

witches & pagans



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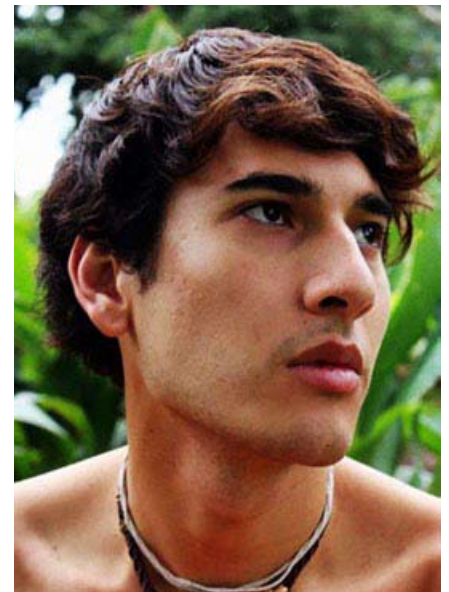
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Out of the Frying Pan...

When it comes to passion, we've got it. Common sense, not so much.

As most readers of this magazine are undoubtedly aware, we Pagans had a wee bit of media attention earlier this spring. A "Fox and Friends" segment in February characterized Wiccans as "compulsive *Dungeons and Dragons* players or middle-aged, twice-divorced older rural women working as midwives." The reaction in the Pagan community was nothing short of explosive: within days, more than 40,000 of us signed petitions at change.org and causes.com demanding an apology. In less than a week, a chastened Fox pundit offered his "sincere [ahem] regrets."

Another triumph for truth, justice, and the American way? Well, *maybe*. As soon as the brouhaha blew up I was struck by how much attention was being paid to Fox & Friends' trollish shenanigans and how little to the good news that formed the actual foundation of the story. The decision by the University of Missouri to include Wiccan holidays in their inter-faith campus calendar is a concrete example of the increasingly respectful treatment that Pagan faiths are receiving these days, the fruit of decades of anti-defamation work by groups like the Lady Liberty League. But in spite of this genuinely excellent news, there was hardly a mention of this angle of the story in the coverage by Pagan pundits. With the notable exception of the Covenant of the Goddess — which made a thank-you to the University part of their press release — the buzz consisted almost entirely of righteous indignation.

Outrage has become the lingua franca of many subcultures in today's polyglot society. Many groups — including Christian triumphalists who see every "winter holiday" not labeled as Christmas as a sign of the secular apocalypse, and the radical Islamists who riot over every Danish cartoon of the Prophet — use a deliberately inflamed sense of persecution to reinforce their sense of community by inciting their followers to feel "affronted together."

As a newly-minted religious minority just beginning to enter the mainstream, we Pagans should be especially wary of "touchy-nerve-syndrome." It should go without saying that bonafide cases of discrimination against members of our movement deserve, and even *require*, vigorous action to defend our rights to equal protection under the law, but it is essential for us to recognize that we have no constitutional right to *not be insulted*.

Lacking a single charismatic leader, holy book, or unifying mythology to rally around, our community is uniquely susceptible to the temptation to embrace outrage in order to feel a sense of connection with one another. This is unwise, if understandable. (Though it would be a shame if the only thing we could agree upon is that we hate Tucker Carlson.) But complicating this conundrum further, many of us fail to distinguish our own spiritual technologies from fairy tale magic and have allowed our identities as post-modern Pagans/Wiccans/witches/polytheists/Heathens to become entangled with the lore and legend of mythical beings.

This leads to an unfortunate tendency to react strongly not only to actual cases of discrimination against our co-religionists, but every time a fairy-tale magick-flinger gets his or her karmic comeuppance on the silver screen. I've seen Pagan spleen vented at *Season of the Witch*, *Hansel & Gretel: Witchhunters*, and *Beautiful Creatures*. To which I ask: why, Goddess, why, do we give this dreck the time of day?

We are part of a vibrant movement of faith communities with sophisticated belief systems, a burgeoning set of organizations, and even some nascent cultural respect. We no longer need (if we ever did) to borrow our *mana* from the Grimm brothers, Marvel comics, and Joss Whedon. Stressing out every time some fictional bad-ass skewers a witchy evil-doer is absurd — and makes us look like even we don't know the difference between fantasy spellcasters and real-life Pagans.

Adding a solid dose of discernment to our sense of moral outrage would do us (and the work of defending Pagan civil rights) a world of good. We can't continue getting up in arms over every unflattering depiction of a Wicked Witch and expect ordinary people to take us seriously. After all, the Dorothy Gales of this world can always be counted upon to throw the cold water of common sense on our puffed-up sense of magickal exceptionalism — and we'll look awfully silly shrieking "I'm a Good Wiccan, not an evil Witch!" as we dissolve into a pool of cultural irrelevancy. ♦

P.S. If our community wants to get worked up about something, maybe we should consider protesting the real-life witchhunting taking place in sub-Saharan Africa and Papua New Guinea.

EDITORIAL NOTES

I'm excited to announce two new columnists have joined us beginning in this issue. Prolific blogger **Teo Bishop** is a regular contributor to HuffPost Religion (www.huffingtonpost.com/teo-bishop) and The Wild Hunt (www.wildhunt.org) as well as the organizer of Solitary Druid Fellowship (<http://www.solitarydruid.org/>.) In his new column "Letters in the Grove" Teo will respond to readers' questions about authentic Pagan living.

No one in contemporary Druidism (or the post-Peak Oil movement) could fail to notice the presence of philosopher, gadfly, and author **John Michael Greer** (featured in the cover interview of *PanGaia* #48.) His first book, *Paths of Wisdom*, appeared in 1996 and has been followed by more than thirty more nonfiction works since. Greer is the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a Druid Revival order founded in 1912, and also writes extensively on the future of industrial society at the end of the age of fossil fuels. He brings his wit, wisdom, and penetrating eye on the foibles of the contemporary Pagan scene to *Witches&Pagans* with his new column "The Operative Druid."

"Everything She touches, changes" as the song goes, and late in December of 2012, our columnist (and blogger) Ruby Sara announced she was retiring from public writing for the time being. She asked me to share the following farewell letters with you, our readers.


Friends,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you in this space. I have sincerely enjoyed writing for Witches and Pagans both on and offline — it has been a privilege to do so. I have decided to concentrate on pursuing some new projects for a while in lieu of my column and various blogs. I am blessed and grateful to be back home in the liminal cedar forests of my beloved Texas hill country after ten years of spiritual and vocational exploration across the country, and I have found that this homecoming has kindled the need for discernment and reflection as I embark on what feels like an exciting but as yet not fully revealed chapter in my life.

Thank you again. All blessings of the Mama, friends and pagani. Grok Earth. Pray without ceasing.

Ruby Sara

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WRITERS & INTERVIEWERS



AMANDA MORRIS ("Land of Enchantment") is a Wiccan Priestess, as well as a graduate student and a professional journalist. While she has made a home for herself in North Carolina,

New Mexico never ceases to enchant her memories and imagination. She documents her adventures as a priestess and graduate student at <http://superdopersocialworker.blogspot.com/>.

BRI SAUSSY ("Glass & Flame") is a root magic ritualist and intuitive reader living in San Antonio. She has written for *Elephant Journal*, *Plant Healer Magazine*, *The Association of Independent Readers and Rootworkers*, and *Roots of She*, and blogs for *PaganSquare.com*. See her website at www.milagroroots.com.



CATHIE RAYES ("Fight Fire with Fire") follows an Eclectic path that leads her to explore as many facets of Paganism as she can find. She lives in Wichita, Kansas with her partner Gryph, one dog, three cats, and a young fruit and berry orchard. Find her at www.littlestonebird.com.

Interviewer **CHARLYNN WALLS** ("Gede Parma") resides with her family in Central Missouri. She is an active member of the St. Louis Pagan Community and is a part of two local covens. Driven toward community service, she has served as the Programming Coordinator for the St. Louis Pagan Picnic for the past 10 years. She recently accepted a position with the *Pagan World Times* as a Column Editor. Find her blog at <http://www.sageofferings.net>.



Storyteller **DAWN SPERBER** ("Hephaestus's Forge") is a writer and editor living in New Mexico, with hills nearby and bobcats on the roof, as she writes away on her books. Dancing, by the way, is her favorite way to pray. You can find more of her work at here4dawn.blogspot.com.



Interviewer **MICHAEL NIGHT SKY** ("Through the Eyes of Enchantment: Sharon Knight") is a Witch and student of Magick, Red Priest with the Circle of the Heartbeat's Drum, is a longtime contributor to

Witches&Pagans, and lives near San Diego.

Interviewer **ROBERT SCOTT** ("Better to Light a Candle: Thea Sabin") serves and practices with Church of the Living Earth, a states recognized Pagan and Wiccan church based in Columbus, Ohio.



Writer, interviewer, and all-around Renaissance man **SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO** ("Brave Enough to Burn") has been Pagan since the late 1970s, and has written professionally since the late 1980s. Given the name Satyros by his tribe in Greece, he is an ecstatic dancer, fire-spinner, and hypercreative malcontent. He makes his home in Seattle.



SUSAN HARPER ("Sensing Fire") is an eclectic solitary Feminist Witch from Irving, Texas and a professor of Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies. When not making magick or fomenting social change, Susan is the head soap-maker, herbalist, and aromatherapist for Dreaming Priestess Creations. She shares her life with her partner, Stephanie, four cats, and two guinea pigs.



Interviewer **TIM SCHNEIDER** ("Spotlight on Pagan Music: Ana") is a Northern Tradition shaman and priest, and blogs at Sarenth.wordpress.com. His passions include writing, martial arts, and sustainable living.




Chair of Pagan Community Education at Cherry Hill Seminary and Adjunct Faculty at Sofia University, **VALENTINE MCKAY-RIDDELL, PH.D.** has a private practice in wellness counseling and shamanic healing in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



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POLITICAL ACTION IN PAGANISM IS ALMOST exclusively the concern of the feminists and environmentalists. This is not surprising since these were both political movements prior to their influence on Paganism. In my twenties, I read Starhawk's *Dreaming the Dark*. It was inspiring. Applying magic to the changes I wanted to see in the world was far more interesting to me than doing magick to be a better job or more money. But twenty years later, using magick to change the political landscape now seems shortsighted, and perhaps even of questionable magickal ethics.

What I realize now is that the issues I was so sure needed to change have far more complexity than I originally understood. Protestors often assume that their will is the highest good. For all – without taking the time to understand if their feelings are correct. Magickal activists often do not take into consideration the difference between the short sightedness of human judgment and the omnipotence of divine judgment. Many of us in this community ideally add the statement "For the highest good" to magickal requests. This statement assumes that we are human and have human limitations. It means we acknowledge no matter how much we want something to happen, we understand that it may not be in everyone else's, or even our own, best interest, and that Deity must have the last word.

Ritual is vastly improved by intense focus, and this same intensity can propel political action. But this level of focus can also lead to polarization and willful ignorance. Simplifying an issue to the point of creating a clear magickal goal can create a moral clarity that is, in actuality, a mirage. Historically, this sort of "moral clarity" has led to millions of people being killed for the "greater good."

Political movements address particular issues that exist in a given society, rather than the nature of human existence. This is the job of religion, and if we focus energy on what amounts to transient issues, we are doomed to fail at creating the depth of meaning that would make Paganism viable for the long-term.

Because politics exists in the physical world, compromise is required. As Pagans, we would be better served to apply the concept of sacred relationship to our political opponents rather than to try and withstand or influence their intentions with magic. Unless we listen with an open mind, we cannot hope to address everyone's concerns.

Selina Rifkin

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I WAS RAISED JEWISH, WHICH MEANS I grew up outside of mainstream religion. I am old enough to remember having to recite "The Lord's Prayer" in school, after the Pledge of Allegiance. I was confused by this, and I went to my mother, who told me to just be quiet and recite the Shema to myself during the prayer. Pagans, too, are a minority religion in the United States, and we have problems with discrimination. In 1985, conservative legislators in the United States introduced legislation designed to take away the tax-exempt status of Wiccans. One would have amended the IRS code so that any organization which promotes witchcraft would not be exempt from taxation. Senator Jesse Helms added an amendment to a post office appropriations bill which stated that organizations promoting witchcraft would not be eligible for tax-exempt status. We organized, protested, and wrote letters, and both were eventually dropped. Today, we as Pagans are still faced with political issues. We have managed to finally get pentagrams on tombstones in military cemeteries, but other Pagan symbols still aren't allowed. We are still fighting for the rights of Pagan prisoners to have access to clergy, counseling, and religious services and rituals.

There have been numerous cases over the years of both government attempts to interfere with the practice of our religions, and of cases of discrimination against Pagans and Witches. Even though much of this discrimination is illegal, it takes time, money, and energy to get back your job, your children, your freedom. This is why many of us are not "out" to co-workers, neighbors, family members, and non-Pagan friends. We are underrepresented in the public sphere; for example, Pagan invocations are not heard in Congress, legislatures, or other public assemblies. Our views on the issues of the day are often ignored, yet these issues have impact on our lives. Many Pagan clergy will marry same-sex couples, but the laws in most states will not allow legal marriage for same-sex Pagans. My relationship with the Goddess informs me that women should have the right to choose birth control, and abortion when they feel it is necessary. There are people who wish to deny us those and many other choices.

Politics always has an impact on our lives. If we don't get involved, we let others make choices for us. And some of these choices are more and more offensive and even dangerous to us.

We need to work to change things in the world, both with magick and with our hands. As long as we live in a world governed by politicians, we Pagans will need to be involved with politics.

Magenta Griffith

I DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO read the editorial (in *Witches&Pagans* 23) that prompted Ashe Isadora's letter "The Broom Closet is Prudent" ("Give & Take", W&P #24) but I want to applaud her as a sure voice of reason. She elucidated case scenarios such as Nazi Germany, the Knights Templar, and was spot on. I would like to take her arguments a bit further.



9/11 brought home the reality of fundamentalist Islam to many who had been unaware of it before.

But when the Towers

came down, that awakened the sleeping dragon of the Church. Since that time, Christianity and Islam have been positioning themselves politically in preparation for an outright conflict. I have personally heard Bryon Fischer of American Family Radio encouraging his millions of listeners to ask the Pope to "take up the cross" for a new crusade. Don't think that it couldn't happen.

Broadcast your private information, especially your address and names of kin, not only at your own risk, but at the risk of those you love. Mayhap before long that Broom Closet will look mighty inviting. Certainly, prudent Pagans who keep their secrets to themselves are not to be criticized; after all, someday, those "Broomers" may have to move the Craft forward again, because all the reckless "out-of-the-closest" activists will have been exterminated.

Seuma

I OFTEN READ ABOUT PRISONERS WHO complain how it is impossible for them to be creative and/or practice Wicca while in solitary confinement or otherwise restricted in their possession of ritual items. This absolutely need not be the case! Being limited by the tools one can use, does not mean one is out of creative options.

It's relatively simple to fashion handmade ritual tools out for nothing more than regulation tissue-paper and a little water. Simply wad up as much t.p. as you deem necessary (some experimentation may be required) put a bit of water on it and mold it into the shape of whatever tool you need — athame, wand, pentacle, etc.). Be sure to let the "paper sculpture" dry before use, then use in your ritual as normal. Depending

on the security procedures of your facility, you may need to dispose of (i.e. flush) your handmade tools after your ritual is complete, but fortunately that's not difficult.

Another tip, if you are permitted to keep five colored pencils, you can use them to represent the Elements/directions according to the correspondences of your tradition or your personal choice. Remember, just because you are limited in your materials, doesn't mean you need to be limited in your creativity. Just keep an open mind and you may be amazed what you can achieve.

Billy J. Radan #120535

I GREW UP IN THE HEART OF THE CAPE BRETON Highlands National Park on the Cabot Trail in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I was immersed in nature and at nature's mercy. There is no gas station, hospital, large grocery store, or restaurant there. The restaurants and the hospital are a forty-five minute drive through the mountains. We learned to live by our wits. I went on whale cruises and hikes, learned how to identify herbs, how to spot animal tracks, how to fish and trim trees, how to stock wood, how to light a woodstove, and how to horse back ride and burn brush. If only those Pagans and Wiccans who want to learn in a classroom environment would think that way. There is nothing wrong with how someone learns or where but let us not forget the point of *being* Pagan or Wiccan. They want to learn in a clean environment. I spotted many moose, heard owl calls, watched blue lightning flash over the ocean, saw eagles soar over the ocean, and watched whales splash and show off. I loved every minute of it. So in closing, please remember to get outdoors to enjoy nature.

Lady Spider Witch, Nova Scotia

I HAVE JUST READ THE MAGIC OF AIR ISSUE AND I must say that the articles in it were amazing. I love that there is a magazine geared for all of us that call ourselves Pagans, please keep up the good work. I am Wiccan and discovered the Goddess while in prison; I am looking for Pagan pen pals of any tradition.

Montigo Arrington #282088
P O Box 767, Clayton, AL 36016

I AM A 27-YEAR-OLD ECLECTIC WITCH looking for pen pals — mostly other Witches that I can discuss Craft matters with.

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THIS LETTER IS IN RESPONSE TO ASHLEEN O'GAEA'S column in issue #25. She states, "Young people generally haven't had to accept the limits that traditionally come with adulthood." Growing up, I was always encouraged to be serious and mature, being raised in a missionary fundamental Baptist house. Even today, I sometimes find it difficult to have "fun." I think it is important to be able to

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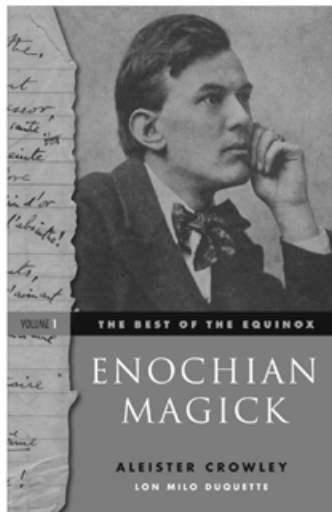
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Michael Dodgens

YOUR MAGAZINE CHANGED MY LIFE. I CAN'T HELP BUT feel that my entire life as a born-again believer has left me disconnected to the world to which I will soon return upon my release. I don't know any Pagans here, but somebody had hidden an old copy of your magazine between two Christian books on a top shelf in the library, and when I reached up there the magazine fell into my hands. The moment it touched me everything changed; I felt like someone had released their grip from around my neck. After reading it, I now know what I have been looking for my entire life is real. The Goddess is real, the faeries I have painted for years are real, and all I need is someone to help mentor me on the most precious path I've so longed to be on. All letters will be answered.

David Ray Eudy #1048788
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HYPERSENSITIVITY TO THE EARTH, ITS FOUR-LEGGEDS and our fellows may advance our walk in the wisdom tradition. Recently I received a pristine copy of *Witches&Pagans* #25 and discovered Kenaz Filan's article "All Hail the Baby!" therein. As former prison secretary for ISKCON I was breath-taken with the article's photo of Krishna and his older half-brother Balarama. Filan correctly cites that "a devotee can approach Krishna as a parent might approach a child, with affection and tenderness," but readers should note that this childhood pastime embodiment is but one of four forms Krishna allows his contingent to worship — friend, lover, and God being the others — depending on the devotee's natural propensity.

There are no coincidences, and so I offer fellow ultrasensitives with depression, anxiety, anorexia/bulimia or body dysmorphic disorder to correspond with me in the pursuit of finding the "coincidence" or reading my letter.

Paul Paulinkonis
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Monroe, WA 98272

WE LOVE YOUR LETTERS! Write to: *Witches & Pagans*, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116 or email www.bbimedia.com/email. Letters may be edited for brevity or clarity, and will be published as space permits. Please try to keep letters to 500 words or less. ♠

Bringing to light
the things obscured in darkness



Join teacher T. Thorn Coyle in a members-only magical exploration

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A Present for the Pachamama

Slippery Elm

A cross of red carnation petals,
 a sugar and coca mandala,
 aniseed & crumbled jewels,
 a sprinkle of melted glacier,
 dried woodchips of eucalyptus,
 condor feathers, an unborn llama,
 two twisted threats of gold and silver,
 Andes spice, two lumps of cotton,
 one, pulled & dyed rainbow
 the other, cumulus & white.
 Fold it all up in fine red wrapping,
 blow, pray, and kiss the wind.
 By snake, puma, and condor,
 Burn or bury it and give thanks.
 And thus I take this parcel
 of my windows, records, spells and songs
 crumbled, dried, woven, and sparkling
 wrapped up in these pages
 and in the secret folds
 of my lips and tongue
 and lift it up
 while, for now, we part
 and offer it to your minds dark earth
 and feed it to your flaming heart.

SLIPPERY ELM is a Witch, poet, and hip hop emcee hailing from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He performs his poetry in the street and at venues, festivals and political actions across the Pacific Northwest. He finds power in spontaneity and explores Filidecht, the ancient Irish tradition of seer-poets. His work has appeared in many publications including Circle Magazine, the Reclaiming Quarterly, and most recently in Mandragora: Further Explorations in Esoteric Poesies. As a member of jazz/hip-hop trio Elekwent Folk, he has released five albums, and Nazza, his first book of poetry, was published in 2011 on the Summer Solstice. He haunts bookstores and wild places. Visit him online at www.freestylegrove.com

Brigid

Lee Clark Zumpe

home in your apple orchard
 on the far side of the Otherworld
 your sweet perfume in the air
 calling bees to collect magical nectar;

I see you in the Fire of the Hearth,
 patroness of healing and fertility
 attendant of Spring
 after the long reign of the Cailleach;

I see you in the Fire of the Forge,
 patroness of smithcraft,
 mother to craftsmen
 and forger of Excalibur;

I see you in the Fire of Inspiration,
 patroness of poetry,
 subtle muse and custodian of verse
 channeling wisdom through willing scribes.

LEE CLARK ZUMPE, an entertainment columnist with Tampa Bay Newspapers, earned his bachelor's in English at the University of South Florida. His work has regularly appeared in a variety of literary journals and genre magazines over the last two decades. Publication credits include Tiferet, Zillah, The Ugly Tree, Modern Drunkard Magazine, Red Owl, Jones Av., Main Street Rag, Space & Time, Mythic Delirium and Weird Tales. Lee lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter.

Enkindling the Need-Fire

Kate Delany

But we must naturally ask, How did it come about that benefits so great and manifold were supposed obtained by means so simple... the application of fire and smoke, of embers and ashes?"

— Sir James Frazer, *The Fire Festivals of Europe*

All I know is this:
we will survive this way,
marred with the scars
of human experience —
We will survive this way.

We have come here
from every corner of our pain,
strangers in search
of an invisible reckoning space,

To this point on a map
a blind compass can't find in the dark;
to this tundra, we set aglow with our tears.

We thought our ancestors left this habit at home
in the highlands and in the Black Hills.
Little did we know
that fire is perennial,
and still feels like a sacrament.

And so the thorny underbrush is the first
to crackle and hiss with the hope of the need-fire.

We circumvent the stake
venerating heat, light
and vaporous strength.

The moment,
like health and happiness,
is fleeting.
For our grief,
we have built a bonfire.
A child has died,
the crops have failed,
my father has gotten cancer.
Like aching saints,
we turn to fire.

In time,
I learn to enkindle the flame internal,
after the hierophany has passed,
grappling for your hands.
Holding on to one another
is our strength
and our last defense.

All I know is this —
we will survive this way,
bearing the badges and bruises of human
existence,
as we always have
and always will,
the inexhaustible embers
in the belly of need-fire.

KATE DELANY's previous publications include a book of poetry, *Reading Darwin*, published by Poets Corner Press. Her poetry has appeared in such journals as *Barrelhouse*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Spire Press* and *Mothering*. Her fiction has appeared in magazines such as *Art Times*, *Jersey Devil Magazine*, *Long Story Short*, *On the Premises* and *Sotto Voce*. She lives in *Collingswood, NJ*, with her husband, *Seth*, her daughter, *Samara*, and her son, *Felix*.

Iris had a fire under her house. She hadn't always, but three months after she moved in, her floor got hot as noonday metal. Her legs turned shapely as a chorus girl's from all the times she had to run, high-stepping and gasping, to protect her shoes. Her soles' tread still melted smooth on the bottom, which, she realized, made them good for dancing.

Obviously, the heat must've come from a fire under her house. Well, Iris was pretty sure, yet didn't know how it could be there without burning everything up, and wouldn't there be billows of smoke and the scent of campfires, and what was under there to burn for so long anyway?

At first, the situation didn't make any sense, so she didn't do anything about it.

Then she thought about what her co-workers would do, the officious form-filler-outers she served in her secretary temp jobs. They'd excite into a flurry of telephone calls to servicemen, speculate on dangers, repercussions, concerns, schedule topic meetings about it. It was exhausting to think about, and Iris figured, you know, lots of time in life, there is another way besides uptight control. What could happen? The fire had been going on for a little while anyway. And she began to like it.

She peered through the bright cracks in the floor, pupils turned to pinpricks, shiny eyes reflecting orange, and thought, "What the heck could be under there, the Forge of the Gods?"

Actually, that's just what it was. Hephaestus, the rugged lame-footed husband of Aphrodite, had to put his forge somewhere. And what was he making? Fine armor to shield the hearts of spiritual warriors? Metal spears to shoot from the eyes of the affronted? Chains to bind men to their addictions? Perhaps. Hephaestus didn't judge. He created what was needed. In this day and age, if he were up in the heavens, eventually astronomers and scientists would come hunting. They'd try to research and name his astral brightness,

debate the effects of his orbit on the solar system, and astrologers would ponder the implications of this new planet when it's in the 3rd house trine Venus ...?

Too much publicity. Hard to deal with that and keep up with filling orders for swords of truth and hinges for the doors of hearts, so he came down to earth where he could hide a little better. Over the years,

Hephaestus would pick a place for his forge and work there happily enough for a short while. Until people became nosy, agitated.

Again and again:

"What's that fire?"

Where'd it come from?

Is it going to burn everything down?" Quit your fussing,

he'd mutter, even as he

began gathering

his godly worktools,

admitting his time had

run out. He packed it all up quickly, having the routine

down good, and everything was collapsible — his forge shrank down to the size of a bright penny. He'd hold

the non-extinguishing coal, heart-seed of his fire, under his tongue until he reached his

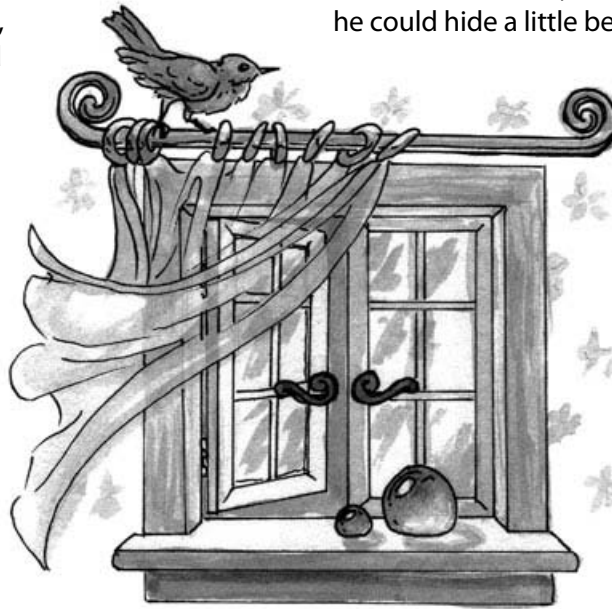
new workplace. Then he'd spit it out, and watch it rage up tall and wide: a dragon's torch of fire shooting from his mouth, lighting the room.

He picked Iris's house

because she had a good-sized unfinished basement with earth walls and spiders everywhere, way too creepy for her to explore. The only way to get in was through a crawlspace under the porch, which supported a thriving colony of black widows.

Hephaestus also liked the way the clay in the earth walls got fired from the heat. He left on adventures at night, escaping through that tiny crawlspace, picking up the black widows with his ruddy, nimble fingers and moving them to the side so he could squeeze past. Then he limped hurriedly down the streets, along the curbsides, filling his pockets with shards of glass.

He scampered back, moonlight shining his face bright for one instant as he looked around, before ducking into the darkness of the house's crawlspace.



Hephaestus's Forge

short fiction by

Dawn Sperber

artwork by

Jane Starr Weils



Once back within his bright den, he turned his pockets upside down and crashed and tinkled the glass onto the ground in a glittery fire-reflecting pile. And then he danced around like only a crazed creative god can, and arranged glass shards into every tiny crack in the earth and clay walls. When the basement got especially hot, the glass bubbled up and shivered in buoyant pools. Hephaestus glanced up from his smiting, time and again, to witness the exact moment of gravity's conquest over the trembling molten liquid: *Spill, drip!* Blue, green, brown, yellow, clear glass slid – smooth, ropy, and overlapping down the earthenware walls. He got a kick out of it. He was a true artist and liked to transform every place he lived into something odd and beautiful.

Iris never heard the metallic pounding of iron being shaped, the ferocious roar of the eternal burning, his curse when the too-hot metal wouldn't keep good form, or his mad giggles watching high art take over the bland mundane world's walls. This was due to a silence spell he transmitted like radio waves that negated all noise for a ½ mile radius. No, Iris didn't hear a thing. But she did notice the heat.

"I just gotta say," Iris told her Internal Jury. "This floor is hot!" And she held up the bottom of her blackened foot as evidence. "See?"

One day the Foreman of the Jury stood up on her hypothalamus. "Okay," the Foreman said, "we've come to a decision." Iris was in the middle of doing the dishes in a hastily-tied sarong, with smoldering hiking boots on.

"Oh?" she replied, and turned off the water.

"Yes," said the Foreman. "There is definitely a fire under this house. Something must be Done."

"I see," humored Iris, who had supposed as much for quite a while. "Why has the house not burned down then?"

The clearing of a few throats. Silence. "Well, we don't exactly know," the Foreman finally mumbled, with a shred of dignity.

"Uh-huh," answered Iris. "Well then," she replied — and Iris slammed shut the door to her Internal Courthouse because those people were stuffy and uptight anyway.

"I like it," she told her steamy-floored kitchen. She did a clump-footed jig from the sink over to the table and back, ending in a soap-scattering wide-armed spin.

"There's a fire under my house. Now that's different. That's pretty cool."

Iris took this newest manifestation as a sign that not being too analytical about the everlasting fire under her house was a Good Thing.

Hephaestus looked up from interlocking a ring of chainmail to wonder how a dining table could dance, because the footsteps above were so elephantine, it was the only explanation. "What giddy furniture," he said to himself. "She must be a nice lady, to excite woodwork in such a way." That was when he started shoving glass shards through the ceiling cracks now and then (while Iris slept so she wouldn't step on them), and by morning they'd be melted into colorful crystalline pools, like gemstones growing up from the floor, but the most interesting

gemstones, because they each had a wee light flickering in the center. It was very magical indeed, and Iris felt it was her compensation for not being too nosy and analytical about why there was a fire under her house.

"Analyzing ruins so much," she said, sweeping her floor with high-speed motions so the broom bristles wouldn't singe. "Sometimes it's better to accept things as they are and leave details unexplained, some rooms in the house unoccupied, ready for magic to live in. Or even just a basement."

Hephaestus created some of his best work in that shiny-walled cave. Meanwhile, her floor thickened with colored glass crystals, eventually looking like a gaseous landscape from Jupiter. It was excellent compensation, Iris felt, for buying four times as many shoes as before and racing across the floor.

Eventually her lease ran up. A new out-of-state owner had purchased the house, and wanted a third more than her original rent. Iris was about to put down a deposit on a cookie-cutter condo that didn't fit her style nearly so well when a strange opportunity came her way, via paper airplane.

It flew through her kitchen window one morning on yellow cardstock wings. She was too busy catching it with one hand while flipping a pancake with the other, to hear the rustling steps outside her window leading back to the porch's crawlspace. By this point, Iris had learned to roll with life's odd dance routine. She took the paper plane as a hopeful omen, and wondered if perhaps she'd be flying somewhere soon. But she didn't think to unfold it, so she didn't discover the message inside.

Later that afternoon, while she was in the bedroom getting dressed, Hephaestus grew more

bold. Time was running thin, and the uptown condo's deposit check was sprawled next to his half-ignored suggestion, so he snuck through the window, tiptoed to the dining table, and just untucked his plane's origami a bit, loosening the folds. Come on, dear girl, open it, he muttered.

Across the hallway, Iris started at the noise. "What's that?" she said out loud. Hephaestus was used to her one-person conversations, and thought he'd miss them third of all. The forge god was surprisingly nimble, and quickly limped back to the sink (sloshing in dishwater on his way out) and out of the kitchen window. He was back underground changing into a dry pair of god pants by the time she arrived at the dining table, coat on and purse slung over her shoulder, to pick up the deposit check on her way out. But something about the table seemed slightly different, and Iris noticed that the paper airplane seemed to be asking to be opened, and so she did. She discovered a message, written in fine-tipped Sharpie:

*Hula Lula's 42-Step Swing
Dance Instructor Program~
Do you love to dance?
How about teaching?
If you got the grooves,
we got the moves,
and then you can make moolah
teaching shy folk
how to loosen up and get down!
Located on the Big Island
of Hawaii.
6 week program.
Starts next week.
Room and board included.
You're not afraid of living
above a volcano, are you?
We're waiting for you.*

There was a phone number for Hula Lula, and a curious mark

that Iris had no way of knowing was a Glyph of Good Fortune. But she did know the note made her happy. She liked its mystery, and also its graceful, loose handwriting. Dancing didn't seem an outrageous occupation; why, she'd been doing an improvised cha cha all during the note-reading to protect the soles of her black demi-heels. Meanwhile, a stinkbug had crawled across the condo's check. Surely, that was an omen, too! Already well trained in not asking too many questions, and making the most of unusual situations, Iris tipped the insect out the window, tore up the check, and went back to her room to search for plane tickets to Hawaii. She found a ridiculous bargain if she flew standby, and with the money she'd save, she could put her belongings in storage.

So, a week later, she did one last heavy jig, ending with a full curtsy, winked at the playful sparks shining through the floor, and kissed them goodbye.

Hephaestus watched her move out, and later clambered through the narrow crawlspace to spy on the new tenants' arrival. The young professional couple wore tight expressions and crisp clothes, and immediately scowled at the beautiful melted glass floor. One of them squatted and cracked a screwdriver handle against the glass to see if it would break away. They didn't even notice the orange faery-lights dancing under their feet.

