

WICCA
Lessons in beginning in the Wiccan Tradition

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LESSON 1

“Wicca encompasses your whole worldview and way of life, and is always there in the way you look at and interact with the world. Wicca is an experiential spiritual system of magick and ceremony that works with the divine as both Goddess and God, and emphasises growth through balance and discipline. This balance, be it of light and dark, feminine and masculine, or active and passive, acts as a dynamic tension to create harmony and enable the individual to progress in their development through understanding their relationship with themselves and the world around them. The celebration of the Goddess and God is at the heart of Wicca. The patron Goddess of Wicca is usually associated with the Moon, although she is also often seen as having stellar, terrestrial and chthonian forms. The patron God of Wicca is usually associated with forests, plants and animals; he is also sometimes seen as having solar and chthonian forms.”

[Extract from CIRCLE OF FIRE by Sorita D'Este & David Rankine]

Wicca can also be described as a nature focused spirituality, which draws on the beliefs and practices of pre-Christian cultures, blended with ceremonial magick, witchcraft, Gnosticism, Thelema and Hermetics. The terms “Wicca” and “Witchcraft” are often used interchangeably, but it is important to note from the beginning of your journey that there are some differences. Keeping these differences in mind will help prevent misunderstandings and will help you focus your learning and practice in a direction which suits you best, rather than wasting time and energy arguing definitions! It is correct to say that all Wiccans are Witches, but important to keep in mind that not all Witches are Wiccans.

Wicca was first made “public” by a man called Gerald Gardner back in the 1950’s and has since grown and evolved. There are many debates about where the practices originated from (if you want to learn more about the history of Wicca, we recommend you read “Triumph of the Moon” by Prof. Ronald Hutton) but although it is important to have a firm grasp of the history of the tradition, it is also important to always keep in mind that as with all magickal traditions, it is the experience and understanding which comes through practice which is the most important aspect.

For many years Wicca was viewed as an initiatory tradition. That is, that in order to learn and experience the tradition fully, it was necessary to find a coven who are both willing and able to accept you as a trainee, work with them, receive initiation and then continue working with them for a few years until such time that you decide you wish to start your own coven.

In some respects not much has changed. It is still true that to fully understand and experience the tradition initiation into the tradition and work with a coven will be of great help. However, now that so much has been written about the tradition (books and websites) it is possible to gain a good understanding of both the spirituality and practices of Wicca. It is even possible to experience some of the mystical aspects.

Learning by yourself is however not an easy path, as you will need to read through dozens of books, spend a great deal of time and energy experimenting to find the methods which work best for you and learn to discriminate between the books which offer good information and those which have been written with a “fast buck” in mind. The latter often seems to be written by people with little understanding and experience of the tradition themselves. (Someone who learns the traditional way, by receiving initiation into a coven and then learning and practicing, will typically take a minimum of 5 years to reach the point at which they are qualified to start teaching!)

Ultimately, to be a “Wiccan” you need to have a both an understanding of the tradition, experience of the spiritual and practical aspects of the tradition, and firsthand experience of the mysticism inherent in the tradition. Wicca combines magick and mysticism with spirituality. In addition you will also need to actually be practicing the tradition through celebration of the seasonal “Wheel of the Year” Sabbats, Moon Ceremonies (Esbats) and through applying the principles, ethics and spiritual life to your everyday life. It is not as easy as it sounds, nor does it suit everyone!

Wiccan ritual is not the same as every other tradition in the modern Pagan movement. It follows a set pattern, in which sacred space is created in the form of a magick circle, the Guardians of the Four Elemental Realms are invoked, the Goddess and God are invoked, celebrations and magickal workings are performed, cakes and wine are

blessed and which ends when the circle is opened at the end. Many modern pagan traditions have taken their ideas from the Wiccan tradition and follow roughly the same structure, although they may apply different symbolism and ideals to each stage.

Witches may sometimes have the same spiritual beliefs as Wiccans, they may even share some of the same practices. However the term Witchcraft is applied in different ways in different cultures and can for this reason mean a variety of things. Witchcraft is a term which can be used to describe magick which draws primarily on the energies of Earth, for this reason Witchcraft is sometimes referred to as “Low Magick” rather than the “High Magick” of Magickians who more often draw energies from the stars and planets. Of course, yet again, there are overlap and Witches may sometimes also work with planetary and stellar energies, and Magickians may sometimes draw energy from the Earth. Witches tend to focus less on “ceremony” than Magickians, where as Wicca takes a bit from both worlds.

Witches are not all spiritual, although all Witches will have a belief in a higher power of some type. Witches do not all believe in or venerate a Goddess or God. Witches may have Christian, Muslim, Hindu or any number of other religions (even if those religions object to witchcraft!), for this reason it is a good idea to clarify the term when you are using it, this can be done, for example, by saying you are a “Pagan Witch”. The term “Witch” is considered by many to be a misappropriation of the term. It was used in the past to describe mythical haglike creatures who ate babies and could fly through the air, it was used to describe those who practiced negative magickal practices - or who were perceived to do so. For the purposes of this website the term is used to mean someone who practices Modern Western Witchcraft, within the context of modern Neo-Paganism.

So in summary: Wiccans follow a specific set of beliefs, and a specific way of performing ceremonies - although there is flexibility, it is certainly not the same as everyone who practice witchcraft or magick. For this reason, Wiccans may all be Witches, but not all Witches are Wiccan, nor are all who practice Magick Witches or Wiccans!

EXERCISE 1

a. Spend some time in a place where you will not be disturbed. Think about your own beliefs in regards to deity (God / Goddess), Nature, Life, Death and what happens to the soul after Death. Make some notes in your notebook. At a later stage we will return to these notes and re-examine them.

b. Write a short definition of the Wiccan tradition - based both on the information provided in Lesson 1 and other books / websites you have read. Write a list of questions for yourself in regards to points which you are unclear on and return to them as you progress through the lessons to see if you are able to answer all of them by the end of this short course.

