



DEBORAH LIPP

THE STUDY OF
WITCHCRAFT

A GUIDEBOOK TO
ADVANCED WICCA

FOREWORD BY ISAAC BONEWITS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would be impossible to accurately cite all the influences and contributions to this book. My own study of witchcraft has been going on for over twenty-five years and there have been many, many teachers, friends, and helpful acquaintances along the way. I hope that, if I fail to mention you, you will somehow feel acknowledged anyway.

First of all, this book germinated as a post on the Mystic Wicks message board, and so I must acknowledge that board and its owners, as well as the many people who have interacted with me there, asking me questions, making contributions, challenging me, and asking for more. The people who simply wanted recommendations, and more to study, contributed as much or more than the well-educated people who offered resources and ideas. So I thank you all.

Susan Carberry, my first teacher in the Craft, is the real source of this book, because the idea of studying everything and reading voraciously as part and parcel of witchcraft came from her, and her reading list was glorious. Contributions to specific sections were gratefully accepted from Isaac Bonewits, Donald Michael Kraig, Judy Harrow, my mother Paula Gellis, Michelle Hull, and the “Canadian Gardnerian and Alexandrian” discussion board.

During the course of writing this book, I had a computer meltdown *and* a hard drive crash *and* a fatal error in my backup drive, and so I may have omitted a thank you, since I lost some of the notes I was keeping about what contributions came from whom. Nonetheless, thanks.

And thanks to Gary Harper and Hermes who helped restore my computer to life. Where would I be without it (and without them)?

A big thank you to Brenda Knight for believing in this book and to Isaac Bonewits for showing it to her.

Finally, thanks to my son, Arthur Lipp-Bonewits, for occasionally getting off Facebook long enough to let me write, and managing to grow up so very, very well despite the fact that I'm always writing instead of doing more traditional maternal things.

FOREWORD

Learning witchcraft? Well, it's kind of like cooking. Let me explain:

Come right into my kitchen and I'll teach you to cook. This thing over here, it's called a "stove." You'll need to learn how to use it. And how to clean it. You may even be interested in maintenance. But enough about the stove, I'm not here to teach you that.

This is a spice rack. You might want to know what the spices are. Or maybe not, I don't know. I use them all the time when cooking. But let's move on. This is a soufflé pan, this is a measuring cup, these are cookie cutters; they all work about the same.

Now you're ready to make a simple three-course dinner.

What's that, you say? You don't have the information you need? You don't know which ingredients to use or why? Sorry, I can't help you.

Learning witchcraft, like learning to cook, can be confusing. And both can depend pretty heavily on the quality of the teacher.

To those of us who learned our witchcraft (or Wicca—they're not quite the same thing, as author Deborah Lipp makes clear in the present volume) and Paganism back in the Dark Ages—the 1960s and 70s—such disorganized, undirected, anarchic, and "free" approaches to teaching bring back memories of our worst (would-be) teachers, not our best. Yet this is exactly what modern students trying to stay afloat in the flood of good, bad, weird, and just plain silly books about the Craft find themselves experiencing. There's more information today than there was back then, but in a way it's even more confusing.

Fortunately, Deborah Lipp has a life preserver for you. In *The Study of Witchcraft*, this experienced Wiccan high priestess tells you what you might need to know, and even better, *how to learn* what you might need to know. Whether you are an experienced Wiccan priest or priestess, a member of a study group, a solitary-by-choice student, or a brand new "baby Pagan," Deborah gives you a flexible, organic study guide that will meet the particular needs of *your kind* of witchcraft.

In fact, experienced Wiccans may get the most out of this book, since it skips most of the "Wicca 101" stuff that seems to be in every book on every shelf, and gets into areas most authors never touch. Oh, sure, it's easy to find out about the eight holidays, about the Wiccan Rede, about any of the half-dozen basics, but don't you want more? Don't you want to take apart your stove? Grow your own herbs for your spice rack? Invent your own soufflés? Deborah's book is here to help you become a Wiccan "master chef."

She understands that there are several different approaches to the study and practice of the Craft—she calls them Traditional, Eclectic, and Radical—and that different students are interested in different topics

Through *The Study of Witchcraft* and its directed reading and practice tips, you will learn about far more than any other book on Wicca offers. You'll study our real history, learn about the evolution of Wicca in the 1980s, '90s, and oh-ohs, and dig into the many topics that every Wiccan should know, such as psychology, Western occultism, myth and folklore, meditation, psychic self-defense, astrology, healing, and herbalism. What's more, by the time you're done, the connections will seem clear and obvious to you!

Consider this book the Wiccan equivalent to an instruction guide for a tailor-your-own-degree program at a liberal college. Don't just read through the chapters; read the recommended books as well (while avoiding the bad or silly bits in them—Deborah helpfully points out many of those), and do the exercises and homework assignments that match your needs and interests. Yes, this means work. Fortunately, you'll be having so much fun doing it, you won't mind!

I can't say whether it's because or despite the fact that she's my ex-wife, but Deborah Lipp is an excellent Wiccan teacher, a fine writer, and someone who has thought long and hard for many years about how to guide students without stifling them. If you are looking for a way to make sense of the chaos of modern Wiccan books, I can think of no better text to recommend than this, *The Study of Witchcraft*.

Isaac Bonewits, March 2007

PREFACE

When I was a girl, I had to walk two miles to school every day, and it was uphill both ways. Okay, that's not quite true. Actually, only the "both ways" part isn't true. And the "girl" part may be suspect. The two-mile walk, in a town called Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, was indeed up a very steep hill (one way), but I only lived there for my last two and a half years of high school, so to refer to myself as a "girl" may not be accurate.

But I digress.

When I began to study Wicca, back in the Dark Ages of 1981 when the Internet did not yet exist and dinosaurs roamed the Earth, it was much more difficult than it is for novices today. Wicca (a word we used interchangeably with "witchcraft" at the time) was very much in the closet, and did not enjoy the wider acceptance it does today. There were only a handful of books on the subject, some of which were quite bad. Active groups were few and far between, and finding them was a challenge. When you did find a group, you studied hard and threw yourself into the process.

Today, it's all much easier. There are Web sites. There are gazillions of books, many of which are *terrific*. Most people, especially in urban areas, have at least a glimmer of an inkling that there's a thing called Wicca and that it isn't evil. I celebrate the accessibility and openness of Wicca in the 21st century.

All this access comes at a price, however. There are times when I am simply appalled at the dumbing-down of the Craft I know and love. It seems that people read one Web site or one book, and decide they are experts. Then they put up their own Web sites, which become authoritative sources for the next newbie who comes along and, in turn, uses them to make him or herself an instant expert. As cumudgeonly as it sounds, I bristle with aggravation as I observe this process repeat itself over and over. The reality is that there are plenty of people who are happy to embrace the simplest and easiest version of whatever is out there. The idea that, in order to become a witch, one must study hard over a significant length of time (a year and a day being the minimum) seems rather quaint today. This book is about that quaint idea. I argue that, no matter what kind of Wiccan you are (and we'll get into that shortly), you can benefit from deeper study in a whole range of areas. I believe that this study will make your Craft stronger, wiser, and more spiritually fulfilling.

In the pages that follow, we'll define Wicca, and then look at different streams of Wicca (and of witchcraft, to a lesser extent) that are current today. We'll explore what they have in common and how they differ. Although I will boldly skip the early history of Wicca, we'll spend a bit of time examining its more recent history in the course of identifying the different types of Wicca now flourishing.

Once we understand its history, we'll talk about a series of topics that are ancillary to Wicca itself. In each chapter, I'll address a single topic, and perhaps some sub-topics, and explain why I think it is a valuable area of study for the serious student of Wicca. Although I'll give some introductory information about that topic, I'll leave it up to you to deepen your study using my recommended readings and homework suggestions as guides. Then I'll give you a summary of other topics you can explore. That is, I'll tell you what I left out. Together, these chapters should give you enough to keep you busy for years to come.

RECOMMENDED READING

The meat of *The Study of Witchcraft* is the body of recommended reading it suggests. It's important, however, to understand exactly what these recommendations are—and what they are not.

When I recommend a book, it does not mean that I think all the information in that book is good information. There are good books that contain serious factual errors. There are books that address a topic thoroughly, but draw incorrect conclusions about it. There are books that are considered basic or classic to a topic, but are also considered old-fashioned and outdated. Yet, to study a topic thoroughly, you often have to read the classics. There are also bad books that contain some very good sections—and sometimes those sections are the only source for that particular information.

Suppose, for example, that I thought it important to write about the history of hairstyling. It may be that I cannot find an excellent or ideal book on the history of hairstyling to recommend. I might find:

- A book on the history of combs;
- A how-to book on hairstyling with a short, but excellent, chapter on history;
- A bad book on the history of hairstyling with a unique and interesting chapter on the blow-dryer.

None of these books is ideal for my purpose. The first is incomplete, the second is barely on-topic, and the third has all sorts of erroneous information. Now I have a choice. I can throw up my hands in despair and decide not to write about hairstyling at all. I can worry that you will take my recommendation as an indication that these books are perfectly accurate, and then fault me for recommending them. Or I can offer the titles with a bit of explanation and trust you to be a discerning and careful reader. This is the course I have chosen here.

As I emphasized in an earlier work, *The Way of Four Spellbook*, *I don't know everything and I haven't read everything*. These facts are of such profound import that they require italics. It may be that there's an absolutely perfect book on hairstyling of which I, amateur that I am, have never heard. It may be that the book on combs has been, unknown to me, utterly discredited by a newer, more authoritative *Comb Encyclopedia*. The vast field of publishing, and the wide range of topics I offer, creates a pretty big risk that somewhere, somehow, an important work that relates to our discussion may have slipped past me. I can only ask my readers to be forgiving.

Remember that I recommend these books as starting points for a serious investigation. No one gets to be really smart on a subject by reading one or two books. Use these recommendations as a platform from which to launch a deeper study. In topics you enjoy and find interesting, use the bibliographies found in these books to expand your reading and broaden your knowledge. Those books, in turn, will have bibliographies. And before you know it, your bookcase will be as messy and overcrowded—and as dusty—as mine.

I also offer homework assignments to give you a jumping-off point for your own study of the various topics in *The Study of Witchcraft*. Pick one or a few to get your feet wet in each chapter's topic area. If you're working in a study group, homework assignments are a way of staying focused and sharing what you've learned.

THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN WICCA

WICCA IN THE UNITED STATES

Modern Wicca arose between the 1930s and the 1950s in England, where it continues to thrive. Its antecedents prior to the 1930s are the subject of much scholarly debate, with which we need not concern ourselves here. Central to this debate is the role that Gerald Gardner played in the transmission, or invention, of the tradition. Indeed, Gardner himself consistently claimed that he modified and added to the “fragmentary” rituals he received. For our purposes here, when I refer to Gardner’s creation or origination of modern Wicca, please note that I refer only to the transformation that changed the face of Wicca and do not intend to contribute to a debate best left to experts.

THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

When Wicca arrived in the United States from England in the 1960s, it stayed in some ways the same; in other ways, it became Americanized (not unexpectedly). It existed quietly in cities and suburbs as a secret “other” life for seemingly ordinary people.

But something was brewing—the cultural phenomena of the 1960s and 1970s. During these decades of sweeping social and cultural change, Wicca, which had previously been almost exclusively traditional and Gardnerian (see [chapter 3](#)), collided with hippies, activists, and self-actualizers. Occult consciousness, alternative spirituality, and personal freedom, all essential to Wicca, were also all part of the counter-culture movement. The attraction between the old tradition and the new consciousness was inevitable. An unforeseen side effect of this cultural collision, however, was that demand for all things Wiccan soon outstripped the ability of Wicca as it was to meet it. Traditional Wicca is designed to grow through one-on-one training in small covens. The parameters of such a group are:

- A maximum of thirteen members, including a High Priestess and High Priest;
- Three degrees of initiation, with a year and a day between degrees;
- Only second and third degree initiates can start their own covens.

Timeline of Wicca in America

1960s:

- Arrived in America from England
- 1–2 groups in New York; 1–2 groups in California
- Collided with hippies, activists, and self-actualizers
- Old tradition meets the new consciousness
- Demand outgrew supply
- Emergence of self-created traditions

EARLY 1970s:

- Emergent (second-wave) feminist movement
- Rejected patriarchal and authoritarian models
- Empowered by self-created ritual, consensus
- Gnosticon, 1971

Wiccan groups built on this model run on the maxim that “it takes a witch to make a witch.” Under these parameters and given optimal conditions (although conditions are never optimal), a Gardnerian couple can create at most eleven second degree initiates (and thus five or six new covens) in no less than two years and two days.

LATE 1970S TO 1980s:

- Ecological movement; Deep Ecology
- Festival movement expands rapidly
- Sharing of rituals, techniques, knowledge, songs

1990s:

- Pagan publishing boom
- Increase in Wiccan resources
- Internet expands access to resources
- *The Craft*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- Wicca enters the mainstream

Now, if you think about how small it all started in this very big country (one or two groups in New York, one or two in California) and if you think about the size and enthusiasm of the counter-culture that arose in the 1960s and 1970s, you can see that something had to give. It was this combination of cultural and social conditions that created the first big change in Wicca—the emergence of self-created traditions.

There had always been “grandmother stories”—the white lie that someone was initiated by his or her grandmother into an ancient tradition reaching back to the Stone Age. But freethinking hippies weren’t all that interested in their grandmothers. People began proudly proclaiming that they had invented their traditions, which, much to the surprise of some, they discovered were very effective! Newly invented rituals turned out to have power and spiritual depth. Who would have guessed? The Church of All Worlds was the first openly invented neo-pagan denomination, but many others—Wiccan and otherwise—have followed happily in their footsteps.

So this is the transformation that took place in 1960s. In the 1970s, another wave of interest in Wicca washed up in the form of the emergent (second-wave) feminist movement, with its interest in female empowerment, goddesses, and self-directed spiritual growth. Once again, demand outstripped supply. Even fewer feminists were interested in seeking a traditional path, which reminded many of the patriarchal

THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, the ecological movement began to have impact on Wicca and Paganism. Wicca had always been a nature religion, but it was from politics that it learned to be really green (or Green).

I first started practicing witchcraft in 1981. (Remember, we used “witchcraft” and “Wicca” interchangeably then. I will do likewise here to remain true to the time we are discussing). The enormous change that occurred over the next twenty years is something I saw with my own eyes. Wiccans practicing during that period were very much aware of the significant changes underway. Sometimes it was glorious; sometimes it felt as if the rug were being pulled out from under us.

One of the most important changes was the festival movement. I don't know (and I don't know if anyone knows) what the first outdoor Pagan festival actually was. There are, of course, a number of early contenders for the honor. Many who were there mention Pan Pagan as the first. The first organized modern Pagan festival, however, was Gnosticon—an indoor, convention-style event sponsored by Llewellyn Publications in 1971. Sometime thereafter, someone figured out that it would be easier and cheaper to hold this type of event outdoors, with participants camping rather than staying in hotel rooms (although hotel events have never gone away).

I cannot begin to express the impact this change had on the Pagan and Wiccan community. Before the advent of outdoor festivals, Wicca was whatever was practiced in your circle. Unless you were in a big city, you probably never met any witches other than the ones with whom you circled. You might buy Gwydion Pendderwen's record (the very first music produced by and for neo-pagans) or another early Pagan recording. These early productions made a few chants and songs available to use. (Drumming didn't enter into Pagan ceremony in a big way until the early 1990s.)

Then suddenly, there were public festivals where you could meet with dozens (ultimately hundreds) of other Pagans. You could share rituals, techniques, knowledge, songs, and fun. Domineering coven leaders who previously had a stranglehold on their students were suddenly robbed of their power, which derived from them being the exclusive source of information. The community exploded in creativity. People who'd done ritual only for their group of five were now creating and learning polished techniques that were effective for groups of fifty.

These festivals also made it much easier to meet likeminded people. Instead of reaching out slowly by word of mouth, or through writing dozens of letters (that's on paper, kids!) that usually went unanswered, Wiccans and Pagans could hook up and exchange phone numbers. At festivals, *everyone* was out of the broom closet (at least until they packed up the car on Sunday).

Groups came and met other groups. Solitaries came and connected with groups, or with other solitaries, and formed groups from those meetings. And then something new happened: Solitaries came and found other solitaries with whom they could circle, while still remaining solitary. The festivals were responsible for the phenomenon of public sabbats. Now, in communities all over the United States, and indeed around the world, there are open or semi-open rituals eight times a year. Many solitaries attend these rituals, while remaining solitary for the rest of the year and never joining a group. The idea of being solitary-by-choice, or solitary supplemented by public ceremony, first became possible in the 1980s through the advent of public festivals.

I mark 1987 as the high point of the festival movement. In the summer of that year, I traveled to a large number of festivals all over the United States, from California to Massachusetts and places in between, accompanied by Isaac Bonewits, who was then my fiancé (and is now my ex-husband). It seemed that, in that year, every festival doubled in size; those that had previously attracted around 90 people a year were flooded with 200 attendees; those that used to have a mere fifty celebrants now had a hundred. The festivals, which had previously been attended by 200 to 250 people, were now squeezing in 400 or more. Nineteen-eighty-seven was the year that some festivals actually had to shut down, because they were no longer able to handle the demand. Others capped attendance based on available land and personnel, and/or required preregistration so that the at-the-door arrivals wouldn't overwhelm the event. It was a trying, yet glorious, time—a time that changed Paganism and Wicca forever.

Another very cool, very influential thing that happened in this period was the Pagan publishing boom. In 1980, the occult bookshelf was limited: *What Witches Do* by Stewart Farrar, *The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk, *Drawing Down the Moon* by Margot Adler, *Real Magic* by Isaac Bonewits, a few books by Doreen Valiente, Gerald Gardner's work, and the early work of Raymond Buckland (although his most famous book, *Buckland's Complete Guide to Witchcraft*, didn't come along until 1986). You could find the work of Sybil Leek, Paul Huson, and Gavin and Yvonne Frost, as well as older stuff by classic authors like Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune, and other pre-Wiccan occultists of an earlier generation. That was about it. You could clean out a bookstore of its Wiccan and neo-pagan material without having to buy a new bookcase at home.

The publishing boom of the 1990s changed all that. It used to be that everyone had read just about everything to do with Wicca. This isn't much of an exaggeration; there were so few books on the subject that everyone involved in the religion for more than a year or two had probably read the majority of available books, and was buying every new one as it came out. Obviously, it is no longer possible to buy every new book on Wicca, nor is it desirable. Your time as a beginner is a joyous time, and books for beginners are wonderful. But there's only so much Wicca 101 a soul can abide! In the 1970s and early 1980s, many of the books in print weren't very good.

In the 21st century, a lot of them still aren't. Whether you're talking about occultism, murder mysteries, popular psychology, or science fiction, the majority of books published just aren't all that great. But the increase in quantity in Pagan publishing has meant that, with the percentage of excellence remaining about the same, the pool of great resources has increased dramatically. In that pool are books that contradict each other, forcing readers to make choices, to interpret, and to stretch themselves. This is good. The same trend, however, has also allowed people to excuse themselves for actually reading *less*. This is not so good.

In 1980, most Wiccans had read all or most of the twenty or thirty basic texts. Furthermore, they'd expanded their reading far afield, dipping into a range of subjects that could supplement the meager supply of Wiccan texts. Now, with many dozens of good books on Wicca available in mainstream stores (no more hunting down occult shops), a beginner has no way of reading them all, and no need to seek beyond them. This sounds paradoxical, but it's true. If I go to a bookstore and find three titles I want, I may well buy all three. If I go to a bookstore and find fifty titles I want, I may only buy one because I am overwhelmed. Today, I find fewer beginners reaching into other topic areas; there are so many books directly related to their interest that books only peripherally related to it get short shrift. This is exactly the situation, in fact, that inspired me to write the book you're holding now.

THE LATE 1990S AND THE 21ST CENTURY

Let's review: In the 1960s, Gardnerian Wicca arrived in the United States and met up with the emerging counter-culture. In the 1970s, it encountered feminism and the ecology movement. In the 1980s, we changed and grew in response to the festival movement and the publishing boom.

The most recent influences on Wicca are the Internet and the media. The former has created unprecedented access, and the latter unsurpassed familiarity. In other words, now anyone can find out about Wicca, and just about everyone has heard of it.

The Internet provides access to enormous amounts of both information and misinformation. It allows people to learn Wicca privately, often secretly. It has spawned the creature known as the “online coven”—something we old-fashioned types find a bit bizarre, but that many people report works quite well. The Internet has vastly increased the mutual self-teaching of Paganism and Wicca—in other words, newcomers sharing what information they have with each other. Sometimes this creates a powerful support group that increases everyone's knowledge; sometimes it amounts to the blind leading the blind. Many Wiccans begin online and use the Web to find in-person contacts; others are satisfied with solitary practice and find that the Internet provides all the outside contact they want or need.

It seems to me that the Wiccan media wave began with the movie *The Craft* in 1996. Although any person knowledgeable in Wicca can readily see that the *Craft* portrayed in the film was not Wicca, it was the first major release to use at least some accurate terminology (including the film's title) and ritual styles. *The Craft* was a horror movie, though, in which empowered girls were punished for using their power. More positive was the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which introduced the “techno-Pagan,” Jenny Calendar. Although having no pretense of accuracy, *Buffy* offered the world positive Wiccans who used their powers to help and protect. It made the word Wicca familiar to the general public and made the *Craft* “cool” to a certain segment of the audience.

Many Wiccans object to the younger generation of Wiccans who first heard of the *Craft* through *Buffy*, but as long as newcomers to Wicca learn that Willow's version of witchcraft is as much a fantasy as Samantha's nose-wiggling was thirty years earlier, I see no harm in it, and plenty of potential good.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft by Ronald Hutton. The definitive and controversial history of the rise of the ideas and practices, in England, that have influenced the formation of modern Wicca.

Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America by Chas S. Clifton. This first scholarly approach to American Wiccan history is getting rave reviews.

Witchcraft: A Concise Guide by Isaac Bonewits. A more light-hearted approach than Hutton's or Clifton's, Bonewits addresses Wicca and witchcraft in America from a bird's eye view, having seen much of the history first-hand.

Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration by Philip Heselton. A newer (2003) book—pricey in the U.S.—that will doubtless become increasingly influential.

A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans by Jeffrey B. Russell. Probably the first look at neo-pagan witchcraft by an “outsider” and scholar, this book is both flawed and out-of-date, but it is still of significant interest. See references to it in [chapter 7](#).

MODERN WICCA DESCRIBED

I use the word “described” in the title of this chapter because “defined” would ruffle too many feathers. As discussed above, modern Wicca has gone through massive changes during each decade of its existence in the United States. The result of this rapid evolution is that there are different types of Wicca active in the world today, sometimes with only glancing familiarity with one another. Thus, when people try to define Wicca, someone inevitably disagrees. In fact, Wicca is now represented by roughly three broad streams. While there is overlap among those streams, there is also enough difference between them that it is difficult to generalize about the religion without specifying which version is being discussed. I will present them chronologically, more or less in the order they appeared over the years, to avoid any appearance of bias or priority. Before I do that, however, let's look at what *all* Wiccans have in common.

WHAT ALL WICCANS SHARE

This is a tricky subject. There are some people who say that Wicca is whatever you say it is—that, if your practice is eclectic, it defies definition. I disagree with that. Wicca is a specific religion, even though it is an extremely open-ended one. I would say that, if you are not closely aligned with the following principles, you are perhaps Pagan, or perhaps a witch, but you are not a Wiccan as I understand it:

Polarity: Wiccans may be monists, meaning they believe all gods are ultimately One. They may be duo-theists, meaning they believe that, in Dion Fortune's words, “All Gods are One God, and all Goddesses are One Goddess.” They may be hard polytheists, meaning they believe that each individual deity is precisely that, an individual and not an aspect or component of a larger One or Two. Whatever they believe, however, they work with *polarity*—ritually and spiritually. However many deities a Wiccan may worship, there is always only one goddess and one god on the altar during ritual.

Immanence: The sacredness of the human being is essential to Wicca. This can be described in many different ways: “If that which thou seekest, thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee”; or “Thou Art God”; or “An' it harm none, do what you will.” Not everyone will embrace every description, but a Wiccan will always have some creed that includes the idea that the gods/goddesses within us are our truest guides.

Nature: Wiccans celebrate holidays that are attuned to the seasons and perform rituals attuned to the phases of the Moon. They worship nature deities, almost always including Mother Earth in some form, and they recognize the sacredness of the physical, including the human body and sexuality.

Magic: Not all Wiccans practice magic, but Wicca as a religion accepts that magic is real, something that people can do, and something that people are allowed or encouraged to do.

Circles and quarters: The ritual structure of Wicca can vary enormously, but a cast circle with four quarters, representing or corresponding to the four elements, is the fundamental format of Wiccan ritual. My friend Ben Schuman describes the fifth element, spirit, as the “sometimes Y” of Wicca. Some Wiccans add a fifth element and some do not, but air, fire, water, and earth are always present.

WICCA AS STRUCTURED TRADITIONALISM

We can say that the first documented Wiccan tradition is Gardnerianism. Any other tradition going back to the 1950s or earlier is either not recognizably Wiccan (more on that shortly) or not well-documented. Gardnerianism arrived in the United States in the early 1960s, and quickly became the model for Wiccan structure. For most of the next twenty years, whether traditions derived directly or indirectly from Gardnerianism, or arose in response or parallel to it, they all took their basic structure from the Gardnerian. What does that mean? Well, let's look at traditional Wicca and determine some of its defining characteristics.

To begin with, we see that Gardnerians always have a lineage—that is, Gardnerians are always initiated by other Gardnerians, those qualified to do so according to the rules of the tradition, and this lineage traces back to one of Gerald Gardner's original covens. Thus it is said: “It takes a witch to make a witch”—or more specifically, it takes a Gardnerian to make a Gardnerian. Initiated Gardnerians work in covens. In fact, they use the word “coven” to refer to a group of initiated Wiccans, not simply to any group gathered in Wiccan worship. Although everyone can and usually does work as a solitary at times, the basic structure of Gardnerian ritual is group work. Likewise, although some people end up working as solitaires for various reasons, the tradition assumes that group work is ideal.



What Wiccans Share:

- Polarity
- Immanence
- Nature
- Magic
- Circles and
quarters



In Gardnerianism, there are three degrees of initiation, each with its own ceremonies, rights, and privileges. Sometimes a second degree can start a coven. Sometimes a second-degree coven must be under the supervision of a third degree from the parent coven (and sometimes not). Sometimes, only a third degree can start a coven.

Gardnerians have a text called *The Book of Shadows*, a collection of rituals, spells, and lore handed down from witch to witch, and also added to by each witch (Gardnerians often use the words “witch” and “Wiccan” interchangeably). The basic structure of the ritual, familiar to all Gardnerians, would be found in *The Book of Shadows*.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Gardnerians are bound by an oath of secrecy. At initiation, each candidate swears to keep certain things secret and to reveal these secrets only to other initiates. A religion with this characteristic is called a “mystery religion.”

I have no idea how many Wiccan traditions¹ currently exist. *Many*—with quite a wide variety among them. But, in general, all modern Wiccans follow the Gardnerian model in the aspects described below:

- Some form of lineage allows members to know how and why they are members of that tradition.
- Initiation ceremonies that are integral to the tradition delineate between those who are Wiccans by that trad's definition, and those who are not.
- Multiple degrees of initiation, usually three.
- Group (coven) work is valued and may be considered essential to Wicca.
- A Book of Shadows codifies some portion of the tradition's rituals and lore. This book can be added to or changed, but usually some “core” part of it must be preserved.
- An oath of secrecy and/or loyalty and/or brotherhood is required.

