

WITCHTOWER



Ostara/Beltane 2006

Vol 2 Issue 3

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Wicca verses Witchcraft
What's it all about?

Read about the fascinating
Folklore and Customs of
Ostara/Beltane

And much much more...

The Pagan Network Magazine

Witchtower

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Editorial

Finally the Spring Equinox is here. What a long, long and dreary Winter this has been. And lets be honest, in some parts of the country it still feels like Winter! But in my neck of the woods, the daffodils are out finally, and as wet as it is, some days we even get to see a bit of blue sky.

I hope everyone enjoys the Bank Holidays coming up. Do try out the recipes and tell us what they are like.

In fact, please start sending in letters, reviews, and comments. YOU are the biggest part of this magazine, so please join in.

MouseDemon

This Issue's Cover

By Caroline Cutting

I'm a freelance artist. i've been a Pagan for as long as i can remember but i've only been reflecting this in my work for about 2 years. I've produced several pieces including Eostres Gift. all of which have gone to good homes. I really enjoy painting but unfortunately it'll never make me rich!



Folklore and Customs of Ostara

Written by Jools

The Vernal equinox is March 21st. It is the first day of Spring, the time when days start to become longer than the nights. It is time for the flowers to appear, the hibernating animals to wake up, and the long cold winter has ended. The Spring Equinox celebrates the Goddess of Spring, the giver of life.

Interestingly, after I started to look into the customs of the Spring Equinox, I found very little. The Spring Equinox has become completely linked with Easter, even up to the fact that many Pagans call the Spring Equinox Eostre or Ostara. Eostre, or Eostara are the names of Goddesses linked to the Spring (Norse and Anglo Saxon); Eostara is traditionally celebrated at the Vernal Full Moon, which is not always the 21st/22nd March, the date of the equinox. This is not the only confusion that has arisen over the naming of this particular equinox. The Christians named March 25th Lady Day, as it was traditionally the date that Jesus would be conceived (to make sure He handily appeared 25th December). Over the years, Lady Day has become an alternative name for Beltane, so it seems that Pagans have used the name Eostre or Ostara to name the equinox for convenience. So witches and wiccans have two choices for their Spring celebrations, the vernal equinox full moon, or the date that the sun crosses the Equator.

As stated above, the vernal equinox is the start of new beginnings, so it is interesting that the ancients chose this date for the start of the zodiac. Aries is traditionally the first sign in the zodiac, and appropriately this time of year the green hills are dotted with tiny lambs, nursing mothers, and an occasional very woolly ram.

Animals connected with the equinox are rabbits and hares. Rabbits are an obvious fertility symbol, although the original was the older and more dramatic "March Hare". The hare is awakened by the cycle and renewal of life, with mating and boxing during this season. The animal has long been associated with Witchcraft. Witches were often believed to be able to shape-shift into hares.

There is a legend that hares were able to lay eggs. It is thought that this arose as the Plover nests on the ground near to hares burrows, so the farmer would see the hare, walk over and find a nest full of eggs! This may also be one of the reasons why eggs are associated with the equinox and Easter. More likely it is the obvious fertility connotations that started this, and many many customs have arisen out of the symbolism of the egg.

The earliest Easter Eggs were hen's or duck's eggs decorated and painted in bright colours at home with vegetable dye and charcoal. The 17th and 18th Centuries saw the manufacture of egg shaped toys, which were given to children at this festival time.



The Victorians had cardboard, 'plush' and satin covered eggs filled with Easter gifts and chocolates. The ultimate Easter egg-shaped gifts must have been the fabulous jewelled creations made by Carl Fabergé in Russia in the 19th Century for the Czar and Czarina at the Russian Court. Today, these superb creations are precious museum pieces.

The first chocolate Easter Eggs were made in Europe in the early 19th Century with France and Germany having the lead in this new artistic confectionery. Eating chocolate, of a sort, had been invented a few years previously but it could not be successfully moulded. Some early eggs were solid and the production of the first hollow chocolate eggs must have been rather painstaking as the moulds were lined with paste chocolate one at a time!

Pace-egging

This is an ancient custom, which is currently being brought back into fashion. The word 'Pace' derives from the Latin word 'Pacha' which means 'Easter'. This Easter custom is Lancastrian and traditionally

performed by a group of men called the 'Pace-egggers' and is very similar to traditions connected with Morris Dancing and Mumming which is found to still be very active in folk festivals in England and parts of Europe.

Pace-egging is thought to relate to the ancient Mumming Plays (which were also performed at Christmas in different parts of the country). Each man would adorn himself with brightly coloured ribbons, animal skins, rags and strips of paper, the reason for which appears to relate back to The Crusades. One of the men would blacken his face with coal or soot, and carry a woven basket on his arm. The group of men then began to process through the village or area and whilst enjoying celebrating the Easter revelries with the community, the idea was that he and his merry fellows goad the people into tossing eggs into the basket (although money may be used as a substitute). The eggs were often wrapped in onion skin and boiled to give a mottled effect, being eaten for Easter breakfast on Easter Sunday.

The blackened face male is traditionally known as the 'Old Tosspot'. Other characters included the 'Lady Gay', the 'Soldier Brave', and the 'Noble Youth'. The Old Tosspot carried a long straw tail that had been stuffed full of pins. He would swing it wildly about, acting as though he was drunk, and wait for some poor unsuspecting fool to try and catch hold of the tail or be tapped by it - all in good humour - but also to encourage people to toss things into his basket. When the Pace-egggers received either sufficient money or eggs in the basket, the group would temporarily stop and present a short play and dance. Usually an additional reward for the presentation would be given to the group by a member of the public, such as a glass of beer if performing outside a public house. Once the play was completed and everyone satisfied the group would process on through the area until the entire village had been travelled. Normally the Pace-egggers would attract quite a large group of followers by the end of their promenade as each presentation was sure to be different and perhaps build upon the last.

Meeting a rival band of Pace-egggers could lead to a lot of competitive friendly exchanges or 'egging', with the passing of witty jibes between the groups with occasional attempts made to steal the eggs.

The blackened face male is traditionally known as the "Old Tosspot"

Perhaps this is where the expression 'to egg someone on' originated from. Sometimes the groups would also have wooden swords that could also be used to poke friendly fun at the rival group. The sword is said in England to relate to St. George who is traditionally seen as protector of justice. It has been known for Pace-egggers to walk away with a couple of 'scratches' when the exchanges have become a little too over-enthusiastic as you might expect! Today Pace-egging is still common place in some communities

Egg Tapping

There are two European variations of traditional 'Egg Tapping' (although the games could be seen as not being entirely eco-friendly in the 1990's but of course this was not traditionally a concern).

The first is a fun game but it can be rather messy, as you must use real eggs. Why is it messy...because it is similar to the game of 'Conkers'. The game produces champion eggs which, just like in conkers, are displayed and usually admired all year.

The second game is short but does allow those with rather wackier tendencies to let go and expel any negative energies that have pent up. For children or adults, the idea is to take a fresh egg and bash it against their opponent's forehead. There is no prize, it's just the enjoyment of taking part. If you're a masochist of course you could engage in the solo sport by smashing it against your own forehead. And why not!

Egg Rolling

A traditional European custom which is similar to the sport of bowls. Real eggs should be used. This custom is believed to be associated with the commemoration of Christ's resurrection. The egg symbolizes the beginning of Creation in many cultures so it not surprising that an egg is used in the event. The specific symbolism relates to the rolling away of the stone from the mouth of Christ's tomb. All those taking part in the Egg Rolling have an egg. The eggs are rolled down a hill on Easter Monday traditionally, and the idea is to try to see which competitor can roll their egg the furthest. Losers have their eggs taken and eaten.