LESSON 2

The Origins of Wicca

There are many debates about the origins of Wicca. Some say that Gerald Gardner “made it all up” whilst others argue that Gerald Gardner was only passing on rituals and beliefs which he himself was taught in the “New Forest Coven”. The history of Wicca is a huge subject and if you are interested in finding out more we would recommend you obtain copies of the following books for a rounded view:

- The Triumph of the Moon by Prof. Ronald Hutton
- Wiccan Roots by Philip Heselton
- Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration by Philip Heselton
- Wicca Magickal Beginnings by Sorita d’Este & David Rankine

However, although the history is an interesting and important part of our inheritance, it is not necessary to be a historian in order to start exploring the beliefs and practices of the Wiccan tradition.

What is true is that regardless of where Wicca originated it has been largely practiced as an initiatory tradition for the last 60+ years. Key figures in its development in Great Britain include:

- Gerald Gardner
- Doreen Valiente
- Patricia Crowther
- Alex Sanders
- Maxine Sanders
- Stewart Farrar

There are of course many more and today many people continue to carry the torch for the tradition by making available information, sharing ideas, teaching, facilitating covens and giving workshops / lectures on the Craft to those who are interested.

When examining key texts of the tradition - such as those presented to initiates in the Book of Shadows (some of which has been published in “The Witches Bible” by Stewart and Janet Farrar) it is clear that the rituals (although not all the beliefs) has been heavily influenced by three older traditions of magick:

- The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (GD)#
- The Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO)
- The Grimoire Tradition (Key of Solomon, Goetia, Heptameron)

When examining the beliefs and spiritual components of the tradition it becomes clear that this has been influenced by:

- Ancient Greek and Roman Religion and Magick
- Celtic and British Folk Customs and Magick
- Egyptian Religion and Magick
- Hermetic, Alchemical and Qabalistic thought

Of course there have been many other influences also and it has become increasingly popular and accepted that individual High Priestesses and High Priests adapt their rituals and other workings through experience, passing on both the traditional and revised practices to their own initiates.

EXERCISE 2

a) Spend some time thinking about what influenced you to find out more about the Wiccan tradition. Was it something you read, experienced or did a friend spark your interest? Make notes about this under the heading “Sparking my Path” (or something like that!) in your notebook. Again this is something that you will return to in time.

LESSON 3

Initiation, Self Dedication & Wicca

You would already have heard the term “initiation” in lessons 1 & 2. But what exactly does it mean within the context of the Wiccan tradition and how is it applied in the tradition?

Traditional “Gardnerian” and “Alexandrian” covens, as well as other derivatives which follow a Wiccan initiatory structure will typically have three degrees. These are usually:

- First Degree - Initiation as a “Witch & Priestess”; “Witch & Priest” or “Witch”.
- Second Degree - Initiation/ Elevation as a “High Priestess”/”High Priest” or “Priestess” / “Priest”
- Third Degree - Initiation/Elevation as a “High Priestess & Witch Queen” or “High Priest & Magus”

These titles are only used in regards to the tradition and only the REALLY pretentious and egotistical go around calling themselves anything of the kind all the time!

Some covens also have a stage before first degree which is called “probationer” or “neophyte” or “trainee” or “dedicant”. It is usual that a person starts their journey with a coven with a simple ceremony in which they pledge to study and walk the path towards initiation - this is done to both the Goddess and God, as well as to the coven they are working with as a sign of their commitment. Typically a period of “a year and a day” is spent in this pre-initiation stage of training, allowing time for the trainee to see whether or not Wicca is something they wish to pursue further and also for both the trainee and coven members to get to know each other, so that they can be sure that they wish to continue working together. I like to describe the probationer stage as “dating before marriage” - for some it is immediately apparent that is the right thing, where as other relationships may take longer - so although the “year and a day” is the norm, it is not unusual to find that some people may be initiated sooner where as for others it may take several years before they are ready to take the step!

What is the purpose of initiation?

Initiation is one of the ways in which mysticism is expressed in Wicca. Those who undertake first degree initiation aligns themselves with the tradition through the experience knowing that everyone else who is of the same tradition has undergone the same experience too. Without the shared experience, alignment to the “current” (a term used to describe the energy of the tradition) is difficult, although not completely impossible.

Initiation is an entrance into the tradition and a commitment to it. It is also a commitment to the Gods and to oneself. Of course it is possible to make these pledges as a solitary, but they would take a different form - a process which is usually called “self-dedication” and at times incorrectly “self-initiation”.

EXERCISE 3

- a) Consider the idea of initiation. Is this something you think you would wish to pursue at some point in the future? Why? Again make notes for yourself in your notebook.
- b) Consider the idea of self-dedication. In such a ceremony, which is personal by its very nature, you will make a pledge to yourself and to the Gods to continue your learning and practice. Is this something which appeals to you? Why? Again make notes for yourself in your notebook.
- c) What are the differences between initiation and self-dedication? Can you think of any other differences which we did not mention?

LESSON 4

Wiccan Beliefs

The Egyptians had many different practices, as did the Greeks and the Romans and the Celts. Wicca is one of the many that exist today and within Wicca there are many different traditions, all with slightly different practices and spiritual focus. All Wiccans do however share some common beliefs, although they may express and experience those beliefs in different ways: Typically the shared spiritual beliefs include:

- Divinity is plural - expressed through both the masculine (God) and feminine (Goddess). Wiccans may be henotheistic, polytheistic or pantheistic - or a combination of these.
- That the Moon, Sun and Earth are important planetary bodies from which power can be drawn. That the Moon, Sun and Earth are all part of the sacred divine - usually expressed as the Moon Goddess, Sun God and Earth Goddess.
- That the changing seasons on Earth yields important symbolic changes in our personal lives too. The celebration of the “turning of the wheel” (ie. The Wheel of the Year Sabbats) play an important role in Wicca.

EXERCISE 4

a) Write down the names of each of the seasons on a clean page in your notebook: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Under each heading write down notes for yourself on what the season represents for you and what your local area looks like during that season, what the trees are doing, which animals you typically see during each season etc.

b) Create a page for “Goddess and God”. Now make some notes on how you view divinity. Do you see the Goddess and God as being part of a greater whole, do you see them as individual, do believe that there are many Gods and Goddesses who all have individual names and individual personalities? Do you believe that the divine is inherent in all life - animal, mineral and plant?

LESSON 5

Wiccan Ethics

“An It Harm None - Do as ye Will”

The Wiccan Rede : “An It Harm None - Do as ye Will” is the central moral / ethical code of the Wiccan Tradition. Interpretation of this is down to the individual practicing Wicca, the stress is on personal responsibility for both magickal and mundane action.

