critical mass: currently there are simply no accreditation institutions to do the job. Accreditation is a peer review process, and Pagan schools don't yet have enough peers that are interested in the process to form an evaluative body.

Some schools, like the Woolsten-Steen Seminary, do not see accreditation as necessary to their function. The Seminary's costs are low enough that federal funds seem unnecessary, and they are satisfied with the policy of Washington State (where the Seminary is based) to exempt small religious educational institutions from oversight.

Others eschew accreditation out of principle. Amber K of Ardantane comments, "The accrediting process is quite expensive, and more importantly, schools have to fit a very tight mold to get approved. We don't believe that our subject material (alternative healing, shamanic studies, ritual and magick, etc.) lends itself to the rigid system used by most mundane universities. Rather than pay large sums to straitjacket ourselves academically, we prefer to keep our creative freedom. If potential students want to learn the magickal arts, grow spiritually, and become more skilled in what we teach, they should consider Ardantane. But if they are looking for an accredited degree for a job in the mundane world, they should seek other options."

Holli Emore, Executive Director for Cherry Hill Seminary elaborates her institution's approach. "Years ago, our Cherry Hill Seminary board of directors realized that we needed to pursue accreditation if we were going to be able to fully serve the students who wanted our services. For example, those receiving military benefits may only apply their tuition to a bricks-and-mortar school or a distance education program which is accredited. After meeting with our liaison at the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, we became better aware of just how many diploma-mills are out there. The Commission feels that their oversight role helps students to avoid becoming encumbered with student loan debt for mediocre programs. That's surely an objective we in the Pagan community can support, and we plan to pursue accreditation as rapidly as our resources and energy allow." ♦

their understanding of their faith, for those who want to learn the tools and methods required to minister to their communities, and for those who simply seek knowledge. Since achieving popularity, the Pagan movement continues to grow at a rapid pace. Living in the Internet Age allows most of us to participate in this growth with the click of a mouse. Many paths of Pagan distance education and training unwind before us, and finding our way through the maze of options can require a traveler's guide.

As in all magick, our intention determines our actions. We take our first turning with our end goals in mind. We seek knowledge, initiation, training, community, ordination, personal satisfaction, or some combination of these things. Next, we must decide which "flavor" of Paganism appeals: a tradition new to us, one familiar, or a course of study that covers multiple traditions. Though taking a left- or right-hand turn into the paths of a particular tradition narrows the way, we still have many choices for the program in which we might study. While the term "distance education" emphasizes a certain method of delivery, we have choices here, too. Finally, we must decide what financial costs we will accept.

## Traditions and Programs

Many kinds of Paganism are represented in the arena of distance learning, as evidenced by the directory accompanying this article. Most prevalent are schools that focus on **Wicca or Witchcraft**. Most of the witchcraft schools found in an Internet search provide basic information of the Wicca 101 variety. The schools listed in the directory go beyond the basics, offering levels of study and sometimes initiations or ordinations. For example: the **Online Pagan Campus** strives to provide college-level curricula; the **Temple of Witchcraft** enrolls students to a program based on the work of Christopher Penczak; and the **College of the Sacred Mists** has classes taught by Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone. Other witchcraft schools offer a general Wiccan education with the option of further study in their specific tradition, like Raven Grimassi's **Fellowship of the Pentacle**, the **Firefly Academy**, or the **Witch School**.

## DIRECTORY OF ONLINE PAGAN/WICCAN SCHOOLS

† = 100 or fewer students. †† = 500 or fewer students. ††† = 501 or more students.

### Seminaries

In this directory, the term "seminary" describes a school's primary purpose as being the training of candidates for leadership in Pagan ministry, loosely-defined. **Please note: none** of the listed schools currently provides students with an accredited degree recognized as a valid professional and/or academic credential by mainstream culture; offers federal student aid; or can ensure that their graduates will be eligible for employment as government or NGO chaplains.

#### Ardantane

www.ardantane.org  
P. O. Box 307  
Jemez Springs, NM 87025



†† Located in New Mexico,

Ardantane offers training in Pagan leadership and ministry skills, sacred living, healing, and shamanism, as well as Wicca and other Pagan paths. Classes offered on-site, in Albuquerque, and online. Founded in 1996, led by Amber K, staff and Directors. Ardantane is intentionally not pursuing accreditation. Cost: \$60-\$110 per seminar.

#### Cherry Hill Seminary

http://cherryhillseminary.org  
P. O. Box 5405  
Columbia, SC 29250-5405  
CHS@cherryhillseminary.org  
888-503-4131



† One of the most well-known and fully-staffed seminaries, Cherry Hill offers practical training in Pagan ministry and Master's programs in ministry. Most classes are online, but the school sponsors several conferences and other in-person options. Founded in 2000, led by an Executive Director (Holly Emore since 2000) and a Board of Directors. Cherry Hill is very upfront about the fact that its Master's programs are not yet accredited and its ongoing plans to acquire accreditation. (See http://www.cherryhillseminary.org/about/frequently-asked-questions/accreditation/) Cost: \$95-\$445 per class.

#### Ocean Seminary College

www.oceanseminarycollege.org  
no offline contact information was available on the site



† An interfaith seminary with an emphasis on nature-based spiritual wisdom. Founded in 2005, led by Dr. Katherine MacDowell, Ocean is entirely tuition free. OSC does not appear to be pursuing professional accreditation at this time. Cost: \$0.

**Wiccan Seminary  
aka Woolsten-Steen  
Theological Seminary**  
www.wiccanseminary.edu  
770-679-4304



† Woolsten-Steen

teaches in the tradition of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church and offers degrees in Wiccan Ministry. Founded in 2000, led by Lady Belladonna Laveau. Wiccan Seminary features a unique class delivery system through the online MMOG environment Second Life; students also meet at several seasonal festivals. Technology requirements for this school are significant, and prospective students need high-speed internet and Web cams. WSTS asserts that it has "state certification" but does not appear to be pursuing professional academic accreditation at this time. Cost: \$39-\$79 per month. (No tuition rates were available online for specific classes.)

### Single-Gender Schools

Single-gender schools define gender according to their own theological tenets. Transgender/transsexual students may encounter barriers to entry in some single-gender schools. None offer professional degrees.

#### Ash and Thorn Goddess School

http://ashandthorn.webs.com/  
no offline contact information available on the site

† A school for men's spiritual development based in the Order of the White Moon tradition. Founded in 2010, led by Moonwater Chalcedony Ashwood and Lady Zephyr. Initiations offered from 1st Degree to High Priest. Cost: \$30 for 4 lessons, or \$120 per Level.

#### Avalonian Theological Seminary

www.avalonseminary.org ]  
P.O. Box 22  
Seneca Falls, New York 13148



† A small school for women's spiritual awakening in the Celtic Women's Mysteries, in association with the Sisterhood of Avalon. Founded in 1995, led by Jhenah Telyndru. Membership in the Sisterhood of Avalon is \$36/year. ATS Tuition is \$240/year for a five-year program. Applications are accepted twice a year, at Calan Mai (Beltane) and Calan Gaeaf (Samhain).

#### In Her Name

www.inhername.com  
no offline contact information available onsite



† In Her Name — Temple of Learning is a home-study mystery school open to women world-wide, featuring an emphasis on the intuitive arts and dedication to the Goddess. Cost: \$5-\$25 per month.

**Sisterhood  
of the Silver Branch**  
www.thesilverbranch.org  
no offline contact information available on the site



† A personal school for "daughters of the Goddess" in an eclectic Goddess tradition. Founded in 1999, led by Lunaea Weatherstone. Cost: \$25-\$45 per month.

**Women's Theological Institute  
of the Reformed Congregation  
of the Goddess, www.rcgi.org**  
P. O. Box 6677, Madison, WI 53716  
(608) 226-9998, rcgi@rcgi.org



† A small Dianic women's only school for women who wish to further their understanding of the Goddess, women's wisdom and witchcraft. Cost: approx. \$390-\$590 a year. (Academic year runs September-August.)

### Non-Sectarian Magickal School

**The Grey School of Wizardry**  
www.greyschool.com  
no offline contact information available onsite



††† A large school which concentrates on training in magickal arts and science from a non-sectarian perspective. Accepts minors (see sidebar) Cost: approx. \$40-\$80 a year. (Depend on age and level).

### Co-Gender Wiccan/Witchcraft Schools

These schools concentrate on personal spiritual training in their own magical traditions. Many offer initiations and ordinations; none offer professional degrees.

**College of the Sacred Mists**  
www.workingwitches.com  
633 Trancas St, Napa, CA 94558  
866-918-2437, studentservices@workingwitches.com



††† A large school which trains in Celtic/Faerie Wicca. Founded in 1996, led by Lorien Carrillo (aka Lady Raven Moonshadow), some courses taught by Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone. Degrees and clergy ordination offered. Cost: \$25/month; other courses from \$175 to \$350.

**Fellowship of the Pentacle**  
www.fellowshipofthepentacle.com  
P.O. Box 80627  
Springfield, MA 01138



† A personal school teaching older forms of European-rooted Witchcraft through several home study courses. Founded in 2006, led by Raven Grimassi and Stephanie Taylor. Initiations offered. Cost: \$30/month.

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**Firefly Academy**  
www.fireflyacademy.org  
no offline contact  
information available

† † † A medium-sized school training in the Wiccan Firefly Tradition. Founded in 2006, led by Iris Firemoon. Clergy initiations offered. Cost: \$10/year or \$25 for life.



**The Magicka School of Wicca and Tarot**  
www.magickaschool.com  
no offline contact information available

† † † A large school focused on magical skills and study of Wicca and Tarot using a broadly Gardenarian/Alexandrian approach. Founded in 2004 by Pino Longchild and Chantal Santos, led by Pino Longchild. Cost: Lifetime Membership £34.99.

### The Online Pagan Campus

<http://courses.thepagan-campus.net/>

† † † A large school which provides college-level education for pagans about paganism and other metaphysical subjects. Led by Athrawon and Finnoula. Cost: free.



**The Temple of Witchcraft**  
templeofwitchcraft.org/  
PO Box 2252, Salem, NH  
03079

† † † A medium-sized school that teaches witchcraft and magick. Founded in 1998, led by Christopher Penczak, Steve Kenson, and Adam Sartwell. Ordinations and initiations offered. Cost: \$225 - \$300 per course.



**Witch School**  
www.witchschool.com  
P O Box 313  
Hoopston, IL 60942

† † † One of the largest Pagan schools that teaches Wicca. Founded in 1998, led by Ed Hubbard. Offers First degree through clergy ordinations in the Corellian Nativist tradition of Wicca. Accepts minors (see sidebar.) Cost: some free; the rest \$5/month or \$19.99/year.

### Mystery Schools (not Wiccan)

This eclectic category including schools that concentrate on personal spiritual training in their own magical traditions outside of Wiccan lineage. No professional degrees.

### Diana's Grove Mystery School

www.dianasgrove.com  
4150 Hwy M  
Cabool, MO 65689  
St. Louis location: Ferguson, MO  
573-714-4231  
info@dianasgrove.com



DIANA'S GROVE

† † † A medium-sized school that teaches self-actualization within the context of earth-based spiritual community. Founded in 1995, led by Cynthia Jones and Patricia Strom. Cost: \$175 - \$275

### Morningstar Mystery School

www.thorncoyle.com/mystery-school/  
no offline contact information available



† A teaching vehicle and personal school for author T. Thorn Coyle. Founded in 2009. Cost: workshops \$150-200; Fiat LVX! video courses \$20 monthly.

### Celtic/Druid Schools

This category includes official schools of several of the larger Druid organizations. Many offer initiations and ordinations; none offer professional degrees.

#### Ar nDraiocht Fein

www.adf.org/training  
P.O. Box 17874  
Tucson, AZ 85731-7874



† A small school designed to create a community of Druids that have skills common to clergy of all traditions. Offers training from dedicant to clergy, initiation and ordination. Cost: \$25/year.

#### Ireland's Druidschool

www.druidschool.com  
no offline contact information available

† † † A medium-sized school that teaches Celtic Druidism. Founded in 1994, led by Con Connor. Offers an eleven step program culminating in initiation. Cost: Homestudy costs E175 (\$252 USD).

#### The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids

http://druidry.org/  
P O Box 1333, Lewes, East  
Sussex BN7 1DX, UK



† † † A large school which teaches the fundamental skills of Druidry. Founded in 1998, led by Phillip Carr-Gomm. Offers three levels of druidic training culminating in initiation. Cost: £215.00 - £340.00 depending on course. ☼

Druidic training is well-represented. **Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF)**, Ireland's **Druidschool**, and the **Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD)** all have robust programs of study. Many Druids love history and lore, so these programs can approach an academic level of intensity. Students have a long and varied reading list to peruse in addition to learning the experiential practices of the curriculum. Graduates of these programs are well-rounded and thoroughly educated.

Some students prefer their classmates to be restricted to a single gender; the majority of such schools provide education for women. **In Her Name/Temple of Learning** emphasizes the intuitive arts as they relate to developing a deeper relationship with the Goddess while **The Sisterhood of Avalon** has a more Celtic approach. The **Dianic Women's Theological Institute** of the Reformed Congregation of the Goddess as well as the **Sisterhood of the Silver Branch** have more Goddess-spirituality styles. So far, male students have only one choice, the **Ash and Thorn Goddess School**.

The Mystery School approach is not uniform; each school has different goals and thus different methods. **Diana's Grove** teaches using the structure of a different myth every year, emphasizing spiritual work in the context of community. T. Thorn Coyle's **Morningstar Mystery School** takes a syncretic mystical path, informed by Thorn's experience with the Mevlev Sufis, Reclaiming,

the Gurdjeiff Work, and the Anderson Feri tradition.

Degree-seeking students – or those interested in an explicitly academic approach – can attend a Pagan seminary program.

**Ardantane Seminary** and the **Ocean Seminary College** offer

programs in general

topics for students interested in becoming Pagan clergy. **Cherry Hill Seminary** and the **Wiccan Seminary** offer degrees specifically in Pagan ministry and theology. None of these schools offer ordination as part of their ministry tracks, (though the **Wiccan Seminary** is connected with the Aquarian Tabernacle Church) as it's assumed that the ritual of priesthood will be performed by peers in a student's primary tradition.

While every program differs in its details, students at all schools spend time outside of class doing homework: reading texts, doing divination, performing rituals and exercises, integrating lessons into a daily practice, participating in forums, writing papers, journaling, developing personal projects, and engaging in community service.

A good program should include the following elements:

- an emphasis on the “whys” of the subjects, not just a rote “how-to;”
- an institutional culture open to questions;
- an atmosphere that facilitates interaction;
- opportunities for students to learn leadership skills;
- curricula which require the development of a strong personal practice; and
- belief in the value of taking the work out into the world for the benefit of others.



**“A book won’t make a Witch... if you don’t do the work, the growth won’t be there.”**

### **What’s It Actually Like to Study Online?**

Your experience at any particular school may vary widely, but one of the most important factors is the method of delivery: purely online-only and hybrid approaches. The majority of online schools provide instruction solely via the Internet. Students interact with teachers and peers using individual e-mails, mailing lists, asynchronous class forums, and scheduled campus chats. The

**Magicka School** and the **OBOD** also provide their students access to members-only social networking sites.

Schools that take a hybrid approach typically use all of the above methods plus face-to-face instruction, and vary greatly in their specifics. For example, T. Thorn Coyle of the **Morningstar Mystery School** offers local workshops, online classes, live chats, phone calls, and video instruction. Courses for the **OBOD** and the **Temple of Witchcraft** have audio components. Ireland’s **Druidschool**, the **Sisterhood of Avalon**, **Cherry Hill**, and **Diana’s Grove** offer retreats, pilgrimages or intensives while the **Goddess College** and the **Temple of Witchcraft** offer in-person classes in addition to those online. The **Wiccan Seminary** teaches primarily in Second Life, but its President travels and offers public rituals and hands-on instruction, and students are encouraged to attend one or more of regional festivals sponsored by the Aquarian Tabernacle Church (the founding body of the school). Some of the correspondence courses, such as the **OBOD** and the **Temple of Learning**, offer courses by good old-fashioned (and highly accessible) postal mail.

Each school offers individual contact with instructors; however, the following programs explicitly state that they provide mentors for students: the **Sisterhood of Avalon**, the **College of the Sacred Mists**, the **Witch School**, **Temple of Learning** and all three **Druid** programs.




### **The Grey School of Wizardry: An Exciting Option for Pagan Kids**

If you want to enroll your child in a Pagan distance-learning program, the **Grey School of Wizardry** is one of only two options. (The other is Ed Hubbard's **Witch School**, which opened its doors to minors 13+ in September, 2011.) The Grey School, founded in 2004 by Headmaster Oberon Zell-Ravenheart opened specifically to offer magickal education to minors. The similarities to the *Harry Potter* school Hogwarts are deliberate: students are divided into Houses, compete for House points, and hope to win the "House Hat." These characteristics ensure a vibrant sense of identity and a strong school culture.

The Grey School concentrates solely on teaching magickal arts and science. For a student who wants to learn magick first and foremost, the Grey School presents a unique choice. The Grey School is not just for kids, either; a high percentage of its students are over 18, and the school recently instituted a "Magister" track for adult students.

The Grey School programs strive to teach classical and ancient wisdom, unaffiliated with any specific religious tradition. The Grey School of Wizardry graduated its first class of 7th-level students this year; while Hogwarts exists only in fiction, the Grey School is as real as anyone could want. Or, as student Breyonne Blackthorne put it, "I'm in freaking wizard school!"

Find more information at <http://www.greyschool.com/>. 

A good relationship with a dedicated mentor can mirror the kind of guidance experienced in a coven setting. Schools that employ well-known Pagans draw students seeking instruction from specific teachers; in those cases the role of teacher and mentor may be combined.

The hardest data to summarize is cost, since schools have vastly different fee schedules; monthly, yearly, per course, per class, or per credit hour. The most affordable schools are The **Firefly Academy**, the **Witch School**, the **ADF**, and the **Magicka School**. The **Ocean Seminary College**, some **Magicka School** courses, and the **Online Pagan Campus** are tuition-free.

### **Words to the Wise: a Traveler's Advisory**

While distance learning covers much of the same material as face-to-face learning, the experience can be quite different. Once on the path, seekers should be aware of a few pitfalls for the unwary.

• **Balance and Discipline:** Finding balance between ordinary life and the spiritual journey is essential to every seeker. Distance learning requires even more attention to this issue because, without a physical classroom to visit or peers with to study with, it's easy to lose motivation. Grey School Lodge Captain Stargazer notes that "it is easy to get distracted by mundane life and let weeks or months go by without study or practice." Distance learning requires a strong will. Or, as Temple of Witchcraft student Silver remarked, "a book won't make a Witch... if you don't do the work, the growth won't be there."

Students who lack this discipline make it harder for motivated students: lurkers who don't participate in discussions can make active students feel like they are alone in the virtual room. However, it's not just students that need discipline. Sometimes teachers have life events which make them unavailable. Frustrated students might feel like they've fallen into the black hole of distance learning; messages they send never receive responses, and they can't physically walk down to the Dean's Office to try and sort it out.

The issue mentioned the most in the interviews I conducted for this article was the distance part of distance learning. Students often told me that they make deep connections with one another but may never be able to afford to travel and meet in person. They feel left out of gatherings that others can attend. The curriculum is delivered well in an online format, and the connections form just fine through the aether. Still, students wished they could be more physically connected to their friends and teachers.

These points aside, every student I interviewed, from all the schools I contacted, expressed satisfaction with their programs. They considered the rewards they've gained and the advantages to distance learning worth the extra effort. After all, while the expression of our spirituality may be communal, the core of our spiritual work is solitary: our transformations take place within the private chambers of our hearts and minds.

### **Joys on the Journey**

In addition to the practical benefits of distance learning like its convenience and affordability, students I interviewed mentioned the following positive aspects of their education: intellectual stimulation, personal growth and/or emotional development, community involvement, and integration of their spirituality within their lives.

Students from all these schools work hard. Earning a certificate of completion or an initiatory level can require hundreds of hours of study. Skywatcher, a Lodge Captain at the Grey School of Wizardry, estimates

that he's written over 500 essays, while Temple of Witchcraft student Kurt says that his courses require as much work as a college degree program. There's no regurgitation; each completed assignment must prove he's worked with and experienced the material. Rama, also of the Temple, points out that calling the work "challenging" depends on where your strengths lie; it speaks well of their schools that all the students interviewed felt challenged.

Classes do more than stimulate the intellect, however; coursework can force students to face and heal things within themselves. For example, DragonAngel, who studies at the Grey School, confronted deep issues during her classes and now feels "lighter, happier and healthier." Morningstar student Ariana Dawnhawk says following the curriculum requires the "integration of emotions, intellect, and everything else." Tony, also of Morningstar, has experienced major transitions during his time of study which he believes would have been traumatic without the "support of the work." Temple of Witchcraft student Elaaine Stormbender says, "witchcraft changes your life. It is liberating."

Many students I spoke to seek online groups in order to find like-minded people with whom to form a community. Sharing the class experience or participating in a school's social forums uses the immediacy of Internet communication to connect at all hours and in all locations. Tony says that his class forums provide "a supportive container that can help us in our home communities." The Sisterhood of Avalon program encourages "co-mentoring" among students; Sydney discovered that helping her sisters deepens her own learning. River, also of the Sisterhood, appreciates the empathy she discovered by working with that group of women. New students, like Breyonne Blackthorne of the Grey School, value the welcome they receive when finding somewhere that their ideas, feelings, and beliefs are held in high regard.



Perhaps the best lesson learned in these distance programs is that of integration. Morningstar student Shen-Tat says that he has brought his "apparently-separately-moving parts into a more unified whole." Sisterhood of Avalon student Tiffany has learned to

balance "remembered or intuitive information" with scholarship, letting each inform the other. Tony has become more centered, expanded his capacity for emotional intimacy, and deepened his relationship with his gods. Temple of Witchcraft student Erica has a regular practice, and feels connected to the elements and the world around her.

