

**The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum**

(<http://www.ecauldron.net>)

**Presents**

# **Teens & Paganism FAQ**

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*Edited by Brelan*

*Reviewed by Finn, Hyacinth Belle, Kasmira, Sunflower*

*Coordinated by Moon Ivy*

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## **Teens and Paganism FAQ: Introduction**

Welcome to The Cauldron's Frequently Asked Questions for Teen Pagans! Paganism is an umbrella term for a huge variety of religions and beliefs. It's impossible to pinpoint one set of characteristics as "pagan," but it is (fairly) safe to say that, in a nutshell, pagans are not Christian, Jewish, or Muslim and that most believe in things like tolerance and responsibility for one's own actions. It is a way of faith that many find freeing and empowering. If you're interested in learning more about some of the different forms of paganism beyond this overly simplified definition, then you've come to the right place.

It can be really difficult to find relevant information as a teen starting to get interested in paganism, what with limited resources and transportation. We hope that this FAQ will be just what you're looking for! Tons of members here at The Cauldron, including lots of teens, worked together on this project to put together a comprehensive heap of knowledge.

Many of the sections will discuss paganism in general, such as what it is (and what it isn't!), what pagans do, and some common beliefs. A lot of other sites are focused on Wicca and witchcraft but The Cauldron is very much about diversity, so there is info about a lot of other pagan paths as well. There's plenty of practical advice about rituals. Tips and information about challenges such as "fluffy bunnies" and working with a group are included as well. You'll also find material specific to people in their teens, such as how to deal with your faith at school and with family. At the end, there are lists of resources for further study, a glossary, and personal stories from people who are going through or have gone through the teen pagan experience.

From all of us here at The Cauldron, we hope you learn a lot here and enjoy your visit. Snoop around and you'll find a massive amount of other articles in addition to an active forum on this site, so feel free to put them to use as well! We wish you good luck and many blessings as you explore this new path.

Thank you,  
Hyacinth Belle

## **PAGAN PATHS**

As we said in the introduction, there are a huge number of Pagan paths. Wicca is one of the most visible paths, but we'd like to highlight some you may not be as familiar with, like Dianic Witchcraft, Celtic and Hellenic Reconstructionism, Voudon, Eclecticism, and Druidry [ADF]. Each article is meant to be an overview, covering the history, basic tenets/beliefs, and practices of the path. Recommended books and websites are given if you would like to learn more. **For information on a number of other Pagan paths try The Cauldron's Pagan Primer [link].**

### **What is Dianic Wicca and what do Dianics actually DO?**

*by FierFlye*

Dianic Witchcraft is a mystery tradition that addresses the specific spiritual needs of women. Practicing groups – or groves – are women only and work only with Goddesses. Unlike many other Pagan groups, however, the main purpose of the Dianic tradition is not to honor deity but to empower women and celebrate life in a female body.

Feminist Zsuzsanna Budapest is credited with founding the Dianic tradition in the 1970s. She later handed her grove down to Ruth Barrett who, along with partner Falcon River, founded the non-profit Temple of Diana church in 2000. The Temple of Diana is based out of Madison, Wisconsin, and as of 2008, has three groves in California and one in Michigan.

Dianic Witchcraft follows the Wiccan rede of 'if it harms none, do what you will', and the law of return, which states that whatever one puts out in thought or action will return to them times three. Many Dianics believe in reincarnation and believe their return may come to them in another lifetime.

Dianic tradition believes that all Goddesses are faces of one Goddess, the great Creatrix, who birthed herself into being. She may appear in one of three guises, the Maiden who creates, the Mother who sustains, or the Crone who destroys.

Dianic Witchcraft is an Earth-based religion. Dianics believe that what was created by the Goddess is sacred, and so the Earth and its inhabitants (including ourselves) are sacred. Dianics believe that plants and animals have spirits with whom we can communicate.

Dianics follow a ritual format similar to that of Wiccans. First the space in which the ritual is held is purified, then the circle is cast if the ritual calls for it. The Elements are then invited, followed by the Goddess. After the work of the ritual is complete, the Goddess and Elements are thanked and said goodbye to, and the circle is taken down if one was constructed.

The work of the ritual depends on the ritual's purpose. Dianics celebrate 8 holidays a year: Hallowmas, Winter Solstice, Imbolc, Spring Equinox, Beltaine, Summer Solstice, Lammas, and Autumn Equinox. Rituals are also done for personal growth and celebration and spellwork.

Dianics believe the female body is sacred and her lifecycle worth celebrating. The main stages of a woman's life – birth, menstruation, motherhood, menopause, and death – are overlaid with the solar and lunar cycles

and holidays are celebrated accordingly.

While many Dianics consider themselves feminists, that does not mean they are man-haters. Dianics have husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers whom they love. It should be remembered that the Dianic tradition is for women, not against men.

For more information on Dianic Wicca, check out:

[www.templeofdiana.org](http://www.templeofdiana.org)

Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries by Ruth Barrett

Ariadne's Thread by Shekinah Mountainwater

### **What is Celtic Reconstructionism, and what do CRs actually DO?**

*by Finn*

Celtic Reconstructionism is the effort to reconstruct, within a modern context, the ancient Celtic polytheistic and animist traditions and religion, by studying the extant lore and sources found in old manuscripts and regional folklore, and by carefully combining this information with personal mystical inspiration.

Celtic Reconstructionism distinguishes itself from other modern, neo-pagan movements by placing (notoriously so) a lot of emphasis on scholarly research, archaeology, the importance of language and keeping syncretism to a healthy but thoughtful minimum. Unlike other reconstructionist religions, CR has the least amount of manuscript lore and archaeology to support it. As such, UPG (Unverified or Unsubstantiated Personal Gnosis: information, insight, etc. discovered by the practitioner and not attested to in the lore) is encouraged and in fact, needed in order for the Celtic religions to become working, viable spiritual paths. However, CRs are very clear to mark UPG from their research and desire to place their UPG within at least a small degree of cultural evidence or context.

Regardless, CR is healthy and steadily growing, though it still remains one of the smaller paths within the wider pagan community.

CRs honor the deities, ancestors, nature and land spirits in a polytheistic context, and maintain the traditional Celtic cosmology of the three realms of land, sea and sky. Sacred space is found and purified, rather than made, and the role of fire and water within sacred space is often ritually central, as is the omphalos (sacred mound or hill) or the tree (the Bile, the tree at the center of the world) that links all three realms together. Offering and sacrifice are popular worship practices. CRs will often, but not always, celebrate the four Irish fire-festivals (Imbolc, Beltaine, Lughnasadh, Samhain—though they may be known by other names), and some will choose to acknowledge the equinoxes and solstices.

CRs will often follow certain “paths” or maintain roles to place their spirituality within a certain context. These paths include the warrior path, such as that maintained by the Fiana in myth, the poetic or *filidh* path, the healing path, the druidic path (a priestly path), and the outsider path, which may combine many of these paths together. The concepts of liminality, change, story and words are important in CR. The importance of community and hospitality is emphasized, as ancient Celtic society was a tribal one in which the community

defined the individual, but the importance of autonomy and personal connection with deity, land and society is equally emphasized, as the modern culture and importance of the individual has evolved since then.

Overall, CR strives for a living spirituality that focuses on authentic Celtic thought and practice in a modern world. Celtic Reconstructionism is not trying to bring back the Dark Ages, nor is it creating an entirely new religion. It is an attempt at a revival, renewal and redefinition of Celtic polytheism.

For more information on Celtic Reconstructionism, check out:

<http://www.paganachd.com/faq/index.html>: The CR FAQ. What is covered here, and what isn't, is all answered here. The first stop for the CR curious.

<http://homepage.eircom.net/~shae/>: Land, Sea and Sky: an online book all about CR. A good intro.

<http://www.imbas.org/>: Imbas was one of the first CR groups. The mailing list is still active, even if the association is not, and the articles on the site are well worth the read.

<http://www.gaolnaofa.org/index.html>: A modern Gaelic Reconstructionist group. Great resources and links page, and inspiration for the practitioner.

<http://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/>: Erynn Rowan Laurie, a prominent member and co-founder of CR, has written several articles and books about her own spiritual practices. A valuable resource and inspiration for the CR practitioner.

## **What is Hellenic Reconstructionism, and what do Hellenics actually DO?**

*by Melamphoros*

*with a concise introduction by Catja*

*Hellenic Reconstructionists attempt to practice the religion of ancient Greece in a historically accurate manner; a guiding principle is, "How would this religion have looked if it had been allowed to develop continuously to the modern day?" HRs rely extensively upon both the multitude of surviving Greek religious texts and upon modern scholarship of those texts. Practitioners tend to be hard polytheists, and the religion is more orthopraxic than orthodoxic. While some HRs practice magic, magic was not an integral part of most mainstream forms of ancient Greek religion, and the issue of combining magic with religion is a source of some controversy.*

Hellenic Reconstructionism (also known as Hellenismos, Hellenism, Hellenic Polytheism, and many other names) is the worship of the Greek Gods (or *Theoi* as some call them) in a similar manner as the ancient Greeks did while adapting it to modern-day life. Chances are that you know a little bit of Greek Mythology as it is prevalent in Western Culture. Even though more information about Pre-Christian Greek religious practices has survived than other groups such as the Celts, the Hellenic Recon would still have trouble following the *Theoi* like their original worshipers did for many reasons.

One of the main reasons is that there are not as many worshipers now. The ancient festivals and rituals were meant for large crowds of people. Sure, there are some Hellenic Pagan groups such as Hellenion but even each chapter of that group does not have the numbers they did in ancient times. Thus many Hellenics -- especially teens -- are solitary or work in very small groups.

Another thing that separates the religious practices of the ancient Hellenic Pagans from the modern day

Hellenic Recons is the practice of animal sacrifice. In ancient times, hundreds of cattle were sacrificed during the larger festivals and then cooked and eaten by the worshipers. Most people today don't have any sort of livestock, let alone a hundred head of cattle, at hand for ritual sacrifice. Not to mention that blood stains are almost impossible to get out of clothing. There are quite a few Hellenic Recons who are vegetarians and would object to not only slaughtering an animal but consuming it in a ritual feast as well. So it goes without saying that this practice has been discontinued in modern times.

Most modern day followers of Hellenism give bloodless offerings such as fruit, grain, wine, milk, honey and olive oil to the gods. All of these were also common offerings in ancient times as well. You may be asking yourself "Wouldn't ground beef purchased at the supermarket be a good substitute for an animal which has been ritually slaughtered?" Most Hellenics will tell you that the answer is no. The meat found in the store on a Styrofoam tray wrapped in shrink-wrap was killed in the name of your dinner, not in the name of the gods.

Like most pagan religions, Hellenism doesn't have a central authoritative text like the three major monotheistic religions do. The only works that come close are Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Homeric and Orphic hymns, and modern followers tend to pick and choose which aspects they find relevant. Hellenic Recons tend not to believe in the myths in the literal sense. Instead, most see metaphorical truths in the stories about the relationship between mortals and the divine. Then there are the myths that explain the natural world. For the record, Hellenic Recons do not believe the sun is pulled across the sky in a chariot or that the seasons are caused by Demeter's grief.

The Greeks worshiped their gods for many years before the rise of Christianity so it was only natural for their beliefs to change overtime. This change came in part when the Greeks came into closer contact with other cultures. This grew to the point that after the death of Alexander the Great, the ancient Greeks equated the Egyptian gods with their own (a process known as syncretism). Many Hellenic Recons pick a period in ancient Greek history that somewhat resonates with them and follow the practices of that period. It should be noted that this practice isn't something that all Hellenic Recons do.

Hellenic Reconstructionism is different from Wicca or Wiccan inspired pagan paths in many ways. Hellenic Recons tend to be hard polytheists, meaning that they believe that all gods are distinct beings who are completely independent of one another. Magic has little place in Hellenism as the ancient Greeks themselves tended to disapprove of the practice. But that is not saying that a Hellenic Recon can't use magic. Many think it is okay as long as it is used outside of religious practice. Many Hellenic Recons do not consider their path to be Earth-Based but there are some who do.

Another thing that separates Hellenism from Wicca is that not many tools are used in ritual. Most of the time, you would only need the bare essentials on your altar. This includes at least one plate or bowl to place offerings in, incense and something to burn it in, at least one candle, and representation of the god the ritual is for (although it is also fine if there are none). There are some who only use a bare table or do all of their rituals outside and this is acceptable as well.

As modern day Hellenic Reconstructionism is not a hierarchal religion, and the fact that the religious practices in one ancient Greek city-state differed from others, there are many things that are not set. For example, there is no clear consensus with regards to festivals and the various gods' holy days. Many Hellenic Recons use the ancient Athenian Calendar but there are problems with it. First, it is a lunar calendar which may be difficult for someone who is use to a solar calendar (as the modern Gregorian Calendar) to figure out. Another thing to remember when dealing with the Athenian Calendar is that in any given month,

about half of the days are dedicated to one or more deity or spirit and the other half is spent preparing for the next one. This may have worked in ancient Athens where there were priests who did the prep-work for the ritual and little else, but not today. Most people today have responsibilities other than religious ones. As a teen you probably have to go to school, do homework, and maybe have a job while at the same time fitting in sleeping and time with friends as well. Also, the Athenian Calendar only applied to Athens and its surrounding areas. Since the festival dates differed from region to region, many Hellenic Recons create their own festival calendar based on the Gregorian Calendar and local events such as the harvest season and secular holidays.

