A decorative sunburst graphic with yellow lines radiating from a central semi-circle. Four symbols are placed around the top: a triquetra on the left, a circle with a trident in the top center, a five-pointed star in a circle on the right, and a labyrinth on the far right.

The
Definitive Guide
to Wicca, Druidry,
Heathenry, Shamanism
& Other Pagan Practices

PAGAN PATHS

PETE JENNINGS

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Pete Jennings was born in Ipswich, Suffolk, England, in 1953. He has enjoyed a varied career but has now retired as a social worker and psychotherapist. Pete presented a folk show for BBC Radio Suffolk, conducted ghost tours, lectures at conferences and writes articles, reviews and books. He has been a disco DJ, leader of several folk and rock bands, with three albums to his credit. He is a retired President of The Pagan Federation, an international umbrella organisation for Pagan spiritual paths based in the UK. After fifty years of interest in esoteric matters, he is well placed to have gleaned an intimate knowledge of the ideas and personalities that form the many strands of a complex Pagan community. Pete is a devotee of the Heathen tradition of Paganism.

He now lives in an Essex village with his wife Sue, along with a dog called Sasha. He is determined to get his money's worth out of life and aims to grow old disgracefully painting, writing and generally enjoying himself.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- Haunted Suffolk – Tempus (2006)*
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Pete Jennings has also contributed to:

- Modern Pagans: an investigation of contemporary Pagan practices.*
(Eds. V Vale & J. Sulak.) San Francisco: RE/Search (2001)
The Museum of Witchcraft: A Magical History – (Ed. Kerriann Godwin)
Boscastle: Occult Art Co. (2011)
Heathen Information Pack – UK: Pagan Federation (2014)
*The Call of the God: an anthology exploring the divine masculine within
modern Paganism (Ed. Frances Billingshurst) Australia: TDM (2015)*
Pagan Planet: Being, Believing & Belonging in the 21st Century. Ed.
Nimue Brown. Moon Books (2016)
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This book is dedicated to my dear friends Ray and Eric Cowell, as well as all the Pagans who have laughed, cried, celebrated and argued with me. Also, those who encouraged, wrote, got drunk, inspired, welcomed, lectured, put me up for the night, got involved, or simply puzzled me. You are all in here!

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Foreword

I originally wrote *Pagan Paths* in 2002, and in the intervening period, the Pagan scene that I surveyed then has developed beyond my wildest dreams. Inevitably organisations rise and fall, theology advances, and the internet has enabled a global exchange of ideas and information. For those reasons, I have undertaken a complete updating of the original text in this twentieth year.

The results of the 2011 UK Census showed a doubling of the minimum Pagan population to 100,000, but this is agreed to be under-reported and likely to be 120,000 across England, Wales, Scotland and N.Ireland.* The US population is now believed to contain 1.25 million Pagans, and in Australia, Pagans grew to 45,829 in 2001. From surveys and personal experience, I know that the mix of paths has altered as well: whilst modern Pagan populations tend to start as Witchcraft/Wiccan based initially, Druidry, Shamanism, Eclecticism and Heathenism later expand to form over 50 per cent of the total. However, those other traditions have tended to be less divided than the multiplicity of witchcraft forms. Consequently, it has been harder to describe witchcraft compared to other spiritual paths, without retaining any bias towards any particular movement.

Much of the diversification and growth of the Pagan population may be attributed to an explosion of information sources: a

* For details and interpretation of the UK Census in detail as it relates to Paganism see Vivianne Crowley (2014) *Standing up to be counted: understanding Pagan responses to the 2011 British censuses*, Religion, 44:3, 483–501, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2014.903640

small number of books on witchcraft have been overtaken by websites, blogs, and special interest online forums covering every aspect of all forms of Paganism. The development of affordable self-published books and eBooks has enabled a new generation of specialist writers to bypass writing for publishers predominantly interested in mass market content. Some investigate ethics, theology and history for experienced readers who are beyond the need for beginners books. Such authors often distribute them without necessarily going via bookshops. Self-publishing does remove a filter of accuracy and readability previously required by major publishers. However, the advent of academic researchers delving into Paganism within New Religious Movements (NRM) has caused some of the Pagan public to demand better informed and referenced content from all their sources, regardless of how they have been published.