Up until the 1990s, this model was the norm, so much so that you could assume it was what was meant by those identifying themselves as “Wiccan.” In fact, many traditional Wiccans use “Wicca” (or some variation on the word) only to refer to initiates. Noninitiates are often referred to as Pagans rather than as Wiccans. Some traditional Wiccans are offended by the use of the word “Wicca” to mean any other sort of Paganism besides traditional Wicca.

Other traditionalists believe it is legitimate for noninitiates, or nontraditionalists, to refer to themselves as Wiccan. Such traditionalists will call themselves “initiates” or some other word that distinguishes between a Wiccan who is a traditional initiate and a Wiccan who is not.

This is a linguistic argument, not a theological one. The meaning of the word Wicca has evolved from meaning a specific handful of traditions to include a much broader range of practice. Some choose to adhere to the earlier meaning, finding the current one too dilute; others go with the flow. In this book, I use the broader meaning, and add modifiers like “traditional” and “eclectic” to clarify my meaning.



Elements of Traditional Wicca:

- Lineage
- Initiation ceremonies
- Multiple degrees
- Group (coven) work
- Book of Shadows
- Oath of secrecy, loyalty, or brotherhood



Books that exemplify the traditional Wiccan approach include *A Witches' Bible: The Complete Witches Handbook* by Janet and Stewart Farrar and *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* by Doreen Valiente.

WICCA AS RADICAL EMPOWERMENT

In the 1970s, while Wicca was teaching people how to cast circles and call quarters, feminism was teaching women to howl at the Moon. The feminist movement accomplished more for women than equal job opportunities and the right to control their own bank accounts; it encouraged them to find a source of internal power, the very notion of which was diametrically opposed to the way women viewed themselves up until that time. In fact, Western culture had, for hundreds of years, associated the idea of powerful, commanding women with witchcraft and evil. That's why, I think, the most interesting women in stories and movies have been villainesses. As I've said before and will doubtless say again, given a choice of being Snow White (helpless, sweet, voiceless) and the Wicked Queen, with the cool castle and the magic and the minions, give me my Magic Mirror *now!* So, it makes sense that it was feminism that first saw witchcraft as a means to radical change.

Dion Fortune defined magic as “The Art of Changing Consciousness at Will.” In other words, magic was a change of consciousness. Changing consciousness was and is one of the goals of feminism and of other political movements. Radical political witchcraft sees in the practice of witchcraft (or Wicca) a force for inner power, freedom, and social egalitarianism. To that end, Radical Wicca uses self-created rituals, and a model of every-woman-a-Priestess (and every man a Priest). Whereas traditional Wiccans use ritual structure to ensure its workings are as powerful as possible, radical Wiccans find power in the rejection of structure.

Radical Wiccans moved into the political sphere in a variety of ways, creating ritual at protests and activist events, basing political cells on coven-style structure (or vice versa), and using chanting, drumming, and energy movement to create unity and peace in situations ranging from sit-ins to imprisonment. Witches of this ilk are seen almost exclusively at left-wing events like antinuke rallies, Green protests, or environmental protection actions. In fact, one morning not long ago, I awoke bemused to hear Starhawk's voice on my clock radio—she was here in New York for the Republican National Convention protest in 2004.

In the 21st century, many radical witches have dropped the word “Wicca” from their dialog, largely in response to the very gentle nature of the dominant form of Wicca seen today. Still, much of their work is rooted in older forms of Wicca. Radical witchcraft:

- Functions by democratic consensus, either anarchic or with rotating leadership;
- Emphasizes changing consciousness and changing the world;
- Performs freeform and spontaneous ritual to suit the moment;
- Believes in the self-created or self-declared witch, or that every woman is a witch;
- Values ritual process over ritual outcome;
- Blends witchcraft with politics, nature, and day-to-day life.

Starhawk's writing exemplifies radical Wicca; her first two books, *The Spiral Dance* and *Dreaming the Dark* are classics on the topic. I should add that the phrase “radical Wicca” or “radical witchcraft” is not commonly used in the Pagan or Wiccan communities. It is a phrase I coined to describe a distinct and unique form of Wicca treated in this book. If you don't like the name, please feel free to discard it.

WICCA AS GENTLE ECLECTICISM

Perhaps no book has had more influence on Wicca during the past ten or fifteen years than *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* by Scott Cunningham. Scott didn't invent the idea of self-initiation, but he made it commonplace. By doing so, he engendered a form of Wicca that had boundless potential for growth. Whereas you work with an initiated Wiccan and usually undergo some training to become a traditional Wiccan, eclectic Wiccans can more or less declare themselves Wiccan without access to anyone or anything else. Thus their number, over the course of 1990s, quickly outstripped that of any other Wiccan group.

Eclectic Wicca is identified primarily by the Wiccan Rede: “An it harm none, do as ye will” (or variations thereof). Although most traditional Wiccans also use the Rede and accept it as part of their Craft to a greater or lesser degree, eclectics view it as definitive. While “it takes a witch to make a witch” might be the definition of a traditionalist, you could say, “it takes the Rede to make an eclectic Wiccan.” Most eclectics are also fervent proponents of the Rule of Three: Whatever you do will come back to you three-fold. Like the Rede, this rule is familiar to traditional Wiccans, but to eclectics, it is often definitive.



In summary, eclectics:

- Adhere closely to the Rede and believe in the Rule of Three
- Emphasize solitary practice
- Usually self-initiate, if they initiate at all
- Consider that there are no rules in Wicca beyond the Rede



Perhaps these two tenets are so important to eclectics because not much else seems to be. Beyond portraying the characteristics listed on the previous page, as shared by all Wiccans, eclectic Wiccans can be virtually anything. Ritual can be structured or unstructured, and can sometimes be omitted entirely. Rules beyond the Rede are created by each Wiccan, or not at all. The focus of the Craft is a gentle connectedness with nature, with the Lady and Lord, and with the inner voice that guides Wiccan practice.

Eclectic Wicca is typically, but not necessarily, solitary. Even when eclectics practice in groups, they tend to view group workings as a supplement to a robust solitary practice. Eclectics probably call any group that meets regularly a “coven,” in contrast to traditional Wiccans, for whom the word has a more specialized meaning.

THE BEST AND THE WORST OF WICCA

It is hard for me to look at Wicca objectively. Indeed, perhaps no one is ever objective; I surely am not with regard to the Craft. I love the traditionalism that has informed my life for over a quarter century. But I've also seen and learned wonderful things from other paths. I've seen dozens and dozens of paths within Paganism (which, of course, includes Wicca). Sometimes these paths behave badly and often behave well. I've seen different paths used to enhance life, as well as to restrict it unnecessarily. So I offer, with a loving heart, what I see as the best and worst features of traditional, radical, and eclectic Wicca (see [Table 1](#), p. 19).

BEST OF TRADITIONAL WICCA

- **Hierarchical structure:** This creates teachers and leaders who are likely to be very qualified (having gone through a structured training period). It also treats a tradition's elders with honor.
- **Structured ritual:** This imparts confidence to the participants; in a word, they know what they're doing. It also engenders thoughtfulness. Traditional Wiccans are taught that each part of ritual and each rule is there for a reason, so they tend to look for the reasons within ritual. Traditional rituals tend to have an overarching logic; the whole thing holds together.

TABLE 1

The Worst and the Best Characteristics of Wiccan Paths

PATH	BEST	WORST
Traditional Wicca	Hierarchy; structure; secrecy; oaths; rules; scarcity	Elitism; rigidity; excessive hierarchy; scarcity
Radical Wicca	Empowerment; spiritual/social identity; consensus; rotating leadership	Consensus difficulties; ineffective leadership; rigidity
Eclectic Wicca	Accessibility; solitary work; borrowed rituals; simplicity	Dilution; mediocrity

- **Secrecy and oaths:** These, along with the difficulty getting into a traditional group, create a bonding and intimacy that can be incredibly powerful, profoundly enhancing coven work.
- **Rules:** These often provide a fallback position. In their best light, rules help you know what to do when you are conflicted or unsure.
- **Scarcity:** Traditional groups are often hard to find and hard to join. But seeking them out is a process that shapes the seeker.

WORST OF TRADITIONAL WICCA

- **Elitism:** Traditional Wiccans are sometimes accused of being snooty elitists, and sometimes the accusation is just. Some (but not most) think that they've got the only “real” Wicca, and look down upon eclectics and radical witches.
- **Rigidity:** Traditional Wiccans can become rigid—stuck in their rules and in “the way things are done.” They may fail to see beyond the rules, and fail to be creative or interesting with ritual. To be blunt, they can become dull.
- **Hierarchy can backfire:** It can go to the heads of the leaders and create excessive diffidence in their followers.
- **Scarcity:** Traditional groups are often hard to find and hard to join. Shaping the seeker is great, but having no place to go *stinks*.

BEST OF RADICAL WICCA

- **Personal empowerment:** This focus gives radical Wicca profound psychological impact. Such groups often do deep, important work on an individual's inner self or subconscious mind. The ritualized self-help or mutual assistance that is often a part of such groups has a meaningful, positive impact on the lives of participants.

- **Spiritual and social identity:** Radical Wicca teaches that our identity as spiritual individuals and as citizens of the world are inextricably linked, and this is an important lesson. It teaches witches to reach beyond themselves and their personal, sometimes selfish, interests to see how their witchcraft can help change the world.
- **Consensus:** The consensus process used by many radical groups is a powerful tool that teaches patience, listening, and compassion. Giving every member a voice can be life-altering for the quiet and shy who have never made their voices heard. It can also be humbling, in a useful way, for those who are used to being heard all the time.
- **Rotating leadership:** This exposes group members to a wide variety of leadership styles and allows them to experience approaches they might never have tried.

WORST OF RADICAL WICCA

- **Consensus:** This can also result in lots of discussion without much result, making some roll their eyes in frustration. It can be maddening to have a two-hour meeting prior to each ritual just to decide how that ritual will be performed. The desire to *just do it* can be compelling.
- **Rotating leadership:** Likewise, this can mean that people who aren't very good at doing ritual get handed the task. This may be empowering for them psychologically, but doesn't make for moving ceremony or powerful magic. As at a small child's dance recital, you can be proud of someone doing her best while being bored out of your mind by the dance (or witchcraft) itself.
- **Rigidity:** Radical Wicca can also be rigid and strident, in the manner of any politically oriented group. Radical witches can shut their ears to those who do not share their political agenda, and may exclude less-political Wiccan seekers.

BEST OF ECLECTIC WICCA

- **Accessibility:** Probably the single best thing about eclectic Wicca is that it makes Wicca accessible to everyone who wants it. There's no lock on the entry gate; you just walk in. Traditional Wiccans may complain about the lack of training, and radical witches may bemoan the lack of commitment, but there is an undeniable beauty in the open-armed embrace of eclectic Wicca, with its vision of the Goddess gathering all her children in.
- **Solitary work:** Because of this open door, eclecticism is the style of Wicca most accessible to the solitary. It has thus allowed Wicca to grow faster than group-based work.
- **Borrowed rituals:** Eclectic Wicca also borrows from every place and everything that doesn't run fast enough to get away. This is an ancient custom of folk magicians, who have always borrowed spells, charms, ideas, and gods from whatever culture or concept was current. If you have ever wondered why there are so many old spells that use Bible verses or the name of Jesus Christ, this is exactly the reason—cunning folk have never been interested in reshaping the world, only in using the world to do their magical work. When eclectics borrow a ritual here, a god-name there, and a magical tool from yet another source, they are behaving, well, *eclectically*, and in keeping with an ancient and powerful folkway.
- **Simplicity:** Eclectic Wicca has a laudable simplicity: if it works, do it. Eclectics thus have enormous freedom. Unbound by tradition, consensus, process, or structure, they have the power to create a Wicca in the image of their own dreams. They can be intensely creative in both elaborate and subtle ways.

WORST OF ECLECTIC WICCA

- **Dilution:** A Wicca that allows everything and has no inherent rules can be very watered down and tepid, and eclectic ritual sometimes reflects this.
- **Mediocrity:** Eclectic Wicca that has neither a training system nor a requirement of deep inner and outer work can encourage mediocrity. When eclectics read that all you need do to become a Wiccan is to declare yourself one, some interpret this to mean that they need not challenge themselves, and that there isn't really any more to learn. Know-nothing Paganism has created a situation in which people who have been Wiccan for only three months feel qualified to teach Wiccans who are only a few weeks newer. This unfortunate situation has become common enough to earn the nickname "fluffy bunny"—indicating a soft, cute sort of Wicca that is more concerned with how pretty and nice nature is than with Her true power.

TABLE 2
What Wiccans Can Learn from Each Other

PATH	TRADITIONALS	RADICALS	ECLECTICS
Traditionals		Honor experience and skill; shared ritual structure	Value long-term study
Radicals	Listen to all; empower all		Value magic and change
Eclectics	Creativity; simplicity; Gods available to all	Gentleness; avoid political dogmatism	

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

Every sort of Wiccan can afford to learn and to improve, and each of us can learn from the other. Wisdom comes in many forms.

TRADITIONAL WICCANS CAN LEARN. . .

From radical witches: to listen to everyone, not just leaders, and to empower everyone, giving each a voice.

From eclectics: to value creativity and simplicity, and that the gods are available to all.

RADICAL WITCHES CAN LEARN. . .

From traditionalists: that those with more experience and skill should be honored, and that having a shared ritual structure that is already a given can be empowering.

From eclectics: that gentleness is as important as activism, and that Wicca is not just for those of one political stripe.

ECLECTICS CAN LEARN. . .

From traditional Wiccans: that long-term study and practice is necessary to perfect one's Craft.

From radical witches: that magic and change are as important as worship.

AND EVERYONE CAN LEARN. . .

Not to feel too distressed if my generalizations seem harsh. They are just generalizations after all, and the world has as many exceptions as case studies.

RECOMMENDED READING

A Witches' Bible by Janet and Stewart Farrar. This book is a compilation of two volumes: *Eight Sabbats for Witches and rites for Birth, Marriage and Death* and *The Witches' Way* by the same authors.

Witchcraft for Tomorrow by Doreen Valiente. A classic text of inventing ritual in a traditional context. Valiente was one of the Craft's great priestesses and poets.

The Spiral Dance by Starhawk.

Dreaming the Dark by Starhawk. These two texts are the backbone of radical witchcraft.

Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner by Scott Cunningham. The single most important book for the solitary eclectic.

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1. There are traditions that refer to themselves as British Traditional Wiccans (or Wicca), which includes a specific list of traditions. BTWs meet all or most of the criteria I delineate, and more as well. I am specifically using "traditionalist" in this book rather than "BTW" in order to encompass a wider range of practitioners.

LEARNING WICCA

I have called this book *The Study of Witchcraft* rather than *The Study of Wicca* in order to include in it several areas of study. Loosely, Wicca is a religion defined by the basic characteristics listed in the previous chapter. Witchcraft, on the other hand, is a magical practice that includes folk charms, spells, and other arts. Witchcraft has sometimes been referred to as “low magic,” to contrast it with the “high magic” of Ceremonial or Goetic practice. Modern witchcraft may, however, easily incorporate elements of “high magic,” such as its symbols, tools, or ritual styles. Thus, the word “witchcraft” can here refer to witchcraft itself, Wicca, or magic. Eclectics and radical witches may not consider witchcraft a part of their practice, and a radical witch might not consider Wicca a part of hers, but traditional Wiccans invariably consider themselves both Wiccans and witches.

WICCA 101

Although by the time you pick up this book, you will probably already have learned the basics of Wicca, let's quickly review them. Then, at the end of this chapter, I'll offer you a few recommended readings in which you can continue your study of “Wicca 101.”

What Wicca Is: Wicca is a nature-based and life-affirming religion that has nothing to do with Satanism.

Who Wiccans Worship: Wiccans primarily worship the Lord and Lady, as well as other individual gods and goddesses from many cultures. The Wiccan Lady is also known as the Triple Goddess and the Lady of the Earth and the Moon, and the Wiccan Lord is also known as the Horned God, as well as the Dual or Two-faced God.

The Eight Sabbats: Wiccans have eight holidays, known as *sabbats*, spaced evenly around the year at the solstices, equinoxes, and mid-points between.

Lunar Work: Wiccans work with lunar energies. Wiccans hold rites known as *esbats* on the Full Moon, and know that certain things are better done during particular moon phases.

Wiccan Principles: The Wiccan Rede (“harm none”) and the Threefold Law (that which you do returns to you three times) are basic tenets.

Magic and Spellcraft: Wiccans use magic. The casting of spells is frequently a part of Wiccan ritual, and involves raising and sending power to a specific target.

WICCA 202

I am often asked why there aren't more books on advanced Wicca. Indeed there are a few books on “Wicca 202”—and will doubtless be more in the future—but I suspect that Wicca 202 will always be sparsely represented in books, because the *real* Wicca 202 happens when you stretch *beyond* Wicca itself.

When I was trained as a young traditional Wiccan, I was expected to make an extensive study of topics that ranged far beyond Wicca and witchcraft. I received instruction in some areas, but for the most part, I was handed a book list and sent off to study on my own. At that time serious students of witchcraft were expected to learn about history, medieval witchcraft, Western occultism, psychology, and more. Yes, we studied Wicca itself in depth: I have offered some of that study in my book *The Elements of Ritual*, in which circle casting is analyzed in detail.

We studied far more than that, however. Students of Wicca also explored such diverse topics as the theories of Carl Jung, the history of the Golden Dawn, the Kabbalah, and tool-making.

Part I of this book has given you an overview of basic Wiccan concepts. Part II will place Wicca in the larger context of Western occultism; Part III will explore Wiccan practice. Each chapter briefly touches upon a specific area of study and discusses why it is valuable to advanced Wiccans, then discusses its special value for traditional Wiccans, eclectics, and radical witches. Since I can't cover every possible topic, I include a list of additional areas of interest in the final chapter.

RECOMMENDED READING

What Witches Do by Stewart Farrar. A classic introduction to Wicca, one of the first that I read.

Spells and How They Work by Janet and Stewart Farrar. Few books introduce spellcraft in a how-to manner, so this is invaluable.

The Elements of Ritual: Air, Fire, Water, and Earth in the Wiccan Circle by Deborah Lipp. As mentioned above, I put circle-casting under a microscope. Every step of Wiccan ritual is thoroughly explored.

Witchcraft for Tomorrow by Doreen Valiente. A superb introduction by one of the Craft's great ladies.

A Grimoire of Shadows: Witchcraft, Paganism, and Magic by Ed Fitch. Fitch is an extraordinary innovator, one of the people responsible for creating teaching rituals that allowed more people to learn Pagan ritual in the '70s and '80s.

Book of Shadows by Phyllis Curot. A first-person introduction to Wicca that is part diary, part instruction.

Wicca: A Comprehensive Guide to the Old Religion in the Modern World by Vivianne Crowley. Watch out for Vivianne Crowley; she has a few very different books with very similar titles.

HISTORY OF WESTERN OCCULTISM

THE ANCIENT PAGANS

The study of ancient Paganism is of enormous interest to most Wiccans. There are, of course, Reconstructionist Pagans, who base as much as possible of their modern practice on that of the ancients. But even for the most “neo” of neo-pagans, there is a clear recognition that our practice derives, in some portion, from that of their Pagan ancestors. Pagans and Wiccans both worship ancient goddesses and gods, we revive ancient customs, and we tend to be very interested in ancient folkways. The study of ancient Paganism is, however, a field that has changed radically over the past few decades. Moreover, what is studied, and the conclusions being drawn, are radically different from place to place, person to person, and group to group.

WICCA AND MATRIARCHY

Conventional wisdom in the Pagan community has been enormously influenced by theories of matriarchal prehistory. When I began my studies, Wiccan book lists were chock-full of titles like *When God Was a Woman* by Merlin Stone and *The First Sex* by Elizabeth Gould-Davis. These books gave an empowering vision of goddess worship among our ancestors, and created an almost idyllic model of what Pagan society may have been, and might yet become. The problem is that these theories have been soundly and solidly disproved.

In many ways, I believe that the most important book I have read in the past five years is *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* by Cynthia Eller. This work isn't simply a debunking of matriarchal theory, although Eller's examination of the flaws of that theory (or those theories) is essential reading. What makes Eller's work particularly important is that she is a feminist, and her work cannot be dismissed as simply patriarchal prejudice—the fate of many critical examinations of matriarchal models. Personally, I found her book easier to read for exactly that reason; it did not present a smart antifeminist in opposition to smart feminists; it presented a smart feminist debating theory with other smart feminists. This removed the political acrimony from the controversy and allowed me to look at the material dispassionately. It was eye-opening.

Eller carefully examines the most-cited archeological evidence, such as that found at Çatal Hüyük.² She discusses the problem of drawing firm conclusions from locations that left no literary evidence. How do we decide that something is an altar, or a temple, or a throne? How do we decide that a female statue is a goddess, rather than a priestess, or a mother, or a politician? She traces a path from inference to extrapolation to belief, and shows how theoretical suggestions can become overblown and romanticized.

Eller is also concerned with how belief in matriarchal prehistory affects the feminist movement. She asks some probing questions, and, although I often disagree with her conclusions, I find myself applauding the fact that she asked. One question worth asking is: Does historical goddess worship necessarily empower women? To answer that question, I think we need to look at the female-centric veneration with the most extensive documentation and literary history—that of the Virgin Mary. The book *Alone of All Her Sex* by Marina Warner is an excellent examination of that subject.

The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory is one of the strongest recommendations in this book. It has the potential to change completely the way Wiccans look at Pagan history—which is to say, the way we look at ourselves and our relationship with the world. As long as we persist in believing that there was once a golden era in which goddess worship (and/or polytheism) made everything okay, we are grounding our religion in fantasy. And religions grounded in fantasy have been known to cause a great deal of harm. We must shape ourselves, rather, through history; looking to the past is one way of looking to the future. By gaining greater wisdom about where we've been, we gain greater wisdom about where we're going.

WICCA AND FEMINISM

One thing I realized, as I began thinking about the prehistory and history of Wicca in a fresh way, was that books that based the roots of Wicca in matriarchal theory did more than feminize the study of Paganism. They did more than create a Utopian vision of goddess worship. They, in fact, created a false impression of unity and consistency among different historical strains of Paganism. The history of Paganism is easy to study, after all, if you believe that ancient goddess worship was universal and that all different types of goddess worship flow from the same source. Books like *When God Was a Woman* traversed the globe; there was no need to study Northern European history and South Asian history and North American history and Slavic history. Goddess worship, being the same everywhere, covered a host of topics in a few volumes. Without that theory, history became the chore that historians always knew it was and amateur enthusiasts had now to discover.



Looking to the past is one
way of looking to the future.
By gaining greater wisdom
about where we've been, we
gain greater wisdom about
where we're going.



Once you set aside the idea that there was a “goddess culture,” a unified Pagan tradition in which a Great Goddess was worshiped with an identity and religion that transcended location, we also set aside the idea that there is such a thing as “Pagan history.” Instead, there are many histories. I cannot really recommend any *single* work.

REWRITING HISTORY

Historians across many disciplines are discovering the same thing. The idea of “American history,” for instance, is being replaced by more specific histories that analyze both different time periods and different points of view: the history of industrial America, of agrarian America; a history from the point of view of Native Americans, another from the point of view of Colonial settlers, and yet another from the point of view of 19th-century immigrants. And American history is both more localized and of shorter duration than that of Paganism. Consider, then, how many different “Pagan histories” there may be.

The majority of Wiccan historical interest focuses on Europe, where the Classical Greek and Roman cultures and the Minoan culture are all of great interest to feminist witches. Greek culture brought with it a strong influence from the Ancient Near Middle Eastern cultures, with their long Pagan pasts. Many feminist witches have a strong interest in Isis because of her unique role as the original syncretic Great Mother. Thus, they may be particularly interested in Egyptian studies.

Traditional Wiccans, on the other hand, will likely focus their studies on the British Isles. Eclectics are also strongly influenced by traditions from Ireland, England, and Wales. And, as might be expected, eclectics are the group most likely to have interests that span the globe.

Traditional Wiccans often have a strong interest in Italian Paganism and witchcraft because of the seminal book *Aradia or the Gospel of the Witches* by Charles Leland. This controversial work posits a witch cult in 19th-century Italy that bears a strong relationship to modern Wicca (and also portrays many striking differences). Undoubtedly, early Wiccans were influenced by Leland's work. Many people believe *Aradia* to be fraudulent or that Leland was deceived by his source. Raven Grimassi and other prominent current writers, however, believe that Leland was documenting a legitimate survival. Whether or not the work is genuine, it is certainly an area of considerable fascination. Italy gives us not just *Aradia*, but also the Roman Empire, and perhaps the most sophisticated and urbane of Pagan cultures in the ancient world.

While traditional Wiccans may be interested in *Aradia* because of its influence on Gardner and Valiente, radical witches may be fascinated by its revolutionary tone. *Aradia* describes a witchcraft for the oppressed—witchcraft as the tool of slaves and the downtrodden, to be used against the wealthy and powerful.

Personally, my interests *don't* span the globe. While it's possible that I should be embarrassed by that fact, I tend to think it's a good thing to know one's own weaknesses and strengths. There are certain areas in which I am extremely wellread, others in which I have good general knowledge, and some in which I've never cracked a book. While it would be unwise for me to recommend books in that last group, I hope that doesn't dissuade you from doing the research necessary to find excellent reading material about your favorite historical subjects. If a culture really fascinates you, investigate its social and political as well as its religious history, since they all inform each other.

One way to jump into a topic that seems too dry is to pick up a novel about a period of history doesn't excite you, then it's a good bet that nonfiction on the same subject won't either. And if the novel *does* excite you, then you'll read the nonfiction with a more open mind. At least that's been my experience; try it and see.

RECOMMENDED READING

MATRIARCHAL HISTORY

The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory by Cynthia Eller. An essential work.

The Once and Future Goddess by Elinor W. Gadon. This is a wonderful book on matriarchy, having many of the scholarly flaws that Eller derides and many of the strengths that make these books so popular. It is sweeping, inspiring, and lavishly illustrated. I like having books like this one for their illustrations and their sensibility; the imaginative look at Goddess worship in ancient times. But don't dive into this book or others like it without also reading Eller.

Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary by Marina Warner. As discussed earlier, Goddess worship in a patriarchal context.

A History of Pagan Europe by Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick. In the decade since its publication, this has become the definitive book on Pagan Europe, one that every serious neopagan student of the subject should read. It moves at a breathtaking pace, with sections so dense that some pages or even paragraphs could easily become books themselves. A superb introduction that will leave you hungry for more.

God Against the Gods: the History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism by Jonathan Kirsch. Covers in detail the areas where monotheism and polytheism came to blows, including sections on Akhenaton, Julian, and Constantine.

BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles and *Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* by Ronald Hutton. Hutton is certainly a controversial author among many Wiccans, but he presents some amazing material, even if you disagree with his conclusions.

Well researched and thoughtful.

Pagan Celtic Ireland by Barry Rafferty.

Britain BC: Life in Britain and Ireland Before the Romans by Francis Pryor.

These two books come highly recommended by Wiccan teachers with expertise in the topic.

ROME AND ITALY

The Mysteries of Mithra and *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* by Franz Cumont. These two works, written at the beginning of the 20th century, were ground-breaking and remain standard texts. More recent work has been done in the field that has built on Cumont—and in some cases superseded him, but I love the richness and complexity of these early works.

OTHER NONFICTION

Aradia or the Gospel of the Witches by Charles Godfrey Leland. There are several new translations and editions of this work, which was written in 1899 and remains influential.

The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt by Ian Shaw. I don't know of any book that is as comprehensive for Egypt as *A History of Pagan Europe* is for Europe. This is a good starting point, however.

Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age by Catherine L. Albanese. Interesting overview.

A Brief History of India by Alain Daniélou. Daniélou is one of my favorite authors on India and Hinduism.

History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine "Firsts" in Recorded History and *The Sumerians: Their History, Their Culture, Their Character* by Samuel Noah Kramer. The first is fairly definitive, but the second is less dry. Choose your poison.

FICTION

White Mare, Red Stallion by Diana Paxson. A novel of Pagan Ireland. Paxson is as well-known for her work in the Pagan community as for her many excellent novels. You can always trust her research. This one may be hard to find, but it's worth it if you come across it.

Clan of the Cave Bear and *Valley of the Horses* by Jean Auel. Auel has written five books (so far) in the *Earth's Children* series. In my opinion, they've declined in quality with each book. These, the first two, are very good. The vision of life among prehistoric hunter-gatherers is outstanding. Even in the later books, Auel's research and her evocative images of primitive life pull the reader along.

A God Against the Gods and *Return to Thebes* by Allen Drury. These two novels (*Return to Thebes* is the sequel) tell the story of the rise and fall of Akhenaten in Egypt's 18th Dynasty. I found these to be wonderful, very human, very complex stories about people of whom we've all heard, whose grave goods we've seen in museums and pictures, but perhaps never imagined as fallible. These may not be in print, but aren't hard to find.

HOMEWORK

- Read *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* and also a book, Web site, or other resource from a point of view supporting matriarchal prehistory theory. Contrast them in writing.
- Read *Aradia* and research what some writers have said about its veracity.
- Choose one specific location and find out how gods were worshiped there in Pagan times. Reconstruct, to the best of your ability, an authentic altar and/or ritual. Many people like to start with a god from their own ancestral tradition.
- Research an offering to a specific ancient deity and incorporate the giving of that offering into a ritual.

2. *Çatal Hüyük* (or *Çatal Höyük* or *Çatalhöyük*) is a major archeological site in Anatolia, dating to about 7500 B.C.E. It has been interpreted as a major site of goddess worship and is treated extensively in most books that endorse matriarchal theory.

WESTERN OCCULTISM

The history of Western occultism is directly related to the history of Wicca for the simple reason that Wicca *is* the occult. Traditional Wiccans are likely to agree with this statement, while others may not.

Traditional Wiccans will find the history of Western occultism incredibly interesting because it is, in large part, their own history. In fact, every formal Wiccan tradition is deeply rooted in Western occultism. As traditional Wiccans study this topic, they are likely to hear a series of bells ringing: Ah! This passage is familiar! I've heard that prayer before! And this phrase is one I use in my tradition all the time! Indeed, anyone wishing insight into traditional Wicca might thoroughly enjoy original source materials like *The Greater and Lesser Keys of Solomon the King*, or *Duncan's Rituals of Freemasonry*.

Radical witches, on the other hand, may be most interested in the internal politics of various occult groups, and in how these groups evolved one from another in an almost dialectic fashion. They may find histories of the occult as a whole, such as those by Francis King or Nevill Drury, most interesting. Creating new groups with new and radical goals, rethinking social norms in favor of life-changing spiritual goals, struggling with both high-minded ideals and the petty politics of small groups are all familiar topics to those who have worked with others to make radical magic.

Eclectics will discover a vast resource in the past few hundred years of Western occultism. One of the strengths of eclectic Wicca is its passion for “borrowing” from any ritual or religion. This is, of course, in keeping with the ways of our magical ancestors. Eclectic Wiccans who haven't previously explored occultism may want to skip the history and dive straight into the systems and magic, or they may prefer to get the “backstory” on those systems and magical ways.

Part of the history of Wicca's growth is that practitioners of various forms of occultism in the first half of the 20th century grew tired of the complexity and verbosity—not to mention the expense—of various forms of ceremonial magic. They wanted to simplify their workings, to get back to basics. For that reason (and others), the relative purity and simplicity of folk traditions appealed to them. In the past decade or so, however, some Wiccan practices have perhaps become *over*-simplified. Digging around in historical Western occultism is one way to restore some of the color and window dressing that make Wicca much more fun and more powerful.

JOHN DEE AND ENOCHIAN MAGIC

A convenient starting point for examining the history of modern magic is the latter half of the 16th century. There, at the court of Elizabeth I, we find Dr. John Dee, court astrologer, magician, and alchemist. Dee, first alone and later in association with Edward Kelley, developed, discovered, or received (depending on your viewpoint) the “Angelic” or “Enochian” language, a symbol system and mystical map in the form of tablets, shapes, and locations of magical beings that enabled magicians to communicate with angels. Dee believed he received information directly from angels through his occult work, beginning with the angel Uriel. These communications formed the basis of his work, which ultimately became known as Enochian magic.

While Dee had both a good reputation and an immense knowledge of the occult, Kelley was a somewhat shady character. Thus some of their later work in partnership has an unsavory reputation among some magicians. In fact, some magicians today consider Enochian magic to be too dangerous to explore, while others find it exalting. It is certainly sophisticated and complex, requiring mastery of a difficult language.

FREEMASONRY

Another fascinating place to explore is the history of Freemasonry. This is a rather difficult area of study, however. For every good scholarly source on the subject, there are seven wacky ones that claim the Freemasons built King Solomon's temple (a claim so utterly lacking in evidence that it is like the Masonic “grandmother story”), or perhaps came from Atlantis. Or the Pleiades. There are also many books claiming that Freemasons are secretly running the world, controlling the government, stealing our jobs, and printing our money. It's *darn* hard to study the Masons, but I offer a couple of good books to get you started.

Freemasonry first surfaced somewhere between the 11th and 14th centuries. It is difficult to determine exactly where to draw the line between a guild of stoneworkers and a magical society. The scholarly dispute on the subject has a certain fascination. One particular area of controversy is over whether the Masons were connected with the Knights Templar, a “heretical” 12th-century order.

The reason the Masons are important to occultists is that Masonic-style ritual informs just about every subsequent magical group. Masonic initiations, for example, became the template for magical initiation in the Golden Dawn and its offshoots. The same is true for Wicca, and for many, many other groups, including those with no direct knowledge of Masonry. During a Masonic initiation, novices are challenged before entering, blindfolded, bound, read a “charge,” required to take an oath of secrecy, and then presented with tools. These steps will be familiar to many readers. In addition, the Masons are the source of the phrase “the Craft,” a phrase that, for them, refers to both their craft of stonemasonry and their secret order. Because of that, Wiccans call witchcraft “the Craft” (which is where the bad movie got its title). A document known as the *Regus Manuscript*, probably the oldest extant Masonic document, also contains the phrase “So mote it be,” a phrase that almost all Wiccans use and understand.



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THE GOLDEN DAWN

Now let's zip forward several centuries. In the late 1800s, S. L. Macgregor Mathers founded the Golden Dawn. There is no magical group more important to the history of Wicca than the Golden Dawn—except, perhaps, for Gerald Gardner's group itself. The Golden Dawn was devoted to Enochian magic and performed rituals constructed along Masonic lines. Mathers did a prodigious amount of very important occult research, resulting in works like his famous translations of *The Greater Key of Solomon the King* and *The Goetia* (a.k.a. *The Lesser Key*). He presided over the most important occult group of the 19th century, one that boasted as members Dion Fortune, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Edward Waite, and Pamela Coleman Smith. The Golden Dawn is still influential today.

Like many groups founded by charismatic leaders, the Golden Dawn suffered from splinter groups and infighting, particularly after Mathers' passing. Fortune and Crowley are just two members of the original group who became more famous later for their own occult groups. These two occultists, although utterly opposite in temperament, style, and goals, are each extremely important to Wicca today. If you don't know how important these two individuals and the groups they founded are, all the more reason to study up on the subject. Other names you may be interested in studying include Francis Bacon, Helen Blavatsky, Eliphas Lévi, Israel Regardie, and Alice Bailey. They are all important to the development of Western occultism, and are mentioned in the recommended reading.

One day, while teaching a class, I came upon the metaphor of the development of Western occultism as an hourglass—a shape in which many divergent streams converged in the narrow center of the Golden Dawn, and then split into diverse streams again. Some of the source streams are Babylonian astrology, the work of John Dee, and Masonic ritual. Some of the resultant streams are Thelema, Theosophy, chaos magick, typhonic magick, and traditional Wicca. (Note that each resultant stream was derived from other sources as well, but can claim a connection to the Golden Dawn.) Because this is a book on Wicca, I have paid little attention in my recommended reading to post-Wiccan magical philosophies and practices, but the field is vast for the interested student.

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RECOMMENDED READING

Let's start with a few general histories.

The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft by Ronald Hutton. This book has already been suggested for its history of Wicca. It is an invaluable source for Western occult information in its chapters "Finding a Structure" and "Finding a High Magic."

The History of Magic in the Modern Age: A Quest for Personal Transformation by Nevill Drury. A good book, but a credulous one. Drury assembles a good overview, hitting the highlights of magical history, and coming right up to the present day, including chaos magick, Satanism, and cyber-Paganism. But this is a book in which every story that a magician has told about himself is recorded as fact. In *The History of Magic in the Modern Age*, Alex Sanders was initiated by his grandmother, and Anton LeVey's parents were also named LeVey. Watch out!

Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism by Francis King. Focuses on Golden Dawn and post-GD groups, with lots of the inside gossip.

A couple of more specific histories:

The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590–1710 by David Stevenson. A credible source for the early history of freemasonry.

The Golden Dawn by Israel Regardie. Both history and ritual are covered, and you learn much about Enochian magic as well.

Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887-1923 by Ellic Howe. This one's out of print, but if you can find it, it's of interest.

And some biographies:

The Queen's Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Advisor to Queen Elizabeth by Benjamin Woolley. Interesting biography of this important figure.

Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses by Mary K. Greer. Part history, part biography, this one is naturally of interest to feminist Wiccans, or any woman wondering where her predecessors are among the many charismatic men of occultism.

The Legacy of the Beast by Gerald Suster. Ronald Hutton's favorite biography of Aleister Crowley.

Priestess: the Life and Magic of Dion Fortune by Alan Richardson. A well-regarded biography of this elusive and important occult priestess.

Dancers to the Gods by Alan Richardson. The magical work and records of two important members of Fortune's order; Christine Hartley and Charles Seymour.

THE RITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF WESTERN OCCULTISM

Now that we've talked about where Western occult traditions came from, let's talk about what occultist *do*. If you are a Wiccan, you will doubtless find much that resonates here. While you may not have realized that a particular Wiccan activity has Kabbalistic overtones, or that a certain phrase is actually from *The Key of Solomon the King*, there is much that will be familiar to you in these traditions. And it is exciting to come across this kind of knowledge in your reading.

If you are a traditional Wiccan, you may find you already know more magic (or magick, as Western occultists like to spell it) than you realized. And you may find the study perfectly consonant with your existing practice.

If you are an eclectic Wiccan, you may find less that is familiar, but much that is exciting. Because eclectics are so good at borrowing from other traditions, you may be fascinated by topics like color symbolism, numerology, and sacred incense used for various purposes. You can explore these practices without adopting the whole elaborate tradition.

If you are a radical witch, you may find less that is of interest to you here, because much of the older material is patriarchal and hierarchical. For you, I highly recommend modern and feminist-minded writers like Kala Trobe and Donald Michael Kraig. Both these authors are very sensitive to the way the world has changed, and both are very much a part of that change. Eclectics and radicals may also be strongly interested in personal mental work like pathworking, which we will discuss just ahead.

MAGICAL PRACTICE

Magical practice is informed by beliefs, theories, and philosophies. In order to learn about magic, you can't help but learn how magicians think. The workings found in Aleister Crowley's *Thelema*, for instance, are inseparable from its core statement: "Do what thou Wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the Law, Love under Will." So, I think it is helpful to look at both theory and practice (to use Crowley's phrase³). In part, this is because of my basic outlook that ritual should be consistent with belief and vice versa. My book *The Elements of Ritual* is constructed entirely around looking at each step of Wiccan ritual so that what you do, what it means, and how it feels are all of a piece. This isn't a Wiccan concept *per se*; it is a principal that applies to any ritual or religion.

Moreover, you have to work with your own learning style. When you're studying on your own, it's easy to get frustrated or bored. My advice is this: Alternate the kind of books you read so that different parts of your brain are stimulated. Don't read philosophy books or ritual scripts one right after another. Don't try to read reference books (dictionaries, encyclopedias, correspondence lists) straight through. And from time to time, throw in a comic book or a novel to give your brain a rest.

Most good books on the rituals of ceremonial magic give you plenty of supplementary material on symbols, systems, and techniques. Flipping through Donald Michael Kraig's *Modern Magick*, you find a Tree of Life diagram, illustrations of magical seals, and elemental exercises. A quick glance through William Gray's *Magical Ritual Methods* reveals a correspondence chart for Tarot suits, a chart that shows (among other things) perfume correspondences in the Kabbalah, and a correspondence of astrology and the ritual altar. If these topics interest you, seek out books that deal directly with them, as well as reference books that tie many topics together.

By symbol systems, I mean correspondences and structures around which rituals can be built. For example, if, when doing a ritual for love, you first look up planetary correspondences to discover that the planet Venus is connected to love, and then choose seven candles because the number seven is associated with Venus, you are using numbers and planets in a symbolic way and structuring your ritual accordingly. Both radical witches and traditional Wiccans can be expected to have a strong interest in spellcasting, and so will find their work enhanced by this area of study.

KABBALAH

When exploring specific symbol systems within Western occultism, your first stop must be the Kabbalah. This is a complex subject, and one that many Wiccans avoid. There are all sorts of reasons why Wiccans think Kabbalah isn't for them. It originates in Judaism and is steeped in patriarchal monotheism. It is intensely structured and elaborate. It places the Goddess in an inferior position to God the Father. The best book—in fact, the only book—I know that specifically addresses these issues is Ellen Cannon Reed's *The Goddess and the Tree*. (You may find an older edition called *The Witches' Qabala*; it's the same book.) Another good book for Wiccans on this topic is Kala Trobe's *Magick of Qabalah*. (By the way, if you are wondering about the various spellings of Kabbalah/Qabalah/Qabala/Cabala, the word is Hebrew—a language that uses a different alphabet from ours. As with Chanukah/Hannuka/Hannukah, there are variations in transliteration.)

It is from the Kabbalah that a number of other symbol systems used by magicians are derived—numerology, color symbology, and planetary (and therefore astrological) correspondences. Enochian magic, already discussed, has a rich symbol system, as does alchemy. John Dee was an alchemist, so you will find a relationship between the two. You may also be interested in talismans and other forms of numerology. Kabbalistic numerology is either strictly Hebrew or relates the Hebrew system to the English alphabet. Try exploring Pythagorean or other systems for a different frame of reference. I leave these fascinating areas for you to explore.

One particular area of interest within the Kabbalah is pathworking, a form of meditation or active imagination in which you journey on the inner planes along specific paths of the Tree of Life. Some people, by the way, use the term "pathworking" in a general sense, meaning any guided meditation used in the occult. Technically, however, it is only pathworking when you travel along a path of the Tree.

RECOMMENDED READING

GENERAL RITUAL, INCLUDING LOTS OF PERFORMANCE DETAILS AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

Modern Magick: Eleven Lessons in the High Magickal Arts by Donald Michael Kraig. A modern classic, very thorough and practical. If you're only going to look at one book in this whole section, this should probably be it.

Magical Ritual Methods by William G. Gray. An older book, this is an excellent resource.

Duncan's Ritual of Freemasonry by Malcolm C. Duncan. Some Masons say it is out of date, other people say it is definitive. I am not a Mason, so I cannot determine the answer to this question, but everyone agrees it is pretty darn accurate.

PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Initiation Into Hermetics by Franz Bardon. Another classic. Hermetics was a big influence on Crowley.

Magick in Theory and Practice and *Magick Without Tears* by Aleister Crowley. Both contain plenty of practical instruction, but also a good deal of theory (as Crowley's title indicates). These are books that constantly express the philosophy of magic as part and parcel of its performance. Most think the first is the way to go, but I love the second. Some of it is absolutely terrible, but it is incredibly wide-ranging, in parts brilliant, and often quite funny. *Magick Without Tears* is a collection of teaching letters Crowley wrote, which explains why the book is so uneven, but it also gives a huge variety of topics. Keep in mind that passages from this book express the worst sort of sexism and racism.

Heinous though they are, they do not diminish the quality of the rest of the material.

The Golden Dawn: A Complete Course in Practical Ceremonial by Israel Regardie. Considered the definitive Golden Dawn book.

Ritual Use of Magical Tools by Chic and Sandra Tabatha Cicero. This is a Golden Dawn-based book.

KABBALAH

The Goddess and the Tree (formerly *The Witches' Qabala*) by Ellen Cannon Reed. As discussed previously, a Wiccan view of the Kabbalah.

Magick of Qabalah by Kala Trobe. As discussed previously, a very modern view.

A Garden of Pomegranates: Skrying on the Tree of Life by Israel Regardie.

Bigger and denser than the other two, this one is a classic for the student who has chosen to really get into the Kabbalah.

Anatomy of the Body of God by Frater Achad.

The Secret Doctrine of the Kabbalah by Leonora Leet. This and the Frater Achad book were recommended to me by author Donald Michael Kraig.

PATHWORKING

The Initiate's Book of Pathworkings: A Bridge of Dreams by Dolores and Tamara Ashcroft-Nowicki. Ashcroft-Nowicki has written quite a body of work on magic and the Kabbalah. An excellent resource.

More Simplified Magic: Pathworking and the Tree of Life by Ted Andrews.

Another of the very few books on the subject of pathworking from a respected author.

CHAOS MAGICK

Liber Null & Psychonaut by Peter J. Carroll. Chaos magick is a controversial "postmodern" magical system that may or may not be your cup of tea.

This is one of its classic texts.

Prime Chaos: Adventures in Chaos Magic by Phil Hine. Another classic on chaos magick.

TYPHONIAN MAGICK

Outer Gateways and *Nightside of Eden* by Kenneth Grant. Typhonian magick is the offspring of Grant, variously considered a genius, a monster, deranged, inspired, a boon or a curse to the occult community. You can decide for yourself. Most of Grant's works are out of print and pricey; these two are still available.

Maat Magick by Nema. Ritual magic of the Typhonian type, with lots of goddess worship. A very interesting system for those of an eclectic or experimental nature to explore. It is extremely well-regarded in magical circles, and has a sort of Wiccan flavor that may appeal to those exploring both Wicca and magick.

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

The Complete Enochian Dictionary by Donald C. Laycock, John Dee, Edward Kelley. As the title suggests, a reference for the interested student.

The Key of Solomon the King. Translated and edited from manuscripts in the British Museum by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King. Translated by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

The Greater and Lesser Keys of Solomon are crucial magical texts with widespread influence.

777 by Aleister Crowley. This is primarily a reference book.

FICTION

The Sea Priestess and *Moon Magic* by Dion Fortune. True to my word, I am giving you something more restful than the preceding tomes. These two books are classics of occult philosophy, and deeply Pagan as well. Many Wiccans find that excerpts from one or both books have made it into their Book of Shadows. *Moon Magic* is the sequel to *The Sea Priestess*, so you may want to read them in order.

HOMEWORK

- Choose one Western occultist and research him or her. Write a biographical essay about your subject. If you have a study group, set aside time to read each other's essays. It will be quite easy to find material on a very famous occultist like Aleister Crowley, whereas it may prove more challenging to do research on someone like Pamela Coleman Smith.
- Select a problem or issue that needs attention and make a talisman to address that issue. This will involve researching what talismans are and how they are made.
- Rearrange your personal altar according to a symbol system that interests you. Consider, for example, working with numerology, and controlling the number of objects on your altar for a particular effect. Do this for a month and then record the results you've noticed.
- Practice visualization exercises learned from a book on pathworking, the Kabbalah, or any other magical book.

[3](#). I am referring to Aleister Crowley's classic text *Magick in Theory and Practice*.

THE BURNING TIMES

The period of time from roughly the mid-16th through the late 17th centuries during which purported witches were arrested, tortured, and executed (sometimes by burning, sometimes by hanging, sometimes by other means) is of great interest to Wiccans. No matter what kind of Wiccan you are, these witch hunts provide a sort of formative mythology and give all Wiccans an ancestry of persecution and martyrdom. Such history resonates powerfully for people, and inasmuch as Wiccans can be said to be a people (or a community, or a movement) it takes on a special significance.

Radical witches have a particular interest in the topic of oppression and persecution; they tend to identify with past struggles and bring that feeling of solidarity with a past sister/brotherhood forward into present struggles. All Wiccans can connect with the medieval witch as the outsider, the outcast, the “other,” but radical and feminist witches have the deepest understanding of, and interest in, the persecution of minorities by institutional authorities.

Eclectics, most frequently practicing as solitaires, have a strong connection with the isolation of those persecuted for witchcraft. The image of a witch from an earlier time off by herself, gathering and drying her herbs in secret, saying prayers by association, as well as in its own right. Traditional Wiccans whose form of Wicca derives from Gardner and Valiente may have the greatest interest in the witch cult *per se*, as opposed to the persecution of individual “witches.”

Traditional Wiccans know that their own history is directly connected to the study of the witch hunts. Margaret Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* posited that the witch hunts were the persecution of a surviving Pagan cult that worshiped a horned god. This book sparked the Pagan witchcraft craze that inspired and excited such luminaries as Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente. Whatever your opinion about Gardner's role in Wicca—whether you think he invented, popularized, modernized, or reshaped it—there is no question that Murray was influential. So much so, in fact, that she wrote the preface to *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner's first nonfiction book on the topic of witchcraft.

Murray is discredited⁴ and yet influential. Her theories held great fascination among the public long after scholars had finished laughing and moved on. The idea of a witch cult is so important to the origins of Wicca that the topic retains interest by association, as well as in its own right. Traditional Wiccans whose form of Wicca derives from Gardner and Valiente may have the greatest interest in the witch cult *per se*, as opposed to the persecution of individual “witches.”

DEFINING THE WITCH HUNTS

Hundreds of books and articles have been written about the great European witch-hunt of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and during the last few years the subject has received more attention from historians than ever before. But . . . the more is written, the more glaring the disagreements. Were there people who regarded themselves as witches? If so, what did they do, or believe themselves to do? Were they organized, did they hold meetings? What are we to make of covens and sabbats? Again, when and where did the great witch-hunt begin? Who launched it, who perpetuated it, and for what motives? And just how “great” was it—did the numbers of those executed run into thousands, or into tens of thousands, or into hundreds of thousands? On most of these questions there is still no consensus amongst historians—and even where consensus exists, it is not necessarily correct.⁵

Lots of Wiccans are amateur (or professional) scholars, and many are interested in the period of the witch hunts. Thus, lots of “there was no witch cult” or “the people killed weren't witches” or “those numbers are inflated” arguments tend to spring up among well-informed or partially informed people. Many of these arguments work at cross-purposes, however. Deciding who was persecuted, whether they were witches, and how many of them were out there, depends a lot on how you define things.⁶

- Who was considered a “witch” during the witch hunts?
- What defines a “witch hunt”?
- What is meant by “killed”?
- What is meant by “the Inquisition”?

WHAT WAS A WITCH?

It turns out that there were, during the Middle Ages, two entirely different notions of what a witch was, of what sort of person was being arrested, tried, and punished, and of what that person *did* that was called witchcraft.

Long before the Middle Ages, long before Christianity in fact, societies had some notion of a witch as a person who used hexes or magic to cause harm to enemies or society. Such witches are still being persecuted in modern-day Africa. These people may have been ambivalent, performing both good and bad magic. The real people accused of witchcraft may have practiced the evils of which they were accused, or they may have been cunning folk who crossed the wrong person, or were competitors of other cunning folk, or were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. It seems pretty clear that almost every society has had some kind of a witch in its consciousness, and that, when accusations were going to be made, cunning folk were at high risk. Let's call these people “folk witches.”

It is clear that many accusations of witchcraft during the witch-hunt years were against just such purported folk witches—people accused by neighbors or associates of such typical evils as souring cows, blighting fields, and causing illnesses, accidents, death, and impotence. It also seems clear that, as the witch hunts progressed, the definition of witchcraft broadened in some places to include what was previously considered good magic. Folk magic itself, always suspect, came to be outright illegal.

The other kind of witch was the member of a Satan-worshipping cult. Prosecution of these witches didn't depend upon evidence of blighted crops or mysterious fires. These witches were accused of worshipping the devil, having sex with him, and conspiring against Christianity. Let's call these “Satanic witches.”

Now things start to get muddled, because, in some cases, these two kinds of witchcraft were introduced as evidence at the same trial, leading some scholars to look at trial records and conclude that a cult of magic practitioners or cunning folk was being prosecuted. In fact, other kinds of heresy may also have been introduced. It is certainly true that Inquisitors were interested in Pagan survivals centuries before they were much interested in witches. It is easy to blur these lines, and see them all as evidence of a single “witchcraft”—the survival of a Pagan cult that worshiped in groups and practiced magic. This is something like what Murray found, but she failed to realize that it wasn't all one big conspiratorial mish-mash. Despite this confusion in many trials, however, we now know that two entirely different definitions of witchcraft were operating, one much older than the other.

It is difficult for modern witches to hear that there have always been accusations of witchcraft, and that our Pagan ancestors didn't like witches at all. Most Wiccans tend to believe that, when ancient Pagans said “witch,” they meant a “cunning man” or a “wise woman.” But whatever language we explore, we find that there are distinct words for those who help and those who curse. The witch hunts, hideous as they were, are not responsible for giving the word “witch” its negative connotations, but they *are* responsible for taking a bunch of good things (such as healing illnesses) and dumping them into the “witchcraft” bucket.

WHAT WAS A WITCH HUNT?

The reason it is important to define this term is that it affects our understanding of who was persecuted. There is plenty of evidence that suggests population trends for the persecution of folk witches, but the statistics go out the window when the persecution of Satanic witches is tallied in. Because Satanic witches were believed to worship in conspiratorial groups, they were forced, under torture, not just to confess, but to name co-conspirators. These practices led to “crazes,” in which groups of people were arrested in indiscriminate sweeps. The famous Salem witch hunt was one such craze. Everything we know about the gender (overwhelmingly female in most places), social class (usually poor), and other defining characteristics of those persecuted gets lost once a craze takes hold; all bets are off and anyone can be accused next.

Some scholars now argue that there is no evidence that most accused witches were women. This seems mostly intended to counterbalance the feminist argument that witch hunts were a systematic gender persecution. When you separate witch-craze statistics from the slow-and-steady accusations that appear to have been the norm, however, you find that the non-craze statistics bear out the idea that most of the victims in most (not all) places were women. So, if you define a witch hunt as a witchcraze, there are no verifiable trends to analyze. If you define a witch hunt simply as the occurrence of witchcraft arrests, tortures, and executions, it's a different story.

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HOW MANY WERE KILLED?

Many people still confidently believe Matilda Joslyn Gage's figure of nine million witches put to death—a number she pulled out of thin air and printed in 1893 in a book called *Women, Church, and State*. The number is astonishingly large, and that was, perhaps, the point. Current scholars now place the figure as low as fifty thousand.

Here, however, we must stop to ask what is meant by “deaths.” In *Witchcraze*, author Anne Llewellyn Barstow points out that the number of those killed is usually counted as equal to the number of those executed. Yet many died in jail while awaiting trial, sometimes as a result of torture and deprivation, and sometimes by suicide. In addition, many who were found innocent were killed by communities unhappy with the verdict—medieval lynch mobs, in essence. Add to that the number of records not yet uncovered, and Barstow concludes that doubling the current conventional number is justified. She uses a figure of one hundred thousand.

WHAT WAS THE INQUISITION?

