

Ethics of Wicca

There is no devil in Wicca, but we do recognize that there are individual actions that can result in harm to oneself or others. Since we recognize deity in each person, harm to a person is harm to deity as well. As a result, we feel we need only one commandment, and that is the Wiccan Rede ('rule'). The rede states: *An it harm none, do as that wilt.* This is an old English wording that means that whatever is your will to do, it should not harm anyone. Not yourself and not another. This places the responsibility of what you do upon your own shoulders.

We also believe in the 'three-fold' law. It is a law of consequence that states that what is done to others will return three-fold. If you do evil, it will return to you with a much greater force. If you do good, then your rewards will be three-fold. Will it be immediate or in the same vein? Perhaps, perhaps not. It only states that it will return.

Why do we use the word Witch?

The biggest reason is this: There is history that shows that the wise woman or wise man of the European village was a respected healer with herbs and words. This person was the village shaman. Although there has been much evolution, Wiccan history shows a tradition that dates back to these village shamans. Although much has been lost to history, especially during the Inquisition, there is still much that has remained handed down in families.

Why do we continue to use words like witch, pagan, and magick that have such negative connotation? These were the words that were once used before the evil of the inquisition subverted them and tried to turn them into something evil. Words are not evil. Hate is evil and so is intolerance. Wiccans simply do not wish to empower these evils by accepting false allegations. It is hate that must be avoided, not words.

Blessed Be!

Basic Points about Wicca:

- *Wiccans do not perform black magic. We believe that what you do will return to you three-fold and we are bound by the Wiccan Rede.*
- *Wiccans do not sacrifice animals in ritual. Most of us love animals, many of us are vegetarians because we do not wish an animal killed for our food. We see deity in all life, including animals.*
- *Wiccans do not worship the devil. Satan is an entity in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. We have no such concept in Wicca nor is there one in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikism or any other pagan religion except Zoroasterianism from where the concept originated.*
- *Wiccans do not perform 'black masses'. These are parodies of a different religion and we respect other religions. Our celebrations are instead positive and beautiful celebrations of the human spirit.*

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WICCA AN OLD RELIGION IN A NEW AGE

"When I was young, I felt that when I was in a church, I was close to God. Not too far away from my home was a beautiful park with rolling hill of grass outlined with many red and yellow flowers and trees. There, I felt close to Mother Nature. How strange, I thought, that God was in a building made by man and Mother Nature was outside with the flowers. That is when I felt that there had to be a Goddess as well."

The Religion of Wicca

For almost two thousand years, the major religions of the western world have seen deity as a single god representing the spiritual father. Statements and attitudes attributed to Him are male oriented and reflect the general social attitude of mid-Eastern societies. In the last few decades, a religion that had its start in Europe made its way into America. It taught that deity was both God and Goddess and that they were equal, neither superior to the other. It taught that mankind was not the owner of the world or the creatures of the world but instead that we were all brothers and sisters of all living beings. This religion is now called Wicca, but it embraces the teachings of many ancient religions.

Many people who did not understand this new religion, called it worship of the devil, but Wicca has no devil. Instead, it teaches love and respect for nature and all living things as well as the Earth itself. It does not separate people into sinners and saved but instead emphasizes the beautiful nature within each of us. We were born not with sin, but from the passion and loving union of two people. Mankind may have hate, but it also has love. We humans may often hurt each other, but we try to heal each other as well.

In just a few short years, Wicca has grown quickly and is one of the fastest growing religions. It is not a religion of established churches, but of ordinary people. These are the people who have walked into the meadow and looked for the Goddess; people who have seen the magic of nature and have found it beautiful and worthy of deep respect.

In the early villages in Europe, the women practitioners were called 'wise women' and men either 'wise men' or 'cunning men'. These were people who lived in the village and were knowledgeable of the local herbs and how to use their curative powers. They were also the ones who gave advice and helped others deal with the problems of life. Often, they were old since the wisdom they had took many years to develop. The word 'witch' evolved from the older names.