Note: There are various “poetic” versions of the Rede widely published today. Although some of them are very magickal sounding and beautiful, the Wiccan Rede itself is only the eight words given above, the rest as they say, is just “poetry”!

If you are unable to take responsibility for your actions, then practicing magick (in any tradition) is probably a bad idea - regardless of whether or not you believe in the Rede or decide to follow it.

“Wicca has a simple ethical code which is expressed in the eight words "An it harm none, do as ye will". This phrase is called the 'Wiccan Rede', and it was first used publically by Doreen Valiente in 1964. This phrase most probably derives from Aleister Crowley's famous axiom "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law. Love is the Law, Love under Will." Crowley himself drew his inspiration from St Augustine's phrase "Love, and do what thou wilt", and Francois Rabelais' novel Gargantua (1534).

Rede is said to be an old word for 'council' or 'advice', which is exactly what the Wiccan Rede is - it is a philosophical statement which has many possible applications and interpretations.

The Wiccan Rede provides you with a personal guideline which you can use whenever you need to make an important decision. Not just decisions in regard to magickal workings, but also in your every day life. The

Wiccan Rede places the emphasis on personal responsibility for all your actions. It says "hold on a minute, do you need to do that? How will your actions affect you? Are you sure you want to go ahead?"

The Wiccan Rede helps you to think about cause and effect, which is an essential part of magickal work. It is up to you to decide whether or not you should proceed. Some people find that the meaning of the words change for them as they gain in experience. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that hurt and harm are not quite the same thing. If you follow the Wiccan Rede you should strive towards always giving careful consideration to all your actions."

Extract from the book 'Circle of Fire' (2nd edition) by Sorita d'Este & David Rankine, 2008

EXERCISE 5

- a) Note down the Wiccan Rede on a clean page in your notebook.

- b) Spend some time thinking about what the Rede means to you and what it means to you? Is this something you could apply to your life? How would you apply it to everyday situations? Make notes on the various issues you can think of where the Rede would be helpful and where it may seem impossible.

LESSON 6

What do Wiccans Do?

Coven Wiccans

They will meet for the eight seasonal festivals, as well as at the Full Moon to celebrate their Gods and do their magick. Covens usually expect their members to spend a period of time working and learning with them, prior to accepting them as a full member in a ceremony of initiation. People usually stay in a coven for a number of years and may decide to “hive” and form their own coven when they feel ready.

Ritual celebrations and workings are usually followed by a feast, during which the work may be discussed and members socialise whilst sharing food and drinks. The seasonal festivals are known as Sabbats and the Full Moon ceremonies are called Esbats.

Coven Wiccans have the benefit of peers with whom they can discuss problematic workings, share and develop ideas with and who will encourage them when things are difficult. Coven Wiccans also have the benefit of a group of people who can all put energy into a working together (which in a good coven will be far more effective than a person can do by themselves). Additionally, if it is a good coven, they will also have the benefit of regular training sessions with the High Priestess and High Priest of the coven, in which they will be encouraged to and instructed on a variety of techniques and methods which may not be that easy to master alone.

Solitary Wiccans

Solitary Wiccans are often Wiccans who have in the past worked with a Coven, but who for one reason or another is unable to do so at the present time. For example: - It may be that there are no coven accepting new members in their local area to where they live, or that they are simply unable to attend meetings due to family or work obligations.

Some Solitary Wiccans are people who have been unable to find a coven to work and learn with, or who at the present time is unable to commit to a Coven. They are self-taught from books and websites - and often supplement their training by attending public celebrations, workshops and conferences.

Solitary Wiccans will usually also celebrate the seasonal Sabbat festivals, but may do so with others in public ceremonies. They may practice further magickal work at the Full Moon, but as they work by themselves they can be more flexible about the timing of their rituals. As such they are able to fit magickal and spiritual work in around their own lifestyle more easily.

In reality most Coven Wiccans also do regular Solitary work, as it is rare for Covens to meet more than (at the very most) once or twice a week.

EXERCISE 6

- a) Do you want to work in a Coven or do you think that working solitary is more suitable to your lifestyle. ?
Make a list of the pro's and con's for each.

- b) How many days a month are you able to set aside for your magickal and spiritual work?

LESSON 7

The Goddess and God

All Wiccans share a believe in divinity as being plural, both male and female, God and Goddess. The way in which divinity is expressed through different beliefs and philosophies - Wiccans may be henotheistic (all Gods and Goddesses are part of a greater whole); polytheistic (there are many Gods and Goddesses) or pantheistic (Divinity is present in and inherent in all life on Earth, animal, mineral and plant). All Wiccans believe in a female Deity, The Goddess, who is worshipped/celebrated alongside Her male companion, often seen as the Horned God. In Wicca, the Goddess is usually represented by the Moon and the God by the Sun, there are however many different pantheons from which Deities might be drawn from, many Wiccans prefer to work with the Celtic Deities, in particular the Welsh and Irish Gods and Goddesses. The Goddess is often invoked as Aradia, Hekate, Ceridwen, Diana, Arianrhod The God is often invoked as Cernunnos, The Horned God, Herne, Pan, Gwyn Ap Nudd, Llugh

Wiccans celebrate the union of the Goddess & the God in a ceremony known as "The Great Rite" which celebrates the union of male & female and is usually only performed by initiates of second or third degree. The ceremony of Cakes and Wine which is performed at almost all Wiccan rituals is another way in which the union of the Goddess and God is celebrated and expressed. Polarity, be it male / female, light/dark or any other interaction between opposites is a theme central to many of our practises and rituals.

Wicca is a life-affirming and positive spiritual path. Wiccans often personify the changes in nature as different aspects of the Goddess and God. So for example, we celebrate the rebirth of the Child of Promise, the Solar God, at the Winter Equinox (Yule) and we celebrate the return of the beautiful Goddess of Life at the Spring Equinox.

EXERCISE 7

- a) Spend some time thinking about your own beliefs again. Write some additional notes on your views on the Goddess and God. (*See Lesson 4 Exercises)

- b) Do some additional reading on the Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Norse and Celtic pantheons. Is there one of these which appeal to you more than the others?