Ewww, said gruff Hephaestus in a surprisingly girlish manner. Time for me to pack it up and move on. So as Iris roared by overhead in a 747, Hephaestus slid past the black widows back to his beautiful fiery den, quick-packed and collapsed his tools, clipped them to his leather workbelt, and reached in

the fire to pull out its heartseed coal. He popped this under his tongue, and the basement went pitch black.

Thus he exited, leaving the house with a never-to-be-seen enchanted glass cave and jumped up into the sky, to scope out the world below. Soon enough, he saw his next squat, a dank, moldy cellar in England, flew down, and began his housing process again.

As for Iris, from then on she was blessed with a spot-on sense of timing, of where to go and how long to stay, how to put the worries away and dance as long as you're there. Hula Lula's soon named her the Lindy Queen, and put her title on a kitchen magnet for her new jungle cabin's fridge. She took to always doing her dishes in a sarong and hiking boots, in honor of the fiery house. And from then on, all through her years, on whichever continent she lived, she'd find translucent blue, green, and clear stalagmites edging her windows, brown and white glass monocles under her mailbox, violet glass horses and golden eagles dangling from the nearby trees. Little gifts, but she noticed, she always noticed, and that's why Hephaestus left them for her. ♦



DAWN SPERBER
is a writer and editor living in New Mexico, with hills nearby and bobcats on the roof, as she writes away on

her books. Her writing has appeared in Gargoyle, Going Down Swinging, Hunger Mountain, Moon Milk Review, The Pedestal, and PANK. Dancing, by the way, is her favorite way to pray. You can read more of her writing at here4dawn.blogspot.com.

The Great European Witch Hunt was one of the more pivotal events in the development of modern capitalist society. The unleashing of a campaign of terror against women weakened the resistance of the European peasantry to the assault launched against it by the gentry, church, and state, at a time when the peasant community was already disintegrating under the combined impact of land privatization, increased taxation, and the extension of state control over every aspect of social life. Silvia Federici offers a fascinating study of the relationship between the “enclosures” of public property, the development of capitalism, and the persecution of women as witches in her book, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*.

The cultural legacy of the Burning Times in modern Paganism is profound, leading to the well-known phenomenon of the “Broom Closet” — Pagans largely keeping their religion private, sometimes even from close friends and family. Furthermore, Pagans (closeted or open) have largely shunned the political forum. This trend was partially reversed in the early 1970s by a new generation of open — and politically active — witches, including such leaders as Z. Budapest, Starhawk, M. Macha Nightmare, and others. An entire tradition — Reclaiming — overtly took on the task of not only being openly Pagan, but politically active. Members of this tradition — as well as others — took to the streets in explicitly Pagan political actions, as well as long-term campaigns, especially in environmental causes.

Despite the influence of openly political, many (if not most) Witches, Pagans, polytheists and allies today remain ambivalent about mixing religion and political causes. Many of us find ourselves wondering how to effectively address the concerns of our own communities and the global community of which we are all a part. Should we run for office? Should we publicly demonstrate on behalf of our favorite causes or candidates? Should we even vote, or should we disengage from politics entirely?

When the editor of this magazine requested submissions on the topic of “Pagans and politics,” I took it upon myself to survey Pagan ministers, educators, activists, and students, asking them to respond to the following questions:

1. Are you, as a Pagan, concerned with national and/or global politics? If yes, are you open in your political activity or more inclined to work for change behind the scenes?

2. Do you believe that Pagans are most effective as activists, candidates, or in some other way? (If in another way, please elaborate.)

3. Please describe how you incorporate your political beliefs into your life as a Pagan.

I found that the most interesting responses were to the third question, in which Pagans revealed the nexus (or lack thereof) between political activity and their spiritual orientation. The following responses represent many of the opinions on this topic that I encountered.

“Being Pagan does not mean an individual will be effective as either an activist or political candidate. Effectiveness in either arena will be dependent on the person’s maturity, intelligence and ability to be articulate and strategic. [However] I do use magic in ritual to try to effect change “for the good of all and the harm of none,” often with a political intention in mind.”

— Victoria, Educator

“I am very quiet in my political activity. You won’t see me holding picket signs, making calls, canvassing, or fighting for a particular candidate or specific issue.

I prefer to live by example.

If I make choices and take actions that positively impact my life and the lives of those around me, I can deliver a message without speaking a word.

I watch the Gay Pride and Pagan Pride events in my city, but I don’t believe that demonstrating our differences is going to get us anywhere. Mostly, participants in such events just end up preaching to the choir, and unsympathetic citizens aren’t persuaded anyway. But you will see me trying to live in a way that changes our current dynamic. If someone asks [about my religion] it’s usually someone who watched or listened from the heart, and that’s the person who probably is going to help expand a circle of kindness, one who will most understand and be receptive to my Pagan-ness.”

— Maria, student

Pagans & Politics: Thoughts on Engagement

op-ed by
Valentine McKay-Riddell Ph.D.

“While I think that Pagans would be amazing politicians, I doubt American society is ready for a Pagan governor, senator or even state representative. I think right now we are relegated to the role of activist (and I am not saying that this is a bad thing) because of our lack of social acceptance. I think that another way we can play an important role is as teachers.”

— G. White, Student & Priestess

“The single most effective thing we as Pagans can do to work for change is to build healthy, vibrant, sustainable Pagan communities, and a culture to inform them. This practical and theoretical work together will see ourselves, our people, and the ways that we love into the future. We do this by learning the ways of the ancestors and putting them into practice in our own lives. We do this through deep research, creative application of the Received Tradition to our own immediate situation, and hard work. We do this by putting our feet to the ground and actually becoming a People of Place.”

— Steven Posch, Educator

“As Pagans, we are concerned with the Earth, with maintaining the natural balance or balance of nature and with protecting the environment as the *prima facie* holy act. I perceive limits to both activist and political positions in the present climate. By default then, the other ways I see to participate are immediate, local small scale activities such as is being done in Narragansett, RI through the reclaiming project by the Friends of Canonchet Farm.

— Dr. Michael York, Educator

“Activism” is a touchy word with me. Violent activism, of any genre, is destructive. Some contemporary “activists” want to take away my religious freedom, some want to take away my right of free expression, some want to take away my guns, some want to take away all of the above. On the other hand, I can fully embrace and support non-violent activism whether or not I personally believe in the cause itself. It is Constitutionally-protected even if sometimes it is lawfully confrontational. I would actually term [such actions] more as “advocacy” rather than “activism.” I incorporate my belief into my life as a Pagan simply by living my life as a Pagan.

— Dr. David Oringderff, Educator & Minister

“Those who follow an Earth-based spiritual path (a term I prefer to “Pagan”), are likely to be very engaged in the political process, will be ready to vote on all issues, and tend to be more aware of how they relate to political issues than the majority of the American public. But, that is true for most minorities, in my opinion. Being a minority heightens awareness and engagement, even if that engagement is under cover.”

— Dr. Robert Patrick, Educator

My own approach is a combination of occasional online commentary, conversation, and attempting to “walk my talk.” Activism can be very polarizing, and the planet already suffers from too much division; we are all struggling to reclaim a sense of deep connection with Spirit. (What else is ritual for?)

Democratic process alone is inadequate to address the many challenges facing us. In a democracy — even a true democracy — there are always winners and losers. Winners often become complacent and autocratic, while losers resist what they feel does not support their views. The sensible way of resolving conflict in intact communities is to encourage community members to talk among themselves until they reach consensus. To paraphrase Chief Dan George, “...if we do not talk with each other we cannot understand each other. And what we do not understand, we destroy.” In the interest of preserving life on this planet, seeking consensus may be the path we Pagans must choose. The way to achieve this is not through insisting on our differences from others, especially non-Pagan others, but through focusing on our similarities. Only by acknowledging our mutual dependence upon each other and upon the earth itself will we arrive at a state where political process can finally take a back seat to heart-centered human interaction.💎

VALENTINE MCKAY-RIDDELL is a graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute and currently serves as Chair of Pagan Community Education at Cherry Hill Seminary and as Adjunct Faculty at Sofia University in Palo Alto, CA, where she earned a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology and a Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology. She teaches shamanism at Cherry Hill and has a private practice in wellness counseling and shamanic healing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is the author of *The River Goddess & Other Stories* and *Starfriends*, Books I and II in her fantasy series for young adults, *The Alyssa Chronicles*, published by Cool Well Press.

GLASS & FLAME

Have you ever wandered down an aisle in your local grocery store and found yourself staring at row upon row of brightly-colored glass candles and wondered “What are these for?” Whether lovingly embellished – festooned with silk-screened images on the glass, topped with foil or saran wrap, scented in fragrance – or simple, plain and unmarked, welcome to the world of *novena* candles, also called vigil lights, 9-day candles, or devotional candles.

Once confined to use in Roman Catholic devotions, these candles are used today by a vast variety of people. Their original intention – to build a relationship with a saint and seeking his or her aid for a specific purpose – can be traced back centuries, but it was only in the early 1940s that mass production of such candles began in the U.S. Candle shops that stocked supplies for those working in the Hoodoo and Conjure traditions of the African-American community quickly adopted these low-cost products and soon the glass encased vigil candle found its way into Southern Conjure. Meanwhile specialty shops known as Botanicas sprang up to serve immigrants from Mexico, South, and Central America in the 1960s and 1970s. Pharmacies and grocery stores in Latin American neighborhoods also began carrying them, and today these candles are ubiquitous, appearing in occult stores, novelty shops, and even in major chains and grocery stores such as Target, Walmart, and Safeway.

Today’s practitioners have adopted the novena candle for a wide variety of magickal purposes – and you can learn to use them as well!

The Magick of Novena Candles

4 Simple Steps to Novena Magick

Novena candles have developed a vast amount of folklore around their use across many religious traditions, but the basic outline is fairly simple: write a petition, “dress” (aka “bless”) the candle, and “set” the candle, which places the petition in motion.

1 Ask for what you need. In traditional Roman Catholic novena usage, the devotional candle represents a way to honor a specific saint, but it also gives light, energy, and the magic of fire to the devotees’ petition. So it is in our own magic-making we begin the desire that we wish to manifest. The first step, then, is to carefully define what you are working for, then write it on the candle. A petition is not a spell in the traditional sense, it is a *request*. The difference is subtle, but real: in Neo-Pagan practice, spellwork often uses one’s own willpower (and arcane knowledge) to bend or shape reality, whereas in novena work the petition is addressed to a Higher Power – whether to a saint, ancestor, deity, or other spiritual being – as a request for assistance. As such it is generally considered wise to address the deity/saint/spiritual being by name, and to take some the time to understand the particular nature of the Power in question. This will help avoid offense or an accidental misfire of the request. Many deities, especially in the African-based traditions which commonly use these candles today, do not take kindly to being asked for a favor before being properly acknowledged. (Using a candle because it was “on sale at the Dollar store” is rude and unwise.) Also, *please* think your petition through carefully before proceeding.

Today’s devotional candles usually have images in the front and a “canned” prayer on the reverse, with blank lines for you to write your own petition. If you are working with a plain devotional candle – one that does not feature any pre-written petitions – you can write your petition on a small piece of paper and tape it to the bottom or side of the candle. Another popular way to include the message is to write it into the wax at the top of the candle. (An ink-free stylus such as for a smart phone works nicely for this purpose.) If you are using paper for your petition you can anoint the paper with sacred oil or your own bodily fluids (if appropriate to the stated purpose) or pass the paper through incense smoke. I have also seen candle shop and botanica owners use a sharpie to inscribe a client’s petition directly onto the glass side of the candle.

2 Dress or “fix” your candle. Once the petition has been written, it is time to bless, dress, or “fix” your devotional candle. You can start by inscribing the top of the candle with a sigil, name, or abbreviated request, or you can leave it pristine if you feel that your petition (attached to the candle) says it all.

Next, sprinkle a pinch of dried herbs on top of the candle. The herbs should be ritually appropriate to whatever situation it is that you wish to magically address. Thus if you are working to cleanse and purify you may wish to use a pinch of sage; to bring about love, red rose petals; to increase protection, use ginger; and so on.

Years of burning candles for myself and my clients has taught me that a finely-ground mix is ideal for this purpose. (If you do this work often, invest in a spice grinder.) You also want to keep the herbs relatively far away from the candle wick so that they don’t catch on fire.

After the herbs are added to the candle, you may desire to include further embellishments to empower the candle with your desire. In Conjure work, the addition of lodestone grit, small pieces of pyrite, and High John the Conqueror root chips is often seen, while in Latin-inspired botanicas, devotional candles are often dressed by studding them with quartz crystal tips (very pretty!), pennies, and even large horseshoe confetti. Non-toxic fine glitter may also be added for extra sparkle.

The final step in dressing a novena candle is to anoint it. A variety of oils work for this purpose, ranging from simple vegetable oils to complex preparations filled with essential oils. (Some essential oils are flammable so its important to do your research!) One simple and fast method is to use a ritual anointing oil available from the same candle shops and botanicas where you purchase the candle. (I prefer to make my own since many of the mass market ritual oils begin with a base of low-grade mineral oil.) Making your own ritual anointing oil is relatively simple; just gather dried herbs that are appropriate for your situation and soak them in almond (or olive) oil for several weeks before using to imbue the oil with the properties of the herb in question. One last point: don’t drown your candle, just lightly anoint it, as if you were putting perfume on your wrist. Dumping lots of liquid on your novena will leave you with a weak or smoky-burning candle and that will have an impact on how you read the candle. A few drops and you are good to go!

Now that your candle has been dressed, you are most of the way there. You have now represented three of the four Elements in your candle: Earth is invoked by the dried herbs, Air by the scent of the herbs and oils, and Water by the liquid oil with which you anointed it. All that is missing is Fire!

It is time to bless the candle. I have been taught many ways to bless a candle but my favorite way is to hold the candle up at my heart level and speak into it. Sometimes when I do this I go into a bit of a trance and sometimes I will ask my guides for a specific, physical sign during the course of the candle burn to let me know if the magic is manifesting. In some traditions, practitioners will set the candle down and clap over it one or three times to seal it, tap the bottom of the candle on the table three times (this is referred to as “knocking” the candle) or use one hand to cover the top of the candle and then lightly tap that hand with the other hand. The point of all these procedures is to awaken the candle and to let the spirits know that you are ready for them to help you in your magical endeavors.

3 Put Your Candle to Work. Once you have made your request, dressed, and blessed your candle, it is time to set it! A devotional candle is intended to be allowed to sit and burn from beginning to end. There are many safe ways to accomplish this: place it in a large aluminum stock pot; in a glass casserole dish filled with water, sand, or rocks; in the kitchen sink, in a bathtub, shower, or in the fireplace. When I lived in a one room apartment and lit candles for clients, I placed them in the kitchen sink and bathtub whenever I went out so that I wouldn't need to extinguish them while I was gone.

When I moved into my own house, I had a local blacksmith make two metal candle houses for me. (I went a local Catholic shrine and saw a design there that I was able to alter for my needs.) I like to light my devotional candles with wooden matches. You may light them and say a charm or prayer over them or you may light them in silence. You have now added the 4th element—fire to your magical candle—may it burn brightly!

4 Did it work? Divination with your candle. One of the nicest aspects of working with glass devotional candles is that after they have finished burning you may perform a simple divinatory reading of the glass and candle to determine whether your work is on its way to manifesting, or, conversely, needs to be repeated or refined in some way in order to reach your desired outcome. When reading a glass candle there are three main aspects to examine: the glass itself, any remaining wax and debris from the burned candle, and the paper petition or label attached to it containing the petition.


- **First, look at the glass:** do you see black soot, scorch marks, a gray fog or haze, or is glass completely clear? A clean and clear glass casing is easy: it indicates that your road is open and the petition has been heard “loud and clear.” Black soot indicates resistance or obstacles to your desire, while gray haze or fog can indicate a lack of clarity or a scattered intention in your work is holding you back. Discreet scorch marks indicate that the work will manifest but there may be one specific challenge that needs to be addressed first.

- **Second, check out the wax:** When considering the wax and debris inside of the candle, you may notice that some of the wax has not melted completely, that there is wax (perhaps in specific shapes) along the sides of the candle. Debris from your herbs and other adornments may also adhere to the inside of the glass, again, often in specific shapes. I recommend books on Tasseomancy and Bone Reading as particularly useful in this respect.

However, the more you work with these candles, the more you will discover your own unique language of symbols for reading them. For those of us that come to magic from inherited traditions we often find that a symbol that has deep meaning for us also has meaning for someone else in our family. Sometimes rings of wax will form on the candles, and these may indicate the numbers of days/weeks/months to wait before your work will manifest. If there is residual wax at the bottom of the candle it may indicate that a similar candle should be lit again for the same purpose in order to complete the work.

Fire Safe Candle Magick

Fire safety is important when dealing with candles of all kinds. If you are setting more than one devotional candle, do be aware of putting them too close to one another — especially in a closed area like a stock pot — they will increase one another's heat, and melting will happen faster — especially with the paraffin candles — and the glass around the wax can break or scorch.

If you are away from home for most of the day, have a cat, dog, or small children that are sometimes left unattended, then working with glass-encased devotional candles may not be the best choice. It is possible to snuff out devotional candles but I strongly prefer to work with taper or figural candles if I am going to be snuffing a candle out repeatedly. I will say from my own experience of burning thousands of candles that if a glass devotional candle tips over, it is most likely simply going to go out as it is very hard for a fire to start from one of these lights. However, of course, caution is always advised. 

Tricky Burns. Often when we first start working with devotional candles we will encounter the candle that refuses to light, the wick that continues to drown, the herb that catches on fire, floating wicks and other similarly tricky situations. Schools of thought diverge on what the best methods for dealing with these candles are. Some practitioners believe that messing with the candle at all destroys the ability to get an accurate read from the candle; this is especially problematic for those of us who light candles for clients because part of the service includes a report wherein the candle is read. When a candle I am burning on behalf of a client has to be physically altered in some manner I make a note, and consider this circumstance when the finished candle is read for signs.

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I stopped burning paraffin candles myself several years ago, as I have birds that cannot tolerate paraffin. Fortunately, you may buy empty novena-style glass containers and add your own candle or you can order beeswax or soy-based glass devotional candles. My favorite is beeswax, which has qualities like a the release of negative ions into the air and those of bees and honey! I've compared burning beeswax alongside a paraffin novena of a similar shape and size and the beeswax outlasted the paraffin candle by nearly five days! Why skimp on your magic?

Devotional candles are a unique magical tool that combine spellwork and divination all in one working – a wonderful way to be blessed by the power of fire. ✦

Disposing of Devotional Candles. Devotional candles have a long history of use in American folk magic, but as we progress into the 21st century, I feel some remarks about their environmental impact should be considered. Many old spells call for the burial of candle remains, and some practitioners have taken this to mean the remains of glass candles as well. However, for ecological reasons it is preferable to recycle glass candle casings or better yet – reuse them.

The majority of today's glass-encased novena candles are made of dyed paraffin. Paraffin is a petroleum by-product and the wax is whipped with air to create a softer, malleable product that can be easily poured into glass containers. Though these candles were originally for novenas (nine-day rituals) back when they were made of beeswax, today's candles only last an average of four or five days even under ideal conditions. Burning paraffin releases toxins into the air; even worse, some paraffin candles also contain lead in their wicks.

For Further Reading

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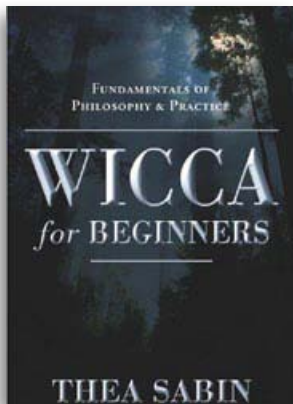
INTERVIEW BY
ROBERT SCOTT
PHOTO BY DINEA DE PHOTO

BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE...

A CONVERSATION WITH

Thea Sabin

ON WHY SHE WROTE A BOOK FOR NEWCOMERS TO THE CRAFT — AS WELL AS ONE FOR TEACHERS.



Author, editor, and British Traditional Witch Thea Sabin holds a master's degree in education and has taught for more than two decades. She has been a practicing Wiccan since her teens. She recently wrote two books for Llewellyn, *Wicca for Beginners* and *A Teaching Handbook for Wiccans & Pagans*. We got her to sit down and explain herself late last fall.

W&P *I'm sorry, Thea – but I really have to start here – what possessed you to write a book for beginners? Let me be less snarky and just ask: how did your first book *Wicca for Beginners* come about?*

THEA I would love to tell you that the Goddess appeared to me on a mountaintop and told me to write a beginning Wicca book, but the unglamorous truth is that I wrote it because Llewellyn (the publisher) asked me to. They have a “for beginners” series that didn’t have a book about Wicca in it.

I’ll admit – I wasn’t excited about the idea at first. I figured there was little that hadn’t already been said, probably more eloquently than I could. But as I thought about it more, I realized I’d been given a wonderful opportunity to create a book that presented information in the way that I personally teach it to my students. At the time, I was using bits and pieces of many other books with my students, but this project allowed me to structure information in a way that made the most sense to me as a teacher. Despite my early misgivings, I’m proud of this book and I’ve had a lot of great feedback.

W&P *How did you decide what was essential to teach to the complete beginner?*


THEA I wrote it with the idea of creating a foundation of basic history and philosophy, and then layering concepts in a logical progression. I was aiming to be positive and empowering, especially for people who might not have a community of their own. I tried to be unbiased about specific traditions and beliefs because critical thinking is absolutely essential to being Wiccan, and I want beginners to make their own choices. I also added a little humor. I’m a firm believer that spiritual growth requires both mirth and reverence. And also, as the estimable Mary Poppins says, “a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.”

W&P *I couldn't help but notice the prominence of ethics in the book. It shows up really quite early for a beginner's guide. Why do you place so much emphasis on this topic?*


THEA I believe it is essential for students to really think through what it means to be a person, and to be a Wiccan. People come to Wicca from all kinds of places, including many from families, religions, or social groups with strong ethical guidelines that everyone is supposed to know and follow. Shifting to a new paradigm such as Wicca gives these newcomers an opportunity to examine (or re-examine) what they feel is right and wrong for themselves.

Wicca is a challenging path, not least because it doesn’t provide a book of hard-and-fast rules that offer absolute certainty. Students must be responsible for themselves and their own actions, and that requires critical thinking that some may not be accustomed to in a spiritual path. I don’t want my students to abdicate their power to fit into my group or into the Wiccan community as a whole; I want them to think for themselves. Personal responsibility and self-understanding are two primary themes of my teaching, and ethical exploration is one of the best ways to emphasize that.

Self-exploration is very empowering. As I wrote in the book, “the Wiccan Rede says ‘do what you will,’ not ‘do what you want.’” A thorough understanding of your own ethical principles is a big step toward working your will or acting in service of your inner purpose. It also helps to know yourself before you try to know the gods. Ethics is an area in which beginning Wiccans (and those of us who have been around for a while, too) can begin to understand the power of Wicca as a spiritual path.


 What traits are important to success for students who want to learn about Wicca?

THEA Everyone who teaches Wicca or leads a group probably has a different answer to this question, but for me, the most important traits are being open to change and transformation, being willing to speak their minds and listen to others do the same, and commitment to doing the work. If a student manages to find the sweet spot between a healthy skepticism and a sense of wonder, that's even better.


 So, having succeeded with your “beginners” book, you extended your foray into Wiccan education by writing a book about how to teach Wicca. Wasn't that jumping out of the frying pan into the fire?

THEA [Laughs] I can see that it looks that way! However, knowing *what* to teach and knowing *how* to teach are two completely different things. Many Wiccans and Pagans know a great deal about their subject matter, but are not taught how to pass it on to others effectively. When I started teaching Wicca, I was clumsy and unprepared, and despite my best efforts I did a terrible job.

In the years since then I've been working in educational publishing, teaching, and managing e-learning and instructional design projects. With *A Teaching Handbook* I hoped to put some of what I've learned into a resource that would help new Wiccan and Pagan teachers. I was also motivated by my own students, some of whom were getting ready to themselves become teachers by this time, so I was thinking a lot about what I wanted them to know before they took on students of their own.

 Is *A Teaching Handbook* based solely on your own experience as a teacher?


THEA Oh, *hell* no! The Wiccan and Pagan communities are very diverse, so there's no one way to teach that would work across the board, and I wouldn't presume to tell people they had to teach in a certain way. I tried to describe techniques and tools that could be modified for different circumstances rather than a specific teaching methodology. I also interviewed other teachers in order to make the picture of teaching I was presenting more well-rounded, and I'm very grateful to the people who allowed me to interview them for the book.

 Is *A Teaching Handbook* geared towards personal teachers, online groups, or all of the above?

THEA I hope the book is useful for all kinds of learning environments. Personally, I am very much in favor of using technology for teaching — after all, I help build educational websites for a living — but I am even more in favor of using the right tool for the job. Sometimes that is a technological tool, but sometimes it isn't.

It's important to look at all the variables when choosing whether to use a particular tool or technology. Questions such as “will it help me meet my class objectives,” “will it help me reach more students,” and “does it work with my students' learning styles?” are essential. Online teaching can be a great option for people who don't have face-to-face access to a teacher, those who want to learn at their own speed in their own time, and

for teachers to reach many more students. But, as Patrick McCollum pointed out when I interviewed him for the book, sometimes nothing is better than leaving the technology behind and getting out into nature. For some things, like teaching energy work, it's close to essential to have other people in the room with you. It's hard to feel people's energy over a webcam. I've also learned from experience that even motivated, self-directed online learners retain things better when they've discussed them with others in a group. The social aspects of teaching and learning are very important.

 What other advice do you have for Wiccan teachers? Can you describe ways to avoid burnout?

THEA Well, I'm afraid that my advice would be *not* to do what I do! I've always been one of those “eat your vegetables before you have dessert” kind of people, but the problem with that is I get hung up on the veggies and rarely get to dessert.

Last year I truly burned out: between work, writing the teaching book, running my student group, and a back injury, I was just *done*. I scaled back at work, dissolved my student group — which was very difficult — and cut out a lot of other commitments. Then I found myself standing at the edge of a cliff of sorts. I didn't have to do anything for anyone else, and I didn't know what to do with myself. So I decided to get back to basics. Eat better food; exercise more; and rejuvenate my personal spiritual practice. Plus spend time with good friends, drink a little wine, laugh as much as possible. I still have a way to go to crawl out of the burnout hole, but I'm making progress.

W&P *I know of groups which make your teaching book “required reading” in their clergy training program. Did you expect that to happen when it was published?*

THEA I have known for a while that people use the beginner book in training, but I didn't know anyone was using the teaching book that way! But I'm glad! I hope it helps them. It was much, much harder to write than the beginner book for many reasons, so it would be very gratifying — and satisfying — to know that it had done some good.

Writing the teaching book was more of a catalyst in my life than the beginner book. I've also learned a lot from talking with people who have read it. It never ceases to surprise me which parts they find most useful and which they disagree with. But I think that's been the real plus of having written both books — the opportunity to talk with a wide variety of people I never would have met otherwise about the material and use those conversations and learnings to inform my own practice.

We have talked about the “Beginner,” and the “Teacher” in Paganism, so now I'm moved to ask you to share your opinions about the role of Pagan clergy.

THEA Clergy is a word that means many various things to people in the Wiccan and Pagan communities. Some Wiccan traditions consider all initiated members clergy, whereas other paths require members to go through designated training if they wish to fulfill that role. I wrote a little about clergy in the teaching book because these roles overlap a great deal. Both teachers and

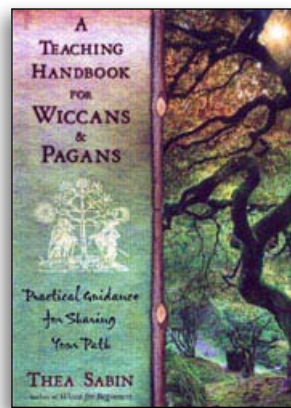
clergy are asked to mentor others, help handle spiritual and emotional problems, and be role models and leaders. If you act as a teacher, it's quite likely that at some point you will act as clergy, and vice-versa.

What do you do to unwind from your very busy schedule?

THEA My favorite thing to do to unwind is travel; I love wandering around places I've never been before. I am somewhat obsessed with obscure movies, and I'm pretty sure some of the films I've made my husband sit through are grounds for divorce in some states! I love art and music and find both essential to maintaining my sense of well-being. My husband and I are both animal lovers, so when I really need to calm down and shake something off, I spend time with my hubby and our menagerie. Especially our parrot, who is hilarious and delightful and who probably would be ruling the world if she wasn't terrified of my exercise ball.

Is there anything else you would just generally like to share with the community at large?

THEA There have been a lot of discussions lately about “the nones” — people who claim no religious affinity. Many of these people haven't turned their backs on spirituality; they've just turned away from organized religion in favor of more unconventional ways of interacting with deity. We live in a time and place



where we have the freedom to create rituals, traditions, and relationships with deity on our own terms, in a way that people who went before us did not have. One of the underlying themes I tried to get across in both of my books is that if this kind of spiritual journey speaks

to you, you should go for it. Build your own relationship to deity. Do your own spiritual exploration. Make your own mistakes. Have your own epiphanies. Delve into the mysteries on your own terms. Teachers, mentors, circles, clergy, and books are very helpful in pointing out the path, but the best spiritual discoveries are the ones we make for ourselves.

Our heart's desire, as Dorothy discovers at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, is no further away than our own backyard, and we have power within us all along. But sometimes it takes a few flying monkeys and a horse of a different color to help us believe it.

What new projects do you think might be in the works for you?

THEA I am not doing any big writing projects this year, but I'm blogging (irregularly) at your *Witches&Pagans* blogosphere at PaganSquare.com and on my own website, theasabin.com. I do have a partially finished (non-Pagan) manuscript, and I am planning a solo backpacking trip in Italy, but mostly I'm looking forward to getting outside, digging my toes back into the earth, and reconnecting. ♦

ARTICLE BY
AMANDA MORRIS

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A Witches' Guide to New Mexico

LAND *of* ENCHANTMENT

New Mexico is the place of my youth and of my heart. I remember the shock of the landscape as my family drove down from Montana and through the Rocky Mountains. When did the plains become desert, the mountains into plateaus? Why was everything so dry, so flat, and so vividly-colored?

Flying from the East Coast to the Southwest today brings the same sensations. The neat grids of crops and fences make way for larger and less defined expanses, until nothing at all is partitioned off. All I see is a pink backdrop and the round, dark smudges of mesquite, yucca and creosote.

The landscape and culture are breathtaking and heartbreaking, the energy wild and tragic. Native Americans mix with the descendants of conquistadors, military installations, hippies, celebrities, Catholics, Pagans, people from all corners of the world, and anything and everything in between. Something has always drawn people to New Mexico, to the sad and lovely desert, a land of fire and magic.

TAOS, NEW MEXICO - The entrance gate to the San Geronimo Church in Taos, New Mexico on September 7, 2011. The old mission church was rebuilt in 1850 after being burned by US troops.

A typical “tourist trap,” the Continental Divide “Indian” Market typifies the kind of exploitation that plagues many Native communities.



in every nook and cranny. But no soil is as sacred as that of Chimayo. A sacred site to New Mexico

European settlers have been here since the 16th century C.E., but the land still very much belongs to the First Americans – including Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache – who have inhabited this special place for many thousands of years longer. Cultures are shared by tourists, gawkers, and locals in roadside shops and casinos dotted throughout the state. Appropriation is something all Pagans should beware of, and New Mexico is a place where reservations and tribal homes share sacred space with Catholic Churches and earth-loving anarchists. My family has lived here for a decade, but it still seems like we’re borrowing the space.

Sacred Soil

Chaco Canyon in the north-eastern part of the state is a monumental 1,000-year-old settlement that is still a mystery to many archeologists. In these inspiring, ancient ruins, one can find examples of a flourishing community of artisans, masons and architects. While many settlements of the ancient Americans show evidence of being constructed gradually over time, the civilization that flourished at Chaco seems to have been carefully planned to fit in with the landscape of the high New Mexico desert. Among the dwelling structures, scientists have found proof of astronomical measurement, systems of water gathering, sacred mountains, a turquoise trade, shrines, and even hearths that held a place in the center of each dwelling. To walk among the ruins of Chaco is to find oneself truly in the homes of the first New Mexicans.

A striking feature of New Mexico is how dirty, dusty and windy the state is. The desert soil gets everywhere,



Catholics, **El Santuario de Chimayo Shrine** is located just outside of the tiny town of Chimayo, north of Santa Fe. The dirt of this tiny adobe mission is said to have miraculous healing properties, and the energy of hope and prayer permeates every inch of its adobe walls. As the story goes, a friar saw a bright light while performing penance, dug into a hillside, and found a crucifix. Every time the friar tried to take the cross away from the hole in the hill, the cross would disappear and reappear back in the earth. Soon believers in the miracle built a small chapel around the hole where the cross – which they named *El Senor de Esquipulas* – was found, and later they built a larger adobe mission. The locals call this sacred space the “*Lourdes of America*,” and the crucifix is still on display. However, the healing powers of the shrine center around a hole in the ground and the dirt that surrounds it. More than 300,000 visitors make a pilgrimage

to this tiny mud structure every year. After touching the blessed soil and praying for a miracle, visitors leave crutches, rosaries, photos, candles, incense, food and other offerings in an organic, homemade shrine of devotion to the healing dirt.

South of Chimayo is **Santa Fe**, a surreal (and highly historical) city inspired by European cafes and Spanish courtyards. The capitol of New Mexico, Santa Fe is truly in a different world. Much of the architecture and style of the city is maintained to preserve its much-lauded look-and-feel.

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One notable landmark in Santa Fe is the **Cross of the Martyrs**, a huge monument standing watch over the oldest part of the city. In 1680, the Pueblo Indians revolted and drove the Spanish invaders out of their territory. During the uprising, Franciscan priests and other settlers met their fates on this small hill of cactus and rock. Now a steep footpath leads visitors up to a huge white cross. Vigils, candlelight processions and bonfires still mark this bloody event.

The stark prehistoric ruins of Chaco Canyon still mystify visitors and scholars alike.



Spirals of Fire & Wood

Santa Fe loves eccentricity almost as much as its storied history, and the annual **Festival of Zozobra** is where the two come together. Since 1712, the city has gathered to celebrate Fiesta (which represents the return of the Spanish after the Indian revolt) in the historic plaza. Every September since 1924, a fifty foot papier-mâché marionette named Zozobra (who represents “Old Man Gloom”) is burned in a spectacular display of chanting and fireworks to purify the city and citizens of their troubles.