Once through the maze, distance students usually find the rewards they sought. Like effective graduates of any educational institution, they then bring their work out into the world. Tiffany takes what she learned to help other women experience the Goddess in their lives. Shea of the Temple of Witchcraft works to "heal the worlds and bring them together." Silver, also of the Temple, was called to a path of Service through her study and now brings her witchcraft into her hypnotherapy practice.

The struggle for the discipline required in a distance program, when mastered, results in strong, well-balanced students with great resiliency. They can perform a solitary ritual with confidence, and that confidence translates to compelling public rituals. They become the kinds of peers that we wish to circle with, or the kinds of leaders we wish to emulate.

Pagan distance education is a practical and powerful option for today's generation of seekers. It's a good tool to have in the box for lifetime learners, and the success of the online model of distance learning has given many Pagan seekers the chance to expand their horizons. Finding the school that's right for you is a challenging endeavor, but will hone you for the ongoing work of your Pagan education. For, as Kurt says, the work never ends: "the more work you can do, the more work you are given to do." ♦

*We live in an ocean of air... by our breathing we are attuned to our atmosphere. In all Oriental and mystic philosophies, the breath holds the secret to the highest bliss. That is why breathing is the dominant factor in the practice of Yoga.*

– Alexander Lowen, *The Voice of the Body*

# THE power OF breath

ARTICLE BY DIOTIMA MANTINEIA  
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“Air moves us” begins a popular Pagan chant, and indeed, motion defines Air. From the soft stirrings of our breath to the destructive force of a hurricane, Air swirls, churns, transmits, spins, circulates, expands, flutters, wafts, and gusts. Gases – the phase of matter that is analogous to the Element of Air – have no shape or volume of their own; in almost constant motion, they take on the shape of their container and expand to fill it. But if you compress gases – as, for instance, the piston of an engine does – you can extract considerable power.

This is true of our breath as well. When we control it – compress it using both our bodies and mental intent – we generate personal, magical, and spiritual power. Anyone who aspires to do serious magic or walk the Otherworlds will benefit from practicing some form of breath control.

Many of the techniques in use today in Western magical traditions are drawn from the various branches of yoga, as well as Taoist medical texts and the martial arts. Many historians consider that the use of breath control in the martial arts and Zen Buddhism can be traced back to Bodhidharma, the 5<sup>th</sup> century Indian Buddhist monk who taught the Shaolin monks techniques of internal and external exercises, including breathing exercises, to improve their health and strength. *Pranayama*, the Sanskrit name for the yogic techniques of breath control, can be traced back at least to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, where it is listed as one of the eight branches of yoga.

Pranayama – which translates to “control of the life force” – is used to increase awareness of subtle energies, regulate them and use that regulation to better integrate the subtle and physical bodies. Swami Rama wrote:

“The purposes of pranayama are to balance the vital principles, to bring the mind under volitional control, and to direct the vital force through certain channels in the body. These practices help reveal a subtle aspect of life and nature that can be experienced in no other way.”<sup>1</sup>

Weaving and re-weaving the tapestry of body, mind, and spirit as a living work of art is the goal of magick as well as yoga, and the practices of pranayama affect all three of those threads.

Yogic practices of pranayama begin simply, but progress – ideally under the guidance of an experienced teacher – to more complex practices involving *bandhas* (various muscular locks used in conjunction with the breath), dietary restrictions, and specific physical postures. While the more advanced pranayamas should be approached from within the structure of a wider practice of yoga, some basic techniques (see sidebar) can be used to enhance any magical practice through increased awareness of, and ability to manipulate, subtle energies.

Yogic breathing techniques, while not inherently more effective than those used in the martial arts, are more easily adapted to magical practice because the martial arts breathing techniques are closely tied to the physical movements, whether used to cultivate chi as an internal strengthening practice as in tai chi, or to issue power, as in a martial form (series of movements) or a combat situation. Control of chi, which requires control of the breath, is a pinnacle of achievement in the martial arts, and it is said that no lesser practitioner can defeat a true master of tai chi.

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## Preparing for Breathwork

Utilizing yogic breathing techniques starts with re-learning the art of diaphragmatic breathing – our natural breath. Because breath is so entwined with the autonomic nervous system, stress triggers a “fight or flight” response that includes shallow chest breathing. Ironically, so many of us are stressed-out in modern life that it is rather unusual to find anyone who breathes naturally without training. Restoring diaphragmatic breathing is helpful in reducing stress and foundational for further work with the breath.

To re-learn this type of “belly breathing” begin by lying down on a firm surface and simply becoming aware of your breath. Keeping your arms relaxed, elbows on the floor, place your hands on your belly below your rib cage. Now focus on inhaling into your belly so your hands are raised, then exhaling. (Both the inhalation and exhalation



**W**hen we control our breath, we generate magical power. You can use that energy by learning how to breathe naturally.

should be through the nose.) Notice how your rib cage does not need to move as you breath this way. Focus on relaxing the muscles of your abdomen and regulating your breath until it is effortless. Now rest your hands by your sides and continue to

observe your breath. When you are ready, stretch and sit up.

Next, you try this type of breathing sitting or standing. Either way, your spine should be straight, but relaxed. When standing or sitting, you will notice that the lower ribs tend to expand to the sides during belly breathing as the abdomen fills with breath. Observe your breath, and work to bring it to a place where it is relaxed and comfortable to breath this way. It won't be hard, once you relax. This is the way you were born to breathe. Now try to bring this type of breathing into your daily life, checking regularly during the course of the day and returning your breath to your belly if you find yourself breathing high in your chest.

### **The Nose Knows**

Preparation for breathwork also entails becoming aware of the nasal cycle, the alternating dominance of one nostril over the other. Ideally, this will switch off on a regular cycle, but stress and blockages interfere with it. Once you have become attuned to your breath, it's fairly easy to tell which nostril has a greater flow of air at any given time, but if you want a visual, get a

mirror and hold it under your nose. The nostril that makes the largest breath mark on the mirror is the dominant one. Spend some time becoming aware of the way your nostrils switch which one is handling the greater amount of air. The shift from nostril to nostril should happen every two hours or so. This cycle measurably affects brain function, mood and other physiological states. Eventually, you can learn to switch nostril dominance to affect which area of your brain – the right or left lobe – is getting the most oxygen. Creative block? Free up the left nostril. Math homework? Free up the right.

### The Three-Part Breath, or Dirgha Pranayama,

These three exercises are from the yogic traditions, and together offer the benefits of cleansing, energizing, balancing, and strengthening the aura, as well as a refinement of the ability to sense energy. In all the following exercises, a crossed-legged position on the floor is preferable, but sitting straight in a chair is fine.

The Three-Part Breath, or *Dirgha Pranayama*, is foundational to the practice of pranayama. To learn this breath, it's important to re-learn how you breathed when you were a baby — from your belly. First spend some time exploring the limits of your breath; breath into your belly only, letting it expand as much as it can on the inhale without forcing, then, without pause, beginning to exhale, and exhaling as much as you can. Your stomach muscles will contract some as your lungs empty, but, again, do not force this.

Next, see how much you can breath into the middle part of your chest after you have filled your belly, and practice smooth inhalations and exhalations. Try breathing only into your middle chest, too. Pay attention and become familiar with what happens in your body when you breath.

Finally, let your inhale extend all the way from your belly to the top of your lungs, but — and this is important — do not let your shoulders rise when you breath into the upper part of your lungs.

Now, your practice shifts to smoothing the breath out. In a smooth wave, not a series of steps, breath into your belly, then middle chest, then upper chest. Without holding the breath at all or locking the throat, exhale from your upper chest, then middle chest, then finally, your belly, driving all the stale air out of your lungs, and without pause, inhale into your belly, then keep the breath moving, without pausing or closing the throat as you switch from inhale to exhale or vice-versa. The breath is a circular one, and will help you balance and center, as well as energizing all your cells.

The next breath, the Breath of Fire\*, or Agni Prasana, comes from the Kundalini Yoga tradition, though it has counterparts in other yogic systems. For this breath, you should start with your abdominal muscles relaxed, sitting straight, neck long, chin slightly tucked. Breathing only through the nose, begin forcefully inhaling and exhaling small, quick breaths from the diaphragm. It will be like sniffing. There should be equal emphasis on the inhale and exhale. Start slowly, and gradually increase the amount of time you practice this exercise. ❖

\*NOTE: Do not practice this breath if you have high blood pressure.

To clear up sinus issues and physical blockages of the nostrils, yogis use a small ceramic pot called a “neti pot” to clean their nostrils regularly. Neti pots are available in most health food stores. But many people still react with horror at the thought of pouring salt water through their nostrils. As it happens, if you tilt your head at just the right angle, the water runs from one nostril over the top of the nasal cartilage and out the other nostril into the sink, carrying pollen, bacteria, fungi, etc with it. It doesn't hurt, you don't feel like you are drowning, and there are no side effects. Best of all, it works!

### Finding the Prana in Your Pranayama

*Prana*, a Sanskrit word, translates as “vital energy.” It is a form of energy that pervades all living things, and is analogous to what the Chinese refer to as *chi*, or *qi*. Becoming more aware of the flow of prana requires a meditative focus on the breath. The three main channels of prana in the body run up the spine and on either side of it, switching directions regularly, just like the snakes on the medical caduceus. These channels, or *nadis*, are called the *Ida*, which rules the right side of the brain, the left side of the body and ends in the left nostril; *Pingala*, which rules the left side of the brain, the right side of the body and ends in the right nostril; and *Sushumna*, which runs straight up the spine. You may find it easiest to sense the prana in these channels, or possibly in the chakras, if you are familiar with them, or you may simply become aware of the flow of energy on the breath and let that carry you where it will.

While focusing on the breath can be an excellent meditation technique, it's also very helpful in refining and sharpening a magician's ability to work with etheric energy. Most magicians remember at least one or two of the exercises they used to train themselves to sense and manipulate energy — forming a ball of energy between your palms is a common one. Try one or two of those exercises before you do some breathwork, and again after, and see if you can sense a difference in the amount of energy that you can raise.

Certain postures and mudras (hand gestures) can strengthen the effects of pranayama and help channel energy. Try raising your arms in a V-shape over your head, with either four fingers closed and thumbs pointing up, or with both hands flat as if carrying a tray while doing the Breath of Fire (see sidebar). Kundalini yoga is a branch of yoga that tends to combine postures, mudras, and pranayama in useful and very magical ways.

Healing, whether in person or long-distance, is another magical protocol that is enhanced by doing breathwork. If you do healing work, experiment with various breaths to find what enhances your healing energy, and also which ones help to ground you afterwards.

Basic work with the breath will enhance your health and mental focus whether you try to sense the prana or not. But a magician can take breathwork much farther by working to sense the energy they are moving and cultivating it. The three exercises given in the sidebar are a good and safe way to start, but be sure to pay close attention to your mood and attention span during the day as you start doing the exercises. Tweak your posture and experiment with the breaths to find what works for you.

There is no doubt, becoming aware of and working with your breath will assist your magical and spiritual practice, as well as improve your emotional and physical well-being. The power is truly within and around you. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Swami Rama, *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 1, Advanced Practices of Yoga*, Himalayan Institute Press, 1986, p. 2.



*Interviewer*

**TIM SCHNEIDER**

is a Northern Tradition shaman and priest. He has written as well as edited articles for *RendingtheVeil.com*, an occult e-zine. His passions include writing, reading, drawing, martial arts, spirituality, and sustainable living. He lives in Michigan.

# Kellianna

## Songstress of the Sacred

**K**ellianna is an American pagan artist internationally performing songs and chants inspired by myth, magic, sacred places, and ancient times. With guitar and vocals she brings to life the stories and sagas of the Gods and Goddesses. With Native American frame drum and chant she honors the Earth and the Ancestors via primal drumming and powerful vocals. Her live shows are a combination of acoustic guitar songs and chants and she facilitates chant circles at festivals and workshops. Kellianna is a collector of chants and takes great joy in sharing these chants in her circles. She is experienced in the art of ritual chant, and chooses the songs to move energy, to celebrate the ancient mysteries, and to strengthen intention. Her most recent album, *The Ancient Ones*, was just released in April 2012. Our interviewer Tim Schneider reached Kellianna via email.

**W&P** Thank you for this interview, Kellianna. First, please, tell us a little about yourself.

**Kellianna** I'm from Massachusetts and have been a musician for more than twenty years. A decade ago, I switched styles from blues and rock-n-roll to Goddess music, and I've never looked back. It was definitely the right thing for me to be doing the more sacred music, which has taken me to amazing places. I've been a practicing Pagan for almost a quarter-century!

**W&P** When you switched from secular to Goddess music, that must have been an amazing experience.

**Kellianna** Yes, it was! *Lady Moon* was recorded and released in Winter of 2004; I didn't know what I was doing when I started, so it was easy. (Beginner's luck, I guess!) I had seven tracks written from material I had created for rituals, and then I wrote "Morgana" and "Maiden, Mother, Crone." I went into the studio full of passion and recorded it really fast; it was like a purging, and I just needed to get it out in the world and get it done. By my third CD, *Elemental*, I'd become much pickier; I love the actual recording, but the mixing and editing is the real bulk of stress, I'd say.

**W&P** Why did you make that switch – from secular to sacred music?

**Kellianna** Well, it's quite a story, actually! I had taken a trip to Glastonbury, England with Shawna Carol in July of 2002. We were fortunate enough to have private access to Stonehenge at dawn one morning, and we did a guided ceremony there.

At that time, I had been playing in a rock band with four guys, and it was like this horrible boat anchor that I was dragging around. I remember walking around Stonehenge thinking, "I probably should quit music," because I couldn't continue the lifestyle of playing in bars and pubs any longer. After a thirty-minute silent meditation we came back together, and the chant "Stonehenge" was the first thing that came out of my mouth. We went on to the Goddess Conference two days later, and women were singing music to the Goddess, and that experience just lit a fire under me. I went into the studio and recorded *Lady Moon* in twenty-two hours, sent it to Glastonbury, and by New Year's I was already being called back to the Conference to sing the following year.

The production style of *Lady Moon* is what I love; it's organic, it's powerful, it's raw. I'm a performer all the way, and I would much prefer to do live performances than a CD, but recording is a means to an end.

**W&P** What is the primary influence on your music, spiritually-thinking?

**Kellianna** I've been a mythology buff since I was a child. To take an element of a myth and try to tell it in the way I understand it is a favorite practice of mine. Over the years, I have traveled to international sacred sites and sacred sites within the United States, which provides me with an enormous source of inspiration. I write from my experiences of these sacred sites, and I write about the Wheel of the Year and the celebrations we Pagans carry on throughout the year.

**W&P** Is there a style that impacts your composition the most?

**Kellianna** I think I have my own sound and my own presentation. When I started, I knew ritual chants, but I didn't know Shawna Carol back then, and I didn't know that traditional styles, of modern Pagan music. So I just took my passion for strong vocals and powerful drums and guitar, and I made my own style. I want my songs to evoke powerful feelings because I'm singing them with a lot of emotion.

Wherever the Goddess takes me, I trust my inner creative creature. I don't concentrate on having a sound or style, I just create what I

am called to do.

**W&P** How do you record your albums? What instruments do you like the best?

**Kellianna** I had some experience in working in the studio before I began my sacred work, so I'm not just wasting time not knowing what to do. I go in and record a drum track and the base vocals, and then I write the rounds based on how these things grow. Sometimes all the parts come at once, but more often they morph as I work with them. I play the frame drum, Native American style, the guitar, and flute, and I use these because they are the ones I can play the best! I learned the guitar as a means to an end, but I love to drum.

**W&P** Do you have a favorite song, one that you feel is your best?

**Kellianna** Yes, "Brigid's Flame," from *Elemental*. I love the harmony, and it's also one of the hardest things I've ever sung in my life. That song came to me at Imbolc in 2009, and it really surprised me. It was technically difficult to record; it's four lines with one breath, so you need to have serious lung power and sing it clearly. When I went into the studio, I bent over pulling in big breaths just to do the lines; we had to edit them



out later! We just did it over and over until I was satisfied.

**W&P** Do you incorporate rituals and/or magic into your work? If so, how?

## Kellianna

Absolutely. I consider my performances to be rituals, and I set them up with that intention. My music is written for rituals, and I want these songs to be out there and used. I want people to say "Let's do Persephone for Samhain." I want people using these songs for their ceremonies; it's why I wrote them in the first place.

**W&P** What is it like to be a Pagan musician? What do you see as the state of Pagan music?

## Kellianna

I think we are very fortunate in this country to have such an amazing Pagan music scene. I've spent years on the festival circuit and the other performers and bands are like my tribe. Amazing musicians are all around: people like SJ Tucker, Kenny Kline, Sharon Knight, the Dragon Ritual Drummers, Frenchy & the Punk, Wendy Rule; there's so many I can't possibly name them all. It's a fabulous time for our music, even with the difficult economic times we are in.

As for the business side of things: I don't know if we'll ever be considered mainstream; the music industry people have no clue what my music means, which is an experience common to all Pagan artists. We depend on the festival circuits; and now the Pagan music is a huge draw for the festivals themselves. We're all doing our sacred music in our own way, and everybody's craft is beautiful, and there's no competition because everyone has their own unique vision. It's pretty liberating, and everyone likes to sit around and help each other; I like the fact this tribe is just welcoming and appreciative of what each of us do. There's room for everybody.

I imagine we'll probably remain underground, but then the underground is limitless with the internet. I see access for the Internet as the future for Pagan music, a place in which a Pagan in Hungary can download Wendy Rule and enjoy her



work. Plus, of course, doing shows, rituals and festivals; this is the future, where any Pagan on the planet can hear us!

**W&P** Where do you see your music taking you? Conversely, where would you like to take your music?

## Kellianna

I see my music taking me to all kinds of amazing places around the world, just like it has been doing for a decade! See, this is a family, a world, a tribe full of connections, and you never know what's going to happen next!

An example: I got a connection from my years performing at the Goddess Conference that led to my being

into the Netherlands for the Lorelei Vrouwen Festival, a women's festival there. In all the miles I cover and the connections I make, the threads just go out there into the world, and I follow them wherever and whenever I can.

**W&P** Is there anything you would like our readers to know? Where can they go to find your albums or to discover where you'll be touring next?

**Kellianna** As far as my music goes, I hope that when listening to the songs or singing them or using them in ritual, people will feel the intent I put into the music, and I hope that they are getting out of it what I had put this sacred music out there for.

I'm traveling quite a bit this year to some amazing venues and events, many of them with Wendy Rule. This summer, I'll be at Wisteria Summer Solstice Gathering, the New York Faerie Festival, Spirits of the Earth Festival in Ontario, the Lughnasadh at the End of the Universe (I love that name!), just to name a few. Check out my website: I update my touring calendar every week, and hopefully I'll be appearing somewhere close to you soon!

As much as I love performing live, I know that not everyone can get to those events, so please feel free to pick up my latest CD, *The Ancient Ones*, (as well as my other CDs) directly from my site at [www.kellianna.com](http://www.kellianna.com) or from CD Baby. ❖



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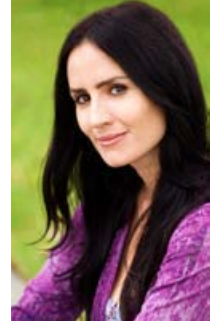
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## The Craft by Tess Whitehurst

# The Air Makeover

Lighten up with this four-week magical plan.

To flow harmoniously with the current during such rapidly changing times, it's especially important for us to keep our personal energy moving in a healthy way. In other words, when we stay energetically clear and buoyant, we can manifest our desires more effectively, recognize and follow our divine guidance, and generally make the most of all of these (ultimately) positive macrocosmic shifts.

And, since this issue's topic is the element of Air, I thought it would be lovely to present a magical makeover formulated with the intention of getting out of ruts, clearing away challenging energetic debris, and generally opening ourselves up to our most ideal energetic flow. This makeover is intended to cover a four week period, but you can do it more slowly if you choose. (I don't recommend speeding it up, though, since this is an important key to shifting momentum, getting out of ruts, and getting into the flow.)

Throughout the entire makeover, consciously connect with the Air element whenever possible. Notice the appearance and sound of wind through the trees, watch the clouds move across the sky, gaze at birds and imagine being one, pay special attention to scent and subtleties, and let your spirit soar with music, poetry, and scintillating new ideas.

A note: I recommend beginning this makeover during the waning phase of the Moon (just past Full until New Moon), since the first two weeks are all about releasing what's "weighing you down" — a task best suited to the second half of the Lunar cycle.



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### Week #1: Lighten Up!

To encourage the blessings of the Air element to blow through your life, it's important to clear the decks. Once you do so your inner and outer landscapes will begin to glow and sparkle. So here's your homework assignments for the first week.

Every day for seven days:

- Spend ten minutes (or more) clearing clutter, organizing, and cleaning your home.
- Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, sugar, and flour. (If you are asking "what does that leave?" the answer is: lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, which is what medical professionals want us to eat more of anyway!)
- Drink eight full glasses of pure water.
- Practice forgiveness. At both waking and bedtime, search your consciousness for one grudge, old hurt, or limiting belief that you are willing to let go of. Then, forty times (count on all your fingers four times) say aloud, "I am willing to let go of \_\_\_\_."

The first step to becoming lighter is to release whatever is "weighing" you down.

and pen and free write your answers to each of the following questions. Express yourself as you would to your most intimate friend; don't censor yourself, just let your mind flow in response to the questions.

When you are done with one question, blow out the candle and put your writing in a safe place and ponder your answer until the next day.

**1. Love & friendship.** How are your family/intimate/friend relationships? In what ways do you feel appreciated, and conversely, how do you feel taken for granted? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

### Week #2: Smoke & Mirrors: 7 Steps to Discovering Your True Self

During the course of this week, put aside a half-hour each day to complete the following exercise, one question at a time.

Light a stick or cone of incense and sit comfortably so that you can easily gaze into a mirror. (If you are sensitive to smoke/scents put on your favorite meditative music instead.) Be sure you have plenty of water nearby and drink a glass or more as you do the work. You'll need a journal and something to write with, too.