LESSON 8

Introducing the Wheel of the Year

The Sabbats are seasonal festivals which mark the turning of the Wheel of the Year and the cycles of nature. Most western pagans celebrate eight sabbats; the Summer and Winter Solstices, the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes and the quarter days or fire festivals - Samhain, Imbolc, Beltaine and Lughnasadh.

These sabbats help you tune in to the cycles of nature as they exist within you as well as without. The idea of the eight-fold Wheel of the Year was created by Ross Nicholls and Gerald Gardner in the 1950's. The festivals themselves, however, are very old, and mark important times in the agricultural cycle of the year. All of the eight sabbats were celebrated in the ancient world, but not all necessarily by the same people or in the same place. It should be remembered that the energies at different times of the year are different depending on where you are. If you are living in the southern hemisphere, the seasons and therefore the festivals are reversed.

It is important to try to learn what you can about the myths, legends, beliefs and festivals of the land you live in, to enable you to tune in to the natural energies as perceived by the inhabitants of the land through time.

SAMHAIN - 31st OCTOBER

Samhain, or Halloween, is the death festival, marking the descent of Winter. The leaves are falling from the trees in drifts, and life is drawn away from the surface of the earth, and descends deep into the earth. Life is now in the roots and bulbs of plants which rest over the Winter. The Horned God who was Lord of Life and the Wild Greenwood has now truly taken His throne as Lord of the Underworld, the dread Lord of Shadows, the comforter of souls. The earth prepares for sleep and draws energy inwards. This is a time for introspection, as we too draw our energy within and prepare for the Winter. The Earth is becoming cold, and barren, and we see Her as the Cailleach, the Crone, the Wise One. She is the Dark Mother who devours the God that She may give birth to Him again. Her womb is also the tomb, and the Underworld, and the Horned God thus resides within Her womb over the Winter months. Samhain is a time of transformation and inner work. It is also a sombre time of remembrance, when we remember and honour

those who have died. The veil is thinnest between the worlds and we call on the spirits of the dead and invite them to feast with us on this, the feast of death. We call upon our ancestors and contact the ancient wisdom. It is a time of endings, but also a time of beginnings, as Samhain is a Celtic New Year's Eve festival. Thus we give up the past and look to the future, and it is also a good time for skrying. It is the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. Samhain is a good time for banishings, and for sorting out unfinished business. At Samhain we look back and take stock of the past year and contemplate what we have learned. Samhain is also the time to face our shadow, the dark side of ourselves. We find no wild flowers blooming, yet the colours of nature are rich and warm. Magick mushrooms grow to help us explore other realms, to make the veil thinner still. Samhain is also a harvest festival, but a harvest of flesh. The livestock would be killed at this time so that there would be meat throughout the bleak Winter. The wind blows, Jack Frost makes patterns on our windows and the mists rise. It is no wonder this season is one of mystery.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE: YULE - 21st DECEMBER

Yule is the time we celebrate the return of the waxing sun. Light and life can be seen to be returning and conquering death. Yule is a turning point, a point of change, where the tides of the year turn and begin to flow in the opposite direction. It is the darkest time of the year, the time of the longest night, but there is the promise of the return of light. We encourage the sun to rise and to grow in power, and we remember the seasons of plenty. Magickally we bring back the season of plenty, and we feast on rich foods and drinks. The fir tree represents life amidst death, it is evergreen, representing everlasting life, and lasting friendship. Holly and Mistletoe bear berries at this time, symbolizing fertility. Mistletoe berries are white, representing the semen of the Horned God, the Holly berries are blood red, symbolizing both the menstrual blood of the Goddess and the sacrifice of the God. Evergreen trees also represent youth and freshness, and are symbols of the promise of spring. A yule custom, still practised at Christmas is to dress an evergreen tree, and make offerings. We honour the spirit of the tree, and what it represents. It is sad that a custom of honouring the living tree has been replaced by the meaningless decoration of ghastly plastic or tinsel trees, or the cutting down of thousands of living trees so that people can have them in their living rooms for a couple of weeks, and then dump them, causing environmental damage. It is far better to honour a living tree, outdoors. The tree may be decorated with appropriate offerings, fruit, decorated pine cones, jewellery, symbols of

the sun, symbols of fertility, birds, animals, etc. At yule we say goodbye to the dying sun, and wait through the long, cold night for the sun's rebirth. The night belongs to the Goddess, and is a night of waiting, through her pregnancy, for the Child of Promise. In the morning we greet the new sun and celebrate the waxing year. The rising sun brings the promise of the spring and the gifts that will bring. It is still a long time before the sun will be strong, but we hope and we trust. The sun is now the Child of Promise, the young hero God. It is a time of making wishes and hopes for the coming year, and of setting resolutions. From the darkness comes light.

IMBOLC or BRIDE - 1st FEBRUARY

The Festival of Imbolc or Bride, is celebrated around 2nd February by Pagans, and by Christians who call it Candlemas. Imbolc is Irish- Gaelic, translated variously as "in the belly" and "ewe's milk", and represents the quickening of Light and Life. The first stirrings of the coming of Spring can be seen, as the first flowers (snowdrops and winter aconite) begin to appear. Seeds which have lain dormant within the Earth over the cold Winter months begin to stir with life, as yet unseen. At Imbolc we celebrate the Waking Light of the soul. Our spirits begin to quicken as we anticipate the rebirth of Nature. In Wicca it is the traditional time for initiation. Now is the time for the banishing of Winter and the welcoming of Spring. We welcome the Goddess Who is renewed, reborn as the Flower Maiden. She has passed through Her phase as the Hag, Crone or Wise One, and is a Maiden again. Bride or Brigid is a three-fold Celtic Goddess who has been christianized into St. Brigid, whose day is celebrated on 1st February. In Ireland, St. Brigid's cross is made of rushes and straw, and goes back to pre-Christian times, representing the Sun Wheel or Fire Wheel. It may also be linked to an ancient ceremony connected with the preparation of the grain for sowing in the Spring. It was believed that the Spirit of the Grain, or the Goddess Herself, resided in the last grain harvested, and the last grain from the Harvest Festival was ritually brought into the house at Imbolc, blessed and planted as the first seed of the next harvest. The grain may also be made into a female figure, the Brideog (little Brighde) and dressed. Bride's bed is made, and She is welcomed in. The Goddess is seen in Her three aspects at Imbolc, as the new-born Flower Maiden; the Mother, or bride of fertility, awaiting the fertilizing Sun God, and the Dark Crone of the dark half of the year. The sun is growing in strength, the Child of Promise, re-born at Yule, is now the Conquering Child. What was born at the Solstice begins to manifest, and this is the time for individuation, as we each light our own light, and set ourselves tasks and challenges. We nurture and kindle our resolutions and begin to look outwards again, do outer activity, although first we look deep within to discover what

potential lies there waiting to be fulfilled. Through the weeks ahead the days grow gradually longer, but we are still in the dark half of the year (until Beltaine) and this is the time to develop non-physical skills, such as psychometry, clairvoyance and precognition.