Along with the conquistadors came their Catholic Christianity. One whimsical local legend states that the Virgin Mary's (earthly) husband, the carpenter Joseph, walked the dusty Santa Fe Trail to the **Loretto Chapel**. When completed in 1878, no way to access the choir loft twenty-two feet above the nave could be found. Stymied, the Sisters of the Chapel made a novena to Joseph, patron saint of carpenters. On the ninth and final day of prayers, a man appeared at the chapel looking for work. Months later, the elegant circular staircase was complete, and the carpenter disappeared without a trace, leaving some to conclude that the craftsman was St. Joseph himself, come to answer the sisters' prayers. Whatever its provenance, the staircase is an architectural masterpiece of unusual beauty, showcasing two 360 degree turns with no visible means of support. It is said that the staircase was built without nails – only wooden pegs.

Following the Santa Fe Trail south towards Mexico, one comes near **Trinity Site**, yet another example of the tragic history of New Mexico. In 1945, the US



detonated the very first atomic bomb by splitting an atom in a fiery display of the possibilities of manipulating life and death. Warfare is still big business in New Mexico, which has many military bases and hundreds of acres of desert devoted to munitions and bomb testing.

Past Trinity Site and further down the Trail is **Petroglyph National Monument**, featuring carvings from both natives and the Spanish that are hundreds (some thousands) of years old. A favorite feature of the monument is Kokopelli, the humpbacked Hopi symbol of fertility, music, dance, mischief and the life of the desert. Kokopelli is everywhere, dancing and



The spiral staircase at the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe offers its beauty regardless of one's religious affiliation.

playing his flute (which originally was probably a giant phallus). He's on greeting cards, jars of salsa, jewelry, mailboxes, and t-shirts: if it has a flat surface, Kokopelli is there. In my experience, despite the bloody history of European oppression on his native sands, he really does love all New Mexicans. I used to see Kokopelli as a cheap way to get tourist to buy shot glasses and ball caps, but I've come to realize that he loves to bring joy to all people in any way he can.

Sometimes joy can come in the form of handcrafted copper earrings, or a postcard sent to a faraway relative who may never have a chance to experience the desert in their own lives. This desert god dances on the thin line between cultural appropriation and profit, but for me he is a happy reminder of the desert that I love.

Heaven and Earth

Another deity found everywhere in the southwest is Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of the Americas and New World face of the Virgin Mary. Like Kokopelli, she's ubiquitous; some see her as a reinterpretation of an ancient native goddess and others as the mother of Jesus, but either way, she is a benevolent, loving source of protection.

New Mexico loves its sky almost as much as its desert, and in a place where the past is so ancient and sacred, the future holds an equally special place in the heart of the people. Places like **Sacramento Peak**, the **Museum of Space History**, the **Very Large Array**, and **Space Port America** are just a few options for scientists and laypeople to look to the heavens and ask existential and scientific questions. New Mexico is sparsely populated, so it's only a quick drive out of town until it's just you, the velvet black of the night sky, and endless, endless stars. It's easy to talk to the gods when you can see the branch of the Milky Way

Wall Painting at Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine Mesilla Park, New Mexico. This parish has largely served a population of Tiwa Indians. (photo by Gerri Morris)

swooping through the night. When the moon is full in the desert, she seems close enough to touch. At moments like these, I really do feel at one with nature, when the sun sets in the most spectacular array of colors, and when the sunrise is like pulling a colorful scarf very slowly over the body of the goddess herself. With skies like this, it's easy to talk to sky deities like Artemis, Sekhmet, Selene, Apollo, or Horus. Though the origins of these gods are far away, New Mexico has become the home of people from all over the world, including their gods.

In my hometown, we have a mountain formation we call The Lady, and very clearly you can see the bridge of her nose, the wave of her hair, the curve of her breast. While no lore or stories exist for her, she is a very real presence, an ever-watching guardian looking down at her little town. Even though her home is plagued with poverty, unemployment, racism, and economic disparity, still she gazes on, triumphing in our joys and mourning at our sorrows. She has been watching people move through her basin for thousands of years, and she will remain ever vigilant. **White Sands National Monument** tickles at her feet, hundreds of miles of gypsum sand as white as the most perfect snow. The Lady's hair swoops up the mountain to the home of the Mescalero Apaches. While these people have their own secret ceremonies and traditions, each year basin dwellers wait for the tribe's annual 4th of July rain dance, which signals the beginning of the monsoon season so crucial to life here.

Taking the gorgeous drive east up the mountains, one passes a large, stone church nestled into the mountainside. While to some the **St. Joseph Apache Mission** may serve as a symbol of the conquering Europeans on this native holy land, this property marks the spot where invading culture meets traditional ceremony. Every year, young Apache women of the appropriate age participate in the



Mescalero Apache Puberty Rite Ceremony. This sacred tradition is celebrated and cherished by the whole tribe, with everyone coming together to celebrate the girls' maturity and entrance into womanhood by observing holy traditions passed down through the generations.

Land of the Zia

In the desert of New Mexico, it's easy to talk to Sekhmet and Jesus in the same breath. Where the grapes grow Dionysus dwells, and where there is beer (made with green chilies!) Odin likes to hang out. Athena guards the military men and women, whereas Mother Mary protects us all.

Meanwhile, Kokopelli asks us to dance with him between the cactus and beneath the stars, and afterwards he'll want to come home with you, wherever that may be.

Perhaps the best representation of the spirit of New Mexico is the Zia symbol, named after a Pueblo tribe that knows what it means to survive the best and worse that the desert has to offer. Found on the pottery of these tribal peoples, the Zia symbol is a cross that represents, among many things, the four quarters, the four stages of humanity, the four seasons, the sun and its life-giving rays. In New Mexico the Zia symbol is a sign of "perfect friendship among united cultures." No statement could be more appropriate for a state that has known such bloodshed and adversity in its history, but looks forward to a future of togetherness, solidarity and respect.



The energy of New Mexico is old, so very old. But for all of its history and the conquest of its peoples, it will never be tamed. Like any other place, it has problems. There is a lot of poverty in New Mexico, racism, unemployment, gang violence, drug use, alcoholism, drought, pollution, and there is a long history of sadness and oppression. But for all of its anguish, New Mexico is and forever shall be the land of enchantment. ♠



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For More Information

Chaco Canyon – <http://www.nps.gov/chcu/index.htm>

Chimayo – <http://www.archdiocesasantafe.org/AboutASF/Chimayo.html>

Cross of the Martyrs – <http://www.historicsantafe.org/popcross.html>

Loretto Chapel – <http://www.lorettochapel.com/staircase.html>

Zozobra – <http://zozobra.com/>

Trinity Site – <http://www.wsmr.army.mil/PAO/Trinity/Pages/default.aspx>

Petroglyph National Monument – <http://www.nps.gov/petr/index.htm>

Kokopelli – <http://www.indigenoupeople.net/kokopelli.htm>

Our Lady of Guadalupe – <http://www.catholic.org/about/guadalupe.php>

Sacramento Peak – <http://nsosp.nso.edu/>

Museum of Space History – <http://www.nmspacemuseum.org/>

Very Large Array – <http://www.vla.nrao.edu/>

Space Port America – <http://spaceportamerica.com/>

White Sands National Monument – <http://www.nps.gov/whsa/index.htm>

Mescalero Apache – http://www.mescaleroapache.com/area/history_and_cul.htm

St. Joseph Apache Mission – <http://www.stjosephmission.org>

Zia – <http://www.indianpueblo.org/19pueblos/zia.html>



AMANDA MORRIS is a Wiccan Priestess, as well as a graduate student and a professional journalist. While she has made a home for herself in North Carolina,

New Mexico never ceases to enchant her memories and imagination. She documents her adventures as a priestess and graduate student at <http://superdopersocialworker.blogspot.com/>, and if given the choice between “red or green,” she always picks green. (It’s a New Mexico thing.)

Sand ripples in the dunes at White Sands National Monument near Alamogordo, New Mexico.

ANA

Out of the Broom Closet — and Loving It.

Interviewer
TIM SCHNEIDER
is a Northern
Tradition shaman
and priest. His
passions include
writing, reading,
drawing, martial
arts, spirituality,
and sustainable
living. He lives in
Michigan.

Pagan singer-songwriter Ana (formerly Ana Winter) started her career on the Canadian folk circuit over a decade ago. In the beginning, she always kept her spirituality very private and separate from the music, which she has described as “very tedious.” After several years of this, she decided to bridge that gap, and explore her connection to Spirit through her musical work. This newfound sound has brought together her talents, and that of others, to produce a powerful song-scape, bridging her folk and electronica backgrounds into a vibrant mix that reaches into the elements at times, and dives into herself at others.

The first single Ana released as openly Pagan artist was “My Inner Voice,” which became part of her first Pagan music CD, *Within the Mystic*, released in 2010. Her first foray into Pagan music is a mystic mix, the personal and Fae, the Otherworld and mundane all coming together in an exploration of silence, self, and the inner voice. Together with Nancy Rancourt and Ashton Price, *Within the Mystic* invites the listener to their own journey, each track another beautifully-crafted step along the way.

W&P *I wanted to start off this interview asking about when you first started making music.*

Ana I have been making music for twenty years, and for most of my musical career, I was working under my legal name and kept my spiritual self very separate and private. But about five years ago, I started to develop a new area of music, and it occurred to me that I should start working in my spiritual realm. So I married my spiritual self to my musical self and used my Wiccan name and decided not to be so concerned about the music industry and all that entailed. So I became myself, I would say.

W&P *What prompted the change?*

Ana It was my discontent with the music industry. I was working really hard to become a world-famous rockstar, and it just became really unfulfilling. I was looking to center my work more on my spirituality, and it occurred to me – Hey, why not actually just delve into my Wiccan self and make music from spirit? This is the original intention for most musicians, and I had lost that passion just from the business of music, which can be really soul-destroying.

I came to this crossroads as I began to work on my second degree as a Wiccan priestess, and I think that it came at the exact right time as these things often do.

W&P *You have a very lyrical, esoteric quality to your sound. Did you create that intentionally or did it evolve out this new exploration?*

Ana That aspect of my music has evolved over a long time. I've always written esoteric, lyrically based music, but it just never fit in with the pop/rock mainstream. The last record I made before I came out as a Pagan musician, *The Changeling*, talks about the Fae community, the faeries, and the mystic qualities of life.

W&P *That fits my experience of your music, which has this very Fae, airy quality that sucks you in and takes you to the Otherworld. Is that intentional on your part? Do you work with the faeries to get that quality in your music.*

Ana It is always intentional. I believe intensely in the Otherworld and Fae. However, being firmly adult in my mind, I haven't been able to see them. So I always want my music to reflect the Otherworld. I am an audio-based person, so when I hear and feel things, I go right from that gut, from that sensory input. When we hear sound and have an imagination of a sound, you're not just here, but you're hearing into other things as well.

W&P *Something I've come across, from Within the Mystic is the idea of stillness and the inner Self. There's sort of a dichotomy in the music; on some of these tracks, a very vibrant and elemental focus. On others, there's a very deep and inward focus.*

Ana Much of that dual focus is driven by the lyrics. I am a songwriter and lyricist first, so I hire and work with other artists on the music. So I always have the story of the song in mind, the story behind the lyric that feeds into what the music is going to become. For example "Ana" is all about grounding, so I had to bring out the heartbeat of the Earth. The melody, the music is always secondary to the lyrics; I tend to be a bit of a storyteller, so it needs to tell a story or I'm not really interested.



photo ©2013 Luke Fillion

W&P *You mention you hire your musicians and bring them in as the story behind the music develops. How do you decide who to bring in?*

Ana I have worked with producer Nancy Rancort for over a decade. She supported my move to become a more spiritually-based artist, and she has helped me make

those decisions. Nowadays, I'm choosing musicians based on both the sound they have, and whether they are on the same wavelength. Are they part of the spiritual world? Do they have this kind of basic understanding and belief system that you can work in your music with that belief system?

W&P *Who do you see as your primary musical inspirations? Your website mentions Sarah Brightman and Tory Amos.*

Ana Tory has always been an inspiration; I find her courage to simply use her voice and a piano is very brave, and there's always story behind every song. Sarah Brightman has a fantastic voice. Her work is filled with space and amazing movements and sounds and feeling – I really think that's where I'd like to head as an artist.

W&P *Speaking of where you are headed: do think creativity is stifled in modern Pagan music? Like everyone is trying to fit into a specific mode?*

Ana I have had the opportunity to hear some pretty amazing musicians doing the festival scene. I've also heard some Pagan musicians who are Pagan first; they go right from the heart, and Goddess bless them. Who am I to judge them because they're having a great time? Then there are great musicians who are also Pagan and

Wiccan, and they don't seem to be fitting into any restrictive category. Most Pagan musicians they tend to be more folksy, while I prefer my big sound system and being high tech, and I'll admit that can be challenging for some festivals. I have a much more complex style, and I can't show up with just my guitar and patchouli oil and say "Hey, I'm ready to play!"

W&P *We need the Wiccan Philharmonic Orchestra.*

Ana Exactly! Speaking of which, I'm going back to University for a Music Degree in Vocal Performance. I try to blend a whole bunch of different things. I'm not normal.

W&P *I look at that as a plus. If you're going to try to be normal as a musician, you're not likely to get very far. Where do you hope to take your music?*

Ana I would like to do more expansive projects. I would love to be touring the world, and I envy those Pagan musicians who have that luxury. I'm not interested in playing bars and that sort of thing, but I want to play larger and larger places. I'd like to have an entourage of Pagan musicians and dancers and have a big show. I'd love to do a stage production with non-lyrical dance and performance art. A Pagan Cirque de Soleil, so to speak. I want to make an experience, provide a way that they'll go home from that show and wake up, still gaping from that show.

W&P *I remember a very similar feeling when I saw the Irish Rovers in concert in Troy, MI. They were absolutely phenomenal. You could hear the lyrics the next day. You could still experience what they were saying.*

Ana I want people to be involved in a spectacle that inspires them to do their own art or be better people or try harder for themselves. That transformational type of art is what I'm interested in. Anything less and I say "meh." It's hard; you have to dig deep; you can't just make a beat and put lyrics to it.

Having more and more Pagans who are musicians, who come out [of the Broom Closet] and just did work from the heart would create better music. There's probably many better-known professional musicians who are Pagan who

just have their private life as Pagans, while music is their business, and they keep those worlds separate. There's more open Pagan artists than there were a decade ago. It's fantastic. That being said, there are also avowedly Pagan artists that I listen to and think, on the musical side, "Okay, that might need a little work," but Goddess bless them for trying and for being out about who they are.

W&P *Sounds like what you are saying is that they are making music that comes from the heart, but technically, they are trying for things that are beyond their grasp.*

Ana One's craft as a musician can improve over time; people can only ever get better, and I have so much work I have to do myself. Goddess help me, if any of my earlier records got back in print I would die. They're not out on YouTube anywhere, I hope! I still have tons to learn.

W&P *Is there anything you want our readers to know about you and your music?*

Ana I have really been turned on by Ginger Doss. I am plugging her because

she is such a talented artist, your readers need to listen to her stuff. Bekah Kelso is also a fantastic artist. I aspire to be as good as they are.

I have begun doing writing workshops at Pagan festivals called "Finding your Voice Through Color," using color to help people find new melodies. This is helpful for non-musicians to broaden their writing and choose sounds and melodies that are outside their normal tendencies. The first workshop was held at Michigan Pagan Festival in 2012; the participants came up with beautiful writing, songs, chants and poetry. I love to help people reach farther and explore their creativity. I met some wonderful budding songwriters who did great work!

W&P *If people want to purchase your music where should they go?*

Ana The best place for readers to start exploring my work is on my site at ana.wyldpatchouli.com. It has all the news about my upcoming events and projects and links to the sites at CDBaby and Vibedeck.

photo ©2013 Luke Fillion





BRAVE ENOUGH
to Burn

“If you are brave enough to fly
Then you are brave enough to burn”
— SJ Tucker, *Firebird's Child*

*K*ids love fire. I know I did. Once, when my friend Mike and I were rocking out to *KISS Alive II* around 1978, we ran around his house shooting fire from hairspray-and-lighter combinations in imitation of our idol Gene Simmons. Thankfully, we didn't burn the house down... or set ourselves on fire, the way Simmons himself occasionally did. Still, the rush of fire-performance never left me. These days, when I can, I light up balls of Kevlar and spin them around in a far safer (and more impressive) form of expression: the fire-dance.

Gene Simmons introduced me to what folks now call the flow arts. Spinning, twirling, juggling, spitting, and otherwise dancing with strange implements and the most hazardous element we know: fire. Water can drown you, earth can break your bones, and air can tear your neighborhood to shreds; but one touch of fire will remind you instantly just how mortal flesh can be. Flow arts performers call the minor burns they sustain while working with flames a *fire-kiss*. As SJ Tucker (herself a fire-dancer) says in her anthem “Firebird's Child,” daring the fiery flow arts involves accepting a certain amount of pain.

Fast-forward to 1995: my first trip to Burning Man. With my then-partner asleep in the tent, I went wandering in the dark. Seeing an oasis of flames and people, I stepped up to the small crowd gathered around a pair of naked fire-dancers. One man and one woman, dressed in nothing but body paint, they performed a dazzling array of semi-improvised acts. There was a drummer or two, and there may also have been some pre-recorded music — I honestly don't recall. All I remember is the fire, the skin, the audacity of bringing one so close to the other again and again and again. After trading off the “spotlight” a few times, the dancers performed a duet of fire that climaxed (so to speak) with the woman dousing a fire-wand in the guy's ass while he did a handstand. I still don't know how they did that last trick, and I really don't want to. All I knew then was that, ass-trick aside, this had been one of the sexist things I'd ever seen... and I wanted to do it, too.

Opposite page: Byron Heflen gets cross.

It was nearly ten years before I found someone who could teach me, but the inspiration lingered. At the climax of my book *Cult of Ecstasy*, written the following year, I wrote:

As I heft the flame-batons, I chase the darkness from my sight. Within my reach, a firestorm whirls, close enough to singe but not to burn. I'm careful, you know, and well-trained. The fire-dance won't consume me. Not now. Not ever.

I'm not the only one who's felt that fire. In the nearly two decades since that night, the flow arts have grown from cult practice to phenomenon. Flow arts — named for Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*¹ — are defined as “an overarching term for the emerging movement-based art forms that integrate dance and creative exploration of movement with skill-based prop manipulation.”² Too outré to become truly mainstream, what was once the province of a few thousand practitioners has become common alternative-culture coin. This past summer, I watched dozens of people spinning cold electric fires at FaerieWorlds: a festival that hosts an official live-fire show each year as well.³ Almost every major American city has at least one fire-performance troupe, and certain ones — such as my hometown of Seattle — have several. If you go to Burning Man, you'll see hundreds of people spinning fire simultaneously, gathered from around the world to celebrate the wonders of the flame.

Playing with Fire

A few years back, as I watched a then-14-year-old spinner named Kristen Berlin at Florida's annual Phoenix Phyre gathering, I learned that some young Pagans are taking up the flow arts as a form of initiation. (See “Voices From the Flames, on pages 38 and 40.”) “It started with my love for music and dancing,” Kristen told me. “I can remember seeing my first fire dancer when I was about eight; her performance was so graceful and beautiful that it created a spark in me that I still feel every time I spin. She completely changed my life, and I wish I could tell her so.”



“Fire is everywhere. In my quick temper, in my passion for the things I love, in the eyes of my lover, in the pit of my gut. In the beating heart of every creature. In Gaia herself. To be alive is to be on Fire!”

— Inky Grrl

Fire in Your Hands: the Tools of Flow

Innovation and imagination are two of the prime virtues of flow arts; anything that *can* be used eventually winds up *being* used. Still, the following tools and toys are the most common in the fire-slinging scene. It's no accident that many of these designs have been drawn from weapons; fire has a martial quality that's never truly absent in a performance.

- **Poi:** Probably the most common flow-art implement, poi consist of heavy balls (for fire, made of wire mesh or Kevlar) attached to chords (in fire, chains) that are attached, in turn, to loops for your hands. Those balls are then spun in patterns, using momentum to shape astonishing designs.

- **Staff:** A sturdy rod, usually wood, with one or both ends covered in fireproof weights and then set on fire, constitutes the second most popular spinning instrument. Like poi, a staff can be used in sets, creating virtually unlimited stunt potential.

- **Baton:** Like the staff, only smaller and usually lit and weighted on a single end, this toy gets used for juggling, fire-spitting, relays and many other tricks. Some batons are thick club-like implements, while others are essentially metal rods and may be called *wands*, *torches*, *rods* or *sticks* rather than batons, depending on variations of the tool.

- **Fan:** A spread of metal rods fanning out from a central hub, the fan comes in several varieties. In a skilled dancer's hands, this tool becomes one of the most spectacular fire-toys around.

- **Fingers:** Like the fan but without the central connection, fire fingers involve individual metal rods with wicks on each end. These rods attach to the dancer's real fingers, offering a wider range of gestures and tricks.

- **Sword:** Just what it appears to be, the fire-sword lets a dancer become a magical samurai. Most dancers employ kendo, fencing and other sword techniques to enhance this tool's style and allure. One of fire-play's progenitors, the Samoan war-rite *Siva Afi* (also called *ailao*), involves flaming knives or machetes, and so shorter blades have a place of honor in the fiery arts as well.

- **Whip:** A long, thin, flexible lash of Kevlar or flame-resistant leather, a fire-whip is an extremely dangerous toy. In the hands of someone who knows what she's doing, though, it commands a fantastic erotic appeal.

- **Chain:** Like the whip, a chain implement (which comes in several varieties) demands skill, focus and – above all – space. Weighed at one or both ends, the chain gets spun and lashed in fantastic patterns for mesmerizing effect.

- **Meteor:** A popular chain-based tool, the meteor involves one (occasionally two) very large, heavy balls of mesh or Kevlar. Perhaps the most intimidating fire-toy, a flaming meteor denotes strength and courage... and makes a lot of noise!

- **Hoop:** Like common hula hoops made of metal, fire-hoops get spun around the dancer's body. In this case, the toy often involves a double-hoop, with the outer one flaming and the inner one used to spin the toy around without getting burnt.

- **Devil Sticks:** A set of sticks (see batons) used to juggle one another, flaming devil-sticks get lit on one or both ends and then "dance" through gravity and momentum off one another. ♠

SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO.

Fighting to Flow

Regardless of our age or the ways in which we discover them, such arts expand us. Fire, in particular, creates a vivid demarcation between who we were before taking up the flames and who we become when we dare their touch.

The fire-arts probably began with tests of courage and dexterity. Long before written records, warriors, artists, shamans, and other mad folk juggled brands and leapt over fires. The roots of our modern flame-arts can be found in the practices of Maori poi artists,⁴ Egyptian jugglers, medieval fire-eaters and other children of the flames.⁵ Employed by both men and women, these arts honed reflexes and demonstrated bravery, but for centuries they remained the specialty of a dedicated few. According to "Pele, the Henna Lady" at homeofpoi.com, such stunts were rare before the 20th century, simply because the essential materials for doing them were expensive, unstable and rare.

It was the growing Burning Man movement⁶ that opened the doors for fire-performance on a grand scale. You can see flashes of it in the fire-breathing antics of Gene Simmons and the Australian film *The Road Warrior* or White Wolf's *World of Darkness* prior to the mid-1990s, but Burning Man brought artists together from all over the world to trade tricks and back each other up. Since then, the small array of fire tools and techniques has spread... well, like wildfire; whereas Simmons spit fire once or twice, kids who'd grown up watching him expanded the trick far beyond carnival bounds.

Meanwhile, the flow arts have expanded in popularity since their introduction to the counterculture in the 1960s. Hula Hoops, Hacky Sacks, contact juggling, Tai Chi, ecstatic dance, devil sticks, and other flow toys and techniques – many of which, like the Hacky Sack, were invented in the '60s or '70s⁷ – have grown from schoolyard diversions to elaborate and occasionally profitable arts. In the process, they've also acquired – or rather, re-acquired – a place as tools of spiritual discipline⁸ especially within the Pagan community, most especially when lit on fire.

"Fire," says Tierany Seriflame, co-founder of Seattle's IGNITION fire troupe, "defines the core of who I am and how I embrace every aspect of life. Fire is movement, fire is opportunity, fire is full of curiosity and the promise of excitement. Yes, fire is dangerous, but so is life – and if you don't step out and light that fire, you'll never know the potential of what life can be." This creed leads folks like Tierany, Kristen and others to embrace the trials and risks of flame performance. "There is a certain magical intrigue," adds K Kevin Wiley, my own teacher in the art, "about working and playing with fire that brings an undeniable call to the art as well." Regardless of our age or the ways in which we discover them, such arts expand us. Fire, in particular, creates a vivid demarcation between who we were before taking up the flames and who we become when we dare their touch.

*Synder Miche Stonecastle and Alexander James Adams,
performing at Strower Nights Seattle, 2010.*



VOICES FROM THE FLAMES

PERFORMER: TIERANY SERIFLAME

TROUPE: Co-founder of IGNITION

AGE: 29; began performing at age 24

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? A relationship had ended on my birthday weekend at an SCA event, and [IGNITION co-founder] Khan discovered me wandering around in complete sadness and invited me to his encampment. . . That evening, Khan and his friends put on a show in the gravel roadway. I saw my first fire-breathing performance and simply watched in awe. Within a month, the fire fever took over and I was performing, seeking every fire-related skill I could dream up and stepping into the flames of a blazing future.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? Fire is my belief and my practice. I have seen fire save so many friends from going down a path of destruction by providing [an] opportunity for rebirth, an outlet for expression and a pool of creativity and possibility. Fire brings people together and makes everyone family.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE? Never say you “can’t,” instead, say only that you can’t *yet*. Find your inspiration and act on it. Be safe, but challenge yourself. Practice, practice, *practice* — and when you’ve reached a place where you think you know it all, remind yourself that you don’t, and keep right on learning! Don’t forget to enjoy [yourself] and *smile!*

PERFORMER: SYNDER (Miche Stonecastle)

TROUPE: Troupe: IGNITION

AGE: 26 years old, spinning since age 23

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? A few founders of IGNITION fire troupe were in my martial-arts dojo; when I came back from college, they invited me to join. My sister was also close friends with a member, and told me, “You would love to be a part of this group. They are your people!” She bought me poi for my birthday — so I had to go learn to spin.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? I hold no definitions to my spiritual beliefs. Fire relates to that because fire is not defined as “organized.” It just *is*, and will continue to be as it should be.

The greatest challenge I have faced with fire is fire-*dance*. It adds a [certain] handicap. . . but creates a new aspect. Without “fire” you’re just left with “dance,” and without “dancing” you’re left with “fire.” The challenge is putting them together.



PERFORMER: JAYMI ELFORD

TROUPE: None

Age: 38 years old, spinning since age 25

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? I had three friends who learned how to spin, so I stumbled on homeofpoi.com and watched their beginner’s and intermediate instructional videos. My first set of poi was a home-made blend of chains bought at PetSmart, attached, via carabiners, to racquetballs that had holes in them for hook screws. A friend made the finger loops. It was lightweight, but taught me not to hit myself!

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? I love spinning. There is a strange connection that happens when you spin fire, as if you’re one with the Earth. I feel the power of making the flames do what I want; you cannot hear anything beyond the whooshing sounds of the flames. It’s hypnotic and meditative.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE? I am an eclectic witch, and the elements are a big part of my practice. I honor them daily [and] see Fire’s place as a creative force in my daily work. As I am a Fire sign, I use it for meditation. It fuels my writing and my workshops. It reminds me that I am interconnected to something greater than I am.

Inky Grrl

PERFORMER: NATHAN “N.U.G.” THOMAS

TROUPES: Former member of IGNITION, now building T.R.I.B.E. (Transilluminated Radiant Individuals Becoming Everything)

AGE: 26; spinning since 22.

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW?

I discovered fire-art as a drummer with IGNITION. Then, at a Winter Solstice festival, I had my first fire performance, and I’ve been playing with balls of fire on stage ever since.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? I enjoy *everything* about fire performing — the attention, primal expression and passion, as well as the danger and excitement of wielding fire. It’s quite a Tantric experience. I practice my own path into the Divine, and fire seems to be a huge connection to passage and truth, to love and forgiveness of our chosen sins to our bodies, to earth,

and soul sacredness [as well as] a form of thanks.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE? Do it your way and never give up. Learn from everything and everyone around you, and listen to your heart and your fire when you spin.

PERFORMER: KRAIG BLACKWELDER

TROUPES: Chicago Fire Tribe, Pyrotechnique.

AGE: 44, spinning since age 40

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? Fire-spinning was part of my recovery process after a five-month depression that followed a horrible romantic disaster.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? I’m on a vaguely Pagan/shamanic spiritual path, and while I can see a spiritual element to spinning fire; that’s a fairly minor element of it for me. That being said, my spiritual life has blossomed in the time I’ve been spinning fire. I don’t think there’s a direct connection, but something is going on that I’m not aware of.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE?

Spinning fire has connected me to a great group of people; it has given me the experience of performing in front of a very appreciative audience. It [also] gave me the opportunity to spin fire in the conclave at Burning Man, and I’ve even made a little money from it here and there.

(continued on pp. 40)

Don't Try This at Home

For obvious reasons, the fire-arts are *not* something you just “wing it” with. Before ever lighting up, it is vital to find someone who knows what he or she is doing, ask that person for instruction, and *pay attention to what they say and do*. As you would with any other form of training, get references if you can, remain attentive to your trainer’s ethics and behavior, and if s/he acts careless or abusive, sever the relationship. Fire demands focus and does not forgive stupidity. A botched stunt can scar, maim or kill.

“Safety” is actually a position in any responsible fire troupe. Dressed in fire-protective clothes and holding a towel or two that has been soaked in water, treated with fire-retardant chemicals, or both, the safety crouches within quick grabbing range of a performer. (Many troupes use several especially during large public performances.) If and when an accident occurs, the safety darts out, covers the flames (and possibly the performer) with the towel(s), and rolls them up to smother the fire fast. In public gigs, safeties also take “moth duty,” ready to grab or restrain over-enthusiastic bystanders who want to join the show.

In my experience, a mentor trains a would-be artist in fire safety first, and then puts him/her in the safety position to see how s/he handles herself. Meanwhile, the mentor offers the trainee a practice instrument – usually a pair of poi or a staff – and shows him how to work with it. If the trainee shows dedication and finesse, the mentor might allow her to light up once she’s seen what fire can do.

To dance with fire is to open yourself to an awareness beyond the shuttered world we walk through daily, and an initiatory burn is an unforgettable experience. The flame roars at the end of your hands like a barely shackled beast, playing with the air and hungry to taste your skin. Caught between freedom and momentum, the fire is a living thing, restrained – but only just! – by your skill and concentration. In such moments, it’s easy to see where the flow arts get their name. For a short time, time itself hangs suspended in a blur. That balance between ecstasy and focus remains dazzling even to an experienced fire dancer. As an initiation rite, nothing I’ve experienced comes close.



That enchanted state is one of the reasons behind the cardinal rule of fire-dancing: *Never light up alone*. Practice with your tools unlit, but don’t risk yourself or others by assuming that you’re good enough to spin fire by yourself. The hypnotic quality and intimate focus of the art can blind a dancer to his/her surroundings. In this way, fire is an excellent teacher for magickal practice: it teaches you to know your limits. And just as no wise wizard would summon demons without assistance, no fire-dancer should dare the flames without someone nearby to put them out if need be.

The fire-arts involve esoteric techniques, specialized gear, and other protocols. In the interests of space (and caution), I’m not going to reveal the details here; it’s far better to learn the art from a dedicated mentor and a responsible troupe.

My Soul Rejoices

With or without fire, the flow arts open up a wider range of experience and fun. As The Teafaerie explains in her article “Why the Flow Arts are Awesome,” such practices inspire “a state in which the ‘action and awareness are merged...’ a state of relaxed responsive focus that you feel when your body, mind, and spirit are in dynamic balance and the Now is so compelling that everything else fades away.” Adding fire sharpens that focus. Through both its vivid presence and the potential damage it can do, this bright element burns away all the cobwebs of day-to-day passivity. You cannot be bored when you dance with fire. As

an art, a discipline, an athletic feat, and an erotic display, fire performance has few equals. “Spinning fire,” says Synder, who began spinning fire in her early 20s, “is a way to connect my passion for dance with the elements of the universe. I feel free from daily worries, and my soul rejoices. I enjoy shining so that everyone who watches can have a moment of happiness with me.”

Whether they come to fire arts during the adolescent crucible or after another life-changing event, artists who dance with flames note an amazing clarity. “Spinning fire,” says Robbie Barnabee, “lets me cut out the bad energies in my life and allows me to channel or recharge the good energies. Spinning is my natural anti-oxidant.” The flames beckon those of us brave and dedicated enough to approach them willingly.

Raw, primal and scary as hell on a chain, fire-play is drop-dead sexy. It doesn’t so much *break* social ice as *melt* it, especially in groups that bond

*Fenris (Shadow Wolf Ward)
of IGNITION! Fire Troupe*

(continued from page 38)

PERFORMER: TEMPUS MORI

TROUPE: None currently

AGE: Eek...!

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? My best friend, Ryan, took me to a local fire show, where I was immediately mesmerized. Whenever I discover a new art form that inspires me, I have to learn more about it. This is why I have so many hobbies and aspirations, and fire is no exception.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU?

Fire is a powerful element. When wielded confidently, it can elevate your mood and fill you with a sense of power and control. It is both dangerous and beautiful. Fire-dancing, despite being a spectacle to behold, is still very personal. I have sometimes felt more connected to nature and more at peace with myself while dancing.

PERFORMER: K° (K WILEY)

TROUPES: Founding member of Fire & Strings; occasionally performs with IGNITION

AGE: 37; started spinning fire shortly before I turned 25

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? I discovered fire-spinning at Burning Man in 1999. In early 2000, I took a structured, six-week class in Denver, where I learned the basics – but I really started to “get it” when I started teaching my friends and associates in Colorado Springs that summer. It was that summer when I graduated from just “spinning poi” into practicing the flow arts.

I particularly enjoy the movement itself, dancing with the unique weight and rhythm of each flow toy. It’s an amazing form of exercise, especially when you incorporate dance and full-body movement. Fire has a special place in my view of how the universe works.