There is also no real consensus as to which gods are to be counted among the Olympian Twelve. The gods that are most commonly placed in the Twelve include: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Hades, Hestia, Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Dionysus, Hephaestus, and Hermes. Heracles is even on some lists but not as common as the fourteen that were previously mentioned. Some have Dionysus and leave out Hestia because of the story she gave up her seat to him in order to keep the peace among the Olympians. Most lists leave out Hades all together even though he is an important god.

Some deities were more important in some regions of Greece than others. For example, Poseidon had more status in a coastal town or island than he did in an inland region. Local nature spirits such as nymphs and the god of a nearby river had prominent places in localized religious practices. The Greeks also had many festivals that honored the dead. Both of these practices have been adopted by some modern day practitioners by leaving offerings to their local nature spirits as well as their ancestors -- both the individual's deceased blood relatives as well as cultural ancestors.

The worship of heroes was also an important part of the ancient Greek religion. However, as Heracles was the only one worshiped throughout the Greek world and the rest were localized (Theseus in Athens, Perseus in Argos, etc.), this doesn't figure largely in the practices of modern worshipers.

Hellenic Reconstructionism may be more difficult for a teen to follow than a few other pagan religions but with a little bit of patience and enough research, it is possible. Just remember three things: One, quite a bit of research is needed for all Recon paths and Hellenism is no different. Two, if you find a bit of information that seems suspect or sanitized for your protection, then it probably is. Three, if there is a part of an ancient ritual that probably can't be adapted, then it probably belongs in the past.

For more information on Hellenic Reconstructionism, check out:

*Greek Religion* by Walter Burkert

*The Gods of the Greeks* by Carl Kerenyi

*Old Stones, New Temples* by Drew Campbell

*Kharis: Hellenic Polytheism Explored* by Sarah Kate Istra Winter

*A Temple of Words* by H. Jeremiah Lewis

Recommended Websites:

Sannion's Sanctuary <http://www.winterscapes.com/sannion/>

Theoi Project <http://www.theoi.com/>

Sponde <http://sponde.suneagle.info/>

[TC's Hellenic Reconstructionism Page](#)

## **What is Voudon, and what to practitioners actually DO?**

*by Catja*

Haitian Voudon, like Santeria/Lukumí, Palo Mayombe, Umbanda, Candomble, and others, is a syncretic religion that developed out of a combination of West African tribal beliefs with Christianity. When Christian European slavers captured African people and forced them to convert, the slaves kept their own belief systems but adopted some of the language and imagery of Christianity (usually Catholicism) as camouflage. Over time, the disparate elements melded into something new. These religions, collectively, are known as African Diasporic Religions, or ADRs. (Compare to African Traditional Religions (ATRs) – tribal religions practiced in Africa.) Haitian Voudon is the most famous of these religions; most American depictions of Voudon/Voodoo, motivated by racism and religious bigotry, distort and sensationalize practices such as animal sacrifice and ritual possession. Voudon, like many West African-derived systems, conceives of a single god (often called “Bon Dieu”) who is very distant from creation; practitioners instead interact with the *lwa* (spirits), who are combinations of West African (especially from the Fon and Ewe tribes) spirits and Catholic saints.

Louisiana Voodoo, while linked to Haitian Voudon, developed somewhat differently, and focuses more upon magical practices than religion. Hoodoo is folk magic that combines African, European, and Native American elements.

For more information on Voudon, check out:

*Tell My Horse* by Zora Neale Hurston

*Mules and Men* by Zora Neale Hurston

*The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* by Leslie G. Desmangles

*Sacred Possessions* by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

*Creole Religions of the Caribbean* by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

*The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux* by Ina Johanna Fandrich

*Black Magic: Religion and the African-American Conjuring Tradition* by Yvonne P. Chireau

*Conjure in African-American Society* by Jeffrey E. Anderson

Website: [www.luckymojo.com](http://www.luckymojo.com)

## **What is an eclectic pagan, and what does such a person actually DO?**

*by Hyacinth Belle*

An eclectic pagan is somebody who combines more than one path, religion, or tradition to form their own cohesive spiritual and/or religious practice. There are many reasons why someone might choose to do this. The most common seems to be simply feeling a significant connection to more than one path. Due to the very nature of eclecticism, it may not be for someone who wants to do things “by the book.” It takes common sense, creativity, and commitment to put together a personal eclectic practice that works. The technicalities of weaving together several different traditions can be difficult, but the end result could be more fulfilling than any single path would be!

The common sense part of making eclecticism happen effectively can be surprisingly easy to overlook. With the endless supply of religions to pick from, it is necessary to narrow it down to the few (as in, probably two or three) that you feel most connected with. I can find something I agree with in practically every religion, but that doesn’t mean I try to follow every religion in my eclectic work. As someone who is new to paganism, it’s tempting to become enamored with almost every new belief system you come across!

Enthusiasm is great, but it's probably impossible to combine them all. This is where research becomes absolutely important, so that you can find what is going to be best for you.

In addition to the number of paths you decide to focus on, common sense is also important in how you put them together. To make an extreme and predictable example, creating an eclectic system with Christianity and Satanism is not going to work! You need to make sure that whatever you want to combine is going to complement and agree with the other(s). Whether or not two religions are complementary is not always obvious, but it is necessary to put them together in a way that "fits."

Going along with this, it is also vitally important to not throw away one part of a belief system to force it to fit with the new path you are making! This "take what you like and leave the rest" attitude is not going to do you or anyone else any favors, and it is generally considered very unfair. You wouldn't make your boyfriend or girlfriend change something about themselves just so the two of you could form a couple, right? You should feel the same way about any religion you work with, falling in love with everything about it and not just the pretty parts. You could emphasize or de-emphasize some aspects (not everything...) about a tradition, but you can't pretend it doesn't exist entirely.

This is where creativity comes in. The joy of eclecticism is that you get to choose how you want to do things! It is fun to explore and examine how ideologies interact with each other. Common ways of combining paths might be mixing holidays or worshiping gods from both pantheons. This is your personal spiritual path, and it should reflect what you believe.

So see what works for you, but allow another word of caution. Similar to the whole bit about not ignoring the parts of a religion that don't fit with your eclectic perspective, it is probably wisest to avoid at all costs the notion that if what you are doing feels "right", then it is perfectly fine. Intuition is a valuable thing, but it is important to follow the customs of each religion whenever logical. For example, you probably won't get very far if the gods are offended by what you are doing or if it is not appropriately historically accurate. This, of course, assumes that your path involves a tradition with specific deities or one that has a strong base in and values historical accuracy. ;)

Hopefully, now you can understand how eclectics must use common sense to choose different paths and creativity to fit them together. The key to this whole thing is commitment. In a lot of ways, being eclectic can be harder to do than something else with a more structured practice. It takes motivation to follow through, since there is no priest/ess telling you what you should be doing or when. Eclectics are also generally solitary since their paths are so unique, which means it's possible to miss support and camaraderie. It may not always be easy, but do justice to yourself and practice what you preach!

One would be hard-pressed to find someplace else where it's possible to personalize spirituality so much as in eclecticism. What attracts many people to paganism is the relative freedom it usually allows, especially in comparison with the predominant JCI religions. Eclecticism takes this one step further to make it okay for someone to follow more than one religion if they feel the need, creating limitless possibilities for inspiring spirituality!

### **What is Ár nDraíocht Féin Druidry [ADF]?**

*by FierFlye*

Ár nDraíocht Féin (pronounced arn reeOCT fane) is one of the many forms of neo-pagan druidry. Founded  
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in 1983 by author and priest Isaac Bonewits, Ár nDraíocht Féin is an Irish phrase that translates to ‘our own magic’ or ‘own our druidry’. It is commonly abbreviated as ADF.

Druids were the educated, priestly class in pre-Christian European cultures. ADF takes its inspiration from these cultures and their religions. A practicing group (grove) usually focuses on one culture - Celtic, Slavic, Norse, Vedic, Greek, or Roman, and its pantheon and festivals.

ADF members are polytheistic – they worship many gods and goddesses whom they believe are each separate entities. Groves work with a pantheon of deities and focus on one or two Deities on each holy day. Individual members may develop a close relationship with one Deity. They also believe that divinity is everywhere, including within themselves and within the earth, and so give high regard to nature.

Scholarship and study are important to ADF. Members are expected to read the myths, stories, and history of their preferred culture. This information can be used to understand Deities, create practices, and form moral codes. Members are also encouraged to examine ADF practices, ask questions, and offer new ideas rather than blindly follow. To further encourage academia, ADF offers a study program for its members. The program is designed to develop dedication in worshipping the Gods, a trained mind through meditation, and understanding of the nine ADF virtues.

Making neo-druidry available to everyone is a main goal of ADF. Rituals are open to everyone, including children. One need not be a member to attend. The ritual format goes as follows: After cleansing the ritual area and participants the gate between the worlds is opened. Offerings are made to the Deities, Ancestors, and Nature Spirits and divination is performed to determine if the offers were accepted. A blessing of the participants and work of the ritual follows. Once the work is done the spirits are thanked and the gate closed. Keeping the format consistent helps provide a familiar feel when participants visit different groves.

Each grove is required to hold 8 holy day ceremonies a year. These occur February 1st, Spring Equinox, May 1st, Summer Solstice, August 1st, Fall Equinox, November 1st, and Winter Solstice. The specific purpose of ritual varies depending on the grove’s hearth culture.

For more information on ADF or to find a local grove, visit [www.adf.org](http://www.adf.org).

## **BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

### **What is polytheism?**

*by Finn and Dania*

Polytheism is the belief in and worship of many deities. Not all polytheists worship every deity that they believe in; for example, some may believe that all deities exist, but may only actively worship one or two. Polytheism may be seen as a spectrum of belief with two extremes: hard polytheism and soft polytheism. Hard polytheists believe that all deities are distinct and separate individuals, and are worshiped as such. Soft polytheists may believe that different gods (for example, from different cultures) are just different names for the same god, or are manifestations of one god and one goddess, or even have their origin in an ultimate divine source, and worship of these deities will vary, depending on personal preference. Polytheism is not incompatible with pantheism or panentheism, but it is generally incompatible with monotheism (the belief in one god). However, depending on how "soft" a polytheist is, polytheism can be seen as monotheist in origin (for example, if one believes all comes from One Source, such a belief is, essentially, monotheistic). Monotheist faiths that do not allow for multiple deities to exist, of course, will not accept this kind of reasoning.

### **What are pantheism and panentheism?**

*by Jorgath*

Pantheism is, by dictionary definition, "A doctrine identifying the Deity with the universe and its phenomena." Panentheism is "the belief that the world is part, though not all of God." For purposes of the pagan viewpoints, which are generally open to the idea of plural gods, the better definitions are, respectively, "the belief that the universe and its phenomena are equivalent to the Divine" and "the belief that the universe and its phenomena are part of, but not all of the Divine."

*But what does all this mean?*

The simple answer is that a person who believes in pantheism (called a pantheist) believes that everything that is in the Universe or happens in the Universe is part Divinity, and panentheists agree but add that the Divine is made up of more than that. Pantheists refer to this Divinity in several ways. Some simply call it God, some call it the Divine or the All or the Unity or what have you. Many just refer to it as the Universe and leave it at that, remembering all the while that they view the Universe as sacred.

The more complicated answer is that to a pantheist, you are divine. So is the pantheist, the sun, the earth, the air, a dog, etc. Things that are seemingly bad or destructive are considered divine as well, from supernovas to the AIDS virus. Ideas, actions, all of these are in some way part of the Divine.

In addition, a panentheist differs from a pantheist by their belief that the Divinity encompasses more than the Universe. Some believe that there is more than one universe, while others believe that the Divinity is partially outside the Universe.

*How does a pantheist construct a moral code?*

Many pantheists and panentheists simply say that morality is a construction of a person, not a religion. Some

pantheists follow the Golden Rule of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Some follow the Wiccan Rede (which you can find elsewhere in this guide) or some related code, and some follow some other system.

*What is the pantheistic view of gods?*

This is about as answerable a question as “What is the pagan view of gods?” Ask five pantheists or panentheists and you will get twelve answers. A general consensus seems to hold, though, that in the pantheistic/panentheistic view, if gods exist they are higher beings than humans but still part of the greater Divine.

*Are pantheists all environmentalists?*

Some are and some aren't. Most pantheists and panentheists are fairly environmentally conscious, however. They advise against mistreatment of any part of the Divine, and definitely include this planet among that definition.

*Are pantheists all pagans?*

No, nor are pagans all pantheists. Pantheism and panentheism are beliefs that a person can hold whether or not they are pagan, and many (most!) pagans are not pantheists or panentheists.

*How do I become a pantheist/panentheist?*

If your perception of the Divine is similar enough to what is described above that you feel comfortable calling yourself a pantheist or a panentheist, you are one.

### **Do I have to fit into a specific label, or can I just do what feels right to me?**

*by Finn and Dania*

You don't have to fit into a specific label, of course. In fact, many pagans don't. A lot of us just "do our own thing". Labels are made for other people; they help to communicate where we stand and what we believe. Ultimately choosing a label is a decision based on how you wish to communicate yourself to others.

In some cases, a pre-set label will serve just fine, and in others, only a label of one's own making will do. However, if you are working in a set and specific path, you really do need to understand just what that label means, what it defines, what it implies to the wider community, and if you can live up to that label.