EOSTRE: THE SPRING EQUINOX - 21st MARCH

This festival is named after the Anglo-Saxon Goddess Eostre or Eastre, also known in Old German as Ostara. Little is known about this Goddess, except that her festival was celebrated at the Spring Equinox, and became Easter, and that She was a Goddess of fertility. She was later connected with hares and eggs. She may also be connected with the Greek Eos and the Roman Aurora, both Dawn Goddesses, and with the Babylonian Ishtar and Phoenician Astarte, both love Goddesses. The Anglo-Saxon lunar month, which became April, was called Eastermonath. The equinox is a time both of fertility and new life, and of balance and harmony. Light and dark are here in balance, but the light is growing stronger. It is a time of birth, and of manifestation. Daffodils, tulips and crocuses are all in full bloom, blossom appears on trees and catkins can be found on the hazel and willow. Rites are best performed at dawn or dusk, (but better at Dawn) that time between light and dark. The days grow lighter and the earth grows warmer. As at Imbolc, seeds may be blessed and planted. Seeds of wisdom, understanding, and magickal skills may also be planted. Eggs may be used for the creation of talismans, or ritually eaten. The egg is a symbol of rebirth, and its yolk represents the sun, its white, the Goddess. Egg production in hens is stimulated when the bird's retina is stimulated by more than 12 hours of light, thus more eggs are produced after the equinox. This is a time both of growth and of balance, and we may work on balancing ourselves and the subtle energies within us, such as our chakras, the inner masculine and feminine qualities, the light and dark aspects, etc. The equinox is also the time of Persephone's return from the underworld, to re-unite with Her mother Demeter, making the earth green again. This is the time of spring's return, the joyful time, the seed time, when life bursts forth from the earth and the chains of winter are broken. It is a time of balance when all the elements within must be brought into new harmony. The Prince of the Sun reaches out His hand, and the Kore, the maiden, returns from the dark underworld. Where they dance, wild flowers appear, sorrow turns to joy, and scarcity turns to abundance.

BELTAINE - 1st MAY

The Spiral Dance Beltaine (also spelled Bealteinne, Bealtaine and various other ways) is the beginning of the Celtic Summer, the light season of the year. Like Samhain, it is a time when the veil is thin between the worlds, a time to communicate with spirits, particularly at this time nature spirits. In Irish Gaelic, Bealtaine is the name of the month of May. In Scottish Gaelic Bealtuinn means May Day. The word originally meant "Bel Fire", and Beltane is associated with the Celtic God Bel, also known as Balor or Belenus. Bel is a God of Light and Fire and has been equated with the Greek Apollo, and associated with the Sun, although He is not specifically a Sun God. Fires were traditionally built at Beltane, and people would jump over the fire. Young, unmarried people would leap the bonfire and wish for a husband or wife, young women would leap it to ensure their fertility and couples leap it to strengthen a bond. Cattle were driven through the ashes or between two Beltane fires to ensure a good milk yield. The maypole, still used in Mayday festivities, represents both the phallus and the Goddess. It is also the World Tree connecting the three Worlds, its root in the Underworld, its branches in the Heavens. The shaman's spirit may travel between the realms via the World Tree, and the phallus is also connected with life, love and death. The phallus and the World Tree may be seen as two aspects of the God in His relationship to the Goddess in His cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The May Queen is still elected in many village May Day festivals, although the May King is largely left out these days (apart from in Pagan circles). The May King is the Green Man, and was often covered entirely with leaves. The mating of the Green Man with the Goddess as Queen of May was a magickal act considered necessary for the fertility of the Earth. Beltane is a time of fertility and is also an excellent time for Handfastings, the couple enacting the HeirosýÓgamos, or sacred marriage. The Hawthorn tree (also called the May tree) blossoms at this time, and we are in the Hawthorn month. The blossoms can be gathered, and a delicious wine made from them, to be drunk the following Beltane. Celebrate Beltane by taking pleasure in life and enjoying the gifts of the Goddess.

LITHA: SUMMER SOLSTICE - 21st JUNE

At the Summer Solstice the sun is at its highest and brightest and the day is at its longest. The Lord of Light has fought the powers of darkness, and is triumphant, ensuring fertility in the land. But in so doing so, He sows the seeds of His own death. The Wheel turns and the Dark God (the Holly King) begins to wax in power as the Light God (Oak King) wanes. The Goddess shows Her Death- in-Life aspect, the Earth is fertile, and all is in bloom, the Goddess reaches out to the fertilizing Sun God at the height of His powers. At the same time She presides over the death of the God. The Goddess dances Her dance of Life and Death, the Sun God loves Her, and dies of His love. The Summer Solstice is a time of fulfilment of love. Flowers are in bloom everywhere, i.e. in sexual maturity, ready for pollination, fertilization, yet once fertilized they die that the seeds and fruits may develop. At the same time, summer fruits appear, for a short but delicious season. June was considered by some to be the luckiest month to be married in, and is the time of the mead moon, or honey moon. A tradition was for newly weds to drink mead daily for a month after their wedding, hence the post wedding holiday being named the honeymoon. Although the days begin to grow shorter after the Summer Solstice, the time of greatest abundance is still to come. The promises of the Goddess and God are still to be fulfilled. This is a time of beauty, love, strength, energy, rejoicing in the warmth of the sun, and the promise of the fruitfulness to come. It seems a carefree time, yet in the knowledge of life, is the knowledge of death, and beauty is but transitory. We celebrate life, and the triumph of light, but acknowledge death, and the power of the Dark Lord which now begins to grow stronger. At this time of year, our physical energy is generally at its peak, and we are active and strong. Games involving a show of strength, such as tug of war, wrestling, etc. are appropriate here, and are often staged at summer fayres. This can be considered a remnant of pagan customs involving the battle between the light and dark Gods.