Naturally, the egg is considered a magical signal of fertility. In many Pagan cultures, the Goddess of fertility is also the Goddess of grain. It is customary in many areas to make special breads and cakes which were given to her, with the eggs, as an offering. Eventually, most European countries developed some sort of Eostre bread. These were served with cheese and cakes decorated with flowers. The equal-armed cross on the hot cross bun was a representation of the four elements and the four solar festivals.



Spring is a time of the Earth's renewal, a rousing of nature after the cold sleep of winter. As such, it is an ideal time to clean your home to welcome the new season. Spring cleaning is much more than simply physical work. It may be seen as a concentrated effort to rid your home of the problems and negativity of the past months, and to prepare for the coming spring and summer. To do this, many Pagans approach the task of cleaning their homes with positive thoughts. This frees the home of any negative feelings brought about by a harsh winter. A common rule of thumb for spring cleaning is that all motions involving scrubbing of stains or hand rubbing the floors should be done "clockwise". It is believed this custom aids in filling the home with good energy for growth.

It is at this time that the old clothes worn during winter were cast off, and new clothes were worn. This custom is carried on with the tradition of the Easter Bonnet, or the wearing of new hats by women!

So as you can see, there are many customs still in use around the Spring Equinox, though unfortunately they seem to have become linked to Easter. Maybe this year you could go out egg rolling or, even better, egg tapping on the equinox. Happy Equinox!



Want to know how to advertise in the Witchtower?

With the Witchtower magazine being downloaded by hundreds of our members on each occasion, what better way is there to advertise your business/course/website ?

Advertising rates are listed below. The discounted rate is for shops who take part in our Full Members Discount Scheme. Further details about this can be found later in this issue.

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NotSoWiseSage writes a fascinating introduction to Tasseomancy, otherwise known as Tea Leaves Reading

Tasseomancy

Tasseomancy, in plain terms, is the science/art of reading tea leaves. Its origins are believed to be in the middle ages, derived from earlier forms of popular middle age divination such as ceroscopy (dripping hot wax into cold water) and molybdomancy (dripping melted lead or tin into cold water).

In the 17th century merchants from the West Dutch Indies brought tea to Britain from the orient. It quickly become a popular drink; however, whereas today we either use tea bags or strainers, at that time tea leaves were left in the cup as it was drunk. Tasseomancy, or tasseography is the practice of interpreting those leaves left behind.

Tasseomancy is largely dependent on psychic intuition. Tea is poured into a cup without the use of a strainer. The one seeking psychic help, the inquirer, consumes all of the tea in the cup. If any moisture remains it is shaken out onto a napkin. The diviner observes the leaves remaining in the bottom of the cup to see what patterns are formed.



There are basically two ways by which a diviner may get a reading, the first being more common. There are some standard symbolisms that are observed when interpreting the patterns: snake (enmity or falsehood), spade (good fortune through industry), mountain (journey or hindrance), house (change, success), etc. The standards differ from reader to reader, most building up associations with symbols based on experience as they practice over time. This method becomes more complex when taking into consideration the location of the symbol in relation to the centre of the cup and the rim, and the distance to the handle.

The second method is based more on clairvoyance, whereby the diviner concentrates on the pattern produced, and senses the meaning (as opposed to using a standardised list of associations). Concentration can be in the form of meditation, or it may be in the form of prayer to outside influences to show the diviner the meaning of the pattern, calling on some form of deity or deities.

The technique of tasseomancy has grown since the 17th century: the use of coffee granules is gaining popularity (due to not everyone liking the taste of tea), or for those unwilling or unable to obtain loose leaves, a tea bag can be split and used. This latter form isn't recommended, however, as the tea leaves in tea bags are ground more finely.

Italians claim they invented the coffee-ground form of the

divination in the 18th century. Also, they believed the prophecies came from demons so the diviners recited incantations during their practices, such as: "Aqua boraxit venias carajos," "Fixitur et patricam explinabit tornare," and "Hax verticalines pax Fantas marobum, max destinatus, veida porol." It was believed that if such incantations were done incorrectly, the reading would be inaccurate.

Want to have your 15 minutes of fame?
Then write for the Witchtower magazine.

We are always looking out for new writers/artists/poets. Even if you're not too sure whether you would be a good writer, you can always send in your article/poem/story/artwork/review to witchtower@gmail.com and we'll take a look at it for you. So, come on, take that first big step, who knows you might even surprise yourself, give it ago!

*Make your mark
on the
world....*



Write for the Witchtower

How to Contribute

1. First decide on what you want to write about. If your not sure whether the subject has been covered before you can email Mousedemon to check.
2. Email us at witchtower@gmail.com to tell us that you intend to write an article and what it will be about. That way we can keep checking in with you on your progress, as we like to look after our writers/artists/poets. Also don't forget to give us an estimated date when your article is expected to be finished. Although please don't worry if you don't finish the article by the estimated date. We all have lives outside of Pagan Network and we are very understanding of this.
3. Let the Muse flow.....Write your article/create your artwork/pen that poem!
4. Email your finished masterpiece to witchtower@gmail.com. We will acknowledge receipt of your work and will also inform you of any changes that need to be done or what issue your masterpiece will be published in. Should we decide that your work is not suitable for publication we will also let you know. But don't let that put you off... practice makes perfect!

Now the Techy bit

LENGTH GUIDELINE

Anywhere between 1/4 side of A4 to 3 sides of A4.

Ideal length is 1 side of A4.

If your article is too long, consider breaking up into two articles.

Artwork should be 300dpi

FORMAT PREFERENCES

(in descending order of preference)

Microsoft Word (any version)

RTF file

Plain text file

Body of email

HTML file

Typed manuscript

Handwritten manuscript

Beyond The Easter Egg

Recipes by *MouseDemon*

Tsoureki (Greek Easter Bread)

Servings: Makes 1 loaf
Level of difficulty: Easy
Preparation Time: 30 minutes, plus 2 hours rising
Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients

500g strong white flour
90g Sugar
90g Butter
2 eggs
15g Salt
30g dried yeast
180ml water
180ml Milk
grated zest of 2 oranges
1 pinch of ground mahleb (sour cherry pits/stones)
1 pinch of ground mastic
1 pinch of ground cinnamon
100g sultanas
beaten egg, for egg wash
3 hard-boiled eggs, dyed red

Method

1. In a mixing bowl place the flour, sugar, butter, eggs, salt, yeast, water, milk, orange zest, mahleb, mastic and cinnamon. Mix together well and form into a dough.
2. Knead for four minutes on a lightly flowered surface.
3. Return dough to bowl and leave to rise for 1 hour
4. Add the sultanas to the dough and divide dough into 3 equal parts.
5. Form the three dough portions into three 'strands' and plait together to form a 3 strand plait-shaped loaf.
6. Brush with beaten egg, place on a lined baking sheet and set aside to rise for 1 hour.
7. Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6.
8. Place the red-dyed eggs evenly down the centre of the plait, pressing their bases into the dough.
9. Bake the loaf for 25-30 minutes until golden

Hot Cross Bun and Chocolate Pudding

Servings: 4-6
Level of difficulty: Easy
Preparation Time: 10 minutes, plus 1 hour
soaking
Cooking Time: 40 minutes

Ingredients

6 hot cross buns, sliced in half
4 tbsp chocolate spread
16 ready-to-eat dried prunes
600ml double cream
300ml Milk
200g dark chocolate, 70% cocoa solids
2 tsp dark brown sugar
6 eggs and rum, to taste

Method

1. Spread the hot cross buns with the chocolate spread and then sandwich in the prunes.
2. Cut each bun into four and press together firmly.
3. Heat the cream and the milk together in a saucepan. Add the chocolate and cook over low heat, stirring, until the chocolate melts, taking care not to bring the mixture to the boil.
4. Beat the eggs and sugar together in a mixing bowl and add the rum. Pour the chocolate cream over the egg mixture and stir well.
5. Place the hot cross bun sandwiches in a buttered 1.2 litre ovenproof dish. Pour over the chocolate egg and cream mixture and leave to soak in for 1 hour.
6. Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas 4. Bake the pudding for 35 minutes. Serve.

