

Wicca

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity: Wicca, an Old English word which means “to bend or alter” (or perhaps “wise”), is becoming the most widely used name for the beliefs and practices of what has been popularly known as witchcraft. Other terms or names by which Wiccan practices are identified are the Craft (of the Wise), the Old Religion, the Goddess Religion.

Founders: Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), a British civil servant. Americans Raymond and Rosemary Buckland traveled to England in the mid-1960s to be initiated into Gardner’s Goddess religion and brought its practices back to the United States. Modern spokespersons for Wicca today include Margot Adler, Mary Nesnick, Selena Fox, Gavin and Yvonne Frost, Sybil Leek, Miriam Simos (Starhawk), and Doreen Valiente.

Statistics: Estimates vary widely. No verifiable numbers available.

History: Some involved in Wicca would claim that its origins can be traced to ancient, pagan, nature-worshipping practices in tribal Europe that predate Christianity. Those who have studied the subject generally agree that modern witchcraft is a continuing development of a complex mixture of beliefs and practices that can be traced to the writings of Gardner. Gardner was deeply involved in a variety of occultic activities. He was also a member of Freemasonry, the Rosicrucians, and the Ordo Templi Orientis. His writings draw upon his many occultic experiences and his involvement in a variety of organizations and movements (e.g., Theosophy, Western ritual magic, and native Asian and near Eastern religions). Sybil Leek, much influenced by Gardner’s writings and known as “a New Forest witch,” brought her modified version of the rituals and practices of witchcraft with her when she moved to the United States in the late 1960s.

Texts: Gerald Gardner’s *Witchcraft Today* (1954), followed by *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959).

Beliefs and Practices:

The beliefs of Wicca as a nature-worshipping religion have many parallels to the New Age Movement:

- *Monism* – All is one. A mystical oneness connects all things in nature together.
- *Animism* – The Life Force or energy is in all of nature—mountains, streams, trees, birds, animals, humans. Therefore all is sacred and to be cared for.
- *Pantheism* – God (the divine, the primal Life Force) is in all things. Humans and all nature contain the divine. Wicca is based on a sense of being one and in harmony with all of nature.
- *Polytheism* – A belief in multiple gods and goddesses along with multiple levels of reality that support the Wiccan idea of relativism in all areas of life, with no absolutes in religion or reality.

Wiccans gather in an assembly or group usually numbering 13 witches (called a “coven”). Wiccan beliefs and practices vary greatly among individuals and groups (covens) and often include a blending of other pagan and Native American spirituality. What follows would be characteristic of most but not all who would identify themselves as wiccans or witches.

- An invoking or worshipping of the Mother Goddess by a variety of names. She is viewed as having three roles as maiden, mother, and crone¹ which in Wiccan rituals (most well-known is “Drawing Down the Moon”) is associated with the three phases of the moon—waxing, full, and waning.

¹ Third aspect of the Mother Goddess issuing the curse of death.

- The practice of magic (sorcery or divination, not the stage variety) and casting of spells calling upon the energy of the Life Force personified or symbolized by the Goddess and her male consort, the Horned God, for the purpose of achieving something positive in the life of a person.
- The “*law of threefold*”—whatever good or bad a person does will come back threefold.
- The Wiccan Rede (Wiccan law)—“*if it harms none, do as you will.*”

Wiccans are not Satanists (see evaluation on “Satanism”). They link Satan with Christianity. They pride themselves on promoting a concern (even a reverence) for all of life and seeking a balance and harmony within nature.

A Lutheran Response

Those who practice witchcraft or Wiccan rituals would strongly disassociate themselves from any worship of Satan. However, according to the Scriptures we must conclude that this practice nevertheless serves the purpose of Satan by leading people away from the worship of the true God. The worship and serving of created things rather than the Creator is as much condemned in God’s Word as is sexual immorality and every other kind of wickedness and evil (Rom. 1:24-32). God’s Word is clear in identifying practices associated with witchcraft—divination, sorcery, interpreting omens, and casting spells—as activities that are detestable to the Lord (Deut. 18:9-13). Furthermore, the invoking of gods or goddesses (e.g., Baals and Ashtoreths in Canaanite religions of the Old Testament period) to provide some blessing or to grant the desired request (spell) of those performing worship rituals is crass idolatry and places a person under the wrath and judgment of God (Judg. 2:13-14; 1 Kgs. 11:5-6, 33). Witches may be “good” people in the sense that they are peace-loving, care about nature and the environment, and seek to live in harmony with all things. But they, too, as sinful human beings need a righteousness that comes not “from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Phil 3:9). To live in peace and harmony with everyone and everything is something that God desires for those who live in this world (Rom. 12:18). But the peace that is God-pleasing comes only as God’s gift to those who live in the peace Christ established between God and humankind (John 14:27). Practitioners of witchcraft need to know that the Creator whose creation they revere and deify is also the Creator of a special people (Isa. 43:1, 15) through whom He has brought into the world the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, creates peace between God and man through His blood shed on the cross (Eph. 2:13-17). This peace is so far-reaching that creation itself will be blessed through it (Rom. 8:19-21; Isa. 11:6-9).

For Further Reading....

Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. 2d ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Bass, David. “Drawing Down the Moon.” *Christianity Today* (April 29, 1991): 14-19.

Hawkins, Craig S. “The Modern World of Witchcraft: Part One.” *Christian Research Journal* (Winter/Spring 1990): 8-14.

Hawkins, Craig S. “The Modern World of Witchcraft: Part Two.” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1990): 22-27.

Melton, J. Gordon. *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1999, 803-837.

Links and Websites

<http://www.wicca.org>

<http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/re/move>