LUGHNASADH - 1st AUGUST

Lughnasadh or Lammas is celebrated on August eve or August 1st and is the festival of the first of the harvests. Lammas is the Anglo-Saxon name for the festival, meaning Loaf mass. Lughnasadh is the festival of Lugh, a Celtic God of Light and Fire and God of crafts and skills. His Welsh form is Llew Law Gyffes, and in the Mabinogion story of Blodeuwidd and Llew, the theme of Llew as the sacrificed God can be seen (we need of course to consider the pre-Christian origins of the story). Gronw can be seen as the Dark God of the Waning year, and Llew as the Bright Lord of the Waxing year, Blodeuwidd represents the Goddess in Her Flower Maiden aspect. Lammas or

Lughnasadh then has the theme of the sacrificed God of the harvest, but he is sacrificed and transformed, rather than descending into the underworld to become Lord of Death, which comes later in the year. Lammas is a time of the fullness of Life, and a celebration of the bountiful earth. It is a time of the sacrificial mating of Goddess and God, where the Corn King, given life by the Goddess and tasting of Her love is sacrificed and transformed into bread and ale which feeds us. The main themes of Lammas may therefore be seen as thanksgiving to the Goddess for Her bountiful harvest, stating our hopes for what we wish to harvest (for Lammas is the very beginning of the harvest), sacrifice, transformation, and a sharing of the energy of the Corn King.

MODRON: THE AUTUMNAL EQUINOX - 21st SEPTEMBER

The two equinoxes are times of equilibrium. Day and night are equal and the tide of the year flows steadily, but whilst the Spring Equinox manifests the equilibrium before action, the Autumnal Equinox represents the repose after action, the time to take satisfaction in the work of the summer and reap its benefits. The Autumnal Equinox is celebrated on 21st September, and is the second harvest festival, with the fruit being gathered in. We celebrate the abundance of the earth, and make wine from the excess fruit, to preserve the richness of the fruits of the earth to give us joy throughout the year. This is the time of the Vine. The God, who was Lord of the Greenwood in the summer and the Corn King at Lughnasadh now dances His last dance upon the earth, as Dionysus, God of wine, music and dance, before making his descent to the underworld to take up his role as Dread Lord of Shadows. The Lord of Light, the Sun King, His power waning, exists briefly in balance with the Dark Lord before giving way to the growing power of darkness, but the power of the sun is encapsulated in the grape and the fruits of the earth. The wine will remind us of his power throughout the year. The leaves falling from the trees and rotting into the earth are a reflection of the Horned God's journey from the Greenwood to the underworld, deep into the womb of the Mother, where He will reside until He begins to emerge with the new green shoots in the spring. The Autumnal Equinox marks the completion of the harvest, and thanksgiving, with the emphasis on the future return of that abundance. The Eleusinian mysteries took place at this time, during which the initiate was said to have been shown a single ear of grain with the words "In silence is the seed of wisdom gained". The themes then of the Autumnal Equinox are the completion of the harvest, the balance of light and dark, and of male and female, and an acknowledgement of the waning power of the sun and the waxing power of the Dark Lord.

EXERCISE 8

Write down the following questions in your magickal diary and then work through them one by one, you can draw on the material given or use other reference material, remember the more work you put in, the more you will get out of your work so do take your time!

- a) When is the next Sabbat? Which one is it? Explain what this sabbat and the time of the year mean to you and how it affects your environment.
- b) Describe the aspects of the Goddess at the different sabbats/seasons.
- c) Go to a nearby forest or park and gather any items such as leaves, flowers, etc that represent the current season. These items can be put on a shrine if you have one. You can also draw pictures or make something which represent the current season for your own shrine or alter.

LESSON 9

Sacred Space - the Magickal Circle

When performing any magickal work, it is usual to create a sacred or temple space. In the Wiccan tradition, as in many Pagan and Magickal traditions this is normally done by casting a circle around you. The elements are called into the circle after the casting. Casting the circle can be done in a number of ways. One of the simplest ways is to visualize a sphere of blue or gold light forming around yourself and expanding for several yards in each direction.

Other ways include walking round in a circle beating a drum, clapping or using bells, and visualizing the circle being created as you walk round.

Wiccans usually use the sword, athame or wand to draw the circle, walking deosil (clockwise) whilst visualising the circle forming and speaking the words of intent, such as: *"I cast this circle, my circle of power, to be a shield of protection and a boundary between the worlds of Men and the realms of the Mighty Ones. I bless thee and consecrate thee, in the names of the Lady and Lord. The Circle is Cast. So mote it be! "*

Representations of the elements may be carried around the circle, such as a censer or joss stick (air), candle (fire), water (water) and salt (earth) to consecrate and purify the space. Some people also sweep the circle with a besom (broom) prior to casting the circle. Do this by walking deosil (sunwise - which is clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere) sweeping the boundaries of the circle. Circles are generally cast sunwise in the northern hemisphere, starting and finishing in the east, the place of the sunrise. At the end of a ritual, the circle is opened by reversing the casting, so if you visualized coloured light forming a sphere, you take the light back into yourself; if you walked around playing a musical instrument, you walk round anti-clockwise, playing the instrument again, etc. In the Southern Hemisphere, things are usually done in the reverse from how they are done in the Northern Hemisphere - which is due to the way in which the Sun appears to move anti-clockwise through the sky at day. [There are quite a few debates about whether or not this should be done clock or anti-clockwise, so it may be best to consult some books and websites written by people who live and work their magick in Australia or New Zealand for examples and arguments for and against.]The circle should be opened at the end of your rite with words of intent, here is an example: *"By the Earth that is Her body, by the living waters of Her womb, by the fire of Her bright spirit and by the*

Air that is Her breath, the circle is open yet unbroken!" [This is sometimes followed by "May the Love of the Goddess and God go forever in your hearts, merry meet and merry part and merry meet again!" - although if you are working by yourself, that would make no sense whatsoever of course, but if you do decide to work with others then you may want to try using it at the end of the opening of the circle! In our covens we usually have a big "group hug" at the end too]

EXERCISE 9

- a) Write down the words for casting the circle in your magickal diary.
- b) Practice casting a circle, remember to purify the space first. Spend some time meditating on different aspects of the current season in your circle and then open the circle. Write down your experiences in your magickal diary / notebook.