### **What kinds of tools do I need and where do I find them?**

*by Dania*

You really don't need any tools to believe or practice, unless your tradition requires it. A lot of people find tools helpful, but you can get along without them if you can't acquire them easily. Some of the most common tools used are a wand, athame (dagger, usually), incense, chalice and candles. A lot of these things can already be found in your home or easily made yourself. A wand for instance, when you get right down to it, is really just a glorified stick! Find a nice piece of wood, not rotted, and make sure there aren't any bugs. Windfall branches are good for this. Cut it to the length you want, sand it, carve it, paint it or otherwise decorate it, and there you go! A wine glass does good double duty as a chalice. Athames can be found at Ren Faires or online, OR if you're the "practical pagan", a good utility knife can do double duty. Something to

remember about the Athame is that it does not have to be sharp, if you're not using it to cut anything on this plane. It doesn't even have to be made from metal, I've seen some great examples made from bone, wood, and antler. Incense and incense burners are pretty easy to find, and don't usually need to be of any specific variety (although some traditions require, for example, a swinging censer, but most don't). These can even be found at places like K-mart! Spencer Gifts has some really nice ones as well. Candles are also not difficult to find. I personally recommend either pillars or votives, because they're safer than tapers. If you're not going to have a permanent altar, these things can be put away and only brought out when needed.

**I feel like there is some kind of presence in my life, but I don't know who or what it is.  
How do I find out and what does it mean? Is it a god/dess? Or something else?**

*by Dania*

It could be a deity, it could also be an ancestor, a spirit guide, or even just one of your friends on this plane who is thinking about you! If you feel that it is an ancestor, spirit guide, or deity the best way to find out is to do some meditation or a small ritual to make contact with the being and to find out more about it.

**What is divination and how does it work?**

*by Marilyn*

The simple answer is that divination is a way to acquire information not available through other channels. This information can be about the future, and often is, but it is also often about the present and the past, about the motivations and needs of other people in the subject's life, about outside situations beyond the subject's control, etc. Any information not readily apparent can be divined for, with varying rates of success.

There are ways to improve those rates, and that is where study, practice, and basic skill come in. What method to use, what question to ask, whether to divine for yourself or ask someone else to do it, and, importantly in many systems, whether it is information you have a right to. Getting the information is often the easy part; interpreting it correctly can be difficult.

Methods of Divination:

- Runes
- Palms
- Tea Leaves
- The I Ching
- Scrying
- Ouija
- Augury
- Omens
- Mediums
- Tarot
- Pendulum
- Bibliomancy
- Ogam

**Cards** *by Marilyn*

Also known as cartomancy, divining with cards is one of the most common and widespread methods. It has been around for approximately as long as cards themselves have. It is not the most ancient method extant, but there is a great weight of history and symbolism behind it.

**Tarot Cards** – Tarot cards are special decks divided into two main segments, the Major and the Minor Arcana. The Minor Arcana is further divided into suits, generally some variant of Cups, Wands, Pentacles, and Swords. The names of the suits can vary according to deck author or school, so that some decks might have Chalices, Rods, Disks, and Knives, but the suits tend to be readily identifiable from deck to deck.

Most modern decks are similar in style to the Ryder Waite deck, with variations on the same themes. There are some more esoteric styles as well, though, which is why it is generally best to learn each deck individually.

**Oracle Cards** – Oracle cards are similar in style to Tarot cards, but are often themed for certain purposes, such as meditation or magic or specific kinds of questions. They usually have fewer cards than Tarot decks, the cards are not always divided into suits, and the meanings are often different for each individual deck.

**Playing Cards** - The regular 52 card game deck, sometimes using the jokers and sometimes not. How to interpret these cards often varies greatly from reader to reader, and it can be difficult to find coherent information on them. The four suits are often related to the four Tarot suits, but the meanings of individual cards are not necessarily the same, especially since playing cards do not have upright and reversed positions.

## **Scrying** *by Shadow*

- *What is scrying?*

Scrying is seeing things in smoke, pools of water, crystal balls, or anything else where you look for a picture to tell you of things you cannot directly see. Of all forms of divination, it has the most flexibility and the least rules. That makes it both very powerful and very difficult to master, or even use.

- *What's the difference between scrying and just daydreaming?*

Sometimes, not much. You have to test what you see, not just once but over and over. It's very easy to think you're seeing something, and actually just be imagining things. The more you want to see something, the more likely it is to appear.

- *Do I see actual pictures, or just impressions?*

Sometimes one, sometimes another. I have never seen actual pictures myself. But that does not change the fact that there is a definite feel to a scrying when information comes into your mind from the pictures that you see. The visual tool is more a distraction – it keeps your mind from focusing on anything that it can grab on to, so it finds meaning in the chaos. But you do not need to see actual pictures for the scry to be successful.

- *What happens when I scry without intending to?*

That's a problem that can happen to anyone, but especially when you first start opening yourself up to vision. There are no simple ways to counter this. For some, picking a different form of divination helps, because you can teach your mind to only open up when you want it to. For others, this does nothing, and you simply need

to learn to cope with what you see.

There are no easy ways to cope with scrying involuntarily. You have to learn how to handle having images appear unexpectedly. Setting aside time to scry can help, because you are telling your mind that certain times are acceptable to see. And sometimes, you simply have to cope with seeing. There aren't always easy answers. But regular training of your mind can make a difference. You can either learn to see when you're willing, or learn to accept the images and let them pass through you.

- *What happens when I see things that relate to other people?*

Again, no easy answers. If the person knows that you can scry, and believes in you, you can tell them. Sometimes you can use what you've seen to try to change things. And, unfortunately, sometimes you simply have to live with knowledge that you don't know how to deal with. There's no particular reason for that that I'm aware of. It just is. And the best way to handle it is to file it away and try to not be bothered about it. When you scry, sometimes you see things that have nothing to do with you. Sometimes there isn't any rhyme or reason to what we see. Seeking answers to everything will drive you mad.

## **Ogam** by Finn

Ogam is a primitive Irish alphabet, existing from around the 4th or 5th century CE, consisting of twenty *feda* or letters, with the occasional inclusion of five *forfeda*, or extra letters, which are later in origin. Surviving archaeological evidence suggests these letters were primarily used to mark boundaries of land on stones, or to make funerary markers. But literary tradition, dating from the 7th century CE, has evidence of druids, among others, using the ogam for divination and magical purposes, and as such, modern Celtic practitioners see no problem in using the ogam in divination, magic, ritual and healing.

Ogam is traditionally marked on staves: wood, amber, bone and stone have been found with ogam marks on them and can be used to make your own set. These staves or stones are then either drawn out of a bag or tossed, and interpreted. Several layouts, such as in tarot, are possible to be used in interpretation as well.

Though it is highly unlikely the druids did not create the ogam system, it was well in place and used by them in their poetic practice. In fact, ogam is often known as the "poet's secret language" because the letters had such a wealth of associations and concepts behind them it took many years of training and memory to know all of them, years of training only available to poets. The ogam letters and their word-lists were often tools in creating poetry, and though many of these word-lists are unlikely to have any communal magical or symbolic associations, the individual poet was free to create his or her own system of magical meaning, symbolism and association by creating his or her own word-lists and making internal, individual connections between the existing lists. More often than not, however, these words lists were used as a mnemonic system of remembering hundreds of items, plants, birds, trees, rivers, crafts, etc., many of which are found in the *Auriacept na n-Eces*, The Scholar's Primer.

One of the most popular misconceptions about ogam is that it was only a tree alphabet, and the basis for a lunar calendrical system, as laid out by Robert Graves in his famous work, *The White Goddess*. This is most definitely not the case. While *The White Goddess* is an important and beautiful work of poetry, it is in no way historically sound or a work of scholarship, nor does the astrological and calendrical system Graves devised have roots in authentic Celtic practice or ogam. Most of the knowledge about ogam that most people come by is, unfortunately, through Graves and his interpretations, but it is by no means accurate, nor, in the

end, is it very freeing. The tree-ogam is but one list among many: ogam is, at its heart, an alphabet, and a word-system, and it is the letters themselves and their meanings, which form the basis for divination and magical work.

For more information on ogam, check out:

*Ogam: Weaving Word Wisdom* by Erynn Rowan Laurie:

An inspirational, scholarly, poetic and essential guide to ogam and divination by one of the founders of the Celtic Reconstructionist movement. The first place to start for anyone interested in ogam as a divination system.

*The Ogham Tract*, from the Scholar's Primer: <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/ogham.html>

A primary source of many word-lists.

### **What is energy work, and how do I do it?**

*by Hyacinth Belle*

Before I begin to discuss energy work, it will probably be helpful to have a working definition of energy as it is viewed by most pagans. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary definition of energy is:

1 a: dynamic quality <narrative energy> b: the capacity of acting or being active <intellectual energy> c: a usually positive spiritual force <the energy flowing through all people>

This is a pretty good definition to keep in mind. Energy is everywhere. Energy holds atoms together; it's the colors of the rainbow; it's the ocean tides. Everything you can imagine relies on energy in some way, shape, or form. There is no way to escape it! Think about your ideas of energy now (perhaps a more scientific view of it), and think about what also might be included in energy (everything else!).

Energy work is the process of directing, changing, or creating/removing energy. In order to start this, you naturally have to know what energy feels like to do anything with it. A very simple and rudimentary way to feel a basic form of energy is to vigorously rub your hands together and then hold them a few inches apart. The tingly/hot/cold/whatever feeling created by the friction is, essentially, energy. Energy can feel different for different types of people, and different types of energy can feel different for the same person. The ones aforementioned are, to my knowledge, the most common although some people also see energy as colors in addition to (or instead of) feeling it.

Energy is best dealt with when the person working with it is free of anything that would "block the flow," be it stress or nerves or anything else. Centering and grounding are common ways for a person to prepare themselves to work with energy. Being able to visualize and meditate will also allow you to create a "clean slate."

Centering is just what it sounds like. It involves finding the physical center of your body and balancing it. The process should also be able to center your mind as well, focusing it and reining in things that are causing imbalance. To center, you can sit, stand, or lay down. Just be comfortable and have your body in balance (so no crossing your legs or arms). The center is in the middle of the body, often in your abdomen near the region of the belly button (possibly as high as behind your breastbone). Focus on these areas and think of literally finding balance and figuratively bringing your mind into balance. Closing your eyes, totally relaxing

your body, and/or breathing slowly and rhythmically can help this. You might also rock back and forth slowly, making smaller and smaller motions until you are in balance and no longer move. You'll probably feel a sense of heaviness or warmth in your center.

Grounding is the next step. It's probably a good idea to ground both before and after doing any energy work. Grounding before lets you drain off any excess or negative energy so you can work more effectively, and grounding after lets you shed the energy you may have accumulated during the work so you can continue with your normal life without any energy "aftertaste." When you ground, you are pouring energy into or drawing energy from the earth. You will have the sense of energy leaving or coming into you, maybe feeling lighter/heavier or colder/hotter. Visualization is often used for grounding. A common version of grounding visualization is to picture tree roots growing into the earth out of your spine or feet. You might also picture yourself as a sponge or a well or pipes... anything that appeals to you that has releasing and absorbing/drawing tendencies.

Visualization is very important to energy work, as has already been seen with grounding. Visualization is picturing things in your mind to give your work a boost. Visualizing a flow of energy or simple things like the tree roots idea can make it all easier to do and provides an "outlet" for the energy. The area of your forehead is often referred to as the third eye. Close your eyes and picture things in your head, maybe starting out with picturing a movie screen or something else blank on the inside of your skull. Picture colors, objects, places. "Look" at them and make them as real as possible. Real enough that you can taste the food or smell the breeze or feel the temperature. Visualization is a simple concept, but some find it harder than others. The only way to get better is just to practice! Like any muscle in your body, your third eye will get stronger if you use it.

Meditation could be viewed as the final basic skill required for energy work. There are so many ways to meditate that it would be impossible to discuss them all here. The goal of any meditation, however, is usually to reach a state of "higher awareness" and clear the mind. Clearing the mind does not mean "thinking of nothing," a common misconception about meditating. Thinking of nothing is probably the most difficult thing you could do! Meditation commonly involves visualizations or focusing on the senses or body. You can meditate on a candle flame or incense smoke (both the sight and smell of it) or running water. You could also do a moving meditation by focusing on your body movements when walking or doing things like yoga and tai chi. By focusing intently on one thing, you are freeing the mind of mundane worries and getting it ready for further work. As I already mentioned, there are a multitude of methods for meditating, and the best idea would be to try a little of everything and just to practice.

Now it is time to do actual work with energy! "Creating" energy should come first, I suppose. "Creating" could actually be a misnomer, as it could really be thought of as a form of manipulation of existing energy; we can learn from science that no matter or energy is ever created or destroyed. Keep this in mind as you are thinking about "creating" energy. At any rate, created energy might be most easily created in the form of a ball. One can form energy in any number of ways. The most basic could be holding your hands a few inches apart to form a ball between or focusing on a body part to form a ball or cloud around it.

Removing energy, once again, could be a misnomer. You really could think of it as "de-focusing" the energy or scattering it. The energy could be squished, blown away like dust, or washed off. Work on alternating creating and removing energy, thinking about the change of state: concentrating and diluting it.

Changing or altering energy can be more complicated. Create a little energy mass and hold onto it. Just study it for a while. Then slowly try to change something about it. If it's "hot," make it cold. Change the shape or

imbue it with a color. Try to tweak one of its properties, and experiment with how it feels. Instill the energy with what we would recognize as an “emotion.” Make “passionate” or “upset” energy.

Directing energy is just another step off. First try to direct energy by moving it around your body. You could do a meditation that involves this, “scanning” your body with a mass of energy from head to toe. Or focus energy in your chest, and move it down one of your arms. This could feel very fluid to you or it might even be slightly uncomfortable at first. Sending energy out of yourself or directing energy that is outside yourself is the extension of moving it around the body. The hands are often the best way to direct energy, out of the fingertips and/or the palm. You could visualize moving energy like batting at a balloon with enough helium in it that it just floats.