When church missionaries came north to the country villages in northern Europe, they were threatened by the respect the village people had for their healers, so many missionaries called the village wise women and men worshipers of the devil, heretics and practitioners of evil witchcraft.

This later became a wholesale torture and killing of up to many thousands of people during the years of the inquisition. This time of horror lasted from 1233 with the first Papal ordinance directly dealing with witchcraft until 1782 with the last burning of a witch, 549 years!

Another term that was marginalized was the word 'pagan'. Pagan does not mean atheist or devil worshiper. It simply means that the person is of a religion other than Jewish, Christianity or Islam. In this regard, Shintoism of Japan, Taoism of China and Hinduism of India are all pagan religions. The first religion in the North American hemisphere was pagan, the religion of the Native Americans. 'Pagan' comes from the Latin word for countryman or country dweller and referred to the people who lived in the countryside.

Wicca is a pagan religion as are most religions. A pagan religion is usually, but not always, polytheistic or possessing more than one god. In Wicca, we believe that there is both female and male aspects of deity and this is enough for us to think in terms of Goddess and God. The God and the Goddess are not distant beings, but are actively around us in terrestrial and celestial nature and in all living things. It is not unusual for us to greet another in a religious celebration with the greeting 'Thou art God' or 'Thou art Goddess' as a recognition of the deity within each of us.

Celebrations and Worship

Our worship is in a circle with people facing each other. Since deity is within each of us, facing each other seems more natural than being in an audience style arrangement of a church congregation where the priest or minister is the focal point. Since Wiccans do their own ritual, we are all priests and priestesses. Deity is within each of us; we need no intermediary person to make a divine connection for us.

We honor the celestial aspect of deity by celebrating the solar and lunar events. The sun is projective and is a representation of the God. The moon is softer and has a monthly cycle, so it is a good representation of the Goddess. Instead of praying before a statue of the God or the Goddess, it seems more natural to us to feel the rays of the sun or raise our hands to the light of the moon when we pray. We prefer to worship outdoors if possible.

We have two kinds of regular rituals. One type is the sabbat. There are total of eight sabbats, four are

celebrations of a solar events like the equinoxes or the solstices. These are: Yule (winter solstice), Ostara (spring equinox), Litha (summer solstice) and Mabon (fall equinox). These are held close to the time of the event. The other sabbats are the Celtic celebrations of Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane and Lughnasadh.

One of the most important sabbats is Samhain (pronounced 'sow'-when'). It is an important celebration of our ancestors who have left the world of the living, but still live in our hearts. We honor those of our families that have passed over with a 'dumb supper'. This is a place setting at our dinner table for Uncle Jim or Grandmother Judy so that we can show their spirits that they are still loved by us and not forgotten. Unfortunately, those who wish to believe that we pray to the devil also say that Samhain is a celebration of Sam Hain, the god of the underworld. There is no Sam Hain; Samhain means 'summers end' in the ancient tongue. Although Samhain is celebrated in early November (variously the 1st to the 14th), it is not the same holiday as Halloween. Halloween is the night before All Saints Day, a day that was moved to November 1st by Pope Gregory around 835 AD and is thus a Christian holiday.

Another major celebration is Beltane (pronounced in the US as 'bell-tane' although this is not the traditional pronunciation). Beltane is a celebration of life and springtime. We think of it as the time when the Goddess and the God wed. It is held on May 1st and is usually celebrated with a dance around the maypole. The remaining sabbats are Imbolc, the celebration of the return of the light on the February 1st and Lughnasadh, the celebration of the first harvest on August 1st.

In addition to the sabbats are the esbats or moon celebrations. Depending on the tradition, the esbat may be celebrated on the night of the full moon or the night of the new moon or both. It is the time for private work such as healings and blessings rather than celebrations.

Other rituals include one of the most beautiful of rituals, the Handfasting. This is a celebration of the union of two people and may be done as a legal marriage. The two people to be handfasted face each other rather than the altar since the focus of each is on the other person, again because deity resides within. The beauty of the handfasting is apparent to those who have never seen a Wiccan ritual and is a wonderful way to be introduced to the religion.