LESSON 10

Sacred Space - Altars and Shrines

An altar is your main working tool storage area during a ritual. Everything you will need for a ritual, such as salt and water, candles, magickal weapons, food and drink, are all placed on the altar so they can be easily reached during a ritual or spell. Altars do not need to have statues of deities on them, although you may do so if you feel it is appropriate to the nature of the work you are performing. A shrine is a devotional area to a specific deity or energy (such as season of the year, element, planet, ancestors). It may be as simple or elaborate as you like, and should contain only items you feel appropriate to the nature of the shrine. Examples of items that may be placed on shrines are flowers, crystals, statues, pictures and candles.

EXERCISE 10

- a) Create a small seasonal shrine. This can be for the next Sabbat or just for the season in general. Collect items from a nearby forest, woodland or from your garden which represents the current season. This may include pine cones, stones, leaves, tree bark, herbs, flowers or anything you find interesting and which represents this time of the year to you. Make a note of the items you have included on your altar and what they represent to you.

- b) Light a candle on your shrine and meditate on the season. If possible burn some incense or joss on your shrine whilst doing so. Write down your experiences in your notebook.

LESSON 11

Air, Fire, Water & Earth - and Spirit- Introducing the Elements

The five elements make up everything in the world around us. They are not merely earth, air, fire, water and spirit - but are concepts, energy states, states of being, philosophical concepts. It is important to realize how fundamental the elements are to our existence. Working with the elements enables us to balance ourselves and remain centred, and promotes growth through realization of imbalances in ourselves (be they qualities, emotions, habits, etc) and the means to change the qualities, through working with them and transmuting them. The aim of any Witch regardless of tradition would include mastering the four elements and bringing them into balance. This can take a lifetime to achieve, but is a goal worth pursuing. The elements make up everything and as such is part of the foundations of practical magick.

AIR : To Know

Direction: East

Tools: Dagger / Athame, Censer, Flute

Time: Dawn

Season: Spring

Colours: Yellow & White

Sense: Smell Concepts: Intellect, Knowledge, Clarity, Discrimination, Mind, Speed, Sound, Intuition

Qualities (+):

Inspiration, Wisdom, Happiness, Hope, Logic, Joy, Analysis, Discernment, Decisiveness

Qualities (-):

Anxiety, Fear, Impulsiveness, Paranoia, Dispersion, Prejudice, Insecurity

FIRE : To Will

Direction: South

Tools: Wand, Rattle, Sistrum

Time: Noon

Season: Summer

Colours: Reds & Oranges

Sense: Sight

Concepts: Energy, Freedom, Success, Drive, Transmutation, Light, Power, Vision

Qualities (+):

Courage, Motivation, Drive, Enthusiasm, Passion, Will, Creativity

Qualities (-):

Fickleness, Vengefulness, Violence, Possessiveness, Fear, Hatred ? Violent, Cruelty. Physical, Anger, Egotism

WATER : To Dare

Direction: West

Tool: Chalice

Time: Dusk

Season: Autumn

Colours: Blues

Sense: Taste

Concepts: Emotions, Dreams, Intuition, Death/Rebirth, Taste, Primal Chaos, Underworld, Unconscious, Blood, Womb

Qualities (+):

Compassion, Sympathy, Empathy, Nurture, Sexuality, Trust, Serenity, Tranquillity, Depth

Qualities (-):

Sadness, Jealousy, Hatred, Insipid, Treachery, Sorrow, Deceit, Spite, Venom

EARTH - To Keep Silent

Direction: North

Tools: Pentacle, Drum

Time: Midnight

Season: Winter

Colours: Greens & Browns Sense: Touch

Concepts: Body, Strength, Stillness, Endurance, Mystery, Power, Healing, Skill, Touch

Qualities (+):

Strength, Steadfastness, Stability, Sensuality, Humility, Selflessness, Patience, Responsibility, Persistence, Realization, Tolerance

Qualities (-):

Laziness, Stubbornness, Greed, Attention? Seeking, Inertia, Domineering, Depression, Melancholy

SPIRIT : To Go

Direction: Centre (Within/Without)

Tools: Cauldron & Sword

Time: Between the Worlds

Season: The Turning Wheel

Colours: Purple, Black, White

Sense: Hearing

Concepts: Will, Harmony, Evolution, Life Force, Transcendence, Sixth Sense, Transformation Continue to Spirit

Spirit is represented by the top point of the upwards pointing pentagram and is said to be present when the four elements are in balance.

EXERCISE 11

- a) Copy the correspondences into your notebook. Write a short description of how you view each of the 5 elements into your notebook, spending time on each re-reading their correspondences and thinking of how they are present in the world around you.

- b) Which is your favourite? Why?

LESSON 12

Exploring the Elements

This is a practical lesson aimed at helping you to gain a deeper understanding of the elements.

Elemental Meditation Exercise #1

Focus on your body and meditate on how each element is present within it. You may become aware of how air is present as the oxygen in your lungs and bloodstream, fire as the nerve impulses and digestive process, water as the blood and bulk of the tissues, earth as the bones, teeth, hair, etc. Contemplate how each element is part of the combination that is you. Write down your experiences for each of the elements on a separate page in your magickal diary.

Elemental Meditation Exercise # 2

Meditate on each element in turn, facing the direction of the element. Start by considering the element in yourself as you have already done, and then visualize whatever feels right for you (e.g. rivers, rain, waterfalls, the sea, etc for water) and see how it makes you feel. If you can, go and be near the element, e.g. by the sea or a river for water, or out in a storm. Consider the presence and action of the elements in our lives around us all the time, and add this to your notes. For example, consider when you have bath - you bathe in water, which cleanses you, then you use a towel (earth) to dry, you may use a dryer on your hair (air, powered by electricity = fire), etc.

When you use this method of perception you will appreciate the elements and their qualities much more, and develop your relationship with them, and see how you can use them to balance yourself. Learning about Magick is very much learning methods of perceiving the world around you in a different way, seeing the little things and gaining a deeper awareness of Nature and of yourself.

