

# Wicca

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## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Wiccan festivals follow the seasonal Sacred Wheel of the Year. Four of these festivals, the minor festivals, represent the solar festivals of solstices and equinoxes; the remaining four, known as the major festivals, represent agricultural and pastoral festivals. The latter four occur on points halfway between the solstices and equinoxes and are called Cross-Quarter days.

The annual cycle known as the Sacred Wheel of Year includes eight Sabbats (solar festivals). In addition, there are lunar observances, called Esbats. These center around the four phases of the moon: new, waxing, full, and waning. Observances generally occur from about three days before until about three days after each phase of the moon.

In many denominations the moon is associated with symbols of the Goddess and represents the feminine aspect of the divinity. The sun is often a symbol of the masculine aspect of the divinity.

Festivals are not concerned with historical figures or founders, but with the mysterious elemental forces inherent in nature and the psyche.

Wiccans meet in sacred circles where rituals are held. Rituals usually include a combination of meditation, invocations, movement, music, and prayer. Wiccans honor the elements of nature – earth, air, fire, water, and spirit and their associated directions of north, east, south, west, and center. It is recommended that congregant ceremonies be held outdoors.

**Required Daily Observances.** There is no universal standard across traditions. Most Wiccans develop a set of personally unique rituals for daily devotion. Examples include greeting the day, prayers before meals, prayers to close the day.

**Required Weekly Observances.** No universal standard exists. It is appropriate to provide a weekly study time on topics related to nature-based spirituality.

### **Required Occasional Observances**

Eight Sabbats are celebrated in the Sacred Wheel of the Year. Each occurs on or near the date identified. These dates fall on the solstices, equinoxes, and points halfway in between, called “Cross-Quarter days.” The following names may have variants:

October 31	Samhain.
December 21	Yule (Winter Solstice).
February 2	Imbolc.
March 21	Ostara (Spring Equinox).
April 30	Beltane.
June 22	Litha (Summer Solstice/Midsummer).
August 2	Lughnasadh.
September 21	Mabon (Fall Equinox).

**Holy Days.** Most Wiccan traditions do not have work proscription in association with holy days. When work proscription is observed, it is usually connected with Samhain.

## **RELIGIOUS ITEMS**

### **Personal Religious Items**

- **Book of Shadows** (a spiritual journal).
- Divination tool (Tarot Cards, Rune Cards, or Rune stones. Rune stones are plastic and no larger than the diameter of a nickel).
- Items to honor the elements of nature:
  - ▶ Salt – Earth.

- ▶ Feather/(Herb) – Air.
- ▶ Wood Wand – Fire.
- ▶ Water – Water.
- ▶ Picture of Divine Unity/Divinity – Center.
- Religious medallion, usually a pentacle, and chain.

**Security note:** The Wood Wand need be no larger than a pencil.

## Congregate Religious Items

- Altar.
- Altar Cloth.
- Anointing Oil.
- Bell.
- Book of Shadows.
- Candle.
- Chalice.
- Drum.
- Feather.
- Herbs (sage, cedar, lavender, frankincense, myrrh, rosemary, chamomile).
- Icon (picture/statue of the sacred).
- Incense.
- Pentacle.
- Pentagram.
- Quartz crystal.
- Rattle.
- Tarot or Rune cards.
- Salt.
- Tabard (Hoodless Poncho).

**Security note:** An Athame, a ritual dagger, is used in community observances and rituals. In a correctional setting, the use or display of daggers is not authorized.

**Searches.** A Book of Shadows is considered very sacred. Any required examination of such religious objects or other spiritual articles shall normally be done by having the owner display them for visual inspection by the examining officer. Where owner display is not feasible, the chaplain should be called to inspect or manipulate the contents for inspection. Religious articles are not to be mishandled, thrown, placed on the floor, or brought into the bathroom and placed on the toilet or basin.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Requirements.** Since there is understood to be growth in the ability to enter into the balance that flows from being at one with Nature and Nature's forces, there are different perspectives within the Wiccan body about initiation. For some, self-initiation is possible through the simple commitment to follow a Wiccan path; for others, membership has to be the fruit of having received training from an elder within coven-centered rituals. Many forms of Wiccan religion are initiatory; others are not. Some require membership in a coven; others are sole practitioners.

**Security note:** Covens are not permitted inside Bureau facilities because of their organization/hierarchal structure.

**Total Membership.** Due to the eclectic and decentralized nature of the movement, as well as a well-grounded fear of publicity and harassment, it is difficult to arrive at any realistic estimate of how many follow the Wiccan way of life. Membership is probably in the hundreds of thousands.

## MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS

No universal standard exists. A healing service conducted by a community member may be requested.

## DIETARY STANDARDS

No universal dietary standard exists for Wicca. Self-selection from the mainline, including the no-flesh option, generally meets Wiccan dietary requirements.

## BURIAL RITUALS

**Ministering to the Dying.** When possible, a "Crossing Over" ritual is done just prior to death, with loved ones circled around the bedside of the dying person and at least one lighted candle present. "Crossing Over" rituals are usually conducted by the dying person's own minister, but can be conducted by someone else of the dying person's choosing, including a chaplain or minister of another religion who has a respect for the dying person's religious orientation. When circumstances permit, counseling and discussions are done by a minister with the dying person to assist personal spiritual preparations for the transition as well as to incorporate the dying person's ideas and beliefs into funeral and memorial service planning. When death happens suddenly and at a distance, the deceased's home spiritual community should be notified so that members can engage in individual and group meditations to mark the passing.

**Post-Death Rites.** Following death, it is common to have both a wake (especially for those of

Celtic heritage), which is open to the deceased's closest family and friends, as well as a funeral or memorial service, open to family friends and associates. There may be either cremation or burial, depending on the individual's choice. Loved ones often place flowers, herbs, and other spiritual objects with the body prior to cremation or burial. Personal religious objects, writings, and other spiritual materials may be mailed to next of kin, or to person(s) designated in the inmate's Central File.

## **SACRED WRITINGS**

No universally recognized sacred text exists for Wicca.

Divination tools:

- Tarot Cards.
- Rune Cards.
- Rune Stones (plastic – no larger than the diameter of a nickel).

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

**Headquarters Location.** No centralized headquarters exists. Some Wiccans are solitary practitioners. Others meet with a group; these may be known as circles, covens, or churches. Most covens are headed by a High Priestess or High Priest. Covens or groups are autonomous. Today's trend among Wiccans is to form larger public church institutions with IRS recognition.

**Contact Office/Person.** A variety of nationally recognized Wiccan denominations may be able to help identify local resources. In addition, local advisors may be available through an area's organized churches or nature-based spirituality bookstores.

## **HISTORY**

Wicca is a diverse, decentralized religion that is part of the nature-based spirituality movement. Nature religions are rapidly re-emerging into public view after centuries of persecution. Today, hundreds of thousands of individuals and groups practice forms of nature-based spirituality and Wiccan religion throughout the U.S., Canada, and around the world.

There are many forms of Wiccan religion. Hereditary, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Celtic, and Traditionalist are just some of the traditions or denominations within contemporary Wiccan spirituality. Within most traditions are groups as well as individual practitioners. Groups, sometimes called covens, differ widely in size, structure, purpose, orientation, symbology, and ritual practices. There is even more variation among those practicing the tradition (the Craft) on their own without being a part of a coven. Many forms of Wiccan religion are

initiatory; others are not. Practices vary from tradition to tradition and include initiations through dreams, vision quests, self-initiations, and initiations by teachers and groups. In some cases, the initiation process into a group opens the gate into a traditionally secret society.

Although many differences exist, Wiccans tend to have some spiritual practices and philosophies in common:

- Wiccans love and respect nature and seek to live in harmony with the rest of the ecosphere.
- Many Wiccans have personal friendships and communicate with animals, plants, and other life forms.
- Ceremonies are held at New and Full moon times and also at the eight seasonal Festivals, called Sabbats, spaced six to seven weeks apart throughout the year and coinciding with the Solstices, Equinoxes, and midpoints between (usually called Cross-Quarters).
- Samhain is the New Year for most Wiccan traditions.

Wiccan spirituality draws on ancient roots as it adapts to living in a modern age. Today the religion combines old ways with new. Many practitioners create new chants, meditations, and rituals, and share them through publications, correspondence, and contact at multi-tradition festivals.

Nature-based spirituality has opened up for many a journey toward a holistic sense of spiritual power and grace. With hints of prehistoric as well as legendary roots in an ancient wisdom of natural healing, the religion of the Mother Goddess and her Horned Consort has developed a contemporary spirituality for thousands of persons worldwide. The Horned Consort, or male principle of nature, is not to be identified with the Devil. Due to the horns, many non-Wiccans have been misled into thinking that Devil worship or Satanism is a component of the Wiccan way.