INTERVIEW WITH A

Third in the series of interviews with members of the Pagan Network. Here, 2stepfan2 puts the questions to Elani

PAGAN

PAGAN IDENTITY

PN: Name / username

Elani: Elani

PN: What age are you and where do you live?

Elani: 31, Gloucestershire

PN: How would you describe your spiritual path?

Elani: Atheist, a bit humanist, a witch by my own definition, an environmentalist - a mishmash really.

PN: How did you get involved with this path? What's your "history"? How did your personal background influence this?

Elani: When I was a very small child I felt an affinity with nature, I was aware of an energy and it could make me feel very extreme emotions. That's what I believe magic to be to this day - the interaction of our subconscious with the energy/spirit of nature.

HOW PAGANISM FITS INTO YOUR LIFE

PN: What do you do for a living? Is there any conflict between your work life and your spirituality?

Elani: I'm a full time Mum with 3 children. My beliefs didn't really crop up much in day-to-day conversations with my children until my son began R.E at primary school. He asked me if I believed in God and I said "No." and we had a quick chat (very quick,

there were more interesting things in the back ground like...TV!) about evolution and I finished by saying that he should listen to as many different opinions as possible and make up his own mind.

PN: What are your hobbies and interests?

Elani: Oh the usual, reading, art, cycling, walking and getting drunk. Seriously, I'm very into my artwork, its something I'm occasionally paid to do, I'm writing/illustrating a children's book so hopefully it may become something I'm constantly paid to do.

PN: What about your family and friends? Are they of similar spiritual paths to you, or are there differences?

Elani: I don't know any other pagans, although I'd say most of my friends have decidedly pagan attitudes about a lot of things (though they might not describe themselves as such!). My Dad's side of the family are ex-circus folk (wall of death) and the women on that side all have a history of precognition that my sisters and I (and my dad too oddly) also share. They don't practise themselves but are generally very interested in the things I get up to.

BELIEFS

PN: Do you believe in the existence of a 'deity'? If so, have you ever had any divine experiences?

Elani: No.

PN: Do you believe in the existence of 'spirits' – human or non-human? Have you ever had any experiences of 'spirit'?

Elani: Yes, sort of - I believe nature itself is an energy that could also be described as a spirit. As for human spirits, I believe when we're dead that's it - but that people can leave an imprint on your memory or the collective memory of places or communities/tribes of people. I did receive a farewell from a friend, who'd died, in a dream once - it was a very real and profound experience that I can't explain.

PN: Do you believe in the existence of magic? As a believer, how would you explain it?

Elani: As I said previously, I believe magic is the result of an interaction between the human subconscious and the energy that is nature (to encompass everything, elements, plants, animals...)

PN: Do you practice your spirituality alone, in a group, or both? Was this a deliberate decision or a necessity?

Elani: Alone. Originally because I didn't know of anyone else who

shared my beliefs, although it's become so personal to me that I prefer to continue alone.

PN: Do you believe in the reality of curses? Would you ever do one? What types of spell would you include in your concept of a 'curse'?

Elani: Well, I've never cursed anyone, but I think for a curse to work the recipient would need to believe in the power of the curse as much as the sender. I guess by that I'm saying I think it's mostly a psychological thing?

PN: Do you think the law of three-fold returns exists?

Elani: I didn't, but then I had an experience where I made a spell for, well what could be construed as material gain I suppose. The spell worked (which was a surprise in itself) but I definitely paid a price for it. So I definitely believe you should be prepared to make some sacrifice for things you hope to "gain" by magic.

ACTIVITIES

PN: What practices are regularly incorporated in your spiritual life? (E.g. meditation, prayer, ritual, magic, visualisations, trance work...)

Elani: None, I'm quite erratic - although I write down any spells I make in a special book I have.

PN: What festivals, holy days, special occasions etc do you mark as part of your spirituality?

Elani: Well all the regular ones, Easter, harvest, Halloween and Christmas - which is pretty much down to either the kids, consumerism or both - but for my self just Midsummer's Eve which is very special to me for

purely personal reasons.

PN: Have you ever done magic to get something and did it work?

Elani: Yes, see question 18!

PN: Do you spend much time in nature, in the wild? Do you spend enough time out there?

Elani: Absolutely! I live in the Cotswolds, its so beautiful here it'd be criminal not to get outside and appreciate it on a daily basis.

PN: Do you think paganism works better in the country than in the city?

Elani: Why? I think you may be likely to feel more "in tune" in the country - but its something that essentially comes from within, so if you have the conviction it doesn't matter where you are.

IDENTITY ON PAGAN NETWORK

PN: How long have you been a member?

Elani: Since June this year.

PN: Is this your main online hangout? Where else do you go to regularly (especially pagan / Wicca / magic-related)?

Elani: About 5 other sites, non-pagan - mostly book or music related.

PN: Do you like the style of discussions that happen at Pagan Network? Do you like the subject matter?

Elani: Yes.

PN: Do you think it's always fresh or too repetitive?

Elani: Repetitive as in "what defines a wiccan?" No, generally I find topics to be original or at

least old topics discussed in new ways.

PN: What would you change about Pagan Network?

Elani: Nowt.

CONTENTIOUS PAGAN NETWORK QUESTIONS

PN: How do you define the term "Wiccan"? How do you feel about the idea that "Wiccans" are people who have been initiated into a lineaged Wiccan coven?

Elani: Ha! Ha! Well, I'm not wiccan so I'm ultimately not bothered - but for the sake of argument I land on the side of those who say - if you haven't been initiated into what is basically an initiatory religion, then why do you need to call yourself wiccan to validate your own beliefs?

PN: Is Wicca and paganism generally too "fluffy"?

Elani: Only in America!

Beltane Recipes

Recipes by Isauria

Strawberry Bread Delight

This is a very moist bread so please test a corner to check it is cooked!

Ingredients:

2 eggs
2/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup butter
1 3/4 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 pint strawberries
1/4 teaspoon baking soda

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F. Grease a 8 x 4 bread loaf pan.
2. Purée the strawberries in a blender
3. Beat the eggs together in a bowl.
4. Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt together and beat the butter with the sugar for at least 3 minutes until fluffy then add it to the flour mix.
5. Add the eggs into the flour mix and beat until smooth.
6. Then add spoonfuls of the strawberries to the flour mix. Keep mixing thoroughly. Once everything has been mixed together for about 2 minutes, pour the mixture into your prepared pan
7. Bake for 45 minutes to an hour and cool in the pan 10 minutes, before placing on a cooling rack.

Elderberry Pie

Ingredients :

1 frozen pie crust & lid
2 1/2 cup of stemmed elderberries
1/2 cup of sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoon flour
3 Tablespoon lemon juice

Method:

1. Place your frozen pie crust in a pie pan.
2. Fill with the Elderberries (after removing the stems)
3. Mix sugar, salt and flour together and sprinkle over the berries.
4. Add the lemon juice
5. Cover with top crust.
6. Bake in very hot oven (450 degrees) for 10 minutes, then reduce temperature to moderate (350 degrees) and bake 30 minutes longer

Folklore and Customs of

Beltane, also known as May Day and Walpurgis Night, is one of the main festivals of the Celtic Year.

It was also celebrated by the Romans as Floralia. In fact it is second only to Samhain to most, and in certain areas such as Wales, it is the most important. It is the beginning of the month of May, which is named in honour of the goddess Maia, originally a Greek mountain nymph, later identified as the most beautiful of the Seven Sisters, the Pleiades. By Zeus, she is also the mother of Hermes, god of magic. Maia's parents were Atlas and Pleione, a sea nymph.

