

## I'm just curious about Wicca



You're "just curious" about Wicca? That's okay.

In fact, it's great! Curiosity's a good thing.

It's a sign of intelligence and an open mind.

You've come to the right place for answers, too. I'm an ordained priestess, and I've been practicing for over 40 years; for 13 years I led a coven with my husband/high priest, Canyondancer. I've presented workshops and conducted private and public rituals (including legal weddings), here and abroad.

I've written non-fiction books and novels about Wicca, and I'm available to consult with others who are writing about Wiccans and other Pagans. As the Writing Priestess for Mother Earth Ministries-ATC from 2000 to 2019, I answered 100+ letters/month from incarcerated Pagans nation-wide who had questions about Wicca – and I'll be happy to answer the ones you have when you've read this PDF. brochure.

By the way, in person this is a tri-fold brochure – but this way, you get some of the pictures in color!

## WICCA

Most people's first question is, what the heck *is* Wicca?

The short answer is that it's the best-known of several Neo-Pagan religions.

Neo-Pagan? Okay, quick history lesson. Paleo-Pagan religions are the ones practiced by our ancient ancestors, back in the cave days. We don't know exactly what they believed because the only references we have are some burials, votive figurines, and cave paintings. But that's Paleo-Paganism.

Then there's classical Paganism, and that's what was going on in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome (and a few other cultures most of us don't know as much about). Now you might be thinking, wait – Egyptian and Greco-Roman religions were pretty different. And there you've hit upon an important point: we call them all "Pagan" religions, but there are lots of different Pagan faiths, even today.

Which brings us to Neo-Paganism. Modern Pagan religions are diverse, ranging from hybrids, like various Afro-Caribbean faiths, through recreations of Babylonian, Etruscan, and other ancient religions, to modernizations of Greek and Roman practices, restorations of medieval and earlier Pagan practices, like Druidry and Ásatrú (the Viking religion) – to the creation of a mostly new Pagan religion, Wicca.

Wicca's founder, Gerald Gardner, thought he was rescuing a pre-Christian religion from extinction. Influenced by Margaret Murray and other anthropologists, he figured that a lot of British folk customs were remnants of an ancient faith. With many others, he believed that Wicca (a.k.a. witchcraft, but not the bad kind) had gone underground during the Inquisition, and by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in danger of dying out completely.

We know now that all those stories about secret midnight witch meetings are our lore, not our actual history; you can read Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford University Press, 1999) for more about that. Today there are no more witch burnings in the Western world, but there's still a lot of ignorance and prejudice against Paganism and the people who practice it.

Witchcraft is a practice – you know, water-witching (dousing), divination (reading cards or tea leaves), herbal healing, that sort of thing – and it’s very old. Wicca is a religion that incorporates the practice of witchcraft, and it’s only about 75 years old. Does its youth make it less legitimate? Nope. A lot of religions were about 75 years old at one time!

So. Wicca is a Neo-Pagan religion that incorporates some very old ideas about humanity’s relationship with the natural world and draws on folk customs for its form and some of its practice. But ... what are its theological tenets?

Let me digress for a moment: no, you didn’t just catch a typo. Many Wiccans spell *theology* with an *a* because – and this is the first tenet we’ll talk about – our primary divinity is the Goddess.

## Theology/Beliefs

Wicca is a Nature religion, which means that we call Life itself both the source and object of sacredness.

The Great Mother Goddess, by one or another of many names, was once worshipped everywhere. We still know her today as Mother Earth. For Wiccans, she’s a triple goddess: Maiden, Mother, and Crone, represented by the waxing, full, and waning phases of the Moon. ☾☽ She is all that is eternal and generative.

Her consort, the Horned God (no, not Satan) is all that dies and is reborn. “Together,” Wiccans say, “they are one and more than one.” He is the Goddess’ son, her lover – and the Green Man and the Jack o’Lantern, Father Time, and the Lord of the Dance.

The dance is the Spiral Dance of Life, the one that takes us from birth through all the wonders of growth and maturity and repose, through the Gates of Death, and back to the womb of the Mother, from which Wicca teaches us we will be reborn.

Reincarnation is another tenet of our belief, but we don’t all think about it in the classical sense. Are you wearing any gold jewelry? A few of its molecules are probably from Pharaoh’s gold – and that natural recycling is an aspect of reincarnation too.

We know that energy can’t be created or destroyed, so as we see it, there’s nowhere else to go when we die but back around again.

You can guess from all this that we think of life, the universe, and everything – living beings, eco-systems, natural processes, everything – as interconnected. You might put it this way: we are all related on our Mother’s side.