A few years ago, the consensus was that those tortured and killed during the witch hunts were, by and large, the victims of the Inquisition. It turns out this isn't really true. While this may lead some to argue that the Catholic Church is not responsible for this terrible period in history, let's be clear that a whitewash is not in order either.

These extreme positions are a normal part of the pendulum swing that characterizes scholarly dialogues about history.² First, we think one extreme (It was all the Catholic Church's fault!); then we think the opposite (The Catholic Church really had very little to do with it!). The truth is that the Inquisition did not conduct the worst of the witch hunts, and was not generally a direct player where true crazes took hold. But the Inquisition played an important indirect role.

Many people who aren't scholars, but are somewhat well informed about the period in history that Wiccans call “The Burning Times,” may not be equally well informed about the Catholic Church or what, exactly, the Inquisition is. To be precise, the Inquisition is a specific church order founded to combat and prosecute heresy. Some people certainly misunderstand the term and use it to mean any prosecution of heresy during the period, even that done by Protestants. Some use the term loosely to mean a tribunal using inquisitorial procedures. This is more significant because, even though it is technically incorrect, it points to innovations of the Inquisition that were influential, in fact crucial, for creating an atmosphere in which witch-crazes could occur.

Before the institution of Inquisitorial procedure, charges, even charges of witchcraft, could only be brought before most courts in Europe through an accusatory procedure in which a plaintiff bore responsibility for his accusation. With the advent of Inquisitorial procedure, authorities could inquire of any citizen about a crime, and accusations made during such an inquiry didn't have to be proven by the person making them. Furthermore, Inquisitorial procedure allowed for confession by torture. These practices, introduced by the Inquisition for use against Cathars, were adopted by secular courts for later use against witches.

This is important, because when people say the Inquisition was responsible for this or that crime against accused witches, burned this or that many people, and so on, the truth or falsehood of the claim rests entirely on whether they mean the acts were committed by a specific office of the Catholic Church, or merely through a procedure introduced into medieval Europe by that office.

STUDYING THE WITCH HUNTS

The existence of historical forgeries and the biases of various authors makes studying *The Burning Times* difficult. *Europe's Inner Demons*, published in 1975 by Norman Cohn, is the first book on the witch hunts that uncovers forgeries that greatly exaggerate the size and period of the persecutions. Reading books published after 1975 is one way to protect yourself against believing material that relies on forged medieval records. Cohn's book, though, is biased against the supernatural to such an extent that it can be irritating for a magical person to read. Other books may be biased toward or against the Catholic Church, have a feminist slant, or espouse a pet theory. Your best defense against distorted material, as is so often the case, is to read several sources and draw your own conclusions.

On the other hand, you can learn a lot by reading material with a slant. I am particularly fond of the book *Witchcraze*, which has a pronounced feminist bias that sometimes slants the material away from the truth. I think, though, that the feminist point of view lends more insight, in this case, than it does distortion. The important part is to keep that grain of salt handy!

RECOMMENDED READING

Ecstas: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath by Carlo Ginzburg.

The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries by Carlo Ginzburg. Many Wiccans are enormously fond of Ginzburg because he seems to corroborate Margaret Murray, which was never his intention. He does point to some magical doings in the period, and is informative about the sort of things that may or may not have survived.

Europe's Inner Demons by Norman Cohn. There's a lot that's annoying about this book, but it's invaluable. Cohn is 100% dismissive of any occult phenomenon; if someone claimed to fly, for example, or claimed to use “baby fat” as an ingredient, this is proof that everything they say is false. The “baby fat” and “dragon's blood” thing is something that has tripped up a lot of scholars, who apparently don't know that ingredients in folk recipes often have nicknames. Just as St. John's wort is not provided by St. John, and just as Queen Anne's lace is not made of lace, so too is “baby fat,” in a medieval witches' brew, an innocent item.

Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe by Stuart Clark. Clark is an interesting, thoughtful man and a respected scholar.

Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts by Anne Llewellyn Barstow. The best feminist book on the topic I've found. Drives some scholars absolutely batty, but it's worth reading.

Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft by Robin Briggs. Offers a radically different view of who accused whom, and why.

A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans by Jeffrey B. Russell. Russell also wrote *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, but this is more recent.

It also covers modern Paganism and is mentioned in [chapter 1](#).

Male Witches in Early Modern Europe by Lara Apps and Andrew Gow. A much-neglected area. Anyone who is reading the feminist version of the witch-craze should balance it with this more rare viewpoint.

The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England by Carol F. Karlsen. New England witchcraft is an entirely different area of study, one of less interest to many

Wiccans, who are most fascinated by the ancestry of modern witchcraft, which resides in Europe. However, it's certainly a fascinating book—a careful, scholarly, and feminist work that paints a vivid picture of Colonial life.

In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692 by Mary Beth Norton. Some people find this work too comprehensive, but it gives you all the information you may want, and is quite scholarly.

HOMEWORK

Of the following assignments, I find the first the most educational, but also the most analytical. Since that isn't everyone's style, I offer the others as well.

- Find two points upon which scholars disagree and create a diagram of those points: e.g., some authors contend that the witch hunts were a war against women, and others disagree. What evidence does each side present? Look carefully at the results of your diagram and draw your own conclusions. If you have a study group, you can argue your conclusion to your group.
- Research the life of one person killed for witchcraft.
- Find out something of the daily life of people during the witch-craze. What did they eat, wear, or sing?

4. Some scholars attribute a large or small grain of truth to her, but no one accepts her theories in their entirety

5. *Europe's Inner Demons*, p. 99

6. As a matter of fact, a *lot* of arguments can be resolved by examining the definitions of the terms being argued over.

7. In fact, they're part of human nature, and may be exacerbated by the dualism in our culture.

WICCAN PRACTICE

MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

To me, the study of myth—of the gods—holds much of the heart of my Wiccan path. It is my favorite area of study. I am far happier reading a book on mythology than reading a novel. When I read the stories of the gods, I learn who they are and how best to worship them. Other than actually being in the process of worship, what could be more rewarding?

When first learning Wicca, we all pick up some preconceptions about the Wiccan gods, although what those conceptions are will vary depending upon whether you are a traditional Wiccan, an eclectic, or a radical witch. Radical and feminist witches and goddess spirituality practitioners are most likely to emphasize the concept of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. They may give little attention to any god. Radicals and eclectics often correspond a Triple God to the Triple Goddess, while traditional Wiccans tend to focus on a Two-Faced God and a Triple Goddess.

Some Traditionalists give little attention to mythology beyond the lore of their own tradition, but may study that internal myth a great deal. They will often focus on the culture from which their tradition derives, often (but not always) Celtic or some specific Celtic culture. Traditional Wiccans may benefit from learning that their gods are broader and more complex than they had originally believed. Studying syncretic theories of mythology, such as Joseph Campbell's "monomyth," may be an enlightening way of reframing their explorations of deity.

Many feminist witches argue that all goddesses are Maiden, Mother, or Crone, while some feminist scholars argue fervently against this theory. Radical and feminist witches can be empowered by learning about a great variety of goddesses, especially those who seem to fall outside this triple formulation. They can then make up their own minds about this controversy.

Overall, eclectics are most likely to embrace a truly universalist approach to mythology, because they have neither a tradition nor an ideology to confine their explorations. (That is not to say that other Wiccans are necessarily confined in their outlook, but there is always that potential.) Eclectics can benefit most from a study of mythology that pays attention to preference and cultural context. While, at its best, eclecticism grabs hold of a great breadth of material, at its worst, it utterly disregards depth. Studying stories of the gods informs us about things that individual deities may like or dislike, and can impart information on how they should be worshiped. Even a quick overview of Greek mythology tells us that Demeter and Hades do not belong on an altar together. In the story of the abduction of Persephone, Demeter declared Hades to be her eternal enemy. In this same story, Demeter also refused wine and drank a barley beverage instead. Studying this one story tells us who the goddess gets along with and what kind of offerings are, and are not, acceptable on her altar.

FINDING A PATRON DEITY

One of the questions I most often hear from young Pagans and Wiccans is: "How do I find my patron god or goddess?" My first answer is: You don't have to. Lots of people worship many gods and goddesses—or the Lord and the Lady, or the Mother—without ever finding a patron. Having "your" god or goddess is not a necessary part of most Pagan paths—certainly not of Wicca.

There is no doubt that the relationship with a patron deity is a rewarding one, if you happen to find it. (And, over the course of a lifetime, you may well find more than one.) The only reliable way to find a deity is to *know* about them. It is possible, and does sometimes happen, that a deity about whom a person knows absolutely nothing will suddenly appear to that person. Not often, though. I like to say that, in general, Catholic nuns do not have visions of Kali Ma, and Hindu brahmins do not have visions of the Virgin Mary. What is in your head beforehand affects what emerges for you in an ecstatic or meditative state. Wiccans believe in immanent deity, gods within, as well as (or rather than) gods without. We can thus expect our gods to emerge from within ourselves. When we study the stories of the gods, we create a fertile ground from which they can emerge.

Think of your brain as a filing cabinet through which the gods will rifle. The more files you have in your cabinet, the more choices they will have. Or think of studying myth as getting a Liberal Arts education in polytheism; the idea is to follow a syllabus that gives you a taste of the diversity of the topic so that you can focus later.

MYTH AS STORYTELLING

Myth is not just about the gods. It is also about stories and storytelling. Myths have been described as collective dreams—peculiar narratives shared by a culture. (Conversely, dreams have been described as personal, private myths.) Myths, in their nonlinear fashion, communicate ideas about gods, life, and humanity that theology cannot. You may think of them as a right-brain study of religion, of which theology is the left-brain counterpart.

Many people focus on the answer provided in myths; they tell why there is winter, why there are two genders, and why certain flowers are certain colors. But more than that, myths ask questions. They represent our desire, as humans, to know why there is death, or why there are two genders, or why we must sacrifice. The stories function as a way of validating the questions we ask. By telling or enacting the stories, we participate in the questions and find peace in the lack of definitive answers.



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Myth can inform Wiccan ritual (of all sorts). As I have just suggested, stories can be enacted as ritual drama, or the simpler act of reciting a story can be incorporated into a ceremony. Knowledge of mythology can also inform worship and invocation. For example, you can invoke the goddess Parvati as "mother of Ganesha, wife of Shiva, she who performed austerities to gain golden skin." Each of these statements about Parvati recall a different story about her.

When you decide to start reading about myth, there are a number of possible approaches you can take. One is to look for stories or collections of stories. Many books collect stories from one culture or geographic region—Hindu stories, or Native American stories of the Pacific Northwest, or Yoruba stories, or Greek mythology. Other story collections are thematic—a book of creation stories worldwide, or trickster tales, or stories of rebirth.

MYTH AS MEANING

There are innumerable ways of deriving meaning from mythology. Scholarly books may focus on a single topic. Among the most famous of these is Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, in which numerous stories are used to illustrate Campbell's theory of the mono-myth, a.k.a. the "Hero Journey." Other scholars of religious studies may choose a single god or goddess, or a pair of deities, and write about them. For example, *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus* by Alain Daniélou takes two deities from different cultures and compares them. Books like this—which may contain stories and interpretations, history, iconography, information about worship, customs, philosophy, and more—have become, for me, the most rewarding.

Studies like these are specific and specialized—not necessarily what a beginner wants. But, in addition to talking about their topic with insight and erudition, such authors as Wendy Doniger and Alain Daniélou teach us how to *look* at gods and their stories. When I hear a myth, my understanding of it is informed by how other myths have been interpreted. I am open to the whole idea of looking at the story from different angles, in ways both sacred and profane.

Another way of interpreting myth is through a Jungian lens (see [chapter 11](#)). There is, in fact, a great body of literature about mythology by Jungians (students of the theories of psychologist Carl G. Jung). Jungians see gods as existing within our own psyches. For them, the examination of mythology becomes an inner task—a path toward self-actualization.

Some Jungian authors have written books that serve primarily as self-help guides. Others provide enormous insight into mythology itself. Although none of the psychologists who write these books are, to my

knowledge, actually Pagans or worshippers of the gods they describe, the best of them nonetheless provide depth and wisdom that Pagans might well emulate. Among these, my favorite is Christine Downing. Downing's books are both universally applicable and intensely personal. She provides instruction by example as to how we can find the gods within us. I prefer this approach, rather than having it spelled out for me.

There are also reference books on mythology. It is certainly handy to have a few sacred encyclopedias in the house. There are many on the market, of varying quality. The two that I recommend don't cover everything, but I find them very reliable.

RECOMMENDED READING

STORIES

Mythology by Edith Hamilton. The classic collection of Greek stories.

The Myths and Gods of India by Alain Daniélou. An excellent introduction by one of my favorites.

The Universal Myths by Alexander Eliot. Sorted into mythic categories and cross cultural.

God: Myths of the Male Divine by David Leeming and Jake Page. In the course of studying Wicca and modern Paganism, you will encounter enormous quantities of material about goddesses. To balance that, I have sought out a good book of Pagan myths that focus on the male deity. These authors have also written a Goddess book in similar format: *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*.

Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer. This is a unique book—a collaboration between a renowned storyteller (Wolkstein) and a famous scholar (Kramer).

SCHOLARLY BOOKS

The Hero With a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell. A classic, and the start of Campbell's stellar career. I could happily recommend a sizable number of works by Campbell, whose passion for both storytelling and inner experience creates a unique and magnificent point of view that colors everything he wrote. Consider the four volumes of *The Masks of God*, as well as smaller volumes such as *Myths to Live By*. There's also a DVD collection of the 1988 television series *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, with Bill Moyers. It's absolutely delightful and many Wiccan groups have used the videos as class material.

Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. This is a wonderful book about the value of stories that come from outside your own culture, with examples that include, not just scholarship, but stories that illustrate this very concept. Note that Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty is a scholar who originally published under her married name of O'Flaherty, then added her maiden name to the middle. She then dropped the married name entirely. Any book on a mythological topic you find written by Wendy O'Flaherty or Wendy Doniger is by the same author. Doniger is perhaps my favorite author in the entire subject area. She has written many books that look at myth from various viewpoints, including disguise and masquerade, and sexuality. Her book *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* is out of print, but worth hunting down.

Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus by Alain Daniélou. An interesting idea; paralleling two gods from different parts of the world with striking similarities.

Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol by Kathleen Erndl. This book has meant a great deal to me personally. It paints a rich portrait of goddess worship in the Punjab, and shows Hindu goddess stories in light of their modern ritual setting. Other scholars you may be interested in reading include Karl Kerenyi, Mircea Eliade, and Heinrich Zimmer.

JUNGLIAN

The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine; Gods in Our Midst:

Mythological Images of the Masculine: A Woman's View; and *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* by Christine Downing. I hope you'll forgive me for offering three books by the same author. In the study of myth, I have encountered no other Jungian whose work I enjoy so much, and these three books balance each other so very well. The first two focus on relating to the gods in a personal way. They also offer rich insight, of a quality I've found in few other places, into Greek gods. The last has only one section devoted to myths about deities and heroes. It could as easily have appeared in the sections on psychology or feminism and gender theory. I find the book fascinating and unique, but if these topics don't interest you, give it a pass.

REFERENCE BOOKS

Gods and Mortals in Classical Mythology: A Dictionary by Michael Grant and John Hazel. I've had this one on my shelf for twenty years, pulled down and paged through, relied on, and loved.

The Book of Goddesses and Heroines by Patricia Monaghan. There's also a *New Book of Goddesses and Heroines*, and I understand another revision is in the works. Monaghan is a trustworthy resource, a terrific scholar, and someone with genuine passion for goddesses and goddess worship.

HOMEWORK

- Find a culture you don't know much about, and read some of its stories. Most of us know Greek mythology from our school days, but that leaves Norse, Indian, Egyptian, a wide range of Native American, Yoruban, Nigerian, Russian—indeed, the whole world.
- If you use a ritual that invokes particular deities as part of your worship life, make sure you know as many myths as possible about those deities.
- Choose a myth that is meaningful to you and build a ritual around its telling/enactment. This can be a group or solitary project.
- Write an invocation that uses information derived from myth. For example, Demeter can be invoked as "Mother of Persephone, she who wandered in search of her daughter, nursemaid to Demophon." Incorporate as many specifics, articles of clothing, colors, etc. in your invocation as possible. If you are invoking a Lord and Lady, be sure that both have equally grand invocations.
- Incorporate a myth into a form of art: Write a song, paint a painting, choreograph a dance, or design a piece of jewelry that tells a mythological story.

DIVINATION

In many covens and other Wiccan groups, divination is an expected skill. Some traditional Wiccans make it a requirement for initiation, and almost all Wiccans at least recommend it. What do Wiccans get out of divination that makes it so important to us?

The ability to “far-see” (the literal meaning of the word “clairvoyant” is “farseeing”) allows us to peek around the corners that block our vision. We can see into the future, into the past, into secrets held (consciously or unconsciously) in the present. Divination finds lost objects and missing persons, and uncovers mysteries from womb to tomb.

One of the ways that divination helps us is in making ethical decisions. Is it right to do this spell? Is it for the good of all? If, for example, you are of the belief that you should seek permission to do magic, and you are asked to heal a comatose person, you can use divination to learn that person's wishes. This is divination *as* divination: you “divine” the truth. It is also “fortune-telling” (although this is a phrase much disdained among Pagans and Wiccans) in that it allows you to see what was, what is, and what will be. Often, this form of divination is of greatest interest to Wiccans who do a lot of spellcasting, whether they are traditional, eclectic, or radical witches.

Of course, far-seeing is not just used to make ethical decisions; it is also helpful in very pragmatic ways. I once had a business associate who was in the middle of starting a new consulting company. Unfortunately, he had also just begun a messy divorce, and his wife had taken off with money he'd promised to put up for the business. He was in a tight situation. He came to me because he had heard I was psychic. I wasn't sure what I'd be able to do, but using my Tarot cards, I accurately pinpointed his wife's exact location.

You can also use divination as a counseling or self-help tool. I have heard feminist witches say that they would never do a reading for anyone but themselves; they consider divination a tool of self-empowerment. To read for another smacks, to them, of power-over; of the dominance behavior that they believe typifies patriarchal culture and has no place in witchcraft. I think there are plenty of feminist witches who do readings for others, but it is an intriguing point of view—one I respect even though I disagree with it.

People who use divination primarily for counseling or self-help may or may not believe in the psychic and “supernatural” aspects of the art. They may see Tarot, astrology, runes, the *I Ching*, tea leaves, palmistry, and every other divination method as no more than a tool or prop through which to access inner wisdom, selfknowledge, and/or empathy. On the other hand, they may thoroughly validate the psychic arts while keeping their readings grounded in the present-day and emotionbased world of the psychological. Many groups and individuals of radical orientation have a strong self-help/mutual-help emphasis. For them, divination used in this way is a potent aid.

Eclectics, because they are the Wiccans most likely to practice as solitaires, probably take full advantage of one or more divination systems. Divination is a form of communication, of back-and-forth interplay, and solitaires often appreciate adding this aspect to their practice even though there are no other people about. Divination can be awkward in a group setting. Normally, it is done by a solitary or one-to-one. When I've done it in a group, I have usually paired off the group members. In divination, solitaires have the advantage, since their natural working method is one of the best for doing a reading.

Divination is also a tool of spiritual transformation. Many students of the Tarot never use their cards for “fortune-telling” or counseling at all. It was Eliphas Lévi who first associated the Tarot with the Kabbalah in occult teachings; his system became part of the Golden Dawn primarily through Arthur Edward Waite. If you know even a little Tarot, you've probably heard of the influential Rider-Waite (now known as Waite-Smith) deck. The correspondences between Tarot and Kabbalah make tarot imagery ideal for pathworking, a practice discussed briefly in [chapter 5](#). Groups and solitaires alike can benefit from meditation and other exercises using the tarot.

Tarot is not the only divination system associated with transformative wisdom. Astrology has long been said to unlock the secrets of the planets and of karma. The *I Ching* is a representation and description, in hexagrams and text, of every possible relationship between *yin* and *yang*. Studying the hexagrams of the *I Ching* can teach you the nature of the universe in which you live. Many people think that using these potent tools for seeing the unseen is a debasement of their power, while others do not object to far-seeing, but consider it a decidedly secondary aspect of divination.

Most people who learn to divine specialize in one tool, but I have found, over the years, that different tools have different strengths and weaknesses. Astrology is excellent for timing (finding the best day for an event, for example) and for seeing broad patterns. It is excellent for uncovering karmic issues—the relationship between current events in your life and their roots in your past (including past lives). Palmistry also provides the gift of seeing your whole life, all at once.

The *I Ching*, on the other hand, is an excellent tool for studying or discussing a problem in depth. You cast the sticks or coins, look up the hexagram, and then find a complex and obscure passage of text corresponding to it. Try reading the passage aloud in a group and exploring what it may mean.

Tarot and rune stones are superb for short answers to immediate questions, and for figuring out the direction you should take. Both are great for decision-making. I find Tarot exceptionally good for finding the hidden cause of current issues. I have limited experience with tea-leaf reading, but it, too, seems best at seeing underlying causes of pressing issues, and of answering questions by showing patterns.

All divination systems work, in part, by generating randomness. If everything is orderly and predictable, synchronicity cannot happen. Most Wiccans can benefit by a study of the theories of Jung, who defined synchronicity as “meaningful coincidence” (see [chapters 8](#) and [10](#)). According to Jung, we allow the universe to communicate in our lives by generating some sort of randomness through which it can speak. In other words, when we shake up a bag of rune stones, or shuffle cards, or toss coins, and then allow meaning to be derived from the results, we open a channel between ourselves and those forces that speak through synchronicity.

Let's take a closer look at the two systems of divination most commonly used by Wiccans.

ASTROLOGY

Astrology is probably the form of divination about which most of us hear before any other. Maybe we've seen a daily horoscope column in the newspaper, or received one with our My Yahoo! home page, or maybe someone asked: “What's your sign?” I pasted my son's astrological chart into his baby book a few days after he was born, so I'm sure *he* saw astrology before any other occult art!

Astrology is a rich and complicated field. A full chart takes into account the sign in which all ten “planets” fall (the eight planets of the solar system ⁸ besides the Earth, plus the Sun and Moon), as well as the Ascendant and Midheaven. Most astrologers also look at “nodes” and some also look at other heavenly bodies. In addition to reading a planet in a sign, there is also the relationship between the planets; when drawn on a chart, these angles are either harmonious or disharmonious, representing different advantages or challenges. For example, my Sun is in Taurus, which means my basic nature (Sun) has the qualities of Taurus. My Moon is in Capricorn, which means my emotional and secret nature (Moon) has the qualities of Capricorn. My Sun and Moon are trine, a harmonious relationship indicating that my inner and outer natures will be able to work together.

Normally, we are introduced to our Sun signs first, because they're the easiest to calculate. Sun signs are relatively stable, referring to the same dates each year (plus or minus a day or two). The three most important signs in a chart are Sun, Moon, and Rising (Ascendant), but the Moon sign changes about every two days, and the Ascendant changes about every two hours, so it requires more effort to discover them.

One would look for preponderances and absences in a chart. In my case, with five planets in Earth signs and only Uranus in Fire, one would expect an elemental imbalance and a decided stubbornness and slowness to move. Placement on the chart also has meaning. There are twelve “houses,” each of which controls an area of life. Planets clustered in certain houses show where the energies of those planets will mostly be expended in your life.

This is just an overview of a scientifically complex and intuitively free system of divination that can be used in a variety of ways. Your birth chart represents who you are. It can be examined at a particular time to see what you are going through at that time (using “progression”). In a progression, the chart is viewed in the light of current planetary events that have impact on it. Another sort of reading is when two charts are compared for their interrelationship (“composite” charting); this can be done to see what is happening for a couple.

Astrology is used in conjunction with medicine, with event planning, and with travel. Places, things, events, and institutions all have charts. Everything that comes into being was “born” at a time that can be charted. For example, a business is born when ownership papers are signed.

One of the first books on astrology I ever read, and the first one I completely loved, was *Linda Goodman's Sun Signs*. A lot of people look down their noses at Sun-sign astrology because full charts are so much more complex than that. However, after all these years I still say you can't do any better learning about Sun signs than with Goodman, and you certainly can't understand more complex astrological subjects unless you know what the signs are. Goodman had a way with words that make Sun signs come alive.

My other favorite astrological book, *The Everything Astrology Book*, is an excellent introduction that I keep around as a reference. It was a great book for my teenager to learn from and I often use it when I forget something about houses or planets. (I'm not an astrologer, just an interested amateur). In our house, it's grown quite dog-eared. Below, I offer more sophisticated recommendations. If you find yourself fascinated by this art, there is no end of books, magazines, and Web sites that explore its particulars and history, but start with the simple ones.

Many witches of all stripes find astrology appealing because it corresponds to a version of nature and the universe already consonant with their practice. Astrology, like Wicca, emphasizes the importance of the four elements and the influence of the Moon. More important, it is rooted in a worldview that acknowledges both inner nature and fate (or karma)—we are who we are, and our charts cannot be changed—as well as our ability to make choices that change our lives. Charts can be used to explore reincarnation, but the fixing of planets and angles from the past onto the present is not fatalistic. Because of this, the philosophy of astrology is, to many, a natural companion to the philosophy of Wicca.

A Tarot deck usually consists of seventy-eight cards—fifty-six Minor Arcana that resemble playing cards, with four suits each (ace to ten, followed by “court cards”) and twenty-two Major Arcana, each with unique illustrations. These numbers are synchronous with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, which has ten *sephiroth* in four emanations and twenty-two paths between them. Although there is no evidence that the Kabbalah and the Tarot are historically connected, the odd coincidence of 10-4-22 is too much for most Kabbalists and Tarot readers to ignore.

Traditionally, deep meditative work is confined to the Major Arcana, which depict (depending upon whom you ask) a mystery play, a hero journey, a medieval passion play, a series of archetypes, or a psychological and spiritual process. In the late 1800s, Arthur Edward Waite and Pamela Coleman Smith created a Tarot deck that incorporated Kabbalistic imagery in both the Major and Minor Arcana, giving a spiritual dimension to all seventy-eight cards. Most magicians, however, still consider the Major Arcana to be exalted, and the Minor Arcana to be debased and ordinary. Until Waite, practitioners of Western occultism worked with the Major Arcana as a spiritual and magical tool, while “fortune-tellers” used ordinary playing cards.



Wicca inherited the Tarot
and many other occult tools
from Western occultism.

The Tarot resonates
with Wicca because it is
elemental and uses magical
symbolism.



As discussed in [chapter 5](#), the origins of Wicca are rooted in Western occultism, and thus Wicca inherited the Tarot along with many other occult tools. Just as with astrology, Tarot resonates with Wicca because it is elemental and uses magical symbolism. In addition, in using a Tarot deck, you literally take your fate into your own hands—something that modern Wiccans often find profoundly empowering.

There are a great number of variations on the Tarot, not just in the types of decks, as described below, but in the structure. Most, but not all, decks stick with the four suits and the 56-plus-22 system. Some decks change the suits or the number of suits; some discard suits entirely and go with unique pictures on each card—perhaps retaining seventy-eight cards, perhaps not. The deck structure you decide to use may depend on whether you are an eclectic, radical, or traditional witch. Here, I don't mean what kind of Wicca you practice, but what kind of person you tend to be. I like traditional Tarot decks because I like traditional things, like antique furniture. It is to my taste. When choosing a Tarot deck, suit your taste first and foremost, because Tarot is visual—you'll spend a lot of time looking at the pictures.

If you're going to read a book or two on Tarot, you will probably want to have a Waite-Smith Tarot deck in addition to any other deck you may prefer, simply because most books use the Waite-Smith deck as their standard. Some books, on the other hand, are released in conjunction with a specific deck.