Beltane (in its most popular Anglicised form) is derived from the Irish Gaelic 'Bealtaine' or the Scottish Gaelic 'Bealtuinn', meaning 'Bel-fire', the fire of the Celtic god of light (Bel, Beli or Belinus). He, in turn, may be traced to the Middle Eastern god Baal.

As was discussed in last issue, there is no historical justification for calling May 1st 'Lady Day'. For hundreds of years, that title has been proper to the Vernal Equinox, another holiday sacred to the Great Goddess. The non-traditional use of 'Lady Day' for May 1st is quite recent (since the early 1970's), and seems to be confined to America, where it has gained acceptance among certain sections of the Craft population. This departure from tradition would seem to indicate unfamiliarity with European calendar customs.

This is one of the main Celtic Festivals, and as such is not necessarily fixed to a date. There are thoughts that Beltane was to be held once the Hawthorne flowered, and as this can be any time between early April and late May, it can be seen that celebrating this festival is not as set as the equinoxes and solstices are.

After the problems I had last time to separate the folklore of

the Spring Equinox from Easter, I had no such problems this time! As Beltane was (and still is)

considered so important in the Pagan Year, many of the ancient customs are still practiced today. We are fortunate that these traditions have survived as in the past

festivities have been opposed by Church and State alike!

Beltane

BY JOOLS

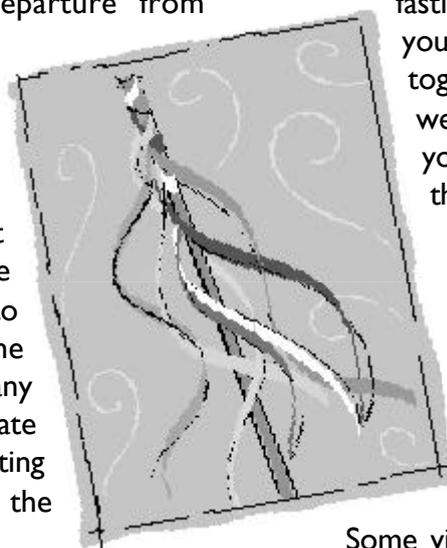
The May Pole

The Maypole is the most familiar feature of May festivities, but it has a few distinct interpretations. In some cultures, the Maypole represented the world centre, or alternately, the hub of the Wheel of heaven. In ancient times, it is thought the intricate dance of weaving cords around the pole was a magical attempt to direct Nature, which had become topsy-turvy over the course of time, back in order. Today the dance is performed by any who wish to participate in weaving the magic.

Another meaning of the Maypole is the one that people mostly go by today. It is the phallus, the male principle of fertilization. Female principles are represented by baskets and wreaths used in the dances around the pole. In past times, the hand-fasting movements of the dances would give young couples licence to 'go into the green' together! Any children born of these unions were not usually acknowledged by the young man, and were said to be 'born of the god'.

In medieval times, May Day was often celebrated by young men and women dancing on the village green around the maypole. The branches of a slender tree were cut off, coloured ribbons tied to the top and the revellers held on to the ends of the ribbons and danced.

Some villages still carry on the tradition today. Before the dancing began there was also a procession led by a woman appointed May Queen for the day. Sometimes she was accompanied by a



May King, who dressed in green to symbolise springtime and fertility.

The church in the middle ages tolerated the May Day celebrations but the Protestant Reformation of the 17th century soon put a stop to them. The Puritans were outraged at the immorality that often accompanied the drinking and dancing and Parliament banned maypoles altogether in 1644. But when Charles II was restored to the throne a few years later, people all over the country put up maypoles as a celebration and a sign of loyalty to the crown. May Day had a boost in popularity again in the 19th century when the Victorians seized on it as a "rustic delight". But our strait-laced ancestors ignored many of the significant pagan aspects of the day and instead of a fertility rite, dancing around the maypole became a children's game.

Flowers and Greenwood

"Here we go gathering nuts in May..." Wasn't this an unusual thing to say? Usually nuts are harvested in the autumn. Of course it is explained simply as a mistranslation of 'knots of May', which is the custom of gathering of flowers, particularly May Blossom (Hawthorn). Homes, barns and other buildings were decorated with green budding branches including Hawthorn. Incidentally this was the only time of the year that Hawthorn was allowed into properties, as it was considered unlucky for the rest of the year. Garlands and wreaths of flowers and/or greens were made and worn for the celebrations. May Baskets were given or placed secretly on doorsteps to friends, lovers and others. This was definitely a festival for the 'wearing of the green'.

Beltane Fires

Frequently, cattle would be driven between two such bonfires (oak wood was the favourite fuel for them) and the day after they would be taken to their summer pastures. It was custom for people to jump over the fire to ensure good luck and prosperity for the coming year, and for couples too, to ensure fertility! Beltane community fire purification customs included symbolic sacrifice of an effigy, or, in medieval times, mock sacrifice of



Beltane Carline (Hag) who received blackened piece of Beltane Cake.

Wells

There are many Beltane customs concerned with wells. Some go on throughout May. In Madron, in Cornwall, for the first three Sundays in May you must bathe in the waters of Madron's well to cure rickets then sleep on Madron's bed, a nearby stone. If you do this on the first Thursday in May it will cure nightmares, breathing difficulties and afflictions of the limbs.

May Waters

Rolling in May Eve dew or washing face in pre-dawn May Day dew is supposed to be great for health, luck and beauty, although be careful it isn't TOO wet, as getting muddy isn't the point. And if you get caught in the rain on May Day, don't get cross. It is supposed to be a blessing. This is also the perfect time for scrying in ponds, springs or collected sacred waters. Local Customs

There are several celebrations peculiar to various towns within the British Isles. The first (and probably most famous) is the Padstow 'Obby 'Oss. This is one of the oldest surviving festivals in Cornwall and is believed to be a fertility rite marking the start of summer. Padstow is decorated with the first greenery of the year, including bluebells, cowslips, forget-me-nots, hazel catkins and sycamore twigs. The procession sings the May Song and is dressed in white with red or blue sashes. The celebrations start early in the morning when the stable is opened to release the 'Oss. The Oss is a man in a full-skirted costume wearing a grotesque mask in the centre of a hoop with black material stretched across it. He then travels all round the harbour, the though the town, including private gardens. The festivities last all day. There are also Hobby Horse Parades in Minehead and Dunster.

Though it isn't strictly a May Day celebration, as it is held on St Michaels Day, May 8th, the Helston Furry Dance is thought to be derived from an ancient Pagan fertility rite, so gets an honorary mention here. The inhabitants of the town dress up in their best, with the men in top hats and the children in white, and dance through the town at set times during the day.

Discount Scheme

Other forms of welcoming the summer on May Day included the crowning of the May Queen or May Lady. There were special dances by milkmaids who sometimes carried their pails or circled a pile of plates fixed to a garland, and the capers of Jack in the Green. In London Jack in the Green was associated with chimney sweeps, who escorted this figure, looking rather like a walking bush, with their brushes held high.

As the above shows, the folklore of this festival is still very strong throughout the British Isles. I have only been able to give a taste of the better known celebrations, but the fact that they go on show a deep feeling in this country for the old ways.

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Reclaiming Eclecticism

by Nixie

The eclectic path is one that most newcomers to Paganism gravitate towards first—me included. Like many preteen seekers, I sought to rebel against the dogmatism of the various churches in which I had been brought up by rejecting all sources of traditional knowledge. Eclectic Paganism, I wrongly believed, wouldn't entail going back to study texts and history as Christianity required—merely picking and choosing things that were simple enough for me to understand as a beginner. Though I didn't realize it at the time, I was making the mistakes that many experienced Pagans disapprove of (quite rightly) today.