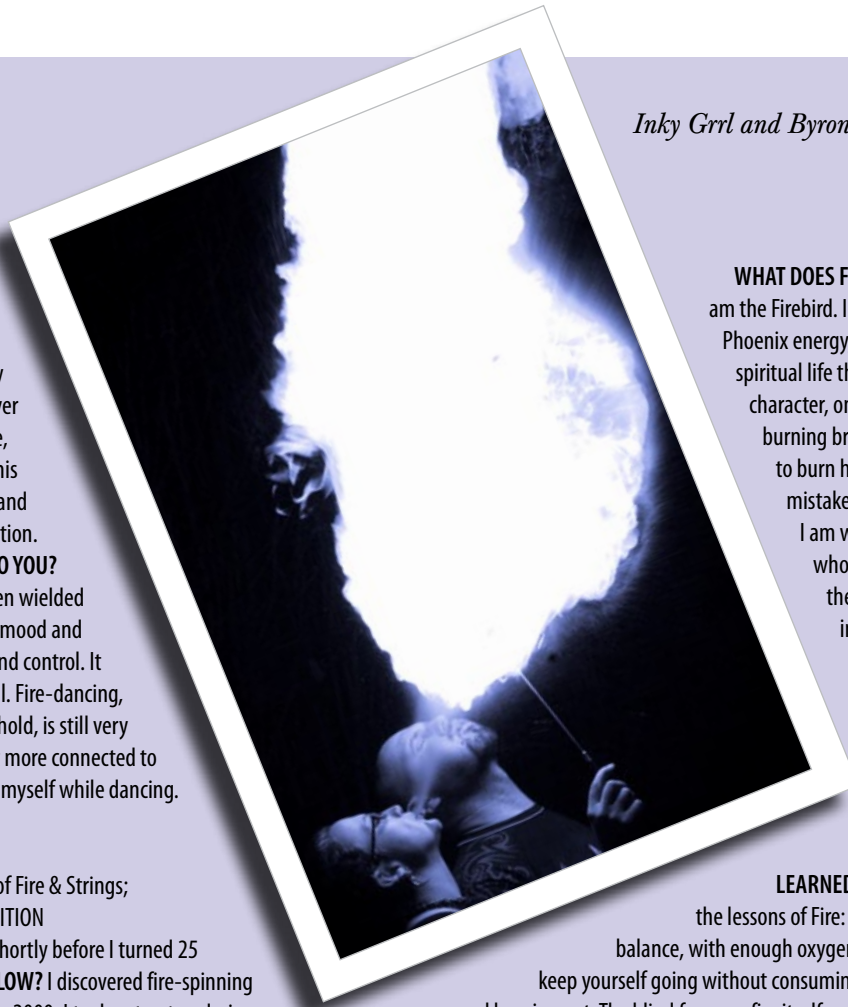
WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE? The greatest rewards have been in the community of people that I have found. I’ve added aspects of fire to my wardrobe, in the colors and patterns and materials I choose to wear. I’ve found ways to incorporate fire into romantic and sexual interactions as well. The logistics [involved in fire-spinning] are a bear; it’s difficult to find places where it’s both safe and comfortable to practice, but fire adds an intense and energetic dynamic to the experience [of flow arts] that is impossible to achieve in any other way.

PERFORMER: KOE SOZUTEKI

TROUPE: Firebird’s Children

AGE: Early 20s, began spinning poi at age 16

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? I discovered the flow arts in the rave scene as a teenager; there was this hot alternative chick spinning glowsticks, and I wanted to be her. Eventually, I got the rhythm of how they work, and they wouldn’t leave my hands.



Inky Grrl and Byron Heflen.

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? I am the Firebird. I identify heavily with Phoenix energy, and harness it in my spiritual life through writing. She is a character, one of my aspects, forever burning bright and brash and able to burn herself anew through the mistakes that test her. She is who I am when I fire-dance; she is who I am whenever I hold the Fire quarter/ element in ritual. Fire is the spark, the spiritual portion of elemental existence; it is inherent in the way we make magick (our dreams) come to life.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM FIRE? These are the lessons of Fire: How to keep one's self in balance, with enough oxygen and ignition source to keep yourself going without consuming everything around you and burning out. The blind focus on fire itself and the glory thereof [can be challenging]. It makes me angry, worried and upset to see young practitioners look at the fire as something to conquer, and to start their relationship [with Fire] before they are ready. It's not just about being safe; it's about earning and maturing into your relationship with the Flame.

PERFORMER: INKY GRRL

TROUPE: IGNITION; formerly of Fire & Strings

AGE: 31, began spinning at age 23

HOW DID YOU COME TO FLOW? Living in Denver, a group [of us] would spin fire by the river on Sunday nights. I was invited to come watch by my good friend K Wiley. I was enthralled within moments, and began plotting which tools I would learn first. With K as my primary fire-tool mentor, I began spinning poi and constructed a set of fire fingers. From my first burn [onward], I was hooked. I enjoy the entire experience: the roar of the flames as they rush past my ears, the heat, the raw energy contained in fire that seems to sing along the tools and into me. I love it all!

WHAT DOES FIRE MEAN TO YOU? With several [chronic physical] injuries, I don't move like I would like to be able to. But just getting out there and lighting up and feeding off the Fire energy is a pretty amazing reward. Touring the United States with Fire & Strings in 2006 was also a great reward for my practice and dedication.

My spiritual beliefs tend toward general Pagan, with some flavorings of Voudon and Khemetic [beliefs]. My practices are usually very ritual-centric, and Fire plays a large role [in them]. I use Fire to burn offerings and cleanse items, and also dance with Fire to raise energy and show my appreciation to the Gods. ♠ SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO.

around fire-play. Koe Sozuteki, who began practicing flow-arts as a teenager, points out that “some of the greatest Loves of my life” have come from her dedication: “Being able to fill a ritual space that is as dramatic as I need it to be, firedancing gives me something that I get to feel like a rock star about.” “I’m pretty shy,” says Tempus Mori. “Spinning fire helps me overcome some of that shyness. The rewards have been many,” she adds, “but one of the best benefits has involved meeting the nicest people from the community. Also, there’s nothing quite like the sound of whirling fire all around you. It is *exhilarating*.”

From a spiritual perspective, dancing with fire offers an intimate connection with the element. In our hermetically sealed lives, the rush of danger wakes you up in grand style. The fire-dance – especially if and when you choose to treat the flow arts as a meditative practice – draws us closer to Divine heat. In it, we become Rabbit, Prometheus and Kali – all in one. As Kraig Blackwelder puts it, “Playing with fire is a whole way of life.”

If you choose, as we did, to embrace the flames, do so with caution, devotion and respect. Find a good teacher that you can trust; be *careful*, yet not *tentative*. Fire rewards commitment. *Practice*. And never give up; through dedication, you can be connected to the element in fire in ways you never thought possible. ♠

Endnotes

¹“...times when... we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like. This is what we mean by optimal experience.” *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.

²From “The Flow Arts,” see fundtheflowarts.org/the-flow-arts/.

³I performed in this show myself in 2009, with SJ Tucker, K Wiley and their troupe Fire & Strings.

⁴*Poi* translates roughly to “ball (on a string),” and can refer to both the instrument and the art of using it. The word is also both singular and plural, and has been applied to a wide range of flow-arts toys sharing the same basic configuration and techniques.

⁵For more details than we have space to present here, check out the following articles: “Firedancing: History” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_dancing#History); “Fire Show History” (www.homeofpoi.com/ubbthreads/linkto/-Fire-Show-History-321934/); and “The History of Fire Dancing” (www.zenartsla.com/news/history-fire-dancing/), plus their associated sources and links.

⁶A neotribal gathering and arts festival that has been held annually since 1986, growing from a handful of people to current totals of over 50,000 attendees. See burningman.com/whatisburningman/ for details.

⁷Created by John Stalberger and Mike Marshall in 1972; see “Hacky Sack,” investors.about.com/library/inventors/blhackysack.htm.

⁸Hoop, juggling, fire-trials and kendo, among other practices, have old ties to spiritual practices. See *Lakota Hoop Dancer*, by Suzanne Haldane and Kevin Locke (Dutton Juvenile, 1999); *Kendo: Elements, Rules, and Philosophy*, by Jinichi Tokeshi (Latitude 20, 2003); and related links and resources in this article.

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Author, publisher and game-designer SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO has been writing for BBI Media since early 2004. Co-founder of Quiet Thunder Productions (with his partner Sandra Damiana Buskirk), Satyr is currently at work on the 20th anniversary edition of his award-winning series Mage: The Ascension, as well as the urban fantasy webcomic Arpeggio, the book series Powerchords, and gods-only-know-what-else this week. Find out more at the following sites: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/126494504028229/>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/112614342093476/>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/115245605197451/>, <http://www.quietthunderproductions.net/> and <http://arpeggiothecomix.com/>.

sharon

THROUGH THE EYES OF ENCHANTMENT

knighth

San Francisco songstress Sharon Knight is a Celtic folk singer in leather armbands. She plays octave mandolin as if it were an electric guitar and sings as though she means to summon a storm. Her penchant for combining fierce and gutsy bravado with ethereal beauty, fantastical lyrics, and a love of storytelling has inspired her own musical style, which she calls "Neofolk Romantique." Sharon describes her style as inspired by "Folktales that ran away with the Faeries at the turn of the century, and stowed away in an old trunk bound for the circus which was then commandeered by pirates."

Sharon's distinctive voice and striking poetry have won her a loyal following both in and beyond the Pagan subculture. Together with her longtime collaborator Winter, she tours extensively during the warm seasons, performing at festivals, masquerades, conventions, cafes, shops and house concerts. Her music has been featured in two independent films – Beatific Vision and The Commune. Sharon and Winter are also the founding members of the gothic tribal folk metal band, Pandemonaeon. Sharon's wide-ranging interests form an ever-changing kaleidoscope that reminds us that we can all see the world through the eyes of enchantment.

Welcome, Sharon, I'm so happy to finally meet you! Let's start with a leading question: What part does music play in your life?

Music is my life: I cannot imagine a life without music. It opens up the inner landscapes of the soul for me, adding so much more dimension and depth than I could ever access without it. Music truly is the core of my magick.

When did music first become central to your life? What was your first like?

Well, I could say it was always central, but there was a particular time when I became conscious of how important music was going to be in my life. I was thirteen and attending a British school in Bangkok. I had previously been listening to pop music, but one of the high school boys had a radio show that played at lunch, and that was when I heard Led Zeppelin for the first time. Their music – especially songs like "Battle of Evermore" and "Stairway to Heaven" – was so otherworldly and beautiful that it tore open a corner of my mind I hadn't even known was there. I knew I had to find more music like that, and I have never looked back.

In that vein, I am enamored with folk metal – bands such as Arkona, Moon-sorrow, and Eluveitie – who are carrying on the tradition I first fell in love with.

Interviewer MICHAEL NIGHT SKY is a Witch and student of Magick, currently Red Priest with the Circle of the Heartbeat's Drum. He is a longtime contributor to Witches & Pagans.

What inspired you to start creating and playing music of your own?

Although I had played around a bit with music while I was growing up, it wasn't until I was about nineteen that I decided to take music seriously. I had discovered Celtic music around that time, and was listening to groups such as Planxty, Steele Eye Span, Pentangle, and Fairport Convention. The melodies and instrumen-



tation that they used were so haunting and enchanting that I wanted to learn to play them myself. Musician Karl Franzen of Broceliande – who worked with me at a natural grocery store – taught me some songs and we began playing together around town.

Did you come to Paganism about the same time you were discovering Celtic music?

As with many folks, I began having “witchy” kinds of experiences at about the time puberty hit. I had numerous dreams that were intensely vivid and magickal; began seeing auras around plants and people; had waking visions; and developed a growing intuitive sense that there was a lot more going on in this world than meets the eye.

My first exposure to Witchcraft proper was Sybil Leek’s *Diary of a Witch*, which went a long way toward helping me understand what was happening. In terms of discovering the Pagan community itself, I look to my formative experience at the Ancient Ways Festival in California when I was eighteen – discovering Paganism felt like I had “come home.” Shortly thereafter I began studying within the Anderson Feri tradition.

These days there’s a great deal of talk about defining “Pagan.” What does that term mean to you?

That’s a huge question! Let me answer by describing the elements of Paganism that I find personally fulfilling. To begin with, the notion that the forces of nature are worthy of worship is deeply moving to me. I also appreciate the fact that my core tradition

is primarily based in practice. In the line of Feri that I studied (Bloodrose), experience was emphasized over written word or lore. Lore was valued, but not itself considered a living relationship with the Gods. This has been an important distinction throughout my life. Paganism, to me, is largely defined by experience, not belief. To be a Pagan is to forge a direct connection with the root forces of nature underlying all creation.



Caith Threfires, Sharon Knight, and Winter of Sharon Knight Trio.

When I first began to practice, I wondered if I was just imagining it all, but what began as a picture in my mind soon became a palpable energetic presence. As my teacher described it, we use our imaginations to create a compatible shape for an indwelling spirit to inhabit. The visualized structure is like a birdcage, and the indwelling spirit is the bird.

Such practices gave me direct experience of subtle energetic patterns as well as the bodies of consciousness we refer to as Gods, or forces of nature. They also gave me the means to further explore the portals in my soul that had begun to open during puberty, strengthening my conviction that there was more to reality than meets the eye.

Paganism as a practice helps us to open up to much deeper dimensions, both within ourselves and in our world; to experience firsthand the interconnectedness of all life; and to come to a realization of our own inherent divinity. This is the Great Work of human evolution and, I believe, our ultimate destiny. As we come into deeper awareness of the potential of human consciousness, we cultivate a more rich and harmonious life, and thus a more

harmonious world. A sense of destiny becomes ours as we engage ever more skillfully in the great epic that is a fully-actualized life.

In musical terms, magickal practice helps us to tune ourselves so that we can more fully partake of the grand symphony of all creation.

What does the word “magick” mean?

Crowley gets things off to a good start with his description: “Magick is the art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will.” Magick as a practice is a means

of mastering and moving energy. We wield magick to shape our lives in accordance with our ideals, to become as the Gods by expanding our consciousness, allowing our minds to encompass the vastness of the Universe. The more our minds can encompass the Universe, the more forces we have at our disposal. Then the art becomes about skillful use of these forces. Whether we are using magick to alchemically craft ourselves and our lives; or to communicate with denizens of the unseen worlds for learning, insight, or alliance, we are engaging in action that shifts us energetically, which is then reflected in our outer world. Thus is change initiated.

The term “magick” can also be used to describe any force that comes

photo ©2013 photo by Ankhira Seordplough

from a world we don't recognize as our own. As I see it, what we as a species call "reality" is little more than a status quo agreement that only a certain spectrum of perception, based on the undeniably obvious, can be considered "real." The term "magick" can pertain to unseen forces that we can feel as a palpable, alive, energetic presence, such as the magick of a place.

Does the word "magick" apply to music?

Absolutely. Music is the core of my practice at this point, and it is remarkable how similar the two disciplines are. Both are practices that take years to master; both structure the mind in accordance with the Will of the practitioner; and both can evoke a sense of space in the mind.

Music is very geometrical, so learning the forms of music is very akin to sacred geometry: both disciplines organize the mind in an elegant way. Musical discipline develops concentration, which is also very important to magickal development.

Music engages the mind in a higher order of activity which can lead to mystical union. A mind so engaged cannot fall into worry or chatter. The sound itself tunes the energy fields around us, which is why music is so effective in ritual. Singing is a profoundly powerful tool in charging and infusing the entire being with energy and light. Music is a powerful way to open the channels of communication between ourselves and beings from unseen worlds, and can be created to resonate with the chosen Gods or spirits.

One of the things I like best about using music as magick is that it works entirely independently of religious symbolism. This makes it possible to communicate without having to engage in the usual dance of translating religious language and symbols between paradigms. Music has an immediate effect — if you create music that resonates sufficiently with your intended purpose, you create magick without ever needing religion at all. It sounds clichéd, I know, but music truly *is* a universal language.

You have two musical projects: Sharon Knight and Pandemonaeon. What inspired you to participate in two separate musical groups with such very different styles?

My solo project ("Sharon Knight") represents my musical roots. I learned my craft playing songs from Celtic and British folk traditions; dozens of Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention songs as well as loads of traditional Celtic ballads. My earliest songwriting attempts strove to emulate and carry these traditions forward.

But my interests couldn't be completely contained within that style. By the time I met Winter, I was belly-dancing avidly and had become enamored of Middle Eastern music. Winter and I were intrigued by the possibilities of hard-driving rock music with exotic eastern scales and rhythms and began experimenting with these themes in the project that became "Pandemonaeon." In the end, Pandemonaeon's sound was too different from my solo work to comfortably fit within that project, and it seemed a stronger statement to split them up so each project could have a more solid sense of identity.

What do you like about each project?

Each one represents a core part of my magickal worldview. I've tried choosing one over the other and always end up missing the one that's on the back burner. So I have come to accept that these are both equally important expressions for me. It also increases our live show opportunities to be able to perform in a few different configurations and styles.

To begin with my namesake project — "Sharon Knight" — I've always loved the sparkling sound of acoustic instruments, there's something organic and magickal about them. They create a soft feeling of enchantment that helps listeners feel relaxed and balanced. My acoustic work tends to be less challenging and therefore it is more accessible to a broader audience.

I love Pandemonaeon for its fierce, wild energy. There is more opportunity to explore challenging topics, and the edges of life. This music is driving, serpentine, dark rock — approaching metal — and unapologetic about being Pagan. Pandemonaeon lets me express the more extreme parts of my nature.

Of course, you can hear influences from either project in the other. My acoustic music is not entirely without grit, and

MUSIC IS MY LIFE: I CANNOT IMAGINE A LIFE WITHOUT MUSIC. IT OPENS UP THE INNER LANDSCAPES OF THE SOUL FOR ME, ADDING SO MUCH MORE DIMENSION AND DEPTH THAN I COULD EVER ACCESS WITHOUT IT. MUSIC TRULY IS THE CORE OF MY MAGICK.

Pandemonaeon is not without a lush beauty. But the emphasis is very different; I often think of my more Celtic acoustic-based music as coming from the bright realms of inspiration, and Pandemonaeon's music as coming from the Underworld. We all need both, do we not?

What does the name of your band mean? How is it significant to you or to the purpose of the band?

As I understand it, Peter Carroll coined the term "Pandemonaeon" to refer to the New Aeon, an age characterized by a magical world view. Carroll is often considered the "Father of Chaos Magick," a field of arcane thought that has inspired me greatly over the years. Many of these ideas — particularly the ideas of belief as a tool rather than an ultimate truth, and the practice of shifting one's own magical paradigms regularly to keep the mind flexible — appealed to Winter and I.

In fact, it is this very idea — that identity is not static, and that one can run many different currents and just "change the channel" at will — that makes it possible for me to be committed to two seemingly contradictory music projects at the same time.

You travel extensively to perform but are also pretty prolific in the studio. When it comes to doing a studio recording versus live performances, which do you prefer?

I couldn't choose a favorite! Both styles of work have their place. In the studio I have time to sculpt a song into a true work of art. I can layer and add textures that are much trickier to accomplish live, as well as experiment and feature guest musicians. Also, if I have an "off" day I can redo my work and no one needs to know! We are fortunate enough to have our own studio, so there is a feeling of relaxation with recording for us that a musician paying for studio time by the hour may not feel.

photo ©2013 Winter



On the other hand, there is nothing to beat live performance for sheer energy-raising and connecting with a group of people. I absolutely love the feel of performing live and the energy that moves through us. I love the feeling of "One-mind" that happens with my fellow musicians, the feeling that we are all creating — or facilitating — something larger than ourselves. When it is a good concert, the energy sweeps through us and out into the audience, with everyone getting swept up in it — that's an epic feeling.

You mention energy — can music be used to enhance rituals or to reach an ecstatic state of consciousness?

Absolutely! Rituals that utilize music are always the most powerful for me. Most folks reading this will be familiar with the power that skillful drummers bring to a ritual, especially for inducing ecstatic states. The use of rhythm to induce possessory trance has been practiced by humans since we first beat two sticks together. Music has been used to incite the frenzy of

battle among ancient Celts, to commune with spirits or Gods, as in Egyptian Zar and African-diaspora based Umbanda, and to heal the sick in classical Greece. At the root of all of these practices is the intent to induce a type of spiritual ecstasy, that something may be accomplished that is not attainable in an ordinary state of consciousness.

The qualities of certain sounds can bring us into energetic resonance with other worlds — for example, flutes evoke the spirits of Air; the warm strum of a guitar or mandolin can kindle a sense of the woods and realms of the Fey. When we listen to a

song that makes the hair stand up on the back of our necks, it can really open us to the numinous. Add to this magical intention, and the results can be profound.

What can you tell me about your newest projects and plans for 2013 and beyond?

I am particularly excited about The Ring of Enchantment, an online membership circle I have created in which I teach my music-driven magical work via a series of essays, meditations, and rituals. Sound brings magick into the body in a visceral way, and I am pleased to share this fusion of music and magick — which has been so powerful to me — with others.

Aside from that, my big project is to complete my next solo album! It's been a long time coming, and Winter and I are taking some time off the road so that we can give it the focus it's due. I look forwards to working on that this coming year!

Follow Sharon at her site at <http://www.sharonknight.net/> .

SENSING FIRE

One Element, Five Senses, One Journey

What would it be like if we learned to experience Fire not just in our ritual circles but in our every day lives? How can we get beyond our fear of Fire?

Fire. Whether we invoke it in the East or the South (or the North or the West, for that matter), the element of Fire brings its creativity, its passion, its complex dance of creation and destruction to every circle in which we welcome it. When we want to cleanse, purify or banish, we turn to fire: in cauldrons, in backyard fire pits, in ritual bonfires, or in the flame of a solitary candle. Guardians, Watchtowers, salamanders, and flame spirits without number have been part of the ritual circles in which I have stood throughout my Pagan life. Fire burns in our blood, in our hearts, in our passion, in our sexuality, in our creativity. Yet most of us are taught not to get too close to Fire in its physical form, or even to fear the power of its heat and flames.

What would it be like if we learned to experience Fire not just in our ritual circles but in our everyday lives; to sense Fire without fear?

Take this journey through Fire with the five senses as your guide; by grounding your relationship with Fire in your senses, in your physical body, you can learn to bring Fire energy to all you do – inside the ritual circle and in your every day life as well.¹



Sight. Most of the time, when we unexpectedly see Fire it is an unwelcome incident such as a wildfire, a house fire, etc. However, actual flames are only one way to see Fire. Taking the time to see Fire in our environment makes us more aware of this element.

Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and choose one or more representations of Fire to observe. Focus on your chosen representation and really see Fire. Choose one of the following methods (or come up with one of your own).

- Light a candle and gaze into the flame;
- Light a fire in your grill or fire pit and gaze into the flames;
- Cook a piece of raw meat or vegetable and watch how it transforms from the application of heat;
- Burn a piece of paper and watch it transform to ash; or
- Watch the wax drips from a lit candle, or place wax chips in a potpourri warmer and watch them soften and melt.

After you've made these observations, write down the answers to these questions in your journal or Book of Shadows:

What was it like to experience Fire through sight? What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of seeing Fire easier or more pleasant? How did this exercise make you feel emotionally? Where did you feel these images in your body? What emotions or memories came up for you?

Touch. The nature of Fire may make it more challenging to access through touch than the other Elements, but it is well worth our time to explore. Please practice common sense and caution.

For this exercise, choose one or more representations of Fire to touch. You might choose to:

- Light a candle and hold your hand a safe distance over the flame where you can feel the heat;



- Extinguish a candle flame by licking your fingers and pinching the flame; or,
- Sit out in the sun and fully experience its heat on your skin. (Use good sense, stay hydrated and wear sunscreen!); or
- Sit before a fire pit or fireplace with a fire in it and explore what the heat feels like. Compare what areas of your body near the flames feels like with those which are away from the fire.

After you have experienced your representation(s) of Fire, answer these questions:

What was it like to experience Fire through touch? What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of touching Fire easier or more pleasant? How did this exercise make you feel? Where did you feel this exercise in your body? What emotions or memories came up for you? Write about this experience in your journal or Book of Shadows.

Smell. Our sense of smell is the sense most closely tied to memory. Smell is also the sense least likely to feed us misleading information, as olfactory hallucinations are incredibly rare. Take the time to experience Fire through smell, and see what it brings up for you. In choosing how to “smell Fire,” try one or more of the following options



to experience Fire by following your nose You might choose to:

- Create a fire in your fireplace, fire pit, cauldron, or grill, and inhale the scent. Notice what the firewood or other material smells like, what the fire itself smells like, and if smells linger after the fire has been extinguished; or
- Light a match, and try to smell of the sulfur as it catches fire; or
- Light a candle or burn something in a fireproof container and smell the smoke.
- Try smelling Fire through essential oils and herbs that are associated with this element such as cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, frankincense, dragon’s blood, and plumeria. You can inhale these scents directly from a jar or bottle or place some herb or oil in/on your skin and sniff. You might also burn some of them in your censer or simmer them in a warming pot or on the stove. Inhale these scents and notice how your nose feels. What feelings and memories do these scents invoke? Or create “fire” based incense (see sidebar).

As we take the time to connect with Fire through our senses, we can move beyond our preconceived ideas about this element into direct gnosis.

When you’ve completed your smelling exercise, reflect on these questions: What was it like to experience Fire through smell? What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of smelling Fire easier or more pleasant? What different notes did you notice in the aromas? How did these smells make you feel? Where did you feel these smells in your body? Write about this experience in your journal or Book of Shadows.



Taste. Taste and smell are intricately linked, and both are strongly linked with memory. For this exercise, choose one or more representations of Fire to taste.

If you want to be literal about it, you can certainly place a match or other small flame in your mouth and experience taste that way. (Don’t try fire-swallowing unless you are taught, in person, by a professional. This powerful skill cannot be taught any other way). If you want to experience the taste of Fire in more edible ways, consider using:

- A pinch of any Fire herb, listed in the section on small above (use common sense and don’t taste anything toxic); or
- Jalapenos or other peppers, red pepper flakes, or a drop of hot sauce, or spicy food; or
- Spice cookies or spice cake (this will give you a taste profile with more of a “warm” sensation than a “burning” one.
- Adults only: try

a “flaming shot” of your favorite liquor or a sip of a “fiery” liquor such as hot pepper vodka, or peppermint/cinnamon schnapps. Keep your samples simple so you can enjoy them unadulterated.

Take the time to really focus on what you are eating/drinking/tasting. Do not do anything else while you eat — be fully present in the moment, whether you are tasting a pinch of habenero pepper or a smidge of hot salsa. As you eat, focus on the flavor, texture, and sensation of each representation of Fire. When you have completed your exploration, answer these questions: What did Fire taste like? What was pleasant? What was unpleasant? What feelings or emotions did this exercise bring up for you? What did tasting Fire feel like in your body? Where did you feel it? Write about this experience in your journal or Book of Shadows.

Hearing. Sound can bring up emotions in ways that no other sense can, which accounts for concepts like a couple having “their song” which reminds them of their relationship. This exercise challenges us to tune into the sounds of Fire, which can be mighty or gentle.

There are many ways to hear Fire. You might choose to:

- Light a fire in a cauldron, grill, fireplace, or fire pit. Listen to the different sounds – as the kindling catches, as the flames begin to consume it, as they burn, and then as they die down.

- Light a candle and listen to it. This may seem odd, but candle flames have their own voice if you listen – guttering, hissing, sizzling.

- Cook (especially over a flame, if that is possible) and listen to the sounds that the food (or the medium in which you cook it) makes. What’s the difference between the sound of boiling water and that of sizzling oil? How do both of them change as the heat intensifies or diminishes?

- Ask yourself what music you associate with Fire and listen to that as a counterpoint to listening to actual flames. This could be sounds that remind you of Fire, or songs that actually mention Fire, burning, etc.



When you've taken the time to listen, reflect on these questions: What was it like to listen to Fire? What was difficult

about this exercise? What was easy or fun? What sounds did you hear? What surprised you? What emotions or memories did this exercise evoke? What other ways can you think of to listen to Fire? What are “fiery” sounds to you? Write about this experience in your journal or Book of Shadows.

Completing the Journey and Further Work

After you have worked through all the sensory exercises, take time to reflect. What was it like to work the Fire in this way? Has your relationship with the Element of Fire changed? How? What did you learn? What surprised you? You may wish to perform a ritual or to thank Fire for being with you on your journey. Another idea is to build a Fire altar, including any ritual tools you associate with fire, some candles or oil lamps, God/Goddess images – anything you find inspires you to think fiery thoughts. You may want to set up an altar at the beginning of the exercise and add to it as you work through each sense’s exercise. Have fun as you explore this amazing element. ♠

SUSAN HARPER is an eclectic solitary Feminist Witch from Irving, Texas. She is a professor of Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies, with a focus on gender, religion, and sexuality. She is also an activist, community educator, and writer. When she's not making magick or fomenting social change, Susan is the head soapmaker, herbalist, and aromatherapist for Dreaming Priestess Creations. She shares her life with her partner, Stephanie, four cats, and two guinea pigs.

Magickal Fire Associations

Direction: South (East in some traditions)

Energy: Active, transformation, creativity, passion

Colors: Red, orange, gold, yellow

Scents: Cinnamon, plumeria, frankincense, dragon's blood

Stones: Carnelian, tiger's eye, red agate, red jasper

Magickal Tool: Sword/knife (Wand in some trads)

Magickal Purposes: Transformation, creativity, inspiration, sexuality, passion, activism, forward movement and progress.

Fire-Filled Crafts

You may also wish to create incenses or oils to use as you continue to build your relationship with Fire. Here are some recipes to play with as you explore Fire and ways to incorporate it into your practice.

Incense: You can burn the resins whole, or grind together with a mortar and pestle. Add each ingredient until you get the scent you desire. Burn on charcoal.

Fire Incense #1

Mix 1 part of each:
Frankincense
Dragon's Blood
Cinnamon

Fire Incense #2

Mix 1 part of each:
Orange peel
Lemon peel
Clove

Fire Incense #3

Mix 1 part of each:
Orange Peel
Lemon Peel
Frankincense

Oil: Gently warm the carrier oil in a pot. Add the essential oils and stir. You can double or triple this oil recipe, but do *not* increase the proportion of 1:5 of cinnamon or clove to other oils, as they can burn skin.

Fire Oil #1

Mix 1 part of each:
5 drops orange oil
5 drops lemon oil
1 drop clove (do not exceed)
1 drop cinnamon (do not exceed)
1 c. carrier oil such as grapeseed or olive ♠

Fire Oil #2

Mix:
1 c. carrier oil
5 drops frankincense
3 drops dragonsblood

ARTICLE BY
CATHIE RAYES

ILLUSTRATION

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SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



FIGHT
Five
WITH
Five

My Experience with
Protection Magick

I first came to the Pagan community through the Women's Spirituality Movement of the 1980s. In the circles I moved in, most people insisted that negativity and harm could only occur if one believed they were possible. For many years, I thought these discussions — of “hexing vs. healing,” “protective vs. mirror magick” were only rhetorical until one day these dilemmas became very real.

It happened a while ago, in a place that now seems far, far away. I was part of a community of like-minded folk attempting to send healing energy to a member of our group, when I ran afoul of a set of powerful people who were actively sabotaging my efforts. When I persisted in sending healing, they turned their attack on me. I was startled at first to have a headache spring up “out of nowhere” so intense that it completely stopped me from sending healing to the person who needed it. I thought it was just a random occurrence, until I discovered headaches and even toothaches had derailed several of the people who were sending healing in this community effort.

There was a time when I did not believe such a thing could be possible, when I believed that “psychic attacks” were nothing more than an over-used plot device in fantasy novels. There was a time when I thought I was merely hobbled by childhood fears, and that *not* believing in negative magick was all I needed in the way of protection work, since there wasn't really anything out there to be protected against. So encountering active negative magick, aimed at me personally, was quite surprising. I promptly set up new shields to passively deflect any attacks and resumed sending healing energy.

Unfortunately, I had not thought to specifically shield my dog. When the attack resumed, it slid off my shields and hit my nine-year-old Pomeranian, who suddenly staggered to her feet from a sound sleep, barking in pain and unable to use one leg. Again, no healing was sent to the person who needed it, since suddenly all my skills were needed for my dog. It took me several hours (and medication) to ease her sudden and inexplicable pain.

Meanwhile, my partner also came under psychic attack. Secure in my non-belief, I was not only powerless to defend her, but baffled by the attack even as I watched it happen. Eventually, my passive shielding was also overcome, and I was finally driven away. Then I discovered that my partner was the further victim of an attempted murder by her attacker. I took shielding more seriously after that, and was forced to reconsider my belief both in the reality of psychic attacks and the ethics of protection magic. Would it have been ethical to bind the attacker, or to use mirrors to return the attack? Would it have been ethical to hex the attacker?

The limits of the Wiccan Rede

Once upon a time, I would have held firmly to the precise instructions of the Wiccan Rede, but today I find its emphasis on avoiding harm at all costs to be impossible to fulfill in practice. “An it harm none” is simply not possible when someone must be stopped from harming others, for the perpetrator of an active attack (whether psychic or ordinary) would surely take being stopped in their tracks as “harm.” We must each be able to both protect ourselves and those around us who are unable to protect themselves.

Today, after my personal experiences of needing to protect myself, I have an additional ethical imperative: defend the defenseless against aggression. When someone tells me about being attacked (whether they understand what they are telling me or not), I feel ethically compelled to augment their protection with my own. Sometimes this can be accomplished by teaching the victim a simple binding magic of protection. For instance, the simplest way to deal with someone who is attacking you is to write the words “whoever is attacking me” on a small piece of paper, place the piece of paper inside a plastic water bottle, and put the bottle in the freezer. Under ordinary circumstances, this binding will keep your attacker from sending psychic attacks against you and will last as long as the water is frozen.

The next simplest binding is to place some

There was a time when I believed that “psychic attacks” were nothing more than a plot device in fantasy novels and that not believing in negative magick was all I needed in the way of protection work. Not any more.

Spell to Banish a Hex

Sweet sage
and cedar my
tools against your
arrogant sabotage,
this hex you placed
against my heart.

I reject you
and yours, your
tools and your
wars. I reject you
completely, begone!

A trace down the
line travels whip-
crack true to find
the bones of your
arson, your city-slick
ways to circle and
jog:

I reject you
and yours, your
tools and your
wars. I reject you
completely, begone!