Tarot is one of my very favorite things. It is an art and a skill that I took to quickly, and have continued to use regularly for more than twenty-five years.

One of the joys of Tarot is its adaptability to each person's interests and style. Because of the enormous number of decks on the market, you can certainly find one that fits your needs. If you are an astrologer, try the *Thoth Tarot* (Aleister Crowley's deck), which gives a planet and sign for each card. If you are a Kabbalist, choose a deck with a strong emphasis on the Kabbalah, perhaps the Waite-Smith or the Dion Fortune Tarot⁹, or Ellen Cannon Reed's *Witches' Tarot* (not to be confused with *Tarot of the Witches*). On the other hand, Robin Wood's Tarot has no Kabbalistic influence at all, as Wood has no interest in the topic. Her deck is strongly Wiccan. It emphasizes Pagan deities and imagery, places the four elements in a natural setting, and portrays people as vital and integrated into their environment.

Feminists and radical witches often prefer a deck with that focus, and will certainly want a woman-centered and ethnically diverse deck. *Motherpeace* and *Daughters of the Moon* are the most popular feminist decks. The round cards of both also symbolize a different way of viewing the world than is implied by the angles of rectangular cards. Traditional Tarot readings use *reversals*; a card is upside down or right-side up. A round card has gradations of movement, indicating a worldview where things aren't either-or.

There's also an *Herbal Tarot* that herbalists will probably appreciate. If you are inspired by whimsy, you might want the *Wonderland Tarot* (as in Lewis Carroll); if you appreciate fine art, seek out the rare and expensive *Salvador Dali Tarot*. Odd tastes can make for odd choices: I love the *Tarot of the Witches* because it was designed for the movie *Live and Let Die* and I happen to be a huge James Bond fan.¹⁰

Also consider for whom you will read. If you read for the general public or for children, you'll probably avoid sexually explicit decks, but if you work a great deal with sex energies, then something like the *Nybor Tarot* may be just the thing.

Finally, think about how the cards feel in your hands. During one winter, I suffered from very sore, stiff hands, so I switched to the *Hanson-Roberts Tarot*, one of the few decks that is the size of regular playing cards (most Tarot cards are bigger). Of course, I shuffle like a card sharp, so the comfortable feel mattered more to me than it does to most readers, who tend to simply mix the cards.

LEARN BY DOING

Divination is an art; it cannot be learned from books alone. You have to *do* readings to become skilled at them. Some people take naturally, almost instantly, to one or more divination systems. Others work at it for a long time before they feel at ease.

Some people are entirely comfortable with systems that cannot be learned from books—scrying, for example. Scrying is gazing into water, a crystal, a mirror, or fire, and allowing visions to appear. It is learned entirely by experience, although skill at meditation and concentration will help a great deal (see [chapter 10](#)). A lot of people, though, find scrying too open-ended; they need a more systemized approach.

You can also try a system that produces results virtually instantly, like a pendulum. Here you need nothing more than a weight of some kind (a stone or bead is common) at the end of a string, cord, or chain. You decide in advance what sort of movement will be meaningful—for example, side-to-side for “no,” up-and-down for “yes,” and circles for “unknown.” Then you hold up the pendulum, wait for random movement to cease, and ask a question. You may find a pendulum useless, or you may find it wonderfully informative. If the latter, try alternative uses of the pendulum, such as holding it over a map or a floor plan to pinpoint a location of someone or something.

In *all* divination, even the most structured, you have to apply your intuition. Choose a method in which you feel your intuition can emerge. Your choice doesn't have to make sense to anyone but you. You might choose runes because you have an interest in Asatru, or just because you like how they look. I chose Tarot in part because I love playing cards and they felt good in my hands.

RECOMMENDED READING

ASTROLOGY

Astrodiens: www.astro.com. I love this astrological Web site for its chartdrawing and its very informative articles. I keep it bookmarked and visit often. Registration lets you save charts for later reference.

Linda Goodman's Sun Signs and *Linda Goodman's Love Signs* by Linda Goodman. One is just as good as the other. Only Sun signs are used, and the relationships are strictly heterosexual, but the insight is wonderful and you'll learn a lot about how signs change in relation to other signs—the beginning of chart interpretation. Goodman's *Star Signs*, however, is a

dreadful, rambling piece of nonsense.

The Everything Astrology Book by Trish MacGregor. A superb introduction with good quick reference section.

Mythic Astrology by Ariel Guttman & Kenneth Johnson. Uses the connection of the planets to Greco-Roman mythology to deepen your understanding of astrology.

Chart Interpretation Handbook by Stephen Arroyo. Excellent reference, with a section on chart synthesis that many astrologers praise to the skies (no pun intended). Arroyo has written numerous books, including *Relationships & Life Cycles* and *Exploring Jupiter*.

The Changing Sky: A Practical Guide to Predictive Astrology by Steven Forrest. Once you've got the basics of signs and planets, this is an excellent resource for exploring prediction and progression in astrology. Forrest has also written *The Inner Sky*, which focuses more on the self than on events, and *Skymates*, which deals with relationships and sexuality in astrology. Volume II of *Skymates* is an in-depth look at composite charts.

Sexual Astrology by Martine. High-quality and fun, a classic. Keep in mind, it is strictly heterosexual, but many people find they can easily work around that.

Karmic Astrology: Retrogrades and Reincarnation by Martin Schulman.

Schulman has written numerous books, mostly in the Karmic Astrology series. They cover specialized topics from which the intermediate or advanced astrologer will benefit. If you like this book, consider *Karmic Astrology: The Moon's Nodes and Reincarnation*, or *Karmic Astrology: Joy and the Part of Fortune*.

TAROT

Mastering the Tarot by Eden Gray. I am inordinately fond of this little book.

It is simple, clear, and excellent for beginners. As you may guess, it was my first Tarot book.

Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom by Rachel Pollack. Probably the book most often recommended by tarot readers. Everything that Pollack has written is worthwhile. She has a great deal of knowledge of Tarot and the Kabbalah, and a keen eye for detail. She's a prolific author; you'll find many fine Tarot and other books by Pollack, but start with this one.

Dictionary of the Tarot by Bill Butler. This one has been out of print forever, but if you find it, grab it. It has the very clever idea of taking a variety of decks and a variety of interpretations, and placing the picture descriptions and meanings side-by-side, card by card.

Tarot As a Way of Life: A Jungian Approach to the Tarot by Karen Hamaker-Zondag. Jungians have a particular approach to the Tarot, seeing it as an inner and archetypal journey. There are quite a few books on the topic. This one is generally well regarded.

The Complete Book of Tarot Reversals by Mary K. Greer. This is an understudied topic. Many readers don't use reversals at all, but just as life has reversals, and just as astrological charts have retrogrades, so does the Tarot have reversals that I think are meaningful and should be studied. Greer has also written *Understanding the Tarot Court*, which is also a difficult topic for many readers (including me!).

Designing Your Own Tarot Spreads by Teresa Michelsen. This one covers another special area that is of interest to many readers, and is applicable to the assigned homework for this chapter.

www.tarot.com. This Web site has extensive pictures of the Tarot, including many of the decks mentioned here.

OTHER

Light on Life: An Introduction to the Astrology of India by Hart DeFouw and Robert Svoboda. Vedic astrology is a completely different art from Western astrology. If this interests you, this book is a good starting point.

Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic by Edred Thorson. Probably the best introduction to the runes.

I Ching: A New Interpretation For Modern Times by Sam Reifler. This is Isaac Bonewits's favorite *I Ching*.

The Art of Hand Reading by Lori Read. An introduction to palmistry.

HOMEWORK

- While in the process of choosing a divination system you like, try at least two that are quite different from each other. For example, both Tarot and astrology are systemized, laid out in specified patterns (a layout, a chart), and each item (sign/planet, card) has specified meanings. Rather than trying two such similar methods, try one that is systemized and one that is more fluid (casting stones, scrying).
- Explore ways of getting to know your divination tool(s). Sleep with them under your pillow, say good morning to them, meditate while holding them, or come up with other ways of increasing your connection to your tools.
- Try establishing a reading ritual, such as always holding your rune bag to your forehead before drawing a rune.
- Begin a two-pronged process of study: first, by reading whatever material is appropriate (i.e. meanings of cards, of runes) and second, by scheduling frequent readings. My teacher told me that, as a beginner, she'd leave her Tarot deck by the phone and, when it rang, cut a card and interpret it quickly before answering. You can, more simply, promise two or three different friends a weekly reading (and stick to it!).
- Become inventive. Create a new way to use an established divination system. This can be a new Tarot layout, or something more elaborate. Try combining two or more systems.
- Invent your own divination system. Some people devote months or years to this process, but, rather than obsessing over a Grand Unification Theory of divination, see if you can keep it simple and come up with something in a week or so.

8. The "demotion" of Pluto hasn't affected astrology yet; as far as I can tell, almost all astrologers are still talking about Pluto as a planet. New planetary discoveries also impact astrology, but in general, most astrologers just work with this set.

9. From Fortune's Society of Inner Light; www.innerlight.org.uk

10. I am the author of a book on the topic, *The Ultimate James Bond Fan Book*. New York: Sterling & Ross, 2006.

MIND SKILLS

One thing that beginning Wiccans seem to ask quite a lot is “Must I meditate?” The short answer is, yes. Meditation is exercise and training for the mind, and mind skills are essential for all Wiccans.

Even if you don't particularly want to develop yourself in the wide range of areas described in this book, you still need mind skills to perform Wiccan basics. You must be able to focus your mind and remove distractions to perform any sort of ritual at all. You must be able to stay with guided imagery to ground and center yourself. You must visualize imaginatively and with focus to see the circles you cast. You must be able to concentrate and hold an idea or picture firmly before you in order to cast spells.

You may be surprised to learn that the more freeform your Wicca, the more you will depend on mind skills. Traditional Wiccans can allow the structure of ritual to guide them through the visualization and focusing process; they can use the words repeated in each ritual, Moon after Moon, as a hypnotic induction. They can use the repeated gestures as a movement meditation. Indeed, repetition is one of the most powerful tools of trance induction; it narrows the mind into the locus of the work quite effectively. Because eclectics, who tend to do a different sort of ritual every time they work, don't have repetition as a tool to concentrate their minds from the outside, they must hone their interior skills.

Radical witches sometimes perform rituals with untrained people. A women's empowerment circle may have a few witches and a bunch of newcomers interested in the empowerment experience. Or a Green meeting may have a few witches imparting spiritual focus to political work. These are occasions when only a small percentage of those present can be expected to know how to ground and center, how to visualize, how to concentrate the mind on a unified purpose. Thus their skills must be sufficient to support the group.

MEDITATION

When I teach, I like to emphasize these very practical, and fairly simple, qualities of meditation:

- The ability to focus;
- The removal of distractions;
- The acquisition of vivid visualization and sensory imagery;
- The ability to apply more advanced mind skills like psychic selfdefense (see page 91).

Most of us have heard of Zen meditation. We expect that successful meditation involves emptying the mind into a state of no-thought, and becoming one with white light. Or something. The truth is, even hardcore Zen masters don't consistently achieve a state of no-thought. Instead, they have learned to have thoughts to which they pay no attention, thoughts that fall away, that fade into the background. This eventually allows them to have long periods of no-thought, but thoughts will always come, sooner or later.

The point is, Zen meditation and many similar forms have entirely different goals than that of the average Wiccan. They seek to achieve inner peace, to become closer to the gods, (or God, or the Universal Oneness), to know the nature of the Self, and to transcend the ego-mind. These are laudable goals and goals that Wiccans might be very interested in accomplishing. Certain advanced Wiccan skills, such as deep trance or channeling, depend on a greater ability to still the mind, quiet the ego, and reach an inner balance. Of course, these goals are also valuable in and of themselves. But these goals are not the same as the rather simpler set with which I started. They are not the same as being able to visualize, concentrate on an image or idea, respond appropriately to guided imagery, and remove distractions from the mind in order to focus.

When you begin to play a musical instrument, such as the piano or the clarinet, you may be given finger exercises to learn. These train the hands to play the instrument. As you become skilled at your instrument, you may do these exercises much less often, using them only as a warmup. Eventually, you will play well enough that the instrument itself trains your fingers. Or, you may continue the exercises throughout your life.

Meditation is a similar training exercise—for your mind. As you become skilled, you may use it less often, or you may adopt it as a lifelong practice. It's up to you.

There are many different kinds of meditation. Some ask only for stillness; others employ postures (yoga), sounds (chanting or mantra meditation), ideas, or images upon which your mind can focus.



Qualities of Meditation:

- Ability to focus
- Removal of distractions
- Acquisition of vivid
visualization and sensory
imagery
- Ability to apply more
advanced mind skills



Although there are numerous books on meditation, the one I recommend most highly is *Meditation: The Complete Guide* by Patricia Monaghan and Eleanor G. Viereck. Of the several books I've read on meditation, this is the only one that can claim to be complete. Many claim to talk comprehensively about meditation, but really only talk about one particular school of thought. Some books are surprisingly racist, referring to Indians as having a unique gift of meditation because they are primitive, with less-developed minds. Although I recommend Aleister Crowley despite his racism, that is only because his teachings are unique and irreplaceable. With the wealth of good books on mind skills available on the market, I find no justification for offering books grounded in a racist view of the mind.

Meditation: The Complete Guide is an excellent source because it surveys the world for different approaches to the topic, looking at many religions and disciplines, and insisting that practitioners be respectful of the origins of each path. The book also gives some quizzes that allow you to discover meditation styles may be best for you, along with resource guides for each section. In addition to traditional seated meditations such as *za-zen* and yoga, Monaghan and Viereck also offer sections on a number of other topics, including Quaker meetings, writing haiku, shamanic drumming, trance dancing, and labyrinth walking.

RECEPTIVE SKILLS

Receptive mind skills allow your mind to bring forth what it will. Their goal is to still the chatter of random thoughts and allow something to emerge. That “something” may be silence (no-thought), imagery, inner wisdom, or the answer to prayers. Meditation is the first, and most necessary, receptive mind skill—the foundation on which other mind skills are built.

In [chapter 9](#), we concentrated on “reading” skills—divination systems that use a structured approach, and that can be interpreted by reading. You can read cards, charts, stones, leaves, or palm creases; there are guides for the interpretation of each. We also mentioned scrying, the art of gazing into a reflective surface—a flame, mirror, crystal, or polished stone, or a pool or bowl of water—and allowing your gaze to become “unfixed” from the object. Once you have let go of “looking at” the scrying surface, you can allow vision to happen.

Any meditation skills you develop will aid you in divination. Even if you are using a “reading” method, with set meanings available to describe, you are still drawing upon inner (or higher) wisdom in

determining which of several available meanings is appropriate to a given reading at a given time. Thus, the mind skills learned through meditation are a necessary precursor to divination. On the opposite side of the coin, we see that the practice of divination can be a form of meditation.

Is fire- or surface-gazing a form of divination or of meditation? Both. The difference is in your intention. If you gaze at a candle flame in order to still the ego-mind, you are meditating. If you are gazing (and stilling the ego-mind) in order to open yourself to images from a deeper or higher place—from the subconscious, super-conscious, or the gods—you are scrying. The only adjustment in technique is that, in meditation, you allow the images that arise to hold your attention for a moment, and then let them go. In scrying, you pay more attention to those images, because they are the “answer” you seek.

Automatic writing is another skill that straddles meditative openness and divinatory answer-seeking. The basic principal of automatic writing is to place yourself into a meditative state while seated in a position in which you can write—at your desk, at a computer, or with a pad in your lap. Ask a deity, power, or inner force for wisdom, and then simply begin writing.

There are many such skills—some very advanced. They all depend on your ability to enter a meditative, grounded, centered state of mind. So meditation is an absolutely necessary skill on which these others are based.

DREAM WORK

Dream work straddles the boundary between receptive and active skills. Learning to recall dreams, journaling them, and interpreting them are receptive skills—you receive information nonjudgmentally and, in the case of interpretation, interact with that information.

The simple act of recalling dreams is powerful. It teaches you to become familiar with the full contents of your inner life. It opens doors within you to the obvious things—the images and people that populate your dreams are often messages from your own mind and heart, or from other realms. And it also opens doors to indirect wisdom, as our life within becomes broadened by our awareness of its many journeys, we become more open to the mysteries of the waking world, and to inner promptings we receive while awake. We may become better psychics, better at trance induction, and generally more intuitive.

Dream recall is accessible even if you think you “don’t dream” (everyone does) or never remember your dreams. Waking thoughts tend to drive out dreams, so the most important thing to do is to ask yourself, immediately upon awakening, what you were dreaming. Still any thoughts of the day; refrain from thinking about what you will do, where you will go, what you will wear, what’s for breakfast. When those thoughts come in, let them go and stay on the question of what you dreamed. If the answer is “I don’t remember,” ask instead “What was I just thinking? Who was I just talking to? What was I just doing?” I find it remarkable how I can be sure that my dreams have fled because the question “What did I dream?” brings up a blank, but then when I ask the next question, whole narratives rush in.

It is difficult to quiet your mind and ask these questions if your morning is tumultuous. Alarms that buzz can rattle your mind, and talk radio can distract you. Try waking to instrumental music. If your family wakes you with demands, try setting your music alarm to go off a few minutes before they wake up, so that you have that time to yourself. Some people also find it effective simply to tell themselves “I will remember my dreams” just before going to sleep.

Dream journaling is the next step; simply write down the dreams that you recall. Keep your dream journal and pen by your bedside or under your pillow for easy access.



Flower of Dreams:

- ♦ Become familiar with the full contents of your inner life
- ♦ Open doors within you to imagery and meaning
- ♦ Deliver messages from your own mind and heart
- ♦ Access indirect wisdom



From here, there are two directions in which to go; having input *on* your dreams, and receiving input *from* them. Frankly, I am not very good at influencing my own dreams. The techniques of dream induction (choosing what dream to have) and lucid dreaming (becoming aware while remaining in a dream) are familiar to me, but success usually eludes me. Many people find these skills quite natural and easy, and there are quite a few good books on the topic.

Receiving input from dreams involves dream interpretation and/or active imagination with dream images. There are quite a lot of different books on dream interpretation, using a wide variety of systems. My favorite is *Inner Work* by Robert Johnson. The book is divided between dream interpretation and active imagination, and I find it indispensable.

When working on dream interpretation, I find that using a variety of styles and approaches helps. Don’t make assumptions. Your dream may have a mythic, almost universal, nature, or it may be very personal. It may best be interpreted as expressive of subconscious anxiety, or as a message from the gods, or as something else entirely. Don’t assume you know its meaning in advance. They say that Freudian therapists have Freudian dreams, while Jungians have Jungian dreams. The meaning of this pithy statement is obvious: your own inner symbology responds to what you think you know. So don’t be rigid about what you think you know!

It also helps to work with others on dream interpretation. This may be too intimate and embarrassing at times, but using another person as a sounding board is often the best way to get through a tangled web of imagery. A group of friends who discuss dreams together need not be Wiccan or Pagan; interest in the mind goes far beyond any one form of spirituality! Forming a dream group is one of many ways that Wiccans without access to a coven have met like-minded people.

ACTIVE SKILLS

Active mind skills are those in which we choose what we will visualize, sense, or experience, and focus on that. For example, in creative visualization, we choose the image we wish to visualize, and we hold that image, and that alone, in our mind’s eye. We learn to be fixed, intentional, and purposeful. Active mind skills are necessarily preceded by meditation. This should come as no surprise. You will not be able to hold your mind to your will until you’ve become familiar with its contents. There are many active mind skills, including psychic shielding, active imagination, creative visualization, astral protection, telepathic “sending,” and Kabbalistic pathworking.

PSYCHIC SHIELDING

Psychic shielding is the first active skill that every Wiccan should learn. Not because there’s all sorts of stuff out there that can hurt you, but because when you are training yourself to be more sensitive (psychic, intuitive, receptive), you need more protection. When you strip away your clothing, you may require a blanket; just so, when you strip away the unconscious defenses that protect you from the psychic detritus of the world around you, but also prevent psychic information from reaching you, you need something protective to replace that function—something that will not have the same drawbacks. In other words, you want to keep out the bad, without also keeping out the good.

Psychic shielding, like so many mind skills, depends primarily on visualization. This is the point, when teaching, that I like to pause and explain that “visualization” is a misnomer in that it implies that the technique involves seeing pictures. It can, but it can also involve hearing sounds, smelling aromas, tasting flavors, and experiencing body sensations. Sometimes, in my own rather unusual method of visualization, I see words—when I visualize a rose, I see the flower, but I often also see the word “rose” in my mind’s eye. This is probably a side effect of being a writer.

Most people are strongest at visualizing images, but a significant minority—as many as twenty percent—use other senses (usually hearing) as their primary imaginative sense. Unfortunately for those people, the word used to describe the process is still “visualization.”

Protecting yourself using visualization is a basic skill—one that eerily large number of people neglect. If you are feeling raw, exposed, tearful, or overwhelmed, a simple twice-daily shielding meditation can make the world of difference. If you are in an unsafe environment—emotionally, psychically, or interpersonally—shielding yourself before entering that environment can be an enormous help. Thus, this is a skill I've taught to many people, not just Wiccans, because many people, perhaps most, will need it at some point in their lives. For example, I used shielding when I was in the hospital to help keep the other patients' pain at a distance so I could focus on my own healing.



Active Mind Skills:

- Psychic shielding
- Creative visualization
- Active imagination
- Astral projection
- Telepathic sending
- Kabbalistic pathworking



To psychically shield, begin by relaxing into a meditative posture; do the breathing, unwinding, or focusing exercises you normally use when meditating. It's important to choose a visualization that works and makes sense to you; there are many available. A psychic shield can be made of white light or a sweet aroma, of an actual shield (maybe a Viking shield held before you) or a polarized lens, or of body armor or an invisible, body-shaped sheath. In fact, it can be anything you choose. Pick an image that feels protective. Imagine it keeping bad stuff out. Imagine the good stuff getting in. Imagine yourself fully shielded, and then imagine love and kindness reaching through your shield. Know that these good things are completely able to get in. Know that negativity and psychic garbage cannot reach you.

When I shield, I picture a polarized lens covering my entire body, like a second skin. First, I visualize putting on a pair of polarized sunglasses. Polarization is a great concept to use, because it keeps harmful UV rays (bad light) out, but lets in good light (you can still see). I then visualize the lenses extending up over my head and down over my whole body, including the soles of my feet. Once I feel fully coated, I imagine someone very negative coming toward me and kind of bouncing off the shield; I don't even feel the impact. Then I imagine someone wonderful coming toward me and giving me a great hug. I again picture the shield to reinforce that image, and I'm done.

Once you have disciplined yourself, over a period of time, to create this psychic shield daily or twice daily (every morning, or morning and night), you will be able to call it up in an instant when you need it. So, practice creating the shield *before* you need it!

CREATIVE VISUALIZATION

Visualizing something you want in a way that empowers you to actually get it can be seen as a magical skill. In some hands, it is the very essence of occultism; in others, it is very New Age. There are many books on the subject, of varying quality.

The basic principal of creative visualization is so simple that it barely takes a paragraph to describe. You visualize what you want and it comes to you. Bingo! Of course, the actual practice is not so simple. It is a "mind skill" because it involves learning the ways in which you are already visualizing results—day in and day out—sometimes in very counter-productive ways. As you learn what your mind does involuntarily, you take control of the activity so that it works in your favor.

Books often present the philosophy of manifesting your desires (some books do a better job of this than others) and then offer techniques and exercises for accomplishing this. Some of the exercises are intended to build skills in disciplining your mind, relaxation, and meditation; some are specifically geared toward creative visualization itself. One thing you'll find is that many techniques are used to supplement your mind's power. Most teachers of creative visualization do not assume you will succeed simply by meditating and concentrating.

This is a great lesson to learn—and a very magical one. Many students ask: "Why do I need magical tools, or rituals, or candles of a particular color, or a particular word or phrase? Isn't it really all in my mind?" The answer is: Yes, perhaps it really is all in your mind. But your mind can be helped by props, imagery, color, sensory stimulation, and mnemonic devices. It's like asking why you can't cross a river by swimming, why must you take a boat? Well, you *could* swim, but it would take longer and you might get swept away by strong currents. There are strong currents in the mind, and while you are busily learning to tame them from within through meditation, you could also be applying techniques that overcome them from the outside.

Some of the techniques used by various creative visualization teachers include making collages, lighting candles, and even singing. What do these have in common? They stimulate the senses and create a secondary means of focus. Instead of just focusing with your mind's eye, you involve your hands, voice, and external eye.

ACTIVE IMAGINATION

Carl Jung coined the term "active imagination," and first described the technique. In reality, however, the process is much older than that. Many people believe that the techniques of Ceremonial Magick—raising demons and otherworldly beings into triangles of manifestation—were in fact techniques of active imagination. The magicians were confronting, not devils as imagined by Hollywood, but *inner* demons. The secrets they uncovered were of the psyche, not of buried pirate treasure. This may have been true some or all of the time, although it is hard to know for sure. It is certainly an interesting view of Ceremonial Magick—and one that provides a great deal of insight into many rather arcane rituals.

In active imagination, you have a conversation or meeting with an imagined being. Often, this is someone from a dream—perhaps a recurring dream. Normally, you use active imagination to converse with someone or something causing you anxiety or distress. For this reason, it is important to first learn psychic shielding, so that your sense of safety is enhanced.

Active imagination isn't necessarily done with ritual trappings—certainly it isn't used this way by Jungian psychologists. However, those of us with a magical orientation will almost certainly see this technique as a ritual. It may or may not occur in sacred or magically protected space, although you can add these techniques to the mundane psychological version. Just as making collages helps creative visualization be more potent, casting a circle can help active imagination be more vivid, and it will create protection as well. I have used active imagination in a circle of manifestation. I have also used it with an automatic writing technique, having a written, rather than spoken, interaction with someone. (As a writer, this particular method is very natural for me.)

The technique of active imagination can be seen as an occult or magical skill. It can also be seen as a psychological process—the act of facing inner "demons" or "beings" that are the anthropomorphic face of fears, memories, or unresolved issues. In fact, techniques of working with the inner child, as popularized by such 1990s psychotherapists as John Bradshaw, are largely techniques of active imagination. I include the practice here under mind skills rather than elsewhere, because it requires the use of mind skills to be effective and safe. You must call forth an image with enough vividness to interact with it, and you must hold the image clearly, not allowing it to transmute into something else, as it might in a dream or freeform meditation. You should also do calming and/or shielding exercises before you begin, since you may face images that are disturbing.

You will probably be surprised at how easy active imagination is. Most people look askance at such techniques at first, thinking that "play-acting" cannot have profound psychological or spiritual results. Our minds fall readily into the imagery they create, however, particularly when that imagery already has a strong emotional component.

RECOMMENDED READING

RECEPTIVE SKILLS

Meditation: The Complete Guide by Patricia Monaghan and Eleanor G. Viereck. The best and most comprehensive guide.

Scrying for Beginners by Donald Tyson. Magical scrying.

The Silva Mind Control Method by Jose Silva. This is a specific mind discipline that you may find valuable. It was trendy at one time and is no longer, but that doesn't change its worth.

8 Minute Meditation: Quiet Your Mind. Change Your Life by Victor N. Davich.

Primarily "Lovingkindness" meditation, but in short, easy spurts.

Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness by Sharon Salzberg.

"Metta meditation," also known as "lovingkindness."

Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom by Joseph Goldstein. "Vipassana" meditation, also known as "insight" meditation.

Relaxing into Your Being: The Water Method of Taoist Meditation by Bruce Kumar Frantzis. Another meditation technique.

DREAM WORK

Lucid Dreams in 30 Days by Keith Harary, Ph.D. and Pamela Weintraub. The dream work in this book is not confined to lucid dreaming. The techniques of exploring the differences and similarities between sleeping and waking life are quite rewarding.

Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming by Stephen LaBerge.

Lucid Dreaming by Stephen LaBerge. Dr. LaBerge is one of the innovators in the field of lucid dreaming, and one of the first modern scientists to take the subject seriously. Be warned, though, that he is firmly anti-mysticism.

OTHER

The Practical Guide to Psychic Self-Defense and Well-Being by Denning and Phillips. Denning and Phillips wrote on a wide range of occult topics.

Practical Psychic Self-Defense: Understanding and Surviving Unseen Influences by Robert Bruce. This one is very well thought of and quite interesting.

The Psychic Self-Defense Personal Training Manual by Marcia L. Pickands.

Another book on this very important topic.

The Gift of Fear: And Other Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence by Gavin de Becker. A book about using intuition to protect yourself, and to free yourself from fear. Psychic self-defense meets physical self-defense.

The Art and Practice of Creative Visualization and *The Art and Practice of Astral Projection* by Ophiel. I love Ophiel's books. Reading him is like sitting in a room listening to a very smart, but somewhat bemused, lecturer. He's funny and charming and provides good, sensible information.

Creative Visualization by Shakti Gawain. This is the classic of the field. Shakti Gawain also wrote *The Creative Visualization Workbook* which some people like even better.

The Practical Guide to Creative Visualization by Denning and Phillips. I hesitated about including this book, because in many ways I don't like it. But it has one technique that I've never seen anywhere else (singing the visualization), which I find invaluable. Worth looking at.

Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth by Robert A. Johnson. As the subtitle suggests, this book covers both active imagination and dream interpretation, and is my favorite in both areas. In fact, it is one of my all-time favorite books.

The Practical Guide to Astral Projection by Denning and Phillips. A simple and straightforward guide.

HOMEWORK

- Meditate at least three times a week, for at least ten minutes each time. Increase to fifteen minutes as your skills improve. While learning to meditate, experiment with different types of meditation. Explore chants, mantras, mandalas (images), drumming, candle-gazing, water-gazing, or any number of other methods.
- Give yourself a single topic to explore in meditation, or a single image or group of images. You'll find some meditative topics in my book, *The Elements of Ritual*. Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* also offers several excellent ones. Sometimes simple questions work well: "What is peace?" Try keeping a journal of the results you discover in these meditation sessions.
- Explore two or three different psychic shielding images, and choose one that is comfortable for you. Practice with this image until you can put up a shield in just a few seconds.
- Experiment with adding something from your other studies to your meditation as a suggestive or hypnotic aid. For example, if you are learning to make incense, add an incense during meditation, and continue using the same one each time—the aroma will help induce a meditative state. If you're learning numerology, use a set number of objects placed before you or held in your hand. If you're working with color symbolism, wear a particular color garment. Stick with the same sensory aid each time you meditate. As you gain skill at meditation, try varying the symbol for the purpose; that is, burn rose petals when meditating on love, and sage when meditating on purification.
- Practice remembering your dreams, and keep a dream journal. If you don't have access to a Pagan or Wiccan group, consider forming a dreaminterpretation group.

PSYCHOLOGY

Know thyself: Understanding the contents of your own mind is the true task of any occult practitioner. Psychology, and various psychological disciplines and techniques, are part of that essential study. This work is, in and of itself, fascinating, because it uncovers the secret mechanisms that control us. Understanding your own psychological make-up is something like a latter-day Kabbalah—it reveals the greasy machinery under the gleaming exterior of your mind. Furthermore, a lack of psychological self-understanding leads to the majority of problems most Wiccans will face in their practice.

When I was a girl, dreaming of someday becoming a witch, I thought of herbs hanging in a cozy kitchen, and bubbling cauldrons, and carefully crafted spells. But it turns out that the number one tool of any witch is self-knowledge; an implement far more handy than herbs and cauldrons.

Wiccans who work with trances and trance journeys must understand their own psyches and what they may encounter along the way. I have worked with Wiccans who encountered violent barriers in trance, barriers that seemed to replicate childhood traumas. These individuals are better off avoiding trance work, alone or in a group without trained counselors, until the trauma has been addressed. More common are those who find themselves thrown out of a trance when they touch upon an emotional or psychological hot spot. Their inner defenses won't allow them to breach violent or traumatic barriers, but the real work of trance eludes them because of those defenses. The solution can only be found in safely facing what lies on the other side.

Divination is another touchy area; it is a tool that most Wiccans and witches use, one that I recommend in these very pages. However, psychic knowledge will elude or confuse those who cannot distinguish between true far-seeing and projection. You must know what projection is, and what sort of projection your mind is likely to throw out there, in order to make the distinction.

I believe that working on yourself therapeutically is one of the best ways to improve your psychic talents. In my opinion, all of us are born with telepathic ability (to a greater or lesser extent). As we grow up, we discover a social contract denying telepathy: “You don't read mine, and I won't read yours.” In other words, we're all so scared of having our secrets seen and known that we block out psychic abilities. Unfortunately, when I block you from reading me, I also dampen my ability to read you. As I work on myself, I become less afraid and have less to block (or feel less urgent about it), the dampeners are lifted and I become more naturally telepathic. In addition, far-seeing is not much different from empathy. As I learn to face my own pain compassionately, I have more compassion for others. As I learn what I really think and feel, I have more empathy with what others think and feel.



Understanding your own
psychological make-up
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of your mind.



Traditional Wiccans often work in covens that replicate a family structure. Every therapist knows that we recreate our families wherever we go. As a priestess, I have seen this firsthand. When leading a group, I become the mother; it's a role I cannot escape. I have sat down and told people: “Look, I'm not your mother; don't put that on me.” It doesn't work. The miraculous mechanisms of the psyche are more powerful than my firmest intention to the contrary.

In the throes of subconsciously recreating a familiar family structure, people with cold mothers find me cold; people with warm mothers find me warm. People with demanding mothers can't believe all the homework I give out; people who got away with murder as kids can't believe I actually expect them to do it. In fact, if I had gone into this priestess business thinking that projection was nonsense, my personal experience would certainly have persuaded me otherwise.

These parent/child associations are, perhaps, easier to deal with than all the forms of sibling rivalry that develop. The thing is, we *will* create these systems wherever we go, but we can be in the driver's seat, rather than wondering what's happening and why. That's where a solid understanding of yourself in relation to your family of origin comes in. It's not about wallowing in the past; it's about the living present—the systems, roles, and preconceptions you carry around with you today.

Radical witches often work in groups. They are also the type of Wiccans or witches most likely to explore psychology, psychotherapy, and self-help practices. And that's a good thing. Group dynamics and family systems are at their most challenging when a group is focused in an intensive way, such as when votes are being taken or consensus is being reached.

Activist witches can be empowered by understanding their own anger. If they aren't, the anger that naturally develops when we are politically active can become self-destructive. In other words, there is nothing wrong or neurotic about feeling very angry at injustice, and about fighting that injustice. But unless you've developed tools for handling your own anger in a safe and healing way, however, your activist work can eat away at you. Unless you've developed a facility for being around angry people without becoming frightened or withdrawn, your fellow activists can become uncomfortable companions for you.

Eclectic Wiccans working in groups face family issues as well. When you work as a solitary, it is less confrontational. You aren't facing other people, with *their* issues, and *their* family systems. That's always so tricky. It's not that you replicate your family in the group; it's that each person replicates his or her own family, so that multiple subconscious agenda are played out on a single stage. And that's *life*—that's your place of business, your local SCA group, and your favorite message board.

When you work as a solitary, you are alone with your own baggage; you don't have to worry about other people pushing your buttons. It's one reason many people choose to work alone. On the other hand, when you work alone, there's no one to hold your hand when it gets scary, no one to tell you that you're acting out. There's no one to warn you that the emotions that are coming up while you do trance work are too intense to handle alone, or that your Tarot readings have become impossibly tainted with your own hopes and fears. So it's very important for solitaries to deal honestly with themselves, and to engage with themselves about whatever issues may trouble them.

It was extremely controversial in my group, and in my local community, when I made therapy a requirement for advancement among my most serious students. I was told that it was invasive, doctrinaire, and inappropriate. I am sure many readers are equally outraged, but bear with me. Recognizing we all have freedom of choice, I believe my reasons are sound.

By asking my group to participate in therapy, I was asking people with whom I would be interacting intimately to do something to empower that intimacy. I believe this is just the opposite of invasive. It *would* have been invasive if I had imposed myself onto the process. Lots of priestesses counsel their group members. I was asking mine to seek that counsel elsewhere, in safe space, so that they had privacy, outside our group, in which to deal with whatever they chose. This also freed me and the entire group from being held captive by needy individuals who continually sought to have us act as their amateur therapists. In a traditional Wiccan group, a priestess can ask her students to meditate, to engage in trance journeys, to participate in intimate communication or trust-building exercises, and more. Therapy is a no more invasive requirement in my opinion than any of these. I certainly think it is less invasive than forbidding group members to read certain books, a practice by some teachers that has always offended my First Amendment activist sensibilities.

Nor have I indoctrinated anyone. I have never insisted on a methodology, style, or school of thought. “Therapy” can mean anything from Freudian psychoanalysis to primal-scream, from the most conservative to the most wildly alternative practice—whether performed privately, in a group, or as a couple.

“Inappropriate” is the term used when a priestess (or teacher or boss, etc.) is using a position of authority to violate the boundaries of a student, circle member, or employee. By sending people away from me for this work, I was allowing them to maintain boundaries, quite the opposite of violating them.

You have probably gathered where I'm going with this. I can offer you a reading list on psychology, as I have in every other chapter. My real recommendation, however, is that you enter into some form of therapy of your choosing. Reading books is great, but reading about meditation is no substitute for meditating. And reading about psychology is no substitute for actively engaging with the contents of your own mind and heart. Find someone you feel you can trust, and allow yourself to embrace the process fully. You won't regret it.

You can't accomplish much therapeutic work by reading, although there are some therapeutic exercises in some self-help books. Fundamentally, inner work is an exploration and an experience, not a study. There is, nonetheless, a good deal of reading that can supplement and enhance that work and inform you about the work of those around you. This last point can be important to those in covens and groups, but also to all Wiccans in their role as healers (something we'll address more in [chapter 13](#)).

The areas of reading I find useful are:

- Concepts of psychology, schools of thought, terminology and meaning;
- The mind and brain, neurology, psychopharmacology, and the nature of thinking;

- Specific psychological issues—those of interest to us both as humans and Wiccans;
- Self-help, again including topics of particular interest to Wiccans;
- The interface between religion or spirituality and psychology;
- Encounters with the self through myth.

CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOLOGY

There are many schools of psychological thought. You've certainly already heard of Freud and psychoanalytic thought, and probably of Skinner and behaviorism. These are just two of a huge variety of theories and approaches. Virtually all of them are controversial to some people, with camps that condemn specific theorists or practitioners as quacks, or misogynists, or what have you. These differences of opinion don't mean there's nothing to learn from controversial psychological ideas, however. Indeed, reading about controversy can be stimulating!

Although learning about these various approaches is the left-brain, logical part of psychology, not the real inner work, it does have its advantages. First, it gives you a vocabulary; it helps you learn about the “shadow,” or “projection,” or the “id”—terms that are often bandied about without any real understanding.

Language is a powerful tool. It is sometimes hard to perceive a thing if we cannot name it. Once we give something a label, whether it's “ego” or “influenza,” we have a way of making sense of it. Imagine if you'd never heard of the flu, and didn't know what it was. You start having symptoms; you think you have a cold, because that's the word you *do* know that's closest to your experience. But you're way sicker than that! Without an understanding of “flu,” you either think there's something terribly wrong (“I must be dying”) or you think you're overreacting (“That's me,” “I tend to think; “Get out of bed you lazy bum,” instead of realizing I'm actually sick). The label and its definition allow you to know that you should stay in bed, drink fluids, and expect to recover.

The language of psychology gives shape to inner experience. The various schools of thought provide a frame on which to hang your life; they can help you learn how you have come to be who you are. There's no evidence that any one of the major schools of thought is more effective than any other; there are no statistics that support a claim of more wellness and happiness for those in Jungian analysis than for those undergoing mood therapy, or transactional analysis, or any other therapeutic approach. The inner work you do is experiential and personal. The psychological frame you use to interpret that work is just that—a frame of reference. For that reason, I recommend you get an overview of psychological theories, learn about their ideas, but not depend upon those ideas for self-healing.

I offer four introductory texts to psychology that may be of interest to you: *Doing Psychotherapy*, *An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis*, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, and *Current Psychotherapies*. None of these are written for the rank beginner, and all of them require that the reader bring a reasonable amount of interest to the subject. If you want something less scholarly, *Doing Psychotherapy* may be the best choice, since it discusses concepts by walking the reader through the experience.

As an alternative, try one of the *For Dummies* series, or a *Complete Idiot's* book, just to get the terminology and concepts under your belt before you move on.

NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is a discipline that straddles a number of areas. It is a mind skill. It is a communication technique. It is used as therapy. It is used as a way of increasing sales and improving business.

Essentially, NLP presents a theory of how the mind works and then puts that theory to a number of uses. NLP practitioners often refer to the techniques as “magic,” but it's not occult. The techniques can be used to deepen your understanding of yourself and how your mind works, to learn how to communicate with others, or to learn how to manipulate conversations in your own favor. Fundamentally, NLP is an understanding of the mind and a way to use it. It advocates a certain construct of mind, just as Freud's ego-superego-id is a construct, or Jung's self-anima-shadow. Some people, to be fair, think NLP is pure quackery—but then, most mainstream people think that astrology and runes are credulous nonsense as well. I am not an NLP expert, or even an advanced amateur, but what I know about it is fascinating, and I find it worth investigating.

THE MIND AND BRAIN

An area of interest that overlaps with psychology is the study of the physiology of the brain, how the mind actually works. This is especially interesting to Wiccans, I think, because we use the mind as a tool (see [chapter 10](#)). Knowledge of how we perceive, communicate, and filter the world around us is crucial to magic, to divination, and to empathy. It is of interest to solitaries, who rely so heavily upon their own minds, as well as to those who work in groups, who depend upon their ability to communicate authentically and understand one another. Understanding the physiology of the brain's function also serves as an adjunct and counterbalance to the psychotherapeutic model by considering those parts of our consciousness that are (or may be) “hard-wired.”

Here's an example of how this area of study impacts magical work. In a book called *The Three Pound Universe*, I read about how information crosses the *corpus callosum*—the bridge that divides the left and right brain. When you send information across this bridge, you engage much more of your brain; it takes a lot of synaptic connections to make the journey. Whenever you do something that engages both the left and right sides of your brain, you awaken enormous mental resources. Have you ever noticed that, when you talk a problem out with someone else, you often find the solution, even before the other person has responded? You've moved the problem from right-brain thinking it over, to left-brain speech. In so doing, your own resources are more engaged with it. This is also why teaching something to others is a great way to learn. You engage different parts of your brain when you study and when you teach others.¹¹

I am very fond of *The Three Pound Universe*. It gives an overview of the “latest” in brain research. I use quotes around the word “latest” because the book is several years old, but I haven't found anything similar that's more current.



Understanding the physiology of the brain serves as an adjunct and counterbalance to the psycho-therapeutic model by considering those parts of our consciousness that are (or may be) “hard-wired.”



The idea of using both sides of your brain in this way has had a huge impact on me as a witch and as a high priestess. I now encourage all of my shy students to verbalize their ideas. I also encourage my intellectual students to engage the creative side of their brains—to sing, paint, sculpt, or dance their thoughts. In magic and ritual, I work to create an experience that crosses the brain bridge—for example, one that uses words, movement, meditation, and rhythm together. Understanding more about how my brain is awakened and excited has had a huge impact on my life as a Wiccan.

Another of my favorite books is *An Anthropologist on Mars* by Oliver Sacks. Sacks is the neurologist made famous when his book *Awakenings* was made into a Robert DeNiro movie. He's written numerous books about his work with unusual neurological cases. Looking at brains gone awry, gives us great insight into the brain in its more normal state. In *The Elements of Ritual*, I discuss a way of perceiving time as simultaneous;¹² my insight into the relationship between space perception and time perception came to me while reading *An Anthropologist on Mars*. So what you learn while reading about the brain really can be used in your rituals.

Sacks's book is especially interesting because it isn't so much about neurological illness as it is about neurological *difference*. He devotes chapters to people with autism, Tourette's syndrome, and other perceptual differences. One chapter is about Temple Grandin, an autistic woman who is, herself, an author.¹³ Perhaps no one expresses as clearly as Grandin the idea that a neurological “disability” (autism) is simply the brain working in a different way. By sharing her experience with us, she allows us to understand that much more about our own brains.

Does it seem that half the people you know are on an SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor)—an antidepressant drug such as Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil? The first SSRI, Prozac, was introduced in 1988; by 1990, it was one of the most prescribed drugs in the United States. The drug was overpraised at first, believed to be far more effective than earlier antidepressants. In fact, it's about as effective, but its side effects are fewer and less severe. Prozac made pharmaceutical treatment of depression an option for many more people, and combined with a decreased stigma on depression itself, it made SSRIs virtually ubiquitous.

Psychopharmaceuticals (drugs used to treat psychiatric illnesses) are controversial. Some people believe that treating an emotional condition with medication is inherently wrong—that it distorts the nature of the self. Others liken antidepressants to insulin, a drug that some people need to counter the effects of a medical condition. Clearly the question worth asking is: What is the price paid for whatever benefits these drugs offer? What is lost in exchange for the gain?

At some point, it is likely that you, someone you love, or someone in your coven or circle will take an SSRI, for depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, or some other reason. The book *Listening to Prozac* by Peter Kramer is a superb examination of the questions raised by the very existence of Prozac and its more modern relatives. The book was a best seller in 1997, although it is considered out-of-date now, since Prozac has largely been supplanted by later drugs. The point of the book, however, is not discussion of a specific medication, but a more general examination of the questions engendered by treating depressive illnesses with SSRIs.

Kramer points to a host of changes reported by people taking Prozac—for instance, shy people becoming more social—and asks what these changes mean. Does the fact that some personality trait changes in a positive way with the use of medication make that trait a “symptom”? Is shyness an “illness” simply because Prozac can potentially “cure” it? These questions are at the heart of controversies about psychiatric drugs. They stand on the boundary between psychiatric diagnosis and a spiritual or holistic definition of the self. If we don't ask these crucial questions, we risk treating our selves as a series of component symptoms instead of as a person.



Questions about psychiatric drugs stand on the boundary between psychiatric diagnosis and a spiritual or holistic definition of the self. If you don't ask these crucial questions, you risk treating your self as a series of component symptoms instead of as a person.



Kramer's book has been roundly criticized by people who, apparently, have not read it. Critics fault Kramer for recommending that these borderline non-illnesses be treated with Prozac when he never makes any such recommendation! What I love about the book is the intelligent way the author asks questions without insisting on providing answers. *Listening to Prozac* draws no conclusions; it does what the title promises—it *listens* without answering back. Given the huge influence of drugs on the therapeutic process, those of us interested in psychological issues really need to listen.

Since drugs work with the brain on a physical level, the questions Kramer raises are important here. Ask yourself this: If changes to personality wrought from the outside through medication make you uncomfortable, how does that affect your attitude to changes wrought from the outside through magic?

Food for thought.

GRIEVING AND GROWING

Discussions about the mind, the brain, and the psyche provide the broad outlines of a discussion about psychology. There is a host of specific psychological issues, however, that flows from these introductory topics. In fact, the field is impossibly large, with books, it seems, about every idea that anyone ever had.¹⁴ Some of these specific areas are of particular interest to Wiccans.

There is so much “pop-psych” nonsense out there, and it can be challenging to separate the wheat from the chaff. Here's one rule of thumb: If a solution seems too simple, it probably is. Inner healing doesn't happen instantly. You can't snap your fingers and make traumatic pain, mental illness, or negative behavior patterns go away. There's snake oil in the world of psychology just as there is in the world of alternative medicine—or in the occult world, for that matter. But don't throw away any of these disciplines simply because they require you to be discerning.

Another rule of thumb is: If you experience a lot of “aha” moments while reading, then keep reading. A book doesn't have to be scholarly or rigorous to help you understand something (although sometimes it helps). This is especially true in the area of self-help.

DEATH AND DYING

Why is it essential to understand dying? In part, because it's something we all do. In part because, as Wiccans, we present to the world a theology of death that is very different from that of the dominant monotheistic faiths to which Western culture is accustomed. Most people in the West have a view of death that is shaped by Christianity or Judaism, even if they aren't followers of those religions, because the views are pervasive. We are brought up to anticipate some sort of heaven or heavenly reward, or an absolute end to our existence. In either case, we are brought up to see death as an end.

Eastern religions embrace reincarnation, but Wicca is virtually unique in the West as a religion that includes a belief in reincarnation.¹⁵ Since we do not view death as an end, it stands to reason that we should not fear or resist it. Yet this is not, in general, the case. Wiccans die and grieve much as anyone else in the West, in part because we are betrayed by our culture. People's deepest beliefs tend to be those laid down by the world around them in their early years. An understanding of psychology can help illuminate the process by which these patterns are created. We can reprogram ourselves to a certain extent, but not completely. Culture is pervasive—this is also why many Pagans are so deeply concerned with creating an alternative, Pagan, culture.

Understanding the stages that we go through in grieving can help. Understanding grief, fear, denial, anger, and depression as part of a natural and expected progression provides comfort and peace during a tumultuous and often agonizing time.

When people learn you are a Wiccan, they tend to call upon you in times of need. They may ask you to read cards, cast spells, and heal. They will also ask you to hold their hand when they are sad and grieving. A sense of what the bereaved are going through will help you be supportive at such times.

Grief is something we can all anticipate in our own lives. When I was bereaved, I remember saying that, although I was familiar with the “five stages,” I had no idea that I was going to cycle through them from beginning to end every three minutes, and then start over. Going through the experience changed me. Later in life, it enabled me to provide compassionate support to those going through similar losses.

There's a lot of literature on the subjects of death and grief. Virtually all of it depends upon *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. This book has been essential reading since 1969. It changed Western culture's notions of death, dying, and grief. Kübler-Ross's “Five Stages of Grief” (or “Five Stages of Death”) have entered the language. I also recommend *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, which is less about the psychology of death and more about its spirituality from a Pagan perspective. A book like this can help us incorporate what we know about our own inner experience and translate it into ritual, prayer, and a Pagan life.

am often asked by Wiccans or other Pagans: “Why are so many people in the Pagan community (or toxic families, or unhappy childhoods)?” A number of theories have been put forward to explain this. One that I like is that family backgrounds that are dysfunctional or toxic are more common than we know. In fact, they are not more prevalent in the Pagan community; they are just more visible. Since no one has gathered hard data on this point, we can't prove or disprove it. Most observers, however, disagree with my pet theory; most claim that Paganism does seem to draw a higher proportion of people with a troubled past (and sometimes a troubled present).

I've had a number of thoughts on this over the years. One is that people raised in happy, healthy environments are less likely to seek outside of those environments for spiritual fulfillment. If your early experiences with church or synagogue or whatever are associated in your mind with a sense of safety, satisfaction, and joy, why abandon it?

Another possibility is that the helping professions in general are attractive and fulfilling to people who went through childhood as “little adults.” A priestess once told me: “All high priestesses are eldest daughters of alcoholics.” While this is not literally true, it is an apt generalization that is as applicable to psychotherapists, social workers, and other healers as it is to high priestesses. Caring for others is a way that children learn to compensate for not having been cared for themselves. What begins as a defense mechanism can result in a fulfilling career. Wicca, in which we heal and help with magic and ritual, is a natural place for such caretakers to wind up.

Although these observations come from many years spent with Pagans and Wiccans, they are still just theories. And none of this would make much sense to me if I hadn't also been reading about these issues and learning something of their origins. An excellent place to begin that study is Alice Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child*.

The Drama of the Gifted Child isn't exactly self-help, although it addresses similar subjects. Miller talks about issues relating to narcissistic parents (see also *Toxic Parents*), and talks about her own profoundly wounded inner child (see also *Homecoming*). But Miller never simplifies her discussion; she never leaves behind her professionalism or her role as a therapist. This can make the going a bit tough for the reader; the book is sometimes dry. It is a profound book, nonetheless. Miller places careful diagnostic categories side by side with vivid descriptions of her own and others' childhood agony. She doesn't offer miraculous cures in seven easy steps. Instead, she presents the difficulty with compassion and thoughtful hope.

Miller's primary concern is to protect children. Discussions of child abuse don't make for pleasant reading, in this or in her other books. If these concerns are meaningful to you, however, she has written a number of powerful and intelligent works in addition to this one. Wiccans concerned with healing themselves or others, whether they are traditional, eclectic, or radical, will benefit from her work.

COMING OUT

Witches often say they're in or out of “the broom closet”—drawing an analogy, of course, to gays being in or out of the closet (gay witches apparently have lots of closets). The vast majority of Wiccans of all stripes were raised to be something other than Pagan. Unless we were born into a Pagan household, every one of us has had, at some point, to have “that” conversation with our families, or has chosen not to have it. Issues of communicating difficult things, communicating about difference, are thus very real to us.

The only book I know that addresses this sort of communication directly is *There's Something I Have to Tell You*. The book is out of print, but not hard to find. In this chapter's Recommended Reading, I also suggest a couple of books about coming out that were written for a gay audience. Whether a Wiccan is gay, straight, bisexual, or of another or indeterminate orientation, books about coming out of the closet speak to our experience.

SELF-HELP

No one really bothers to define self-help clearly or precisely. When lay people seek to do something on behalf of themselves—particularly in the area of personal betterment, and particularly in areas where a professional's help is considered the norm—they tend to call it self-help. This may include recovery from addictions, eating disorders, or childhood abuse; it may be about improved success, motivation, or organization; it may be oriented around satisfaction and joy. Popular self-help areas include relationships and sexuality, effectiveness, and child-rearing.

Self-help is trendy, and specific movements within self-help are also trendy. Work I did in the 1980s and 1990s—profound, life-altering, immensely valuable work—is now considered passé. That makes no sense to me. Barring new research or discoveries, inner work that was meaningful in 1995 should be meaningful in 2005 and beyond. After all, meditation techniques have been around for thousands of years, and haven't changed in response to the best-seller list. In other words, my goal in this section is not to describe what is popular, but rather what works.

Self-help really *can* work. It can allow people who don't want or need professional therapy to explore their inner selves on their own. It can work as an adjunct to therapy. It can send people to therapy based on what they discover on their own.

If you think the available books in psychology cover a wide range, you should see the self-help reading list! After weeding through a huge pile, I've come up with a selection of books that have been personally meaningful to me or to people I know. The quality of information and exercises (when applicable) is high. They are all a few years old, because I haven't been delving much into self-help lately. However, as mentioned, there's no reason to think that a decade has changed the value or wisdom of the information they provide.

Because these books are my personal favorites, they are slanted toward particular issues I have dealt with, either for myself or for people I know. I am sure there are problem areas that interest you that I haven't explored in depth. I hope, however, that the recommended reading for this section will be a good starting point for you.

One book that was recommended to me by Wiccan author Judy Harrow is *What You Can Change and What You Can't*. This is a very important book when you are exploring difficult issues, and trying to determine if self-help is the right route for you.

Self-help without any therapeutic support is not for people dealing with severe trauma, such as incest. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (and surviving incest and/or physical abuse is now classified as PTSD) requires someone who can help you through the rough spots; it will definitely get rough. If you are encountering terrifying memories, if you feel suicidal or wish to injure yourself, *don't* attempt to go it alone! Read self-help books if you like, but don't do exercises like active imagination without a support system.