All the actions you can do with energy combine and interact in any type of spell work or ritual work. It is difficult to actually explain how to do any of these activities in writing, and I wish I could do it better somehow. You just have to play around with it and experience it and believe in yourself! Working with a partner, if possible, is very helpful. The four things mentioned at the beginning of this section (center, ground, visualize, meditate) are very, very important here, and if you practice all of this eventually you will honestly be doing work with energy (and you will learn to feel it, if you can’t automatically)!

### **Is there any physical danger involved in any pagan practices?**

*by Kasmira*

Well, yes. Of course there is. To quote J.R.R. Tolkien, “it’s a dangerous business, going out your front door.” Pretty much everything you choose to do in life is going to have some risk involved. The trick lays in minimizing the risks and then weighing them against the benefits.

Are there risks that are particularly evident in particular pagan practices? Once again, yes. But for the most part they come down to common sense and general caution: careful with fire, take sharp objects seriously, that sort of thing.

As for less mundane risks, there are some, but they are probably far less prevalent than you might be led to believe. Pagans are not, on the whole, any different from the folks you see at the coffee shop. Heck, some of us probably are among the folks you see at the coffee shop. We are not baby-killers who sacrifice our neighbors’ cats and children to wrathful gods and we aren’t out to sacrifice/molest/or otherwise harm you. That said, you’re not just going to find love and light either, there are darker aspects to many pagan religions which can be very spiritually rewarding if practiced with a full knowledge of their potential dangers and safeguards in place to minimize those as significantly as possible. The real world may not harbor age-old demons intent on destroying you a la Buffy or Charmed, but there are real potential side effects, both physical and mental, to some rituals and practices and you should be very aware of these and how you can avoid them. It just boils down to making sure you do your research and keep your mind open to considering potential risks.

There are also people and groups around who do prey spiritually, monetarily, and physically upon those new to paganism. This isn’t a phenomenon unique to paganism. Unfortunately, bad people exist, regardless of religion. That said, for some info on this in a pagan context, take a look at [“What are the ‘red flags’ I should look for in a teacher?”\[link\]](#), and [“What are the ‘red flags’ I should look for? How do I know I’m not getting into a cult?”\[link\]](#) for some ideas on who to trust in the pagan community. Beyond that, just be cautious.

As far as other risks go; use your common sense. Pagan practice shouldn't be any more dangerous than crossing the street and it is my opinion that the benefits far outweigh the dangers.

### **What do pagans believe about reincarnation?**

*by Kasmira*

Good question. What do we believe? Well, ask three pagans and you'll get five different answers ranging from "it's a load of bull" to "I am the 333rd reincarnation of Cleopatra." As you've probably noticed, asking what pagans believe on anything is kind of like asking what redheads believe, or what the American people want. You're not talking about a homogeneous, uniform group and so you are not going to get a homogeneous and uniform set of answers.

But, at this point, you are probably wondering "what sort of answer is that?" I have so far succeeded in writing nearly a hundred words and not actually providing any sort of answer to the original question. In an attempt to rectify that, here are a few of the responses you might get if you were to ask attendants at a Pagan Pride festival what they believe about reincarnation:

- When you die, you're dead. End of story. No second chance, no eternity in heaven. Just a wooden box and a hole in the ground.
- I don't believe in reincarnation. I believe that when you die you go to the:
  - Summerlands
  - Valhalla
  - Elysian Fields
  - Tuat
  - or one of about a thousand other possibilities.
- I believe that I will be reincarnated until I reach enlightenment at which point I will reach Nirvana.
- If rotting down and fertilizing a daisy counts then, yes, I believe in reincarnation.

... and so on and so forth.

Still not a particularly useful answer, perhaps, but hey! You'll just have to research the particular paths you are interested in and find out. TC's forum is a great place to start and if you want a diverse idea of what pagans believe about the afterlife then look through our threads or post a new one to see what our members believe.

### **How can I integrate religion into my daily life using art or music?**

*by Mithril*

A good way to integrate your religion into your daily life is to piggyback it onto a habit you have already formed. Adding a new religion onto something you are familiar and comfortable with helps you feel more at ease. Externally, you're not doing anything you don't already do, so you don't have to worry about looking foolish or about someone walking in on you, something especially useful if you're having to be discrete about being a pagan.

For example, if you're a musician, you could use five minutes at the beginning of your practice to do something with religious meaning. You could play or sing something to honor any god(s) or goddess(es) you worship. Or, you could raise energy, either for practice or for performing minor musical spells.

Something that I find especially effective is using my music to help me meditate. Take a piece or an exercise that is memorized and easy and play it over and over again, allowing your mind to clear. This would work especially if you have trouble with the traditional sitting-still-and-watching-your-breathing method.

Beginning music practice with magic or religion has the added benefit of making your practice session more efficient. Those five minutes can help you relax and open up your emotions, allowing you to be more musical and make progress more quickly.

One final word of advice: It does not matter how you sound. It doesn't matter if your voice cracks or your bow's crooked or your fingers slip or you forget a note. The music here is not the point; it is just a tool. It doesn't matter how good a tool looks as long as it works. Similarly, it doesn't matter how good your music sounds in this case, as long as you can achieve the desired effect.

## **DISPELLING MISCONCEPTIONS**

Misconceptions about Paganism abound. Below, we have addressed some of the more common ones about Wicca, vegetarianism, sex, and drugs. These may be true for some Pagans, but, as with most broad generalizations, they're way off the mark for many (most) of us.

For a humorous list of misconceptions about Paganism, see ["You Know You Can't Be Pagan If..."](#) [dead link...]

### **Aren't all pagans Wiccan?**

*by Finn*

No. Wicca is the best-known pagan religion, probably because it is the most showcased by the media and publishing industries. Because of this high exposure in society, Wicca is often the first pagan religion seekers come across when they first begin learning. But it is no more true to say that all pagans are Wiccan than it is to say that all Christians are Catholic.

### **Aren't all pagans vegetarians?**

*by Melamphoros*

No. There are some who may interpret the Wiccan Rede to mean that the eating of meat should be prohibited. Others believe that not eating meat brings one closer to nature (some counter that eating meat is perfectly natural otherwise the human body wouldn't be able to digest it) and others don't eat meat due to ethical reasons such as animal welfare. There are many pagans who do eat meat and they respect the animal it came from.

### **Don't all pagan rituals include drug use?**

*by Melamphoros*

No. Certain hallucinogens were used by some cultures in the past, but most pagans today respect their local laws regarding controlled substances.

### **Don't all pagan rituals include sex?**

*by Melamphoros*

No. In some British Traditional Wiccan covens, the Great Rite is performed in the literal sense by the high priest and priestess. The majority of covens and solitary practitioners perform it symbolically by placing the athame in the chalice. This only applies to Wiccan and Wicca influenced brands of paganism. No sexual acts -- literal or symbolic -- appear in Reconstructionist religions.

## **FAMILY**

Many adult pagans struggle with whether to tell their family about their beliefs, and it can be even more of a struggle if you are a minor and still living at home. Your situation is going to be unique - we can't tell you what to do - but below we can give you a few pointers and things to think about before you discuss your beliefs with your family.

### **My parents don't know that I'm pagan and would be very upset. Should I "come out" to them?**

*by Nigel*

A tricky question; however, in this case I would say adopt a military approach: that is to say, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." They may still want you to go to church, and even though you don't believe it could still be a good experience to go, some church services are very beautiful and give a sense of community. However, you may feel uncomfortable in a church setting; in that case ask your parents if it is okay if you don't go.

### **What will happen if I come out to my parents?**

*by Nigel and Kasmira*

Each of the authors of this piece have had different experiences and thus have slightly different advice for you.

*Nigel:* It all depends really on how your parents are, and unfortunately, that is something I can't give a hard and fast guide to. Some parents who are liberal on pretty much everything may dislike the idea of you exploring alternative religions; feel them out and then determine.

*Kasmira:* I don't know your parents and I cannot possibly predict how they will react. I can only give you a few pointers that in my experience tend to improve the reception that coming out gets with one's parents.

First of all, start the conversation in a mature fashion and take it slowly: "Mom, Dad, I've dedicated myself to Zeus" probably isn't a great conversation starter. Instead, you could try something like; "Mom, Dad, you've probably noticed that I have been reading a lot of Greek mythology lately and I'm really interested in the religion of Ancient Greece. I've also been reading up on people today who try to follow this spiritual path in a modern form and I would like to talk to you about it as it is something that really interests me." You don't have to jump out of the closet ripping off the hinges as you go, you can come out over time, over a number of different conversations in which you educate them about what you have been researching [\[link to "How can I educate my parents?"\]](#) and slowly explain what it is that you believe and how you got there.

The worst thing that you can do in this situation is lose your temper: it makes you seem childish. Even if your parents are acting immaturely, you should make sure that you do not follow their example. Act like an adult and you are far more likely to get treated like one. You can scream out your frustration later if you need to.

That said, no matter how maturely you come out, there is still, of course, the factor of your parents. Are they committed followers of a particular religion? Non-practicing members of a religion? Secular? Atheists?

Completely apathetic? How tolerant are they towards other faiths? You can suss them out by asking them some general questions about religion, and seeing what their answers are. Mostly, think about the kind of people your parents are as individuals, even more so than what their particular religious beliefs are: some parents with seemingly-intolerant religious beliefs may prove accepting about anything to do with their kids; some otherwise open-minded parents may freak out at the thought of the occult. Think about how your parents respond to difference in general. You are in the best place to accurately estimate what your parents' responses will be.

### **How can I educate my parents?**

*by Nigel, Catja, and Kasmira*

This is perhaps the most important part of coming out if you want your beliefs to be accepted by your parents. And the best way to do it is to make sure that you have educated yourself extensively and from reliable sources. You want to make sure that you are comfortable in the depth and accuracy of your research before you try to explain it to someone else: the more educated you are, the better you'll be able to educate your parents.

Again, each of the authors of this piece have had different experiences and thus have slightly different advice. Here's what some of us have to say:

*Nigel:* Best way? Don't act like a flake: show them that you have thought out your beliefs and opinions. If you don't do this, no matter what information you give them, they will still judge it based on their biases (some parents can be biased) and on your actions.

*Catja:* As Nigel says, don't be flaky! Pagan religions are real religions with serious beliefs behind them – if you give your parents the impression that you care more about upsetting them or rebelling against society than you do about your beliefs, then you won't do yourself any favors. Don't just read Pagan 101 books; read up on mythology, folklore, and ancient religions as well. Also, try and learn something about the history of modern Pagan religions as well; Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* is a dense, but readable, scholarly book that puts modern Paganisms in historical context. Sit down and write out your beliefs, and ideas about your beliefs: it will help you gather your thoughts, and will be of great help if you do decide to tell your parents.

*Kasmira:* Believe me, having your arguments picked apart because you did not research them enough is no fun. Another important point is to present the information maturely and slowly. Just because they're your parents doesn't mean that they can absorb in 10 minutes what it took you 10 weeks to figure out.

### **If I keep my beliefs secret from my parents, how can I practice what I believe?**

*Nigel, Catja, and Kasmira*

Practice can range from just researching through small unobtrusive devotionals and on to full-scale ritual at home or with a group. You need to balance the risks of your parents finding out with how important you feel the particular practice is. If your parents catch you, remember: "What will be the consequences, and can I live with them?" The less overt practicing you do, the less likely you are to get caught – which can also be deeply frustrating. Whatever you decide, it will help to think of it as a temporary measure; at some point, you will have the opportunity to move out and do things your way.

## Options

- You can cease any and all religious activity until you move away from home, which, if your parents are both exceptionally intolerant and exceptionally nosy, might be the best option.
- Your parents are not mind-readers: silent prayers are as legitimate a form of devotion as elaborate rituals.
- You can confine yourself to easily explainable research: the aforementioned mythology, folklore, and ancient civilizations.

(*Catja*: As a bonus, your teachers will love you! See if there's a class for which you can do a project on mythology – put your research to work. Because Pagan religions don't have the kind of pre-existing infrastructure that mainstream religions do, all Pagans need to learn some good research skills to get the information they need. Talk to your teachers and librarians; also, if there's a university nearby, professors and university librarians are often happy to suggest specific books and websites. Use discretion, though – there are laws about adults giving minors religious instruction without their parents' consent, so confine your requests to general research skills, and suggestions for good books on mythology, ancient history, and so forth. Also, be specific in your requests: "Can you recommend a good book that retells Celtic myths, and also a book on women in ancient Celtic religion?" will get much better results than "I want to learn about ancient Celtic religion. What should I read?" See: ["How do I find supportive adults at school who can help me?"\[link\]](#) )

- You can store books, etc., at a friend's house.
- If you want to practice herb magic, take up cooking: not only will it give you access to herbs, but you will also learn a great deal about their tastes and effects. Also, your parents might be less inclined to question your desire for basil and rosemary if they know you're making dinner.

And so on.

Regarding lying: We think of "lying" not as simply keeping your beliefs to yourself, but as active deception. Some people (i.e., Silver RavenWolf) will advise you to lie to your parents, while far more will order you never to do so. We at TC are not the morality police, and neither recommend for or against lying: every individual's situation is too different. For some, the anxiety and guilt of lying will override any spiritual rewards of practice; for others, lying is a necessary survival strategy. We cannot presume to advise you on what to do, beyond thinking about your particular situation, and what you're prepared to live with.