You thought
I couldn't fend
for myself against
your smoke and
ashes, your pinball
slalom on my
heart? I reject you
and yours, your
tools and your
wars, I reject you
completely, begone!

You've tangled
at last in the reel
of my wrath, like
an envelope slitted
and torn; smug silk
of your pride's now
in pieces: I reject
you and yours,
your tools and your
wars. I reject you
completely, begone!

☞ CATHIE RAYES.

representation of the person (a photo, a possession, the name written out) in a mirror box—a cube made of glued-together mirrors, with the mirrored sides all facing inward so that any attack is reflected back at the attacker without harming others. This binding lasts until the mirrors crack or the box is taken apart. When used with prayer for protection, these two techniques of binding work nearly all the time. When they do not work, asking another Pagan or two to lend energy to the binding almost always accomplishes it.

When binding isn't enough

The worst attack I have ever endured required stronger methods. My partner and I came under unrelenting psychic attack from a person we could not avoid. He attacked us because we were Pagan, and possessed shields neither of us could penetrate. Our passive deflection shields failed, one after another; bindings failed; active channeling of the attack energy into the earth for transformation failed as well. Asking other Pagans for help also failed despite the large number of people who were sending protective energies to us; his unrelenting attacks were draining us. Nothing was left in our toolbox but hexing, and yet his defenses were such that everything slid off, so surely a hex would return to us.

One day I burned a nasty note he had written to me while chanting that this man could not affect me. Although I didn't believe it would really work, it unexpectedly broke a glamour which had surrounded him. We saw then that he was being actively protected by Baphomet and that we needed to ask for direct divine intervention. He claimed to be Christian so we asked his own deity, Jesus, for help in breaking off his unjust and harmful attacks. The two gods changed places during my spellwork, and Baphomet then began defending us against the man.

Shortly thereafter, we managed to cut all mundane ties with our tormentor, but I had been drained by the battle and needed to shut him out entirely. So I invented a new tool: "Be Gone Spray." I visualized picking up an industrial-sized spray can with the label "Jerk-Be-Gone," and I sprayed him right out of my thoughts. Every time I thought about him, I "sprayed" my thoughts and "dissolved" him. I was retraining my mind that thoughts about my attacker were not acceptable. The first day I had to spray several times an hour. After that, my thoughts about him gradually decreased until I could go several days without thinking about him at all. The immediacy of the attack over, I still had to deal with the consequences of the long battle. I had so much anger that I wasn't coping with life very well, so I invented another tool: "Rage Be Gone" Spray. That one I used to give myself a respite from the feelings of anger that were overwhelming me, "spraying" my hostile thoughts away until I could deal with my anger more rationally, process it and be done. That, too, was highly effective.

Coming to terms with the reality of psychic attacks against me has changed my life. I have grown in skills and abilities as I have developed ethical magickal responses to aggression. Today I know that I can defend myself and others.

I know that it is ethically important to consider the ramifications of my protection work on those around me, but that defending myself, my loved ones, and the innocent is not only acceptable, but required of me as an ethical Witch. ☞

CATHIE RAYES lives in Wichita, Kansas with her partner Gryph, one dog, three cats, and a young fruit and berry orchard. She follows an Eclectic path that leads her to explore as many facets of Paganism as she can find, and feels a primary connection to the Goddess of Compassion in all Her many Faces. You can find her online at <http://www.littlestonebird.com>.

INTERVIEW BY
CHARLYNN WALLS

“There are some people who have that a really strong connection to the Divine – as if their reception is more powerful, more flowing, more vital. Gede Parma is one of those people. What makes Gede even more unique is that he can radiate this divinity out. He’s plugged in, he receives, and he just emanates that joyous soulful energy. He’s the fruit of the vine. And his work is nectar for the spirit.”

Lucy Cavendish, Witch & Writer

In today’s age of point-and-click instant gratification, when many young people are consistently in the news for all the wrong reasons, it is refreshing to see many Pagan young people picking up the torch of leadership in our community. One such young man is witch, priest, and author Gede Parma. Haven’t heard of him yet? Don’t worry, you will before long.

Gede is driven to connect deeply with the world of magick, and he attacks everything he does with an enthusiasm that burns like fire. Gede – who hails from Queensland, Australia – first became involved in the Pagan community when he was fourteen, and is seen by many of his peers as a leader of their generation of Paganism. By seventeen, Gede had become the co-founder of Coven of the WildWood tradition, which currently has three covens in Australia and one in the United Kingdom. It doesn’t look like he’ll be slowing down any time soon, either; our intrepid interviewer Charlynn Walls caught him during his tour of the United States last summer.

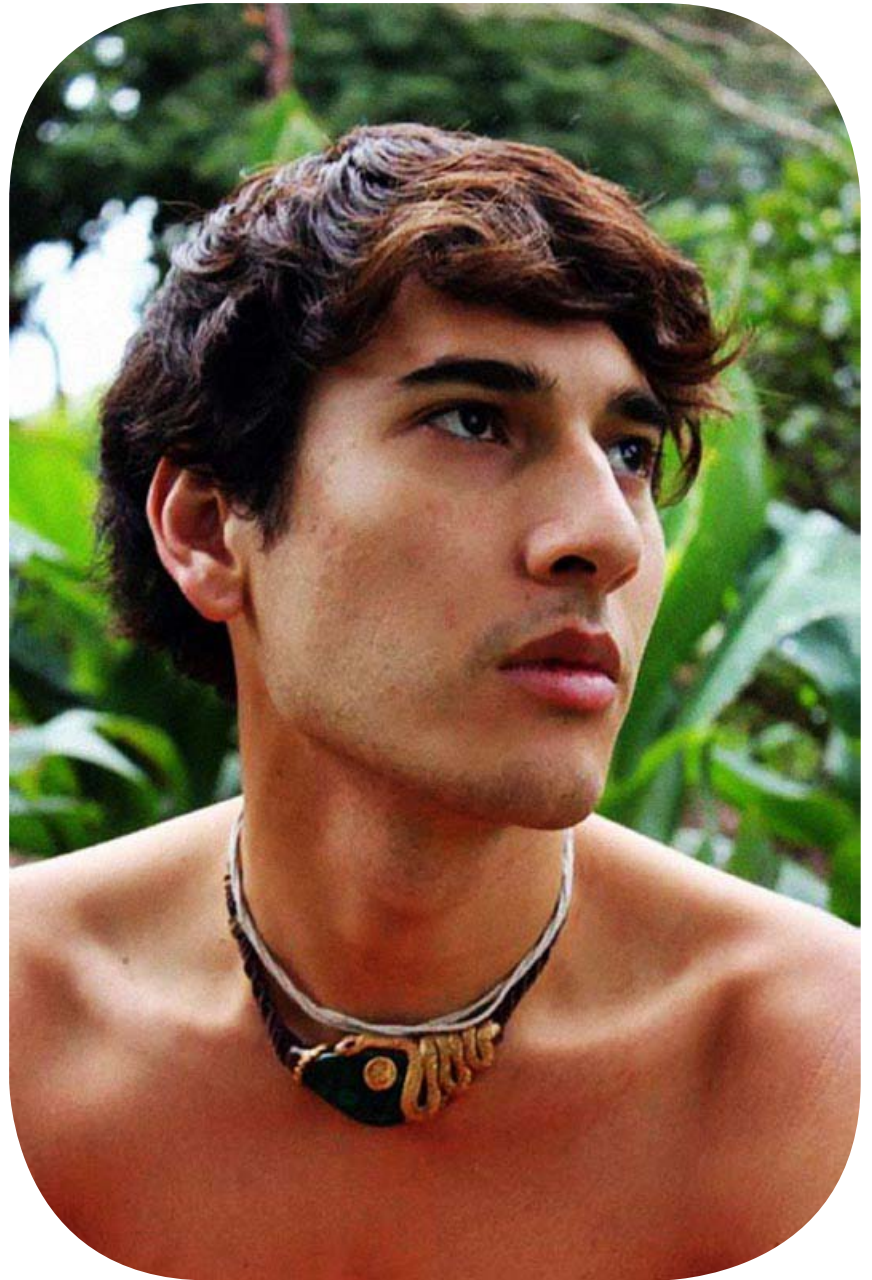


photo ©2013 Brendan Hancock.

gede FRUIT OF THE VINE parma

Tell our readers a little about your journey.

I was raised with a respect for the Gods, for the Spirits, and for the power/s able to be conjured by certain people aligned with their sacred nature. From my Balinese Hindu upbringing, I was placed in the context of pantheism, polytheism and animism. In many ways, this enabled me to circumnavigate many of the obstacles that typical Westerners have to face in deepening magickal consciousness. I am also a very Western-minded person; while I spent some time in Bali each year, I grew up in Australia, surrounded by a very moralistic Judeo-Christian community which did create issues as I deepened into my Pagan spirituality.

I came to the Craft at the age of twelve, after a series of juvenile attempts of “trying to be a Witch/warlock/wizard.” I had realized that I was a Witch and that I would walk the path for the rest of my life. I initially practiced an eclectic version of Wicca, until I discovered that I didn’t have to fit my square-head into a standard-brand round-hole; when Persephone (my soul-Goddess) came knocking, I realized that my destiny was taking me into a realm that I didn’t expect. Before Persephone, I didn’t really dally in the realm of deity – I simply communed with that very ambiguous paradigm of the nebulous and gender-essentialist “God and Goddess.” Nowadays I connect with an entire collective of Gods, Goddesses and spirits to whom I share ally-ship. I am always open to new experiences and will participate in almost any life-affirming celebration or ceremony.

You started Coven of the Wildwood with a few other young people at an early age. Why did you feel you needed to start your own tradition?

When I was fourteen, I was initiated into a teen Wiccan coven but it soon deteriorated into ego-trips and power-play. I reverted back to being a solitary for the remainder of high school, sharing the sabbats and esbats with others in my local community. When I moved to Brisbane at the age of seventeen, I had plans to meet and speak with several young Pagans and establish a group catering to our unique spiritual needs; that came swiftly to fruition, and the Coven of the WildWood is seven years old this year. The first coven has now given birth to two more groups – one which I founded (OakSun Grove) and one in Oxfordshire, England (Anthesterion Circle). We are now the WildWood Tradition of Witchcraft.

THERE IS MUCH MORE ROOM IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE, AWAY FROM THE NORTHERN INFLUENCE FROM WHICH MANY OF OUR PHILOSOPHIES DERIVE. THAT DISTANCE PERMITS US TO RE-CONTEXTUALIZE AND REINTERPRET THE MEANING BEHIND OUR SPIRITUALITY.

You’ve already written three books! What motivated you to become an author at such an early age? Were you trying specifically to reach younger Pagans?

My first book, *Spirited*, was born out of angst, but it ended up being a love-note to my own soul-story and to the journeys of other young Pagans. I catered explicitly in *Spirited* to Pagan youth seeking identity and direction; but the latter half of the book is open to all Pagans willing to look a little deeper into the Mysteries.

What challenges have you experienced in the Craft, specifically because you are young?

It is much easier for people – especially family and friends – to dismiss your spiritual interests as a phase or cult when you are young and inexperienced. When I first began attending open Pagan social-meets, I was shocked to find this attitude as well. Quite a few of the old-hands instantly regarded me as a “fluffy-bunny” simply because of my youth. (By the way, I believe that “fluffy-bunny” is a pejorative term and should be struck from the list, considering that the whole aim of the term is to qualify another person’s experience and perspective as worthless. Fluffy-bunnies do exist, but many of them will become exceptional Witches and Pagans in the future.)

This dismissive attitude used to be aimed at all Pagan young people, but more and more I see a change in attitude, and older Pagans are beginning to invest their hopes in my generation. In my travels in the States already I have had this spoken of by many respected Pagan elders and activists; they are often ecstatic to see the work people of my generation are doing in the community.

What prompted you to research the history of paganism in Australia for your book Crafting the Community?

The drive to put together *Crafting the Community* came about after being inspired by similar anthologies about Paganism generally, but which were comprised of mainly American contributors. I decided that it would be great to have something similar for Australian Pagans, telling our unique stories and perspectives from the southern-hemisphere angle. I wanted other Pagans to see the long history of the Australian Pagan search for identity to learn of the actions taken to fight for and safeguard our rights.

The most surprising thing I learned was how much was going on in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, the fact that *Witchcraft* magazine (which lasted over a decade here in Australia) was the first all-color, glossy-paged magazine catering for Pagans and Witches worldwide. It’s a great claim to fame! It is important to see where we come from, and that does not just refer to our ancient, ancestral inheritances in history, but our presence as a distinct people in this day and age.

photo ©2013 Sarah Cook



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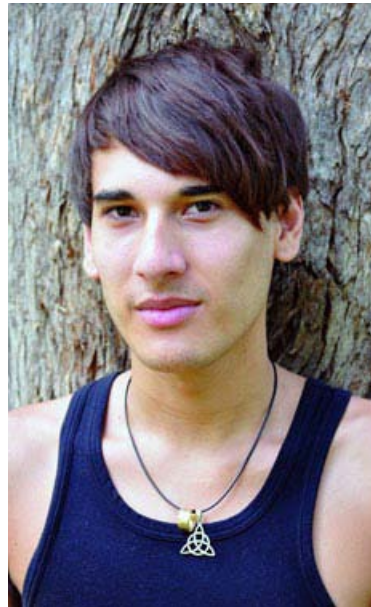
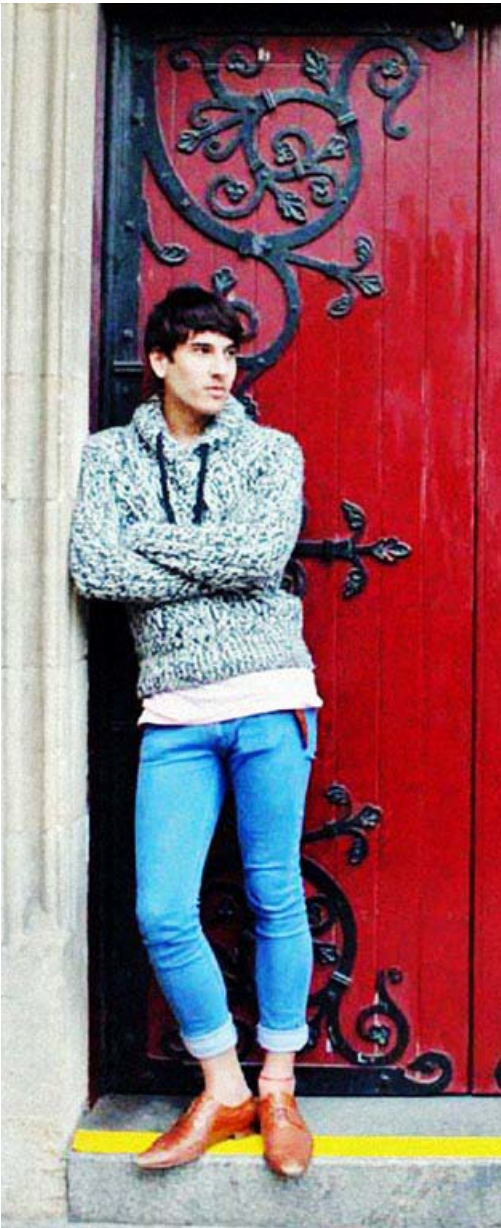


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GEDE'S LIST OF TEN NOTABLE AUSTRALIAN PAGANS



DAVID GARLAND, founder of the Pagan Awareness Network Incorporated (PAN Inc.) in Australia. PAN is the largest Pagan network/organization in Australia, and fights for our legal rights as citizens worthy

of equal treatment within our nation's legislation, etc. PAN also hosts a wide variety of events for the Pagan community through the year in most of our states and territories, and enables other autonomous groups to do the same. www.paganawareness.net.au/PAN/

SHE D'MONTFORD is one of the first legal Pagan celebrants in Australia and the founder of Shambhalla Awareness Centre; always supportive of those whom she sees doing positive work in our community. www.shambhalla.org/. Shambhalla Awareness Centre, P. O. Box 3541, Helensvale Town Centre, Queensland Australia



ROSALEEN NORTON (1917-1979) "The Witch of King's Cross." An exceptional artist born before her time, Roie was defamed as a hedonist and a devil-worshipper. Remembered fondly by those who knew her

personally. Pages that discuss her include www.controversial.com/Rosaleen%20Norton.htm and www.takver.com/history/rosaleen.htm

FIONA HORNE is an actress, witch, model and controversial Pagan celebrity. Well known in the global Pagan community; though she now calls Los Angeles her home, but as far as I know and hear she is still an Aussie girl. www.fionahorne.com/



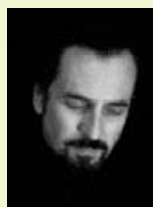
WENDY RULE is an Australian Pagan musician. Her voice, her music, her many Goddess-sent albums, her pride, her mystery. Wendy Rule is evocative... and from what I hear, she is quite well-loved in the States as well. www.wendyrule.com



SPIRAL DANCE (the band) Amazing, fun-filled, deeply meaningful lyrics and music come from these

wonder-Witches! www.spiraldance.com.au

TIM HARTRIDGE – Pagan radio and internet celebrity and teacher, Tim has founded many covens and helped to train and introduce many would-be Witches to the Craft. He is well-known in our community, and there



is always a strong opinion regarding him. From what I can tell, he is very devoted to the Craft, to the Mysteries, and to ensuring their continued celebration in the future. www.witchesworkshop.com/timhartridge/tim_hartridge.html



LUCY CAVENDISH has produced many inspiring works (including several decks of oracle cards, my favorite being the *Dragonfae*). Lucy started *Witchcraft* magazine back in the day and

has done much to improve our image. <http://www.lucycavendish.com/home/noflash.html>



STACEY DEMARCO (best-known in Australian households as being the "metaphysics" judge on the psychic program, *The One*) is also one upstanding witchy-woman. <http://www.themodernwitch.com/>

LEE MORGAN — one of the first Traditional Witches in Australia to come public and write a book on the subject (*A Deed Without a Name*, Moon Books, 2013). Lee writes, teaches and marvels with the Mysteries in Tasmania. <http://www.blogger.com/profile/10045165717518868527>. GEDE PARMA. 



What are the important issues you see facing the Australian Pagan Community today?

Pagans are still struggling to be heard and seen here in Australia. We are definitely making inroads; I was blessed enough to be present alongside many esteemed local and international Pagans at the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne. Through the connections we made at the Parliament with many American Pagans, we realized that interfaith is truly deserving of as much attention and honour as it can get. It is truly a worthy cause. It will also help bring to light that Pagans are just as spiritual and devoted to our causes as any other tradition and its adherents.

What distinguishes Australian Pagans from those of other countries?

Australian Pagans tend to be, well...Australian. Australians are known for their love of laughter, sarcasm, dry-wit and boisterousness. There is much more room in the southern hemisphere, away from the Northern influence from which many of our philosophies, practices and traditions derive. That distance permits us to re-contextualize and reinterpret the meaning behind our spirituality. There is an organic freshness to our way of life as Pagans in the Great Down-Under.

In the U.S. we often see pagans taking cues from the Native peoples and incorporating some of those practices into their own practice. Do you see this happening with Aboriginal practices in Australia?

Rarely, if ever. For many indigenous cultures worldwide, the absorption of native spiritual practices into other systems is considered the final insult after hundreds of years of destruction and dispossession. I personally believe that if a culture, a custom or a spirit calls to you genuinely

(regardless of context or origin) then it is only right to respond, but always with respect and with an aim towards conscious relationship and communion. There are definitely Pagans I have met who incorporate [Australian] indigenous practices, but it is a respectful syncretism which occurs. I believe it needs to be this way. We also need to remember that Paganism often opens doors to discover our own ancestral and indigenous heritage. Indigenous also means “of the land” and when we do the work of attuning to where we are and honoring that particular manifestation of the Great Mother, we gradually become native. We are all native Gaians, as my friend Jarrah would say.

Are you seeing more material being published specifically for the Southern Hemisphere now?

Not as much as I would like. There are a few books published here and there catering to that need, but it seems no one has yet taken it upon themselves to write an Australian *Book of Shadows*; although there have been attempts. Of course, the concept of a single BOS for a whole country might seem completely ridiculous considering that we are a vast and diverse collection of traditions. We are vehemently individualistic, and yet, conversely, deeply tribal. I do know of one book in the works that would be of much interest to Australian Pagans looking to honor the spirits of place, of time and of heritage simultaneously, and I hope that the author completes it!

What projects are you working on now?

My focus has really shifted in the past two years. I am now the proud author of three published books, all through Llewellyn Worldwide. My most recent book is *Ecstatic Witchcraft*, which was released in mid-2012. I toured the US in both 2010 and 2012 for *By Land, Sky & Sea* and *Ecstatic Witchcraft*, respectively. My writing projects are all collaborative at the moment; I am working on a book with my good friend Jane Meredith and an Oracle Deck with another awesome friend Lily Collard, whose current profession is tattooing. She is the artist of the Oracle Deck and it will blow people away.

I've also become much more involved in the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft, and I have been co-teaching Reclaiming Core Classes and at WitchCamps. Personally, I find that while WildWood is my personal religiosity and intimate tribe, Reclaiming is my connection to a broader community of Witches and Pagans seeking to do the work of justice and healing. Our world is in sore need of it! Finally, I am also looking to release a CD of my own chants this year.

To find out more about Gede, his Wildwood traditions, and his many projects, check out his website at www.gedeparma.com.



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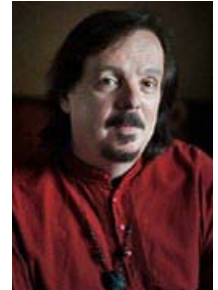
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Old World Witchcraft *by Raven Grimassi* artwork by Jane Starr Weils

Divine Fire, Sacred Ash

Combine fire and herbs for a potent magickal mix.

As an Aries, I've been fascinated with fire for most of my life, and it's not just me. Watch anyone sitting in front of a warm hearth or a campfire and you'll observe fire's mesmerizing power. In the prehistoric world, Fire wasn't as readily available as the elements of Earth, Air and Water. Fire appeared almost magically: when it fell from the sky as lightning, arose in the midst of flowing lava, or was created through friction (and later through a glass lens). In short, unique among the elements, fire had to be intentionally invoked even in its material form.

As an element, fire is associated with transformation. Anything that fire touches changes: light a piece of paper, or a log, or even flesh, and, left unfettered, fire will transform it to ash. In Old Ways Witchcraft, the image of fire beneath a cauldron represents the principle of transformation through the alchemy of the cauldron. Into the cauldron for transformation went a variety of items; most importantly, herbs. Among the ancient arts of Witchcraft is the use of herbs and other plants for the making of tinctures, potions, sachets, and talismans. A lesser-known use of plants is the creation of magical and ritual ashes.

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust

Ashes have featured in spiritual traditions for millennia; in many, ashes are used (often marked on the forehead) for a variety of purposes, often related to the concepts of transition, transformation, or connection. This is also the heart of the meaning related to the use of ashes in Old World Witchcraft.

Not all magickal ashes require fire; the bark of trees, finely ground down into sawdust, is also called "ash" in the magical tradition. Heat,



in the form of friction, can be regarded as a manifestation of Fire in such a process, and in this light we can assign its elemental nature to the process of transformation.

There are two key uses of ashes in Old World Witchcraft. The first (and best-known) is the creation of magical sigils. The second is the often overlooked practice of enriching of soil in the magickal garden. In the case of the latter, ashes from every spell or ritual are worked into the soil. This creates a strong reservoir of energy that empowers the plants and passes to them specific properties imprinted in the ashes through ritual or spellcraft work.

In the tradition I practice, we create what is called a Shadow Garden, associated with the concept of the "organic memory of the earth." The basic idea is that every living thing on earth that has ever died and was buried in the earth passed its essence along into the soil, and furthermore, that this "memory" is retained within the mineral composition of the soil.

As a further application of this idea, soil in the Shadow Garden is instilled with the memory of the magical imprints contained within the ashes that come from our spells and rituals. A specific rite or work of magick, if it uses ashes, passes its intent into them, which then can be worked into the soil of the garden around a particular plant. For example, ashes from a spell for prosperity can be worked into the soil around a plant that is assigned the correspondence of prosperity. The plant absorbs the energy, which increases its own magical nature associated with prosperity. The next time this plant is used in prosperity magick, it will lend even more potency to the work at hand.

Creating magickal herbal ashes adds the transformative power of fire to your workings.

The process of creating magickal ash begins with harvesting the herbs that you will be using. In my tradition, we sing "the harvester song" as we approach the garden. This song — which can be unique to an individual or shared as a coven as part of your tradition — can be anything from humming a simple melody to a full scale song complete with

written lyrics. Its purpose is to create an environment in which the plant accepts the harvesting act as a spiritual moment, rather than as unwelcome destruction or an annoying intrusion. When, as magicians and witches, we work with plants, we must also work with their spirits, and therefore we want to be in "common cause" with our plant allies as we harvest them.

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Creating a Herbal Ash for Magick

The best time to harvest an herb is just before it blossoms, even if you are harvesting leaves; look for the appearance of buds or the first signs of a new blossom. (Note: for the purposes of this article, I will assume you are going to use the leaves of a plant, but the underlying instruction also applies to flowers.) Talk to the herb and explain why you need to harvest some of it, adding that you will return its essence back into the garden. Always use a sharp blade to quickly sever what you need, and leave an offering whenever you harvest. I like to use pure water into which I have passed good thoughts while blowing breath across the liquid surface.

During all of these processes, be sure to concentrate on your magical intent and see the outcome in your mind's eye. Gather the branches that you received from the plant (always think in terms of receiving a gift from the plant as opposed to taking a part of it against its will). Group them into bundles and tie each bunch at or near the stems. Hang the bundles to dry in a sheltered area, in a cool spot with low humidity. It usually takes about one to two weeks for the herbs to dry thoroughly, although this time period can vary depending upon environmental conditions.

When the leaves are completely dried, remove them from the stems and put them on a cloth. Next, crumble the leaves between the palms of your hands, and let the fragments fall back on to the cloth. (If you are going to use the stems as well, cut the stems into tiny pieces; otherwise be sure to compost/bury the stems as you would any woody yard cuttings.) When all the leaves have been crumbled (and stems if you are using them) pour them into your mortar and pestle set.

The mortar and pestle is used to energetically charge the plant material with your desire. To accomplish this, take the pestle in hand and decide whether your intent is related to increase or decrease (gain or loss). This will determine the direction in which you'll turn the pestle within the mortar as you grind the herbs. The traditional method calls for a clockwise (deosil) grinding motion for increase and a counterclockwise (widdershins) movement for decrease. While performing this action you can add "words of enchantment" that you speak while grinding the herbs. The words can rhyme

or not, but they need to "inform" the herbs as to what you desire in terms of results. In other words, you are answering the implied question: what is your intent and what purpose will the herbs carry?

To illustrate the process, let's look at preparing ash from mint leaves for healing. The mint is harvested and dried in the manner described above. After being placed in the mortar, the herbs are ground with the pestle in a clockwise movement while you say these words:

*In a circle of power
I turn the wheel,
calling to forces
that mend and heal*

*I conjure these forces
in space and time,
and into these herbs
I hereby bind
(repeat this three times as you continue to
grind the herbs)*

Next, prepare to light a small charcoal block with a match or lighter (the charcoal represents the shadow memory deep inside the earth.) Before striking, evoke the flame as the presence of divinity, saying:

*I call into the black potential
from which all things issue forth,
and bring through the sacred flame,
and here give it birth.*

(Strike the match or lighter, and watch the flame for a moment, seeing it as the bright presence of the divine spark, and then light the charcoal.)

When the charcoal is lit and glowing, place a pinch of herbs from the mortar onto the charcoal, and continue until all the mint is burned to ash. Your intent is that through the fire the herbs transform from material use to spiritual application. Each time you place a pinch of the mixture on the coal, say:

*Through sacred fire
change form in kind,
otherworld likeness,
body, spirit and mind.*

When all the plant material you have gathered is turned to ash, take a spoon and collect it.

Some of the charcoal ash will come along with it, and that's fine because it connects back in association to the mineral composition in which the Shadow memory resides. If you are not going to use the ash right away, then preserve it in a labeled jar until needed.

When you are ready to cast a spell using this ash, set a light-colored plate on your work area. Sprinkle a fine coat of ash across the surface of the plate. Using your finger, draw a symbol in the ash appropriate for your purpose. In doing so the ash will move away to reveal the color of the plate, and the symbol will then show itself. For healing purposes, draw a caduceus or some other symbol that is healing to you.

When drawing the symbol in the ash, speak these words of enchantment:

*A symbol of healing
in the ash now shows,
restoration of body
and normalcy grows.
I send forth now
with this magical ash
the empowerment needed
to accomplish the task.*

There are several methods of delivering the magical energy charge to the person who is to be healed. One magickal technique is to blow the ash into the wind with the intent that this will carry the healing to the person; another method is to sprinkle the ash where the person is likely to walk on it as they pass by (the porch or in front of a doorway is one example.) The most direct method is to mix the ash into a drink or food; if you choose this method use only small amounts to avoid tasting the ash. Always be conscientious when selecting plants for use in ash work, and be sure they are not toxic, either when raw or when burned. Never just guess or hope that the ashes are safe if the plant material itself is poisonous or toxic; toxic smoke can create extremely serious affects or even death in susceptible individuals.

When turning plant material into ash, it's important to remember that the process of burning is using fire to transform, not to destroy or take anything away from the plant material. If you don't have a natural affinity for fire, or have any difficulty with this idea, there's a simple technique that can be helpful in embracing fire as a transformational force.

Select a metal container that can withstand direct contact with flames; I use a stainless steel dessert bowl, the kind often used to serve ice cream in restaurants. For the purpose of this article you can simply use the metal lid to a medium size jar (pickles for example.) Fill the lid about halfway with a good quality cologne or a high alcohol liqueur (180 proof is ideal.) Carefully touch a lighted match to the surface of the liquid in the lid and it will ignite with a gentle blue flame. Once the flame appears, use both hands (high enough to avoid being burned) to form a triangle shape above the flame. This configuration will require that the index fingertips of both hands touch as well as the tips of both thumbs. Hold the palms of both hands downward so that you see the backs of your hands level and facing up. If you do this correctly you will see a distinct triangle formed in the opening between your hands. In my tradition we refer to this as the Triangle of Manifestation.

Position your hands so that you can see the flames easily through the triangular opening between them. Focus your attention on the flames and say the following words of enchantment:

*By the triangle of manifestation,
I evoke the fire of change,
transform from matter to spirit
all that it claims."*

*Nothing is lost
but all is gained
for what enters the fire
therein it remains.*

Once you have successfully made this conscious (and subconscious) alignment you can precede without inner conflict. Use the blue flame to light a match that is to be used to ignite the charcoal block. This is a magical transfer of the blue flame of transformation to the match. In this way you wield the mystical flame that changes matter into spirit. ♠

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/

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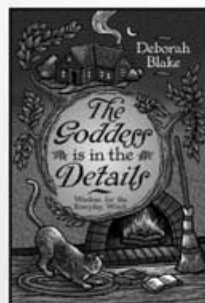
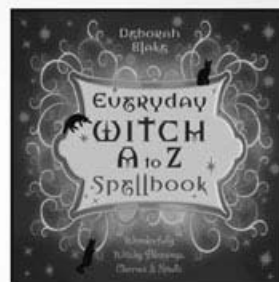
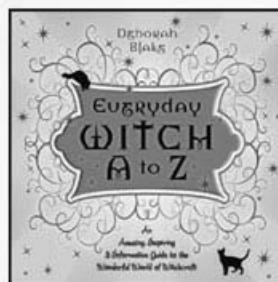
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Connections by Archer

The Tree

Root and branch, trees are central to our oldest myths.

In the beginning, three young gods walked along the shore, that place of change and transformation. Finding two trees torn up by the roots, they made them into the first humans, man and woman. And we've been looking for our roots ever since.

This Norse tale offers one explanation for why we look to the tree to tell us who we are, and why we feel both awe and intimacy in its presence. Our biology strengthens that connection: our veins and nerves, like the rivers of the earth, follow the branching patterns of trees. Our trunk and limbs and digits have the same proportional relation as the trunk and limbs and twigs of a tree. The map of our lungs, the grooves of water running down through the beach to the sea, the very flow of life itself — all take the pattern of the tree. The tree is freedom and structure, rootedness and reaching held in fruitful balance.

Sacred Space

Trees have always exerted a religious fascination. Though older and taller, they stand on the earth as we do and so can still remind us of ourselves. They are thus the perfect link between ourselves and something greater. The pattern of an impressive tree and a water source defined virtually every sacred site in the ancient world. In third millennium BCE Egypt, centers of worship were marked by the planting of a Syrian fir. There are numerous Minoan, Assyrian, and Sumerian images of a fenced tree beside an altar, or flanked by deities. In Greece, many temples were centered on trees sacred to specific deities. In Canaan, "the standard equipment of a 'high place' was an altar, a stone pillar, and a sacred tree."¹ The Norse temple at Uppsala featured a sacred grove, a spring, and an immense tree



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with magical qualities. In the British Isles, trees by healing wells or springs are still visited, and numerous special trees are enshrined in folklore as sacred or magical.

But the ultimate sacred tree is the World Tree depicted in myth — the invisible spine of a multilayered universe. What the individual tree was for its local shrine — the source of power and meaning — the World Tree is for the whole cosmos. Like the local tree, the World Tree has a spring or well located at its base — but it also has roots that delve the underworld abyss and branches that rake the heavens. (An early Egyptian concept held that a celestial tree branched out across the sky, with the stars as its fruit and the gods perched in its boughs.)² There is often a serpent or dragon at the World Tree's base, and an eagle, hawk, or phoenix at its crown. Other animals and divine beings attend it, feed from it, or live in it. Versions of the World Tree existed in the myths of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Eurasia, the Pacific, Mesopotamia, and India, while World Tree imagery can be glimpsed in the magical trees of Greek and Irish myth.

Birth and Nurture

Trees and their groves are natural symbols of the center, and thus of the origin, of life. Sacred trees "served for the community as a model of the original centre, set up at creation when order emerged from chaos."³ To the Germanic Semnones tribe, their sacred grove was "the cradle of their race,"⁴ while in Norse tradition, the world tree Yggdrasil both precedes and outlasts the gods who assemble beneath it, a practiced echoed in the gathering of the Swedish tribes near Uppsala's great tree to offer sacrifice and renew the community.