Relax, take some deep breaths, and gaze at yourself lovingly. Feel your heart opening to yourself as it would if you were gazing at a beloved family member or friend. Once you feel sufficiently tuned in to yourself, grab a notebook

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**2. The well of inspiration.** In what ways is your inner child healthy and happy? How do you express yourself in satisfying ways? What makes you really happy? How do you share your creativity with the world? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

**3. Finding your balance.** How often do you feel grounded and well-balanced in your life? Considering the different aspects of your life — work, social, home, family, etc. — which part(s) get the most attention and which one(s) are neglected? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

**4. Safe and supported.** How abundant and supported do you feel with regards to your basic needs? In what ways — financial, emotional, physical — do you feel safe and secure? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

**5. Luck and fate.** Do you feel that things flow harmoniously for you, or are you always “fighting the current?” How often, and in what ways, do you receive help from the seen and unseen worlds? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

**6. Your unique destiny.** How often do you experience serenity in your life? When you feel “in the flow,” what are you doing, and who are you doing it with? How often do you feel that you are on your most ideal life path and in touch with your authentic depths? What would you like to change about this aspect of your life?

**7. Use what you have written to clear blockages.** On the seventh day, light the candle and look into your eyes again. Place your right hand lovingly on your heart and your left hand lovingly on your belly. Take a few deep breaths and send yourself a pulse of deep, kind, healing energy.

Next, look back over what you’ve written and find several conditions you’d like to clear. (The “what would you like to change” portion of the writing should reveal some patterns that are holding you down. Write down a short list (no more than five) of what you would most like to let go of.

Now light a bundle of white sage, and say, “I now call upon Element of Air to help me clear these \_\_\_\_\_ (patterns, beliefs, conditions) from my life.”

Carefully smudge your sacred space (home, temple, room) in a counterclockwise direction. When this is complete, smudge your own energetic field, then extinguish the sage.

Now, sit down once again, take a look at your answers, and formulate or choose one affirmations, rhyme, invocation, song, or chant (anything with words, since word magick

**Consciously moving our bodies, especially our breath, helps align our intention the buoyant, swiftly-moving element of Air.**

belongs to the realm of Air) that will effectively shift your inner landscape in the way you desire.

For example, if you notice that you desire more romance in your life, you might choose the affirmation, “I am love, love is everywhere, and I am in a whirlwind

of romantic bliss.” Or, perhaps you realize that manifesting more abundance (or even just feeling more abundant) would do you a world of good. In this case, you might formulate an invocation such as, “Abundantia, Golden Goddess, I call on you! Thank you for sharing your wealth and drenching me in an avalanche of abundance!” Or you might choose to call in a specific type of energy or condition with a single word. For example, you might simply say the word, “Love,” or “Wealth,” or “Creativity,” over and over again with the intention of aligning your personal energy with the vibration of the word.

You have now prepared the way to bring about the change you desire. Write down your affirmations, extinguish the candle and put your writing in a safe place as it will be used in next week’s exercise.

**Week #3: Breathe, Move, and Affirm.**

Consciously moving our bodies, especially moving air in and out of our lungs, helps align us with the fresh, buoyant, swiftly moving air element. So, on each day of week number three, do the following exercise.

Now, light a candle (or incense) and put on some relaxing music and sit comfortably. Set a timer for five minutes. Close your eyes

and simply notice your breath as it goes in and out. Notice how it feels in your nostrils, chest, and belly. Allow it to naturally deepen as you notice it. If you notice your mind wandering, don't worry – simply bring it back to the breath.

After the timer dings, set it for one minute. Open your eyes wide, stick out your tongue, and pant like a dog. Relax your stomach and feel the breath moving your belly in and out. After the timer dings again, bring your breathing back to normal and breathe consciously until you feel grounded, centered, and comfortable.

Now change the music to a more uplifting and energetic one, and get out your written work from last week. Choose one of the chants/invocations/songs/words/affirmations. Repeat it over and over. Put everything into it. Feel it. Believe it. Speak/sing/chant from your heart.

End this exercise by moving your body, while repeating your affirmation silently; walk, run, dance, do yoga, or otherwise move your body for at least 10 minutes. Then come back to your quiet place and your ground and center.

By using three modalities — breathwork, word magick, and bodily movement — around the affirmation, you make it three times as powerful; feel free to continue this practice for the rest of the month — or beyond!

#### **Week #4: Fly with the Winged Ones**

Most of us call on spiritual allies (or a group of helpers) that is aligned with the Air element, whether we call them “spirits of the East,” “sylphs,” “fairies,” “angels,” or animal allies like birds. This week's practice is about getting even more in alignment with how the Spirits of the East and the divine aspects of the Air element manifest in our personal cosmology. This helps us to activate our airy flow and open ourselves even more profoundly to the blessings of the Air element. Those benefits include (but are not limited to):

- fresh ideas;
- useful new perspectives;
- self expression and creativity;
- lightness and buoyancy;
- swift, positive change; and
- synchronicity and harmonious flow.



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All this week, do the following exercises.

**1. Meditate on the East.** Wake up before sunrise and make a cup of your favorite morning beverage. Go outside somewhere where you can see the eastern horizon. Sit comfortably, facing east, relaxing as you sip your hot beverage while the sun rises. As you do so, periodically close your eyes and gently tune in to the Spirits of the East. You may see visual representations of them with your inner vision or your actual eyes, feel feathery wings brush your brow, hear specific names, or even sense communications from your Air spirit allies. If you sense their presence, feel free to ask questions and receive answers in the form of words, feelings, or pictures. Be open to all of it. Allow your awareness of your air allies to naturally deepen, shift, and expand throughout the day, and when you feel them, make a conscious effort to tune in to their energy and guidance.

**2. Create an air altar** (or add specific Air aspect representations to your existing altar.) If possible, place your air altar facing East towards the rising sun.

Be sure to include representations of and/or offerings to your air allies and spiritual helpers. For example, you might consider adding one or more of the following:

- naturally shed feathers;
- incense;
- images of angels, fairies, birds; as well as airplanes, sailboats, balloons, and kites;

- a fan;
- a flute or other wind instrument;
- a small potted palm;
- a wind chime (perhaps hanging above your altar).

To dedicate it (as part of your meditation on the final day of the week) face East at sunrise. Place your hands on your heart, take some deep breaths, and relax deeply. When you feel ready, say:

*Spirits of Air,  
I thank you for being present  
in my life.*

*I can feel you billowing around  
and through me like a breeze, filling  
and surrounding me with lightness,  
joy, and fresh perspectives.*

*You whisk through my life, blessing and  
transforming everything with ease.*

*I rise on your wings,  
and fly with your swift current.  
Spirits of Air, with your help, I am free.  
Thank you, thank you, thank you, and  
Blessed be.*

Continue these meditations on the Element of Air for as long as they are helpful for you; who knows, they might become part of your every day personal practice!

A personal note from the author:

*My dear readers, how I have enjoyed writing for Witches and Pagans! It is now time for me to retire this particular pen, however, as I concentrate more and more of my focus toward my books and workshops. I hope you will check in with me at my website and read my blog.*

*With love, gratitude, and the most magical wishes, Tess. ♠*

**TESS WHITEHURST** is the author of *The Good Energy Book: Creating Harmony and Balance for Yourself and Your Home*. Visit her at [www.tesswhitehurst.com](http://www.tesswhitehurst.com) or read her blog at [www.enchantingtheday.blogspot.com](http://www.enchantingtheday.blogspot.com).

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## Old World Witchcraft by Raven Grimassi

artwork by Jane Starr Weils

### Entering the Greenwood

Getting down to the roots of our religion.

**W**hen I was a small child, I used to play in the backyard where my mother tended her herb garden.

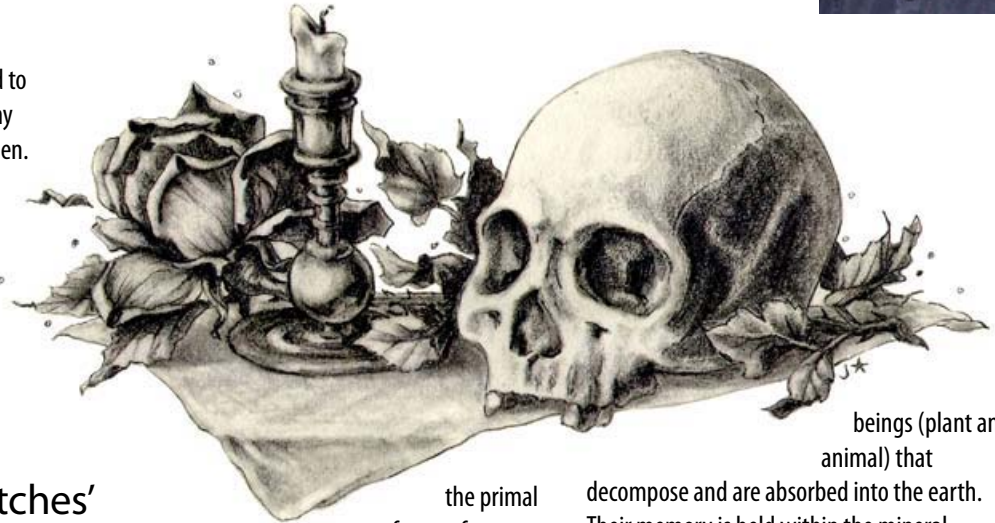
She often called me to her side as she gently cupped the leaves on one of her plants. Upon my arrival, she asked "Did I ever tell you what we do with this plant?" This was always the moment for a simple teaching or sharing of old lore. My mother was born and raised in Italy and from her I learned about the

enchanted worldview of my European ancestors. It was there in her herb garden that I unknowingly began the path of a lineage bearer.

As I grew older and could safely venture away from the house, I began exploring the woods and canyons that surrounded our home. Believing that the trees and plants were very real beings that were conscious in their own way, in the woods I felt a great presence that took me years to define. In my earliest experiences, it guided me in building rapport with the trees and plants that I encountered. I was starting down a path that would ultimately lead me into the Greenwood magic of the Plant World.

Witches have long been associated with the medicinal (and magical) use of plants. The foundational beliefs of Old World Witchcraft arose in the minds of our ancestors who lived in the forest lands. Here in the primordial forests, ideas about forces, spirits, and deities first began to evolve. European folk stories about Witches often depict them living in or near the woods, a place of light-and-shadow tied to the archetype of the Witch in tune with

**A Witches' knowledge of plants goes beyond herbalism to a more primal connection.**



the primal forces of nature.

The earliest written usage of a specific word for the concept we now know as "Witch" is the Greek word *pharmakeute* (pronounced far-mah-koo-tey).<sup>1</sup> Associated with medicines and drugs (which in ancient times came from solely from plants) the

*pharmakeute* can be thought of as a herbalist, in addition to being a spell-caster. Classical Witches were the pre-eminent plant experts and medicinal herbalists of Old Europe.

The medicinal and occult knowledge of plants is one of the oldest arts of Witchcraft. But a Witches' knowledge goes beyond simple herbalism to a more mystical connection between the Witch and the spirits of the plants with which s/he worked. This psychic and spiritual bond forms the essence of the Greenwood magic of Old World Witchcraft.

#### Plant Spirits as Magical Allies

Today's Old World Witches see the Plant Realm as sentient, a part of the collective consciousness of Nature itself, sometimes called "the organic memory of the earth." Witches with an intimate knowledge of this realm often call it Shadow, and consider it to be made up of lingering consciousness of the once-living

beings (plant and animal) that


decompose and are absorbed into the earth. Their memory is held within the mineral composition of the Land, and in Old World Witchcraft, minerals are called "the bones of the earth" or "the bone memory (of the land)."

Plants absorb minerals through the fine hair-like strands of their roots, while the thicker divisions of the root take in moisture. In the mystical view, the plant draws upon Shadow under the direction of the plant's Spirit being.

The Greenwood Witch learns to develop relationships with plant spirits who chose to become magical allies. Among the most powerful of these allies is the mandrake spirit. Often called the "sorcerer's root," the mandrake resembles the form of a human body and is believed by mystical tradition to enhance the magical ability of a Witch. The Spirit of mandrake (literally a plant in human shape) serves as a bridge between the Human and Plant Realms. Once we connect with the mandrake, its spirit can not only help us understand other plants, but to penetrate the mysteries left behind by Witches whose life force was absorbed into Nature when they died.


I have raised mandrakes for many years, and my work with their spirits was (and remains) invaluable in my work as a Witch. It was the spirit of the mandrake that first introduced me to one of the most valuable tools of the Greenwood Witch: the mortar and pestle.

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### The Mortar and Pestle: Portal and Key to the Greenwood Realm.

In my experience there is no tool more effective for working with plants and their spirits than the mortar and pestle. This seemingly prosaic tool is ideal for refining, blending, and integrating (crucial to crafting materials for a spell, as well as medicinal herbal preparations or grinding spices.)

I recommend buying several sets (none of which need to be expensive) for different uses. A stone mortar and pestle is best for working directly with Shadow (the deep realm underlying all plant work) because it connects directly with the bone memory of the earth. A stone set is also best for coarse grinding and heavy pounding and hence is most useful when working with tough and fibrous materials, such as roots, twigs, bark, and seeds; or for grinding minerals such as salt.

A wooden/bamboo mortar and pestle is ideal for connecting directly with the Plant Realm as it is made from plant materials. This type of set works best for delicate ingredients such as flowers and leaves, and for mixing ingredients together.

Using both types of mortar and pestle — either in sequence (stone first, then wood) or separately and then mixing the materials together — often yields the best magical results by invoking each realm (Shadow and Plant) directly, and then invoking each into one another when you mix the two outputs.

If you are using your mortar and pestle set(s) for magical purposes, I highly recommend that you ritually dedicate them and use them for no other purpose. (Acquire another set for kitchen/medicinal uses.) I use the following ritual to empower a mortar and pestle as a magical tool in the practice of Old World Witchcraft. Thus empowered, the set can be used both for transforming physical components as well as in a symbolic way to represent the Plant and Shadow Realms in ritual and on your home altar.



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In modern GreenWood practice an altar is used for the purpose of honoring the Green World. Set your mortar and pestle in the center of your altar, the pestle placed upright inside the mortar so that it stands like a pillar. Place plants materials appropriate for the current season around the mortar as well as inside it. When decorated in this way, the mortar and pestle become the centerpiece and indeed the focal point of the altar, a matrix through which you can interface with the Greenwood realm.

This arrangement — erect pestle inside of the cupped mortar — represents the active relationship in the natural world between the feminine and masculine forces that constitute many of the cycles of the natural world through the energy of sexual reproduction.

To enter into the energy of this imagery simply focus your attention on the mortar and pestle and speak the following words of joining:

*Seed to sprout, sprout to leaf,  
Leaf to bud, bud to flower,  
flower to fruit, fruit to seed;*

and then, the words of the mystical cycle:

*Shadow to spirit, spirit to earth,  
Earth to season, season to plants,  
Plants to tender, tender to garden,  
garden to magic, magic to mortar & pestle.*

Now, pick up the mortar and hold it between the palms of your hands. Close your eyes and envision yourself as a tree. Once you have this firmly in your mind's eye, then feel the roots extending downward from the lower half of your body. Next, feel the branches raising up from your upper half; becoming aware of your connection through your "roots" to the Shadow Realm and your "branches" to the Plant realm. Your tools are now consecrated, and you have established an enduring connection to the Greenwood.

### Using Your Mortar and Pestle.

As a concrete connection with the Green World, the mortar and pestle aids the witch in maintaining inner rapport with the Plant Realm and encourages plant spirits to work with you.

Prayers, requests, and blessings can also be channelled through the mortar and pestle. One way to do this is to use the meditation I've just described and then direct your intention down into the earth to connect with ancestors or departed souls, by envisioning the roots of the tree as you speak the words of your communication. Likewise your intentions can be directed up into the celestial realms by mentally invoking your "branches" (symbolized by extending your arms upward) as you speak.

The best results are obtained by establishing a routine. You can perform your alignments and connect to lunar forces at the new moon, half moon, and full moon. This will recharge you and intensify a personal connection. During the waning moon, you can use the alignment to release negative energy as a means of purification. Direct this into the soil through envisioned roots.

### Your First Greenwood Ally: She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose

Previously I mentioned working with plant spirits, and mentioned the mandrake. However, true mandrake (*mandragora officinarum*) is quite rare, and sprouting your own mandrake from seed is quite difficult even for experienced gardeners. For this reason, I recommend that newcomers to Greenwood Magic begin by working with a much more accessible plant, the queen of garden flowers: the Rose.

One of the advantages of Old World Witchcraft is that the budding witch can be taught directly by many of the spirit beings associated with the Plant Realm. The spirit of the Rose is among the first who will come forth to meet you, as she serves as an intermediary between plant kind and humankind. The following alignment exercise will help you connect with Her more easily.

Begin by setting your mortar and pestle in front of you. (A wood or bamboo set is best for this ritual.) Inside the mortar place a stem, flower, leaf, and a whole thorn of a red rose, and a piece of ginger root. Set the pestle in the mortar so that it stands erect, and then hold both palms over the mortar & pestle, and say:

*I call to She of the Thorn-blooded Rose,  
The spirit, whose deep earth memory knows,  
join me with the all-unseen,  
awake in me the woodland green.*

Now, tap the pestle back and forth against the inner rim of the mortar to the rhythm of a heartbeat. After a few moments, maintain the tapping while you say:

*I am the beating of the Greenwood heart  
blood memories flow from end to start  
secret mysteries passed now from Shadow  
mind, body, and spirit receives the flow.*

Cease the tapping, and then slowly and deeply inhale the fragrance within the mortar three times. As you inhale, you are invoking the essence of the spirit of the Greenwood. Next, pick up the mortar, hold it up with both hands, and say the words of affirmation:

*I hold the Greenwood magic key,  
portals open the ways to see,  
to know, to will, in silence dare,  
the Greenwood ways I lift to share.*

Conclude by holding up the mortar and pestle in presentation to the Powers. Finish removing the rose parts objects from the mortar and put them in pouch that you can carry on your person and place under your pillow at night.

You are now ready to start to begin your journey into the Greenwood Realm. As you enter the path of the *Pharmakeute*, you will connect with a spiritual lineage that embraces the enchanted world of our ancestors as well as the living world of the Greenwood in our own day. Through this magic's deep connection to the organic memory of the earth, we can become living vessels for delivering what is timeless. ✦

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup>Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2nd edition, p. 505.

**Raven Grimassi** is a practitioner of Old World Witchcraft; the author of seventeen books on Witchcraft, Wicca, and Magic; and the co-directing Elder of the Ash, Birch, and Willow tradition. His most recent book is *Old World Witchcraft*, (Weiser, 2011.) Visit his website at [www.ravengrimassi.net/](http://www.ravengrimassi.net/)

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## Connections by Archer

### The Veil

An archetype of mysteries hidden in plain sight.

“Vision is through the veil  
and inescapably so.”  
— Ibn Al-Arabi

A veil shrouds a tabernacle, wafts through the air around a dancer, covers a nun’s head. In its long history, the veil has signified enticement, vulnerability, protection, and, most recently, both oppression and defiance. But in the political controversy over Muslim veiling, the broader meaning of the veil is often ignored. In all its forms, the veil teases and suggests; it conceals but promises, someday, to reveal. It speaks of mystery — and is one.

The veils of nature draw our eyes — the mists over the mountain, the clouds half-shrouding the moon, a fall of snow blurring the landscape, smoke from a fire. Shed snake skins or insect cocoons are veils, as are the rings of fire or walls of thorn that conceal folklore’s sleeping beauties. A woman’s long hair can be a veil, or a baby can be born “veiled” with a translucent caul obscuring the face (a sign of the “sight,” the ability to see “beyond the veil” of this world).<sup>1</sup> The womb itself is a veil, within which the unborn basks in a gentle filtered light, protected from the harsher contrasts of the outer world.<sup>2</sup> We gain intimacy through the veil of another’s body, (sometimes through the veil of the hymen), and in death we leave the veil of our own body behind. Echoing these natural veils are the swaddling cloths, bridal veils, and shrouds of human life. These veils accompany us from womb to tomb and back again: we enter the world as swaddled babes and leave it “swaddled for the journey into the afterlife.”<sup>3</sup> In Indonesia, a sacred cloth is woven for every child. Used during each rite of passage, it is a literal reminder of how each step on life’s journey is a step from the known into the unknown, a step through a veil.<sup>4</sup>



“Veiled Vestal” by Raffaello Monti  
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#### Wearing the Veil

The veil of the Virgin or the mantle of Bridget, cast over their worshippers, offer womb-like protection.<sup>5</sup> Veiling their heads, worshippers echo this protection in an act of humility that provides a feeling of security and meditative seclusion.<sup>6</sup> Plutarch relates how Roman men veiled during worship, entering an enclosed world in which the inner spirit could reach out to the gods without distraction.<sup>7</sup> Early Christians wore face veils in the days before their baptism,<sup>8</sup> and Catholic penitents march wearing *capirotes* in order to share the silence and suffering of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Those entering into the mysteries of Eleusis had to “sit in solemn silence” with their heads and faces veiled, as they purified themselves in preparation for the revelations to come.<sup>10</sup> Within the veil, such initiates can “separate themselves from the profane and live only in the sacred world.”<sup>11</sup>

Seen from without, veils beckon us to mystery, marking the boundary between inner and outer, sacred and profane. Thus, holy persons — nuns, priests and priestesses, deities — and holy places and objects — chalices, altars, mandalas — are veiled.<sup>12</sup> In a way, veiling them makes them sacred, invoking the Divine by offering what’s behind the veil exclusively to It. If veiling is an act of humility, it is also one of assertion, of stepping into the place of power. Divine women veil, the folds of cloth emphasizing the “wide all-seeing eyes” of Isis, Mary and Hathor.<sup>13</sup> Throughout history, the bride, the noble woman, the dedicated virgin have all veiled as a sign of special status: “I see without being fully seen... Like a goddess... I declare this my sanctuary, from which I impart what I will.”<sup>14</sup> These could be the words of the Pythia of Delphi, who was veiled in the mists that rose from her cavern floor, and who veiled her prophecies in riddling verses. Stepping under the veil, even in humility, one makes oneself holy.