Likewise, if you are an addict, you will not succeed at self-help (or in therapy, for that matter) while actively engaging in your addiction. “Working on” your alcoholism while drinking, or your drug addiction while using, or your bulimia while bingeing and purging, is not effective.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

Any Wiccan may be interested in how all this psychology relates to the whole person—the spiritual person. I've often heard Wiccans express the feeling that psychology has fundamentally secular aims—that it seeks to crush the spiritual, mystical, and supernatural in a person. They worry that those of us who believe in magic will be seen as delusional. They are concerned that there is a psychological problem called “magical thinking” that can lead many to feel that our worldview is not welcomed by the psychological community.

Magical thinking, to Freud and his followers, is the term for believing you have inordinate and impossible control over the universe around you. The child is angry with his mother and, in his fury, wishes her dead. The next day, the mother is killed in a car accident and the child feels unbearable guilt.



“Wishcraft” is just the modern Wiccan's term for “magical thinking.” It is a way of thinking that denies that life includes effort, focus, intention, and hard work.



In my experience as a high priestess, I have found that this sort of magical thinking is as much a problem for those working at real magic as it is for any other sort of functioning. Older Wiccans sometimes sneer at “wishcraft,” belittling those who think that working magic and creating ritual is no more complicated than having a wish and blowing out the birthday candles. I think “wishcraft” is just the modern Wiccan's term for “magical thinking.” It is a way of thinking that denies that life includes effort, focus, intention, and hard work. Because experienced and talented Wiccans *always* understand that there's effort and intention involved in magic, I don't believe that the concept of magical thinking is in any way at odds with Wicca.

Nonetheless, there have been times when spiritual experiences have been diagnosed as illness, when a “dark night of the soul” has been diagnosed as depression, or a “psychic experience as psychosis. That’s why it’s important to choose a therapist who is friendly toward your unique spiritual orientation. And that’s why books like *Spiritual Emergency* are valuable.

ENCOUNTERING YOUR SELF THROUGH MYTH

In [chapter 8](#), we discussed the unique Jungian view of myths. In [chapter 10](#), we discussed their dream analysis and active imagination techniques. Now let’s revisit the Jungian take on myth this time as it pertains to self-help and inner work.

Jungians view myths as wisdom stories about the human psyche. I have experienced lots of those “aha” moments reading various Jungian interpretations of dreams. In fact, I think it is a particularly Pagan way of doing inner work—one that connects it up with the gods.

Some Pagans object to the Jungian manner of viewing gods and goddesses as nothing more than aspects of the individual self. I don’t feel, however, that viewing deity in this way, either literally (they are aspects of ourselves) or metaphorically (we view them as aspects of ourselves) precludes our worshiping the gods as beings in their own right. The Jungians may think they’re just creating psychological metaphors. But then, ecologists think they’re just doing good science. Just as we can worship the Earth while studying the science, we can worship the gods while studying the psychological interpretation of their myths.

RECOMMENDED READING

CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Doing Psychotherapy by Michael Basch. Recommended to me by therapist and priestess Judy Harrow.

An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis by Charles Brenner, M.D. Excellent introduction that doesn’t assume you are a professional, but stops before more recent theories were introduced.

Introduction to Psychoanalysis: Contemporary Theory & Practice by Anthony Bateman and Jeremy Holmes. Fills in a lot of the gaps left by Brenner.

Current Psychotherapies edited by Raymond Corsini and Dany Wedding.

This is a series of essays explaining many of the current systems of psychotherapy, including the most popular. Written for the professional, it is valuable to those who simply want to be informed.

Psychology for Dummies by Adam Cash, Psy.D. Introduces concepts and terminology.

The Complete Idiots Guide to Psychology by Joni E. Johnston, Psy.D. Look at “For Dummies” and “Complete Idiots” books when you need to start from scratch.

Games People Play: The Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis by Eric Berne, M.D. The advent of Transactional Analysis in the 1960s created an entirely different way of viewing human interaction and communication. A combination of psychology and observation, with enormous insight, this classic is still fresh today.

NLP

Neuro-Linguistic Programming for Dummies by Romilla Reedy and Kate Burton. An introduction to this controversial subject.

Develop Your NLP Skills by Andrew Bradbury. A short, easy-to-read introduction that focuses on the business aspects of NLP.

7 Steps to Emotional Intelligence by Patrick E. Merlevede, Denis Bridoux, and Rudy Vandamme. Another NLP book, this one introducing the theory of “emotional intelligence,” which is becoming increasingly widespread.

Secrets of Personal Mastery by L. Michael Hall. Hall has written numerous NLP classics.

The User’s Manual for the Brain: The Complete Manual for Neuro-Linguistic Programming Practitioner Certification by Bob G. Bodenhamer, D. Min, and L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. Another well-regarded NLP book.

THE MIND AND BRAIN

“The Split Brain Revisited” by Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Scientific American*. Available at <http://www.courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/splitbrain.pdf>

“‘Right Brain’ or ‘Left Brain’—Myth Or Reality?” by John McCrone, *The New Scientist*. Available at <http://www.rense.com/general2/rb.htm>

The Three Pound Universe by Judith Hooper. As mentioned, an enlightening book on the human brain.

An Anthropologist On Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales by Oliver Sacks. Among Sacks’s other books are *Awakenings* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.

Thinking in Pictures: And Other Reports From My Life With Autism by Temple Grandin. Grandin, as an autistic author, is rare and fascinating.

There is also a chapter about her in *An Anthropologist on Mars*.

Listening to Prozac, by Peter D. Kramer. As discussed.

Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind by George Lakoff. A book about “cognitive semantics,” which approaches an understanding of the mind from the point of view of categorization and linguistics. Very dry and academic, but quite interesting.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

On Death and Dying by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D. As discussed.

The Pagan Book of Living and Dying by Starhawk, M. Macha Nightmare, and The Reclaiming Collective. Death from a Pagan perspective. Valuable.

The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self by Alice Miller. As discussed.

There’s Something I Have to Tell You: How to Communicate Difficult News in Tough Situations by Charles Foster.

Coming Out to Parents: A Two-Way Survival Guide for Lesbians and Gay Men and Their Parents by Mary V. Borhek.

Mom, Dad, I’m Gay: How Families Negotiate Coming Out by Ritch C. Savin-Williams. These three books convey the experience of “coming out” and all it entails.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

Modern Psychology and Ancient Wisdom: Psychological Healing Practices from the World’s Religious Traditions edited by Sharon G. Mijares. Highly recommended by Judy Harrow; discusses the interconnection between a variety of faiths (including “Goddess Spirituality,” but not Wicca) and psychological healing.

Rituals for Living and Dying: From Life’s Wounds to Spiritual Awakening by David Feinstein, David and Peg Elliott Mayo. A beautiful blend of the spiritual, mythic, and psychological. Available through Dr. Feinstein at www.innersource.net.

Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis edited by Stanislav and Christina Grof. In some ways, completely unconventional, but a very important book. It views those moments in life when the pressures of spiritual transformation can become a crisis, even a breakdown. It is unconventional in that it refuses to view such crises as pathology, but, as the title suggests, it also recognizes the danger.

SELF-HELP

It's Never Too Late to Be Happy: Reparenting Yourself for Happiness by Muriel James.

What You Can Change and What You Can't: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement Learning to Accept Who You Are by Martin E.

Seligman. This and Muriel James's book were highly recommended by Judy Harrow.

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns. High-quality self-help. This is not one of those books that rejects other forms of help; it doesn't say never take medications, or never seek help, or that this book is all you'll ever need. Instead, it offers tools for how to recognize and break through depression, and it includes a "Complete Consumer's Guide to Antidepressant Drug Therapy." For this reason, be sure to get the 1999 revision, and keep in mind that even that date will not include the very latest information.

An Adult Child's Guide to What's Normal by John and Linda Friel. It's fine to refuse to be mainstream, but if you ever feel a painful sense of disconnection from "normal" people, this book can help.

Codependence: Misunderstood—Mistreated by Anne Wilson Schaeff.

Understanding codependence helps us see how we get entangled in other people's problems, and what we get out of it.

The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis. This is a controversial book, primarily because of its "always believe" stance. But it has been an immeasurable help to many thousands.

The Courage to Heal Workbook: For Women and Men Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse by Laura Davis. An excellent follow-up, this book has an outstanding section on how to choose a therapist.

Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child by John Bradshaw. Bradshaw is the granddaddy of the inner-child movement.

Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life by Dr. Susan Forward, with Craig Buck. Full of useful exercises.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. The "12 & 12" that, along with the AA "Big Book" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), forms the backbone of twelve-step recovery. The 12 & 12 is especially valuable for those who are working in twelve-step programs other than AA, since the Big Book is oriented more strictly around alcoholism.

Women Who Love Too Much: When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change by Robin Norwood. A lot of people ridicule this one, but it is incredibly insightful.

ENCOUNTERS WITH MYTH

Goddesses in Every Woman and Gods in Every Man by Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D.

He: Understanding Masculine Psychology; She: Understanding Feminine Psychology; and We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love by Robert A. Johnson. Obviously, I have favorite authors. Johnson's books are very small and readable, and he's written quite a lot of them.

The Mythic Path: Discovering the Guiding Stories of Your Past—Creating a Vision for Your Future by David Feinstein, Ph.D. and Stanley Krippner, Ph.D. A course for using mythology as a guide for psychological healing by well-respected psychologists.

HOMEWORK

- Consider therapy or a self-help group. You may find a 12-step group applicable to you (there are so many!); try visiting an open meeting.
- Pick a self-help book on a topic meaningful for you. If it feels safe, do some of the exercises in the book.
- Write a "myth" or "fairy tale" about your childhood. Make yourself the hero.
- Find out what your local community resources are for therapeutic help, including those that operate on a sliding scale. These may include community centers, private charitable organizations like Jewish Family Services, suicide hotlines, etc. This can give you or someone you know information that makes you feel less helpless or expands your sense of choice. It is grounding and empowering to have options available, and it may help someone in an emergency.

[11.](#) The left-right hemisphere theory of the brain is far more complicated than what I've sketched here. The recommended reading has more information if this interests you.

[12.](#) Lipp, Deborah. *The Elements of Ritual*, page 56.

[13.](#) She has written three books, including *Thinking in Pictures: And Other Reports From My Life With Autism*.

[14.](#) Here's a small sampling of subjects in the psychology section of Amazon: sleep disorders, optimism, work strategies, behavior modification, Asperger's Syndrome, male depression, bipolar disorder in children, sexual addiction, personality types, enneagrams, anger, attention deficit disorder, introversion, conversation, cognitive therapy, grief counseling, creative therapy, integral psychology, acceptance, group dynamics, power, infidelity, and family therapy.

[15.](#) Not all Wiccans believe in reincarnation. Wicca is nondogmatic, so no belief is treated as a "test of faith." However, reincarnation is a normal part of Wiccan theology and its acceptance is built into the religion.

STAYING INVOLVED

If we identify the immanent Goddess with reality, then our spiritual practice must confront reality. The territory of the quest moves beyond the individual self.

STARHAWK, *Dreaming the Dark*

One thing that the rest of us can learn from radical witches is that we are all interconnected parts of the world, and our witchcraft is integral to that connection. In *The Way of Four Spellbook*, I talk about how magical work is based, in part, on a web of interconnection; everything touches and is touched by everything else. Part of the process of working magic is finding strands along the web that connect us to our goal and target. We use the web when we cast spells, but this doesn't mean that it goes away when we're not casting spells. We can experience this interconnection at all times; at any time.

Wicca is an Earth-centered religion; we worship Mother Earth; we venerate nature and natural cycles. We attune ourselves to the Earth. It doesn't make sense to me that people with a spiritual consciousness rooted in the world can isolate themselves from that world. Yet, some Wiccans do exactly that.

British witches have political activism as part of their folk heritage. It is said that magicians and witches created the storm winds that turned back and ultimately wrecked the Spanish Armada in 1588, preventing the invasion of England. It is also said that witches and occultists in England worked in concert to prevent Hitler from crossing the English Channel during World War II.

Folklore about performing seasonal ritual has it that the rituals must always be done properly or the seasons will not turn. This is a very ancient, and cross-cultural, belief that gives the performance of these rituals a great deal of *gravitas*. Although we now know that weather patterns work in predictable ways (sort of), it has been pointed out that the “ritual-did-it” theory of seasonal well-being cannot be disproved, because we can never be certain that some small group somewhere did, or did not, perform the rites. This folklore means, in part, that performing seasonal rites serves both the Earth and the community. It is not uncommon, therefore, for Wiccans to conceive of themselves as a hidden force, serving the common good behind the scenes.



Everything touches and is
touched by everything else.
Magical work depends on
finding strands along the
web that connect us to our
goal and target.



Many traditional Wiccans say that the work they do within their coven *is* involvement in the world. This is, no doubt about it, a very good point. If the magic they do at home turns the seasons and protects the nation, then surely one cannot accuse them of being uninvolved! Yet I still think that the attitude of isolationism can harm your witchcraft. You can feel emotionally or spiritually disconnected from humanity or from nature unless you are *out in it*.

In other words, when we involve ourselves in the outside world, we care more about it, we know it better, we feel its life force more deeply, and that empowers the private work we do in our circles.

What can we do to become and remain involved? The choices are myriad, and can reflect your personal interests and style. No one can do it all. Here are some options:

- Donate food to a food kitchen.
- Volunteer at your local library.
- Pick up litter when you see it.
- Vote.
- Give time, money, and/or goods to an organization you believe in.
- Run for the school board.
- Consume less (that's the reduce-reuse part of reduce-reuse-recycle).
- Write to or phone your elected representatives.
- Become a Big Brother/Sister.
- Help out at a nursing home.
- Clean up a park.
- Volunteer at an animal shelter.

One thing that I do is plant a small garden. Sounds selfish and stay-at-home, doesn't it? But “healing the Earth” doesn't mean a lot to me when I'm not touching earth myself. Living in the suburbs as I do, it's easy to get abstract about the whole “nature” thing. Gardening makes it real to me. We suburban and urban people need to make an effort to touch nature. Some of us may likewise need to make an effort to touch other people by saying hi to strangers, making new friends, or getting involved with community life.

I also vote, write to my representatives, write letters to the editor of my local newspaper, give money to a political organization I believe in, and donate clothing to a local charity that matches the clothes up directly with people in need. (I like that better, personally, than giving to a big charitable organization that resells the clothes to finance operations). Another important thing we can all do is be informed.

Several of the things listed above require having information about the state of my world, my country, and my community. Since this book is about *study*, you'd expect there to be some research involved! I can't write to my representative without some foreknowledge: Who is my representative and how do I contact him or her? What issues are before Congress? What are my opinions about those issues? Why? What is the other side and why do I disagree with it?

Knowledge is power. This truism is something that all witches use as a part of their practice; be it knowledge of healing, of herbs, of weather-lore, or of the current state of the world. I have often suggested that healers study anatomy, and you'll find anatomy books listed in [chapter 13](#). Just so, those working to heal the Earth should understand something of the earth sciences, and those looking to help tsunami victims should understand something of life in Thailand.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

I function in a pendulum relationship to the news of the day. The more I learn about what's going on out there, the more I care—until, finally, I care so much that I experience anxiety, rage, and despair. Then I back away from the flow of daily information until I realize that I am ill-informed, and the cycle starts up again.

My current practice is to ingest a moderate dose of daily news (usually news radio) and follow politically biased Web sites, especially blogs (Web logs). As the bias of “objective” mainstream media sources has become more and more prevalent, I feel better-served when I know the slant at the outset. That is to say, when I read a newspaper or watch a television news broadcast, I know there's a slant in the information being presented, but I can't always figure out what it is. When you read a political blog, the slant is right out front where you can see it, and the good blogs link back to their sources. For example, the widely read liberal blog *Eschaton* (<http://www.atrivos.blogspot.com>) frequently features a “Wanker of the Day” with a link to a right-wing political column, blog, or news editorial. (Or, more often, it links to a left-wing blog that criticizes and links to the right-wing source). The advantage here is that you can read the liberal complaint and the conservative source, and decide for yourself with whom you agree.

Since eclectics are so individualistic, they generally have no set approach to politics. Radical witches are left-wing by definition. Traditional Wiccans, by contrast, have long maintained the value of political neutrality. In a traditional coven, harmony and unity are absolutely essential, and political discussion can lead to strife. In addition, traditional Wiccans usually believe that you become Wiccan because you are meant to be so, because you are “of the blood,” or were connected to witchcraft in a past life. A political litmus test for coven entry would violate the principal that whoever belongs, belongs. What matters is the connection to Wicca, the bonds in the coven, and the skill of the witch. Traditional Wiccans are thus not likely to become involved in the sort of political action that radical witches embrace, such as Green

Party activism, or protest marches.

That doesn't mean, however, that traditional Wiccans should eschew all involvement in the outside world. A traditional witch said to me that she considers her various community activities a part of good citizenship, not a part of good witchcraft. I consider that dividing line artificial. Witches should be good citizens, in whatever way each witch defines it. In groups, "good citizen" activities can also be a wonderful way of bonding. You can clean up a park, distribute holiday gifts at a nursing home, or wrap "Toys for Tots" together. All of these nonpartisan acts of good citizenship can breed good will among the people doing them. They also breed good will in the larger community for groups that choose to be out of the broom closet.

Around the United States, Pagan Pride Day (<http://www.paganpride.org>) events have done a marvelous job of community outreach, and have donated proceeds including money, food, and goods to local charities. These events have, on the whole, done such a good job of interacting with the world that, when they are treated with prejudice (as in the several cases of churches that refused to accept Pagan donations to their church-sponsored charities), the Pagans came out looking like the good guys and the bigots came out looking like, well . . . bigots, even in conservative parts of the country.

GENDER POLITICS

By "gender politics," I mean the whole range of gender issues that include male/female relations, feminism, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) issues.

Many people think that Wicca is inherently feminist. Radical witches will certainly agree, but eclectic and traditional Wiccans may not. Certainly all kinds of Wicca embrace the idea of female empowerment as embodied in Wiccan ritual, and almost all agree with the basic principles of either equality feminism (men and women are basically the same, and biology is not destiny) or difference feminism (men and women are different and should celebrate that difference; differences should not be valued one over the other). But the word "feminism" itself tends to rankle a lot of people.

Whether or not we consider ourselves feminists, Wiccans are almost inevitably drawn into some kind of conversation about gender difference (or lack thereof) and about the appropriateness of gender roles, since Wiccan ritual emphasizes polarity. Some covens are structured on polarity lines, with men and women taking different roles in the coven. Some people are comfortable with this; some are angered by it. An awareness of the history of gender relations, and of the ways that taking gender roles affects people, is important. In other words, if we are acting out gender issues in our practice of Wicca, we should educate ourselves about the subtext inherent in those issues.

When we talk about polarity-based roles, we open up questions about how those roles apply to GLBT people. There were some groups in the early days of Wicca that practiced a sort of institutional homophobia. Essentially, they believed that a polarity system meant that only male-female couples could work together. Moreover, they didn't welcome gay people even if they worked ritually with people of the opposite sex. This is totally unacceptable, and thankfully, a thing of the past.

Why is it important to acknowledge a homophobia that happened fifty years ago? Because it points to the way in which political movements in the outside world affect the internal workings of Wicca. Gay-rights activism, both within Paganism and in the world as a whole, has had a profound impact on how even the most conservative traditional Wiccans view gender, orientation, and polarity. We have gone from being a religion in which some people believed that some orientations were more sacred than others, to being, for queer people, one of the most positive, accepting, and respectful religions around. Wicca today understands that "All acts of Love and Pleasure are My rituals" really means *all* acts.

I like to think our tendency, as Wiccans, is to be accepting and embracing of difference, and that the homophobia of the past was a knee-jerk acceptance of the outside world's standards. In other words, because "everyone" was homophobic, Wiccans didn't need to examine those attitudes much upon becoming Wiccan. This made it easy for Wiccans to shed their prejudice once they saw it for what it was.

This is a good example of why it is so valuable to be in touch with the issues of the world around us. We may have attitudes, even prejudices, that are holdovers from the culture in which we were raised; a culture with very different ideas about the world than ours. Good "issue" writing asks us to examine what we think we know, and reframe it. Good feminist writing, for example, asks us what we think we know about women and men, and why we think we know it. Certainly, pre-Stonewall, people weren't asking a lot of those questions about homosexuality.

The issue of gays in Wicca isn't just about gay rights specifically; it is, more broadly, about gender politics. Polarity is based on gender. It is based on who is "male" and who is "female." Gender politics asks how we define those terms. When a gay man is disallowed from working polarity as a man, those who disallow it are using sexual activity to define gender. They are saying he is not "male" if he is not straight—that his polarity is defined by his orientation.

Look how obviously false that is! A gay man is certainly a man. Every argument that suggests otherwise can easily be struck down. If maleness is based on sexual activity, then are celibate straight men not male? If maleness is based on whom one desires, then does a straight man cease to be male when he experiences desire toward another man? It's the Brad Pitt argument; out lesbian Melissa Etheridge famously said that Pitt was a man who could "change a woman's mind." At the same time, many straight men have admitted that they've experienced attraction to Pitt or some other male movie star with androgynous good looks. If gender isn't orientation, then we must return to gender studies to examine what else it may be. And we haven't even addressed transgendered people, and how they might work a polarity system.

Radical witches may be most interested in learning about gender politics, because it is an involvement that they already have, an area that is already integral to the magic they do. Eclectics, who often work as solitaires, and who sometimes come together with other solitaires for lunar or solar celebrations, may find it a way of learning to relate to a wider range of people, or to themselves, or to the world. Traditional Wiccans, who are generally committed to a fairly strict polarity system, may be most interested in seeing different ways such a system can interact with GLBT people (perhaps including themselves).

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

This is perhaps the least controversial of the controversial issues presented in this chapter. Wiccans are, among other things, nature worshipers. So, to attribute to them an understanding of issues affecting nature is not much of a stretch. Indeed, all Wiccans worship nature in some way. In fact, the Gaia Hypothesis and the Deep Ecology movement are both areas where the science of environmentalism and the spirituality of nature intersect (albeit not without controversy).

The Gaia Hypothesis sees the Earth as a living organism. While the original theory used the name Gaia (the Greek Earth goddess) metaphorically, simply as a convenient name for the idea, when it was taken up as a spiritual as well as scientific theory, author James Lovelock was not displeased. "Deep ecology" attributes an inherent value to all beings on the Earth, and proposes an environmental policy that isn't human-centric. Both have attracted a great many Pagans because of their consonance with Earth-centered religious thought.

Some Wiccans may choose to be politically active for the environment in one or more ways, and this might tie in with their political involvement in general. Others might choose simply to pay attention to nature as part of their religious path, by being out in nature and experiencing it directly, by learning more about it, or both.

Warning: Learning about global warming (now more often called "climate change") and other environmental issues may change your life. It may change what you drive and how often. It may change what energy sources you use and how much of them. Big life decisions and small ones may become colored by your concern for the Earth. And as you make these changes, as you walk instead of drive, or repair something old instead of buying something new, you may think of your new behavior as part of your practice of Wicca.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

As Wiccans, we necessarily have a strong interest in religion. In order to be Wiccan, you have to make a conscious choice. While Wiccan parents perform ceremonies called "Baby Blessings," "Wiccanings," or "Paganings," the first is the most correct of the three terms.¹⁶ The baby or child isn't made Wiccan, he or she is simply blessed, and brought to the attention of the Wiccan or Pagan community and of the gods. Wicca is something we choose, either by leaving the religion in which we were raised, acquiring religion if we were raised without it, or becoming more conscious and focused in our religious practice if we were raised in a Pagan or Wiccan home.

I have a Memnonite friend who theorizes that there's a religion "gene" (metaphorically speaking) and that some people have it and some don't. He suggests that he and I have more in common than he does with someone who is a Memnonite by upbringing, but not terribly fascinated by it. To be enraptured by things of the spirit is to have a particular sensibility, which my friend and I share, and by which we are enriched.

As a Wiccan living in the world and being interested in the world around us, we can also be interested in religions other than our own. All Westerners live in a world deeply influenced by Christianity. In addition, huge waves of immigration have given many of us the opportunity to spend time with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and others from all over the world. I have found that my interest in religions has created a common ground, a meeting of minds, and a sense of sharing with those of all sorts of backgrounds, if they also have the "gene." Moreover, the rise of Islamic Extremism and the increasing political clout of Christian Conservatism have made it evident that understanding world religion these days is more than an academic pursuit.

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sensitivity by which
we are enriched.



When we become Wiccans, that isn't the end of our religious exploration, but (if we choose) the beginning. I see a lot of people nowadays who choose to call themselves Wiccan, but who do not seem to be changing themselves in any way. They seem to view finding the right label to describe themselves as the goal of their spiritual quest. Once they acquire the label "Wiccan," they breathe a sigh of relief and are done. They maintain the same values and beliefs they had before, just under a new name.

This isn't Wicca as I understand it. As I've said repeatedly in this book, part of the nature of the Wiccan is self-examination. When we choose Wicca as our path, part of our task, I believe, is to examine everything in our lives in light of this emerging view of the world. How does living in the world change when the Earth is sacred? How do my ideas about work, about relationships, about happiness, about success, about community, about a hundred things, change? Perhaps things in my life change radically, perhaps not at all, but I will have to examine myself and my ideas and beliefs carefully to find out.

One way to begin that examination is through a study of comparative religion. Most of us know only the faith in which we were raised (if any), and probably don't know it as well as we might. As we study a variety of religions, we see that their underlying assumptions are entirely different. For instance, Christians generally understand religion as "that which you believe," and naturally assume that belief is the basis for all religion. Many former Christians come to Wicca and ask what it is that Wicca believes. When the answer is open-ended, they find it impossible to understand. But in another mainstream religion, Judaism, belief is not the crux of the matter. A Jew is a Jew regardless of what he or she believes. You can be an atheist Jew, something that baffles many Christians. How can this be so? In part, it is because, in Judaism, a Jew is what you *are*. You are Jewish if you were born to a Jewish mother. Judaism is membership in the tribe of the Jews.

Secondarily, Judaism is what you *do*. "Orthodox" is really the wrong word for strictly observant Jews. They aren't *orthodox*, meaning strict in belief; they are *orthoprax*, meaning strict in practice. An observant Jew, a "good" Jew, is one who keeps kosher, keeps the Sabbath, gives to charity, studies the Torah, observes the holy days, and practices good deeds. Note that this is a list of practices, of activities, and never addresses a belief in God. Of course, most Jews believe in God. And of course, there is a deep spiritual and mystical tradition within Judaism. But belief doesn't *define* Judaism in the way that belief in Jesus Christ may be said to be the single defining factor in Christianity.

Once you have practiced this bit of comparative religion, and understand that some religions consider belief their fundamental defining feature and others do not, it is easier to look at Wicca and say: Oh, I see—belief can be varied within a religion and it's still a religion. In fact, I view Wicca as more closely allied with Judaism than with Christianity in this respect. Wicca is a religion in which practice is more identifying than belief.

In [chapter 2](#), I laid out five defining characteristics of Wicca. Only two were belief (belief in magic and belief in immanence). The others were practices (attuning to nature, using polarity, and casting circles and calling quarters). Strictly traditional Wiccans are more orthoprax than orthodox. As a traditional Wiccan myself, I teach how to do circles, celebrate holidays, call quarters, and so on.¹⁷ But I am decidedly *not* the Thought Police; I never tell my students what to believe.

The point here is that the study of comparative religion can shed light on Wicca. If you never question the idea that religion equals belief, you will fail to understand that idea as an assumption you're bringing to Wicca, and not necessarily a correct one.