I was a devoted patron of the Barnes and Noble New Age section, and I didn't feel a need to look any further. Most books on Witchcraft and Paganism designated for the mass market



hardly paint a realistic picture of true Eclecticism (as the well-read practitioner will know). For example, note the popular trend of including a list of blurbs about deities from greatly different cultures found in '101' books

today, which imply that all gods and goddesses only differ by their cultural manifestations, taking no account whatsoever of the different struggles and ideals of their various respective worshippers.

Thus, as illustrated by my childhood self, it isn't difficult to see why eclectic practitioners are generally frowned on by their Reconstructionist or otherwise more traditional fellow Pagans. Simplified interpretations of concepts such as karma and reincarnation are, to people versed in Hinduism, a regrettable trend in Neopaganism.

Similarly, if the era of the Flower Children taught us nothing else, it's that trying to funnel every vaguely Pagan-friendly idea from around the world into a Goddess-happy blender leads to religious homogenization, inaccurate revisions of history, and eventual dissatisfaction, disillusionment and embarrassment over the entire thing. "Eclectic Paganism" can become a practice of passive acceptance of any self-described Pagan idea which is easy to obtain, regardless of its source—which will ultimately lead anyone to confusion and disheartenment. Without a dedication to

scholarship, eclectics are condemned to a fragmentary path, defined by seeming irreverence for the complexities of a complete spiritual tradition.

I was a devoted patron of the Barnes and Noble New Age Section

Yet there is a distinction between skimming religious philosophies, pulling out the interesting-looking bits, and whittling them down to a convenient size until they don't require too much contemplation of their originally intended significance and the genuinely educated development of one's spirituality from different sources. Recently, I have seen the idea that "spiritual Eclecticism is unforgivable cultural violation!" passed about the online Pagan community. I find this a bit shortsighted. If one considers the origin of Gerald Gardner's Book of Shadows, one realizes that he certainly didn't use sources from only one spiritual tradition, thus making traditional Wicca a religion with essentially eclectic foundations (no need to denote the irony there).

The soundest mystical philosophies to me are the ones that come from a variety of lands and traditions, most of which use multi-cultural information in an integrated but knowledgeable way. Crowley's Thelema drew on

sources as far-ranging as Taoism and the Cabala; the post-Renaissance Rosicrucian movement was certainly devoutly Protestant but looked to Jewish mysticism and alchemy to enrich its purpose. In that vein, I see the most accomplished spiritual thinkers as being those that can integrate the tradition they were brought up in with new and foreign ideas, without losing reverence for the identity of the path from which they have “borrowed:” for example, Carl Jung, whose greatly esteemed theories concerning archetypal imagery were developed by the study of many spiritual/religious ideas and traditions.

Now that anthropologists and historians are aware of the cross-cultural similarities (not interchangeabilities) between different belief systems, developing one’s own eclectic spiritual system is more valid than ever. Consider the recent phenomenon of the ‘Pagan rosary,’ for example. Evidence for the use of beads as a means of prayer has been found in most major religions around the world: Hinduism and Islam for example.

What reason is there to keep Pagans from adopting this meditative and prayerful practice? One of the most important elements of my spirituality is Hatha yoga: the Indian asana practices intended to unite two polar energy channels in the body. The idea of this sort of duality—feminine and masculine, passive and energetic, and of the moon and the sun—and the need to reconcile the two is integral to many major religions, including Wicca, and to the inner progression of the alchemist and tarot student alike.

To be clear, I am not talking about some sort of all-embracing celebratory Universalism that declares that all religions are only superficially different. Eclecticism does not, or should not, attempt to try to make all religions converge on a single plane. What I feel makes my spiritual beliefs so fulfilling is that I can accept the vastly diverse wealth of sacred knowledge around the world. As most Pagans are aware, the religions of the past and present earth are fantastically unique and many have ultimately divergent ideals.

For example, talk to a Roman Reconstructionist and a Jainist about the value of armed conflict! Similarly, one can’t follow Christianity and a Goddess-centered path at the same time (without ignoring some important central concepts), for obvious reasons. This is not Eclecticism this is ignorance. To identify oneself with an established religion requires a different type of application, which I fully respect, but which is frequently entirely incongruent with the eclectic mindset (so if you do try to reconcile Protestantism and Dianic Wicca, you will find your foundation utterly faulty).

But perhaps if we can try to cease emphasizing our spiritual labels, and explore and incorporate some of the practices and philosophies from other paths, we would gain not just a scholarly understanding of the faiths of our human brethren, but also empathy and a personal belief system that takes advantage of the abundance of information we can access, and which is limiting only in necessitating respectfulness, flexibility, and

persistent honesty with oneself. On both a personal and universal scale, spiritual faith will inevitably evolve, and the greater the cultural scope from which it grows, the stronger and more realistic its foundation will be.

DIARY OF A SACRED TREE - PART 2

Written by Beith-ann & Candlesprite

Dear friends, let us continue our little chronicle of the Sacred Oak Tree. Yea! The same Oak Tree who has unfortunately found itself at the centre of controversial events far beyond his comprehension. Yea! That same Oak Tree whose misfortune it is to exist in a small woodland a short distance away from a Mediaeval dumping ground, which was falsely assumed to be the ancient remains of a Celtic King's household by amateur archaeologists with dubious diplomas. (Methinks they had actually been over-dosing on the TV program Time Team). Yea! That very same Oak Tree who has consequently become the focus for warring bands of dodgy druids, playful pagans, and just about anyone else who feels that this particular oak tree is something 'special', much to the amusement and bemusement of the tree itself. We continue the story one season after the most recent installment and as previously the diary is written from the tree's own perspective.

Beltane

Finally, it's stopped bloody raining! I must admit I like a little bit of rain as it keeps my roots nice and moist and stops the visitors from lighting fires but since Imbolc it hardly stopped until the last full moon. Now the sun is nice and bright again and the resident thrush is singing his little heart out again trying to attract yet another potential mate. Unfortunately the good weather also attracted yet more of those damned squirrels to run and leap around my body; playing, scratching, nibbling and irritating me intensely. There was one particularly fat one trying to do a clever balancing act on the end of one of my longer branches. You should have seen his face when I suddenly twitched my branch and made him lose his balance – I've never seen a squirrel bounce quite so high before. That will teach him not to eat so many acorns.

The rains didn't stop the weirdos from stomping through the mud and paying me visits, though. Just before the last full moon there was these three men... well, I thought it was two men and a wolf for a start because one of them was dressed in dirty shaggy grey furs and long hair just as matted and unkempt, until they stood in front of me. Come to think of it he smelled as bad as a wolf, too! Grey Wolf Man seemed to be the pack leader 'cos he

stood in front of the others and seemed to be meditating. I've seen people do this before; they pretend to be communicating with me on a 'spiritual' level and I go along with it if I'm in the mood just to make them feel important. Grey Wolf Man then started to growl and make shuffling movements with his feet. I thought that's all I need – another bloody rain dance! He then spoke to me, well I think he spoke as it sounded more like a bark, and said something like "What is thy wyrd?" I'd tired of this game by now and made a sigh of irritation, said a few words and waved a dismissive branch at him. Wolf Man then jumped up and down in delight, turned around and went running away with his two pups trailing behind shouting "he said To Be, he said To Be." All I'd really said was "who are you calling weird? You're the frigging weird one now bugger off and leave me alone.