The veil shields the sacred from the outer world and vice versa, protecting the unworthy or unready from the unexpected power of the Divine. The veil that separates the groom from his desire is like the one that separates the worshipper from his mystery. (The Gnostic gospel of Phillip calls the veiled sanctuary in the Jerusalem temple “the bridal chamber.”<sup>15</sup> Such veiling manages to convey that what is sought is both vulnerable and dangerous, to be seen only by those who have proven and prepared themselves. So initiates in many traditions have had to learn their cult’s wisdom while sitting behind a veil or curtain.<sup>16</sup> In ancient Egypt and Israel, the veils hiding statues or holy objects were parted only at certain special moments.<sup>17</sup> For the veil lifts — as the womb opens — only in the fullness of time.

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## Weaving the Veil

In its role as protective womb, the veil seems particularly connected to the feminine. It is also a product of the woman's work of weaving, which has always symbolized female fertility and creation; the child was thought to be "spun" into existence inside the mother, his thread woven into the tapestry of life.<sup>18</sup> The woven veil easily represents the material

that clothes the spiritual, the body that houses life. Given that we are born of women, the veil "becomes a metaphor for the feminine itself ... for the way we enter into nature, into bodies, into life."<sup>19</sup> Fittingly, it is often a creator goddess who weaves the universe into being. Neith, the Egyptian "Virgin Mother Goddess"<sup>20</sup> wove all of existence on Her loom; in the Orphic Hymns the "Peplos

of the Heavens" was said to have been woven by Persphone, whose mother, the earth goddess Demeter, set Her the task.<sup>21</sup> The Navajo Spider Woman weaves the web of the world<sup>22</sup> as does the Hindu Kala, who in the *Mahabharata* is portrayed as "a cosmic weaver who composes the fabric of life for each individual and for the entire universe by intertwining the white threads of life and light with the black threads of darkness and sorrow."<sup>23</sup>

The practice of cloistered women (often virgins) weaving sacred textiles to clothe temples, deities or royal persons<sup>24</sup> seems like an echo of the original weaving Goddess and Her work. Every five years, a new *peplos* was woven by Athen's virgins, to clothe the statue of Athena (who was also the goddess of weaving). Embroidered with mythological symbols, "it was carried like the sail of a galley in public procession."<sup>25</sup> Even more suggestive is the apocryphal story of the young Virgin Mary being dedicated as a "temple virgin" and instructed to weave the great veil of the Jerusalem sanctuary — a veil Josephus described as depicting "a panorama of the entire heavens" which "typified the universe."<sup>26</sup> In images of the Annunciation, Mary is shown weaving the temple veil as an angel tells her she is also bound to weave the Son of God in her womb.

The mysteries the veil conceals are hidden in plain sight: the unity of nature and its reflection of the truth that rests, ultimately, within the soul.

The veil of the universe, woven by the Goddess, is worn by Her, too. For Isis and Mary, the veil not only symbolizes their divinity and the protection they offer but conveys their cosmic role. Isis wears a veil covered with stars — perhaps inherited from her mother Nut, whose body was the starry sky arching over the earth.<sup>27</sup> Echoing this depiction is the image of the sacred woman in Revelation, clothed with the

sun, with the moon at her feet and a crown of stars. (Revelation 12:1-18.)

The Virgin of Guadalupe similarly has a long veil covered with stars. This cosmic veil woven and worn by a goddess has a particular inviolability that is part of its ultimate seduction: Plutarch reports that the statue of "Isis" in Sais (actually of Neith, the cosmic weaver) bore the

inscription: "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and no mortal has yet lifted my veil."<sup>28</sup>

But the challenge of lifting or penetrating this veil remains. For the veil is also a "means of communication rather than an obstacle.... Half-concealing, it invites fuller knowledge."<sup>29</sup> In myth and cult, the Goddess's veil "indicates profound, hidden, divine knowledge" and "is a channel leading to the mysteries, to wisdom and healing."<sup>30</sup> In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Siduri, goddess of wine, sits veiled by the edge of the great sea that Gilgamesh seeks to cross on his search for immortality. She bars Her gate against Gilgamesh until he listens to Her wisdom. Here, "the veil is connected to a goddess as keeper of the gate or mystery which the initiate... must penetrate in order to obtain knowledge of a new or unseen world."<sup>31</sup>

## Lifting the Veil

More broadly, as we've seen, the veil is the body, woven in the mother's womb, and all material existence, woven by the Goddess — the physical worlds which mediate our every experience. "The body is a veil of senses, a delicate curtain dividing the inner and outer worlds,"<sup>32</sup> and the outer world is likewise a veil, "the garment of the gods" in Porphyry's words.<sup>33</sup> The spiritual is "not seen but hidden in the

world... [in] the veil of nature."<sup>34</sup> In Buddhism this veil is called *Maya* — illusion. But, like a woman managing the openings and coverings of the sari,<sup>35</sup> *Maya* "simultaneously veils and unveils, for did it not veil the ultimate reality... objective manifestation could not be perceived... the veil prevents sight and allows it by screening a light which, if unscreened, would blind — the light of Truth."<sup>36</sup> In the East, this blinding truth is the identity of the individual with the universal Self, the Spirit that animates the body of the world. We are the Mystery, and we are on both sides of the veil.

In Christianity, it is common to assume the veil is separate from what it conceals, and will eventually be rent completely to reveal that transcendent reality. Paul declared that Christ gave believers an entry into heaven's sanctuary through "the veil, that is to say, his body" (Hebrews 10: 19-20). According to tradition, the veil of Jesus's body — rent in death at the same moment the temple veil was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) — opened the way to God's inner sanctum. The soul and God are separate, but when the veil of human ignorance and God's mystery is removed, they can know each other "face to face."<sup>37</sup>

From the perspective of Goddess spirituality, the Goddess's veil has not been lifted because there is no need to; in Goethe's words:

*Nothing is within, nothing is without  
What is inside is also outside.  
Seize then with no delay  
The Sacred mystery in broad daylight.*<sup>38</sup>

Like the Hindu heroine Draupadi's infinite sari, which could never be completely unwound, the veil of nature cannot be separated or removed from the truth it expresses.<sup>39</sup> The mysteries the veil conceals are hidden in plain sight: the unity of nature and its reflection of the truth that rests, ultimately, within the soul. In Tantric thought, "the body is its own universe, a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm. The body becomes the means by which inner subjective consciousness projects its experience and then observes its reflection in the objective world."<sup>40</sup> The body and nature are the necessary manifestation of the same spiritual reality: the mystery and beauty of this universe are their own revelation. In the words of Keats,

*Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*<sup>41</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>4</sup>John E. Vollmer, "Textiles," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 13, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Macmillan Reference USA, Detroit, Michigan, 2005, p. 9088.

<sup>5</sup>Steven Armstrong, "The Veil of Isis: The Evolution of an Archetype Hidden in Plain Sight," *Rosicrucian Digest*, No. 1, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>Ria Morrison, "Veiled Pagans," blog at <http://hubpages.com/hub/Veiled-Pagans>, cited Oct. 20, 2010.

<sup>7</sup>Plutarch, Roman Questions 10, translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, at [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman\\_Questions\\*/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman_Questions*/home.html), cited Oct. 20, 2010.

<sup>8</sup>Wolfred Nelson Cote, *The Archaeology of Baptism*, Yates and Alexander, London, U.K., 1876, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup>Jennifer Heath, "What is Subordinated, Dominates," in *The Veil*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>10</sup>Radcliffe G. Edmonds, "To Sit in Solemn Silence: Thronosis in Ritual, Myth and Iconography," at <http://www.brynmawr.edu/classics/redmonds/thronosis.html>, cited on Oct. 20, 2010.

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<sup>13</sup>Jennifer Heath, "Introduction" in *The Veil*, pp. 7-8

<sup>14</sup>Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East," in *The Veil*, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1990, p. 275.

<sup>16</sup>Jennifer Heath, "What is Subordinated, Dominates," in *The Veil*, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup>John E. Vollmer, "Textiles," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 9091.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 9088.

<sup>19</sup>Roxanna K. Gupta, "Going the Whole Nine Yards," in *The Veil*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>20</sup>"Neith," Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neith>, cited on Oct. 20, 2010.

<sup>21</sup>Caitlin Matthews, "Isis the Savior Goddess" in *Rosicrucian Digest*, No. 1, 2010, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup>"Weaving (mythology)," Wikipedia at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weaving\\_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weaving_(mythology)) cited on Oct. 20, 2010.

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<sup>24</sup>John E. Vollmer, "Textiles," in *Encyclopedia*, p. 9090.

<sup>25</sup>Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox*, p. 272.

<sup>26</sup>David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110:1 (Spring 1991), pp. 123-25.

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<sup>28</sup>Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, section 9, cited at [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis\\_and\\_Osiris\\*/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/home.html), Oct. 21 2010.

<sup>29</sup>Jean Chevalier, "Veil" in *Dictionary of Symbols*, translated by John Buchanan-Brown, Penguin, London, UK, 1996, p. 1063.

<sup>30</sup>Jennifer Heath, "Introduction," in *The Veil*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox*, p. 271.

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<sup>33</sup>J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, translated by Jack Sage, Barnes and Noble, New York, NY, 1995, p. 379.

<sup>34</sup>Eve Grubin, "After Eden: The Veil as a Conduit to the Internal," in *The Veil*, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup>Roxanna K. Gupta, "Going the Whole Nine Yards," in *The Veil*, p. 64.

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<sup>37</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, Harcourt, London, UK, 1984, p. 294.

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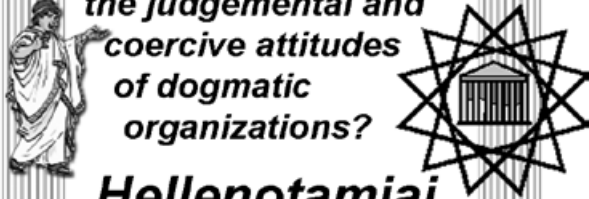
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<sup>41</sup>"Ode on a Grecian Urn," *John Keats: Selected Poetry* at <http://englishhistory.net/keats/poetry.html>, cited May 22, 2012. ♦

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## Looking for Trouble

by Hecate Demetersdatter

### 3 Questions for Activist Witches

Target your Work for best results

**E**nvironmental philosopher Derrick Jensen says that there are five questions that activists should ask themselves in order to create the most effective, deep, and significant actions. These are questions that we Witches (and, in my opinion, other Pagans and earth-loving religionists, too) need to ask ourselves as well. Our religion — based as it is in the natural world, on the Wheel of the Year, of our lovely planet and Her place in the universe —

finds itself intimately connected with activism to preserve, protect, and provide for our landbases, our watersheds, our foodsheds. As a people who find Divinity in every rock, stream, tree, bird, and human on the planet, many of us do magic, engage in activism, and practice politics in order to co-create the kind of world we want. I believe that engaging with the world in this way is one of our highest callings, so making sure our Craft is well-targeted and well thought-out is essential. I've narrowed them down to three questions, and here they are.

#### 1 Whom do you love?

Some of us love animals and volunteer at animal shelters, adopt pets who need good homes, and work to end inhumane practices related to raising and slaughtering animals. We work to defend the ever-shrinking areas of wilderness where animals can live in their natural habitats. We also feed the birds and squirrels in our yards or local parks, blessing the birdseed and peanut-butter-filled apples as we make our offerings.

Others of us adore plants, and grow them everywhere: inside our homes and offices and



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outside in our gardens, via guerilla gardening in urban spaces, or on an abandoned lot turned into a community garden. Some of us engage in political work to prevent Monsanto from genetically-altering crops and then claiming a patent on what we eat. Some of us raise medicinal herbs and share that wisdom with our communities, while others make time to sit regularly with a special tree, twining our magical roots with the roots of an ancient oak or young willow.

Still others of us are enchanted by the water: a small creek, a large river, the ocean, where we honor Yemaja or Oshun. We may magically charge every glass of water that we drink, turning hydration into ritual. We clean up riverbeds, write letters to support legislation that prohibits pollution, donate to organizations that preserve wetlands.

Finally, some of us are people who love people. We staff the crisis hotline, mentor teenagers, volunteer at hospice. We put our bodies on the line at Occupy camps and canvass in support of marriage rights for all. We vote as an act of ritual and consider it a sacred obligation. Ask yourself: *whom do you love?*



#### 2 What are your gifts?

Ask yourself: what am I best at, magically? Furthermore, what are my talents and experience in the more “mundane” realm. And, most importantly: where do my magical and prosaic gifts intersect? If you look for the places where you can act in both the energetic and rooted here-and-now world at the same time, you'll find that your effectiveness in both realms will climb.

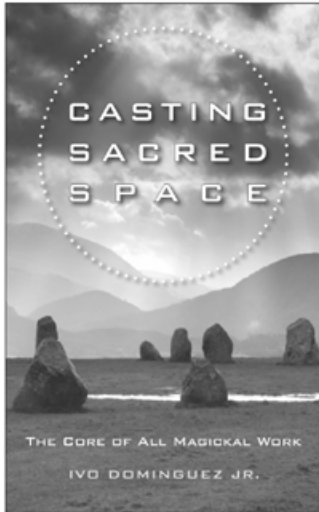
Perhaps you are a budding Earth goddess, and your devotion to the Mama manifests itself in the ability to create compost that nourishes a community garden. Do you bless or charge the table scraps as they go into the bin? Do you invoke the spirits and powers of the land as you turn the compost? Do you energetically add to the compost pile the old habits that you want to see morph into something more useful?

Or perhaps you are more of a “protection Witch.” If your wards are the best in the neighborhood, and you understand boundaries (both physical and etheric) really well, find a way to make that talent useful to your wider community. Perhaps you can cast protection around yourself and the people near you at a demonstration, sending compassion and understanding to counter-demonstrators or law enforcement officers, so that the energy generated by scores of people united for a good cause won't dissipate or fragment or turn against itself in frenzy of chaos.

If “glamour” is your best magical talent, try casting a spell on yourself before you speak to local media about a cause you are supporting, or before attending a town meeting protesting a local polluter or inappropriate development. The synchronicity of combining your talents is one of the best things about being an activist Witch.

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## 3 What does your landbase need to survive?

To be a Witch is to be in relationship: with your landbase, with the plants, animals, people, rocks, rivers, fungi, algae, and Goddesses, Gods, and spirits of it, as well as with the breezes that blow over it, with the rains that fall upon it, with the Moonlight that bathes it in silver. You can be a Witch without a coven, without a pentagram, without ever wielding an athame, or wearing ceremonial robes. But you can't be a Witch and not be in relationship with your landbase.

Part of that relationship is communication; part of it is paying attention; part of it is listening with your heart, observing with both your eyes and your soul, talking through your hands on a tree or your eyes on a graph of local temperatures.

I find that a significant portion of my work as a Witch involves really, seriously grounding *here*, into this ground, this specific Bit of Earth that surrounds my little cottage near the Potomac. I don't mean the sort of generic grounding that we all do at a public ritual, at the home of a sister-Witch whom we're visiting to perform a group spell, at an office, or courtroom, or car dealer when we need to work some instant magic. I mean running my roots into the soil that I've worked, and fed, and weeded, and handled for years and years. The soil fed with compost from the meals that I've cooked to share with friends. The soil that I worship with my bare feet in the Summer and that I rake free of leaves each Autumn. When you spend time with it, your landbase will tell you what it needs. Maybe it needs you to ensure that there is less carbon in the atmosphere; or that it needs you to work to get overpasses built so that animals and plants can cross highways. It may let you know that it needs you to grow sunflowers to leach lead out of the soil or it may insist that what it needs you to do is to spend more time with it and listen to it even more. It may ask for Reiki or a ritual of healing.

### Now, do it.

You're a Witch. Call upon the power to know, to will, to dare, and to keep silent. Call upon Air, Fire, Water, Earth, and Center. Call to your Goddesses and Gods. Call to the spirits of the land itself. You can do anything. Anything. Anything.

Are you willing to do it? ♠

*HecateDemeter is a woman, a Witch, a mother, a grandmother, an ecofeminist, a lawyer, a gardener, a reader, a writer, and a priestess of the Great Mother Earth. See her at <http://hecatemeter.wordpress.com/about/>.*

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## Beyond the Circle by Ashleen O'Gaea

### Learning from Our Youngers

Up-and-coming generations reinvigorate the Craft.

As Pagans, it is common for us to make lots of associations with all the Elements, and so with Air as well. One of the less-often considered correspondences with Air is youth — in both human and in organizational terms. Due to two happy circumstances, which I'll tell you about momentarily, my thoughts have been guided toward a couple of related ideas linking Air, Youth, and the Craft.

New religious movements, such as Wicca, often define themselves in relation to what has come before them. For example, the Craft grew up in a Christian-dominated environment and spent a lot of effort explaining that they weren't Satanists. These days it is largely understood that Wicca has very little to do with Satanism, but in our early days we always had to open our public remarks with a standard brand "Witches-are-not-devil-worshippers" proclamation.

Another youthful tendency is to try out new ideas. Young people generally haven't had to accept the limits that traditionally come with the responsibilities of adulthood, and so are open to new ideas that may seem ungrounded or even foolish. (Notice what society calls those who seem oblivious to the conventions that tie us down: airheads!) Yet it is such visionaries — whether chronologically young or old — who are open enough to the winds of change to help keep their cultures vigorous and flexible. Hooray for the airheads!

I've recently been reading Philip Heselton's *Witchfather: a two-part biography of Gerald Gardner*. (Available at [www.Thoth.co.uk](http://www.Thoth.co.uk).) This excellent book is my first excursion into the historical origins of the Craft, and I'm learning



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from it that Spirit always seems to support the development of new ways of thinking; something that the genesis of the new religion of Wicca clearly represents.

The elders of any path (no matter how young that path may be) are often reluctant to relinquish control to the next generation. It is clear that, from its beginning, Wicca has been as prone to rocky transitions as any other tradition. Evolution is not always smooth and seamless, even though from a more distant vantage point it can seem inevitable. Those of us now in leadership must acknowledge that one day new people will inherit and carry the leadership of our traditions. The only question is how involved will we be in encouraging our descendants to pick up our mantles.

One thing is certain: we can't prevent the next generations from making changes in practice, nor in advancing the thealogy — nor should we aim to! To me, at least, one of the "best things" about Wicca is its innate adaptability. An important part of this flexibility must come from welcoming the experience of our Youngers. They are not only the Craft's future, they're part of our immortality.

I'm delighted to know that our founders struggled with the same issues we face today: personality clashes, intransigence, misunderstandings, and just plain luck (both good and ill). It comforts me to see that the Craft is still the Craft even though it has changed a lot since Gardner started writing it down. I am delighted, comforted and more — honored and awed — to think that I have a chance to witness (and maybe influence a little) the work of the next generation.

Heselton informs us (in *Volume II*) that Gardner knew, before he died, that Raymond Buckland had been almost instantly successful in popularizing Wicca in the United States. Thus, before the Goddess received him to herself, Gerald knew that Wicca would be his lasting legacy, one that would grow and become meaningful to a great many people. I gather from Heselton's work that Gardner's own inner child was still quite lively even as his aging body became frail. I'm sure he would be as thrilled as I am to know that there's a growing interest in the Craft — both Gardnerian and its many offshoots — among today's Youngers.

In February, I was part of a major brainstorming and strategic planning session at the Tucson Area Wiccan Network to identify the needs of our local Pagan community. One of the needs we identified in Tucson was the need to offer more to younger Pagans. TAWN already has a fine "Moon School" curriculum ready for the next time we have members with children between the ages of four and thirteen; we have a curriculum for older kids, too. However, we just haven't known how to encourage teens to attend our meetings and participate in

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our programs. During the meeting, I became acquainted with a thoughtful and well-spoken young woman who is interested in doing just that, and as I draft this column, we have plans to meet at a TAWN Cauldronluck this weekend and make some plans.

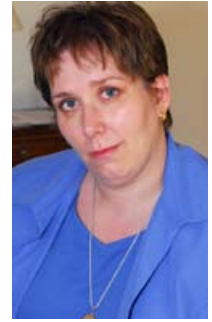
Another concept we discussed was “transformative leadership.” This idea is about leading a group to the accomplishment of a particular goal, and then stepping aside so that the group, rather than the individual, gets credit for the achievement. Of course, there’s some resistance to that, especially among we who are Elders, because we tend to think that the only way we can get any respect is to visibly be in charge — pretty much forever. But we were encouraged to think about service, rather than recognition, and to consider the idea that there might be better ways to serve than at the forefront in a position of personal authority.

Naturally, we all think that we’re motivated only by what’s best for the group. But logically, one of the situations we old-timers often face is that we’ve been “doing this” for so many years, and tried everything we can think of to achieve the community’s goals, that we get caught up in what doesn’t work.

That’s where youth comes in, whether we’re talking about teen-agers and twenty-some-things or simply newcomers to our groups. Lord and Lady love ‘em, they’re not jaded or burned out. Yet when they come up with ideas, all too often we tell them that “we’ve tried that, and it didn’t work.” Well, gosh — yes, we probably *did* try it, but *they* haven’t! So maybe it is time to try that idea again! Times have changed, energy has shifted, and maybe our Youngers will succeed where we were not able to!

We need our Youngers to show us the way into the future: after all, today’s Elders were yesterday’s youthful idealists once upon a time. So, as the metaphoric and atmospheric breezes blow through the assorted windows we can open now that Winter’s passed, we can enjoy the scents of both this year’s and this era’s Spring, knowing that whenever our personal seasons take us to the Summerland, youth will be renewed — and maybe even remember us. ♦

ASHLEEN O’GAEA is the author of *Family Wicca*, *Raising Witches*, and *Celebrating the Seasons of Life*. She and her family live in Arizona.



**Wyrd Ways** by Galina Krasskova

## All Hail, Spirits of Wind and Air!

Including the Elemental Powers in your practice will change your life.