Ancient Near Eastern myth places humanity's origin in a garden complete with a Tree of Life, serpent, and waters flowing out to the world. It was in the garden of Eridu that the Babylonian gods (like the Biblical Yahweh) fashioned humans from clay near the magical Kiskanu tree. In Egyptian myth the navel of the world is Heliopolis, where the Ished tree marks the birthplace of the gods and bears the lineage of the pharaohs on its leaves and trunk.

The place of birth is also one of sustenance. Dews from Yggdrasil and drops from its leaves enrich the earth, and its fruit ensures safe childbirth. It stands over the well of wisdom, offers the mead for Odin's warriors, and is the source of the world's rivers. In the tales of Ireland, Greece and the North, golden apples from magical trees provide immortality to gods and inspiration to men. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, the fruit of the cosmic tree keeps gods immortal, while in the Indian Vedas, the juice of this fruit is said to invigorate humans as well. In the Egyptian afterlife, the goddess Nut's holy sycamore offers food and drink and even a mother's breast to succor the souls of the dead. In many stories, we hear of impressive trees — symbols of strength and fertility — holding up palace roofs or supporting the thrones and marital beds of rulers and deities.

The strength associated with trees is invoked again when they offer protection to the vulnerable. A tree grows to encase the coffin of the god Osiris, protecting it until Isis can locate and revive him. In the final days of Ragnarok, Yggdrasil sheltered the last two humans so that they could survive to repopulate the earth. This echoed the protection a hollowed-out tree offered the first Norse gods — who used it to ride out the flood of Ymir's blood after they murdered him to create the world. A tree-coffin could also be a kind of ark to the next life, as in the tree trunk burials (aka "boat burials") of many a Bronze Age grave in Europe and Britain.⁵

Revelation

If life began and is nurtured at the tree, so is Fate. In Egyptian myth, the goddess Sekhmet sits at the foot of the cosmic tree, recording on its leaves all future events, while the Norns, three divine women at the base of Yggdrasil, weave the fates of gods and humans. These and other mysteries are thus available to those — whether shaman or priestesses — who dare to approach the tree in prophetic readiness or meditative trance. Connecting all the worlds, the tree is a channel to wider truths.

The Eurasian shaman traversed a multi-level reality by means of the World Tree and the trance-inducing beat of a drum. The drum was made of wood from the shaman's clan tree, and covered with skin from a deer born at its foot, while the World Tree itself was symbolized by an actual tree with steps cut into it, a ladder, or a central tent pole.⁶ In other traditions, the tree was not climbed, but listened to: at Greece's oracle of Dodona, priestesses interpreted the rustlings of a great oak's leaves in order to speak the words of Zeus, while at Delphi, the laurel spoke for Apollo when the Pythia chewed its leaves and then uttered inspired words. For the Hebrews, the oak of Mamre (a Canaanite sacred site) marked the site of God's visitation to Abraham.⁷ King David read the will of God in the whisperings of the mulberry trees,⁸ and Deborah prophesied and judged under the palm tree at Bethel.⁹ In Asia, it was the Buddha who, in the sheltering presence of the Bodhi tree, discovered ultimate wisdom.

Sacrifice

But there is more than one route to transcendence through the tree. Sacred trees were popular recipients of sacrifice, for the tree symbolized the center where humans could contact the beings of all worlds through the act of offering. From Rome

to Scandinavia to the British Isles, sacred trees were offered libations, and hung with ribbons, lamps, and trophies of war. Even today we decorate Maypoles and Yule trees, echoing ancient practices from Rome to Britain and Ireland. In pre-Christian Uppsala at the nine-year tribal assembly, animal and human sacrifices were hung on the trees of the sacred grove. In fact, the hanged men of Uppsala, and the image of a great tree hung with this deadly fruit, may have been the reason Yggdrasil was said to be an ash: the seed pods hanging from the ash tree look like tiny, drooping bodies.¹⁰

In myth, these tree sacrifices are echoed in the sufferings of gods and heroes. Odin hung for nine days on Yggdrasil "a sacrifice of myself to myself," before giving a great cry and snatching up the runes, mystical letters used in magic and divination.¹¹ Herne the Hunter, an antlered hero/demigod from British folklore, hung himself on a great oak in Windsor Forest and haunts it still. The spine of the murdered god Osiris was represented in ceremony by the Djed column, a stylized tree of life raised annually in celebration of his revival by Isis.¹² Suffering often led to new life and power through the tree: Odin claimed the runes, Jesus rose to rule heaven, and Osiris became Lord of the Dead.

Like the heroes who hung from it, the tree itself also suffered: "Yggdrasil suffers greater hardship than men know," Odin says in the saga *Grimnismal*.¹³ The great tree was constantly gnawed by its own creatures: the harts in the branches, the great serpent at its base. Yet it endured to nourish life, even through the end time of Ragnarok. Similarly, in the early English poem "Dream of the Rood," the tree of the cross spoke as a living being who suffered along with Jesus, before being "resurrected" as a jeweled icon.¹⁴ In the Indian *Rig Veda*, the Soma tree is deified as a god at once priest and victim, offering from its own crushed branches the life-giving food of the gods.¹⁵ Hero and tree merge in a sacrifice that moves from suffering to transcendence.

Macrocosm and Microcosm

In the Indian Upanishads the all-encompassing nature of the World Tree is made explicit as the incarnation of the One who is All, Brahman: "In that [tree] all worlds are contained and none can pass beyond."¹⁶ Hints of the Cosmic Tree can also be found in miniature in the Ancient Near Eastern and Greek images of the caduceus — a herald's staff entwined by one or more snakes, sometimes topped with wings, which echoes the Djed pillar (both tree

of life and spine of Osiris) shown entwined with a serpent at the Dendera Temple complex.¹⁷

In Indian Tantra these motifs of tree and spine, serpent and flight all come together, in an explicit conflation of human and divine, local and cosmic. In Tantra, "the spinal column is seen as...the Tree of Life, with its roots in the nether world and its branches in the heavens beneath the 'firmament' of the skull."¹⁸ A coiled serpent lies at the base of the spine, the embodiment of one's primal, physical energy. When yogic discipline has enabled serpent energy to climb the tree of the spine, it takes flight into transcendence, becoming the spiritual energy which erases all division between the individual and the universal Self. As the unborn hang within their mothers' bodies before emerging to a new world, as Odin hung on the tree before grasping the runes, so do Tantric yogis "hang" off their spinal core, seeking the sacrifice of their limited selves and a rebirth in which the soul takes wing.

The World Tree, mythic pillar of the world, altar of gods and heroes, can be seen all around us in the burgeoning world of life, death and renewal. But it can also be found within us, as the final and most intimate place of sacrifice and revelation. Like every truly resonant symbol, the tree brings us back to the full richness of ourselves as expressions of a single, infinitely mysterious reality. ☸

Endnotes

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- ¹⁵E.O. James, "The Tree of Life," *Folklore*, Vol. 79, p. 245.
- ¹⁶Katha Upanishad, VI. 1, in *The Upanishads*, F. Max Muller, trans., The Clarendon Press, 1884, p. 21.
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Looking for Trouble by Hecate Demetersdatter

Fire in the Belly

Passion shouldn't overwhelm our magickal ethics.

Involvement in politics often springs from a fiery passion. Someone or something we love — Mamma Gaia, equal marriage rights for gay people, free access to the ballot box, peace, a local creek targeted by developers — is threatened and we respond with a protective passion inspired by our love. Or, something negative hits us in the guts. Could be a homeowners' association forcing a family to stop growing vegetables in their front yard, a cynical attempt to steal teachers' pensions to fund tax cuts for millionaires, the use of government property and resources to support Christian schools, attempts to "other" the children of immigrants, or Westboro Baptist Church disrupting yet another funeral. So wrong! We can't imagine not taking action to put a stop to this nonsense.

The fiery nature of politics can cause us to surrender to what Ivo Dominguez has called the "enchantment of forgetfulness." In fairy tales, an enchantment causes the characters to see a beautiful woman as an old hag in order to test the protagonist's hospitality or a fisherman's hut as a golden palace in order to test for greed. The fey folk can enchant a visitor so that, while a hundred years pass above The Hill, the visitor imagines that only one night has elapsed. The enchantment of forgetfulness (cast by patriarchy, dualism, and modern civilization) causes us to see a fractured universe, a place where "they" are completely the bad guys and "we" are completely on the side of truth, justice, and democracy. Once we "other" our political opponents, it makes it easier to decide that our ends (a just society!) justify the means (making it more difficult for "their" voters to get to the polls). After all, the story goes, "their" voters are the 47% percent who "believe that they are victims" or, from the other side of the aisle, we can claim that our side is the 99% while the other side is the mere 1% of greedy "elites."

The enchantment of forgetfulness (cast by patriarchy, dualism, and modern civilization) can cause us to see a place where "they" are completely the bad guys and "we" are completely on the side of truth, justice, and democracy. What does this have to do with magic? Everything.

What does this have to do with magick? Everything.

I'm an old hedge Witch, not a philosopher or an ethicist. But even I understand that there is an ethics of magick, to be ignored at the magick worker's peril. Many consider the Wiccan Rede a summary of the key ethics of Wicca and many other modern Pagan religions. Auntie Doreen phrased it thusly: "Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill. An it harm none, do what ye will." Witches are also warned to observe the Rule of Three. In *High Magick's Aid*, Uncle Gerald wrote that, "Thou hast obeyed the Law. But mark well, when thou receivest good, so equally art [thou] bound to return good threefold. (For this is the joke in [W]itchcraft, the [W]itch knows, though the initiate does not, that she will get three times what she gave, so she does not strike hard)."

An even simpler summary of this Rule says that whatever you send out into the universe will come back to you threefold.

It's confusing, because, of course, almost our every action — even the not-under-our-conscious-control actions of our immune system destroying the bacteria or cancer cells that would ultimately kill us — does hurt someone. We can't eat a chicken sandwich, or a tablespoon of honey, or an ear of corn without "harming some." (Wiccans aren't Jains, walking around with our besoms out in front of us to insure that we won't step on any ants.)

Another equally-well-known adage suggests that "a Witch who cannot hex cannot heal." So what *are* magickal ethics and how *does* one apply them to political magick?

"Reasonable minds," as one of the least reasonable of my legal colleagues is fond of saying, "can disagree," but my take is that both the Wiccan Rede and the Rule of Three summarize complicated concepts in short, easily-remembered forms, which always attends some loss of nuance. My concept of the Universe/the Goddess/reality is far too beautifully complex to allow it to be reduced to some Accountant in the Sky, watching what we do, multiplying by three, and sending simple messages back to us. (Sometimes, it seems as if that might be a simpler system, but, no, I don't believe that if I work magick to strengthen my immune system and end my cold the universe will ensure that the cold viruses get three more shots at my bronchial tubes or that, if I do magick to help a friend find a job, three rejected job applicants will get a shot at mine.)

I can't remember ever hexing anyone, but I've certainly done magick — including political magick — to bind those that I thought were out to work harm, although I'm careful to word the binding with legal precision, so as to ensure that I, myself, am willing to be "able to do only justice tempered by mercy," or to "have to pay my fair share." I do subscribe to the general principle that one should not do magick that

will interfere with the free will of others. Thus, while most Witches might do a spell to help a young friend find his/her own true love, most will not do a spell to make Mr. Jones fall in love with Our Young Friend. That would involve interfering with Mr. Jones' free will, and few of us are willing to have our own free wills put equally at peril. Or, while I will do a spell to turn the energy of Retrograde Mercury (sadly, too often a force in American elections) back upon those who would make the electoral process difficult and confusing, I've never done a spell that would cause, say, conservative Republicans to have to stay home from the polls en masse due to an outbreak of illness. (Or for any other reason.)

You can find many conscientious Pagans who advocate avoiding political magick all together, but I'm an ardent feminist and, grounded in the belief that the personal is the political (and vice-versa), I can't think of any magickal working that doesn't have political ramifications. ("Hail Asphaltia, full of grace, grant this taxi an open space," will, ultimately,

advantage my needs over someone else's, even if it only means that I get home in order to blog sooner.) As a lawyer living and working in Washington, District of Columbia, I do political magick almost every day. I have never, ever, gone past the White House, or the United States Capitol, or the blindingly-white Supreme Court building without drawing up energy and throwing it out: "Do good for Gaia and not evil." I have never written a brief without sending it off to be filed with the intention: "For the good of all and the harm of none." I have never driven past the C Street Residence (which houses the fundamentalist organization known as "The Family," go ahead, Google it) without warding myself with magickal mirrors, sending right back to the men there what they are sending out into the world.

So what *are* the ethics of political magick?

My first rule is that I don't use magick to do anything that I wouldn't also work to achieve using mundane methods. Thus, if I'd write a letter to my Congressperson on a topic, I'll also do magick around it. If I'd show up, hold a sign,

and protest (and, whooo, boy, have I done that a zillion times in my life) in order to support a political cause, I'll do magick around that subject as well. If I'd climb up into a tree to stop loggers from cutting it down, I'll do magick for the same purpose. If I'd be willing to be bound from seeking discovery into women's personal medical files, I'll do magick to bind officious Right Wing operatives from doing the same. Since I'm unwilling to take any mundane steps to prevent *anyone* from voting, I also won't do magick to get those I disagree with to stay home on election day. Because I would never take down the other side's campaign signs, I won't do magick to blow them away. (Of course, your mileage may vary.) ☞

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Beyond the Circle by Ashleen O'Gaea

Lessons from Campfires

The best fires are the ones we keep under control.

One thing that distinguishes the tradition of Wicca that I follow is that we camp, which makes it natural for me to think of this issue's theme in terms of camp fires . . . and the occasional forest fire. We talk a lot about fire gazing, and sometimes we take those greenish sticks that burn many-colored, so that late in the evening we can ooh and ahh as purples and blues and greens flicker the gold and orange flames. (Don't forget that perennial debate about the best way to lay a fire: as a pyramid, or as a raft?)

Though our beliefs and practices are in many ways dissimilar, Fire means "energy" in all three of these best-known Pagan/Heathen religions. Druids think of Fire as transformative and as the Element that holds Earth, Sea, and Sky together. For the Ásatrú, Fire is chaos to Ice's stasis, and where these two Elements meet, Order becomes possible. As a Wiccan priestess, I associate Fire with power — physical, mental, and emotional.

In the mundane world, too, energy works in all of these ways. Our brains work on electricity, so there's the physical, mental, and emotional Fire. Energy transforms, and is transformed, and it's energy that holds atoms and molecules together, and where energy and matter are in balance, we have order in life's diversity.

So, let's consider . . . not *how* we build our fires, but *what* we build with our Fire. How do we use the power it brings us? What transformation does it make in us? What order do we create with it? Beyond our circles, I mean; outside of ritual celebration and magic. In short, the place that we all live — in Mundania.

Too often we let ourselves be metaphorical flame-throwers. (We once saw another group of campers using a literal flame thrower to start their campfire. Epic weird! But I digress.) Not everyone knows how to be strong and assertive without being angry — and Fire does have



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associations with fury. But anger doesn't solve every problem, just as barbecuing is not the best way to prepare everything we eat.

"Anger management" has become something of a pop-culture joke, supporting the notion that anger is strength and conversely that calmness, gentleness, acceptance is weakness. But what I know from our campfire experience is that you have to move away from really big fires. You can't get close enough to sit next to friends and sing with them, or roast marshmallows, or even relax and look up at the stars. Instead, the most useful fires are the ones that are kept under good control: small and steady-burning fires make a cozy hearth around which you can gather with companions.

What we can share is the fire that lightens and warms, cooks our food, and makes a hearth a home, the one that makes conservative use of — and protects — our precious resources. At camp, that translates to keeping the wood dry: most of it stacked across one or two branches so it's not on the damp ground, and the stack covered with a tarp. It translates to lighting a

low cooking fire that after dinner we can build into a merry blaze. It will be big enough for us to sit in its light, warm enough to ward off the evening's chill, but not so bright as to blind us to the stars or so hot that it melts the soles of our hiking boots when we prop our feet up (yes, that's happened).

Our campfire is well-laid and well-tended. We have the daylight hours to collect wood, which we choose wisely, researching ahead of time if our experience isn't wide enough for a specific campsite. We might all know that if we use wet wood, the fire will be smoky at best; but we have to learn other things. For instance, in Arizona, we don't burn palo verde, because it smokes even when it's dry; and we don't use juniper logs, because they're smoky, too. No matter where you live, pressure-treated wood (though abundantly available in scraps from constructions projects) may produce toxic smoke. As it burns, the wood on our campfire is sometimes readjusted, too, to get the most light and the best heat. Now and again we have to move, shifting our chairs, closer or farther away.

How does this apply to Fire as an Element? First of all, we need to take a moment to consider what will energize and inspire, what will keep our Fire alive for this particular day. Next, if we are wise, we will plan to replenish our energy this day with experiences we choose to have as well as with thoughtful interpretations of what is thrust upon us. That can be difficult to do in the rough-and-tumble of a day filled with crisis, but we should always remember to keep our goals clear and not get caught up in the drama. We don't need to dismiss those bursts of chemical energy that "fire us up" in daily living but we also need to remember that these little flare-ups aren't all that we have to guide us, just as lightning strikes aren't our only source of campfires any more. Look to the coals, not the flares.

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Secondly, just as we need to control our small-fire, nurturing coals to cook our food and flames to light the night and keep us warm and visible to each other, we must control our Fire as well. We have to bank our coals so we won't burn out — and anyone who's been active in Pagan/Heathen causes for more than a year or two knows the truth of this — as well as being able to turn it up when more heat or light is required. That means knowing how much more fuel — and what kind — to add. Tearing through the timberland — or our feelings, in this metaphor — grabbing whatever we can reach first, and heaving it into the fire pit willy-nilly is dangerous and can send our Fire out of control. On the mundane level, carelessness is how forest fires get started; spiritually, feeding our passions without discernment is a way to lose control of not only our temper, but our lives and our magick.

This short column can't light a candle to what we can learn about and from Fire, but I can summarize with one more example. Sometimes we need to light torches from the hearth fire. (These days that's metaphorical: we have flashlights, at home and at camp.) Maybe their light will frighten away monsters; maybe it will help us explore the outer . . . or the inner . . . darkness. But we can't light any torches from a fire that's ill-tended and fitful, producing more smoke than heat and light. Likewise, we can't shine with protective or enlightening Fire ourselves, if we do not conserve and replenish our energies; if we don't take responsibility for our transformations and consciously work at creating a balance between chaos and stasis.

Oh, and by the way, my preference is for pyramid construction of campfires. I think it better accommodates the various-shaped woods we use. But I've been around some very nice raft-style fires, too — and when it comes right down to it, it's the company around the Fire that really matters. Any Fire around which you can sit with true and faithful companions is a good one. ♦

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Wyrd Ways by Galina Krasskova

Flames of the Ancestors

Ancient Pagan faiths honored Fire; we should, too.

I've been writing a lot about fire lately. I didn't realize, until I sat down to craft this column, that fire has been my nearly constant companion of late in my creative work, in divination, and in the ancestor work that is such a fundamental part of my practice.

My ancestors revered fire. They honored it and held it sacred. My paternal ancestry is mostly Lithuanian. I'm very proud of this. My Lithuanian ancestors held out against the crucible of Christian conquest until the 15th century, longer than anywhere else in Europe. Fire was sacred, revered as one of the eldest ancestors, from which we are all descended. Maintaining the sanctity of each hearth fire protected not only the home but the strength of the entire nation itself.

Fire was a woman's mystery. It was the woman's job to tend the hearth fire and keep all the rituals and customs surrounding its proper care. For myriad generations, the women of my paternal line honored fire in this way, many of these customs passing down into the modern day. These women served fire. They tended it. They maintained its integrity in their homes, celebrated its power in community rites, and whispered its secrets to their daughters. They knew it was alive. They knew it was holy.

So, as I steeped myself more and more solidly in ancestor work, I felt the call to honor fire. In spite of the fact that I am half-Lithuanian, I am not a practitioner of Romuva, the indigenous Lithuanian polytheistic faith, as I have been called to other Gods. I do, however, reverence fire, and over the years, engaging with it has become an integral part of my work.

This all started when I received initiation to fire via one of my shamanic ordeals. In retrospect, I realize that fire may have been testing me, to see if I had the fortitude to come to it and the good sense to recognize it as a Power when I did. One has to earn the right to work with fire.



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My ancestors served fire in their homes, celebrated its power in community rites, and whispered its secrets to their daughters. They knew it was alive. They knew it was holy.

All of the Elemental Powers demand respect, and all of them can very dangerous, though it's more obvious with fire. Anyone seeking friendship or alliance with the elements must accept that they always act according to their essential natures. We do not control the elemental forces; we partner with them. But to the polytheist like me, this is what a mature adult does; we honor the Holy Powers, we honor our ancestors, we honor the Elemental Powers (who are really our ancestors too, if one thinks about it logically.) It's a good day to be an animist, folks.

Blessings of fire. Fire is full of blessings; it was our ancestors' protector, and our ancestors summoned it to ward off harm while they slept. It is intimately bound up with the development of human civilization: think of all the things we wouldn't have without fire, including heat, the ability to cook our food, glassworking, metal working, pottery, electricity, speedy transportation. Fire holds the record of our ancestral achievements and has walked with them through the eons.

All of us carry fire within; every time we move, every time our muscles contract and release, there is heat produced. That kinetic heat holds within it the spark of fire. The skilled fire-ally can grab that heat and fan it out into a blaze of warmth throughout the body. Fire is the beating of our heart, the warmth of our blood.

Begin your relationship with fire. Learning to honor fire wisely is a process. A good place to start is to spend a few days meditating on all the ways in which you engage with fire in your life. Start with cooking: even if you don't cook, you eat hot food. Where is fire hiding in our lives? It's there, I promise you. Think about all the types of fire spirits there are: fire, lightning, warmth, heat, electricity... it's all fire.

Set up an altar to fire. Anything that reminds you of the power of fire can go there, but make sure to have a candle, and an offering glass or bowl. I end each night by giving an offering of good, clean water. When you light candles there, bow your head and greet the fire spirit respectfully, thanking it for its gifts, its beauty, strength, and creative power. I make a small offering (good, clean water will do), and eventually, if I need its help, I will ask for what I need and then respectfully wait for an answer. As a fire priest, I usually get an intuitive response; but for a new fire worker, I would recommend divination to ascertain the answer.

The next step is to learn to make fire in one of the old ways: flint and steel or fire bow. This was one of the first tasks set me on the road of the fire-priest. This task will help you to understand at least a tiny bit of what your ancestors went through to bring fire into being here, and how deeply they cherished its presence.

I also require my students to read about the destructive power of the element they are connecting with. In lighting a candle, or putting out a bowl of water, we're dealing with the most "civilized" aspect of an element's presentation. It's all too easy to get into a rut and forget that these are Powers with which we're dealing. In the case of fire, I ask my students to read *Under a Flaming Sky* by Daniel James Brown, a book about the 1894 Hinkley firestorm. I've stood several miles away watching a pillar of fire surge upwards in the night sky during a major California wildfire; the experience was simultaneously exhilarating and terrifying. I've come to realize that's anyone who approaches fire without an edge of fear is doing it wrong. Never, ever forget the nature of the beings with whom you engage.

Discipline and balance. Fire respects passion, but also requires discipline. Because the element is so volatile, it is incumbent on the fire worker to develop healthy personal discipline and to be especially mindful of his or her emotions. Fire will really stir things up if the devotee is not properly prepared; it likes to test us, watching to see whether or not we are capable of ordering ourselves rightly and with good self-control. (For this reason I was taught to abstain from alcohol for a few days before serious fire work as well as a day or so after.)

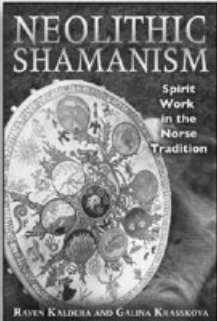
Fire is also all about lineage, about the one from whom mysteries pass to you, and the one to whom you pass them on. To engage with fire is to engage with a hierarchy bound up in the very structure of the elements of our world. In working deeply with fire, I often find that afterwards, I need to seek out one of the other elemental powers for balance. The elements are not enemies; they communicate with each other and work with each other. So a serious fire worker may also find him or herself developing a relationship with air, or water, or earth as a counterbalance to the intensity of fire. After

deep periods of intense fire work — beyond what a devotee would do as part of regular veneration — I find myself drawn to working with earth, and often fasting for a few days to restore my internal balance.

Fire renders all things sacred, teaches us to nourish our connection to the Gods, to the ancestors, and to the elemental powers. Nothing is ever truly lost; our ancestors remember, and fire remembers, too. If we are diligent and respectful, they'll share their knowledge with us too.

So I pour out offerings to fire, tend it with food and drink, and a happy heart... for this is a mystery restored, a blessing given. Fire is magnanimous. It is right to greet it with celebration. It is right to lay offerings at its crimson crackling feet. It's a dance my ancestors knew well and I am happy to learn those same steps anew. ✦

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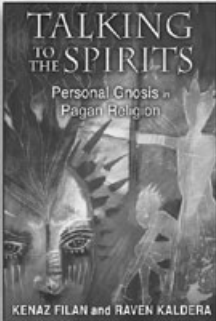
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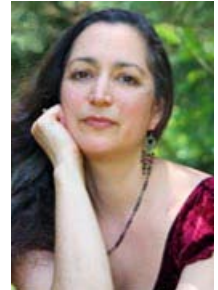


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Magick on a Shoestring by Deborah Blake

All Fired Up

It's easy to connect to this most mercurial of elements.

If you read my last column (and of course you did!), you will remember that I started a series that talked about inexpensive and fun ways to create a stronger connection with the four elements. Last time we focused on Air; this time around we'll be taking a look at the hot and powerful element of Fire.

I have a confession to make: my coven, Blue Moon Circle, and I have a few issues with Fire. Candles don't stay lit, it takes thirty-seven matches to get the bonfire going, and then it starts raining and puts the fire out. It happens so often, we jokingly call ourselves "The Fire-impaired Witches." I don't know why this is, exactly, but it doesn't in any way interfere with our love of this particular element, and despite our challenges, we integrate it in our practice as much as possible. After all, we've only been doing this work together for eight or so years... we have to get good at it eventually!

In our tradition, Fire is the element associated with the South, which makes sense in the Northern Hemisphere since the closer to the equator you get, the hotter it tends to be. In the same way, Fire is also associated with Noon and Summer. Fire also rules creativity, passion, energy, courage, healing, and blood. It is usually represented by bright colors such as red, orange, and gold and is associated with the Zodiac signs Sagittarius, Leo, and Ares.

Those are the basics (which as always, each Witch will alter to suit her own practice and instincts) — but how do we go from lists of correspondences to actually *connecting* with the element of Fire? Here are a few suggestions.

Let the Light Shine

One of the most commonly used Fire tools is the candle. Many of us use candles at every quarter (with red candles for south and the element of Fire), but even when we use other items to symbolize Air (such as a feather), Water (a



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Fortunately one of the best magickal tools is one of the cheapest: the candle. Light one up, and it's already powerful. Better yet, make your own!

shell, for instance), and Earth (a rock or crystal), a candle is almost always the favorite choice to represent Fire. Candles have been around since the dawn of civilization, used in drafty castles and threadbare cottages alike. Originally, most candles were made from tallow, derived from the fat of sheep and cows, or beeswax (which was usually reserved for the wealthy). These days the majority of candles are made from paraffin wax, a petroleum by-product, and sometimes soy.

Thankfully, this is one tool that is reasonably inexpensive. Candles come in a remarkable variety, including various scents and colors, and can be bought pre-blessed and consecrated from numerous magickal supply shops. But if you are trying to find a way to connect with the element of Fire, I strongly recommend making (or creating) your own.

Making candles is fairly simple, and you can find both supplies and instructions online (there's a great, step-by-step set of instructions at <http://www.pioneerthinking.com/crafts/crafts-candles/dipped.html>) or at a local craft store. Just remember to be careful when melting wax (it gets *hot* and can burn your skin, or even catch on fire if you're not careful — and that is not how we want to make this all-important connection, is it?) You may want to experiment a little bit before making your special, magickal version. So how is making a magickal candle different from making any other kind of candle at home? **Focus and intent**, of course.

While you're making your candle, be sure to keep your intent in mind. Are you making a candle for prosperity magick? Add some green candle coloring and a few drops of essential oil from one or more of the herbs associated with prosperity to the wax while you are melting it. (If you want to be even cheaper, use a crayon of the color you desire, or add the end of an almost used-up candle to make the color you want.)

As you pour your wax, or dip your candle, focus on what you wish to achieve. If your purpose is connecting with the element of Fire, keep that in mind, too.

If you don't want to bother with the fuss and muss of making your candles from scratch, you can buy them, but then add your own special touches to them, thereby putting a bit of your own magick into a premade tool. I like to etch magickal symbols and runes onto the sides of "ordinary" candles, and anoint them with magickal oils. When Blue Moon Circle is doing a ritual that involves candle magick, we usually spend some time during the ritual doing this, and talking about our goals, before saying the spell and lighting the candles together. When you add in these extra steps, candle magick can be very powerful indeed — all set into motion when you add Fire.

To connect more deeply with the element of Fire through candles, try this simple ritual:

Take a candle (either one you made yourself or one you made more magickal through the steps I outlined above) and place it in a fire-safe container or holder. Sit in a darkened room with the candle in front of you; it is especially nice if you can do this on the night of the Full Moon, so that the only other light in the room comes from the moonlight's magickal glow. Light a match, being mindful of the snap of the Fire as it bursts into flame, and the smell of the sulfur. Hold the match to the wick and feel the connection as the flame leaps from one to the other. Blow out the match, and see how the Fire lives on in its new host, the candle. Carefully put your hand over the candle and lower it until you can feel the heat, first as a vague warmth, then hotter. Careful — don't burn yourself! Fire is a useful tool, but never forget that if used carelessly, it can burn down houses, or even entire forests. Think about your admiration and respect for this powerful element. Then sit for a while and admire it, before thanking the Fire for all it does, and blowing out the candle.

Burn, Baby, Burn

There is a reason why many of the old pictures of Witches show them dancing around a bonfire. Fire is an indispensable part of ritual; starting with simply sending sparks out into the universe to carry our intentions up to the gods. If you live in a place that allows for the use of a bonfire, I highly recommend adding this Fire element to your rites.

One of my favorite things to do with a bonfire is burn away those things I no longer need. I often use rituals that involve writing something

on a slip of paper and throwing it into the fire to burn clean. Bonfires are also great for tossing dried herbs into: lavender for love and healing, for instance, or sage for purification.

Beltane is traditionally celebrated by leaping the bonfire. But no matter what the occasion, there is no better way to get in touch with your inner Witch and all the Pagans that walked this path before you than to dance around a bonfire — if possible, to the beat of a wild drum. Look — the flames are dancing with you!

Fire without flame

Not everyone is lucky enough to live in a place that allows open flames of any kind. Dorm rooms, for instance, often have rules against lighting any fires, and if you are at a Pagan conference that is held at a hotel, in all likelihood there will be no candles allowed, either. Or you want to have a bonfire for your ritual, but you live in an apartment. What's a Witch to do?

There are a few alternatives to the traditional tools that will still allow you to bring the element of Fire into your ritual. For instance, you can use the small battery-operated lights that look like flickering candles. Or, if you want to simulate a bonfire but you're stuck inside, you can make a small, contained fire using Epsom salts and rubbing alcohol in a fire-safe container. (This will still get hot, so be careful. However, it doesn't give off smoke like a real bonfire.) One of my favorite "faux fire" alternatives is a cauldron with paper flames and LED lights that flicker. A battery makes the fake flames move, so it simulates the feel of a bonfire. It's not a perfect solution, but if you can't have the real thing, it isn't bad; and they're reasonably cheap; between twenty and thirty dollars for a tabletop version.

Fire on the Altar

If you want to build a Fire altar, either to honor the element at any time, or to celebrate it during one of the Fire festivals like Beltane, there are a few inexpensive ways to go about it.

You can start with an altar cloth in red, orange, gold; try using a simple red tablecloth or a large napkin (depending on the size of your altar.) You can probably find one at a dollar store, or a thrift store, or at a yard sale, or you can make your own from a piece of fabric. Using gold fabric paint, you can draw on any symbols you like: a flame, the sun, a lightning bolt, or something along those lines. You can also add the names of any gods or goddesses who have Fire in their powers, such as Hephaestus or Hestia, goddess of the hearth fire. You might want to add Prometheus, who brought the gift of fire to humanity. There are Fire deities in every culture, so no matter which path you follow, you will find Someone who rules over this element.

Then you can place symbols of Fire on the altar, including candles, charcoal, various types of wood to form a mini-bonfire (this is just for show, not to burn), a chunk of obsidian (since it as a stone that is formed in the fire of a volcano), a small iron cauldron, or anything else that speaks of Fire to you.

Making the Connection

It doesn't really matter whether you dance around a bonfire or light a candle — or even just close your eyes and feel the passion we all hold at our core. What's important is that you take a moment during ritual to greet the element of Fire, and remember to thank it for all the wonderful gifts it brings to our lives. After all, without Fire, there would be no cooking; and let's face it, we Pagans love our feasts! So throw something into the cauldron for yourself and maybe a few friends, and light a candle in gratitude for the wonderful power of Fire. ♠

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Lessons from the Grove by Teo Bishop

The Struggle of the Solitary

Building a ritual practice — for one.

I write a blog called “Bishop In The Grove,” which I created as a means of journeying into modern Druidism through Ár nDraiocht Féin (ADF). The blog has grown into something bigger, something more community-oriented. While I still post regularly about my own druidic practice, asking questions of my tradition and making observations about what it

feels like to be a modern Druid, I also allow the blog to be a space for community dialogue and discussion about Paganism in general.

My posts are not diatribes about what it is to be a Pagan. Such a thing would be antithetical to so much of what Neopaganism, as a movement, set out to do. Instead, they are launching points for deeper inspection and contemplation. Many times I write in order to better understand my own perspective, and after I’ve published a post, discover that those commenting on the blog shine a light on the things which I might have missed.

Recently, I created a new section on my blog: letters from readers. This enables readers to initiate the dialogues by asking me questions and sharing their observations. The new feature has been a great success, so much so that I’m bringing it to *Witches and Pagans* in the form of this new column. So, here goes!