We will note that the more you attempt to conceal, the greater the chance that you will be found out. Depending on how nosy your parents are, research is generally pretty low risk, especially with the help of the Internet. Just don't keep a copy of *The Witches' Almanac* in your room and you should be good. Small devotionals can also be pretty low risk. Silent prayers in bed at night are unlikely to be discovered; a hoard of books, incense, candles, herbs, and sundry occult items is much harder to explain. Whatever you decide, you need to take into consideration your personal comfort level, your parents' attitudes – some may be far more upset about lying than about your religious explorations – and what specific practices you plan to do.

*Nigel*: I would say: don't practice your beliefs if you are that worried about lying to your parents or being discovered. Spend this time learning as much as you can; you don't even need to buy any fancy pagan books (many aren't very good anyway). Look through books on mythology, maybe some on religions and pretty

much anything else you feel called toward.

*Kasmira:* Before I came out I used to keep a few little candles and some cone incense on a desk in my room along with various ornaments I had received from friends and family now deceased and some fresh and dried flower cuttings. I'd sit on my bed at night facing my little alter and meditate for a while. None of this was very obviously witchy and I had no problems. When you get more complicated than this you have to be more wary of the risks. If you can't take the consequences of your folks finding out then you've got a pretty obvious path ahead of you: don't practice beyond what you can safely conceal. If you are less worried about consequences then you have a far more open path. Just don't get foolhardy and imagine that because your parents haven't noticed so far they won't notice in the future.

To be honest, with some exceptions, you will receive more freedom if you are open with your parents, and this is the path that I would recommend. The vast majority of pagans that I know feel that they stayed in the closet far too long with their parents out of fear of the reaction they would get, only to find that, when they finally came out, their parents were far more accepting than they had expected. There are exceptions of course but, in my experience, they are few and far between. Please, consider being open very seriously as an option before deciding to conceal your religion from your parents.

## SCHOOL

You spend a good chunk of your life in school right now, and it's only natural to consider sharing something as important as your beliefs with those you spend so much time with. Below are things to consider before "coming out" at school.

### **I'm the only pagan I know in my school. I haven't told anyone yet. Should I "come out"?**

*by Kasmira*

This, as with many questions in this FAQ, is a hard one to answer from a distance and in the end the choice has to be your own. You need to consider two factors: your environment, and yourself. How do you think those around you will react? Is your school very Christian? Secular? Do you think that being out at school will automatically put you out in other places, e.g., at home or work? Will you be adversely affected by being out? And, more importantly, how important is being open to you? Do you care about possible responses you will get? Do you feel that going through those is worth it? Why do you want to be out? So you don't have to hide a part of yourself? To be different? Another reason? Ultimately, all of these things are important.

An important thing that you should also realize about coming out is that you don't need to smash your way out with much ado. You can just decide that if the conversation comes up then you will answer truthfully. Perhaps you wear a small religious pendant or ring that you tend to dodge questions about, you could decide to stop doing so. Being out isn't about making a statement, it is about presenting yourself as who you really are and being comfortable with others seeing that.

### **What will happen if I come out at school?**

*by Jenett*

This depends on a lot of different things: you're probably the only person who has all of the information. Some things to think about, though:

*Do your parents know? Are they supportive?*

If you come out at school, they will probably find out eventually, so you should not come out at school until after you've talked to your parents about your interests and path.

*Generally speaking, people are bad at keeping secrets.*

Teenagers are also people, so you should assume that anything you tell more than one or two friends is going to get spread around - and to people you don't know, don't talk to, and know nothing about.

*Do you know enough about your chosen path to answer other people's common questions about it?*

(Briefly and appropriately: someone who's curious wants the 1-5 sentence answer, not the 5 minute one.) Keep your new path to yourself or a very few trusted close friends until this is true.

*Can you handle questions, concerns, and the occasional nasty remark maturely?*

If you have a hard time keeping your temper, or you're already getting teased a lot by other students, it might be a bad time to come out about something new and different about you.

*Do you have a good support system?*

People you can go to who respect your path, support your choices, but who will also let you know if they think you're going about something in a bad way.

*Is now the right time to do this? What do you hope to get out of coming out to these people at this time?*

Talking to people who have questions can be an emotionally wearing and time-consuming thing: make sure you have plenty of free time in your life for 3-4 weeks after you plan to come out. Doing it right before major exams or projects is a bad idea.

Finally, remember that high school is a closed and emotionally charged place to be: many small things end up blown up to become big deals for a week or two - and then most people forget about it. The trick is coping while that happens, and in dealing with the few people who'll remember it for a long time.

You may wish to look for resources on how to come out as gay, lesbian, bi, or transgendered as a teenager: there are a number of good books about how to help with that process. Even if these things don't apply to you, the advice about talking about important issues that people sometimes don't understand definitely applies to talking about Paganism.

### **Other people at my school know that I'm pagan. How do I deal with it when they tease, harass, or bully me?**

*by Jenett*

This depends on a lot of factors:

- *Know your school's policies.* What do they consider teasing, harassment, or bullying? What kind of evidence do they need to take action on something? What resources are there to help with problems?
- *Be aware that a lot of harassment really isn't very visible to teachers.* They're not always able to listen closely to conversations in the halls, in the lunch room, or in other public spaces. The more you can do to give clear examples and times you have problems, the better. Keep a notebook with notes of problems with whatever details you can share. (You may want to keep this privately, out of sight of the people you have problems with.)
- *Have a plan of action that seems reasonable.* It's very reasonable to ask that teachers and administrators take concrete steps to avoid harassment in classrooms and other required activities. However, there may be no way to have an adult present at all times in public spaces who can stop all harassment: this takes a level of staffing that most schools just can't afford these days. You may need to find some other solutions (safe places for you to be during free periods, a process for reporting problems as they occur in a clear way, etc.) as part of solving this problem. If you have some suggestions that would most help you when you meet with teachers or administrators about this, they may be very willing to help make that happen.
- *Find people you can turn to for support.* This might include people at school, but should also include people outside of your school day - parents, family friends, and so on.

## **How do I find supportive adults at school who can help me?**

*by Jenett*

(These comments come from Jenett's experiences working in a private non-religious high school, as well as her own experiences as a teenager in both public and private schools.)

The first thing you should know is that this is complicated -- not just for you, but for adults at your school. Below are some things to think about -- and then some ideas for some good places to start. (I use 'teacher' below for convenience, but this applies to all professional staff -- teachers, library or technology staff, administrators, and even many coaches.)

### Some things to be aware of:

#### *What are you asking for?*

Bullying or harassment may be triggered by your religious choices. However, this is a pretty common thing for teachers to help with - they are usually aware of school policies and resources, have some training in this area, and can likely help in several ways. This is a different kind of issue from asking them to be public about their own religious beliefs, or asking them to take on ongoing support of a student organization or take on larger issues of religious bias in your school.

#### *They may have boundaries.*

Some kinds of requests can put a lot of pressure on teachers. Being the adviser for a Pagan student group, or asking a teacher for direct support in dealing with religious bias in the school community can make a teacher a target for administrators, parents, or community members. It can have a huge impact on their professional career long after you graduate.

Let them set their own boundaries, and give them time to think about any request. You should also know that teachers may need to balance your hopes with their own concerns: there may be political issues, internal policy issues, contract negotiations, existing issues with some parents, or other factors that mean they need to be careful and thoughtful about what they take on and how.

#### *Teachers may not be comfortable talking about their own beliefs with students.*

Because I work as a librarian, it's really important to me that all students -- including some of our more conservative and Christian students -- feel comfortable asking me for help. But because I don't work with the same class every day, there's no way for most of them to get to know me very well. Therefore, I keep my religion to myself when it comes to students (though I do my best to help out students who are obviously looking for Pagan materials without getting specific about my own beliefs.)

Other teachers I know deliberately take different points of view in their classes, in order to challenge their students. They might bring up points from other religions, political views, or other approaches to make their classes think. In other cases, they may be thoughtful about what points they raise because of community pressure or ongoing conflicts about a topic.

### Where to start:

- *Look for teachers who have been at that school for at least 3-4 years.* People who are new to a school are working very hard to figure things out themselves. They don't always know all of the resources, and simply preparing classes and teaching them is taking a lot of their time and energy right now. They're also generally the most susceptible to negative pressure from administrators or community members.

- *Do you have a school counselor or an office devoted to diversity or community issues?* These can be one of the best places to start, if you feel comfortable talking to them. Counselors should be able to tell you clearly what their confidentiality limits are - and they will also be very aware of the school's policies or process in dealing with things like harassment.
- *Consider the teachers who know you particularly well.* This might be your homeroom/advisory/etc. teacher. I've found that teachers in Social Studies, and in the Arts (music, drama, etc.) tend to be more generally aware of Paganism than others, but look at your own experiences. English teachers also often get to know you fairly well because of the amount of writing done. Even if they can't help you directly, they can probably point you to other people who can. Consider not just teachers you have this year, but teachers you've had previously and connected with or who know you as a generally thoughtful, responsible type. Think about advisers for any student groups you're involved with, too.
- *Look for teachers who clearly value a diverse community.* These might include teachers who support diversity programs with their time and energy, who make sure to talk about civil rights and equality issues regularly in class, or who regularly challenge students to think and reconsider their assumptions. Teachers who are involved in Gay-Straight Alliance groups or other groups supporting minority communities in your school may be a good place to start, but you should be aware that not all of these teachers may be familiar with - or comfortable with - Paganism. You may have to do some education, and they may already have their hands full with the other good things they're already doing.

Some schools have designated 'safe spaces' (usually marked with a sign or sticker of some kind) that indicates that that teacher's made a commitment to talking about discrimination or harassment issues of any. Just be aware that not all supportive teachers may have these up for whatever reason.

- *If someone says they really don't feel comfortable helping - for whatever reason - move on.* Be polite. It never hurts, and you never know if you're going to end up with a class from them later on. But do ask if they can suggest anyone else you might talk to.

For more information, here are some general resources:

[http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel\\_liberty/publicschools/faqs.aspx](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/publicschools/faqs.aspx)  
[http://www.adl.org/religion\\_ps\\_2004/default.asp](http://www.adl.org/religion_ps_2004/default.asp)

## **LEARNING ABOUT PAGANISM**

The majority of pagan paths do not have a *Book of* [insert pagan path here], with everything you need to know and do to practice that path. Therefore, you will most likely have to research on your own, using the library, internet, or other pagans you meet in your area or online.

### **What kinds of topics should I research?**

*by Hyacinth Belle*

Paganism can require a lot of detective work, and it might be difficult to know where to start. Lots of information can be found in the local library and online, but as you get more advanced in your research, it may be necessary to take the plunge to the bookstore or Amazon.com to buy subject-specific material. If the library is your only place to research however, have no fear! There is a wealth of information you can use there.

Especially when just starting out, there are lots of pagan related things that are easy to find in almost any library. Perhaps the most obvious would be texts about mythologies and “ancient” gods. By learning about a religion’s mythology (and other folk sources like epics), you are learning not only about the deities and much of their personalities, but you can also gain insights about the attitudes and beliefs of the people who follow them. Similarly, especially if you are interested in any reconstructionist religions, try to learn about the history and culture of the time a pantheon you were interested in became prevalent.

New Age studies are gaining in popularity, so you should also be able to find books about meditation and visualization (the basis for practically all ritual and spell work!) and things like chakras and auras. If you are interested in tarot, it shouldn’t be too difficult to find a book about that as well.

The best thing you can do is poke around and become familiar with what your library has. Pursue what interests you. And make use of the beautiful thing known as the inter-library loan!

For information specifically about finding information on the internet, look at the question “What kinds of information can I find in the web?”

### **What kinds of information can I find on the web?**

*by Hyacinth Belle*

The internet can be a great source of information, and it could be the only source of information for a teen who is new to paganism and has no car to drive to the bookstore or library. The majority of the pagan-related information available online is going to be geared toward Wicca. There is nothing wrong with Wicca, but one should be aware of this common bias. Those sites that do include information about other religions are often brief summaries, so it can be difficult to find specific information. There could be some form of official body or organization for certain religions, and these often have very helpful websites.

The internet has the advantage of allowing people to connect with each other, both in the form of personal websites and online forums. Individuals’ websites or blogs can contain great information in the form of personal essays or examples of rituals and spells. Forums allow a perfect place for someone new to paganism

to ask questions of real people, and this can be invaluable! When considering joining a pagan forum, there are a few things to think about before you join:

- Make sure people use mostly standard English, with punctuation and correct spellings. This may seem nit-picky, but a lot of “net speak” can often be a sign of people who are not serious or scholarly.
- Forums, if they are to be helpful, should have a sense of tolerance about them. Debates can quickly become hostile, and this is no good for anyone! Moderators should have a presence to prevent disruptive disputes.

It should be helpful, if you haven’t already, to also look at the question “What kinds of topics should I research?” Much of that information will be applicable to looking for things online as well.

### **What are the “red flags” I should look for on websites?**

*by Dania*

The first and most obvious thing that I look for when deciding if a website is even worth looking at is the design. It sounds like a silly thing -- and yes, very good information can be found on very badly designed websites -- but nine times out of ten, if the web page you are looking at has flashing glitter backgrounds, an overabundance of cheesy animated graphics and really garish rainbow colored fonts, it’s not worth looking at.

The second thing I look for is the type of information and how it’s organized. Does it appear well written? Does it appear ‘scholarly’ ...i.e., are sources cited somewhere; does it appear well thought out and well put together? Are there noticeable discrepancies between information on different parts of the website?