I owe a debt to the Spirits of Wind and Air, as it was through their blessings that I first became polytheist. I was drawn to Heathenry, and to hard polytheism, by Odin, who is, among His many attributes, a God of wind and storm.<sup>1</sup> In Heathen cosmology, Odin is said to have breathed the breath of life into the very first human beings. Through Him, I learned *galdr*<sup>2</sup> as well as sacred incantation, the power of speech, and the weaving of words: all techniques associated with Air. Most importantly, I learned to *think*, to consciously hone the blade of my mind and tenaciously question everything that I had been taught, especially when doing so made me uncomfortable.

The Elemental Powers are our eldest ancestors, the progenitors of human kind, and are entitled to just as much honor and respect as the Gods and ancestors. Our pre-Christian ancestors were animists. They knew that the entire world was alive, and every living thing — from people to animals, stones to trees, mountains, wind, fire, water, and soil — was alive, sentient, aware, and imbued with its own connection to the Holy. That's one of the lessons we can draw from the stories of classical cosmology: every tree has its nymph; every bubbling stream its naiad; every place its *genus loci* or guiding spirit. It did not matter if that place were city, town, or forest grove.

Honoring the elements is fundamental to any polytheist practice, and it's really not that difficult. It's not a matter of performing a specific practice; rather, it's a matter of changing the way that you engage with the world, shifting the filter that we all carry inside our heads, and realizing that most precious of secrets: that all the world is alive. It changes everything.



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as the “breath of knowledge,” for instance — rather than on Their immense power. The only times we tend to acknowledge how outmatched we are by the Elements is in case of catastrophe, when we use terms like “act of God” (*sic*) to describe a natural force so overwhelming that it destroys our illusions of control. (Ask any hurricane survivor about the Power of Air!)

### Connecting with the Elemental Nations

Norse cosmology teaches us that all the worlds were created by a dynamic interplay of elemental forces. Once you realize that every part of your world is alive, replete with living beings, it completely and forever alters the way that you engage with the world. One day it really, *really* dawned on me that I move in a fabric of living beings and that how I choose to live has consequences for the entire community — seen and unseen — in which I live.

I began to pay more attention to environmental causes and to make more conscious offerings to the Elemental Nations. I like to use the term “nation” since it correctly implies a cohesive culture, language, and community. It's a reminder to me that I am dealing with Beings who are older and more powerful than I, and that a little respect might be in order.

Our ancestors knew instinctively to venerate the Elemental Powers, but in an urbanized, consumerist culture — a world deeply impacted by powerful monotheisms, including Christianity and scientific materialism — we have been conditioned to believe that humanity is fundamentally outside of, and above, Nature.

Even as Pagans, Heathens, and polytheists, we tend to focus on the most civilized and benign aspects of the Elemental Powers — air

### Opening to the Element of Air

Our relationship with Air is both symbiotic and essential. One can go, after all, without food for many days, and even water for a few, but without Air, we soon lose consciousness, and, if deprived further, will perish in only a few minutes. Furthermore, breathing is fundamentally relational; each breath formed by a measured pulse of inhalation and release, an intimate partnership between the unseen world and our own bodies. No one can breathe in a vacuum: without connection to the realm of Air, we die.

This intimate connection between breath and consciousness illustrates the esoteric nature of Air as well as its more prosaic one. Elemental Powers can always be depended upon to act according to their Essential Natures, no matter what. For Air, that Nature is Revelation. Air — especially in its manifestation as Wind — banishes mental darkness and confusion, and opens our eyes to the unseen. Wind rips away everything which is not truth and teaches us to value clear-sighted, conscious, mindful choice. Most of all, the “medicine”<sup>3</sup> of Wind demolishes the “post-conquest” cultural filter we have all inherited and enables us to search for, and return to, the mindset of our indigenous ancestors, a mindset rooted in respect, piety, and engaged interconnectivity.



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I have found a deeper connection to the Element of Air by developing a regular practice of conscious breathing. I credit Odin for teaching me about the breathcord, the essential connection between body and soul. People often come to me asking how they can develop a relationship with Odin. One thing that I frequently recommend is to meditate upon the mystery of the breathcord. I counsel those who come asking this question to sit and breathe, focusing on Odin and on this essential connection with Him. Eventually such meditation will lead, not just to a greater awareness and connection to Odin, but to a growing awareness of the blessings of Air as well. Air is the conduit He chose through which to bestow the blessings of life. Contemplate this:

*In the beginning, Odin breathed life into humanity. We are connected to Him through our breath. We breathe Him in, taking in His essence with each inhalation. We exhale ourselves into Him with each exhalation. We exist, living our entire lives within the span of His breath.*

Focusing on these fundamental mysteries is a good way to begin exploring how to honor the Elemental Powers. Use the power of Air — your voice — and speak to your own ancestors about your desire to connect more fully to this Elemental Power. Ask them to guide you rightly in this endeavor, and listen carefully to their advice. (After all, if you go far enough back, you'll connect with ancestors who lived every day of their lives in compact with the Elemental Forces.) Then consider their suggestions carefully when creating your own practice.

I also recommend setting up shrine spaces to each of the individual Elements. For Air, such a space *must* be outdoor, even if it is as simple as a set of wind chimes or a pinwheel. Air can never, ever be captured, and it certainly cannot be confined within a building! The power of Wind is the power of freedom: freedom of heart, freedom spirit, and most of all, freedom of the mind. That is perhaps the best way to honor the Air Nation: by working as hard as you can to unfetter your ability to think.

However you choose to honor the Spirits of Air as sentient, elder beings, remember that Air is the element with which you share the most intimate link. As Morihei Ueshiba (the founder of the Japanese art of aikido) said: "Breath is the thread that ties creation together." ♦

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>He is also a God of many other things. "Hard polytheism" is the belief that not only is there a diverse multitude of Gods and Goddesses, but that They are each independent, unique, sentient, and distinct. They are not facets of One Another, nor are They interchangeable.

<sup>2</sup>*Galdr*, drawn etymologically from the Norse verb *gala* ("to crow or to caw") is a type of dissonant magical chant.

<sup>3</sup>Apologies to my Native American colleagues. It is not my intention to infringe upon any Native religious practice or language. Sadly, the comparable Norse and Anglo-Saxon terms for that which is implied by the word "medicine" in this context have been lost. I've chosen to use this word because it most clearly communicates my meaning.

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## Rite Behavior by Kenaz Filan

### All hail, the Baby!

Child deities reveal the disarming allure of innocence.

In honor of my new parenting blog on [witchesandpagans.com](http://witchesandpagans.com) — and the latest addition to our household, my daughter Annamaria Sigyn Estelle Filan — this column is dedicated to child deities. We tend to think of deities as possessed of great wisdom and even greater power: it may take some effort to imagine a helpless infant God screaming for milk and soiling his diaper. Yet there are many examples of divine children to be found in mythology. Indeed, not a few art historians have noted the similarity between Christian images of the Madonna and Child and Egyptian statues of Isis holding the infant Horus.

#### Twins in African/Diaspora Religions

The Yoruba of West Africa have one of the highest rates of twin births in the world — 4.7% (47 per 1,000 births). They believe that twin births bring good fortune to parents, and so twin children are especially honored. Should one twin die at birth, its parents commission a small figure of the same gender: if both die, two statues are carved representing the children as adults. These statues are offered food and anointed with camwood and indigo. The Yoruba believe that twins share one soul. When one part of the soul is in the world of the living and the other among the dead, it causes imbalance. To keep the living twin from joining the other half of its soul, the statue is decorated with weights and heavy jewelry, so it is held in the world of the living.<sup>1</sup>

In Haitian Vodou the Marassa (twins) are among the most important *lwa*, and are served right after Legba, opener of the way. To honor them, a large straw plate full of candy, popcorn and sweets is taken around the ritual space: after offerings are thrown to the corners and



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It may take some effort to imagine a helpless infant god: yet there are many examples of divine children in world mythology.

sacred places, the remainder is passed around the congregation to be eaten. Another popular ceremony is the *mange Marassa* (feeding the Marassa). A party is held for the Marassa, and neighborhood children are invited. They are given cakes, sweets, and goodies but told they must eat with their hands. After they are finished, they are encouraged to wipe their hands on the heads of adult participants.

African veneration for twins is based on a sophisticated metaphysical conception. Each twin maintains its individuality, yet each is part

of a greater whole. As Mambo Vye Zo Komande (Pat Scheu) says, "In the concept of One plus One equals Three, the Marassa represent the result of a union of higher forces bringing into reality a third potentiality."<sup>2</sup> Maya Deren said that the divine twins were distinct from the *lwa*, yet were also the first ancestral *lwa* and the origin of all the other *lwa*.<sup>3</sup>

But while these twins are seen as powerful magicians and allies, they are treated with caution. Like all children, they can be moody and short-tempered: should they become angry they may throw destructive, even lethal temper tantrums. They are also prone to jealousy. In Yoruba culture, twins are venerated but also feared: because they contain so much spiritual potential, it is thought that they could cause great misfortune should they be offended. Generally only Vodouisants who are themselves twins, or who have twins in their family, work with the Marassa, as most others find them too dangerous and unpredictable to approach. Indeed, the power possessed by twins is so feared in some African cultures that twin children were historically killed. Even today twins in central and southern Africa are at heightened risk of being accused of witchcraft and subject to brutal and sometimes fatal "exorcisms."<sup>4</sup>

#### Bala Krishna, the Butter Thief

After hearing a voice from the sky warning him, "Your end is near! The eighth son of your sister Devaki will be responsible for your death," evil King Kamsa decided to take no chances. Imprisoning his sister and her husband Vasudeva, he killed each of their children as they were born. But as Krishna, the eighth child, was born, Lord Vishnu appeared and led Vasudeva out of the prison, where he exchanged his son for a newborn girl baby. When Kamsa came to the chamber in response to the little girl's cries,

he grabbed her to dash her head against the stones. But to his shock, the baby merely laughed in glee and said, "Kamsa, your enemy is still alive. The son of Devaki is alive and well and will come back to kill you," before vanishing into thin air.

Raised by the cowherd Yasodha, Krishna was so beautiful and cheerful that everyone that knew him loved him, and even forgave him his penchant for petty theft. Inordinately fond of butter, little Krishna would sneak into the homes of the milkmaids to get at their butter pots. Today images of *Krishna Makhan Chor* (Krishna the Butter Thief) eating butter are found in many Hindu homes and temples. Hindu Meera Rao explains that butter represents essence and in consuming butter, Krishna shows that he receives the essence of all things.<sup>5</sup>

Little Krishna was also quite capable of fending for himself. King Kamsa sent the *rakshasa* (demon) Putana to kill the child. Smearing poison on her nipples, she visited Krishna's nursery and offered the babe her breast. Krishna took hold of her toxic teat, then sucked so hard that he killed her — and in the process liberated her soul from its evil karma. Later Putana's demon brother Aghasura swallowed the young child and his companions to avenge his fallen sister. But Krishna grew larger and choked the demon, then freed his friends. Still another demon, Trinivarta, came in the form of a mighty storm to carry the babe off. But as he reached the sky he found the infant's weight too much to bear: falling to the ground, he was crushed beneath the youthful deity.

These folk stories reveal infant Krishna as an approachable and charming deity. He does not demand slavish reverence or servitude: a devotee can approach him as a parent might approach a child, with affection and tenderness. As Nitin Kumar says, "A child naturally exhibits an unconcerned transcendental aloofness from the world, which is similar to God's utter self-absorption and self-delight. God as an infant does not govern the world from a majestic throne, but makes the world his playground and even while enjoying himself maintains the cosmic order."<sup>5</sup>



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### The Conquering Child: A Culture of Children?

When discussing modern occultism, it's hard to avoid engaging the Great Beast: Aleister Crowley. Like many esoteric leaders before and since, Crowley was an inveterate showman with an enormous ego and questionable sexual ethics. His antics helped cement his reputation as "the Wickedest Man in the World." Yet there are few contemporary magical traditions that do not show his influence. To take but one notable example: Wicca founder Gerald Gardner's "Charge of the Goddess" quotes liberally from Crowley's *Book of the Law*: the Wiccan Rede simply appending "an it harm none" to Crowley's admonition to "Do What Thou Wilt."

Crowley believed that the rise of Christianity marked the "Aeon of Osiris." The previous Aeon, Crowley asserted, was ruled by Isis and featured peaceful, matriarchal societies living in egalitarian communities worshipping Mother Earth. (Sound familiar?) The Aeon of Osiris, by contrast, was the Age of the Dying and Resurrected God. In this Aeon, patriarchal religions promoting self-sacrifice and submission to divine and temporal authority became prevalent. With the revelation of the *Book of the Law* in 1904, Crowley believed that a new Aeon had begun, an age to be ruled by Horus, son of Isis and Osiris. Describing this Aeon in his *Confessions*, Crowley wrote:

*The child is not merely a symbol of growth, but of complete moral independence and innocence. We may then expect the New Aeon to release mankind from its pretence of altruism, its obsession of fear and its consciousness of sin. It will possess no consciousness of the purpose of its own existence. It will*

*not be possible to persuade it that it should submit to incomprehensible standards; it will suffer from spasms of transitory passion; it will be absurdly sensitive to pain and suffer from meaningless terror; it will be utterly conscienceless, cruel, helpless, affectionate and ambitious, without knowing why; it will be incapable of reason, yet at the same time intuitively aware of truth.<sup>6</sup>*

Over sixty years after Crowley's demise, his commentary is still relevant

today. Our post-modern society (yes, even contemporary Pagan culture) *does* prefer youth over age, and while the benefits of innocence are apparent, eternal youth may be a double-edged sword. By choosing to be a "culture of children" we also embrace such tendencies as ageism (note our problematic relationship with our Pagan elders) and a tendency to smear our enemies as "fascists." It's worth questioning whether the Cult of Youth also creates a culture saturated with willfully-extended immaturity, and what the cost of such eternal adolescence may be. ♠

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Roy and Elizabeth Miller. "Seminar papers on Yoruba twins, Spring 2010" at Art and Life in Africa Project. <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/lbeji%20for%20web/List%20of%20research%20papers.html>

<sup>2</sup> Mambo Vye Zo Komande (Pat Scheu), "Marassa: Divine Twins of Creation," available at Sosyete du Marche, Inc. <http://www.sosyetedumarche.com/html/marassa.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti*, McPherson & Co, 1983. 44-47.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandra Cimpric, "Children Accused of Witchcraft: an Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa." Dakar: UNICEF WCARO, April 2010. 30-32. Available at [www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro\\_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> "The Festival of Lord Krishna," in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, at <http://www.haddonfield.k12.nj.us/hmhs/academics/english/festivalofkrishna.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Nitin Kumar. "Playing with Krishna – God as Child in Art and Mythology" at Exotic India Art. <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/lordkrishna/>

<sup>6</sup> Aleister Crowley. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, Chapter 49. Available at the Hermetic Library. <http://hermetic.com/crowley/confessions/chapter49.html>.

**KENAZ FILAN** is an initiate of Societe La Belle Venus #2. Her most recent book is *The Power of the Poppy* (Inner Traditions, 2011). Find her online at [www.kenazfilan.com](http://www.kenazfilan.com).



**Figs & Honey** by Ruby Sara

## Spirits of Weather

Our constant, capricious companions.

*Proud music of the storm!  
Blast that careers so free,  
whistling across the prairies!  
Strong hum of forest tree-tops!  
Wind of the mountains!  
Personified dim shapes!  
you hidden orchestras!*

— Walt Whitman

I look up from books and papers and a familiar litany of anxious thoughts with a sudden awareness. *It is darker that it ought to be.* On opening the door, I find that in a short handful of minutes the world outside has gone from early summer-sweet to breathlessly ominous. The sky is green, and the air seems to have its own weight — the wind growls and hunts, spinning leaves out to cut impressive arcs across the steel edges of the clouds. A mourning dove startles and darts out towards its home. The trees have begun to thrash and whip against each other like dancers in the throes of religious ecstasy; there is a shock of lightning and the heart-deep pulse of thunder. . . and then the rain, in great hissing sheets, that same rush-bright wind driving it against the window to tap furiously against the glass. The world beyond the liminal threshold of my doorway rocks and shudders, lit and fierce. I stand there, in that in-between place, and watch for lightning. I breathe, and pray, and am nowhere else but here. I am shot through with fear and delight. . . thrilled (thrill: from the Old English *þryllan*, meaning “to pierce through”), and am afraid. Yes, I thrill and am afraid, and I am electric with an ineffable feeling. . . like joy, but encompassing mountains and deserts and stars. Joy and fear the size of solar systems and hurricanes. Joy and laughter and thunder claps so loud they rattle the beams and make the whole world shake. Freedom and ferocity. Thrill and cry.

Wind and weather. Presence and relationship.



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On a road trip from Denver to San Antonio several years ago, I drove through a tapestry of spectacular, breathtaking weather. Down through Colorado, with the Rocky Mountains on my right, singing me ecstatic songs about brilliantly blue skies and golden sunlight. Then over Raton Pass at the state line, I drove through freezing sleet, steel gray skies and howling winds. . . stopping briefly outside Raton, NM to say thanks to the Road for safe passage. I gripped the steering wheel all the way through the rest of that corner of New Mexico as a blizzard ripped over the flatlands and erased everything more than five feet in front of me.

Over the fields of west Texas, I watched dark distant clouds roll and collide and chase each other through a sky so large it seemed to eclipse the earth, sweeping down in places to touch the ground with rain. Each hour, each horizon; the weather kept me deeply within every moment — singing, concentrating, laughing, praying, swearing, and gasping with awe. Yes: I was there. There, and nowhere else.

No matter where I am or what I’m doing, the weather has the power still to lift me out of some dark and brooding meditation and

turn my heart to spider silk. Rain coming in over the mountains and trailing clouds like smoke. Sunlight rushing over cornfields or filtering down into brick alleyways. Wind stripping leaves off autumn trees and hurling them through the air like great

fistfuls of golden coins. Wind and weather — the Mama’s moods made manifest. Hot rage, sweet joy, regret and sorrow. The weather is our constant, capricious, dangerous and marvelous companion. The emotional reflections of a planet in constant motion. And we respond in kind, our emotional bodies reflecting that rich dynamism between each other and back to the Mama in our own gentle and ungentle ways. Each of us separately and together: cyclone, rainstorm, cloudless sky.

There are metaphors and myths in abundance when talking of weather. We are human animals and we respond to the Mama’s moods always with story, with imagination, with observational lore, patterning, and comparison. The storm is a troubled heart, the cyclone a mind confused. The gods send their holy messengers down to the receiving earth via rainbow. Thunder will cause goose eggs not to hatch (though a pair of crossed nails in the nest will prevent this), sundogs and rings around the moon predict coming storms, March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb, and when the rain falls while the sun is shining, the foxes have their weddings.

But in addition to the marvelous wonder of human story, there is the sensate and tangible reality of weather and our relationship to it. The driving rain, the cold snap, the gentle west wind. The Presence. The physical feeling of watching cloud formations over distant mountains or sorghum fields... the deep anticipation of sky meeting earth just before rainfall. It is in this physical, sensual reality that we experience weather as teacher. As mentor, kin, and friend. To consider the rapture, spark and wrack of the turning, breathing planet, and the exquisite response we make to Her moods. Weather teaches. Weather connects. And in that connection, the art of authentic relationship that leads to Presence.

All our lives we are taught by the spirits of weather and the Mama how to be in relationship. When I was little, I thought the wind was my cousin. An obviously distant cousin, of course, but family nonetheless. I would stand outside in the wild flat plain of our backyard in Colorado, and talk to the wind and ask it to sweep over the grass and buffet the fat purple irises or the downy cottonwood trees, and it would respond with joy and teasing purpose, and I would thrill to the knowledge that I was kin to the wind. It was the wind that initiated me into the mysteries of earth-centered worship, rocketing through my heart and straight into my soul on the desert floor of Arizona when I was ten on one of many family road trips through the Southwest. The booming bell-wind of fall and the savage, toothy winds of winter. The sweet, aching, dark wind of spring. And, of course, the fat, marvelous, rock-and-roll wind of an early summer thunderstorm, when the Mama is just letting down all her wondrous hair, and the sky turns green with rain. So it is from the moment we meet the great green world, we walk in constant conversation.

In fact, we have no choice but to be in relationship with the weather. No matter how savvy we become with our predictions, the weather is still untamed. The Mama is wild, and every time we leave the safety of our homes we enter into relationship with wind, rain, sun and season... walking with the spirits and powers of earth. And when we choose to engage in

conscious, attentive relationship with those spirits and powers, even in the time it takes to say hello to the wind, watch the rain, or appreciate the scatter of cumulous clouds in the

**No matter what I'm doing, the weather always has the power to lift me out of myself and turn my heart to spider silk.**

faded-photograph-blue of the sky in June, in those moments of conscious rapport, we are engaging not only in conversation, but in prayer. Prayer and Presence. We cannot be in authentic relationship — alert, worshipful, ecstatic and alive — without being present, and we cannot be present without being in relationship.

Now, to be very honest, I suck at “being present.” I’d much rather send my soul body out to fret about the not-yet or settle in to fret about the past. Which is why I am so grateful in those moments that the spirits of sky and thunder shake me out of my reverie and down into the right-right-now, because it is in the right-right-now — that dark, sweet expanse at the bottom of every breath — that the pulse of the Real (and all the power and raw magic that hums within it) moves and lives and has its being.

In that place — the Presence, the right-right-now — weather cracks open our hearts and we are witness to the emotional nature of the Mama, teaching us about fear and loss and joy. In the Presence, we grok that our lives here on this planet are not perfect, that we cannot control the storm, we cannot always fix our broken things, but we can witness them, be in conversation with them, and, when the circumstances are right, even dance with them, with our arms wide and our feet wet.

The time after a storm is incredible — the clean-scrubbed everything and the fragile heart-cut green slicing its way into your insides — but the heart of the storm is there, too, whether we like it or not. It is how we manage it, how we get up and walk outside and really look at uprooted trees and shattered walls that speaks to our condition as human beings. It remains a truth that the Mama is ungentle and will wrack us with pain as often as she showers us with blessings. Tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, electrical storms, dark mountain passes covered with ice... the Mama

plays her complicated truth on the shoulders of mountains and plains and hill countries every day. So we sit, and we see, and we speak to the elements and the spirits of air, darkness, rain and gale. We pray and wait, we sit and trust. The right-right-now, the right-right-here.