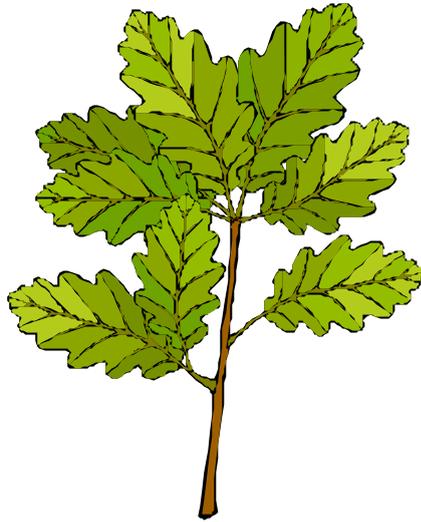
A few nights ago two more people spent some time beneath me. I wasn't quite sure what they were up to for a start until they started kissing and stripping off their clothes. This was all new to me and I watched avidly as they both lay down and the male (I can tell them apart now) started bouncing up and down on his partner. They were both making the most awful racket until the female made a great scream which startled an owl eating a mouse on the branch above them, forcing the owl to drop his midnight feast which landed right between the buttocks of the man. He screamed and convulsed in panic, the woman screamed again thinking it was all part of the act and the owl screamed and flew away in disgust leaving a small trail of feathers behind. By this time the man had come to his senses, removed the offending mouse from his buttocks and grumpily told his quivering female friend it was time to go.

A small group of those tree-trimming nutters came back again last night. I can tell you the Conifers in the Wood are really pissed off with me now 'cos not only are they missing out on the chance of being sacrificial Yule trees who eventually end up in Firvana after being cut down and carted off to some place beyond the valley, but they are also confused as to why I'm getting all the attention these days while they are ignored. To be honest I'm a little tired of all the attention I'm getting these days, find the little ribbons the people keep tying on me almost as

irritating as the squirrels, and I'm sick of the whinging Green Spike-leaves making snide remarks. They are hoping my roots rot. They call me heartless. They say I'm nothing more than Ivy-bait and deserve a slow painful suffocating death.

Anyway, the tree-trimmers really have gone too far this time. They brought ladders along with them this time and tied green and yellow ribbons on all of my lower branches. After that one of them stood in front of me making funny body contortions for about an hour. I think they referred to it as tai chi or kung fu or gung ho or something daft like that. Whatever it was it made the man look ridiculous and I lost interest and turned my attention to a couple of pigeons celebrating Spring in the time honoured fashion. All that ended when another man suddenly produced a long hollow branch called a didgeridoo and started blowing down it making a long-winded sound like a bull farting. It scared the crap out of all the squirrels who all leaped away almost suicidal (which was no bad thing really!) and the two propagating pigeons flew off in a flurry of feathers in different directions. I'd decided enough was enough and allowed one of my large dry branches, hanging right above Farting Bull Man, to fall right on top of his head. It clean knocked him out and had the added bonus of breaking his didgeridoo in half. After the others had managed to revive the unconscious man they decided to leave, thankfully.

After all the recent excitement I was hoping for a nice peaceful day today. The sun is out and a lovely spring breeze is blowing. The conifers have shut up for once and the nearby hawthorn trees look pretty in their white coats of May blossom. There is also still some scented bluebells hanging around on the ground. All of my hopes were shattered an hour before sunset when some familiar figures came traipsing up to me. It was the white-clad Druid Grove of the Unicorn-fiddlers again! There was about twenty of them and this time and this time they were banging on drums and blowing down little twig-like things but thankfully no didgeridoos. What really caught my eye was half of them were carrying a long branchless tree trunk wrapped in long



coloured ribbons, which they stuck upright in the ground. I thought to myself "so that's what happens to the conifers when they've been cut down and carted off". Of course, the live conifers think it was one of their gods returning from the dead!

As dusk fell the people then lit a fire to one side and then gathered around the 'pine prophet' and started chanting, dancing, blowing down the twigs (which sounded like asthmatic blackbirds) and banging on their drums. As they were doing that another familiar group, the Coven of the Rainbow Fart-arses, approached from the opposite direction, carrying an even bigger tree trunk and set up on the other side of me. Glaring at the other group, they also lit a fire and started doing exactly the same as the White Ones, except louder. This didn't go down very well with the Unicorn-fiddlers who suddenly decided to stop and gather around the fire. They did some funny hopping up and down before each and every one of them stripped off and stood naked. The Fart-arses, not to be outdone by the first group, also gathered around their bigger fire, hopped up and down even higher than the Unicorn-fiddlers and stripped off naked, too.

There was obviously some kind of competition going on. The last time these two groups had come to blows at Imbolc there had been a few broken bones when they'd hit each other with big sticks. This time the first group started doing the weirdest thing I've ever seen by leaping over the fire trying their best not to catch light. The second group did exactly the same, except trying to leap higher and further. I must say now that I've seen them all naked I've never seen such a sorry-looking bunch of humans. There were dangly bits dangling, floppy bits flopping and bouncy bits bouncing in all directions. Some of the people in each group then disappeared out of sight into the Woods holding hands and with big grins on their faces.

This went on for some time until one of the Rainbow Fart-arses recognised his wife being carried off by one the Unicorn-fiddlers (whose dangly bit was no longer dangling) and in a fit of rage went chasing after them. I could hear the woman screech as she was dropped on the ground and the sound of the two men hitting each other. That was it!

Whatever the two groups had been doing stopped and they all gave a great battle cry and charged into each other. There were naked bodies flying everywhere, both male and female. One of the Unicorn-fiddlers set light to the Fart-arses' maypole, who in turn set fire to the other maypole. Thankfully before I could worry too much about catching fire myself the rain started to fall heavily again dowsing all the flames. The fighting continued in the rain until all that was left was a pile of slippery bodies covered in mud trying to stand up straight. They were all just about to get their breath back before another round when suddenly from the woods a small muntjac deer came bouncing out, took one look at the piles of naked human flesh and scared out of its wits disappeared into the trees again. The Chief of the Unicorn-fiddlers started hopping up and down in the mud and shouted something about the God Pan had blessed them with a visit and everyone started rolling around chanting 'Pan, Blessed Pan, Pan!'

That seemed to have refocused everyone's attention because they all calmed down, donned their wet clothing and went off in opposite directions covered in cuts and bruises. Once again there was talk about a rematch and the Fart-arses were going to be the Masters of the Universe or something.

I did notice there were two people absent – it was the original pair who had been hoping for some passion until rudely interrupted by the woman's husband who had started the fight in the first place. Strangely enough, I had recognised that pair from a few nights before when the owl had dropped his half-eaten mouse between the man's buttocks!

The next morning the sun shone clear on a veritable war zone, mud and guts all over the place, I needed a break! – but there was no let up. Another chap suddenly appeared and I'm sure he heard me groan – just what I needed. This one was dressed in green and smelled a bit like patchouli. To be honest I almost didn't notice him until he reached my trunk (frightened the life out of me I can tell you!) and walked slowly and silently around me, picking up some owl feathers from the night before and then sat down between my roots. He seemed to spend all morning sitting there writing something on a piece of paper so softly, I almost forgot he was there. Just before he departed he left some food on the ground and poured a little bit of water on my roots (not as though I was thirsty after all the rain) and

disappeared just as quietly as he had arrived. I actually liked this human and didn't think he was as weird as all the others. No doubt other humans would think he is weird for not being weird!



Wicca

I cannot lay claim to have ever been initiated into either a Wiccan or Witchcraft coven, but I have worked as a solitary Witch following the Wiccan path for three years and now work as a solitary Witch leaning towards Traditional Witchcraft. In the time that I have been working as a Witch, I have come to notice in my opinion just how many differences there are between the two.

Witchcraft is a European term for a set of practices that crop up in various forms, all over the world. It is not a religion, although there is often a spiritual aspect to it. Witchcraft involves the use of magic and the honouring of Gods, spirits, and Ancestors. Wicca is an initiatory mystery tradition that involves the use of magic. It is also a religion created out of a combination of fact, fiction, history, philosophy, psychology and other world religions. A Witch is someone who practices Witchcraft and if a Wiccan practices Witchcraft then they are de facto Witches.