“I AM NEW TO PAGANISM, having recently left the Catholic church. I’m what you’d call a solitary and don’t have a group I practice with (at least not yet), so most of the time I’m in my room when I try to reach out and connect with the gods. The only problem is, I don’t ever



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“You’ve articulated a problem many of us face: how to make sense of the stillness when we approach our home shrines.”

really feel a connection. And to be honest, I used to. At almost every Mass, I felt the presence of something divine. I can’t seem to replicate that in my room, though, or with these new gods (who, I know, are actually the old gods.) Is this because I don’t naturally belong to their tradition? Or is there something missing in me?

“I know you encourage people to feel inspiration in their solitary practice. But I feel like I don’t know how to make that happen. I don’t necessarily want a step-by-step here, because I believe that everyone is different. But how can I develop a ritual that feels right to me? Whatever guidance you can give me would be appreciated as I really want to feel connected to the gods I’ve chosen.”

NEWCOMER IN NANTUCKET

DEAR NEWCOMER,

Regardless of your tradition, you’ve articulated a problem that many of us face, which is to make sense of the silence and stillness we experience when we approach our home shrines or our places of meditation. Know that your struggle, while experienced in solitude, is not your’s alone. There are many of us — even those who regularly participate in group practice — who are missing the experience of

connection when we engage in our religious work, for even group-oriented Pagans must face the inevitability of solitude at some point of another.

I appreciate your hesitation around the “step-by-step,” or the “how-to” approach to a personal practice. From my experience, adopting someone else’s practice without alteration doesn’t make sense. As you’ve noted, we are each different, and we each bring to our solitary practice a unique set of preferences, inclinations, and tastes. While this may sound like I’m painting all Pagans as “eclectic” (which isn’t how many of us identify), I’m not; even reconstructionists, while attempting to incorporate ancient practices into their religious life, are still influenced by their own idiosyncrasies. We cannot escape who we are, even as we seek to be something greater/different/more “traditional” through our religious or spiritual endeavors.

But you don’t seem to be trying to escape anything; you’re seeking to engage more deeply. Let me see if I can offer you a few ideas to consider which may help you piece together how to start feeling that connection you’ve been missing.

First off, please recognize that the architects of the Catholic service go to great ends to help facilitate a feeling of presence. The space is made sacred by the use of incense, candles, and music, not to mention choices of decor, statuary and iconography. They've made a complex theological system visible, tangible, and available; and by doing so have made it much easier to experience the feeling of sacredness.

I make this distinction between the feeling of sacredness and the presence of God intentionally. While it may be taught that the god recognized in the Catholic Church is present during services, I'm more inclined to think that what people experience during ritual is actually the theater which has been constructed for them. Catholics do theater very well.

There may be moments when attendees come into direct communion with a deity but that isn't always the point of the ritual. Sometimes the only reason to have ritual is to facilitate the human experiences of reverence, worship, serenity, peace, or connectedness. If you felt that during your experience in the Catholic church, then to some degree they succeeded in their religious work.

But I don't think your feeling of connectedness *then*, but lack of that feeling now, has anything to do with disapproving. And it certainly isn't a matter of you "not belonging to the tradition" from which the deities you now approach originated.

Truth be told, the Gods are mysterious. Their personhood, sentience, whims, wills, and desires are not human. They may mirror those of the human world, but I'd wager that they do only as it serves humans to understand the enigmatic. I choose to think that the Gods, when communicating or interacting with humans, reach out to us in terms that we can understand. This does not mean they are like us; They are different, more complicated, and perhaps impossible to understand completely.

When you attended Mass, you were faced with mystery after mystery, and invited to experience the connection you had with your God. You affirmed a reality of connectedness, and in so doing you experienced connectedness.

Now, you must make new affirmations, and create your own atmosphere of reverence and sacredness. How you do this, exactly, is dependent on a few things.

First, you must determine who you're working with. If you're approaching certain Gods and Goddesses, or if you feel that They have called you into some kind of relationship, you would be well served to search out stories about Them. Or try to write some of your own! If these are the Old Gods, then there are old tales, but there is also value in developing new stories.

For example, I feel a connection with the god Arawn, a Welsh deity who is, in lore, known as a hunter and a deity of the Underworld. By reading through academic translations of the *Mabinogion*, I am able to learn a bit about how the mythology of Arawn was understood by my spiritual ancestors. But by also reading newer writings, based on the tales of the *Mabinogion*, like those of Evangeline Walton in her book, *The Mabinogion Tetralogy*, I am able to engage more imaginatively with the idea of Arawn, and my experience teaches me that this is a good first step to having more meaningful experiences with Him in ritual.

There is a direct connection between the imaginative and the divine. Those who discount religion as a product solely of imagination miss the point and the power of what imagination can be. I see imagination as a kind of inner gateway to mystical experiences. See it first in your mind, and then you might be able to bring it into your ritual space. In my view, what occurs in your imagination is not simply contained in your skull; it's connected to other things unseen.

So, if you want to engage with your Gods, learn about your Gods. Read up on Them, or if you have an inclination to write, write about Them. Ask Them to reveal themselves to you through your imagination, and then trust that the information you've been given about Them is a relevant component of your personal practice. It may not be "gospel" in the way that most Christians think about their scripture, but it can be a revealed truth for your own life.

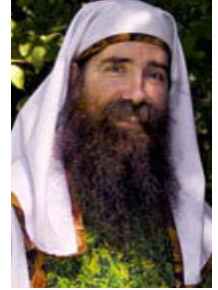
Second, I would encourage you to spend time practicing ways of bringing the more sensory elements of ritual — the theater of it — back into your life. Perhaps liturgy is important to you, which is a fair assumption if you were previously a practicing Roman Catholic, so you may want to develop a liturgy of your own. Pick up a copy of Ceisiwr Serith's books *A Pagan Ritual Prayer Book* and *A Book Of Pagan Prayer*. Ceisiwr does an amazing job at

explaining how prayer and liturgy are available to all of us. Not only does he encourage you to craft your own prayers and ritual, but he's also compiled an amazing wealth of Pagan prayers and ritual components that he's written himself.

To sum up, both your desire to know how to develop a good ritual, and your intention of establishing a meaningful connection with your gods are themselves acts of piety and reverence. You're already doing the thing you wish to be doing, you just need to find a way to infuse those experiences with enough theatricality to make them feel religious. Isaac Bonewits's book, *Neopagan Rites: A Guide to Creating Public Rituals that Work*, while focussed on public or group rituals, offers a lot of constructive advice on what makes a ritual a ritual, and what makes it effective. I think some of what he writes might translate well into your own work.

So, read. Hunt down the history of your Gods. Or, write your own. And don't be afraid to turn your bedroom into a great sanctuary. Fill it with fire and fragrant smoke (safely, of course), and open yourself up to remembering what it felt like before to be in a sacred space, in the presence of Something Greater, something other than yourself. Focus first on creating a quality of ritual experience that suits you, with all of your idiosyncrasies, and once you've done that, you can re-examine whether you still feel this absence of connection. My prediction is that you will, in time, not only feel a deeper sense of reverence and sacredness, but you will also begin to approach again the Mystery which you have felt disconnected from. It hasn't gone anywhere. ♡

TEO BISHOP is a contemplative Pagan, a bard, and the author of *Bishop In The Grove* (www.bishopinthegrove.com). He is a regular contributor to *HuffPost Religion* (www.huffingtonpost.com/teo-bishop) and *The Wild Hunt* (www.wildhunt.org) and the organizer of *Solitary Druid Fellowship* (<http://www.solitarydruid.org/>) providing free liturgies to solitary Druids and Pagans. Teo sees his writing as a kind of ministry, in that it encourages us to look inward, to engage more fully in our lives, and to find a balance between critical thinking (the mind) and intuitive knowing (the heart). To submit your letters for *Letters in the Grove*, visit BishopInTheGrove.com/Letters. Your name will be kept confidential.



The Operative Druid by John Michael Greer

The Middle-Aged Ways

There's more to Pagan history than "way back then."

As a writer and a blogger, not to mention a tolerably well-known figure in the Druid scene, I routinely field questions from people who think they're interested in Druidry. The Druid order I head, the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), gets at least as many. Quite often, those inquiries turn out as predictably as a broken record: someone contacts me or the AODA, bubbling with enthusiasm about studying and practicing Druidry. Within a few emails, it becomes uncomfortably clear that there's very little common ground between me and the querent, and the conversation dwindles away in confusion or ends abruptly as the would-be druid stalks off in high dudgeon.

Around three-quarters of such seekers speak the language of today's popular Paganism: they want to "find people to circle with," "celebrate the Sabbats," and "worship the Goddess," and their emails are liberally sprinkled with phrases like "Blessed be" and "Merry meet." The remaining quarter, by contrast, come from the camp of Pagan Reconstructionism: they want to find a group to help them imitate ancient Celtic culture and religion as exactly as possible, and their emails include salutations in modern (or, very occasionally, Old) Irish. In either case, they soon figure out that this isn't what AODA has to offer, and their final plaint is something along the lines of "But you're Druids, don't you practice the Old Ways?" It's a reasonable question, because what we practice — though it's a good deal older than what most Pagans do these days — isn't much like the "Old Ways" that contemporary Paganism has in mind.

Searching for "Ye Olde" by the very new

The "Old Ways" of today's popular Paganism emerged in America during the 1970s and took center stage after 1980 when Margot Adler's



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Rosy-eyed talk about our venerated Pagan ancestors is everywhere in Pagan circles these days, but if you mention any of the early modern Pagan forebears to today's Pagans, you'll likely get either a blank look or a heated denunciation.

Drawing Down the Moon, Scott Cunningham's *Living Wicca*, and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* redefined Paganism and simultaneously made it a force in American pop culture. The "Old Ways" that defined this very new religious movement drew on older currents in the alternative spirituality scene, including a number of groups that claimed descent from the witches of the Middle Ages. Still, ask a practitioner of British traditional witchcraft how much his or her work has in common with the things that go on at a modern Pagan ritual, and you can expect a salty response.

The very different "Old Ways" referred to in today's Reconstructionist movement took shape during the same period. The first important Reconstructionist groups emerged in the 1970s

in what became the Heathen community, and the broader Reconstructionist project emerged in the decade that followed. Scholarship on the ancient Pagan religions of Europe and elsewhere seemed to offer a way out of the maze of grandmother stories and newly minted "ancient" traditions that pervaded the popular Pagan scene, and a significant minority of American Pagans set off in pursuit of historical authenticity. Whether they managed to achieve their goal is a question I don't propose to address here; the point I want to make is that even if Reconstructionist ideas about archaic Pagan spirituality are correct, the movement itself is just as much a phenomenon of the last few decades as the popular Paganism that so many Reconstructionists despise.

Precedents of modern Paganism

It bears remembering that long before both popular Paganism or Reconstructionism were even dreamt of, there were people in America worshipping Pagan deities and practicing earth-centered spirituality. No, not conveniently untraceable third degree grannies but actual organized movements. The first historically documented Pagan organization in the United States was the Society of Ancient Druids, which was founded at Newburgh, New York in 1799. Hard on its heels came the Transcendentalist movement which got under way in the early 19th century and included newly-translated Hindu writings and the works of the seminal English Pagan Thomas Taylor among its influences.

Both the Society of Ancient Druids and the Transcendentalists can be understood as American reflections of a broader, international movement. You won't find many references to the Pagan revival of the 18th century in discussions of Pagan history today, but it had a massive influence on thought and culture from the late 18th through the early 20th centuries.

The reinvention of Druidry, very much part of that phenomenon, was inspired by a mix of Enlightenment-influenced Deism, liberal Anglican Christianity, Renaissance occult traditions, and a justifiable distaste for the social and environmental costs of the Industrial Revolution.

There were plenty of other Pagan and quasi-Pagan movements sharing space in the European avant-garde at the time. A vigorous revival of Greek Paganism — kickstarted by the same Thomas Taylor whose works the Transcendentalists studied — was, in its day, far more influential than the Druid Revival. So were the teachings of Swedish visionary Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose psychic experiences upended Christian orthodoxy in favor of an evolving cosmos, and the occult offshoots of Masonry that laid the foundation for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and its competitors.

The only good ancestor is a long-dead ancestor

Talk about our venerated Pagan ancestors is commonplace these days, but if you mention any of the early modern Pagan forebears to today's Pagans, you'll likely get either a blank look or a heated denunciation. The blank look is the product of the half-baked history that pops up in the second chapter of most popular Pagan books. Read more than a handful, and you can write that chapter in your sleep: it begins with a glamorous account of life in the Way Back When, leaps straight to the evils of the Burning Times, and then states (outright or implicitly) that the standard-brand teachings you're about to learn were passed down for countless generations by a line of identical third-degree grandmothers. Discussions of 18th century Druids in hoop skirts, gay Victorian gentlemen pouring libations to Pan in their back gardens, and the many manifestations of Paganism that arose between the end of the Middle Ages and the career of Gerald Gardner are conspicuously absent.

The heated denunciation? That has slightly more complicated roots. Central to popular Paganism and Reconstructionism alike is the notion that Pagan spirituality ought to be unaffected by time and cultural change. In this retrograde view, perfection is placed entirely in the past: if our ancient forebears (whether pre-Kurgan matrilineal Goddess worshippers or ancient Heathen polytheists) worshipped in a particular way, that way is the only right way to

do it, and the validity of any later Pagan tradition depends entirely on its claim to duplicate those ways. Curiously, this logic only applies to certain portions of the past; you can imitate the behavior of the Druids in hoop skirts or the Pan-worshipping Victorians as precisely as you wish — and this is tolerably easy to do, since they're thoroughly documented — but it won't win you any friends. Rather, you can count on being dismissed as a "Mesopagan," a label that deserves a column all to itself one of these days. I've long since lost track of the number of times that somebody has denounced me in incandescent language for daring to practice a kind of Druidry that descends from what those people in hoop skirts and knee breeches were doing in the not-so-distant past.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating

The entire notion that Paganism is about "Ye Old Ways" makes such rosy-eyed nostalgia all but impossible to avoid. Religious and spiritual traditions shift constantly over time, taking in new influences and responding to changing conditions like any other living thing. Even when forms remain the same, meanings shift; new gods and goddesses come on the scene and find places in old pantheons; it's only in the nostalgic imagination that any kind of spirituality is a rock standing unmoved amidst the tides of historic change.

The lively history of modern Druidry — from its origins in the 18th century to its relatively flourishing state today — is thus inevitably an affront to many deeply-held assumptions in the modern Pagan scene. More iconoclastic still, a growing number of contemporary Druid orders cheerfully admit that they have no lineal connection to ancient Celtic Druids whatsoever. What makes that actual (but little-known) history of post-Enlightenment Druidry controversial is that it asserts that historical authenticity (even if achievable) is not the same thing as spiritual validity. What makes a spiritual tradition valid, in the view of modern Druidry, is simply whether its practitioners get the results that the tradition promises them. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; your recipe may be as ancient as the hills, cobbled together from the internet, or the result of personal gnosis, but its origins (or age) don't say anything about how the results are going to taste.

Be here now

All of this is, in a way, simply an answer to the people mentioned at the start of this column who ask us why we don't follow the Old Ways. It's because we recognize that we live here-and-now, and not in some more "romantic" time and place. The validity of Druidry, as I see it, depends on its ability to offer something worthwhile to a world that desperately needs people who have cultivated the ecological awareness and the mental and spiritual talents that the Druid Revival traditions strive to develop in their initiates. Our hearth culture, to use a phrase much-discussed in Reconstructionist circles, is modern industrial civilization, and no amount of exegesis of hoary texts or past-life mythologizing will change that. Our choice, in the face of that unyielding reality, is to recognize that the Druid Revival is an indigenous nature religion of modern Anglo-American culture, and embrace it as such.

Of course, that preference will not be shared by everyone. If others find that their own spiritual needs are best met by following modern popular Paganism, or attempting to reconstruct archaic Pagan traditions, it's certainly their right to do so. It just so happens that today's older Druid orders have inherited traditions that have been around a good deal longer than either of these movements, but that's simply one of the many ironies of cultural history. Perhaps we old-fashioned Druids should simply start calling our ways the "Middle-Aged Ways" — older than the current crop of alternative spiritualities, younger than the archaic traditions so many of those latter movements are trying to imitate — and leave it at that. ♦

Born in the gritty Navy town of Bremerton, Washington, JOHN MICHAEL GREER began writing about as soon as he could hold a pencil. His first book, Paths of Wisdom, appeared in 1996 and has been followed by more than thirty more nonfiction works. Greer is the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a Druid Revival order founded in 1912, and also writes extensively on the future of industrial society at the end of the age of fossil fuels. He lives with his wife Sara in Cumberland, MD, an old red brick mill town in the north central Appalachians. Follow him at his blog "The Archdruid Report," at <http://thearchdruidreport.blogspot.com/>



The Crafty Curmudgeon by Fritz Muntean

The Name of the Witch

In which consequences of whitewashing Witchcraft are considered.

Back in the years right after the war, when I was a little kid growing up in a grimy steel town in the folds of the mountains of western Pennsylvania, my granny (who'd been born in the mid-1880s in Wales) warned me and my brother that if we stayed out late after dark we'd be "stolen by the Witches."

We were deeply impressed with these words of wisdom. We talked it over at great length, and finally decided that whatever "the Witches" might be, odds were that they'd be offering young kids a better deal than what was currently going down. So he and I took to sneaking out our bedroom window in the middle of the night and hanging out — in as ostentatious a manner as we could manage — in the darkest corners of our neighborhood, waiting for the Witches.

For all I know, he may still be waiting.

Me, I finally decided to make up my own kind of Witches to run away with, and the rest, as we say, is (early Craft) history, and you can read about our adventures in any number of good books about the earliest days of the Craft in North America. We were all still standing around in the dark. But now we were — or so we fancied ourselves — the dreadful agents of cultural change that our parents (and grandparents) had warned us about.

Twenty-odd years on, though, when we became aware that contemporary Paganism was beginning to grow into a sizeable New Religious Movement, the desire for acceptance by the broader culture began causing a mantle of genteel respectability to be drawn over some of the darker and more powerful aspects of the Craft. Many, under the otherwise laudable banner of Pagan public relations, began insisting that Witch power is only constructive and good, and that the darkness surrounding classical Witch mythology was the slanderous work of repressive patriarchal agencies.



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From the middle 1980s onward, several examples of this "White Witch" mentality began to appear. First there was the campaign to protest and boycott Jim Henson's movie, *The Witches*. Then there was that *Burning Times* video, which promoted the belief that all those who were caught up in the Great European Witch Hunt were *real* Witches — innocent and benign Goddess-worshipping Witches just like us — who'd been condemned by the Inquisition as "Satanists."

From a psychological perspective, the Witch derives her character from dreams, myth, and fairy tales. Much of the popular identity of the Pagan Witch, however (according to writers like Margo Adler)¹, has its roots in the delusional accusations of the Inquisition and the universal, if paranoid, belief in the persistent existence of a small clandestine society engaged in antihuman practices. Much-quoted writers like Marie-Louis von Franz often point out that the Witch of dreams and fairy tales is a solitary woman, living far from the habitats of people, whereas the popular concept of the "Witch as covener" appears to have originated with the Inquisition.²

According to the Jungians, the Witch is the "Shadow" — the opposite contained within — of the divine Feminine. The archetypal Witch represents many of the dark and violent aspects of the Great Mother which exist within us all. If we neglect or mistreat the

Great Mother, what will manifest is the power of the Witch — in the form, say, of roughly-dressed people chaining themselves to the gates of an arms factory or nuclear reactor. I can't help but wonder about the wisdom of invoking this energy in young women and men adrift in the adolescent passageway between Maiden and Mother. (The word "cannon fodder" comes forcibly to mind.)

The psychological Witch has great value. Her harsh energy is necessary for the destruction of outdated institutions. According to Ann Ulanov, the Witch's voracious and lusty appetites for the pleasures of sex and food help us cut through the harmful paradigms of "virgin-or-whore" and "thinness-as-beauty." Equally important to those in midlife, her rejection of the self-sacrificing milky-Mother, makes it possible for the hard-handed, steely-eyed Crone to emerge. Archetypally, the Witch is *not* the Crone, but without this transformational Witch energy, the Crone cannot manifest, and the outdated Mother will live on, victim and martyr, long after her role is played out in a tragic and harmful way.

Back before Zoroaster, people used to have fewer qualms about opposing polarities — like good and bad, light and dark, transformational and conservative, sublime and mundane, creative and destructive energies — being contained within the same Goddess or God. Ancient deities like Kali — who gives birth from the waist down, while cutting off heads from the waist up — embodied both the nurturing Mother and the destroying Witch.

In anthropology, a tribal society's practitioner of helpful magic is usually called a Shaman. The word "Witch" is used in this context to denote the magical evil-doer, the unscrupulous and selfish magician. The issue, according to Eliade, is not so much whether the magic is good or bad — that's more a matter of competence than intent — but whether the practitioner is contained within the society or operates outside of it. The positive Shaman usually works and lives inside the village, either physically or in terms of a mutual responsibility. By contrast, the Witch lives as an outcast, dangerous by way of being out of community control.³ This concept meshes well with the

psychological idea of the Witch as outsider. (It's interesting to note that in matrifocal cultures like the Navaho, such "evil" Witches are usually male.)⁴

Much of our original enthusiasm for using the "Witch" word, back in the 1960s derived from the term "witch hunt" used in the aftermath of McCarthyism to denote the unfair and vicious persecution of progressive and liberal elements by the religious or political forces of repression. Our distaste for the twisted power-mongering of McCarthyism was so strong that we were all too eager to identify with its victims. A noble undertaking, but it does lead one to ask: "Am I necessarily one with the enemies of my enemy?" It's one thing to challenge patriarchal authority by adopting the name of the Church and State's worst nightmare — and quite another to then turn around and insist that "Witches were never bad, were always only good, and that any information to the contrary is intentional defamation of our religion."

Ursula LeGuin says that superstition is caused by taking otherwise useful metaphors literally.⁵ That's a pretty good definition of fundamentalism, too. I get very concerned when otherwise intelligent and well-educated Pagans neglect the study of psychology and anthropology because of the perceived insult to modern Wicca in the scholar's use of the word "Witch."

I've been calling myself a Witch for some time now — almost half a century. I believe the name of the Witch is a name of power, and that the power of the Witch is a power that can truly change the world. But from the beginning, I knew that some elements of the power of the Witch are dark, destructive, and dangerous, not "white light" and harmless. The wielding of Witch energy therefore requires serious training, great restraint, deep humility, and above all — enormous compassion and love.

Our current Pagan cultural mainstreaming and attempted sanitization of the Witch not only trivializes the powers involved — a sort of "Pagan Disneyfication," complete with cutesy unicorns, friendly dragons and Barbie doll elves — but something far worse is happening. By denying the darkness and the destructive energies inherent in the power of the Witch (and in ourselves) — and by the concomitant

de-emphasis of training, restraint, humility, and compassion — we stand in danger of turning this darkness loose upon our own communities. (The tendency of conflicts in our communities to spin out of control, take on a life of their own, and to turn into Witch Wars takes on new meaning in light of these concerns.)

I don't believe that we are, necessarily, working with forces beyond our control; but I do believe that the forces involved require more respect than we're giving them, when we insist that Wicca is nothing but sweetness and light. We don't have anything to gain by publicly emphasizing the darker and more dangerous aspects of our Craft — there is, after all, no need to unduly frighten the broader public. However, we should beware of taking our own public relations literally, for when we do so, we stand in grave danger of losing control of one of the most effective forces available for the restructuring of our culture, to the peril of ourselves and the planet itself. ♦

Endnotes

¹Margo Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* Beacon, 1979.

²Louis von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales*, Shambala, 1995.

³Ann Ulanov, *The Witch and the Clown* Chiron, 1987.

⁴Clyde Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft*, Beacon, 1963.

⁵Ursula Le Guin, *Always Coming Home* Harper & Row, 1985 and *The Birthday of the World*, Harper Perennial, 2003.

A co-founder of California's NROOGD trad, FRITZ MUNTEAN holds order and honorary degrees in several other traditions. Fritz edited The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies until 2003, and works to promote Pagan scholarship and the academic study of Craft organization and theology. He's now retired and lives in Vancouver, Canada, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, and has recently taken up knitting. Fritz is a member of 'Poetry Music and Fire', a NROOGD-based ritual team that performs locally.

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Theatre in a Crowded Fire: Ritual and Spirituality at Burning Man

Lee Gilmore, University of CA Press, 2012

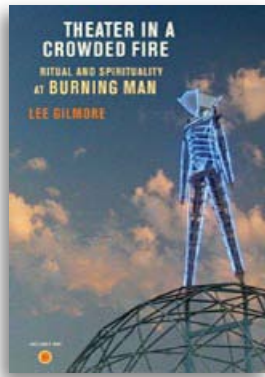
The Burning Man experience transcends words. As one of the more prominent neocultural events of recent years, it begs not only attention but appraisal. Far beyond a simple “desert Woodstock,” the Burn has become a touchstone for small yet significant elements of current culture.

In reversing the common expression “yelling ‘Fire’ in a crowded theatre,” Lee Gilmore — a longtime “Burner” and Lecturer in Religious Studies and Anthropology at California State Northridge — underscores the inverted nature of Burning Man’s culture. It’s an anarchist state, a temporary city, a spiritual experience without religious creed. Burning Man inverts expectations. . . and even, very often, its own institutions. That tension between the human need for order and the human thirst for chaos is one of the festival’s prime dynamics. As Gilmore points out, “Burning Man is many things, and most participants would probably agree with an oft-spoken dictum that it can be ‘whatever you want it to be.’”

But what is Burning Man? Is it, as some have declared it, a religious festival? A neo-Hippie orgy of sex and drugs? Well, no. . . yes. . . all and none of the above, and more. Gilmore’s book tackles the unenviable task of trying to summarize an experience that defies concrete definition. The Burn experience is elusive by its nature; how well, then, can even a commentator versed in both cultural science and Burner culture capture that experience? Actually, as it turns out, quite well.

Ms. Gilmore doesn’t even try to pin down the Burn. She makes it clear very early on that even science has to bow to realities that defy analysis. Using a collection of questionnaires, surveys, anecdotes, quotes, citations of various cultural anthropologists, and even a DVD (poorly shot but still evocative) to present an overview of the Burn from a culturist perspective, she makes the case of Burning Man’s tangential nature as an essential function of the human drama. “In exploring participants’ bodily and conceptual movements,” Gilmore writes, “to, from and within Black Rock City” (the Burn’s annual temporary home), “Burners perform complex and occasionally paradoxical exchanges between imagined and reimagined selves and fictive or exotic others [contributing] to the event’s potential to produce a sense of transformation.”

As these quotes indicate, *Theatre in a Crowded Fire* is written in academic language. Still, Gilmore manages to strike a balance between plain-spoken description and the oft-obtuse discourse of academia. This necessary balance provides a dense reading experience, especially given the book’s small font size and thick slabs of text. *Fire* is far more along the lines of Hutton’s *Triumph of the Moon* than Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment*, but a reader familiar with academic writing will find the book easy to follow. Gilmore’s largest concession to academia runs from pp. 169-219 in which the Appendices — statistics, footnotes and citations, an even the Burning Man Mission Statement — have been collected. This makes *Fire* far easier to digest; casual readers can ignore the academic data completely and concentrate on Gilmore’s descriptions of Burner culture and what we might discover about it.



These observations follow the author’s own experience with Burning Man and snapshots of its history, culture and significance. The book follows the festival’s roots as an act of artistic boredom toward its fruition into a contentious “temporary autonomous zone” that shifts precariously from organized chaos to chaotic order. Gilmore’s primary thesis is that Burning Man both provides and manifests an essential community for a bewildering global era. Pointing out the contradictory nature of its “spiritual but not religious” tone, while also affirming the idea that some Burners think both spirituality and religion are “missing the whole point” of the Burn, Gilmore provides stories that underscore the ritualized nature of an event where said “ritual” can be satirical and serious at once.

The DVD provides an especially trenchant foundation for this idea, highlighting temples and revivals that are simultaneously solemn and ridiculous. One of Gilmore’s survey questions read: “Has Burning Man been a life — or perspective-changing experience for you?” “Nearly three-fourths,” she adds, “responded affirmatively” . . . which — for someone who’s been transformed by that experience myself — is no big surprise.

The DVD puts a face and form to the text, turning home movies and edited interviews into a visceral visual experience. Speaking personally, the DVD brought up complicated feelings: laughter, nostalgia, a little bitterness, and a longing to return. Although technically rough, the footage captures the truth of a Burning Man experience far better than a more polished presentation might have done.

Just as Adler (*Drawing Down the Moon*) provided a “respectable” foundation for the Neopagan movement(s), so Gilmore gives Burning Man some much-needed academic cred. Avoiding (while occasionally citing) the labyrinthine poetics of commentators like Erik Davis and Hakim Bey, she lays out an informed, affectionate view of this “postmodern Mystery culture” and its indisputable rewards for the world at large. For anyone who seriously wants to know what the gibbering hell those dusty weirdos get up to out there in the desert. . . and, more importantly, why anyone else should care. . . *Theatre in a Crowded Fire* may be the definitive resource on that subject. After twenty years of puzzled glances, it’s a joy to have this book around. REVIEW BY SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO.

FOUR-AND-A-HALF BROOMSTICKS 🧹🧹🧹🧹

Ecstatic

H. Jeremiah Lewis, Nysa Press, 2011

For those pagans devoted to the Greek gods, there is no shortage of excellent books to turn to, both for academic information and poetic inspiration. Works dealing with the Hellenic pantheon and beliefs include not only primary source texts, such as the Homeric *Hymns*, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, and the *Iliad*, but more recent works of theory and analysis, such as Walter Burkert’s *Greek Religion* and Karl Kerényi’s *The Gods of the Greeks*. There is also no dearth of tomes on individual deities; plenty of modern authors have devoted ink and time to Hermes and Apollo, Demeter and Hekate.



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One of the more popular gods is Dionysus, and authors such as Walter Otto and Karl Kerényi have explored the myths of the wild god from academic, historical, and psychological viewpoints. With the publication of H. Jeremiah Lewis' *Ecstatic*, we have a new addition to the lore, written by an unabashed devotee.

The book is organized into three sections: essays, poetry, and short stories. Topics cover every aspect of the god and His myths: names and aspects, festivals, historical forms of worship, relationships with other gods and goddesses (not just in the Hellenic pantheon, either), and a hundred other things. *Ecstatic* differs from other books about Dionysus in that it is, in a sense, partially an autobiography of its author; told through the eyes of a devotee of the god, it covers twenty years of Lewis' life with Dionysus as much as it does the academic aspects of Dionysian worship.

Lewis (also known online as Sannion) demonstrates his love for Dionysus on every page and line. In the book's introduction, Lewis describes the *thesauros* — a chamber where the offerings brought to the god by devotees were kept, once found in most temples in ancient Greece. Offerings were given in gratitude, hope, and dedication, but most especially, for love. Sannion explains that *Ecstatic* is his *thesauros* to Dionysus.

There is so much here, it's difficult to pick out only a few gems, but I especially noted the discussion of etymological origins of Dionysus' name in the essay "What's in a Name?", the invocation of shadowy and dangerous face of madness borne by the god in the poem "Dionysos Mainomenos," and the first meeting of Dionysus and Ariadne laid out in the story "Ariadne's Story." As poet, priest, and diviner, Lewis wades hip-deep through matters both obvious and esoteric, and clearly relishes sharing what he knows. *Ecstatic* is ideal for casual readers who might be intimidated by more dense volumes, but deep enough for those looking for substantial fare. Quite an accomplishment for a 600 page (!) tome.

A perfect addition to any Hellenic's library and absolutely indispensable for all devotees of Dionysus, *Ecstatic* is truly a worthy offering. REVIEW BY JENNIFER LAWRENCE.

Heart of the Sun: An Anthology in Exhaltation of Sekhmet

Candace C Kant and Anne Key (editors)
Goddess Ink, 2011.

The Egyptian goddess Sekhmet is a powerful and old force. In mythology, Sekhmet bears the title "eye of Ra." She acted for the Sun God, dispensing his justice to the mortals on earth. When Ra grew particularly weary of the disrespect of humanity towards the gods, he summoned Sekhmet, who went on a killing spree, cleansing the earth of all creatures, and the other gods began to worry. They dyed beer red and spilled it in Sekhmet's path. Thinking it was blood, she stopped to lap it all up, transforming into her docile aspect of Hathor, the Cow Goddess. This myth forms the foundation of worship to Sekhmet, but as the authors of this collection point out, there is much more to this lion-headed Lady than destruction and debauchery. The authors brought together in this work — ranging from shamans and anthropologists to priestesses and teachers — weave an elegant tapestry dedicated to this fierce and powerful goddess.

Lorraine Tartasky, an expert on Egyptian hieroglyphics, explores some of Sekhmet's many titles, including "Lady of Fear," "Lady of Flame," and "Lady of Ma'at." Her well-researched piece presents a glimpse of the many ways the Ancient Egyptians viewed this powerful Goddess. Following Tartasky's piece is a carefully compiled list of the other titles of Sekhmet; the litany presented in this devotional rings with old power. Also of note is a beautiful guided journey to Sekhmet's temple in the Karnak complex. Written by Nicki Scully, a shamanic teacher and healer, this journey resonates even on the page: I can't wait to record it and try it out!

The second section of the book deals entirely with Sekhmet's presence in Nevada after the construction of the Temple of Goddess Spirituality Dedicated to Sekhmet. Many of the pieces in this section focus on the mantra attributed to Robert Masters for awakening Sekhmet forces within. Meditation and chanting are emphasized here, as are personal ritual, including a truly lovely set of quarter calls which focus entirely on Sekhmet by the editor, Candace C. Kant, who is herself a former priestess from the Temple of Goddess Spirituality and the founder of the Goddess Institute.

FIVE BROOMSTICKS 

The third section deals with Sekhmet in Her modern manifestations and includes rituals, hymns, invocations, and personal stories of encounters with Her. According to Ava, founder and priestess of the Goddess Temple of Orange County, Sekhmet showed her the forgotten fourth aspect of the Goddess: that of the Queen. When Hank Wessleman, an anthropologist, traveled to Egypt for the first time, he encountered what is said to be the only living statue of Sekhmet still in existence. His meeting with Her changed his life, which seems to be a recurring theme: no one can encounter this Goddess and not be affected in a dramatic way.