In addition, secretive letter writing under pseudonyms to anonymous box number addresses of the 1980s has given way to more open Paganism, including public moot and camping events. UK Conferences and camps have increased from less than a handful in the 1980s to over twenty regular annual events. The isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated the development of online lectures and seminars, making it easier for international exchanges of information. Several national full-colour glossy magazines have replaced a range of local low budget fanzines. Although prejudice and misinformation still exist, it is far easier to 'come out' as a Pagan now than pre-1990.

Despite the success of the Scottish Pagan Federation in obtaining legal recognition of Pagan handfast weddings in Scotland, the rest of the UK is still lagging. Although the UK government's Home Office recognised Paganism as a legitimate religion within prisons and appointed Pagan 'Chaplains', the UK Pagan Federation has continued to campaign for years to register as a religious charity.

Deceased American service members may now have a Pentagram on their headstone. Yet, despite legislation and officially separating church from state, institutional prejudice against Pagans

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still exists. It is still challenging to identify as a Pagan or even for a business to stock esoteric products in some European countries with a robust Catholic tradition. However, the fall of the USSR has revealed many Baltic states, such as Latvia and Ukraine, where Pagan practices have survived as ‘folk customs’ and are undergoing fervent revivals.

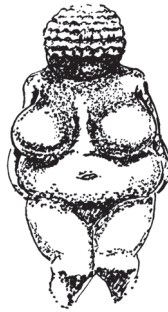
Within the Western traditions of Paganism, we have lost many of our modern pioneers within the last hundred years such as Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Osman Spare and Aleister Crowley. Only a few have been accurately documented for future generations to understand the foundations of their spiritual paths. Many of their documents and artefacts have been lost, dispersed, or destroyed. It is a matter of concern that this process will continue for the second and third generations of Pagan activists unless precautions are taken to preserve their legacy.

I hope that this book helps preserve some knowledge for the future, but more importantly, it helps new Pagans decide their path. The most gratifying result of that is the number of people over the years who have told me that it helped them and that they have recommended it to others. Long may that continue!

Pete Jennings – 2022

Introduction

*O goat-foot God of Arcady!
The modern world hath need of thee!*
(Oscar Wilde)



WHAT IS PAGANISM?

It has been said that if you gather three Pagans together, you get five opinions. Pagans have no absolute source of authority for their spiritual beliefs other than their own conscience and intuition, so have to find their own truths by constantly challenging their own ideas, both privately and in the company of others. That can make it very confusing for an enquirer who wants to find out just what Paganism is. Although no one person can have all the answers (even if there was only one exclusive truth, which there isn't), this book sets out to try to assist that process. Inevitably it will be coloured by my own views, but I hope to provide some wider ranges of opinion by quoting from some of the leading figures within the various paths, and examining the various paths one by one. Although they all have their individual nuances, they also have much in common. Suggestions for practical exercises are included at the end of each chapter, as there are some concepts

that are easier to understand by experience than by reading about them.

THE VARIETY OF PATHS

It is important to realise from the outset that Paganism is a collection of spiritual paths. In the same way that Christianity can include Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Mormon, Paganism can include Traditional, Hereditary, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Seax, Progressive, Eclectic Wicca, Hedgewitches, Druidry, Heathenry and Shamanism, as well as Male and Female Mystery groups. This book explores each of these distinct forms, their subsets and developments. All forms share some common principles, but each has its interpretation of those principles. In general, most Pagans get on well with each other, believing that they have more in common than things that divide them. Well-known Witch and author Teresa Moorey says:

Pagan paths offer ways of rediscovering our mystic heritage and of worshipping without being required to have literal beliefs and lists of rules. Pagans happily acknowledge their unrestrained love of life and its pleasures, but they also undertake responsibility for themselves, humanity and the earth. (Moorey, 1996)