Another definite red flag is if the website appears to have some sort of agenda. There are lots of sites out there whose only ‘agenda’ is to inform, or to get knowledge of their particular tradition out there. But if the site looks like it has a political agenda, or is attempting to get money from unsuspecting visitors, it’s a good idea to stay away. Finally, do the authors of the site seem condescending or ‘holier than thou’? If so, stay away. Especially if you see something like “I can help you achieve great things if only you send me \$\$\$”. If you see that, don’t just stay away: run away, very fast. These sorts of scams run rampant through certain parts of the pagan community. Any site that asks you for money for any reason (other than selling actual products, obviously) should make you suspicious. Some traditions and groups do have monthly dues to cover costs of supplies and course materials, but you should be able to tell if this is the case.

### **Why is it important to try things out and gain experience?**

*by Dania*

You simply cannot learn everything there is to know from a book. It’s entirely possible to know everything ever written on casting a circle, but still be incapable of doing it yourself. There’s a huge difference between knowing the concept intellectually, and understanding it in a way that makes it usable for you. There are also a lot of things in Paganism which cannot be explained in words all that well, and that you are not likely to find written. Religion is a highly personal thing: the experiences are a little different for everyone (sometimes, a lot different) and the only way to gain understanding that is relevant to you is to actually do out there and do the work yourself.

## **How do I find a teacher in my area?**

*by Jenett*

First, take some time to figure out what you want from a teacher. You already have experience with teachers from school, and possibly from other interests. What kind of teacher have you done best with? Some questions to ask yourself:

- *Are there methods or approaches that work well with you?*
- *Do you prefer structure, or independence?*
- *Do you want someone who will continually challenge and push you?*
- *Or do you want a mentor who will wait for you to ask before they offer help or advice?*
- *Are you looking for general information, or specific instruction?*
- *What kind of time and energy do you have for this learning right now?*

In the Pagan and magical community, teachers usually have specific things they teach, or a specific structure they work in. You will want to know enough about your interests to know which topics matter to you. If you want to learn about Wicca, someone who teaches ceremonial magic might not be a good fit. If you want to learn about Celtic Reconstruction or druidry, someone who focuses on ancient Egypt may not know many details that will help.

There are two common places to start. One is an international website with networking information called Witchvox. You can find it at <http://witchvox.com> -- choose your area from the drop down menus in the top left sidebar, and then browse for groups. Another place to look is your local esoteric store. Stores often have a bulletin board with information about local events and teachers.

Important notes:

- You may not be able to find a teacher who will take a student under 18. (See question **"Why won't some teachers accept me as a student before I'm 18?"**)
- There are predatory people out there. You should be cautious when getting to know a possible teacher. (See question **"What are the 'red flags' I should look for in a teacher?"** for more on this.)
- Expect the process to take a while: even for adults living in areas with lots of Pagans, it can take years to find the right teacher. As a teenager, you probably have fewer places you can get to easily, more limits on your time, and fewer teachers who will work with a teenager - expect the process to take longer or that you may not find a teacher who has your exact focus or interests.
- One other option is to look for an online teacher or mentor. There are some times this can work well, but some things that are very hard to impossible to teach online only.

## **What are the "red flags" I should look for in a teacher?**

*by Dania and Jenett*

There are really two kinds of issues. There are really major signs of problems that have very few other reasons for them. And then there are things that often signal possible problems - but that may have good explanations behind them. Below, we're going to talk about some different issues, and how to spot the problems. If you have questions about a group or a particular practice, it can often be very helpful to ask somewhere (like the Cauldron's forums) with a wide range of experience. People can tell you whether there's something you should be particularly cautious of, and because it's a public conversation, any

problems or exceptions tend to get caught pretty quickly.

### Really Big Problems (back off as fast as possible)

- *Predators*: There are predators out there. Obviously, be extremely cautious of anyone soliciting a teenager for sex or who pushes sexual interaction on you - but also be cautious of anyone who says you can't tell anyone what you're doing, can't bring a friend with you to a first meeting or two, or uses other techniques to isolate you (see below for more).
- *Isolationist techniques*: legitimate teachers may have confidential material (details that are not shared outside the tradition or group for various reasons) but most teachers will encourage you to let people close to you know what you're studying in general, and where you're spending your time. Someone who encourages you to keep this entirely secret from the people you're closest to (family, friends) is a big problem.
- *Bigotry, racism, or other obvious bias towards others*: If a teacher is constantly putting down or insulting people based on their race, gender, religion, or other category, this is a big warning sign. (Christian-bashing included.)
- *Someone who asks you to do something that causes you significant discomfort or that is against your own ethical beliefs, and who insists even after you say you're not comfortable*. Some paths involve a certain amount of stretching or discomfort (see the bit about challenges below). However, a respectful teacher will not push you beyond your firm limits or ethics, and they will stop and talk about the issue instead of pushing you if you say you're not comfortable.
- *A teacher who tries to control who you see on your free time, how you spend or earn your money, or limits who you can see romantically to other members of the group (or themselves)*. Your teacher may have opinions about some of this, but there's a big difference between sharing concerns or feelings about something, and dictating your choices to you.

### Red flags (be cautious and investigate further)

- *Doesn't listen to what you want to learn*. Teachers obviously have their own interests and areas they can teach - but a good teacher should be up front about these, and not spring changes on you. A teacher may have good reasons for saying "I know you want to learn X, but I feel strongly that Y needs to come first", too - but in that case, they should be able to explain at least part of why they feel you need to spend time on Y.
- *Trying to restrict or limit community interaction/outside reading*: Teachers may suggest (with good reason) that some books or resources are problematic or have bad information. Good teachers will give you reasons. You should be very cautious about a teacher who wants you to read *\*only\** a specific short list, or to avoid interaction at all with the broader community (public rituals, events, etc.) Sometimes a teacher who does this has a bad reputation in the rest of the community, or feels they don't measure up in some way.
- *Unclear about their own background or training*: A teacher should be able to talk in general terms about their own background (the same way that you might when applying for a job). They don't need to discuss every single detail, but you should be able to find out where they learned what they're teaching, what their experience is, and if they've taught before.

- *Refusal to answer questions or avoiding questions in general.* This is different from "We'll get to that, but we should discuss this other thing first". A teacher who refuses to answer questions, or avoids them should be evaluated carefully. Sometimes it's because they know far less than they pretend to, and don't want to get caught at it. That's not good for you as a student.
- *A teacher you are romantically interested in, or who is interested in you.* This is a very tricky situation in many Pagan settings: close magical and ritual work can raise romantic-type feelings. For ethical and practical reasons (it's really hard to teach a romantic interest fairly!), if this comes up, most teachers will either find someone they're romantically interested in another teacher, or they will put religious or magical training on hold for a year or so until the romantic relationship is solid.

There are also some things that are not automatically red flags:

- *Your teacher has a specific structure for what and how they teach:* a good teacher will know their own limits, interests, and abilities. They will be clear that they can teach some things (or using some methods) but not others. Just as you have a right to study what you're interested in, your teacher has a right to teach what they know (and not feel pressured to teach things they're less confident about).
- *Teachers may challenge you at the edge of your comfort level.* A number of magical paths rely on a certain amount of discomfort because discomfort is a really powerful way to encourage change. Ethical teachers won't break your hard and fast limits - but they may push you to the edge of something you're uncomfortable with.
- *Your teacher will have preferences about where and how they spend their time (and with who!).* Don't expect your teacher to share all of your interests, and don't be surprised if they make different choices for their free time than you would. Some groups or teachers spend a lot of social time together - others don't. If this matters to you, ask early on how your teacher works, and decide if that's a good fit for you.
- *Good teachers may have time requirements, or time limits.* Often, these exist for specific, well-defined reasons. For example, some teachers will only initiate at some times of the year, and many require a certain period of study before initiation or moving to the next step.

### **How long does it take to learn \_\_\_\_\_ ?**

*by Jenett*

How long something takes to learn depends on a lot of factors - especially how much time and energy you put into it. Think of learning a musical instrument or a sport. If you only practice every couple of weeks, you'll make less progress than if you work on it consistently, at least a few days a week.

In Wiccan and Wiccan influenced groups, the traditional training time before initiation in many groups is a year and a day. This is generally enough time for a student who's working on practice and reading outside of their group training time to learn the basics of the religion, and be able to do many religious tasks (like casting circle or creating a ritual) for themselves by the end of the year - but they will need to practice and learn regularly on their own to do all of that in a year.

Many people will find that some skills come faster than others. Some examples: one person might learn how to cast a circle or write a spell very quickly, but might have real trouble creating a visual image in their mind. Someone else might have an easy time with that, but struggle with grounding. Someone else might learn factual information easily, but need more time to learn how to establish a personal emotional relationship with a deity.

It can be hard to learn how you learn best - or learn on your own. Our educational systems often don't talk much about these things while we're students. Fortunately, there's no time limit. Take as long to learn as you need to. Start with something fairly concrete (for people interested in Wicca, this might be casting a circle. Those interested in reconstructionist paths might pick a regular devotional ritual. Those interested in magic might look at those methods.) Take some time to break it down into separate steps, then focus on each part until you feel comfortable with that step. Move onto the next one.

### **Why won't some teachers accept me as a student before I'm 18?**

*by Jenett*

Different teachers have different reasons - the best way to know about a particular teacher is to ask them.

- *Legal concerns:* many areas of the US (and some other countries) have laws about teaching religion without parental consent. Since most Pagan groups and teachers don't have the backing of a large established church or religious organization (with money for lawyers, etc.) even a lawsuit the teacher eventually won might put someone's home, family, or even job at risk. Because of this, many teachers who will teach someone under 18 will require a conversation with a parent, or some other way of determining that they're okay with their child learning the material.
- *Burnout:* Although there certainly are serious teenage students of magic and Paganism, many teenagers get interested in it for a month or two, and then lose interest and go on to other things. This can be immensely frustrating to a teacher who invests time in getting to know a student or figuring out what will work best for them. The 'lose interest' rate for adults can be over 50% - for teenagers, it's often much higher (around 85-90%)
- *Nature of the topic:* Some paths (like traditional Wicca) are a major commitment: initiation involves life-affecting oaths. In these paths, it's common to require students to be able to live independently, and to devote the time and energy needed for formal study. Most people don't reach this point until sometime after they're 21 or older, even if they're otherwise extremely emotionally and intellectually mature for their age.
- *Time needed:* Some paths are more time consuming in training than others. While there are certainly small things you can learn as you go along, learning the details needed to be an initiate of some paths, or a ritual leader in others can take a great deal of time. Many teachers feel that the teen years should be a time when people can explore and try things out, and when they can devote more time and energy to things like schoolwork, college, or starting a career.
- *Approach:* Teenage brains and adult brains are a bit different - and this affects all sorts of things that are important in learning. Teenagers have a lot of strengths, and they're used to learning, but the

learning methods used in mainstream education, and the experiential learning common in many Pagan paths often don't fit together very well. It can be really confusing to go from one to the other. In addition, established teachers may have designed their teaching methods to fit adult learning styles well, but not be sure how to adapt them best for teenagers.

While many teachers are glad to offer less formal mentoring or help with specific questions, formal training in a specific path often has a number of other requirements: it may not be possible to teach only some of it, or only in limited steps. In these cases, teachers will often wait until they can teach using their full process. Because of these issues, you should check carefully if you do find a teacher who's willing to take you as someone under 18 without parental permission. There are certainly good teachers who've figured out ways around these that make them comfortable - but there are also a few predators out there who deliberately seek out minors. Don't lie about your age: it can not only affect your immediate options (the teacher refusing to work with you when they find out) but your reputation in the Pagan community down the road.

## **GROUPS AND SOLITARIES**

### **What are the pros and cons of working with a coven or other group?**

*by Jenett*

First, let's debunk a few myths about Pagan group work.

*Do you need to believe and practice exactly the same way as other group members?*

No! You do need to be able to work with each other - but two people in a group might have quite different beliefs or personal practices. Think of it a little like singing in a chorus or playing a sport. At home, you might listen to different music, or sing differently. You might try different positions in a pick-up game. But when you're in the chorus, or in the game, there are some shared expectations about what you're all going to be focusing on together, and how you're going to do that - who takes which roles, what is expected, and how you're going to coordinate.

*How do people work out the compromises?*

Sometimes everyone decides together. In other groups, the leaders figure out what the group's practices and focus will be and how everything fits. There are also lots of ways to include personal preferences in group work, even if you're all using the same agreed on ritual method. For example, a group might do a working for new opportunities. They might use the same ritual format, but then make tokens to represent their individual goals. Each member might not only use different symbols, colors, or types of materials - but the very way they see prosperity, or the thing they're focusing on could be different. One person might be looking for a job, another hoping to get into the right college for them, and someone else might be working on ways to meet more friends.

*Do people in groups also work on their own?*

Some people think that those in groups never work on their own. This isn't true: it's important for group members to do their own personal work as well. Fortunately, this is a handy way to resolve the previous problem: you might focus on one set of deities in your personal work, and a different set in group work, or might use different practices in each case.

*So, what are the benefits of a group?*

- Some paths require that you learn from someone else, often in a group setting.
- Some ritual techniques require more than one person or only make sense in a group. (And sometimes, group ritual is just plain fun.)
- You can talk to other people about what you're doing and why it's interesting, while having a shared background (so you don't have to explain the background all the time).
- It's easier to get feedback and ideas as you work to improve your skills.
- Many people find it's easier to 'make time' for formal ritual when it's scheduled with other people.
- A number of groups build in enjoyable social times (feasting after a ritual, outings to local events) and people build close friendships.