### SOME CORRESPONDENCES

	EARTH	AIR	FIRE	WATER
DIRECTION	North	East	South	West
COLOR	brown, green black	white, yellow	red, orange, gold	blue, green
SEASON	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
TIME OF DAY	midnight	dawn	noon	sunset, dusk
ANIMAL*	stag	eagle	lion	salmon
TOOL	pentacle	wand**	athame**	chalice
ATTRIBUTES	physical strength	thought	passion	intuition

For us, there are five elements: the four physical elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, plus a fifth: Spirit. We represent these in one of our most controversial symbols, the pentagram. ⬠

Different Traditions (denominations) of Wicca assign the physical elements to different points, but for all of us, the top point represents Spirit.

There are lots of metaphysical and magical correspondences with the Elements. Here’s a chart to give you the idea. (Some of us assign these differently, and all of us have longer lists.)

We represent the Elements along with the Goddess and God and our working tools on our altars. All of these things together make a symbolic map of the cosmos.



Here's an example of an altar. This one is round, but many are rectangular.

Some altars are very elaborate and hold sculpted symbols of the Gods, or natural items like antlers and flowers to represent the deities. Some altars are even more austere than the one in the picture.

Our altars are in the center or at the north or east of a Circle. The Circle is our sacred space, and we cast one for every rite. If we're not working in dedicated (never used for anything else) space, we uncast it when our service is over.

We cast our Circles – build our temples/churches – with all the physical Elements, and when this is done, we say we are “between the Worlds.” Here's a sample casting rhyme:

*I cast this Circle now with Fire,  
with Water, and with Earth and Air,  
to create a safe and sacred shire,  
a space that's neither here nor there.*

Fire delineates the Circle, Salt and Water together cleanse the space, and Air charges it – gives it the task of supporting our worship and magic. Each physical Element is invoked at its direction and invited to bring its energies to the Sabbat or Esbat. (A Sabbat is a solar, seasonal holy day; an Esbat is a meeting at the full Moon.) Finally, we invoke the Goddess and the God to join us in our now-sacred space.

These practices reflect our belief that all the Worlds – this mundane world in which we lead our daily lives, and the other worlds, which we might call Faeryland or ‘the Other Side,’ or by other names – are interrelated and in their own ways equally real.

## Magic

Our practices also remind us that the Goddess and God may manifest in us, too, and that magic works through us. And speaking of magic ... what's it about, anyhow?

First, no, it's not like Disney's or any of those TV shows you may have seen. It's more like a cooperation between your inner child's capacity to believe and a grown-up confidence that you can achieve what you need, or at least contribute significantly to making it happen. It's about shaping natural energies to a desired result. **And no, we don't do curses!**

What does magic look like? Sometimes it's acting out what we want to have happen. That can be fairly subtle, like drawing symbols on paper or chanting while you rub oil on a candle you'll burn.

Sometimes it's reciting or singing a spell. But if you're doing magic to affect anyone's life but your own, you *must* have that person's *explicit* permission to work magic for them.

We don't cast curses and we get permission for helpful magic because our ethical guidelines for magic (and everything else) are the Threefold Law and the Wiccan Rede.

The Law says that whatever we put into the Worlds returns to us “threefold.” But that doesn't mean that if you spill coffee on somebody, three people will spill coffee on you. It means that everything we say and do has physical, mental, and emotional consequences.

The Rede says “An [if] you harm none, do as you will.” But “will” doesn’t mean whatever you want or feel like. Your “will” is your deepest purpose in life.

I’ll say again: we never do magic on, at, for, through, by, or to anyone without their specific and informed permission. (No, not even positive, well-intentioned magic. But conversely, we are not obligated to do magic for people just because they ask us to.)

We mostly do magic to improve our lives, to confront our own fears and prejudices, to be more aware of opportunities, to respect others and create win-win situations.

We have differences of opinion, of course, about how to care for each other and the environment. We have different opinions about what constitutes harm, and what might be the meaning of life.

In practical terms this means there are Wiccan soldiers as well as Wiccan pacifists. We are Republicans and Democrats, Libertarians and Greens. We are prisoners and lawyers, teachers and students, parents and children, straight, gay, bi and transgender. We’re every color and ethnicity. We are industrious and lackadaisical, jerks and cool. We’re your next-door neighbors, maybe your best friend or favorite relative (or maybe your favorite author).

Not all of us are “out of the broom closet,” though, because there are still a few people prowling around with Bics and kindling in their pockets, ready to burn us at the stake of prejudice.

## Wicca’s Liturgical Calendar

The Wiccan calendar is called the Wheel of the Year, and it begins at Samhain, pronounced *saw-win* or *saw-wain*, from two Gaelic words that mean “end of summer”. It’s our third harvest festival and a family reunion as well as our New Year.