Inevitably, there are always a few who see attacks on ideas as attacks on the person who holds those ideas. Consequently, as in other religions, there have developed several sub-divisions of groupings. Because of the nature of Paganism, people drawn to it tend to be in general strong individuals, capable of thinking for themselves and expressing their opinions. Furthermore, it attracts people who by nature challenge authority. Such a collection of people is not easily led, and when I took over the Presidency of the Pagan Federation (an umbrella organisation for all types of Pagan throughout Europe) I was advised, 'It's like herding cats!'

ETHICS

Because of the wide-ranging nature of Paganism, the Pagan Federation had to come up with some agreed principles that everyone (whatever their individual Pagan beliefs) could agree upon. These Three Principles have been reworded and have had minor alterations made to them over the last 30 years, but have become accepted as a reasonable expression of group feeling by most UK Pagans, as well as those of other countries. I think it is worth quoting them in full:

1. Love for and Kinship with Nature. Reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycles of life and death.
2. A Positive Morality, in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community. This is often expressed as: ‘Do what you will, as long as it harms none.’
3. Recognition of the Divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the female and male aspects of Deity.
(‘What is Paganism?’ leaflet, The Pagan Federation, 2000)

However, adherence to this set of principles is no longer a membership requirement in the UK Pagan Federation. Some paths and individuals took issue with some of the details and perceived Wiccan bias. Therefore, it has been relegated to an advisory status within the Constitution but retained by PF Scotland and PF International. As you can see, it is not a prescriptive list of dos and don’ts, but a set of guiding principles, which a large section of the Pagan community use to measure their actions and choices against. You will find an expansion on these principles as they apply to magic in Chapter 13 (see pages 109–120).

Being individuals, Pagans may well have additional beliefs, for example in reincarnation or the process of karma, but these are not universally agreed upon by all Pagans. Karma is a popular Eastern-derived belief. It says that balance must be maintained,

and that if you harm someone, you should immediately try to right the wrong done, or face having to correct it later in either this or a future life. Thus it assumes an existence of reincarnation as well. It does not speak of punishment, only balancing, although many people misinterpret it as that.

Many other Pagan organisations have very similar sets of agreed principles to those of the Pagan Federation. In the USA, the equivalent major Pagan umbrella groupings, Circle Sanctuary and the Covenant of the Goddess, have similar ethical rules, including exhortations to ‘harm none’ and to respect others’ beliefs and diversity. The common emphasis of these principles is to enable people to live decent, well-balanced and spiritually meaningful lives in tune with the natural world. It is implicit that if a person lives in this way, they are unlikely to do any of the anti-social acts proscribed in the laws of other major world religions.

ORIGINS

Nobody really knows what early European Paganism was like in any great detail. The few contemporary written accounts were usually penned, via a third party, by biased people with no direct contact with the Pagans they were describing. For example, the Roman writer Tacitus writes about Germanic tribes casting runes and celebrating their rites in open-air groves of trees, but these are just two brief paragraphs, written by someone who probably never travelled to their land himself. Historians, archaeologists and Pagans are gradually trying to build up a picture, but it is a jigsaw with many pieces missing, no straight edges and only a damaged image to go by.

Paganism is a collection of the nature-based chthonic¹ folk religions that originally existed before mass conversion to larger world religions such as Christianity and Islam, which often demonised the older deities and spread negative propaganda about them. (Hence lurid accusations of Devil worship, orgies and baby-eating being forever erroneously associated with heathen practices; the Devil is, of course, a Judaeo-Christian invention.) Conversion of Europe to Christianity was a gradual and incomplete process, not

INTRODUCTION

suddenly achieved overnight as suggested in some history books. Often a residual underground subculture of Pagan beliefs, sometimes appearing as folk customs or superstitions, was left, ready to blossom again given the right conditions. We have evidence of this from several Bishops Edicts, forbidding such things as dressing up in animal masks and costumes, which was considered a Heathen practice² It is pointless to pass laws against things that are not being carried out, so at the time of the Edict, these practices must have been extant. What is interesting is that such Edicts (or sometimes Papal Bulls) were issued against different practices periodically, indicating that the earlier ones had been replaced with new ones.