*There are also disadvantages or potential problems:*

- It's hard if people aren't participating: you need to be able to commit to being there and willing to participate.
- Being part of a healthy group takes time and attention. You need to be willing to work through problems with others.
- Scheduling can be very complicated.
- Not everyone in the group is going to be interested in all the same things you are: you may need to compromise on the focus, method, or other details of your group work.
- Good group work is based on a solid personal practice: you will still need to find time to work on your own.
- There are unhealthy groups and predatory or just clueless teachers/group leaders out there. These can be miserable experiences.

If you're interested in group work, we suggest reading a few books that deal with it (in the Pagan community, most of the books in print are about covens but you can also find information online or through discussion on other paths). They'll talk about different perspectives and approaches, and help you get a sense for whether it might be a good fit for you now or in the future.

One last note on groups: they're dynamic. They change. You may find that a group you care about has conflicts or disagreements. These are totally normal and they don't have to mean the end of the group. What matters is how they're handled and (we hope) resolved. There are lots of tools to help groups deal with differences of opinion and conflicts - check out books on leadership and group dynamics in your local library. Sometimes, all that's needed is a way to get back on track or refocus the group's work together or some tools to improve communication.

Groups also have a life cycle. You may find that a group exists for three or four years, and then naturally comes to an end. You may find that you change - a group that you loved and were passionate about for a year or more may start feeling uncomfortable to you. This doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with you or the group (though it's worth checking, especially if specific possible changes would make a big difference to you). But it may also be that you and the group are no longer the best fit for each other. Knowing that this is a common experience in advance can help a lot when that happens. (And if you spend much time around the Pagan community, you'll find many people who've had that same experience.)

For more information on working with covens or groups, check out:

*CovenCraft* by Amber K.

*Wicca Covens* by Judy Harrow

*Inside a Witch's Coven* by Edain McCoy (her other work has some historical problems, but this one is based on her own experiences.)

### **How do I find a coven/group?**

*by Jenett*

Be aware that many groups may not take teens (see “Why won’t some/most groups accept me as a member before I’m 18?” and “Why won’t some teachers accept me as a student before I’m 18?”). For those that do, there are three common ways to find groups: none of these are specific to teens (although Witchvox, noted below, does have a teen group listing area within each state/province/region).

- Browse through networking sites like Witchvox (<http://witchvox.com>) and look for groups that are open to new members. You can also check out local networking sites.
- Local stores often have flyers for local groups posted.
- A common way to find out about a group is through personal networking. Attending public rituals, day-long classes, events like Pagan Pride Day, or other community networking events like MeetUps or Coffee Cauldrons may be a great way to meet up with others.

You should be aware that many groups take in a limited number of new members and will be looking at how you behave toward them from the beginning. A polite and clear email is going to make a much better impression than “i want 2 lern wican now. give me spellz plz.” (You may laugh, but many groups get a lot of emails like that!) Did you read any information they provided? It’s fine to ask questions, but it’s good to make sure they haven’t already been answered. Things like this can make a big difference in how you come across.

If you find a group of other teens, you do want to still take your time. Just because someone forms a group doesn’t mean they can lead a group - or that they know much about a particular path! Check them out just the same way we’ve already suggested. And remember, just because someone’s close to your age doesn’t mean you have much in common when it comes to your path. Teen groups can also often form and break apart unusually quickly (due to personality conflicts or other competing demands) which can be hard on everyone involved.

### **What are the “red flags” I should look for? How do I know I’m not getting into a cult?**

*by Jenett*

That’s a good question. We’ve already covered some common red-flags with teachers in “What are the “red flags” I should look for in a teacher?”, so here we want to talk about things that focus on groups. There’s a well-known scale designed by Isaac Bonewitz, who is a widely-known Pagan author. He calls it the ABCDEF scale, and it’s designed to help you figure out how controlling a group might be. You can find it at <http://www.neopagan.net/ABCDEF.html>. Some red-flags include:

*Attempts to overly control your life* - how you spend your time, who you spend it with, or how you earn or spend your money.

Some examples of a group that may be controlling include:

- requiring you to write down or tell them everyone you talk to during the day,
- pressure to drop anyone not in the group as your friend.
- pressure to keep what you’re doing from friends or family.
- pushing you to go against your choices about your body or sexuality.
- expecting you to earn money and give them a large amount of it.

- controlling whether you can continue to talk to people who have left the group.

Healthy groups may talk to you about concerns (for example, if you spend all your time playing games, they may suggest spending more time on homework, or help you find ways to study better. If they have concerns about a particular person in your life, they may share them.) But they won't try and control each decision.

*"We're the special chosen ones":* If the group leader or members claim to have special information that no one else besides them has, be careful! We're talking about groups who think they're there to save the world, or right some great cosmic wrong, or that only the people in this group are 'really' witches or Pagans or magicians or whatever. It's a big world with a lot of variety: chances are, this group is not the only one doing things that way or focused on a particular thing.

We're not talking here about the details of a specific tradition: there are all sorts of variations out there, and many of the details may be private to the group. These can be fine: think of something like in-jokes with your friends, or school spirit or traditions. They don't always make much sense to other people, but they're enjoyable (and not harmful) for people in that community.

*"We're always right":* Be cautious of any group or group leader who claims to be always right. We're all human and we all get things wrong sometimes. It's very easy for a group where the leader is seen as all-knowing or always right to become abusive and controlling and destructive.

In particular, be very careful of any group where the leader follows different rules or requirements than anyone else in the group. The leader may have different jobs or roles or things they do - but if it's not okay for others to make certain kinds of comments, or ask questions, it should be not-okay for the leader, as well. If it's okay to ask other members questions, that goes for the leader.

*Easy to enter, hard to leave:* Healthy groups are the other way around - they're much harder to enter than they are to leave. You'll find many healthy closed Pagan groups (those that aren't open to visitors all the time) take a long time to get to know new potential members, but are very willing to let people go if it's not the place for them anymore. Unhealthy groups will take anyone who shows up - but will have a hard time letting them leave, put a lot of pressure on them, or require that people who leave can't talk to the group.

Within the Pagan community, it's also good to be a little cautious of any group that's actively focusing on recruiting new members (unless it's a very general social community like a meet-up group or some college Pagan groups). This is because Pagan religions generally don't recruit new members: we want the people who are called to Paganism on their own.

*Range of members:* Finally, look at the other members. While a college or teen group is obviously going to have members who are in those age ranges, other healthy groups will probably have a range of people there. Do people come from just one age group? Is there an older teacher, with a bunch of younger students? Those are things to be cautious of.

### **Why won't some/most groups accept me as a member before I'm 18?**

*by Jenett*

For some general issues with teaching someone under 18, look at question, **"Why won't some teachers**

accept me as a student before I'm 18?". However, there are some additional considerations for groups.

First, there are an increasing number of public ritual or family-centered groups that welcome teenagers to some or all events. Many of these provide rituals for some or all sacred days, and often offer general, introductory, or other short-term classes or events. However, for the same legal reasons discussed in "Why won't some teachers accept me as a student before I'm 18?", they may still require parental permission or some other agreement.

Other groups, however, may not be open to teen participation for other reasons (or only rarely, when other guests are also welcome).

Some issues are practical. These can affect everything from scheduling to transportation to preferred time for rituals. For example, a teenager may want Friday or Saturday nights to spend with friends (or to go to school events), while adults may be more comfortable giving up a weekend evening a few times a month. A teen may not be able to get to the group meeting site easily on their own.

Many other issues have to do with focus. A small coven or focused group may have adults in it who are grieving the death of a partner, dealing with the end of a major relationship, or confronting issues about sexuality, sexual health or abuse. They may even be dealing with parenting frustrations or concerns. It may be hard for some adults in this situation to feel comfortable sharing information about or doing ritual work that involves these issues if teenagers are present. Likewise, a teen may simply not feel very interested in rituals focusing on some aspects (for example, crossing from being a mother to being a crone, ritual work around professional choices or situations, etc.)

Finally, some group practices may be an issue. For example, working skyclad (or naked) is a real worry (for legal reasons and because of concerns about sexual abuse) for adults if the teen's parents aren't around/directly giving permission (as would be true in a nudist setting). Other practices (the use of alcohol in more than very token amounts, some initiatory practices, etc.) may also be a problem due to current laws and community understanding.

### **What should I expect at a public ritual?**

*by Jenett and cwummell*

This varies greatly from group to group and path to path.

For some groups (especially Heathenry and various reconstructionist paths), the ritual may range from simple to more formal, honoring the Gods and Goddesses of that path. In a Wiccan-based ritual, you may have a magical working, a ritual play, a seasonal celebration, or a number of other options.

Before you go to the ritual, you should try to find out some basic information:

- Where is it? Anything you need to know about getting there (like parking, bus routes, etc.). Is it outside or inside or some of both? (Dress for the weather if outside.)
- When should you arrive? When will you be done (if you need to arrange to get home).

- Do you need to bring anything? Some rituals ask you to bring food to share, or a small token for the ritual, something to sit on outside, drums or instruments, etc.
- Do you need to wear anything special (robes) or prepare anything?
- Will there be a short overview for new folks, or other information about what to do during the ritual?

There may be an email address to ask any questions, but ask early: the people running the ritual may not be checking email (or home) right before the event. If it's an open, widely advertised ritual, it's fine to bring a friend.

If it's an invitational ritual (especially at a private home), you should ask if it's okay to bring a friend. It's good not to bring more than you need with you: some rituals may be in a relatively small space, and it's a pain to work around everyone's bags. Be thoughtful about whether bringing hard to replace stuff is appropriate - while thefts at open rituals are rare, there's always a chance someone might trip and break something or spill water.

Once you get there, take a moment to look around. Figure out where the bathrooms are, where to leave your stuff, where to put the potluck food if you brought it. If people are still getting set up, don't bug them (they need time to prepare), but if there's someone welcoming new arrivals, feel free to ask if you can help with anything: it's a great way to meet people and make a good impression.

Many public rituals have a short explanation of what will happen before you start. There may be announcements at some point, too - this can be a great way to learn about other community events.

After ritual, there's often time to meet people, chat, and learn more. There might be music, drumming, or just conversation. Some people (especially at a larger ritual) may want to catch up with old friends, but if you're polite, you can probably find people who will be glad to make you welcome. If the ritual space needs to be reset or cleaned up, offering to help is again a great way to meet people.

See **"How should I behave at a public event/ritual?"** for more help on how to behave.

### **How should I behave at a public event/ritual?**

*by Jenett and cwummel*

The best way to behave is politely, without disrupting the event or ritual. Even if it's not your preference, other people may be enjoying it. If you're attending with someone who is a member of the group, they can fill you in.

In general:

- Most open rituals are designed for everyone (even brand new guests) to participate - standing on the side watching is often discouraged or forbidden. If you think you might want to do this, ask first if it's okay.
- Be polite: someone else's choices, religious path, clothing, or lifestyle may not be to your preference - but you can always be polite about it, and move on.

- Events may have rules about what to bring. Public parks often have restrictions that may limit glass containers, alcohol, or bladed weapons. Don't bring pets or a blade to an open ritual without checking first that it's okay.
- Be a good guest: bring something to share if there's potluck, offer to help if things need to be moved (and you're able to help).
- If there's a pre-ritual briefing, pay attention: it will help you figure out what you may need to do, or what's going on.
- You may see people making specific ritual movements at some times, always turning a specific direction, etc. Do your best to follow, but if you're not sure, just stand or sit quietly.
- If you can't eat or drink something (food allergies, etc.), just bow your head over offered ritual food, and repeat any blessing that was passed on to you. (In Wiccan groups, "Blessed Be" is a good all purpose response, for example.) Many open rituals will have an alternative to alcohol, especially if there are children/teens attending, but it's meant to be only a small sip.

If you feel uncomfortable:

It's possible that a ritual, people there, or something else may make you feel uncomfortable. Trust your instincts. If the ritual itself makes you feel uncomfortable, you can let the energy of the ritual flow around you (like a rock in a stream), or even remove yourself from the ritual (if you're in a Wiccan circle or something else with a ritual boundary, don't cross it unless someone cuts you out or it's truly an emergency: this is considered extremely rude).

I always suggest people going to a public ritual either bring a friend, or make sure they have a way to get home that doesn't rely on anyone else (like a ride from an acquaintance), so that if you decide you're uncomfortable, you're not stuck by yourself.

## **PERSONAL STORIES**

### **Kasmira's Story**

I come from a conservative Christian family of bible belt Evangelicals. My parents are somewhat of the black sheep of the family (my mother is an agnostic non-practicing Christian and my father is probably best described as a spiritual atheist). As a consequence of this many of the first family gatherings I remember involved not very well hidden attempts to bring my parents back into the Christian flock and to feed me Christian values in an attempt to prevent Satan's hold on my parents from spreading to me. Over time this changed and mellowed as all involved became more accepting of the situation, and chose to let it be.

Despite my parents' lack of strong religious leanings, I went to Sunday School. It was, however, more because it allowed my parents some precious time alone than for any religious reason and it ceased pretty much as soon as I grew out of the coloring and crafting obsession that had made me quite happy there up to that point. From there my connections to religion slowly waned from a combination of strong disagreement with what I saw of Christianity through my relatives and a predisposition towards overly applying scientific logic to all aspects of my life. By age 10 or so I was a devout atheist. Belief in the divine was a human weakness and those who held such beliefs were failing to see the facts.