So too, in the pale and quiet mornings of summer, when the rich riot of doing and moving have yet to burst open under the frenzy of the sun, the drift of hazy, flowery, and grassy wind comes slow and sweet, around and through, reminding us that for every broken thing there is another mended and whole. Worth, beauty, bliss. The Mama is so vast and so complex and so marvelous and so horrible... we cannot see all of her at once, cannot hold all of her at once. So we say “hail” to that wind and those leaves and that sunlight, walking in relationship and living in the Presence, because it is often some of the most important work we can do.

The wind is our kin and our initiator. The thunderstorm is our mentor and our friend. And when the moods of the Mama come knocking at our door and we answer, ready for a conversation with the righteously beautiful spirits and powers that populate this mossy stone upon which we rock and roll, we are in relationship. And in that relationship, we are present. In the Presence.

Here, and nowhere else.

So grok Chinook and Zephyrus and dance with firefly-shod feet ‘round the great fire, lovely ones. Grok the storm and the gale and the blue, blue sky. Grok mourning doves and rain-drunk roots and the wild roses of summer. May the wind and the weather be your teacher through the fullness of the season and beyond to the brilliant melt of fall. And may you rock safe and sweet in the arms of the Mama, seeking all the power and glory of the Presence in conversation with rain and thunder.

Grok Earth, friends and beloveds. Pray without ceasing. ♡

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## Magick on a Shoestring by Deborah Blake

### Free as the Air

It's easy to connect to this most mercurial of elements.

**A**ir, Fire, Water, and Earth. These four elements are an integral part of many Witchcraft and Pagan practices, as well as being an important way to connect with the world around us. Over the course of my next four columns, I'm going to focus on inexpensive, easy, and fun approaches to making this connection, starting with Air.

Although not all Pagans follow the same exact correspondences, Air is usually associated with the direction East, and the realms of communication, thought, and with the season of spring. It is often represented by the color yellow and can be symbolized on the altar by a feather or incense.

Those are the basics — but how can we make a deeper connection without spending money on fancy decorations or tools? Luckily, Air is the “cheapest” of all the elements, since it is everywhere around us. All we have to do is make a little effort and figure out how to connect with something invisible and untouchable.

Here are a few suggestions for you to try. Hopefully one or more of them will resonate with your own personal practice.

#### 1 Just Breathe.

Air exists outside of us, but we take it in with every breath. One of the simplest ways to form a deeper association with the element of Air is to take some time to breathe mindfully. I recommend doing this while you are taking a walk or sitting by the water (should you be fortunate enough to live near a natural lake, river, stream or ocean) — or even while in your car waiting for your kid to be done with baseball practice. But if you want something a little more focused, here is a simple exercise that anyone can do:

Sit comfortably. Close your eyes. Breathe in and out slowly, paying attention to the way the air feels in your nostrils, your throat, your lungs.

Feel the presence of the air as it surrounds you. If there is a breeze, feel its caress against your skin. Think about the fact that the air is everywhere around you, like a comforting blanket, weightless and invisible, but always there, always dependable, like an old friend. Air has been with you since the first breath you took as a baby, and it will be with you until the last breath you take on the day you die. Breathe deeply, taking the air inside you. A moment ago, it was outside you, separate from you, and now it is a part of you. Feel that connection, and feel the way it connects you, in turn, with the rest of the world. Breathe in and out, slowly and deeply, and feel yourself becoming Air.



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#### 2 Write a Poem.

If you think about it, the spoken word is a way of taking air and transforming it into sound. How magical is that? Without air, there would be no speech. Seriously, just try it: start reading this out loud, and see how far you get without taking a new breath. It won't be very far. No wonder Air is the element associated with communication!

As a result, one of the easiest (and free!) ways to celebrate Air is with the power of the spoken word. Try doing the meditation above

and then writing a poem, an invocation, or a spell to show your appreciation for this all-important element. (You don't have to do the Air meditation practice first, of course, but by deepening your connection before you begin to write, you will really be in the “zone” when you come up with your written piece.)

You don't have to be a great writer to do this. For that matter, you don't have to write it down at all, since our goal here is to come up with the spoken word. You can always just speak from the heart, spontaneously. But if you are more comfortable having something prepared, or if you want to play around with it to get it just right, then you can certainly write it out.

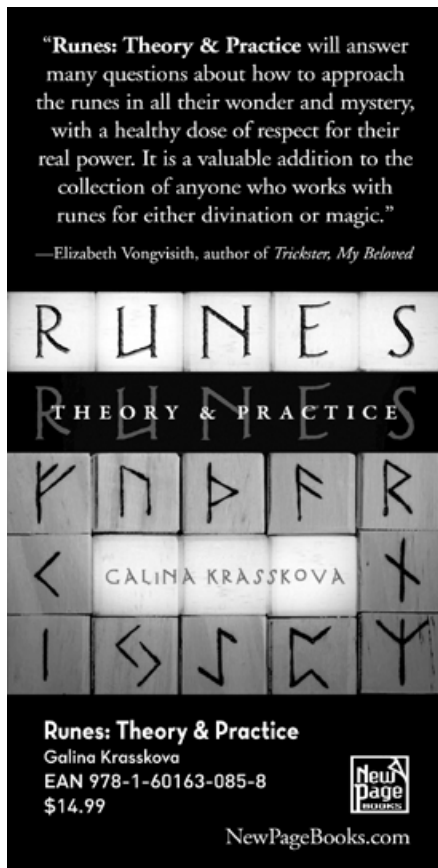
Your poem or invocation doesn't have to rhyme. (Although it can.) You can use it as an invocation when you call the quarters, or you can just use it this once to complete this exercise. Here is a simple example.

#### *Element of Air*

*Gentle as the breeze  
Powerful as the hurricane  
You carry our songs through the sky  
To the god and goddess above  
Through you, our drum beats resonate  
Our heartbeats echo  
And the laughter of children rings  
You give us life  
And so we thank you  
Element of Air*

Okay — now, you do one, and don't forget to read it out loud, using your breath to carry your message to the Spirits of the Air.

If you are not a “spoken word” kind of person, there are lots of other methods you can utilize to communicate with the powers of Air. As the invocation above says, you can sing, drum, or do anything else that causes vibrations in the Air around you. Just make sure they're joyful and filled with gratitude and appreciation.



**3 Fill the Air with Sound.** If you aren't the poetry type, there are plenty of other ways to use sound to connect with the element of Air. One of my favorites is chanting — with a group or by yourself. There are some lovely simple chants that have been a part of our community for years; if you use them, you are not only connecting with Air, but with the Witches that went before you as well. You can also sing. It doesn't matter what; anything from an old folk song to a children's song, to rock and roll. Don't worry about how well you sing; I assure you, the Air doesn't care. Feeling happy? Sing an upbeat tune. Feeling sad? Sing the blues, and share your sorrow with the Air. Any kind of sound will do: hum, whistle, play a musical instrument — just do it mindfully, with the intent of connecting with the element that provides your breath, and give thanks for the ability to make and hear sounds.

Wake up early  
and greet  
the dawn,  
breathing in  
the clear air of  
the new day.

**4 Create an Air Altar**  
Many of us have altars that contain a little something that represents each of the elements. But you can also create an altar that is dedicated to a particular god, goddess, or element. For instance, as a Taurus, I am very "Earth" oriented, and am more likely to have an Earth-centric altar. But if you are an "Airy" type (particularly a Gemini, Aquarius, or Libra), you may want to put together an altar dedicated specifically to the element of Air. Start with an altar cloth in one of the colors associated with Air: white, yellow, pale blue or pale gray. If you are crafty, you can embroider or quilt or paint an air scene on the cloth; maybe something with clouds and birds. (No need to spend a lot of money on a fancy cloth done by someone else; better to do something that comes from the heart!) If possible, the altar should face East.

An Air altar will have representations of various things associated with the element. The god Mercury, for instance. A feather, a bell (to represent sound), a sage smudge stick, or incense. If you don't like incense, you can substitute an oil diffuser, since the scent of the oil will still be carried upwards into the air. Scents usually associated with Air include lemon, lavender, and rosemary. Since Air is the realm of

the intellect, you could also add a book that you find inspiring or your personal Book of Shadows.

Then light a yellow candle, and if you like, recite your incantation, a poem, or the invocation above. Try standing at your Air altar at dawn, especially in the spring. (You may want to put up an Air altar in the spring, then replace it with a Fire altar in the summer, a Water altar in the fall, and an Earth altar in the Winter.)

**5 Go Outside and Smell the Breezes**  
Air is one of the most changeable of all the elements. Sometimes it is calm and quiet, other times, raging and full of fury. Instead of taking these various guises for granted, try going outside in all weathers and at all times of day, and making a mindful connection with all the different faces of this ever-present element.

Wake up early and greet the dawn, breathing in the clean, clear air of a new day. Go out after a storm and smell the crisp ozone that lingers even after the rain is gone. How is the air different in the spring, the summer, the fall, or on a cool winter's evening? Listen to the birds singing their greetings, and recite your own with mindful appreciation. Think about the ways that Air may mirror your own moods, or vice versa!

#### Connection is What it is All About

To me, connection is at the core of a Pagan practice and living a magickal life. Connecting with the elements is just one way to walk that path, which includes connecting with self, with others, and with deity. Because we take in Air every time we breathe, it is the easiest element to connect with. Be sure to remember that, every time you use the air to say those three magickal words: I love you. ✦

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## The Crafty Curmudgeon by Fritz Muntean

### The Magic of '63

In which Goddess-palooza turns out to be a “civilized” religion, after all.

*About me: In 1993, I had an amazing stroke of luck. During the summer, I'd taken some courses at the University of British Columbia to polish up my grasp of Classical pagan<sup>1</sup> mythology. Early that fall, many of the Religious Studies faculty had attended the Parliament of World Religions Centenary in Chicago. Contemporary Pagans were a major presence there, and when the UBC faculty members who'd attended heard that there'd been an actual Pagan Witch (me) amongst their students that summer — and a “mature” student at that (I was 54) — negotiations got underway. Five years later, I emerged with a Masters degree in Religious Studies. While I was in grad school, some friends and I founded The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies<sup>2</sup>, and went on to edit and publish the first 18 issues. I also joined in the efforts of Pagan scholars around the world to create the Contemporary Pagan Studies Group, which has since been granted official status by the American Academy of Religion. But my original encounter with Paganism had begun 30 years before, in 1963, and scholarship played a part in that adventure as well . . .*



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I'd always expected that if I had a vision it would be of unfolding lotus blossoms or “gateless gates.” But to my enormous surprise, I saw visions of circles and avenues of standing stones, and tattooed men with antlers. I had no idea what all this meant, but one of my friends had a buddy named Aidan Kelly who lived in San Francisco. We asked Aidan about what I'd seen and he said, “Oh, that's Robert Graves territory,” and gave us a copy of *The White Goddess*.

I devoured *The White Goddess* and started charting Graves' systems, especially the Tree Alphabet. We knew that Graves' idea of a prehistoric Goddess culture was a poetic vision and not “real” history, since Graves says as much in his introduction. But it was still very inspirational, and Aidan wrote an invocation of Graves' Goddess for a proto-Pagan wedding in 1963. In 1965, he and I wrote our first intentional spellcasting for a Summer Solstice ceremony that invoked both the Graves' Triple Goddess and a handful of Classical gods.

Soon our practice expanded and we were drawing down Goddess energy on the entire circle. (We were not yet drawing down God energy, except as as a “consort” for the Goddess in the form of an erotic woodland demi-deity.) Over the course of the next five years, we created an original West Coast Pagan

Goddess religion: the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD). Somehow we'd brought Graves' Three-Fold Goddess into the Craft.

A great deal of what happened next was informed by our various explorations and interests: Jungian archetypes; the religious dimensions of altered states; ceremonial regalia; and an emphasis on well-crafted poetry. Fold in a double helping of magical experimentation, cheerful eroticism, and serious efforts to create a coherent and stable ethical framework, and you can imagine the fantastical fireworks that ensued!

These wildly divergent influences gave NROOGD a counter-cultural emphasis distinctly different from the British Wiccan traditions on which it was intentionally based. These characteristics had enormous downstream affects on the subsequent development of several important varieties of contemporary Paganism, from “generic Gardnerianism” to Reclaiming and beyond. It's important to remember that those of us who rallied around the ribbon-bedecked May Pole of West Coast Pagan Witchcraft in the early 1960s were attracted like moths to the flames of a religious path that challenged the broader culture's misgivings about nature and disputed that culture's distrust of the ecstatic and impulse-driven life.

In the middle of all this spiritual creativity, my little family left California for the Kootenay valleys of western British Columbia, where we settled in to pursue the life of back-to-the-land hippies. When we'd left the Bay Area, Paganism there was booming, and, like everyone else we knew, we believed that Paganism was, at heart, a rustic or rural religion. “We're a nature religion, after all,” the theory went, and “our beliefs and practices harken back to the distant past when we all lived in a kind of rural Eden.” Right? Well, actually, not so much.

arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the summer of 1962, attracted by the winds of change blowing through the counterculture. The people I knew there were students — mostly at San Francisco State or UC Berkeley, or recent graduates of schools like Sarah Lawrence or Reed.

We were all just kids in our early twenties, and we had high hopes. We were looking for some kind of spiritual activity that we could engage in together. We were especially keen to dedicate ourselves to the search for what Castaneda would later call *A Separate Reality*. By combining meditative/yogic techniques with peyote — and a strong desire to experience the otherworldly — several of us induced visionary experiences.

## Those Ancestral *Urban* Pagans?

Pagan academic studies have turned our earlier visions of “Earth Mama” Paganism on its head. It turns out that much of what we post-modern Pagans think we know about the “rural” nature of pre-Christian European religions derives more from the notions of our Victorian ancestors than from actual studies of pagan antiquity. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantics idolized Nature and rhapsodized about the spirituality of the rustic life, but the countryside they loved was no wilderness. The native softwood forests that had once covered Britain had been stripped away centuries earlier, replaced by gently rolling meadows separated from one another with artful (and artificial) plantings of oak, ash, and hawthorn, making the intensely agrarian English countryside about as “natural” as a city park.

Among the ideas that the Victorians promoted was the concept that Christianity was largely an urban phenomenon, and that classical paganism survived centuries (perhaps millennia) following the Christian ascendancy in the rural backwaters of Europe and Britain. With this pre-conceived notion in mind, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographers eagerly catalogued colorful rural folk customs, citing them as evidence of what they termed “pagan survivals” — traditional religious ceremonies and practices that had persisted in rustic form since pre-Christian times.

Upon further investigations, however, many of these practices (such as the Padstow ‘Obby ‘Os) were found to date from less than a hundred years prior to the Victorian era.<sup>3</sup> Others (like Morris Dancing) can be traced back no further than the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and show no connection to Pagan rituals of antiquity.<sup>4</sup>

Even the hallowed notion that the word “Pagan” harkens back to the rural roots of Paganism (since the Latin word *paganus* meant “peasant”) turns out to be, at best, an overstatement. While it’s true that during the 5<sup>th</sup> century Christians sometimes referred to the ever-dwindling number of their fellow Romans who clung to the old gods as “pagans,” a careful reading of the history of the period reveals that the term was never used in the sense of “country dweller.” *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1982) offers us a variety definitions for *paganus*, many of which denote ignorance, stupidity and a lack of wisdom.<sup>5</sup> When the newly-powered Christians

referred to the unconverted urban populace as “paganus” In short, the Christian use of “pagan” was an insult more akin to today’s insults like “loser” or “dumbass” than a reference to pre-Christian religionist of town or country. Modern scholars of classical history assume this usage as a matter of course.<sup>6,7</sup>

Furthermore, as modern Pagan scholars have discovered, virtually everything we know about classical paganism comes from the study of the civic and mystery religions of Mediterranean antiquity. During the period that these religions flourished — from about 500 BCE until 400 CE — paganism was very much an urban religion. People who lived outside the cities did perform acts of personal devotion in honor of the local guardian deities of their households or small holdings (like the Roman *Iares* and *penates*.) But when country-dwellers wanted to participate in religious ceremonies in honor of the major deities, they walked into town to do so, just like people did in ancient Egypt, Judea, and Mesopotamia. What few rural temples existed — like the oracular shrine at Delphi — were sites of spectacular scenic beauty rather than rustic agrarian settings. Just like modern resorts, these pilgrimage destinations primarily catered to (and were supported by) urban visitors.

When Christianity rose to ascendancy in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E., it was mainly embraced by members of the Imperial Court and the Roman Army. The cultural and philosophical resistance to the rise of Christianity was conducted, in the end, by the urban elite — led by the Academies and the Senatorial nobility.

Some religious movements *do* thrive in the isolation of a rural environment, but they don’t look much like contemporary Paganism. They tend to feature clearly-defined doctrines, a highly-disciplined membership, and a firm rejection other religious groups as illegitimate. Religious absolutism is difficult to maintain in the pluralistic society of the metropolis, so such movements often retire to the isolation of a rural compound. One example of such a religious movement during the classical period was the Essene sect of apocalyptic Judaism in Palestine during the 1st century C.E. That movement (brought to light by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) was a clear precursor to the Jesus movement.

Just as classical paganism flourished in the urban environments of the ancient world, so contemporary Paganism has blossomed in the post modern cities of Today. As a loosely-organized movement with minimal required belief systems and a high degree of theological heterogeneity, the contemporary movement incorporates beliefs and practices from a variety of domestic and foreign sources, confers legitimacy on the claims made by other religious groups, and upholds the authority of the individual. Religious movements of this sort require a liberal, sophisticated, and — above all — urbane, atmosphere in order to survive and to flourish.

To my twenty-something self, I raise a glass of wine and salute the youthful idealism of his desire to go “back to the land.” But from my current vantage point of more than half-century immersed in the contemporary Pagan movement, I find the busy, challenging beehive of the metropolis to be “home, sweet home.” ♦

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I’m following the scholarly convention of capitalizing Paganism when referring to contemporary Paganism and using “small-p” paganism when writing about religions of the pre-Christian past.

<sup>2</sup>See: <http://www.equinoxpub.com/POM>

<sup>3</sup>For up-to-date information about the provenance of the Padstow ‘Os, watch the documentary *OSS Tales*, by John Bishop and Sabina Magliocco: [www.media-generation.com/DVD%20PAGES/Oss%20Tales/OSS.htm](http://www.media-generation.com/DVD%20PAGES/Oss%20Tales/OSS.htm), and read the review “Oss Tales: Creating the Archaic” by Chas Clifton: [www.chasclifton.com/2007/07/oss-tales-creating-archaic.html](http://www.chasclifton.com/2007/07/oss-tales-creating-archaic.html)

<sup>4</sup>*The New Oxford Companion to Music, Vol 2*, Oxford Univ Press, 1983, p. 1203.

<sup>5</sup>Sources cited by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* for these usages are from the 1st century BCE and the 1st-5th century CE, and the writings of Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Juvenal and Apuleius.

<sup>6</sup>For an extended discussion of this issue see Christine Mohrmann’s groundbreaking essay, “*Encore une fois: Paganus*,” *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* 3. (Rome, 1961-65), pp. 277-89.

<sup>7</sup>See also R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, (Cambridge Univ Press, 1990); Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, (Princeton Univ Press, 1991); and William E. Klingshirm, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*. (Cambridge Univ Press, 1994).

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## Casting a Lasting Impression

Review by WitchDoctorJoe

### *Casting Sacred Space:*

#### *The Core of All Magickal Work*

IVO DOMINGUEZ, JR., WEISER 2012

There is an immeasurable diversity that exists beneath the umbrella of Paganism. But the principal uniting factor within that diversity has consistently been the preparation and formation of sacred spaces. But strangely, never before has an entire book been dedicated solely to the development of this fundamental practice.

While attending this year's PantheaCon, I had the pleasure of attending two classes presented by Ivo Dominguez, Jr. Having heard him speak in person, I heard his voice narrating in my head as I read his book, and Ivo has proven to be as eloquent a writer as he is a speaker.

His book is divided into two parts, theory and practice. He begins by introducing the basic premise of casting, and for the sanctity of effective communication he clearly defines the term "casting" as both a noun and a verb. I always love it when an author does this because, while our Pagan culture may share a collective vocabulary, we do not always share the same definitions for the words we use. Taking time to clearly establish the definition and context of key terms before using them for instruction has become a necessary prerequisite within contemporary Paganism.

Ivo commits the first several chapters to presenting and exploring some previously disregarded, yet essential, concepts. Ivo emphasizes the reader's personal worldview and encourages its exploration with a probing exercise (p. 8). Moving on through the following chapters, he calls attention to the reader's internal state (p.13), and expounds on developing your senses and expanding your perception of subtle energies (p. 23). In the fourth chapter, Ivo utilizes a thoughtful question-and-answer format to present and explain the importance of grounding and centering, and this chapter sheds new light on an old craft.

Ivo sensibly uses his chapter on "Immanence, Transcendence, and Magical Reality" to transition from theory to practice. I personally found this to be the most significant portion of the book. The author guides the reader through the "Journey of Spirit into Matter," and we begin to explore the classic NeoPagan Quarters and Elements. Ivo makes use of contrast by offering examples of quarters from nine different cultures before moving into quarter-casting exercises (p. 67).



From this point on, *Casting Sacred Spaces* is all about casting the hell out of some sacred spaces! Originality and substance are rare and valuable attributes these days, and the rest of the book is composed of completely original castings. The first few castings are intended to manipulate energy fields to suit various needs. I had positive results with the "Sword and the Staff Casting" (p. 91) which I performed in my temple space. Like turning a big fan on full blast, it really got the energies circulating! I found the remaining castings fascinating and plan to perform the "Star of Sight" (p.131) with my Coven-mates in the near future.