## **THEOLOGY**

**Introduction.** The Council of American Witches in 1974 adopted the following principles of Wiccan belief. Although the organization disbanded the same year, the principles provide a good summary of Wiccan faith.

- We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the phases of the moon and the seasonal quarters and cross-quarters.
- We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with nature, in ecological balance offering

fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.

- We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than is apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary, it is sometimes called “supernatural,” but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.

- We conceive of the Creative Power in the Universe as manifesting through polarity – as masculine and feminine – and that this same Creative Power lives in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive of the other. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of Life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magickal practice and religious worship.

- We recognize both outer worlds and inner, or psychological worlds – sometimes known as the Spiritual World, the Collective Unconscious, the Inner Planes, etc. – and we see in the interaction of these two dimensions the basis for paranormal phenomena and magickal exercises. We neglect neither dimension for the other, seeing both as necessary for our fulfillment.

- We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy, but do honor those who teach, respect those who share their greater knowledge and wisdom, and acknowledge those who have courageously given of themselves in leadership.

- We see religion, magick, and wisdom-in-living as being united in the way one views the world and lives within it – a world view and philosophy of life, which we identify as Witchcraft or the Wiccan Way.

- Calling oneself “Witch” does not make a Witch – but neither does heredity itself, or the collecting of titles, degrees, and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within him/herself that makes life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with nature.

- We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness, that gives meaning to the Universe we know, and to our personal role within it.

- Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy-of-life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be “the one true right and only way” and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practices and beliefs.

- As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the

Craft, the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present, and our future.

- We do not accept the concept of “absolute evil,” nor do we worship an entity known as “Satan” or “the Devil” as defined by Christian Tradition. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefits can only be derived by denial to another.

- We work within nature for that which is contributory to our health and well-being.

- We are not bound by traditions from other times and other cultures, and owe no allegiance to any person or power greater than the Divinity manifest through our own being. As American Witches, we welcome and respect all life-affirming teachings and traditions, and seek to learn from all and to share our learning. We do not wish to open ourselves to the destruction of Wicca by those on self-serving power trips, or to philosophies and practices contradictory to these principles. In seeking to exclude those whose ways are contradictory to ours we do not want to deny participation with us to any who are sincerely interested in our knowledge and beliefs, regardless of race, color sex, age, national or cultural origins, or sexual preference.

**Deity.** Most Wiccans worship a dualistic deity expressed in female and male forms. Many believe that everything in nature is dual – female and male. Behind the female and male forms of the deity is a divine power so pure and abstract that human beings cannot grasp or comprehend it. To better use the power of the sacred and divine, a human-like overlay, mask, or face has been placed on the ultimate so that Wiccans are able to relate and perceive. The Divine is simply so large, powerful, and incomprehensible that familiar forms and shapes are used to begin to gain a sense of comprehension. Thus, the Divine is one and at the same time dual – monotheistic and polytheistic.

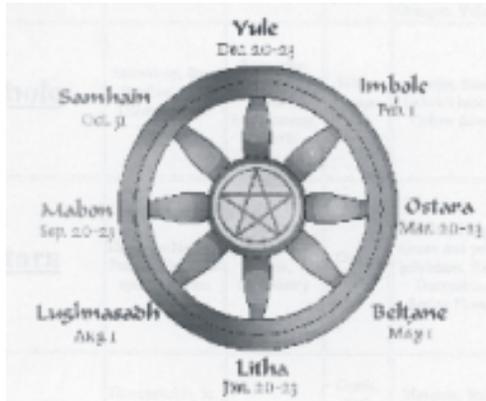
Deity is also considered to be inherent in all things – rocks, clouds, sky, earth, etc. Everything has a divine spirit within. When viewed in this light, deity is perceived as animistic.

Finally, deity is identified with the universe or, more accurately, the universe is viewed as a self-expression of the Divine. The Divine is everywhere and everything is imbued with the Divine. Viewed in this light, the Divine is pantheistic.

Most Wiccans would agree that the Divine is monotheistic, polytheistic, animistic, and pantheistic.

**Sacred Circle.** “Cast the circle thrice about to keep the evil spirits out.” So states the Wiccan Rede (cf. #8). Selena Fox states, in her resource article written for Bureau chaplains, “The predominant ritual and social space form is the circle. As in ancient times, the circle

represents many concepts, including wholeness, balance, the cycles of Nature, continuity, partnership, and interconnectedness. The circle is used by individuals in personal rituals as well as by large and small groups for group rituals and festivals. The circle form facilitates shared experiences and encourages participation.”