My introduction to paganism came in the form of a series of fiction books entitled *Wicca* which I read when I was 12 or 13. There were a lot of incredible feats of magic and wafting around of ideas about the ancient roots of Wicca but parts of me that had been spiritually starved by my unrelenting atheist approach were drawn to this. It seemed to give life a reason to be sunny while being sufficiently different from Christianity for me to dispel the voice in my head which kept reciting my atheist manifesto. Being attracted to this wasn't 'weakness', I would explore it with my logical senses wide open and see what I got.

Of course, my logic didn't do me all that much good. I still read all the wrong books and trusted all the wrong authors and spoon fed myself some ideas that, in hindsight, seem truly ridiculous. My predisposition to do everything on the internet did, however, help me out a great deal more and a few months later I stumbled across The Cauldron. Here logic, or at least a focus on factual accuracy, got back in the game. I started researching my way through various pagan religions as they caught my eye, delving into one until I realized it was not right for me and then moving on.

Slowly I began to build up a picture of what I believed. Atheism, it seemed, was not for me. I believe in the divine. But I still would not, and could not, accept the idea of a conscious god figure working like a puppeteer over our world. It took me a long time to dispel the idea that a need for a conscious god standing over you is a weakness and even when I finally got over making that judgment, I still found that a conscious god figure was not something I believed in or ever would be able to believe in. The divine is ever-present, all-encompassing, beautiful and terrible. It is a force, a substance, it is that which we are all made of. It is life, vitality, energy. To say it is not there, for me, would be like looking down and saying my feet are not there. But to say it is conscious would be like assigning a separate consciousness to those same feet. The divine is conscious only in as much as many of its constituent parts, its manifestations, are conscious.

It has taken me years to reach this point. My spirituality has changed and evolved and I do not hesitate to say that it will continue to change and evolve until my death extinguishes that process. In those years I have gone through a lot of different things: come out to my parents, friends, and finally the world at large; faced the consequences of making such things about myself so readily knowable; gotten thoroughly confused several

times; and had wonderful "Oh gods! Now that makes a heck load more sense!" light bulb moments. But all of these are things I have written about elsewhere in the FAQ and they are not what I feel I need to say here. Here I just want to emphasize that spirituality is a path, not an end destination, and sometimes (particularly as a teen) you need to stop worrying about getting where you're going and start enjoying the actual act of going there. As a teenager, there is frequently quite a lot in the way of barreling off down your path. Everything from school to parents to the views of your peers can stop you from doing what you want to do and going where you want to go. But you'd be surprised how much you can learn right where you are, particularly about yourself. And figuring things out about yourself is something that not only comes as a product of a good spiritual path, but which is also necessary for the formation of such a path. And I sound like such a hypocrite because I was (and frequently still am) really bad at this whole patience thing. But that doesn't change the fact that some of my greatest light bulb moments have come when I stood still for a moment and just took a long hard look at myself and my surroundings and I wish I'd thought to do that more often instead of rushing forwards all the time.

### Sefiru's Story

I've been interested in mythology and world religions since I was young, but for many years I drifted through agnosticism and vague theism. Christianity's ideas of sin and being saved never really made sense to me, and neither did (neo-)Wicca's pentacles and wands and candle spells. I came by my own path in a very round-about way.

Fantasy and world-building is another one of my interests, and I've come up with several different fictional religions. Most of them were no more than story elements, but there was one that stuck in my head, one that I wove more of my own beliefs into. I borrowed names from mythology for some of my little pantheon: Mahat, Seker and Mau. (If you recognize a couple of these names, you can giggle now.) It seemed natural that they would suit me well, since I was inventing something to suit myself ... or so I thought.

Any writer will tell you that characters sometimes take on lives of their own. This went a bit beyond that; for years I'd had "feelings" of Something There (vague, isn't it?), and now I began to notice that my "feelings" were somehow connected to my "imaginary" gods. Around the same time I discovered The Cauldron, where I learned of people who worshiped a zillion different Gods and Goddesses. I became pretty sure that my three gods were real, in the sense of existing outside my head. I was sure enough of their attributes at this point to make an altar depicting them, but I still didn't have an inkling of Who they really were. Yeah, I was pretty clueless.

By this time I was teaching English in Japan, so my access to reference books (that I could read) was nonexistent. So I did what many seekers have done: I posted a Name-That-God thread on The Cauldron, leaving out my borrowed names. Someone replied that one of them (the one I was calling Mau) reminded them of the Kemetic god Set, and linked me to Darkhawk's essay on "Room for the Other." My reaction to this was roughly, "Holy S\*\*t!" The match was virtually perfect – and the only previous knowledge I had of Set was as the guy who offed Wesir. History's given him a bad rap, so it's not a surprise I didn't make the connection before that.

In the next couple of months, also thanks to threads on the Cauldron, I figured out that the entities I'd been calling Mahat and Seker actually were the Kemetic Ma'at and Sokar. Holy S\*\*t again! I actually posted the line, "I'm turning Kemetic in spite of myself." I didn't really mind, though. Unlike the other paths and systems I'd read about, Kemeticism felt comfortable and sensible. The first time I made a proper water

offering, it went something like this:

*Gods: She finally got it! Group hug!*

*Me: I can't breathe ...*

And a similar thing happened when I got up the nerve to call Set by his real name (I still call him Mau sometimes, though). He has a reputation for turning people's lives inside out, but then I've always been the kind of person who says "Meh, s\*\*t happens." So I haven't really noticed. I get support, advice and the occasional swift kick in the pants; They also occasionally laugh at me. I'm cosmically amusing, I guess? I've never been given any big project like some people I've heard from. I have my nightly prayer and weekly ritual with offerings, but mostly I just go through my daily life with Them in the back of my head. Sometimes I'll see something that reminds me of Them (like a pine cone, or a red cat) and smile a little to myself. Sneaky Netjer – they got me in the end.

## **GLOSSARY**

### **Extant**

1 archaic : standing out or above2 a : currently or actually existing <the most charming writer extant — G. W. Johnson> b : still existing : not destroyed or lost <extant manuscripts>  
extant. (2009). In Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.  
Retrieved August 10, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extant>

### **Liminal**

1 : of or relating to a sensory threshold2 : barely perceptible3 : of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition : in-between, transitional <in the liminal state between life and death — Deborah Jowitt>  
liminal. (2009). In Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.  
Retrieved August 10, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal>

### **Syncretism**

1 : the combination of different forms of belief or practice  
syncretism. (2009). In Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.  
Retrieved August 10, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syncretism>

### **Orthopraxy**

1. correct practice or action

### **Orthodoxy**

1. correct belief

### **UPG: Unverified or Unsubstantiated Personal Gnosis**

1 : Unverified personal gnosis (often abbreviated UPG) is the phenomenological concept that an individual's spiritual insights (or gnosis) may be valid for them without being generalizable to the experience of others. It is primarily a neologism used in polytheistic reconstructionism, to differentiate it from ancient sources of spiritual practices. UPG. (2009) In *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*.  
Retrieved August 26, 2009 from <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Unverified+Personal+Gnosis>

## **About The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum**

The original purpose of The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum (<http://www.ecauldron.net/>) was to foster an interfaith community of Pagans and their friends where all members could learn and grow spiritually and intellectually through discussion and debate -- and have a good time doing so. While we have expanded a great deal (for example, we have a large web site) since we opened our doors in late 1997, this is still our main focus today. You are welcome to join us.

Here's a quick rundown of some of The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum's many features (by the way, you can click on the links for more information about many of these features):

## **Message Board**

<http://www.ecauldron.net/forum/>

Our message board is still the heart and soul of The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum. It is a very active (often with over 5000 messages posted a month) virtual community for members of Pagan, Heathen, and Neo-Pagan religions and their friends. If you are tired of Pagan discussion areas dominated by fluff bunnies or where serious discussions are hampered by the need to toe the board owner's "party line" and/or to avoid even polite disagreements, you'll want to visit our message board. You can read messages as a guest if you don't want to sign up for a free message board account.

As our board has many very experienced Pagan members and can seem somewhat intimidating for a some members who are very new to Pagan religions, we have a special board (Pagan Religions 101 - <http://www.ecauldron.net/forum/index.php?board=12.0>) where people new to Paganism can post their questions and concerns and another special board (Magic and the Occult 101 - <http://www.ecauldron.net/forum/index.php?board=13.0>) for people new to Magic. If you choose to post on these boards, our more experienced members will realize you are new and try to provide help accordingly.

We also have a special board for teens, the Teen Pagan SIG (<http://www.ecauldron.net/forum/index.php?board=16.0>) where teens can discuss their special issues (parents, school, etc.) with their peers -- and with interested and caring adult members who remember what it was like when they were teens.

As of March 2007, our message board runs on a slightly modified version of Simple Machines Forum software. Our older "Archive Boards" ran on Beehive Forums software -- which was very non-standard.

## **Live Chat**

<http://www.ecauldron.net/forum/>

Regular live chats are a fairly recent addition to The Cauldron. Our Flash chat room is available 24 hours a day, but moderated chat is only available at scheduled times. Many of our chats are free-form discussions with other Cauldron members, but we also hold special topic chats and even occasional online rituals. A message board account is required to access our chat room.

## CauldronMUX

<http://www.ecauldron.net/cmmux.php>

The Cauldron has another chat area, CauldronMUX. CauldronMUX is a social MUX providing a text-based virtual world where members of The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum can chat with each other, conduct online rituals and classes, etc. in a environment that lets them create rooms and props to use in these activities. If you do not know what a MUX is, this probably means nothing to you so, so you may want to our Chief Wizard's description of a MUX and his examples of what Cauldron members could do with a MUX by clicking on the title link above.

While accounts on CauldronMUX are only available to members of The Cauldron's message board, anyone can access CauldronMUX with a guest account (Type "connect guest" at the login screen) by telneting to ecauldron.net port 24201 with your telnet program or with a MU\* client on your machine.

## Monthly Newsletter

<http://www.ecauldron.net/cnc/index.php>

As of this writing, The Cauldron has published an email newsletter, *Cauldron and Candle*, almost every month for the past five years. As you might expect this newsletter features information on activities at The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum. However, the majority of each issue is book reviews, articles, columns, spells, humor, and other useful information. Our newsletter is handled va Yahoo Groups. The link above will take you to our newsletter archive where you can read back issues and subscribe if you wish.

## Pagan Primer

If you are just looking for basic information on Paganism and the many Pagan religions, our large web site can be overwhelming. Our Pagan Primer will help you understand what Paganism is (and isn't) and point you to resources aimed at those unfamiliar with Paganism.

## Book and Deck Reviews

<http://www.ecauldron.net/bookstore.php>

One of the major features of our web site is over 300 book and divination deck reviews. While I've written the majority of these reviews, many of our members have written reviews that we've published here as well. If you are considering a Pagan book or divination deck purchase, you'll want to check our review section first.

## Humor

<http://www.ecauldron.net/humorindex.php>

The Pagan Humor section of our web site is one of the most popular parts of our web site. We've collected Pagan humor from around the web and added a few humorous pieces our members have created over the years. If you need a laugh (and who doesn't?) you'll want to visit our Pagan Humor area.

# Spells

<http://www.ecauldron.net/spells/index.php>

A small selection of simple spells and incense recipes is available in The Cauldron's Grimoire. There are spells for banishing, binding, healing, job hunting, love, money, protection, and more. We even give a few multi-purpose spells. This is another very popular section of our web site.

The Cauldron: A Pagan Forum has many other features, including pages of articles (on [paganism](#), [magick](#), [divination](#), [holidays](#), and [much more](#)), online [lessons](#), and even a [cookbook](#) full of some of our members' favorite recipes. I hope you'll bookmark our web site and explore our information and features at your leisure. I particularly hope you'll join us as a member of our message board.

## About Our Members

Our members come from a wide variety of backgrounds, religions, and experience levels. You will find many different religions and magical traditions: Traditional Wiccans, Eclectic Wiccans, Ceremonial Mages, Reconstructionists from different cultures, Christians, and many more can be found on our message board. You will find some members have been on their path for 20 or 30 years and others who are just starting down the road. You will find teens, college students, young adults, older adults, and retired people from many different countries on our board.

## About Our Discussions

Our message board is oriented toward more serious (and often somewhat scholarly) discussion and debate than many Pagan discussion areas. Members need not agree with you or with the staff, or otherwise automatically be "politically correct" here -- just be polite and follow our message board rules. Disagreements and actual discussion of beliefs and ideas presented is the norm here, unlike some Pagan message boards where everyone is required to pretend to always agree to "make nice." (As one of our members said, "I much prefer discussions with real people with whom I don't always agree, rather than to pretend to be something I'm not in order to 'make nice'. The former is fellowship, the latter is just social lying.") You will find that each and every member of The Cauldron has personal opinions and biases on religion and other issues -- and you will probably not like all of them. Please be adult enough to cope with the fact that some members will have opinions that upset or annoy you.

Due to the wide variety of our members backgrounds and religions, you will often find views and opinions you normally do not come in contact with on other Pagan discussion areas on our message board. Those who dislike seeing any disagreement in discussions, having members of non-Pagan religions involved in discussions, or being asked to support odd-sounding things they claim to be fact may not be as comfortable on our message board as they might be on others. Because of the nature of the discussions on our message board, we often make clear distinctions between supportable fact and personal beliefs. In addition, posters are often asked to provide sources or a factual basis for claims being made. Being asked for sources does not necessarily mean that you are not believed, many members ask for sources simply because they are interested in finding out more details "direct from the horse's mouth."

This forum welcomes friendly non-Pagan members and has a Christian theologian on staff. If you think non-Pagan religions are evil, do not wish to see Christian and other non-Pagan views, or simply object to not being able to say nasty things about Christians and other non-Pagans, you probably need to find another forum as such behavior is not tolerated here.

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