Ivo's expert castings are garnished with additional advice on subjects like limitations and precautions, and recommendations for master techniques which convey many of the subtle nuances of this essential magical skill. Some of the material and castings are based on Western Hermetic and Qabalistic principles, and while a deeper understanding of those sources is encouraged, it is not at required. Although I wouldn't categorize it as a 101 book, even youngest Witchling will find *Casting Sacred Space* understandable and insightful, while the adept will also find plenty here that is inspirational and revitalizing. Highly recommended.

FIVE BROOMSTICKS 

*WitchDoctorJoe is an author, Wiccan priest and founder of the Mill Creek Tradition and Seminary. He blogs for W&P at pagansquare.com.*

## Origin Stories of Legendary Pagans

Review by Fritz Muntean

### *Hippie Commie Beatnik Witches*

AIDAN KELLY, HIEROPHANT, 2011

I've always loved the comics, especially those "stories of origin" about how major characters first came to be. Now it seems that whenever popular enthusiasm for a particular superhero or a legendary organization begins to fade, a film like *The Avengers* will appear, and interest will revive. So if

interest in the Craft's earliest years is now beginning to wane, then Aidan Kelly's new book, *Hippie Commie Beatnik Witches* couldn't have come at a better time.

Kelly is an accomplished scholar, and for the past forty-odd years he's been a compulsive record keeper. So he's in an excellent position to chronicle the exciting events that took place in California in the '60s and '70s, and the amazing people who came together to found NROOGD (the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn), and then COG (the Covenant of the Goddess). Many of the details of these events are in serious danger of becoming "lost in the mists of time" but Kelly does a credible job of pulling all this information together.

In full disclosure mode, I should admit that I was present for most of the earlier

### ABOUT THE RATINGS

**0 BROOMSTICKS** *Avoid at all costs.*

**1 BROOMSTICK**  
*Awful. Not worth your time or \$.*

**2 BROOMSTICKS**  
*Mediocre. Buy only if you're a collector.*

**3 BROOMSTICKS**  
*Good; not brilliant, but useful, fun, or both.*

**4 BROOMSTICKS**  
*Best in class; highly recommended.*

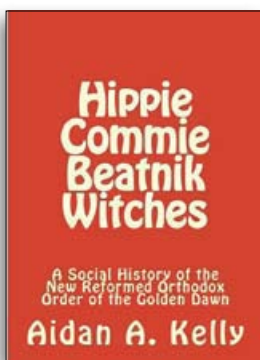
**5 BROOMSTICKS** *Wicked good. Buy it now!*

events described in this book. (When writing about my contributions, Kelly says many complimentary things, some of which may be deserved.)

Kelly's writing style is entertaining and engaging.

Following in the footsteps of famous classical historians like Herodotus and Ssuma Chien, Kelly does not hesitate to simply make up dialogue; and he does such a good job of this that the people whom I used to know sound, in print, exactly like they did in person. I especially enjoyed the "Imaginary Conversation" (p. 47), about the process by which a group of thoughtful and intelligent young people created NROOGD. They all had good educations, and they knew a lot about the history of magical religions. They knew they were creating a new religion for a modern world, and they had the self-confidence to admit that what "hidden truths" they knew had been discovered by themselves.

The central feature of the book is a lengthy description of the founding of the Covenant of the Goddess. The people who organized COG took on the daunting task of pulling together the many groups of magical practitioners that had sprung up or stepped forward in North America from the mid-1960s onward. Many of these organizations had not benefited from the careful thinking that had produced NROOGD, and some had social agendas that were surprisingly conservative. Kelly describes in some detail how the counter-cultural value systems of the Bay Area participants were used to sort out these issues. The organizers separated the chaff from the grain by the simple expedient of including all those who called themselves "Witches" — or at least did not object to the title. More important still, they decided not to be bound by the Gardnerian insistence that covens be of mixed gender. This was a ground breaking decision that opened up the Craft to same-sex covens, and guaranteed "absolute equality to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and people of any other sort of sexual preference" (p. 83).



Kelly's book seems a bit too short, especially considering the importance and the complexity of the period he's covering. And, like many of today's self-published books, it's in desperate need of a skilled (and ruthless) editor. Still, I'm delighted to see it in print, and I heartily recommend *Hippie Commie Beatnik Witches*, not only as a good read but also as an appealing and fascinating glimpse into an exciting era when Pagan Witchcraft first took shape as a liberal, progressive, Goddess-worshipping religion.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 

*A co-founder of California's NROOGD trad, Fritz Muntean edited The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies until 2003, and now is a regular columnist at W&P.*

### Crazy Campy Halloween Deck Review by Janet Boyer

*The Zombie Tarot: An Oracle of the Undead*  
Paul Kepple and Stacey Graham  
QUIRK BOOKS, 2012

I have three words for this deck: inventive, twisted, hilarious! From rotting corpses to severed heads, cannibalistic children to valiant humans fighting for survival, the *Zombie Tarot* serves up heaping doses of both brawn and braaaaainnnnsss for the twisted seeker.

But make no mistake: the *Zombie Tarot* is an actual workhorse deck, too; it reads clear and sharp for those used to reading the cards.

Framed by what looks like yellowed, old-fashioned newsprint, each card of morbid hilarity offers traditional names for the Major Arcana, while the Minor Arcana finds expression through Cups, Swords, Wands and Hazards (Coins). The Court Cards are Pages, Knights, Queens and Kings (love that rifle-toting Queen of Swords grandma luring zombies with a well-heeled ankle smack-dab in the middle of a bear trap!).

The 96-page companion booklet offers five spreads, as well as three keywords and brief interpretation for

each card (the "ads" in the back are too funny!) Labeled "Prediction and Protection", the sturdy *Zombie Tarot* container will serve you well...since it doubles for a box of shotgun shells.

Here are a few card descriptions to give you the flavor of this fantastic flesh-fest:

- Justice: Impartiality, Fairness, Equality. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" takes on an entirely new meaning in the midst of a human-zombie war. Thankfully you can count on Justice to right the wrongs, restore harmony, and offer a karmic slap to the back of the head to those who deserve it. Fight the good fight — don't be on the other end of that slap."

- Eight of Wands: Travel, Expansion, On the Move. "Faster than you can say... well, most anything, since you've lost your tongue, you've been presented with a new opportunity. Travel is imminent, so choose a path to stagger along and enjoy the occasional human morsel as you go. If you take charge, others will follow your lead. Trust your inner zombie and roll with it. Good news is coming. Brace yourself for awesome."

The images also show depth of Tarot knowledge. The Queen of Swords is often known as the "silver-haired widow card," so it's no surprise that our gun-wielding granny waits patiently in her green armchair. Justice's scales carry a brain on one side and a heart on the other, the balance decidedly in favor of the mind (as Justice usually tips). The zombie gal on the 8 of Wands chases her prey on roller skates, a clever nod to the "speed" of this card, and the 3 of Swords? Let's just say this card brings new meaning to the phrase, "eat your heart out."

*The Zombie Tarot* satisfies on every level: artistic, esoteric and divinatory. This purchase should be a no brain-er.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 

Janet Boyer is the author of *Back in Time Tarot* (Hampton Roads), *Tarot in Reverse* (Schiffer) and the *Snowland Tarot* (forthcoming).



**A Warlock's Guide to Working with Spirits**  
Review by Michelle Griffin

***The Witches' Book of the Dead***

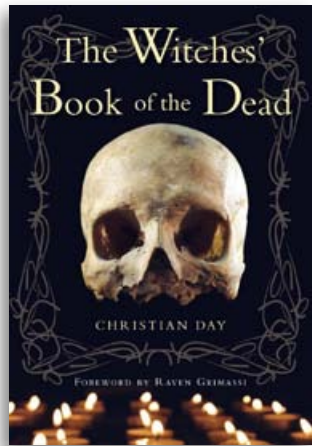
Christian Day  
WEISER, 2011

I have to admit, I didn't want to like *The Witches Book of the Dead*. In fact, I was almost looking forward to writing a bad review. Christian Day is nothing if not controversial, calling himself a Warlock, looking like he just walked off the set of *Charmed*, binding — and then forgiving — a well-known bad boy actor. I bought into the controversy, thinking this book would be no more than an attention grabber without any substance. There is one thing I forgot to take into consideration, though: Christian Day knows his stuff. He has done his homework when it comes to contacting the dead, and it shows.

*The Witches Book of the Dead* is not for everyone. From the recommendation of using a human skull to help connect with the dead to the use of blood in ritual, the book definitely has a high creepiness factor. At first, I found it to be a bit too much, especially after browsing the website Mr. Day recommends for obtaining your human skull. However, he offers historical evidence that backs up his methods, and does state that a crystal or resin skull may be substituted for the real thing, and cautions reader to only use their own blood, taken with a sterile lancet, in ritual.

Looking more deeply, this book is packed full of useful information for those wishing to make contact with the spirit world. Beginning with breathing techniques to connect with what he refers to as the "Death Current," Mr. Day takes the reader step-by-step through the process he has used to successfully connect with the dead. There are chapters on tools, divination, and magick. The writing is conversational and more like a letter to an old friend than an instruction manual.

*The Witches Book of the Dead* does have a few shortcomings. First, there is a



noticeable lack of safety information accompanying the use of blood in ritual. Though he does give some basic precautions, more attention should have been paid to the issue of blood safety. Also, it would have been nice to see less dependence on the use of props as not everyone can

afford or has the need for such theatrics. I realize though, that the author is simply conveying methods that work for him. I will be using this book as a reference in my own quest for contact with the spirit world, adapting what doesn't suit me, relying on my own intuition as well as Mr. Days wisdom. Over all, *The Witches Book of the Dead* is a great read for those wanting to delve into working with spirits.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 

*Michelle Griffin is the Co-founder and High Priestess of Church of the Living Earth.*

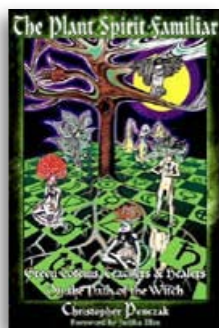
**Let Your Blood Run Green**  
Review by Pegi Eyers

***The Plant Spirit Familiar: Green Totems, Teachers, and Healers on the Path of the Witch***

Christopher Penczak  
COPPER CAULDRON, 2011

Tomes and grimoires have been written on the practical use of plants in magical and healing work, but few connect these practices with the sentient living spirits of the Earth. Now, with his beautiful new book *The Plant*

*Spirit Familiar* Christopher Penczak evokes our ability to communicate directly with the green world. It is a potent reminder of the witch's interconnectivity with nature. Part guidebook, historical study and practicum, Penczak identifies plant familiars not only as intermediaries between the worlds



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**The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook**  
KENAZ FILAN

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but also as our green allies, teachers, guardians, and totems. Christopher speaks of the joy of gardening and the sensory pleasure of working with plants and incorporates material from the worlds of nature-based spirituality, shamanism, herbal folk magic, and alchemy. The experiential tools of meditation, ritual, and practical magic make this book the perfect starting point for a more meaningful relationship with the living beings of the green realm.

Penczak describes the special role of the witch's familiar as a go-between — the "imp", spirit teacher, faery being or ancestor spirit — as rooted in ancient shamanic shapeshifting practices. He discusses the techniques of inter-species communication with plants as practiced by indigenous societies for millennia, and by the Findhorn project and Perelandra in our time.

*The Plant Spirit Familiar* teaches us about the three types of plant allies, the balms, banes, and the Tree Teachers. A wide-ranging journey into the green world, this book will empower you to learn about the Doctrine of Signatures; creating elixirs, potions, incense, tinctures, oils, root fetishes, and wands; working with plant-spirit medicine, the Green Man, and the Lady of Flowers; entering the Council of Trees, the Green Circle, and your own Soul Garden and much, much more.

A witch relates to all beings, the Earth, and the ancient powers as conscious and intelligent, and allows the Green Mystery to weave its magic into their spiritual practice. Green wisdom is essential to re-enchanting the world, as we collectively make the shift away from industrial society to a deeper respect for the natural world. *The Plant Spirit Familiar* is a brilliant guidebook to answering the "Call of the Green" and the recovery of our shared blessings and eternal connection to the land.

FIVE BROOMSTICKS

*Pegi Evers is a Goddess artist and blogger; she creates her original art with mixed-media, oil and acrylic painting, assemblage, stitching and digital applications. As an independent Curator she has developed exhibition projects with artist collectives and arts organizations, and has been employed as an Arts Publicist and Fundraiser. See her work at <http://www.lyssanda-designs.com>.*

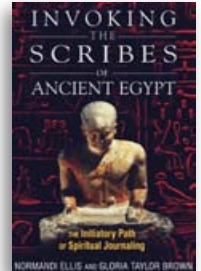
## Journalling as Pilgrimage

Review by Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D.

### *Invoking the Scribes of Ancient Egypt: The Initiatory Path of Spiritual Counseling*

Normandi Ellis & Gloria Taylor Brown  
BEAR & CO, 2011

In the fall of 2009, a group of eighteen women and one man (Scully's husband) embarked on the journey of a lifetime (or several lifetimes) to the temples of Egypt. Its purpose was not only to explore the temples and the *neteru* (the gods and goddesses) of ancient Egypt, but also to explore themselves as spiritual beings. The leaders of this august group were Normandi Ellis, author of *Dreams of Isis* and *Awakening Osiris*, and Gloria Taylor Brown, a spiritual guide whose principal contacts are Thoth, the god of wisdom, and Anubis, the "opener of the way between the worlds." As they sailed north from the First Cataract, the travelers wrote every day — about their own hero's journey, their "stepping stones," their personal "I Am Isis" aretology, and other topics given to them by Ellis, who explains why journalling is so important:



*Who we are becoming is much more important than who we were, yet all that we have felt, all that we have touched, all that we have loved, the words we have spoken, the worlds in which we have traveled, and all the wild longings that we have denied or haven't fulfilled have created the constellation of this vessel we inhabit in the eternal now.... This body is a container for memory and experience.... Rather than imagining that we are writing our life story, imagine that the story we inhabit has been written by the gods (p. 3).*

Brown adds that our memories and stories are our most important legacy.

*Traditionally stories were told to enlighten, educate, and create a sense of belonging. Today, most of the stories our children hear are taught by others outside the family... without regard to the personal.... Some are good, some are bad, some are entertaining, but most of them are not our own [emphasis in the original] (pp. 4-5).*

The travelers, whose biographies are given in the back of the book, write to learn who they were and who they are. Samples are included in the book, along with photographs taken by many of them and some beautiful color plates. The only thing missing is a map showing where they traveled.

After meeting in Cairo, and taking the bus to Giza, where they held a ritual between the paws of the Great Sphinx, the group flew to Aswan, where they visited the temple of Khnum and boarded the Afandina. Other stops included a dozen major temples; the journey ended back at Giza in the pyramids of Djoser and Unas at Saqqara and the Great Pyramid. Not only did they walk in sacred space, but they also climbed up and down countless stone steps, strolled in modern Egyptian towns, and even found time to go shopping.

*Invoking the Scribes of Ancient Egypt* is a book of wisdom that includes the writing exercises, perceptive comments on the temples and gods and goddesses, guided meditations, and even remarks about the heat and how the life of modern Egypt overlies the older civilization. It should have a place on our shelves beside the other fine books on spiritual journalling, including those by Julia Cameron. What if we could all embark on this sacred journey? What would we learn? What would we write?

FIVE BROOMSTICKS 

Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D. ([www.barbaraardinger.com](http://www.barbaraardinger.com)), is the author of *Secret Lives, a novel about crones and other magical folks*, and *Pagan Every Day, a magical daybook*.

## We're All on Faerie Time Here Review by Hillary Johansen

### *An Unreal Estate: Sustainability and Freedom in an Evolving Community*

Lucinda Carspecken  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011  
Indiana University Press, 2011

You know that sense of uneasiness you get when someone turns up on the news and claims to be a representative of the pagan community? I think that was what my cousin felt when I told her about this book profiling the Lothlorien nature sanctuary in Indiana.

Thankfully, Lucinda Carspecken's book *An Unreal Estate* was a pleasant surprise. The author did her research ethically: she spent time at Lothlorien, got involved, and informed those around her that she was observing them.

This book is meant as a sociology textbook. It has the feel of a journalistic anthropological approach combined with history/influence overtones that will make anyone with a background in Lit or European Romanticism feel like they're back in 101. It does get dry at points, but not in an unreadable way.

Carspecken begins by attempting to define aspects of Lothlorien and paganism, but openly acknowledges that the nature of these things is such that everyone is certainly not going to agree on them. She also admits that her book isn't complete. Coming from an academic, it's strange, but when I finished, I couldn't help but think that if more researchers were as open-minded as Carspecken, those of us featured in such books would breathe a sigh of relief.

While the book is outwardly about the place of Lothlorien, the story of the land itself takes a backseat to the people. Carspecken's interviews are the best part of the book, although the book lacks the voices of the dissenters, mostly because she can't really find those who left for ideological reasons.

Anyone who reads the book will feel like they are going back and forth between ideas of what this place is, but I wonder if that's what Carspecken wanted. Lothlorien means something different to everyone, and Lucinda's book is about as much of a broad study as we are likely to get. There are three major ways in which the book really suffers: the absence of color photography, needing more interviews, and journal excerpts from the author.

After viewing pictures of Lothlorien, I had already wanted to see it in person, Carspecken only pushed me further. In our current culture, something about it just feels simpler, safer, and to be honest, I would kind of like a place where hugs are more common than cell phones — if only for a couple of days.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 

*Hillary Johansen is soon to be published for short fiction. She lives in Michigan with her husband and their chinchillas.*

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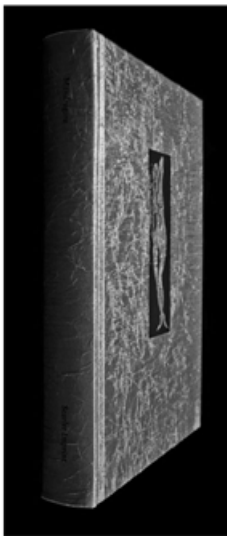
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## BESPELLED

Short Takes on Books & More

### ***A Teaching Handbook for Wiccans and Pagans*** **Thea Sabin, Llewellyn, 2012, 5/5 Broomsticks**

Imagine for a moment that you have signed up for a workshop on teaching spiritual topics. You've heard the name of the workshop leader, but never really met her. You have been feeling called to teach, but since you are not a trained teacher, you have no idea where to begin. The door opens, and the workshop leader walks in, followed by some of the biggest names in Paganism. Christopher Penczak is there, and Patrick McCollum, Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, and T. Thorne Coyle. There are others, too, some well known, some not. They take their seats around the circle and begin to speak. The leader, Thea Sabin, is obviously knowledgeable about the subject matter, and she guides you through every step of the process, from deciding if you're ready to teach, to avoiding burnout as a teacher. Along the way, the other community leaders lend their perspective on the topics at hand. Ellen Evert Hopman tells you "No matter how well you plan, you have to be able to adjust to your audience." Pete "Pathfinder" Davis talks of the complexities of setting up an online class. You find yourself learning more than you ever imagined, from some of the people you respect most. *A Teaching Handbook for Wiccans and Pagans* is that workshop.

The author knows her stuff. With a masters degree in education, she has practical skills most of us never learn as spiritual teachers, and it shows. Ms. Sabin guides you through the process of creating and teaching a class. The ideas and tips given in the book can be used to teach nearly any subject, from "Wicca 101" to "Advanced Herbalism." She breaks things down in conversational language, and there are chapters on adult learning styles, creating a class session, and even teaching online. The resource section alone is worth the price of the book.

*A Teaching Handbook for Wiccans and Pagans* should be on the bookshelf of anyone who wants to teach a class on spirituality. As the leader of a small Pagan group, I have made this book required reading for anyone wishing to teach a class with us. It has truly earned its five broomstick rating, and I would give it more if I could. MICHELLE GRIFFIN.

### ***Anointed: a Devotional Anthology for the Deities of the Near and Middle East*** **Edited by Tess Dawson, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2011, 4/5 Broomsticks**

*May the gods watch over you; may they bless you with health and well-being. May they strengthen you for a thousand days and for ten thousand years unto eternity.*

— Canaanite prayer

It is easy to lose oneself in this rich volume — and a pleasure to do so. Prayers, praise-songs, essays — even recipes — lead the reader through the diverse world of Middle Eastern religions before the rise of the Abrahamic traditions. The reader is introduced to vivid imagery, complex pantheons, unfamiliar names and languages. The writing is fresh and vital because the contributors are either students or practitioners of these ancient spiritual systems. Blessedly, this is not another 101 primer, but rather resource for those who have converted and are in search of authentic paths of veneration to a world long gone, much of it lost in the millennia between its original practice and today's seeker.

Dawson is to be congratulated for assembling the full range of work here. For there is no one faith in these distant lands that holds the essence of the West. From Sumer to Canaan, from Assyria to Egypt, the sacred landscape is peopled with myriad tribes, deities, and expressions. The contributors breathe life into names that are redolent of sweet honey and rich olive oil. Anyone familiar with Noah Kramer's excellent work on the oldest extant prayers will appreciate the praise-songs that mirror that ancient poetry. There are ceremonies as well as prayers and a particularly helpful and well-written piece called "Rekindling the Lamp: Canaanite Rituals for the Solitary Qadish" by Dawson. A handy "who's who" concludes this fascinating book. H. BYRON BALLARD.

### ***Shades of Faith: Minority Voices in Paganism*** **Edited by Crystal Blanton, Megalithica, 2011**

The struggle of minorities in the primarily Caucasian Pagan community is seldom discussed. Crystal Blanton has created an informative and powerful anthology in *Shades of Faith: Minority Voices in Paganism*. The twenty contributing authors shine a light on the subtle racisms, stereotypes and loneliness of being the "minority within a minority spiritual community."

"Stepping Out on Faith", the essay by Flame Bridesdottir, is particularly noteworthy for its description of self discovery and the alienation felt by many non-Caucasian Pagans. As an African-American Pagan myself, I have certainly gone through many of the situations presented: the assumption that all Black pagans practice voodoo or study African paths; the quickly-disguised shock from other practitioners upon attending public rituals; the discrete search of the crowds at festivals for another dark-skinned face. It seems in one way or another, we are all searching for each other, searching for acceptance, searching for a place to call home. The anthology doesn't solely focus on the challenges and frustrations of being a minority in a non-Christian setting. The poetry, essays and memoirs within give a strong and thoughtful voice to the joys of cultural heritage, the beauty of variety, and sharing that knowledge with others. The prose "Multicolored Momma" by Luisha Teish is a fine example, as is "Heart of My Heart," one of the submissions by Blanton.