Yule’s the Winter Solstice; Bride (pronounced breed) is when we first notice days getting longer. Ostara is the Spring Equinox. Beltane is May Day – and yes, many of us do dance the Maypole. Litha (pronounced lee-ha) is the Summer Solstice. Lammas is the first of our harvest festivals, and Mabon, the Autumn Equinox, is the second.

These holy days mark the stages in our God’s life, from his rebirth at Yule through his Springtime growth and Summer maturity to his decline and death (in harvest and hunt) at Mabon. Samhain is when his death becomes gestation – the tomb becomes the womb – and

he once against awaits rebirth.

Our Goddess never dies. And as with the phases of the Moon, she is Maiden, Mother, Crone, and Maiden again. The Goddess’ and God’s cycles don’t exactly match humans’ – because ours aren’t the only lives that cycle!

This brochure’s written by a Wiccan priestess, an ordained clergywoman who will be happy to answer your questions or discuss any aspect of Wicca in greater depth. Your inquiries will be as confidential as you want them to be.

## Just to Clarify

You might have heard some people say that Wicca is Satanic. Nope. Not even.

Satan's a Christian figure, the anti-God. Wicca doesn't have one of those in its pantheon. Our Goddess and God are partners. Their relationship models life and death as complementary, not opposing.



Our Horned God wears the horns and antlers of the game that dies so the hunter's tribe can live. We know him in other symbols, too: the Sun, that daily represents the journey of life, death, and rebirth, and the Green Man, who stands for the cycles of plant life.

This hand-crafted Green Man made from a dollar store mask and "silk" foliage decorates a wall. You can find ceramic versions at many garden centers.

Beneath it, an inherited set of antlers surrounded by a craft-store wreath displays two other symbols of the God – bucks of every sort, and evergreens.



Here's a group celebrating Beltane by dancing a Maypole. (That's 'dancer there at the front.)



The Maypole represents the God, as an erect phallus and as sprouting plants. The Goddess' womb is represented by the ribbons that wrap the pole. The colors of the ribbons represent the diversity of life – and

also correspond to the energies the dance – the spiral dance of life - brings into our lives.

The backyard Circle at right is ready to host a handfasting – a Wiccan wedding – so called because the couple's hands are fastened together with a red cord symbolizing the joining of their lives and souls.



In a Circle, we share a communion we call Cakes and Ale. We bless the Cakes in unison, and feed the person on our left, to keep the energy flowing clockwise, the way the sun moves. (The Ale – which is sometimes juice – is also blessed before the chalice is passed – you guessed it, clockwise.



Not every Wiccan Tradition or coven is the same, but these pictures give you a beginning of an idea what Wicca looks like.

One of Wicca's principles is to take responsibility for ourselves. Like most people of any faith, we try to represent our deities, our religion, and our brothers and sisters in the Craft accurately and with dignity and respect. Sure, you might meet people who call themselves Wiccan and give you a very different impression of the faith – but then, you meet people who say they follow *your* religion

and misrepresent it, too. We appreciate people like you, who make an effort to learn about Wicca rather than believe B-movie scripts and other people's prejudices. Thank you, and blessed be.



We've been at this for a long time, teaching and officiating Sabbats, Esbats, and passage rites. We're retired now; my hair and 'dancer's beard are white - but we're still happy to teach, discuss, and celebrate the Wheel.

O'Gaea has written several books – some of them groundbreaking - about Wicca, including a few novels that feature Wiccan characters.

*In the Shadows of Adventure* details the history and practice of the Adventure Tradition of Wicca that she developed with her husband-priest Canyondancer.

*The Family Wicca Book* was the first to guide families to include their children in the practice of the faith. *Raising Witches* follows up.

*In the Service of Life* is about death, from Wicca's perspective. On the reading list of the Woolston-Steen Theological Seminary, it shows us that "death will always be sad, but it doesn't ever have to be scary again."

Two volumes of *Celebrating the Seasons of Life* (*Samhain to Ostara* and *Beltane to Mabon*) give readers a look at lore, rituals, activities and symbols for each Sabbat.

*Abracadabra for Everyone* showcases magic anyone can do.

For incarcerated Wiccans, Lady O'Gaea co-authored *Enchantment Encumbered* with her colleague Lady Carol Garr. Thanks to their work, *Enchantment* is authorized and popular in prison facilities across the nation.

The Bliss Harper novels (*The Green Boy; The Flower Bride; Maiden, Vampire, Crone; and The Broken Oath*) is about the *almost* ordinary life of a Wiccan priestess, her family, and her coven.

*The Castle Ghosts* and *The Old Mine Ghosts* feature a retired Wiccan priestess who needs a little help dealing with the two ancestral ghosts who decide to move in with her.

These and O'Gaea's other books are available on Amazon. You can get in touch with us through the website, or by emailing us at [AdventureWicca@Comcast.net](mailto:AdventureWicca@Comcast.net).