**Solar Observances.** Wiccan solar observances are called Sabbats and were originally about the changing of the seasons. Eight Sabbats are identified, and are most often referred to as the Wheel of the Year. The sabbats are solar observances connected to the solstices, equinoxes, and points in between, called Cross-Quarter days. For some Wiccans, the Wheel of the Year is an effective metaphor for understanding life, a valid aspect of one’s psychospiritual path. The major Sabbats are Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasadh: the Cross-Quarter days. The minor Sabbats are Yule (Winter Solstice), Ostara (Spring Equinox), Litha (Summer Solstice), and Mabon (Autumn Equinox). The dates listed may vary one to two days depending on the position of the sun.

Aspects of the god/goddess vary with each denomination. One example of the aspects of deity and sacred stories associated with them is presented here:

- **Samhain**, the beginning of the new year, is celebrated on October 31. This is the time when the spirit world is close to the world of the living and the veil between the two worlds is thinnest. The spirits are invited into the circle; the exchange between the spirits of the dead and the living is reverent, natural, joyous, and festive. The Goddess is honored in her aspect as the Crone, the Goddess of dark mysteries. The God is honored in his aspect of the Horned God of the Dead, of human beings as well as animals.

- **Yule** falls on December 21, the winter solstice, the longest, darkest night of the year. From that day, the days begin to grow longer and the nights shorter. The God is honored as the Divine Child and the Goddess as the Divine mother.

- **Imbolc**, on February 2, is a time when Wiccans seek the omens of spring, since the earth is beginning to awaken from its winter sleep. The God is honored as the Spirit Father and the Goddess as the Corn Maiden.

- **Ostara**, the spring equinox, is celebrated on March 21. This is a time of passing and transition; a time of balance – equal day and night; and is viewed as a time of magick. The Goddess is honored in her aspect as the Maiden and the God as her brother/consort, the Sun God.

- **Beltane**, on May 1, one of the most sacred days in the Wiccan calendar, is the celebration of the Divine Marriage, the act of creation. The Goddess is honored in her aspect as the Goddess of fertility and the God as the Lord of Greenwood.

- **Litha**, the summer solstice on June 21, is the longest day of the year. This is a celebration of the sun at the peak of its power. The God is honored in his aspect as Sun God and the Goddess as Earth Mother.

- **Lughnasadh**, on August 1, is the celebration of the first harvest. The ritual is a thanksgiving for the harvest, in particular the grain harvest. The Goddess is honored in her aspect as all-providing Earth Mother and Grain Goddess, and the God is honored as the sacrificed God of Grain, who dies so that people may survive the coming winter on the harvested grain.

- **Mabon**, the autumn equinox, is celebrated on September 21. The hours of night grow longer than the hours of the day. Wiccans prepare to bid farewell to the Goddess as the Maiden of Spring and Mother of Summer, and welcome the Crone. The God is honored in his aspect as the God of the dying Sun, the God of death and rebirth.

**Lunar Observances.** Lunar observances are called Esbats in some traditions. Each of the phases of the moon – new, waxing, full, and waning – has special meaning. In addition, the phases of the moon give timing to the levels and types of energy available for magickal workings. During a calendar year, there are 13 cycles of the moon. There are divergent beliefs about the Lunar cycle among Wiccan traditions. One tradition's belief is presented here as an example:

- **New Moon.** This is the period when the light of the moon disappears. It lasts about three days on either side of the new moon and is generally regarded as a time of minimum energy, a time for reflection and contemplation.

- **Waxing Moon.** This is the period when the moon is growing in the sky, but hasn't reached full. This begins about four days after the new moon and lasts until three days before the new moon. This is the time of growing energy, usually linked to the Maiden Aspect of the Goddess; it is the time for positive change, love, luck, and growth.

- **Full Moon.** This is the period when the moon is seen at its fullest; it lasts from about three days before and three days after the full moon is seen. This period is linked

to the Mother Aspect of the Goddess and is the time when energy is considered to be at its strongest, the time to increase psychic abilities and fertility.

■ **Waning Moon.** This is the period when the moon is decreasing until is no longer seen – about four days after the full moon until about four days before the new moon. This time is linked with the Crone (i.e., aging) aspect of the Goddess. This is a time for reversing magick, banishing and releasing aspects of the personality that are oppressive as long as they are not against the teachings of the Wiccan Rede, “An it harm none, do what ye will.”