With discussions ranging from dating to ostracism, *Shades of Faith* is not only helpful in connecting the people of color in the Pagan community, but can give Caucasian readers a better understanding of their minority sisters and brothers on the path. For as Blanton suggests in the introduction, "... all are welcome in the land of God and Goddess." BRANDI AUSET.

### ***The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook*** **Kenaz Filan, Inner Traditions, 2011, 4/5 broomsticks**

Kenaz Filan has written several books on Voodoo already, but *The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook* is something special. While there are few cities as storied as New Orleans, the amount of information Filan imparts on the culture and magickal history of the Big Easy is quite remarkable. So much has been written on the legends and history of this most unique of American cities, but Filan opens the book with a quick rundown of its history and economic development, emphasizing the diverse peoples that all had a hand in shaping its unique culture. Spanish, French, Native American, Caribbean and African influences abound in the Crescent City, and a certain fatalism about the temporary nature of life, due to the yearly ordeal of hurricane season, encourages the city's hedonistic streak. Enormous creativity and magick bubbles up in the "city that care forgot."



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The second part of the book covers the most significant aspects of New Orleans's popular culture — Jazz, Mardi Gras, the Indians, the cuisine, the Goth and Vampire communities — and then begins to unravel the mysteries of New Orleans Voodoo, a tradition mostly separate from the Haitian tradition. The distortions of racism, as well as the “embellishments” of scammers looking to ensnare gullible tourists have left many “historical” accounts of New Orleans folk magic that are completely unreliable. Filan does an excellent job in presenting good information, and offering caveats for the rest. And while the *Handbook* is not a spell book, the information provided on the spirits, saints, oils and candle magick, plus the best explanation of what a Voodoo doll is (and isn't), is a wonderful entry into this work for anyone who wishes to pursue it further. Fun and informative, *The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook* is a great resource for anyone interested in this style of magick, or who's planning a “magickal vacation” in the Crescent City. LENI HESTER.

### **The Gaian Tarot**

**Joanna Powell Colbert, Llewellyn, 2011, 4/5 broomsticks**

At long last, a deck designed for Earth Religionists, that brings the meanings of the cards back to the touchstone of Nature! Joanna Powell Colbert has a deep relationship with the land she lives on, and the eye of both an artist and a naturalist. Her art (she uses a technique called photo-realistic colored pencil) is lovely — colorful, imaginative, and rich in symbol. Almost every card has at least one element — a wing, a hermit crab's legs, a tongue of fire, a bit of fur — that breaks out of the square of the picture and overflows into the white frame of the card, giving a sense of irrepressible life and motion. Colbert used real people as models for the cards, and she lovingly captures the unique beauty of each individual, giving the deck a real sense of human connection and community.

The deck keeps to the traditional Tarot structure, but the meanings of the cards are reinterpreted in light of Nature's cycles. Some cards, like “The Gardener,” are renamed, but easily distinguishable as the traditional card — in this case, the card shows a pregnant woman reclining in a field surrounded by fruits and flowers. Others, like the Chariot, are re-named (“The Canoe,” in this case) and re-visioned to nature; specifically the Pacific Northwest ecosystem in which the deck is grounded.

Many cards that had been significantly changed are still in line with the traditional meanings. The “Death” card, for instance, is one of the few cards that does not have a human being in it, and is a beautiful, simple picture of a ruined, decaying boat beached on the shore of a lake, containing the partially-decomposed skeleton of a heron, surrounded by wild roses and elderberry. The “Tower” card has been renamed Lightning, which strikes a forest instead of a castle, and the “Ten of Wands” shows a forest fire.

The Minor Arcana are divided by element, using the traditional Tarot assignments of Air for Swords, Fire for Wands, Water for Cups and Earth for Pentacles. The Court cards are translated into Children for Pages, Explorers for Knights, Guardians for Queens and Elders for Kings. These cards are some of my favorites because they thoughtfully replace the archaic and sexist hierarchy of a monarch's court with the universal stages of human development.

Colbert is a knowledgeable and experienced Tarotist, and works skillfully within the traditional story of the human spiritual journey that defines the Major Arcana, while always relating that journey back to the cycles of the Earth. She does not shy away from hard truths, but reflects them through the mirror of Nature. The deck, nine years in the making, is a labor of love — one person's love for a specific place on the Earth and its people. While focused on a single bio-region, these cards speak to anyone who wants to develop a deep connection with their own bio-region — Colbert's eye for detail and relationship reminds us that love of the Earth must begin where we stand. The Gaian Tarot is a standout deck that will inspire and enchant anyone who delights in the gifts of the natural world. DIOTIMA MANTINEIA.

### **Coventry Magic with Candles, Oils, and Herbs**

**Jackie Smith, Weiser Books, 2011, 3.5/5 broomsticks**

Jackie Smith is the creator of Coventry Candles, and true to that background, this book offers practical, down-to-Earth advice on magic in general with a focus on candle magic. It's an especially solid book for someone who is past the 101 stage but hasn't clocked in too many years yet. As someone who is experienced with magic, I still learned from this book: some new takes on grounding that have been helpful to me, a special Tarot spread to do before undertaking a magical working and suggestions on how to wake up devi in plants to make your magical workings

stronger. I found the discussion on self-work, which included exercises to get you to focus your magic better and increase your chances for success, eye-opening. Jackie Smith's tone is wry and engaging, and she's not afraid to talk about her own life, including when things didn't go to plan, which is always refreshing in an author.

The book is not without flaws: the actual technique portion was a little lightweight and assumed knowledge some readers may not have. Conversely, the various glossaries (common to 101 books) seemed like filler. Overall, a good effort and especially useful to those with a special interest in candle magick. DEBORAH CASTELLANO.

### **Carcer Via: an Inmate's Guide to the Craft**

**Joseph Merlin Nichter, Mill Creek Seminary, 2010 4/5 broomsticks**

First, let me admit my bias: I am myself involved with prison ministry, and am the co-author of another book written specifically for Wiccan inmates. I am therefore delighted to see *Carcer Via* available, and predisposed to appreciate what the author is attempting to do.

This book presents a Roman-oriented Craft, the Veritas Tradition. In his Forward, Raymond Buckland sums it up, saying that in this book “can be found all the information that might be needed, including not only the basic rites but also examples of divination, or augury, plus additional resources and recommended reading.”

The Introduction to *Carcer Via* is an overview, establishing a context for Wicca generally and Nichter's Tradition in particular. The book presents the Veritas Trad through meditations, explanation, and examples (many of them illustrated). There are clear directions for the rituals, discussions of Witchcraft's tools, and some original interpretation. I have already heard from incarcerated Pagans who have found this book useful, but its usefulness is not limited to only those behind bars. Written for group practice, *Carcer Via* can be easily adapted to solitary work, and anyone looking for an open yet well-defined classically flavored tradition to follow will do well to check out this slim volume.

Copies are free to the incarcerated (\$15 for others) available from Mill Creek Seminary, Post Office Box 612, Visalia, California, 93291. (Please remember that Rev. Nichter's prison ministry is unfunded, and consider enclosing a donation, too.) ASHLEEN O'GAEA.

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***Iroquois Supernatural: Talking Animals and Medicine People***  
Michael Bastine and Mason Winfield  
Bear & Co, 2011, 3.5/5 broomsticks

If historians got together after a conference to sit around a campfire and tell ghost stories, it might sound a lot like *Iroquois Supernatural: Talking Animals and Medicine People*. Co-written by historian Mason Winfield and Algonquian elder Michael Bastine, this book strikes a pleasant mix between scholarly research and earnest fascination with these stories of supernatural happenings in the New York state area. It's clear that all the research done was a labor of love on the part of both authors, though the "golly isn't this cool" tone of the book seems to come mostly from Mr. Winfield. This isn't a lightweight book; at 357 pages long (with an index and nice-sized bibliography) there's a great deal of depth. But thankfully, the authors don't write in an overly academic style. Think of it as an extended conversation with an avid Native American history buff and you'll get the idea.

I had expected *Iroquois Supernatural* to be just a simple retelling of folk tales, but it is much more. Each chapter has a theme, and the authors discuss the theme in Iroquois culture, inserting stories to illustrate their point. Also, rather than just being older tales, many of the stories are simple anecdotes of experiences of people in post-colonial North America, and of modern Iroquois storytellers like Wallace "Mad Bear" Anderson, Cornplanter, Mary Jemison and Handsome Lake, whose tales are in the early stages of becoming established lore. The format of the book, as well as the blending of new and old stories, really gives a good general idea of Iroquois culture, past and present. In short, *Iroquois Supernatural* is a solid introduction to the lore with cool campfire stories mixed in, intelligent but not pedantic. KESTRIL TRUESEEKER.

***Wyrdowning: The Path of the Saxon Sorcerer***  
Alaric Albertsson, Llewellyn, 2011, 4.5/5 broomsticks

With the glut on spell books in publication, you'd think that the last thing we'd need is yet another book on how to practice magic, but it turns out that this book might very well be the last one that you need.

*Wyrdowning* is something very different: a primer on how to be a sorcerer/magician; a guide for designing a personal magic practice, a whole way of life.

To Albertsson magic is the act of shaping our reality by shaping our Wyrd. Wyrd is a core theological element for any Saxon sorcerer, defined as the process of our future unfolding through our past and current choices. *Wyrdowning* teaches you how to cast magic that comes from exactly who you are and where you want to go. Which is the most powerful kind of magic, after all.

Albertsson first walks you through the Saxon magical systems of Runes (the Anglo-Saxon version, not the Elder Futhark), Herbs, Galdor (words), and Divination, and then teaches you how to use these tools for the most popular types of spells: Health, Love and Prosperity. The first chapter, "The Nature of Magic," is the most essential, and it covers what magic is (and isn't), how it works, and what aspects of the sorcerer themselves feed their work.

Albertsson's work is mature, well-grounded and, above all, practical. This is not a book about Saxon Spirituality (for that you need to read his book *Travels Through Middle Earth*), and Albertsson makes clear from the beginning that spirituality and magic are not the same thing, and though they may lend themselves to each other it is perfectly acceptable to practice one without the other.

If you read between the lines, it's almost as if Albertsson has written a whole way of life into this unassuming book on magic. If you are looking for a solid teacher, a balanced introduction to magic, or find yourself called to the Saxon way, then this book is a necessity for your bookshelf. MEGAN POTTER.

***Rupert's Tales, The Wheel of the Year: Beltane, Litha, Lammas, Mabon***

Kyrja, illustrations by Tonia Bennington  
Schiffer, 2011, 4/5 broomsticks

As the book jacket says, "You don't have to be Pagan to be enchanted by Rupert and the magick found in his tales." But if you are Pagan and you've been searching for meaningful stories to help your children or grandchildren understand the Sabbats, Rupert and his friends will be happy to help you.

This little bunny's curiosity draws him closer and closer to the people who celebrate the changing of the seasons in the clearing at the edge of the forest. Bravely conquering his fear of the dangers from natural predators and the humans that gather in the clearing, Rupert finds that "The God and Goddess aren't only in one place."

As Rupert learns the reasons for each Sabbat celebration, he also learns the deeper meanings of the Pagan tradition and how they apply to life every day. The rich hues of the colorful, full-page illustrations evoke nature and the elements, while the rhyming couplets, though sometimes slightly off in meter, present the tales in classic storybook fashion. Kyrja masterfully weaves the basic tenets central to many Pagan traditions throughout her stories; while the underlying themes advocate personal responsibility, appreciating the moment at hand, respect for life and the environment, and gratefulness for the gifts the Goddess bestows. A splendid book for old and young alike. LADY WILLOW.

***The Scribing Ibis: An Anthology of Pagan Fiction in Honor of Thoth***

Edited by Rebecca Buchanan  
Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2011, 3/5 broomsticks

*The Scribing Ibis: an Anthology of Pagan Fiction in Honor of Thoth* is a book of original short fiction written by Pagan authors. What I hoped to see was stories, poems, and information written by devoted followers of Thoth. However, once I started reading it occurred to me that *The Scribing Ibis* reads more like something to be offered to Thoth, rather than a celebration to the god himself. As Editor Rebecca Buchanan writes in her introduction "these are not ancient tales, but modern stories. Here, the Gods are not figments of the imagination or demons, but Powers to be experienced and honored and loved and feared." Most of the stories aren't connected to Thoth; instead, they represent various myths set in real and imagined lands. Curiously, the book also tosses in four scholastic papers written on themes found in Pagan fiction. Overall, these stories are interesting to read, but I was really hoping that *The Scribing Ibis* had been more like the devotionals that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is known for producing. If you like Pagan short fiction in general, you'll probably enjoy this volume, but if you are looking for material about Thoth, you'll be disappointed. INNOWEN. ♠

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(*My Path: Dying into Life, continued from p. 96*)

about this goddess, I would have to go right to the source. I began to teach myself to read Greek and immersed myself in the study of the ancient Greek religion of Hellenism. It was here also that I realized that the most holy and sacred mountain of Greece, Mount Olympus, is located in the region of Thessaly. I also learned that Thessaly was, in ancient times, considered to be the birthplace of magic. Thessalian witches were believed to be the most skilled magicians in all the world. I immediately knew that this was the path for me, but I had a problem: I had a group of twenty students at varying levels of training who were completely Wiccan. How could I be a Hellenist and still maintain my responsibilities as a Wiccan priest? The result of this conundrum was my first book, *Reclaim the Power of the Witch*, which was my attempt to incorporate a wide variety of knowledge that I had gathered over the years from various people and traditions into a working system set in a Wiccan-type format. Essentially it was Wicca with Hellenic window-dressing. Despite the difficulties it presented, the system did indeed work. However, a third major turning point was soon to come.

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*Hekate and Hermes each held my hand, and there I was — back in that field of yellow daffodils.*

Through my studies of the Golden Dawn, I became familiar with the practice of assuming god-forms, a mild form of possession in which the magician assumes the characteristics of a specific deity in order to channel the energy of that god or goddess. This practice was incorporated into my rituals at Church of Thessaly. However, what we found was that when we incorporated the Hellenic deities into our ritual workings, these meditative states rapidly evolved into outright divine possession, or what the ancient Greeks called *Katoche*. Prophetic messages, healings, and a wide variety of unexplained phenomena began to occur. During one particular ritual I was taken over by the power of Apollo and a grave prophecy was given: that the group had reached a spiritual impasse and that if changes were not made, the group would disintegrate.

A series of events soon followed which led to the prophecy's fulfillment: the group disbanded, and we all went our separate ways, some with good grace and others not so graciously. This experience resulted in my disengagement from the Pagan/occult community for several years in order to re-center myself and my practice. I continued my Hellenistic studies and eventually moved away from Wiccan practices and embraced Hellenism as my true calling.

This realization was confirmed by way of a profound spiritual experience. Studying the ancient religion and mystical practices of Greece led me to learn that asceticism and discipline are key factors in awakening the soul to receive greater wisdom and power. So I set out to replicate an ancient initiation rite. The rite itself required three months of preparation and forty days to perform, during which there is a great deal of prayer

and meditation in conjunction with fasting and sleeping in a room set aside exclusively for worship.

During the performance of this ritual, I received an epiphany of the goddess Hekate and the god Hermes. They appeared to me in a period of semi-wakefulness and each took my hand, calling me, "son." As they held my hands, the scenery changed and there I was — back in that field of yellow daffodils. I looked to Hekate and Hermes, both of whom had devious grins on their faces, and suddenly it hit me. In Greek mythology,

when a person dies, their soul is led by Hermes to their proper place in the afterlife. Those who are truly good will be taken to the Isles of the Blessed, where they find peace and joy. Those who are truly corrupt will be taken to the pit of Tartarus, to be purified until it is time for them to reincarnate and try again. Those between these two extremes are taken to a place called the Fields of Asphodel until the time comes for them to reincarnate. What does all this have to do with

me? It turns out that the name Asphodel, in Greek, means daffodils. I finally I knew where I went on that day back in 1985: and that my path had always been Hellenism, I just took the long road home. ☞

**MONTE PLAISANCE** is a Hellenist of the Thessalian Mystery Tradition, theurgist, author, diviner, and teacher. In conjunction with his priestess Gypsy he is the founder of the *Archaeos Temenoi Hellenica*, a legally-recognized Hellenic Temple in Denham Springs, Louisiana. Both he and Gypsy reside on a three-acre *temenos* (sacred precinct) where they perform the sacred duties of their office. Monte is the author of *Reclaim the Power of the Witch*, and co-author with Gypsy of *A Treasury of Hellenic Prayers* and *A New Traveler on an Ancient Path*. He can be found online at <http://echoesfromthetemple.wordpress.com/>.

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I was born and raised amidst the murky swamps and sugarcane fields of South Louisiana in the small town of Raceland. Like most “bayou boys” I was reared in typical southern traditions, exercising the “*ol joie de vivre*,”<sup>1</sup> enjoying the amenities of Cajun Country — crawfish, rice, alligators, sugarcane, boudin, gumbo, and of course Mardi Gras. My youth was carefree, and filled with adventures that would make Huck Finn envious. However, in 1985, when I was only 13, an event occurred that would change my life forever. That was the day that I nearly died.



### *Dying into Life: My Path to Hellenism* Monte Plaisance

It was a beautiful hot southern afternoon near Grand Isle, Louisiana, a long time before the BP oil spill made such a mess of things. While playing a game of bicycle tag with some friends, a misjudgment on my part hurled me headlong into a standing rack of drilling pipes, fracturing my skull and breaking several of my teeth. Even though I was knocked unconscious, I know every detail of what happened, down to where my glasses landed and who was the first person to come running to my aid. Why? Because just seconds before the accident, I found myself standing outside of my body watching the incident unfold in vivid detail.

This startling experience — existing outside of my body — was followed by another. There was a flash of light and I found myself standing in a field of yellow flowers, which I later identified as daffodils, completely alone, but very much at peace. Then there was another flash of light, and I found myself back in my body, covered in blood. Instinctively I knew that I had died and panic took over; the first thing I did was grab ahold of my friend and ask him if he could see me. (I thought that maybe I had died and become a ghost.) When he acknowledged that he could indeed see me, calm swept over me, and we went to his house to ask for her. Eventually, I was brought to the hospital and diagnosed with a concussion, two broken teeth, and a hairline fracture in my skull. The accident left me with temporal-lobe epilepsy, with which I still suffer to this day.

This NDE (Near Death Experience) brought with it two realizations:

1. Consciousness continues, even when the body is not functioning.
2. All of the things I had been taught as a Catholic about what would happen at the time of death did not happen to me.

As I recovered from my injuries, I began to question everything that I was taught about reality and about the meaning of life. This was the beginning of my quest for spiritual truth. So, just around the time when most young men are discovering dating and sports, I was immersing myself in the spiritual doctrines of the various religions of the world. This course of study eventually led me into research on the occult. During the following decade, I began to travel extensively, studying various occult traditions and cultures and meeting a wide variety of people. My most formative period of spiritual learning came while I was living in Sedona, Arizona and became an initiate into the Alexandrian

tradition of Wicca. Undergoing all of the necessary study and initiations, I acquired my third degree in a relatively short span of time. At the same time, I was initiated into the Isis-Anubis lodge of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The striking contrast between these two systems of spirituality — and the fact that I pursued them simultaneously — was a testament to the profound spiritual confusion I was experiencing at the time. I was lost and looking for meaning; Wicca gave me joy and Hermetic studies provided the knowledge and discipline that I thought a spiritual person should have. Through it all, I was trying to answer a simple question: Where was the field of yellow daffodils, and why had I gone there when I “died?”

I eventually returned home to Louisiana, where I settled down in the town of Houma and started a small occult study group. Our original focus was on general occult topics, but Wicca soon dominated the discussions. As an initiated Priest, I was asked to pass my knowledge on and a series of initiations began; over time the group continued to grow and I decided to make it official. So on April 14, 1994, I founded the Church of Thessaly: the name was chosen when, during a morning meditation, the name *Aristaeus* came into my mind. I had never heard the name before, so I researched it and found that this was the name of a pan-like deity in the region of Thessaly, Greece. The name Thessaly struck a chord, but I had no idea of why. It did not take long before I discovered that this name had a great deal of meaning for me.

All was well for a time, and the group prospered and grew to a very large membership. It was then that a series of dreams began to plague me to such a degree that I found it difficult to sleep. In my dreams, I would see the goddess Diana, who was my matron deity, standing before me, and She would morph into a beautiful black-haired woman with a sadistic grin that sent chills down my spine. There was something about this dark woman that terrified me. Then during one of the dreams she whispered Her name to me: Hekate. This was the second major turning point in my life.

**H**ekate, as many now know, is the ancient Greek goddess of witches and magic. But in those days, there was very little information about Her, and what I could find portrayed Her in a very negative fashion. I found bits and pieces of information in modern Wiccan books which held a different opinion, but the opinions were so varied that I just couldn't reconcile them. So I decided that if I was going to learn anything

*Through it all, I was trying to answer a simple question: where was the field of daffodils, and why had I gone there when I had “died?”*

(continued on p. 95.)

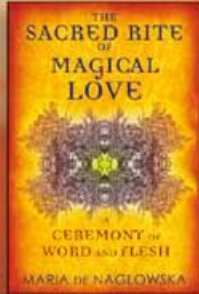
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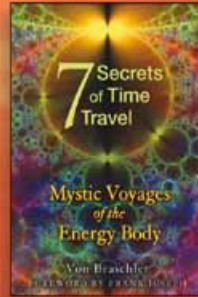
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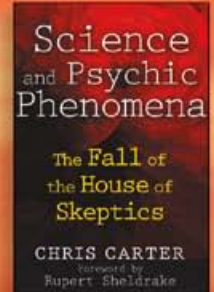
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