

Texas Local Council Covenant of the Goddess

Wiccan General Practices

Historical Roots to Modern Practice

The roots of the religion called Wicca, or Witchcraft, are very old, coming down to us through a variety of channels worldwide. Although any general statement about our practices will have exceptions, the following will attempt to present a basic foundation for understanding. Some of the old practices were lost when indigenous religions encountered militant Christianity and were forced to go underground for survival. The ancient mystery religions were lost when the practice of the rites was stopped and the old oral traditions were no longer available. Parents transmitted their traditions to their children, with parts being lost and new parts created in succeeding generations. These survivals, along with research into the old ways, provide a rich foundation for modern practice. Other factors contributing to the revival of the Craft are archaeological and anthropological studies of the religious practices of non-Christian cultures, the works of the Golden Dawn and other metaphysical orders, and the liberalization of anti-Witchcraft laws.

Modern Witches hold rituals according to the turning of the seasons, the tides of the moon, and personal needs. Most rituals are performed in a ritual space marked by a circle. We do not build church buildings to create this sacred, ritual space -- all Earth is sacred and in touch with the Goddess and so any place, indoors or out, may be consecrated for ritual use.

The Circle

Within this sacred circle, two main activities occur: celebration, and the practice of magic. Celebration is most important at the major seasonal holy days, the Sabbats. At these times, the myths of that particular holiday are enacted in ritual drama, and dancing, singing, feasting, and revelry are all part of the festivities. On these occasions we celebrate our oneness with life on Earth, as well as assimilating on the deepest level myths and archetypes which map and assist our own life-passages.

When the celebration, teaching, or magical work is finished, the blessing of the Goddess (and God) is called into food and drink which are shared by all. The circle is opened, and the space is no longer consecrated.

Magic is more often performed at smaller gatherings, called Esbats, which coincide with the phases of the moon. Types of magic practiced include psychic healing sessions, the focus and direction of energy to achieve positive results, and work toward the individual spiritual development of the coven members. Magic is an art which requires adherence to certain principles, and a conscious direction of will toward the desired end. We believe it to be an attribute of magic that results toward which the will is directed return to the sender as well. Therefore, Witches are very conscientious in their use of magic.

The Tools of a Witch

To create the circle, and in the working of magic, we use tools to facilitate a frame of mind in which the psychic state necessary for this kind of work can be achieved. The tools are part of a complete and self-consistent symbolic system which is agreed upon by the participants and provides them with a "map" for entry into unfamiliar psychic spaces. Such a system, like a map, is arbitrary and not "true" in an absolute sense; it is a guide to a state which is ineffable and can be most clearly reached through the arts (poetry, music, dance, drama) and "starlight" vision.

A primary tool, which is owned by most Witches, is an athame or ritual knife. The athame is charged with the energy of the owner and is used as a pointer to define space (such as casting a sacred circle) and as a conductor of the owner's will and energy.

Other important tools are the symbols on the altar which denote the "Aristotelian" Elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water (some "maps" include Spirit). A pentagram or pentacle (a five-pointed star sometimes surrounded by a circle) is often used to symbolize Earth and its properties -- stability, material wealth, the body, and practical affairs. Alternatively, a small dish of salt or soil can be used to symbolize the Earth Element. A thurible (or censer) or a bell can be used to symbolize Air and its properties -- communications, vitality, intellect and understanding. (A sword or

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wand may be used to symbolize Air or Fire, and many "maps" disagree on with which element the sword or wand should be associated.) A candle or small pot of fire may symbolize the element of Fire and its properties -- will, transmutation, life-force, and power. A chalice of water is used to symbolize the element of Water and its properties -- cleansing, regeneration, and emotion. In the traditions which include the element of Spirit, an ankh or quartz crystal is used to symbolize Spirit and its properties -- perfection, summation, balance, illumination and eternity.

There are many other minor tools which are used for some specific purposes within magical workings, but the tools described above are the basic ones used in the practice of Witchcraft, and many of the minor tools are extrapolations of the basic ones (e.g. the broom of the wand, the sword of the athame, the cauldron of the cup, etc.)

Personal Development

Since these tools are merely the conductors of personal energies, as copper is a conductor for electrical energy, most covens provide at least some degree of training in psychic skills and healing practices to strengthen each member's ability to participate in the religious activities. Each individual decides what level of such training is useful for them. We see psychic abilities as a natural human potential, and are dedicated to developing this as well as all of our positive human potentials.