The modern usage of the terms 'Wicca' and 'Witchcraft' are relatively new inventions coming from specific cultural backgrounds (although stemming from Old English). The first definition of a Witch is mentioned in Aelfric's Homilies, which was written between 955 and 1012, and the first definition of a

Wiccan came from Gerald Gardner. The 1950's were the decade in which Gardner announced the existence of his Witch religion to the world and succeeded in establishing it as a lasting component of modern spirituality. In 1954, his book 'Witchcraft Today' gave that religion a generic name of 'Wica', adapted by the 1960s to its enduring form of 'Wicca'.

Most people who come to learn the traditions of Witchcraft already have some basis in the practice. Nevertheless, it seems it has become popular to use the term 'Witchcraft' by many people who seek to remove themselves from the scope of Wicca. Although this may also be said for many people calling themselves Wiccan, so as to escape the stigma that can be associated with someone being called a Witch. Many such people flock to a term to define themselves without the understanding to which the term refers. This is not a do-whatever-you-want-to-do practice; there are set traditions and structure. Some people who follow these practices do not even call themselves Witches as the term 'Witch' is something that was placed upon their belief. In southern counties, the Midlands and Wales the terms 'Cunning man' and 'Cunning women' were used to describe practitioners who offered a range of skills linked to the operation of apparent supernatural power. Some confusion has been caused by the habit of folklore collectors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries of referring to all

popular magical practices as 'Witchcraft' and to Cunning folk as 'White witches'. However, using the term 'Witchcraft' is an easy way to collectively identify with these beliefs and those who follow them.

Beliefs

Some Witches do not believe in deities at all and believe in a singular all-powerful force known as nature. Nature encompasses all things and we generally see but a small part of it. Witchcraft is comprised of many individual traditions that may differ greatly from one another at times. However, most traditions follow some important elements.

Wiccans believe that the

Versus

divine is male and female, equal and in balance and that we should strive for that balance both in ourselves and in our lives. They believe that there is a Goddess as well as a God and that both are equally powerful, although some festivals and workings may be more appropriately directed to one or the other. Both the God and the Goddess may be referred to by different names at different times, but this does not mean that each Wiccan believes that there are many Gods and Goddesses. There are also polytheistic Wiccans.

The After-life

Some Wiccans have a strong belief in reincarnation, they believe we live many lives and between them we return to the Summerlands. There we review the lessons we have learned in

Witchcraft

the life that we have just completed and select the lessons to be learned in the life to come. We do not come back as the same person but rather our spirit is born again.

When we die according to some Witches we travel to the plane of existence called the Spiritworld. This is where we also rest before continuing our journey, where we may be born into a new life. Another alternative is that we meld with nature becoming one with it, commonly becoming what is known as a land spirit.

Yet there are some that believe that we are nothing but physical beings which decay as nature desires.

Celebrating the Esbats and Sabbats

In Wicca honouring the Esbats and Sabbats is considered desirable in order to follow the religion. The Sabbats in Wicca are related to a continual mythology that runs through the year and joins each Sabbat with the one previous. For Wiccans, the Sabbats are a time of celebration and not a time for magical workings.

In Witchcraft, the Sabbats are based on the actual changes of the Earth (as do Wiccans, may I add) and will celebrate for more than one particular day. These are known as the Tides and usually encompass an eight-day period with the most powerful of those days being mid-way between. The Sabbats are, in some cases, not even celebrated by some Witches as the Sabbats come second to the Esbats. However, when celebrated Witches tend to look at the folk-lore surrounding

the festivals and at existing rituals and traditions. Folk-lore gives us an idea of what our ancestors did, and therefore is a very important source for crafting rituals nowadays.

The Esbats are a time of great importance for both Wiccans and Witches, but more so for Witches as they put more emphasis on the Esbats than they do on the Sabbats. How a Witch celebrates this event is dealt with in different ways by different people.

Ritual structure

Because of its closeness to nature, Witches see the Earth as already sacred and do not feel the need to ritually cast a circle. However, we will call upon Guardians to protect us within our ritual. Quarter calls are a Wiccan specific activity. One of the first rituals that a Wiccan learns is that of casting the circle. While both the Witch and the Wiccan may incorporate similar results from their magical efforts, it is how they each arrive at those end results that bears the shade of differences.



Initiation

In Wicca, initiation is regarded as a magical ritual intended to convey particular numinous mysteries to the candidate. An initiated Wiccan is a Witch and priest/priestess of the religion of Wicca.

Witchcraft is a set of practices

so there are not any priests or priestesses as such. Witchcraft initiations are tailor made for the initiate. The teacher knows what the student needs and can often see ahead, so the initiation can be geared towards that path.

Dedication is a different type of ritual and is performed by both solitary Wiccans and Witches. This is done when the Wiccan dedicates themselves to learning about Wicca and the Witch decides to give themselves over to the service of the Gods. Self-dedication for Witches is an opening up to the forces of the Universe and beyond. It is a clear statement of nature and intent which will attract compassionate forces.

Ethics

Contrary to popular belief, Witches do have a guideline, good advice to think before you act. It is simple - take responsibility for your own actions. This is a concept and not a set of faked old English words. In fact, it is seen as honourable to do whatever is necessary to protect oneself and ones family in a time when they are facing potential danger. If the thought arises to cast a hex or curse we must ask ourselves first is it ethical. Any Witch will tell you that in the defence of their family or a loved one then the answer is yes. If however it relates to someone who cuts you up on the motorway the answer is no.

The most important factor in using magic is the idea that you will be responsible for your own actions. With responsibility being the focus, the idea in Witchcraft is that there is no good or evil, only intent that one has when committing an action. Humans have the ability to make decisions

and act upon them and they may choose and act with bad or good intentions.

In Wicca, there is also personal responsibility. They believe that what you say or what you do is your own responsibility and you cannot blame no outside agency for making you act the way you do. One of the ways that personal responsibility is emphasised is through the Wiccan Rede. This is the rule that Wiccans strive to follow and by which they measure their actions. It is a positive morality, rather than a set of 'don'ts and 'shalt nots'. It simply means that you should do what is right for you in your life but that in doing so you should try not to hurt others. Obviously there are times when doing what is personally right will almost hurt someone else, but here you are required to make your own judgement - to consider, accept and live with the consequences.

It does seem that Wicca and Witchcraft have basically the same moral code, but Witches are more inclined to use hexes and curses than Wiccans.

Magic

Any kind of magical working needs a good deal of thought and there is a saying that 'be careful what you ask for'. In considering whether or not, to work magic you have to be aware of the potential outcomes of what you are asking. When working magic you have to be certain that you will work the kind of spell that will cure the problem and not make it worse in the long term. You also have to realise that sometimes events may seem to work against us, but perhaps the Goddess/Nature knows best.

For the Witch magic consists of simple items or none at all. Making a meal for your family is a form of magic, where simple everyday items would be utilised with intent and direction.

Book of Shadows/Grimoires

Grimoires and Books of Shadows are very recent things. Several hundreds of years ago people were illiterate and to have any written evidence of their beliefs would lead to their death if it were found. With only a small percentage of the population being able to read there was probably not much point in having written books, unless the target market was the educated upper classes. Nevertheless, the fact that Witches were associated with spells, hints at the fact that they could spell, but may have used languages that others would not know. For example the 'Ogham or Runic alphabets'.

Today we have Books of Shadows and Grimoires for ease of reference. In Wicca a Book of Shadows is a traditional collection of texts which defines the identify of a Wiccan coven member. A Grimoire is used to keep information, learning material, and rituals. Information on magic and spells are kept in a separate book.

Tools

Tools will vary widely from a Wiccan to a Witch. Wiccans will often be bogged down with a preponderance of items from ceremonial robes to swinging incense censors and full elaborate altar set-ups. This makes going off to the woods to work rites or perform magic rather bulky and unwieldy. The main tools used by Wiccans are the Athame, the

Chalice, the Pentacle and the Wand, but you will find a much different set of tools to the Witch, if indeed you find any tools at all. These tools include such things as Stangs (a forked branch usually of ash wood that has several significant meanings), Skulls (of animals and on occasion, people), Cauldrons, Spindles and even Millstones.