Countries sometimes converted to Christianity, and then lapsed back to Paganism for political expediency, trading deals or simply reflecting the religious values of a new monarch. Some countries had to be 'converted' or 'reconverted' two or three times.³ Some conversions were just token acts anyway; for example, King Raedwald of the East Anglian Wuffings dynasty supposedly converted to Christianity at the court of the King of Kent, with whom he wanted an alliance. On returning to his palace at Rendlesham, Suffolk, he set up a Christian altar alongside his three Pagan ones, and when he died in 625 CE was given a spectacular Pagan ship burial with costly grave goods at nearby Sutton Hoo.

The Pagan religions of today are mainly, but not exclusively, revivals (or even continuations) of those earlier religions, with much reinterpretation for a modern world. Because so little was written down, we have to reconstruct what we believed was practised. Because times have changed, we most often operate within a modern context. For example, for those following a Celtic path today, it would be inappropriate to keep slaves and execute prisoners of war, and it might be difficult to speak the language; they could, however, acknowledge the same Gods and Goddesses at the same sacred sites. Unlike the institutionalised Paganism of ancient Rome, modern Paganism is a constantly evolving religious path.

Modern Paganism is not a doctrinaire movement like that of the Emperor Julian. But it is nevertheless a

reforming movement, and it bases its argument for reform on experience rather than on blind faith. (Jones and Pennick, 1995)

The word Pagan derives from a Latin word meaning 'of the countryside'. In other words, the town-dwelling Romans were denigrating their quaint country cousins who were still practising nature worship, while they, the sophisticated ones, had shifted to worshipping the emperor. Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic-derived word Heathen denotes a dweller of the heath, closer to nature than the culture of the town.

Associated with Paganism are the terms Witchcraft and Wicca. Experts have disputed the etymology of the word Wicca for many years. Some say it is connected with the Anglo-Saxon *witta* (wise), hence craft of the wise, while others say its roots are in the expression 'to bend' (as bending something to one's will or bending oneself to nature's will). The term Witch means many things to many people. From the nursery tale old hag to the seductive enchantress of some modern films, the Witch fulfils many roles within people's imaginations. The Witch has always been seen as subversive and not fitting in with the prevailing culture, or 'living on the edge' as someone once called it.

Some Pagans believe you are born a Witch, others that you can learn to become one. Some particular paths maintain that you can only become a Witch through being initiated by another. The one common strand is that Witches perform (or attempt to perform) magic, which will be dealt with later on in the book. I believe that this is the defining factor, although inevitably there are some who would disagree, saying that it is more a way of life, while to others (particularly American Feminist Witches), it is more a political statement. Others may argue that some Witches do not attempt magic, which leads on to the thorny subject of what magic is? Is practising as a herbalist magical, for instance? Essentially, if you are a Pagan who does not practise magic, then you are not a Witch. However, for a Witch to attempt magic they are likely to have some belief in supernatural forces. Thus, almost every Witch is a Pagan,

but not every Pagan a Witch. (Incidentally, we rarely use the term warlock – Witches can be male or female.)

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

The moment one mentions the word ‘Pagan’ (or even more emotively, ‘Witch’) to some people, certain stereotypes and fears will spring to their minds, if not their lips. Very often the word triggers a deep-felt fear of the unknown, which can produce very powerful emotions. If you are a non-Pagan, or even somebody contemplating Paganism with uncertainty, these thoughts may be going through your head too, so let’s deal with them now.

