

AN INTRODUCTION TO... THE WICCAN RELIGION

Wicca is a nature-oriented (not nature-worshipping), initiatory pagan mystery religion based on the traditions and beliefs of tribal Europe, with significant influence from Western magical traditions and a ritual structure based on the writings of Gerald Gardner and the practices of the New Forest area covens. There are many 'traditions' (or denominations) in Wicca.

Traditional Wicca

In British Traditional Wicca (or BTW), there is a clear lineage (line of teaching passed on by initiated Traditional priests and priestesses) directly back to Gardner and the New Forest region. From the New Forest origins came various traditions such as Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Central Valley Wicca, Mohsian, Blue Star, Proteus Wicca, and many others.

All forms of Traditional Wicca are variants of a single 'mystery' religion - one that requires initiation by someone who has been initiated in that particular Tradition. Traditional Wicca has a "degree system" or different levels based upon a system of training and the readiness of the initiate to accept the duties and responsibilities of that degree or level. Traditional Wiccan covens have a core of inner knowledge that is shared only with those initiated in that Tradition.

Other forms of Wicca

There are other forms of Wicca that have developed in the last few decades. Some of these are traditions that trace their origins back to British Traditional Wicca but have changed their form of practice in such a way that they do not conform to particular criteria necessary to be considered Traditional Wicca. Others are combinations of Traditional teachings and historical practices, publicly available practices and sources, and/or personal gnosis.

Those following these forms of practice may form groups or not, may or may not follow a degree system, and may or may not have a formal outline of their practices and structure.

Defining Beliefs

Specific beliefs vary among the Traditions and practitioners, but there are some generalities that can be made. Some of the defining beliefs are:

What ALL Wiccans believe:

- The single most common belief is the Wiccan Rede. 'Rede' is an old English term that means 'wise advice', and it is a guideline that decisions and actions are based on. The most commonly cited short form of the Wiccan Rede is "An it harm none, do what ye Will."
- The second most common belief is the Law of Returns. Simply stated, it is the belief that whatever you do comes back to you in some way, good and bad.
- Wiccans have a high respect for Nature. We honor the Earth and try to care for and protect her. We get in touch with Nature by honoring it, by being aware of it and by educating ourselves about it.
- Wiccans believe that Nature is cyclical. We believe everything happens in an ever-repeating cycle. We see this in the seasons: Autumn leads to Winter, which leads to Spring, which leads to Summer, which leads to Autumn. This cycle replays itself over and over. (Although it's more of a Slinky than a circle - there are subtle changes with each revolution...) Our holidays, the Sabbats, are celebrations of the solstices and equinoxes, and the midpoints in between these cardinal points in the great Cycle of Nature.
- Wiccans practice magic. We see magic not as something supernatural (which means

beyond Nature), but as a natural part of the universe.

- Wiccans cast Circles (create sacred space) during ritual and magic, and invite elements or elementals into their working space during both.
- Wicca is an Initiatory religion, which means that you must be initiated into it. Traditional Wiccans believe that you must be initiated by someone who was initiated by someone (and so on back to the New Forest Covens). Some others believe that since initiations come from the Gods, a lineage is not necessary for a valid initiation. Whichever belief is held, a lot of study and practice is required both before and after initiation.
- All initiates are Priests and Priestesses. We believe that you need no one and nothing other than yourself in order to interact with the Divine. We have no need for a mediator, for there is no barrier between Self and the Divine.
- Wiccans do not seek converts. We feel that if Wicca is the right path for a person, he or she will seek out proper training.

What MOST Wiccans believe:

- There are many roads to enlightenment, and each spiritual path is unique. Each individual must walk their own path in their own time and way, and all religions that do not seek to harm or control others are valid for those that follow them.
- Most Wiccans are Duotheistic (that means they believe in a single God and a single Goddess, with all Gods and Goddesses being aspects of these two) or Polytheistic (that means they believe in many Gods and Goddesses as individual entities). Some hold a Monistic view in that they view the various Gods and Goddesses as separate, individual aspects of a single Divine entity.
- Most Wiccans are pantheistic - they believe that all forces and manifestations in the universe are part of the Divine. Deity is in everything and is everything.
- Most Wiccans are also animistic - they believe that everything has a soul that is separate from its physical being, including things that are normally seen as inanimate like rocks and trees. The world and all aspects of it are seen as living life forces: not inert, not dead, and not our enemy to conquer; rather a sibling spirit to live with.
- Most Wiccans believe in reincarnation. Unlike the Eastern view of reincarnation, Wiccans believe that we are born repeatedly in human form in order to learn, to grow and to help others. It is a cyclical view of life - the same things happen over and over again: birth through death then rebirth. Death is not the end of existence, only the end of that incarnation.

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