Wicca and Witchcraft is interchangeable within the Wiccan community. There are so many branches of Witchcraft; for example - Dianic, Seax Wicca, Hereditary Witchcraft, etc. Witchcraft is not one single monolithic entity with everyone believing in similar things.

No matter what path we do follow we all share the same core belief and that is that nature is sacred. As children of nature, we should learn to live within nature and care for it, as we are humanly possible.

by Samantha Ward 2004.

Sources of information.

Kytherier of House Shadow Drake.

The Real Witches Handbook by Kate West.

The Triumph of the Moon by Ronald Hutton.

Stations of the Sun by Ronald Hutton.

JOIN AS A FULL MEMBER AND SUPPORT YOUR ORGANISATION

Pagan Network is a non-profit organisation, run by committee and financed by our members. Profits from membership and the sale of our magazine along with other merchandise help us fulfil our aims of promoting acceptance of Paganism as a belief system within the UK and providing a safe and secure networking platform for those who practise those beliefs.

BENEFITS OF FULL MEMBERSHIP

Becoming a Full Member of Pagan Network not only helps support the organisation financially, but you also get the following benefits:

- A copy of our Pagan Network Directory, with details of local moots, events, groups and shops around the country
- Personal Membership Card (in a choice of designs) which gets you reduced entry to Pagan Network Events and discounts from an ever growing list of shops
- A Pagan Network keyring
- An annual subscription to Witchtower magazine (upon request)
- Access to restricted areas of the Pagan Network website
- A chance to have a say in the running of Pagan Network

Full Members are given full voting rights at our Annual General Meeting, where issues can be raised and discussed with other members and the management committee. Members can also stand for election to the committee. You can also suggest what kind of work you'd like Pagan Network to become involved with, and nominate projects, organisations or events for us to support.

Pagan Network is truly a membership based organisation, and if you want to help shape the future of it, please become a full member today!

COSTS

- £20 Single Working Adult
 - £10 Child (under 18) (Form must be signed by parent)
 - £15 Unemployed/Student
 - £30 Couples (2 adults)
 - £40 Families (2 adults plus 2 children)
- Membership can be paid either by paypal or by cheque.

JOINING

There are two ways to become a Full Member, you can download the Application Form that can be found on the main index page of Pagan Network (www.pagan-network.org) under the membership section or alternatively you can fill in the opposite page and post to BM WiccaUK, London, WC1N 3XX

Full Membership Application Form - Membership runs for 1 year

Your Details

Your Name	
Address	
PN Username	
Email Address	
Date of Birth	

Membership Information

Do you authorise your details to be sent to groups or events organisers	
Do you wish to receive The Witchtower?	
How did you hear about Pagan Network?	
Membership No. for Renewal, if applicable	

Membership Choices

Which membership card do you wish to received? see www.sensorychaos.co.uk/wiccaukcards.htm	
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Type of Membership Required

£20	Single Working Adult (1 card, 1 pack) Optional -printed copies of Witchtower		
£10	Child (under 18) (Form must be signed by parent) (1 card, 1 pack) Optional - printed copies of the Witchtower		
£40	Families (2 adults plus 2 children) (2 cards (one for each parent) and 1 pack) Optional - printed copies of the Witchtower		
£30	Couples (2 cards, 1 pack) Optional - printed copies of the Witchtower		
£15	Unemployed/Student (You must provide proof of your unemployment status or proof of being a student, along with details of how long you expect to be a student) (1 card, 1 pack) Optional - printed copies of the Witchtower		
£35	Organisations (per 10 people). If more than 10 people, additional memberships will be required. (1 group card, 1 pack) Optional - printed copies of the Witchtower. STATE TYPE OF ORGANISATION:		
I wish to pay for membership by:	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">Cheque - (post cheques to BM Wiccuk, London, WC1N 3XX)</td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">Paypal - make payments to "payments@pagan-network.org"</td> </tr> </table>	Cheque - (post cheques to BM Wiccuk, London, WC1N 3XX)	Paypal - make payments to "payments@pagan-network.org"
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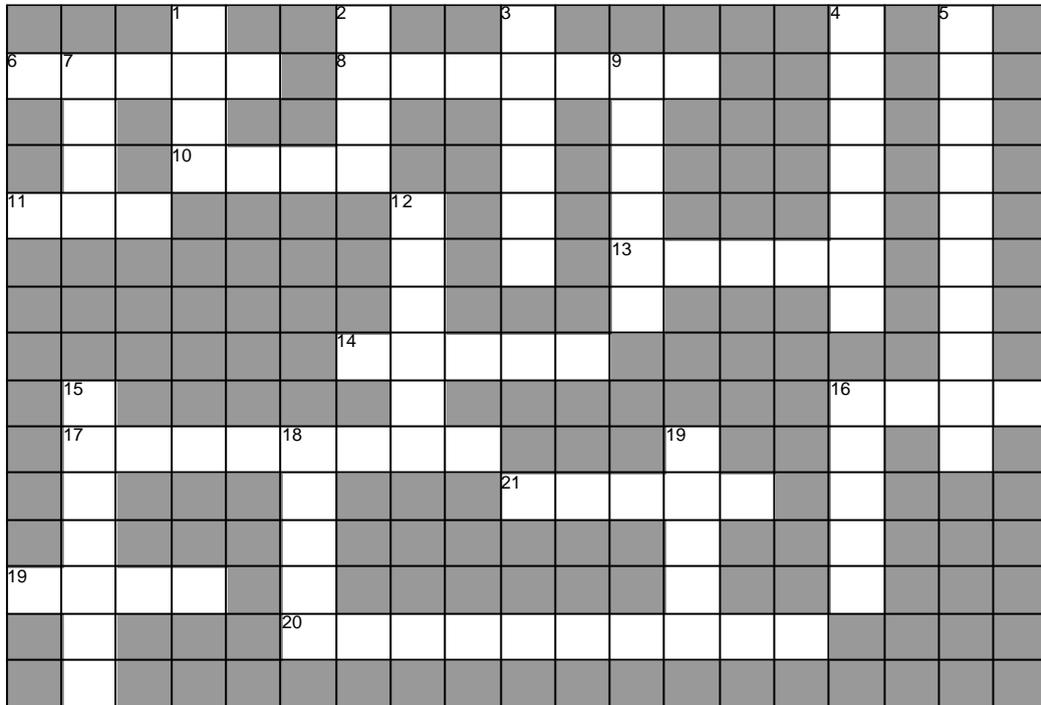
Data is held confidentially for the duration of your membership
 I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the above mentioned information is correct and wish to commence membership of Pagan Network

Signature..... Date.....
 Must be signed by a parent or guardian if aged 16 or 17

Chill Out Zone!

This is my first attempt at creating a crossword, so feedback on whether it was too easy would be greatly appreciated!

By Twilightgirl



ACROSS

6. A form of divination
8. The river of sorrow
10. A burning element
11. A tree that produces acorns
13. A form of energy healing.
14. The law of cause and effect
16. Wave this and watch the rabbit appear
17. Popular purple gemstone
19. The first tarot card in a deck
20. Well known circle where druids gather in the south of england
21. Use this to sweep your magical space

DOWN

1. An animal, howl at the moon
2. A hard chinese gemstone, often carved
3. Sam Neill played him in this film
4. Carved up to create an image on the 31st October
5. Gemstone, a variety of chalcedony, thought to stop bleeding
7. Energy field surrounding the body
9. Spring Equinox
12. Female tree spirits
15. Author of Liber Null
16. Often referred to as the Old Religion
18. Greek, god of the underworld
19. A group of witches join together to form this