LESSON 13

Invoking/Inviting the Quarter Guardians

Sometimes known as "Calling the Quarters"

Having meditated on the elements and experienced them more in your life, you will want to be able to invite them to join you and bring their qualities and blessings into your celebrations and rites. In Wicca, the invocation of the elements is performed after casting your circle. As you call the element raise your arms in the blessing position. The elements are usually called starting in the East, place of Air and new beginnings. You then turn deosil (clockwise) to the South to call Fire, then to the West to call Water and to the North to call Earth, finally turning back to the East to complete the circular motion.

The traditional Wiccan way of invoking the elements, which is published in many books on Wicca is as follows:

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the East, ye Lords of Air; I do summon call and stir you up, to witness our rites and to guard the Circle

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the South, ye Lords of Fire; I do summon call and stir you up, to witness our rites and to guard the Circle

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the West, ye Lords of Water; I do summon call and stir you up, to witness our rites and to guard the Circle

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the North, ye Lords of Earth; I do summon call and stir you up, to witness our rites and to guard the Circle

You may want to invite, rather than command the Elemental Guardians, if that is what you prefer, then here is an example of how you may want to do that:

Powers of Air, I call to you and invite you to join us in this rite, to share your qualities with us; In Love and Truth, we bid you Hail and Welcome!

Powers of Fire, I call to you and invite you to join us in this rite, to share your qualities with us; In Love and Truth, we bid you Hail and Welcome!

Powers of Water, I call to you and invite you to join us in this rite, to share your qualities with us; In Love and Truth, we bid you Hail and Welcome!

Powers of Earth, I call to you and invite you to join us in this rite, to share your qualities with us; In Love and Truth, we bid you Hail and Welcome!

Obviously when you have finished your rite you say farewell to the elements, starting in the North with Earth and moving widdershins (anticlockwise) to Air in the East. This is done before opening the circle, as the closing of a rite is done in reverse order from the opening. Banishing energies and departures are usually performed in a widdershins direction. (anti-clockwise)

Here are the corresponding words to the above invocations:

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the North, ye Lords of Earth; I thank you for attending my rite; and ere you depart to your fair and lovely realms, I bid thee Hail and Farewell.

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the West, ye Lords of Water; I thank you for attending my rite; and ere you depart to your fair and lovely realms, I bid thee Hail and Farewell.

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the South, ye Lords of Fire; I thank you for attending my rite; and ere you depart to your fair and lovely realms, I bid thee Hail and Farewell.

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the East, ye Lords of Air; I thank you for attending my rite; and ere you depart to your fair and lovely realms, I bid thee Hail and Farewell.

Or alternatively:

Powers of Earth, I thank you for joining me and sharing your qualities with me in this rite, and with love and joy and thanks I bid you Hail and Farewell.

Powers of Water, I thank you for joining me and sharing your qualities with me in this rite, and with love and joy and thanks I bid you Hail and Farewell.

Powers of Fire, I thank you for joining me and sharing your qualities with me in this rite, and with love and joy and thanks I bid you Hail and Farewell.

Powers of Air, I thank you for joining me and sharing your qualities with me in this rite, and with love and joy and thanks I bid you Hail and Farewell.

If this is done in a group, you would say "We" rather than "I" and "us" rather than "me" when performing the calling and the farewells, and any other people present should all chorus "Hail and Farewell" after you have said it. You can also change the words for each of the quarters, or write your own. To begin with it is a good idea to use standard words which you can memorise or read for your ceremonies. This is important so that you can both gain confidence and experience of how it is done, and so that you can gain a better understanding of how it works. When you have done this a few times you will better understand of what to include and what not.

EXERCISE 13

a) Practice inviting/invoking and thanking / banishing the Elements in a magick circle. Write down how this changes your circle experience and what you feel when you invoke each in turn.

LESSON 14

A Simple Elemental Ritual

This lesson takes the form of a practical ceremony to the Four Elements. Unless you have previous experience, make sure that you have worked through the previous lessons and exercises before commencing with this ceremony.

Prepare your ritual space, on your altar place a representation of each of the elements.

- Burning incense for Air
- Red Candle for Fire
- Bowl of Spring Water for Water
- A Bowl of ground for Earth

→ Make sure that you will not be disturbed, switch your phone off and take a few deep breaths. Cast a circle, purifying it first.

→ Then invite each of the Elements into your circle:-Air in the East, Fire in the South, Water in the West and Earth in the North.

→ Now take your incense and observe the rising smoke. Observe the patterns the smoke makes as it rises, smell the sweet smells and become aware of Air, which is all around you.

→ Next, meditate for a few minutes on the burning candle. Watch the flame, feel the heat that it is producing. Become aware of the powers of Fire in Nature.

→ Now, take your bowl of water. Smell the water and touch it. Feel the sensation of the water and become aware of the qualities of Water. Its place in Nature.

→ Lastly, take the bowl of Earth. Smell it and touch it. Feel the sensation of the Earth and become aware of the qualities of Earth and its place in Nature.

Now it is time to say farewell to the Elemental Guardians - starting with Earth in the North, then Water in the West, Fire in the South and Air in the East. Open your magick circle and ground yourself by eating some food, bread or cakes are particularly good (ie. carbohydrate rich foods)

FURTHER READING:

If you are interested in exploring the Wiccan Tradition in depth and would like to learn more, I recommend the following published books as a starting point for your studies:

- 50 YEARS OF WICCA by Frederic Lamond
- A WITCHES BIBLE by Stewart and Janet Farrar
- AN ABC OF WITCHCRAFT by Doreen Valiente
- GERALD GARDNER AND THE CAULDRON OF INSPIRATION by Philip Heselton
- LID OF THE CAULDRON by Patricia Crowther
- MAGICK WITHOUT PEERS by Ariadne Rainbird and David Rankine
- THE REAL WITCHES HANDBOOK by Kate West
- TRIUMPH OF THE MOON by Prof. Ronald Hutton
- WICCA by Vivianne Crowley
- WICCA MAGICKAL BEGINNINGS by Sorita d'Este and David Rankine
- WICCA: Circle of Fire by Sorita d'Este and David Rankine
- WICCAN ROOTS by Philip Heselton