Paganism is not Devil worship or Satanism. The Devil is part of the Christian mythology, and since Pagans do not believe in Christianity, they do not believe in the Devil either. ‘Black magic’ is a term often used in books by non-Pagans, but has no more relevance to us than Satanism, since we believe it is wrong to harm anyone. Generally, we believe that magic is neither black nor white but neutral. Like electricity, it can be used for good or bad purposes, and will be discussed together with its ethics in Chapter 13 (see pages 109–120). Neither is Paganism a cult. The UK government-sponsored cult-watch organisation INFORM confirms this, and specifies that cults generally are led by charismatic individuals who demand absolute belief and discipline from their followers. Yes, we have a few charismatic leaders (I’ve even been described as one!), but the notion of absolute belief and discipline is a non-starter and would be regarded as a joke by most Pagans.

The other image popularised by tabloid newspapers is that of ritual nudity, which they equate with mass orgies. Only a couple of paths within Paganism sometimes use ritual nudity, and even within those paths it is on the decline. Pagans tend to be sexually liberated since they have no concept of sin, but they are almost surprisingly moral, and the question of indiscriminate sex is not a relevant issue to most. Pagans have a very strong idea of what is right and wrong, but have no theological basis for the concept of sin. Hence murder would be considered wrong, because it harms somebody, but if

two unattached consenting adults had a loving sexual relationship outside of marriage, in which no coercion or unwanted pregnancy was involved, it would not.

One phrase much beloved of the more fundamentalist elements of society is that Paganism will 'lead people to the occult'. The root meaning of the word occult is 'secret', particularly a religious secret. Most religions have secrets or mysteries. As an ex-member of the Anglican Church, I can appreciate that the sacrament of bread and wine is a respected sacred mystery, and therefore occult. Are they suggesting that they should ban Communion? I think not. Or is it a case of 'our occult is all right, but not yours'? I am not attacking Christian spirituality. Pagans are not usually against other forms of religion, since we do not set ourselves up as the only arbiter of spiritual taste. We are, however, against individuals within other religions attacking us to bolster up their own spiritual uncertainty, while most others of their ilk are willing to conduct a meaningful dialogue. We can respect the rights of others to hold differing religious views without needing to agree with them necessarily.

The British Witchcraft Act was repealed in 1951, mainly because it was thought that Witches no longer existed, so from that time it was no longer illegal to be a Witch in the UK. In fact nowadays the UK Government's Home Office officially recognises Paganism as a religion within the prison service and pays for a visiting ministry to Pagan inmates. Furthermore, in common with many other countries, it has ratified its support for the International Convention on Human Rights, which asserts the right of people to follow beliefs of their choice, either individually or in the company of others. In the USA, servicemen and -women can ask for facilities to practise a Pagan religion within their military bases, but their UK counterparts are still expected to attend Christian services. Having said that, I am aware that although the US Constitution gives the right of freedom of religious expression, many States have individual contradictory laws against Pagan activities such as magic and divination.

Hopefully, the situation in the UK and elsewhere will change as

INTRODUCTION

the recently signed Act is incorporated into everyday activities and local law. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The US Constitution also entitles its citizens to freedom of thought and expression. No one in the Western world can forbid you to be a Pagan or a Witch. Nobody within the Pagan community has the right to decide whether you conform to their definition of Paganism either, since few Pagans actually agree on an all-encompassing definition.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Because we deal with very real adult issues, it is normal practice for Pagan groups not to admit people under 18 or even 21. Originally this was more for Pagans' protection – not to be seen by the sensationalist tabloids to be 'corrupting minors'. The press is less of an issue now, but it is thought by many that young people should be free to grow up without pressure from any religious group, and then make up their minds on such an important lifestyle issue when they are mature enough to do so. The argument against that is that in Europe generally, Christianity is taught as part of the school syllabus and that we should at least be providing accurate information to younger people so that they can make informed choices when they reach 18. In the USA, although Church and State are separate, there is still a lot of well-funded Christian proselytising to young people.

This has been the topic of much-heated debate within the Pagan community in recent years, especially as there are now many young people brought up by Pagan parents who do not want them shut out