This rich anthology would be a lovely addition to any collection of works praising the Goddess. Sekhmet is a complicated force, but beneath Her fierce exterior, She is a Lady of great love. Whether you already have a relationship with this Goddess, or if you would like start one, this collection is a wonderful guide. REVIEW BY JEN MCCONNEL.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 🧹🧹🧹🧹

The Modern Book of the Dead

Ptolemy Tompkins, Atria Books, 2012

The central problem for all human life, according to Ptolemy Tompkins, is that Western culture has accepted a materialistic world view, and the task of this book is to solve this problem. The first fifty pages of this promising but ultimately disappointing book are an autobiographical account of his stormy relationship with his famous father, Peter Tompkins (author of *The Secret Life of Plants*, among other works). Unfortunately, this section of the book reads mostly as self-indulgence and narcissism, and as I got deeper into the text, the more little annoyances I found.

For instance, the author presupposes the new age claim that “human beings are spiritual beings having a human experience,” a quotation he (correctly) attributes to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (p. 31). But whether this proposition is true is one of the questions that the book was supposed to explain. This example and others like it left me feeling that the book is simply an extended circular argument. Further along, Tompkins invokes quantum physics, saying, “Just as quantum physics has discovered that subatomic particles only appear to be in one single place at a time but are in fact in many places at once, so too does the essential experiencing self appear to have, once out of the body, something of this everywhere-at-once quality” (p. 202). But this argument is a clear example of faulty analogy: there is just not enough in common between souls and subatomic particles to make it work.

Tompkins also draws on religious world views — including Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, and early Egyptian polytheism — to bolster his arguments, but ignores or glosses over the differences between these divergent systems. Indeed, in a chapter called “The Need For A Single Map” (of the afterlife, that is), he categorizes *all* of Western philosophical and religious thought into just four categories!

I had high hopes for this book. It asks some excellent and important questions. Why are so many people unhappy with their lives? When Western culture transitioned from a religious to a scientific and materialist world view, what did we lose, what did we gain? And was it worth it? But both Tompkins’ method for answering these questions, and the answers he arrived at, left me deeply unsatisfied. REVIEW BY BRENDAN MYERS.

ONE BROOMSTICK 🧹



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**Spiritual Cleansing:
A Handbook of Psychic Protection**
Draja Mickaharic, Weiser Books, 2012

A beautiful navy blue hamsa, palm edged with lines of orange and yellow, as well as delicate white flowers, immediately drew me to this reprint of the 1982 classic, *Spiritual Cleansing* by Draja Mickaharic. Opening to this slim volume's table of contents, I immediately saw this author meant to teach the reader how to spiritually cleanse using simple, everyday ingredients and objects.

Before Mickaharic delves into the "how to," he defines what he believes spiritual cleansing is, as well as what constitutes *Malochia*, or evil eye. For him, spiritual cleansing is the removal of negative vibration and the restoration of one's own, a necessity as much as washing our hands to remove dirt is. He argues that such spiritual cleansing techniques used to be common knowledge, passed on from generation to generation. Here, too, the reader gets a taste of Mickaharic's no-nonsense style tone in a warning he gives to the reader: "Deviating from the instructions given in this book may be harmful, and could cause serious damage to the spiritual nature of the experimenter." (pg.3) Although such a statement could make a metaphysical maverick balk, Mickaharic does follow with a reasonable explanation as to why he believes this is important.

For those spiritual practitioners concerned with the evil eye, the author not only defines it, he also describes its origins, its symptoms, and its removal. An interesting distinction he makes is between psychic attack – a rare occurrence – and psychic negativity, a more common form. Like the renowned Greek healer, the Magus of Strovolos, Mickaharic claims that true psychic attack is rare because most people are not important enough to warrant such an attack, and, most black magicians are not capable of delivering the blow! The lesser *Malochia*, however, is not only common, but responsible for much human suffering. Symptoms of it include a form of dull headache, dullness of thought process, and a general feeling of disability accompanied by a headache. *Malochia*, he claims, is usually passed when the person casting it is envious, jealous, or possessive. Oddly, one can even give oneself *Malochia* through self-praise and adoration!

So important is *Malochia* that Mickaharic immediately includes remedies to remove it. The single most effective remedy – other than prayer – is a beer bath. (For the reader who is eager to try

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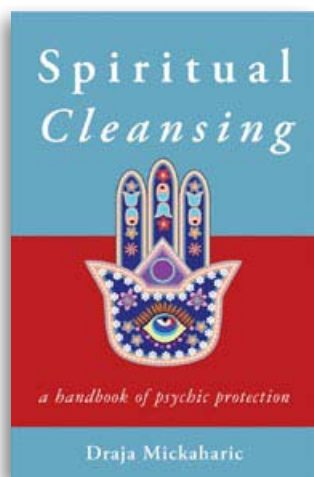
this remedy right away, I would suggest you continue reading ahead a bit to where he gives his instructions about ritual baths in general.) After Malochia, the next most prevalent spiritual difficulty occurs while asleep, as Mickaharic believes this is the time when one's spiritual nature is greatly open to influence. He calls this "influence while asleep," and prescribes a simple ritual involving placing a glass of water at the head of one's bed and disposing of the water in a prescribed way the next morning.

Upon trying this remedy, I immediately had intense, but revelatory dreams. I then asked a friend of mine to try it as well. He later told me that it produced the best night's sleep he had in a long time.

Mickaharic dedicates the longest chapter in this book to the ritual bath. In this section, he gives a bit of historical background, what a ritual bath can accomplish, and how to take a ritual bath. He then proceeds to instruct the reader on over thirty different baths, using a range of ingredients from baking soda to herbs and even, to nuts. Experiencing various negative influences? Try "Bath #2", a bath of 1 cup apple cider vinegar and 1 tsp. salt. Want to attract a lover and increase finances? Then the parsley and honey bath can help. One of the nicest parts of these bath recipes is that most use everyday, inexpensive ingredients.

For those readers who do not have a bathtub or access to one, do not despair. This book also contains remedies using eggs and incense to cleanse. An egg, writes the author, "is a symbol of the potential for life – especially one of growth and development" (pg. 71) — and also absorb negativity without questions, so it is the perfect device to aid in illness. Incense, of course, is commonly known for all kinds of cleansing. In his book, however, he describes a kind of self-fumigation, rather like a steam bath, which I had never heard of before.

Towards the end, Mickaharic includes an intriguing chapter called "Quieting the Mind." Here, he describes ways to literally quiet the mind by either washing or feeding the head. One simple remedy he gives is a salt head washing, used to help ground a person.



In this chapter, he makes it clear that these remedies are not a substitute for psychiatric help. His aim is to help cleanse the spiritual part of the individual.

What happens when such remedies simply aren't enough? Draja Mickaharic not only suggests seeking out a spiritual practitioner, but gives

guidance as to how to choose a true one. Living in Los Angeles, city of dreams and demons, I particularly liked his comment on "the flamboyant personality, the psychic showman." Says Mickaharic: "If you hear of someone who works as a spiritual practitioner, and you hear he is booked months in advance, or that he has a waiting list of the best clients . . . then you know that the person is not really a spiritual worker. A sincere spiritual worker does not let even other clients know who his clients are." (p. 105) Another thoughtful point is the note that for a spiritual practitioner to treat a spiritual condition successfully, the practitioner must work within the boundaries the client will accept.

All and all, I heartily recommend this well-written little gem. Having tried several of the remedies myself, I am prepared to say Mr. Mickaharic — whose own beliefs may at times offend a reader or two — really knows what he is talking about. Besides, rather than pay exorbitant fees to incompetent false spiritualists, why not pay a mere \$14.95 to take Malochia into one's own hands? I plan on keeping this volume right next to Dion Fortune's book on *Psychic Self-Protection*; I plan on filling my "Wonder Woman" drinking glass with water and nightly placing it by my bed. And yes — and I look forward to taking the occasion all beer bath to neutralize any accidental Malochia I may have given myself while pounding out the occasional review, poems, rant, and a screenplay or two. REVIEW BY KRISTA SCHWIMMER.

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Short Takes on Books & More

***Sexual Outlaw, Erotic Mystic: The Essential Ida Craddock* by Vere Chappell, Weiser, 2010 4/5 Broomsticks**

Ida Craddock was a 19th century American sexologist, feminist and theosophical mystic. Craddock spoke frankly about sex, and was unable to find a conventional publisher during her lifetime. Her works were distributed to selective clients through the post, which was a violation of the Comstock Law, and therefore a federal offence, under which she was prosecuted to the extent that she eventually committed suicide rather than be imprisoned.

Out of a rented office, Craddock ran a "Marriage Instruction" business, which provided what amounted to sexual counselling for couples, as well as individual sessions. Though there was speculation about mortal lovers influencing her teachings, Craddock maintained that she only had relations with her spirit husband, Soph. Chappell reproduces some of Craddock's diary entries, including detailed accounts of erotic experiences with Soph, and "assistance" from other spirits.

"Heavenly Bridegrooms", her first book, is included in its entirety along with its original introductory note from Theodore Schroeder and additional notes providing a history and context for spiritual lovers, and touching upon a three degree system of spiritual union. This system is explored in greater detail in a later treatise, "Psychic Wedlock," the final stage of which involves inviting god to share in the couple's pleasure, enabling "sex union upon all three planes of body, mentality and spirit".

Aleister Crowley's review of "Heavenly Bridegrooms," (reproduced in the appendix) calls it "one of the most remarkable documents ever produced . . . of incalculable value to every student of occult matters." While I can't top Crowley's praise, Craddock was a remarkable person, and this book serves as a useful aid in understanding and contextualizing Craddock's unique contribution to spiritual sex. REVIEW BY PSYCHE.

Stalking the Goddess

Mark Carter, Moon Books, 2012, 5/5 Broomsticks

Pagans often say that they really want a "beyond 101" quality book. They want a book that looks more deeply and critically into our history, practices, ideas, and beliefs. Friends, I'm delighted to say that Mark Carter's *Stalking the Goddess* is just such a book. I am enormously impressed.

The Goddess that Carter speaks of is none other than "The White Goddess," and the seeker who stalks her is (of course) Robert Graves, author of the book that bears her name. Today, Graves is controversial in some quarters of the Pagan movement: he's been posthumously accused of mistaking (or fabricating) the history, and so on. Carter's study shows us how all such criticisms miss the point.

Carter not only details the story of how Graves came to write *The White Goddess*, but the impact of Graves' text on neo-pagan culture and modern Druidry. Carter's work should be considered a must-have for anyone who wants to study the origins of our movement. He carefully unpacks Graves' theory of poetry, trying to make it easier

to understand, while also identifying mistakes, omissions, or continuity decisions Graves made along the way. In that sense, the book reads a bit like a detective story. But even this motif serves a deeper thesis, which has to do with the importance of poetry in religion and magic, and the importance of an inspirational goddess in the life of a magical poet. After Carter, it seems to me that *The White Goddess* should be read as one of the finest, most intellectually comprehensive, and most artistically brilliant love stories ever written by a poet about his muse.

At over 340 pages, *Stalking the Goddess* is a lot of work but it is well worth it. Fortunately, it is written in a conversational style, and should be accessible to all interested readers. The next time you want to demand that publishers support higher quality books, you can point to *Stalking the Goddess* as an example of what such books look like. REVIEW BY BRENDAN MYERS.

The Three Rays of Witchcraft

Christopher Penczak, Copper Cauldron, 2010 4/5 Broomsticks

Visiting the metaphysical section of my local bookstore has become an exercise in frustration. It seems every other book is a Wicca 101 manual, with the exact same information presented in different ways. Scattered among them are books on various other Pagan and New Age traditions, none of which provide the reader with much more than a cursory understanding of the subject matter. Then, every once in awhile, there is a hidden gem waiting to be discovered. Christopher Penczak's *The Three Rays of Witchcraft* is just such a gem.

The prolific Penczak has always had a knack for combining disparate magickal traditions, and *The Three Rays of Witchcraft* is no exception. In this book, he finds a common thread between many traditions and cultures in the three "rays" of power, love, and wisdom and proceeds to create a complete magickal system around them.

Penczak's system of magick is well-researched and thorough. Each of the three rays runs through the Upper World (the heavens), the Middle World (the world between), and the Lower World (home of the dead). Each ray has its own color, which shifts and changes as it moves through the worlds. Each ray also has its own Chakra, its own helper spirits, its own magickal correspondences, even its own life calling. Penczak not only explains what corresponds with each ray, he explains *why*.

Throughout the book, there are meditations and rituals to help you explore the three rays on your own. There are rituals and magick spells for practical application of the rays. The book culminates with a complicated (but powerful) ritual invoking all three rays.

The only beef I have with "The Three Rays of Witchcraft" is the lack of an appendix with all the comparison charts that are currently scattered throughout the book, but it's a small quibble. *The Three Rays of Witchcraft* is one of the rare books that challenges you to look deeper both within yourself, and within your tradition. It makes you look at how your tradition is similar to others, and at what cultures and systems you draw from in your own practice. It also gives you a good foundation for your own magickal practice. REVIEW BY MICHELE GRIFFIN.

Mrs. B's Guide to Household Witchery:

Everyday Magic, Spells, and Recipes

by Kris Bradley, Weiser, 2012 4/5 Broomsticks

Sometimes, life gets in the way of our spiritual practice. It's easy to get bogged down and busy, and before you know it, you haven't done a cleansing spell in months. But the mundane world doesn't have to dominate the magical one; in fact, the two can work hand-in-hand if you're willing to apply a little creative elbow grease, and that's what this book is.

Best known for her popular blog "Confessions of a Pagan Soccer Mom," author Kris Bradley offers a wealth of practical knowledge in such a way that it feels like you're sitting down with her for tea. The chapters are short enough to read in a sitting, and the book is neatly organized to provide ready reference for all your household magical needs. Mrs. B's *Guide* works through a home room by room, offering simple suggestions to incorporate magic into your space. There are suggestions for altars, protective charms, and quirky ideas like "junk drawer divination" to help you transform your home into a place pulsing with positive energy. I especially enjoyed the "Laundry Room Consecration" spell; it makes the whole house feel light and safe! While many of the charms in this section focus on protection, there are also spells to add spice in the bedroom; after all, it's another magical spot in your house!

Bradley emphasizes the importance of the elements within a domestic context, offering a slew of ways to balance the forces of nature within a dwelling. To add fire to a space, why not hang up a strand of dried hot peppers? Water can be added by using a piece of fishing net to hold toys, while air is welcomed with wind chimes near the door. An easy way to add earth is keeping terracotta pots in the windows. All of the suggestions are simple, cheap, and easily-executed, reinforcing Bradley's point that anything can be magical with the right intention.

This book also includes a lengthy section listing household deities and spirits from around the world. The gods, goddesses, and other immortals found in this section are helpful in protecting hearth and home, and they also bring joy and good fortune to families. Following the section on domestic deities is a useful herbal which lists the magical and mundane properties of readily available ingredients. Bradley even includes easy recipes for incense, oils, and house washes. I can't wait to try the "Friendship Mix" potpourri before my next gathering.

My favorite part of this book is the final section, "Simple Sabbats for the Busy Witch." This section includes a five-minute solo ritual, a group ritual, and an idea geared for children, for each of the eight traditional Sabbats. I particularly enjoy the different "For the Kids" ideas, including donating gifts during Yule, coloring eggs for Ostara, and creating a Midsummer home for the faeries. Filled with whimsy and practical suggestions, these Sabbat celebrations offer interesting ways for you to connect with your family and community during the holidays.

If you've been feeling disconnected from magic lately, pick up this book and get energized! If you think you're too busy to have a spiritual practice, think again. And if you just need some fresh ideas and a boost, Mrs. B's is the book for you. REVIEW BY JEN MCCONNELL.

Steampunk Tarot

By Barbara Moore & Aly Fell, Llewellyn, 2012

4/5 Broomsticks

Coming from a background in traditional tarot, I am very particular in what kind of deck that I use, and I must admit I had low expectations for this deck, believing that it might be just another “passing fad” novelty. However, when I received the Steampunk Tarot, I was pleasantly surprised. Not only did Moore correctly translate the fundamentals of the steampunk genre, but she also has a keen insight into the subtleties of the tarot as well. Aesthetically, the artwork of the deck is utterly gorgeous, yet skillfully crafted to include all of the symbols that make the tarot such a useful tool of the subconscious mind.

One of the first things that struck me as I flipped through the deck for the first time was how devoid the pictures are of any signs of nature, which is, of course, completely in line with the “industrial revolution” conceit of the steampunk genre. Amazingly, the whole deck exudes the indisputable feeling of living within a 19th century metropolis right out of the pages of H.G. Wells, yet paradoxically is filled with the mystical vibe that all good tarot decks should exude.

The deck maintains the traditional 78 card count and names for both the Major Arcana and Court, cards but everything else about this deck is utterly unique, and in many cases unorthodox. Some cards that are traditionally male are shown with female figures, which gives the deck a stronger slant towards the feminine.

The book which comes with the deck gives an excellent guide to reading the tarot, an extensive description of each card and its symbolism. I especially enjoyed the variety of spreads that Moore discusses: rather than stick to the time-honored Celtic Cross, Moore introduces several innovative spreads ranging from a “One Card Wonder” to a series of “Adaptable Spreads” that all fit in nicely with the steampunk theme.

As a tarot traditionalist, I had a difficult time reading with this deck, but that had more to do with my inability to relate to the imagery, than to any defect in the deck itself. I would recommend it to anyone with a strong pull towards steampunk culture. Review by MONTE PLAISANCE.

Seasons of Witchery:

Celebrating the Sabbats with the Garden Witch

by Ellen Dugan, Llewellyn, 2012, 4/5 Broomsticks

Take a wonder-filled journey around the Wheel of the Year with “Garden Witch” Ellen Dugan’s new book *Seasons of Witchery!* Beginning on the longest day — June 21, aka Midsummer, Summer Solstice, Litha — enchantments, rituals, thematic celebrations, and personal musings abound for each season and festival throughout the magickal year. Ellen celebrates the history, themes, correspondences, and symbols for Pagan life in harmony with the passing year in her characteristic style: intimate, upfront, and amusing. She offers us journal excerpts from her own enchanted gardens, listings on faerie and Yuletide plants, and advice on gardening and herbcrafting, the language of flowers, how to keep the faeries and earth spirits happy, feeding the birds, “greenhouse therapy” in the cold months, and even a guide to butterfly magick!

From sacred mysteries like calling in your plant familiar to honoring the May Queen, there is an abundance of suggestions here for sabbat-themed spells, charms, candle workings, blessings, divinations, and full moon magick. Decorating tips for your home and environs, and crafts and yummy recipes for each sabbat are included, such as Vernal Equinox Quiche, Midsummer Sangria Slush, and Yuletide Gingerbread People. I especially resonated with the folklore of Goddesses Brigid, Luna, and Ostara. Ellen relates stories and “personal lessons” from her own life and coven to illuminate the synchronicities, magic, and miracles that surround us in every time and place. Immersed in busy activity, having fun, or spending time alone in introspection, this book will encourage you to make your own seasons of witchery more unique and meaningful. Connecting each holiday to both God/Goddess and nature, there are plenty of ideas, insights and inspirations in “Seasons of Witchery” to (as Ellen would say) warm your Witchy heart! REVIEW BY PEGI EYERS

Enchantment Encumbered

Ashleen O’Gaea, CreateSpace, 2012, 3/5 broomsticks

This book is self-published by Mother Earth Ministries, a Pagan prison ministry in Arizona and affiliated to the Aquarian Tabernacle Church. They are a group of religious volunteers working in Arizona, so much of the book is framed within their experiences in that state’s system.

In its favor, the book has good basic information for prison settings, such as liturgical formats for ritual, glossaries, and how to do things. (An index for information would have been helpful at the end of the book for referencing purposes.) Part One’s introduction to Wicca is good and well rounded. All of the basics are well explained. Tools can be a difficult topic with officials, and the basics are there for everyone to sort through. The section on mythologies is to be applauded and is more information than needed. The environmental section begins a brilliant conversation that all inmates honoring nature-centered paths should think about and discuss with their chaplains, how can they support the caretaking of the land they are living on; a section that discusses indoor ritual a bit would open more possibilities for inmates who cannot be outside.

A serious flaw in the book is the lack of a thorough discussion of RLUIPA and RFRA, federal laws that protect religious freedom and pluralism in institutions such as prisons. In many states, clergy, chaplains, and inmates struggle with the balance of these two laws, the distinctions between the two and how to get things done in a way that serves the population at hand. Pagan clergy must know these laws to know the boundaries of the systems and protect themselves. More attention to this topic in the book to those serving inmates and would support inmates in know the boundaries of the volunteer’s work. I hope the authors will consider adding this information to future editions.

Part Two begins to discuss rituals, creating circle, esbats, sabbats, passage rites, and magic. This is the strongest section of the book. It is clear the authors are extremely passionate and dedicated to meaningful ritual. Magic and spells are often the most difficult thing to explain to the layperson or others outside of the Craft.

Part Three discusses Wicca in the World, and this section is tailored for those leaving the correctional system. The section on authors in Wicca is reasonably well-written, but of limited usefulness (most inmates cannot hope to receive assistance from famous writers) — it would have been more useful to discuss groups and organizations such as Lady Liberty League (to name just one) that specialize in Pagan rights. Another suggestion: resources on how to find local Pagan groups back home (and maybe a sidebar on how to overcome anti-prisoner prejudice in such groups) would be very useful.

As the authors have openly said however, this is one of the first books of this kind and is needed. For those in our world who are encumbered in their expressions of religion, it is a start. REVIEW BY JERRIE HILDEBRAND.

Witch Hunts: A Graphic History of the Burning Times
Rocky Wood, Lisa Morton, and Greg Chapman;
McFarland Publishing, 2012, ZERO broomsticks

Being a fan of comics, and well-read on the Burning Times, I was really looking forward to a graphic novel presenting itself as a historical account. To say that I was sadly disappointed by this book would be a serious understatement; to put it simply, *Witch Hunts* is exploitative schlock whose primary mission appears to be using explicit images to provoke the reader.

Witch Hunts is certainly not for young or sensitive audiences, yet lacks a maturity warning. The scenes of torture and seemingly random nudity are exploitative of women (no males are drawn full-frontally nude, yet many fully nude females are present), and the artwork is crude and inadequate, with mediocre perspective, incomplete panels, and rudimentary techniques. The very first picture inside the book features a cronish women standing inside of a protective circle surrounded by candles waving a wand at an impish creature, while the first actual panel prominently features a woman hanged in public.

Appalling scenes are integral to the horror genre, and both Wood and Morton are well-established horror writers, but sadly the writing is even more abysmal than the imagery. The book is well-nigh unreadable; horror tropes dominate to the extent that is difficult to recall characters from one page to the next, and the non-lineal nature of the narrative seems completely inappropriate for the material.

This disjointed and muddled book mangles sensitive subject matter to further an unknown agenda. With two of the participants writing dedications to the victims while another mentions how horror writers entertain their audience, it seems apparent that the intention of the piece was never fully clear even to its creators. Add a rushed ending relating “current” events as evidence of witch-related injustice still being a problem in the world, and the whole treatment comes off as trite. Perhaps if the horrific illustrations were matched with some respect for the victims, *Witch Hunts* would not feel so exploitative. REVIEW BY LITHO FAYNE. ♦

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*(My Path: Fire in the Belly,
continued from p. 88)*

a mixture of red sand and three Fire-connected herbs: ginger, cinnamon, and sometimes cloves as an offering whenever I do ritual. Every month I also offer Her my menstrual blood. I was unsure at first if She would appreciate this offering (I was very squeamish about offering Her my blood in any other way), but I upon more research I discovered that Sekhmet is not only a Goddess of War, but that because of Her connection to blood, She also presides over menstruation. I further checked via divination and ritual whether she would appreciate my form of a blood offering, and based on the wonderfully hot, buzzing sensation I felt from Her during this ritual I believed that She was more than pleased.

Sekhmet has also taught about the ways in which Fire is related to passion. Passion is most often associated with lust and/or love, and Fire is certainly a representative of both, as shown by popular phrases like “in the heat of passion” and “getting fired up.” However, Fire represents not only sexual passion but the passion of deeply-held personal belief. In my case, this shows up in my unabashed feminism — whenever someone uses rhetoric that denounces women and seeks to deny us our autonomy and rights, I feel the Fire of Passion rage within me. This is yet another aspect of passion: that of anger, of unbridled fury. Sekhmet is an obvious representation of that fury, as evidenced by the fact that She attempted to destroy humankind without a second thought. However, one of Her most important lessons to me, a lesson for which I am incredibly grateful, is how to use my anger constructively. If I — either deliberately or accidentally — destroy everything I touch, as in Her original myth, my only success will be that destruction. While a rampage might feel good in the moment, when the dust settles and the embers die down, you find that you’re left with nothing but a steady stream of blood flowing down the quiet sands. What Sekhmet has taught me is that if you channel that anger and use that energy to affect change, the impact of your work is both profound and longer-lasting. (It’s hard to feel satisfaction in your work if all you do is create a smoking ruin!)

Sekhmet has awakened and strengthened my inner warrior, and has taught me to embrace my Fire when faced with injustice, especially the injustices that women still face all over the world. Her Warrior aspect appeals to mine, and we will never stand silently by while discrimination and violence against women continues.

She has also taught me to feel that Fire in the belly rising as I connect myself with All That Is, whether I am in ritual or simply outside enjoying nature. Fire doesn’t just exist as a tangible flame; it also exists as the spark of life within each and every living (and non-living!) thing on this planet, the lightning that sizzles through the sky, the warmth of the blood that courses through our veins and keeps us alive.



*Fire doesn't just
exist as a tangible
flame: but as the spark
of life within, the
lightning that sizzles
through the sky, and
the warmth of blood
that courses through
our veins.*

Of course, it would be naive to declare that fire is all “sweetness and light;” clearly, Fire can be incredibly dangerous and it has the capacity to engulf and destroy. The intense heat of the Egyptian desert, Sekhmet’s native environment, is harsh and unforgiving. So, too, is the Element of Fire generally. Those who are disrespectful of and careless with Fire will find that there are dire consequences. For example, I once made the huge mistake of ignoring Her earnest attempts to get my attention. She chose to remind me of my obligation in the form of a second degree sunburn that covered me from my shoulder blades to the middle of my back. Needless to say, I only made that mistake once!

However, I have come to see over time that the difference between controlling Fire and allowing Fire to control you is the

amount of care, effort, and respect you put into working with it. If you light a campfire and careless walk away from it without dousing the burning embers, chances are that section of the forest will be gone by morning. Similarly, engaging with Fire energy — either directly with a Fire goddess like Sekhmet or directly with the Element of Fire — requires caution, discretion, and appropriate respect. But in my experience, the benefits of igniting your passion with the spirit of Fire are worth the risk.

ILYSSA is an openly Pagan graduate student at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, focusing on Gender and Sexuality Studies. She has been a practicing Pagan for the last eleven years and is a devotee of Sekhmet. Her poem “Sekhmet as Healer” was published in Sekhmet: When the Lion Roars, a devotional anthology compiled by Galina Krasskova and published by Asphodel Press. She enjoys spending her free time ranting on her blog “What the Feminist,” located at <http://wtfwhatthefeminist.blogspot.com>.

Would you like to share your spiritual journey? We are always looking for submissions that concern a specific named tradition or path, rather than personal eclecticism. Email www.bbimedia.com/email and put “My Path” in the subject header to find out more.

My spiritual path began when I was still fairly small, although I wouldn't know it for another few years. I was lying on my stomach on the grass at an outdoor classical concert, staring at the flame emanating from our neighbors' citronella candle. I watched the tiny blue and orange flame undulate in the cool night air, and I became transfixed. My mother admonished me for eavesdropping on their conversation, even though they were amused and laughing at how mesmerized I was by this one tiny flame. They needn't have worried: I wasn't listening to anything else except the sound of my heart pounding in my ears.

I believe that I have been Pagan since childhood, but I officially claimed the label when I was about eleven years old. For the first few years, like most teens, I focused solely on spellwork, and it wasn't until I was fifteen years old that I started paying attention to the spiritual aspect of being a Pagan. However, I was always very attracted to the Elements, particularly fire. Before becoming consciously Pagan, I associated fire solely with fear. I was entranced by fire because I believed that its only purpose was to blindly destroy everything in its path. This idea was exemplified by the raging forest fires I heard about every summer and the house fires I witnessed on the news. However, in my personal life, Fire kept calling to me, and somehow I knew that there was more to the dancing embers than mindless destruction.

The Spirit of Fire made Herself known to me on October 18, 2008. I was at a ritual at a friend's house, and during a particularly intense meditation, the Goddess Sekhmet appeared to me in the form of a lion-headed woman with long, flowing black hair, and a sun disk on top of Her head with a cobra snaking out in front of it. Her face was hidden by shadow, but Her name flashed into my mind, and instantly I knew that I had just embarked on an incredible journey.

Sekhmet is associated with the element of Fire and the intense heat of the midday sun. One of Her many names is "Nesert," which means "Flame." The most commonly known story of Sekhmet is that She was created from the fire of Ra's eyes for the purpose of destroying those who had disobeyed him. However, She was so strong that, like Fire itself, once on her (war)path, She began to incinerate everything in her path. She was only stopped when she was offered an intoxicating mixture of beer and pomegranate juice, meant to resemble blood, which quelled Her rage.

This story of Sekhmet only intensified my belief that Fire was purely destructive, but as I began to connect with Sekhmet more deeply, I began to see another side of Her. Not too long after She first showed Herself to me, my then-boyfriend came down with a bad flu. I wanted to do a healing spell for him, but from what I had previously known, the



Fire in the Belly: Sekhmet and Me

by Ilyssa Silfen

only element associated with healing was Water, which was not an element I worked with well. I meditated on the matter for quite some time, and eventually Sekhmet revealed to me that while fire is destructive, its power can be used for positive, purifying ends. This revelation was reinforced when I discovered that Sekhmet is not only a Goddess of War, but also in Kemet tradition, a Goddess of healing and the patron of healers and physicians.

Now, I'm no biology major, and I'm pretty sure I'd pass out if I ever had to perform surgery, but I've reached a compromise with Her in that I've chosen to use my magick to heal and protect. Through Her teachings, She was able to show me that Fire could heal by cauterizing wounds and destroying disease, thereby using Fire's purifying properties to heal. I realized that rather than focusing on gently washing away my boyfriend's illness, I could focus on Fire burning away the germs and purifying his body. (Our bodies' natural defense

against viruses, for example, is elevating our body temperature through fever.) Whatever the source of the healing, my boyfriend was back in school within a couple of days instead of a week, and I have continued to use Fire in my healing spells ever since.

Sekhmet is a Goddess of War and Destruction as well as Fire, and my relationship with Her is very devotional: based on personal gnosis, but heavily buttressed by reading, research, and practice. Even though I would in no way describe myself as an Egyptian Reconstructionist, I honor Sekhmet in a way that respects Her history, Her culture, and Her personal tastes. When I first obtained a statue of Her, I blessed it using a modified version of the Opening of the Mouths ceremony, wherein the statue is symbolically animated by the deity in question, and I began offering her gifts, based on both lore and my own intuition.

For example, I have quite a few pieces of carnelian surrounding Her statue on my altar, along with a bloodstone, a small ankh made of bone, and a silver sun pendant with a piece of amber set in the center. Another ankh, this one made of silver with another piece of amber set in the loop, rests on Her neck, and a sunstone pendant is laced to Her waist. I use

As I began to connect with Sekhmet more deeply, I began to see another side of Her. Sekhmet is not only a Goddess of War, but the patron of healers and physicians.

(continued on p. 87.)

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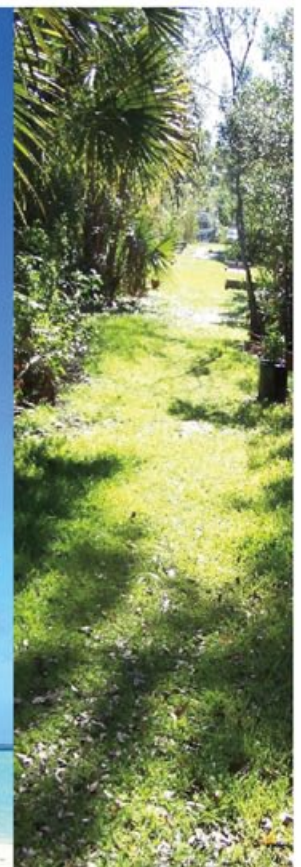
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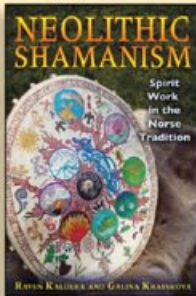
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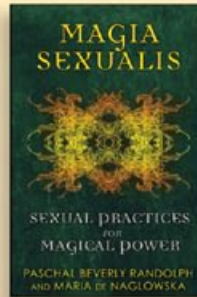
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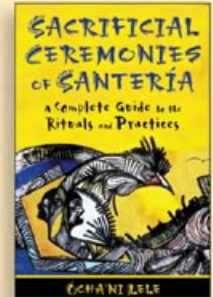
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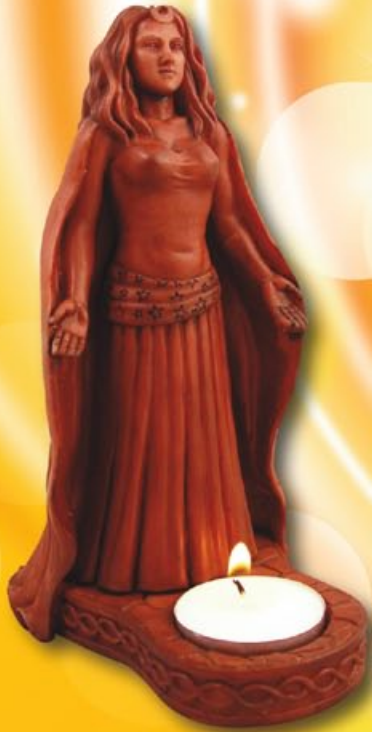
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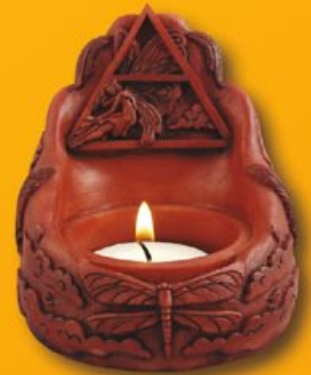


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