**Five Elements of Nature.** According to Selena Fox, high priestess of Circle Sanctuary, the five elements of nature form a “standard framework of spiritual symbology, teachings, and practice.” Each element is associated with a sacred direction and is acknowledged in Wiccan rituals. The first element is earth with its associated direction, north. The second element is air; its direction, east. The third is fire; its direction, south. The fourth is water; its direction, west. The fifth is spirit, which has no associated direction, since spirit is within each human being and thus is centered.

**Pentacle.** The Pentacle, the symbol of Wicca, represents an ancient concept that people have the ability to bring spirit to earth. This applies to everyday life and every area of life. The ability to bring spirit to earth is the ability to make human beings whole. Traditionally, each of the of five angles has been attributed to the five elements of nature described above. One system of correspondence is:

- The lower left-hand corner represents earth: stability and physical endurance.
- The lower right-hand corner represents fire: courage and daring.
- The upper right-hand corner represents water: emotions and intuition.
- The upper left-hand corner represents air: intelligence, thought, and the arts.
- The topmost point represents spirit: the All and the Divine.

**Ethics and Morality.** The Wiccan Rede contains the basic ethical statement of the Wiccan tradition. The eight words, “An it harm none, do what ye will” is part of the rede. In addition, the three-fold law plays a significant role in Wiccan morality and ethics. There are several versions of the Wiccan Rede. This is the full Rede as held by some traditions:

Bide the Wiccan Laws we must, in Perfect Love and Perfect Trust,  
Live and let live. Fairly take and fairly give.  
Cast the circle thrice about to keep the evil spirits out.  
To bind the spell every time let the spell be spake in rhyme.  
Soft of eye and light of touch, Speak little, listen much.  
Deosil go by the waxing moon, chanting out the Witches' rune.  
When the lady's moon is new, kiss the hand to **her times to**.  
When the moon rides at her peak, then your heart's desire seek.

Heed the North wind's mighty gale, lock the door and drop the sail.  
When the wind comes from the South, love will kiss thee on the mouth.  
When the wind blows from the West, departed souls will have no rest.  
When the wind blows from the East, expect the new and set the feast.  
Nine woods in the cauldron go, burn them fast and burn them slow.  
Elder be the Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed you'll be.  
When the wheel begins to turn, let the Beltane fires burn.  
When the Wheel has turned to Yule, light the log and the Horned One rules.  
Heed ye flower, Bush and Tree, by the Lady, blessed be.  
Where the rippling waters go, cast a stone and truth you'll know.  
When ye have a true need, hearken not to others' greed.  
With a fool no season spend, lest ye be counted as his friend.  
Merry meet and merry part, bright the cheeks and warm the heart.  
Mind the Threefold Law you should, three times bad and three times good.  
When misfortune is enow, wear the blue star on thy brow.  
True in love ever be, lest thy lover's false to thee.  
Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: An it harm none, do what ye will.

The Wiccan ethic begins with the individual practitioner and it is up to the individual to decide what is right and wrong. The governing rule for determining right and wrong is the Wiccan Rede: "An it harm none, do what ye will." To ensure a positive ethic, the Threefold Law is a guide for living: "Mind the Threefold Law you should, three times bad and three times good." If something bad is done to another, that act multiplies threefold to the perpetrator. In the same manner, a good deed is magnified threefold for the Wiccan practitioner. Ethical situations are weighed by the implications of the Wiccan Rede and the Threefold Law, resulting in a positive belief system and lifestyle.

**Wiccan Magick (Spiritual Workings).** Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a distinction was made between Magic and Magick because of the great difference between the two types. Magic has come to mean illusion or stage magic. In Wicca, an alternate spelling was adopted by many practitioners to mean transformation and change, which has nothing to do with illusion and fantasy. Wiccan Magick is not the same as magical thinking. "Magical thinking" connotes buying into illusion and fantasy. "Magickal thinking" entails actively working to create meaningful change in oneself and one's life.



Magickal practice is an integral part of most Wiccan spiritual activity. Its purpose is to support personal growth and a state of "becoming." Marion Weinstein, in her book **Positive Magic**, states, "You cannot use magic[k] to help yourself if it harms another." Magick is working through prayer and meditation toward self-transformation. In a correctional environment, magickal activity should be by individuals, even within a group, working separately on their own spiritual growth, change, and "becoming" processes. Magick is not done to control or manipulate someone else. It is used to connect to the divine power within for personal change rather than the oppression or domination of others.

*Pentacle*