Similarly, monotheistic religions have an underlying assumption of "one that is right; all others are wrong." You either worship the One God, or you worship false gods. Isaac Bonewits likes to point out (far too many times to cite) that monotheism leads to One-True-Right-and-Only-Wayism (or "monotheism") in all parts of life. It affects us in ways of which we may not be aware. I see people all the time who talk about "the right" choice, assuming that all other choices are wrong. Is this the right job for me? (Because there's only one True job, and others will make me unhappy.) Are you my one True love? (Many widows and widowers, among other people, have learned that there is more than one true love available for each of us.) As polytheists, it behooves us to reexamine our ideas about truth and falsehood in the light of worshipping many gods, *all* of whom are equally true. What can this tell us about other truths we once thought singular?

Each type of Wiccan may choose a different starting point for a study of comparative religion:

- Traditional Wicca derives, in part, from the Golden Dawn and other magical traditions based in Jewish and Christian mysticism. In studying other religions, the mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam may be a favored starting point for them.
- Radical witches may be most interested in the history of religions as they relate to oppression, liberation, and justice, as well as to the role of women in various religions. Liberation Theology may be of interest to them.
- Eclectics borrow from a wide range of traditions. They may prefer to start with religions rooted in polytheism, such as Hinduism, because studying other polytheistic traditions may enhance their own practice by giving them more from which to borrow. Or, they may enjoy overviews like *World Religions* by Bowker, a real cornucopia from which the reader can pick and choose.

RECOMMENDED READING

POLITICS

Eschaton is found at <http://www.atrios.blogspot.com>. Where you can enjoy reading about the "Wanker of the Day."

Media Matters is at <http://www.mediamatters.org>. *Media Matters* is a liberal blog that exposes lies within the conservative media. As does *Eschaton*, it links you directly back to the source story, so you can always read both sides.

FactCheck.org: Annenberg Political Fact Check is at <http://www.factcheck.org>.

Similar to *Media Matters*, this site is more conservative. Some liberal sites dismiss it as too conservative, but it is usually very fair, as far as I can tell—good at supplying details behind "sound bites" that don't say much.

The Utne Reader Magazine. A left-leaning magazine about the interface between politics and spirit, often hovering between political commentary and New Age philosophy. Asks questions about living a good life while remaining engaged with the world.

Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky by Noam Chomsky.

Chomsky is a radical thinker—challenging, infuriating, fascinating, and worthwhile.

Harvey Wasserman's History of the United States by Harvey Franklin Wasserman. Changing the way we look at the past is a way of changing the way we look at the present.

FEMINISM AND GENDER ISSUES

The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women by Naomi Wolf. Issues of body image have become increasingly important to feminism in recent years. I find an advantage in examining things like how we look at ourselves in the mirror, because that doesn't seem overtly political. It allows us to see the connection between "politics" and day-to-day life.

Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women by Susan Faludi.

Written in 1992, this book may already seem outdated, yet it is important to understand the shifts, the back-and-forth dialogue between feminism and those who decry it. *Backlash* also helps answer the "Feminism is over, it's already achieved its goals" position.

Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future by Jennifer Baungardner and Amy Richards. This is a love-it-or-hate-it book that I chose because it speaks specifically to a young woman's view of feminism. Not your grandmother's women's movement, this is way beyond anything that Betty Friedan or Germaine Greer ever thought of.

The F Word: Feminism in Jeopardy by Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner. Another third-wave book that talks to and about second-wave feminists. A little dry sometimes, but excellent.

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D. Dr. Tannen is a linguist, not a political theorist, yet this book had an enormous impact on the public perception of gender relations. Most people who read this book have a lot of “aha” moments about the way genders interact and fail to communicate successfully.

Gender Shock: Exploding the Myths of Male and Female by Phyllis Burke.

One of the most highly regarded books on the subject.

Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism by Pat Califia. I was a long-time admirer of the work of Patricia Califia—lesbian, feminist, advocate of sexual freedom. Then Pat transitioned and became Patrick Califia, and has taken on the issue of transgenderism with gusto.

THE ENVIRONMENT

An Inconvenient Truth by Al Gore. In the short period of time since this book was first completed, it has become the definitive text on the crisis of Witchcraft of global climate change. Also consider renting or purchasing the DVD of the Academy Award-winning film of the same name.

You Can Prevent Global Warming (and Save Money) by Jeffrey Langholz and Kelly Turner. Explanations of household energy-users (water heaters, light bulbs, air conditioning) and other daily environmental impact items (driving, food shopping), followed by chapters like “Climate Results,” “Money Matters,” and “Easy Ways You Can Help.”

Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet by Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé. *Diet for a Small Planet* was a classic in the 60s, connecting how we eat with how our food is produced, and showing the connection between diet and the environment. Thirty years later, the original author and her daughter are writing about 21st century sustainable eating.

Listening to the Land: Conversations About Nature, Culture and Eros by Derrick Jensen.

A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural by Wendell Berry.

This and Derrick Jensen's book celebrate nature, which is surely as important as being aware of issues and controversies.

The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology edited by Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue. The deep ecology movement is a different, and perhaps more Pagan, way of perceiving environmentalism.

Thinking Like a Mountain by John Seed et al. This book is about a deepecology ritual with strong Pagan overtones.

Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth by James Lovelock.

Scientists Debate Gaia: The Next Century edited by Stephen H. Schneider, James R. Miller, Eileen Crist, and Penelope J. Boston. *Gaia* is the breakthrough book that was embraced by Pagans and environmentalists alike. By defining Earth as a living organism with the name of a goddess, Lovelock made big waves. The second book looks at some of the flaws in his theory, and offers lively discussion.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions by Huston Smith. This one has been a classic since 1958. It only includes the most populous religions, including Confucianism, which some don't consider a religion at all. Smith writes with clarity and understanding, however, and it is a fine introduction.

World Religions by John Westerdale Bowker. Like all Dorling Kindersley books, this one is lavishly illustrated. It has the advantage, too, of covering native traditions.

A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam by Karen Armstrong.

Islam: a Short History by Karen Armstrong. It's not a huge exaggeration to say that this entire section could be occupied by the works of Karen Armstrong. She's really something.

Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish

Religion, Its People and Its History by Joseph Telushkin. This is considered the definitive introduction to Judaism.

To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. This is the one I refer to regularly.

Buddhism: A Concise Introduction by Huston Smith. By the author of *World Religions*.

God's Bullies: Power, Politics and Religious Tyranny by Perry Dean Young.

Written in 1982, this one may not be easy to find. I include it because it is so prophetic, and also because it was a favorite book of my high priestess, one that opened my eyes to the importance of Wiccans paying attention to issues of religion in political life.

What's Wrong With The Christian Right by Jan G. Linn Brown. Look on this as a 21st-century follow-up to *God's Bullies*.

The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism by Karen Armstrong. Fundamentalism throughout history by one of the best authors on religious topics.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism by Linda Johnsen. This one is really a beginner's guide; if you already know a bit about Hinduism, it may be unsatisfying. However, it's a good general introduction and Johnsen knows her stuff. She makes a good guide, being a Westerner who is also a devout Hindu.

HOMEWORK

- Look at your connection to the world. How do you express it? Perhaps you are already very active in your community, perhaps not. Perhaps you are very political, perhaps not. Take a personal inventory of the ways you touch the world outside your family, friends, and coven or group.
- Now ask yourself, are there gaps? Do you notice missing pieces in your connectedness to the world? Do you notice that the people to whom you are connected are themselves connected to a part of the world that is a total blank for you? For example, perhaps you have a transgendered friend, but know nothing about the issues she or he faces. Perhaps you have a friend with an environmental illness, but know nothing about pollutants. A while back, I noticed that, for someone who is involved in a nature religion, I had remarkably little connection with nature. That's when my garden became important to me. If you look for gaps, you may not need any further homework assignments; you may naturally see the next step.
- Don't burn out! If you are already deeply involved in the world, don't push yourself to find one more involvement.
- Is your next step one of information (reading books or news) or one of activity? Some “next steps” can be supplemented by meditation, and meditation can also help clarify what you want to do. For example, I can meditate on nature using my garden as a focal point. Or, meditation may be where your “garden” idea emerges.

[16.](#) This rite is also sometimes called “Saining.”

[17.](#) My book *The Elements of Ritual* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2003) teaches circle-casting in detail.

CHOOSING A SPECIALTY

This book was written to help you improve yourself as a witch by studying a variety of topics. You might consider this a Liberal Arts Wicca education. Significant to this analogy, in many universities, you aren't allowed to choose a major until your second or third year.

Your first year was Wicca 101, as described in chapter three. You needed to learn the basics of Wicca, and of being a Pagan. Your second year was learning the 202 topics covered in chapters four through eleven. Here you introduced yourself to a wide range of skills and knowledge that, while not exactly Wicca, will deepen your work in your religion.

Now you're ready to "choose a major," and focus deeply on one or a few areas. You may elect to delve more deeply into an area we've already covered—divination, for example, is a common specialty—or you may look into other skills entirely. You may have already been studying your area of specialization—perhaps for quite some time. Now you can focus on it to the exclusion of some of your other studies.

If you were my student, I would require that you have at least some knowledge of each of the topics treated in the preceding chapters. Now we enter into "optional" territory. Having mastered the basics, you're now ready to move more deeply into areas of your own choosing. The best I can do is to point out to you what some of those many areas of specialization are.



Some Wiccan specialties:

• Healing • Counseling • Herbalism • Handicrafts • Bardic arts, including
drumming • Astrology • Kabbalah • Yoga • Chakra work • Gemology •
Weather-working • Astral travel • Historical research • Child care



Of course, when I say "specialization," I refer to those things that relate to Wicca in particular. There is nothing wrong with developing all sorts of interests, from soap-making to the history of film, from auto mechanics to hair-weaving, but this chapter is concerned with those skills that apply to magic, ritual, worship, or coven work.

HEALING

As specialties go, healing is one of the most important ones for a Wiccan. In fact, many other specialties (such as chakra work or herbalism) relate to healing. A large part of the traditional work of a witch is to heal.

Eclectics, who are often more deeply concerned with "harm none" than other Wiccans, sometimes find that healing is the only magical work with which they are really comfortable. Radical witches often follow a model in which the coven functions as a kind of self-help group, with members healing one another—physically, psychologically, psychically, spiritually. Healing is an essential component of these groups, and is consonant with the radicals aim to heal the Earth and all of Her children.

Traditional Wiccan groups just about always do healing as part of their work; they are the Wiccans most likely to consider traditional spellcraft an essential part of being Wiccan. While eclectics may consider Wicca a religion in which witchcraft is optional, and while radicals may consider magic a metaphor and healing something done through empowerment, support, and encouragement, traditional Wiccans tend to take magic as a real and an inherent part of the religion they practice. Thus, most Traditional Wiccan esbats include some spellwork, and healing spells are the sort most often needed.

In other words, all Wiccans have their own reasons for considering healing a very important skill. Not all, though, specialize in it. Eclectics, as the ones most likely to work as solitaires, may be most likely to study this art, since in a group, only one person needs to be a specialist in any given area.

COUNSELING

As you advance in your studies, you may find yourself more interested in psychic and psychological healing than in physical healing. Counseling is an area in which many Wiccans choose to further their studies.

It has been my experience that Wiccans are often sought out for counsel. By this, I don't mean that people in need flip through the phone book looking for Wiccans, or that they ask around: "Hey, do you know any Wiccans? I sure need someone to talk to." Not quite. Rather, I mean that those needing a friendly ear to listen or a shoulder to lean on often find themselves drawn to Wiccans. They often pour out their hearts to us or ask our advice without even knowing why.

Traditional Wiccans working in covens may find the role of a priestess or priest somewhat similar to that of a counselor, and may wish to hone their counseling skills because of that, perhaps studying pastoral counseling.

Eclectic Wiccans working in groups may notice that people in crisis are drawn to such groups. This doesn't mean Wicca attracts "crazies"! When people seek to heal themselves, they may reach for a new spiritual path as part of that healing. So people in need of healing may be more likely to sample Wicca, and open eclectic groups are often easy to find—easier than traditional groups, anyway. I also suspect, as mentioned earlier, that people who had difficult childhoods are more likely to walk away from their childhood religions, whereas people with more functional childhoods are more likely to be content with the religion in which they were raised. Although I have no statistics to support that suspicion, I have over two decades of observing Paganism under my belt! All kinds of Wiccans, not just eclectics, will encounter this.

I have already mentioned that radical witches are oriented toward self-help and mutual healing. In addition, politically active radicals often find themselves in crisis situations—protests, arrests, or confrontations. These are provocative and emotionally challenging. Radical witches may also find themselves working with people who, by definition, are fragile or in need of healing—battered women, for example. Activism often brings you into contact with those who have been abused, injured, or demeaned.

Every Wiccan who works in a group also encounters issues of group interaction. People in groups are not simply individuals added together; they create systems in which people play roles, gossip, and form and break bonds.

All of these observations can motivate you to study psychology beyond simple self-help. It's important to remember, however, that being a good listener doesn't make you a counselor, although learning listening skills is a fine way to start. Being good at giving advice doesn't make you a counselor either, although having resources to offer people is an excellent idea.

Some Wiccans who become interested in counseling become professional social workers, psychotherapists, or addiction counselors, just as some Wiccans interested in physical healing sometimes become nurses, doctors, chiropractors, or massage therapists. Others seek to develop and practice skills in ways available to the layperson.

Certainly, reading a book won't make you a good counselor, but there are fine books available and several are listed at the end of this chapter. The homework for counseling at the end of the chapter, however, is far more important, and essential if you choose to pursue this path.

WITCHES' BREWS

Herbalism is probably second only to healing in popularity and significance as a specialty. When the average person visualizes a witch, herbs are probably embedded somewhere in the image—in the cauldron that bubbles, in the ingredients that make up the brew, even in the straws composing the witch's broom. Many of us investigate herbalism for this reason alone: it is an art that sparks the imagination and makes us feel magical. Yet there are many other good reasons to study herbs.

Connecting with nature is part of being Wiccan. We follow the phases of the moon, and our Sabbats are connected to agricultural cycles. We see the Earth as a living being, and we learn to notice our part in Her rhythms. Connection with growing things, then, is a natural part of Wicca.

Witches, as we've seen, have always been healers. To take care of oneself and others isn't necessarily a "professional" practice. A soothing tea is accessible to anyone. Radical witches are perhaps those

most aware of the corruption of mainstream industries that include agricultural, pharmaceutical manufacture, and medicine. So, they are likely to be most interested in practices that opt out of those industries. But all witches, I think, find some truth in the notion that to be a witch is to find resources within, rather than always looking outside for answers. Whether we're using herbs for improving our moods, beautifying our skin, or soothing a tummy ache, we're taking care of ourselves with our own skills and knowledge, and that is a form of power.

Most people use the word "herbalism" to cover a wide variety of topics. Some of the most common include:

Healing herbalism: Knowledge of the use of herbs and plants—usually in the form of teas, infusions, decoctions, tinctures, or poultices—for health purposes. In addition, it may use herbs for physical purposes other than healing—for example, as a natural insecticide or cleanser—and may include specific disciplines such as Bach Flower Remedies.

Magical herbalism: Knowledge of herbs or plants for magical purposes. For example, using a peppermint tea to settle an upset stomach is healing herbalism; sprinkling fresh peppermint on your altar to dispel negativity is magical herbalism. There's a huge range of ways that magical herbs can be used, including teas, incenses, sprinkling here or there, adding to mojo bags, and inhalation, which leads us to. . .

Aromatherapy: The use of scent for magical or healing purposes. Normally, fresh herbs or plants, or essential oils, are used.

Wildcrafting: The art of gathering herbs and plants in the wild. It includes learning to recognize plants, knowing how to harvest them properly, knowing what parts of a plant are useful, and knowing the time of year and sometimes time of day and Moon phase during which they should be picked.

Herb gardening: Another way of acquiring herbs, in addition to or instead of wildcrafting. City dwellers can enjoy window-box gardening while increasing their knowledge of magical and healing plants.

Herbal preparation: Knowing how to preserve and prepare herbs for magical or healing use, as well as how to make incense and other blends. You can learn how to dry herbs, how to make sage bundles, how to blend loose incense or prepare sticks or cones, or how to use essential oils, fresh herbs, or other ingredients in bath salts, soaks, or other preparations.

While students of herbalism may, over time, learn a good deal about all or most of these, they generally focus on only a portion of them. I advise students who are overwhelmed by the breadth of this topic, but who wish to learn something about it, simply to find one task that they want to do and use herbalism to do it, or to find one herb they already have and learn about it.

HANDICRAFTS

Back in the old days (when dinosaurs roamed the Earth), it wasn't as easy to find witchy things for the home altar. It wasn't just that we didn't have the Internet; it was that Sears wasn't so cooperative as to have candleholders and aromatherapy kits. In fact, when I was starting out, just finding candles was an issue. The Yankee Candle Company had not yet become a chain. Burning candles was neither trendy nor fashionable.

It is traditional for witches to make their own tools. Wiccans of all sorts recognize that a tool made by you will have special power linked to your effort and intention. The focused state you are in while creating tools and other crafts is not unlike meditation, and this state of mind can be used to pour magical energy into the object being made.

In addition, such a tool is made to order; you aren't compromising to accommodate what's available in the store. My own athame is carved to fit the curves of my hand. I have a wand made of wood picked up in a local park. Connections to your own body, neighborhood, feelings, family, and tastes can deepen the strength and energy of any tool.

Many handicrafts are within reach of a beginner. I've made several wands. The simple woodcarving involved is not difficult once you learn the basics, and it's fun. In my years in Wicca, I've known people who had the following skills and used them in their Wiccan work:

- Woodcarving (wands, other altar objects)
- Knife-making/Sword-making
- Carpentry (altars, wall sconces for quarter candles)
- Sewing, appliqué, embroidery, weaving, and other textile arts (robes, altar clothes, mojo bags)
- Candle-making
- Sculpture and pottery (god and goddess statues, ceramic dishes and goblets for the altar)
- Jewelry-making
- Metal work (engraving tools, altar objects)
- Calligraphy

Don't demand of yourself that a specific handicraft be your area of specialization or expertise before choosing to make something. A slightly flawed tool made by hand is, in many ways, better than a store-bought one (unless it's a leaky goblet—goblets really shouldn't leak). You may try something once, and never again (I've never taken to sewing, and only do it when I need to). Or you may enjoy a craft so much that you become an enthusiastic hobbyist.

OTHER SPECIALTIES

Some people are naturally good at some or all of the bardic arts (instrumental music, song, poetry, storytelling) and these can greatly enhance ritual. Some folks are terrific drummers and can be counted on to add a sacred beat when needed. Of course, "naturally" talented people still need to practice and study, and even practicing and studying doesn't make something your specialty *per se*. Specializing entails making a choice. You can choose to have an affinity for one or more bardic arts, add practice and study, stir, and come out a bard. People who bring these skills to ritual bless us all with their gifts. Over twenty years after his death, Gwydion Pendderwen's music is still used in many Pagan groups.

Some people delve deeply into areas such as astrology, Kabbalah, yoga, chakra work, or gemology. Some study magical arts such as weather-working or astral travel. Some apply intellectual skills to Wicca; we have historians, for example, who bring a particular perspective to our religion. Some parents and child-care professionals have created Pagan children's activities that are used in private groups or at festivals. SpiralScouts™ International is a large-scale manifestation of that.

It isn't usual to separate your magical life entirely from the rest of your life. Most Wiccans will tell you it isn't healthy either. Integration—being a whole person, a centered person—is part of the goal of Wicca. So, it's not surprising that many people decide that the way to be the best Wiccan they can be is to be the best person they can be—the person they already are. They bring talents they had already to their practice of witchcraft. I know a number of people who were talented musicians before they ever heard of Wicca, and proceeded to use their talents to enhance their Craft; for instance, writing and performing ritual music.

On the other hand, your studies are also an opportunity to branch out, to try new things, to explore different parts of yourself. I know several people who have changed careers as a result of their studies in Wicca. Mostly, though, you can expect to acquire new hobbies, new skills, new interests that bring you joy—far more joy than most people experience. It often seems that Americans, in particular, "do" little more than their jobs. We work, we shop, we watch others do things on television, in sports, or at the movies or theater. Whenever I have acquired a new interest, someone in my life has pushed me to make money at it—to sell my jewelry, to get my poetry published, and, yes, to write books, which I eventually did. But money isn't the point; that's just how our culture tends to react to talent. If something is really good, it should turn a profit. Not so! The word "amateur" means "one who loves." Doing something out of love is a great way to deepen your connection with the world, with your community, and with the gods. Specializing in Wicca-related activities can be a way of becoming a true amateur.

IT NEVER ENDS

Wicca involves a lifetime of study and practice. It isn't all, or even mostly, study, of course—the mind is just a part of the self, and it is the whole self that walks this path. I have been Wiccan for nearly twenty-five years. That's a long time, (and telling you this makes me feel *old*, but never mind). Yet I still learn new skills every day. The pile of books teetering at my bedside never seems to get smaller. Throughout the writing of this book, I have been far more aware of my deficits than of my strengths, and was constantly brought up short by how little I genuinely know. The world is full of secrets for us to uncover. They can't be uncovered quickly or impatiently. But those of us who are committed to our paths can know that the world is full of treasure, if only we put our minds to finding it.

Blessed be!

RECOMMENDED READING

HEALING

You Can Heal Your Life by Louise Hay. This is a renowned classic. Louise Hay defined a language of spiritual healing that remains hugely influential.

The Healing Craft: Healing Practices for Witches and Pagans by Janet and Stewart Farrar and Gavin Bone. The only book of its kind written by and for Wiccans and Pagans.

Hands of Light by Barbara Brennan. Another classic of New Age healing technique.

The Concise Gray's Anatomy by C.H. Leonard, A.M., M.D. Keep an anatomy book in the house so that you can see the internal details of the work you're doing.

The Anatomy Coloring Book by Wynn Kapit and Lawrence M. Elson. This is a useful book for healers and magicians. Meant as a teaching tool, you can also use it as a healing guide, or for sympathetic magic. It gives you symbolic access to specific parts of the body.

Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary. This is the classic reference for diseases and other medical terminology. It has been in print since approximately forever. Every nurse and doctor I know owns one. Mine was purchased over twenty-five years ago, and so has nothing on AIDS, or fibromyalgia, or other new diseases. Still, it is incredibly helpful 99 percent of the time. When someone tells me they've been diagnosed with a condition, I look it up here to understand it. It explains medical prefixes and suffixes as well. (Even though my 1977 edition doesn't have fibromyalgia, it does have fibro- and myalgia.)

COUNSELING

On Becoming a Counselor: a Basic Guide for Nonprofessional Counselors and Other Helpers by Eugene Kennedy and Sara C. Charles. The most ontarget recommendation I can offer.

How Can I Help? Stories and Reflection on Service by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman. Ram Dass is a great spiritual teacher; his essays here give profound guidance to counselors and healers.

The Art of Helping by Robert Carkhuff. Another good book on helping and counseling.

The Power of Empathy: A Practical Guide to Creating Intimacy, Self-Understanding and Lasting Love by Arthur P. Ciaramicoli. Out of print, but worthwhile if you can find it.

The Skilled Helper by Gerard Egan. Because this is a professional book, you'll find it quite expensive. However, older editions are available from used booksellers at more reasonable prices.

The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships by Michael Nichols.

Values Clarification: A Practical, Action-Directed Workbook by Drs. Sidney Simon, Leland Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum.

Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling by Howard J. Clinebell, Jr.

Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling edited by Howard Stone. Here are four books recommended by Judy Harrow that have been valuable to Wiccans who specialize in counseling as a skill of priesthood.

HERBALISM

Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs by Scott Cunningham. As the title suggests, this is a reference work more than a how-to book. Covers magical uses and folklore of herbs and other plants. I refer to it often.

Jude's Herbal Home Remedies by Jude C. Todd. This is a nice, handy book focusing on healing and medicinal usage.

The Master Book of Herbalism by Paul Beyerl. Another classic, this one should be on the shelf of everyone who wants to focus on herbalism as an area of study.

Healing Wise by Susun S. Weed. Susun Weed's "Wise Woman Herbal" series is renowned. Other books focus on the herbal needs of stages in a woman's life.

OTHER

The Complete Book of Incense, Oils and Brews by Scott Cunningham. This is a fine how-to book, covering a full range of do-it-yourself techniques, most excellent for the beginner.

Incense: Crafting and Use of Magical Scents by Carl F. Neal. Another good how-to book.

Candle Making in a Weekend by Sue Spear. These "In a Weekend" books are surprisingly good.

Gwydion Pendderwen: The Music of Gwydion is available from Serpentine Music, www.serpentinemusic.com.

SpiralScouts www.spiralscouts.org. "SpiralScouts" International is a program for girls and boys of minority faiths working, growing and learning together."

HOMEWORK

HEALING

- Visit a practitioner of alternative healing as a client. This can be a more mainstream healing art, such as massage therapy or acupuncture, or it can be less mainstream, like Reiki or aromatherapy. Simply allow yourself to take in the experience. Do you notice sensations associated with the healing? Do you notice changes in your health, energy, posture, or attitude the next day? The next week?
- Working with a partner, see if you can sense pain or tension in his or her body. Run your hands over the person's body, close but not touching—about an inch or two away tends to work. See if you notice hot, cold, or other sensations in a particular spot. Sometimes, I find thoughts or feelings hovering over a particular spot—anger over a knot of tension, or sorrow over a sour stomach. After doing a quiet diagnostic sweep, tell your partner what you experienced and get some feedback. Your partner doesn't need to be Wiccan or Pagan. Anyone with an interest in healing will enjoy this. In fact, most anyone finds it interesting.
- In *You Can Heal Your Life*, author Louise Hay suggests a body-mind connection based on a sort of metaphorical meaning. I find such metaphors to be profoundly true and they have helped my understanding of health a great deal. Keep a journal, for a month, of symptoms you notice in yourself or others; record the kind of metaphors that come to mind. For example, sore throat may mean: "There's something I'm afraid to say." Be intuitive and imaginative, and don't worry if the notes you take make sense.
- If available in your area, get a Reiki attunement.

COUNSELING

- Consider volunteering for helping organizations that put volunteers through free training programs in exchange for a commitment to volunteer service. Suicide and crisis hotlines, rape crisis centers, and women's clinics often have such programs. They provide high-quality training to the nonprofessional, which is then passed on to the community.
- Try to locate a mutual-counseling group using a system like Reevaluation Counseling (Co-Counseling) that doesn't require professional credentials.
- Consider a class in active listening, communication, or interpersonal skills.

HERBALISM

- Research an antitheft herb or herbal blend, charge it, and sprinkle it on the floor of your car.
- Choose a health problem experienced by you or someone you know (headaches, insomnia, menstrual cramps) and look up herbal treatments. Prepare and use a

treatment.

- Find out the medicinal and magical uses of a culinary or other herb you like. If, for example, you buy catnip for your cat, find out what else can be done with it. If you grow basil to make your own pesto, find out its magical uses.
- Learn to identify any wild plants that may be growing in your yard, in a local park, or in some other nearby spot. Confine yourself to the specific plants that you see locally.
- Research a loose incense that may be appropriate for an upcoming holiday rite. Prepare the incense.

HANDICRAFTS

- Consider using a poppet (doll) in a spell, and make the poppet yourself. You can work from a doll kit (of which many are available) or from scratch.
- At Imbolc, learn to make a Brigid's Cross. This is an equal-armed woven symbol of the goddess Brigid. Instructions can be found online at: <http://www.kensmen.com/catholic/stbrigidscross.html> or at: <http://groups.msn.com/PaganHearthRecipes/comdollies.msnw>
- Use polymer clay to make a god or goddess statue. A simple symbol, such as a phallus, yoni, or omphalos is an excellent beginner's project and makes an evocative finished piece, suitable for your altar.
- Peruse your local library for do-it-yourself books. There is an astonishing array of material available in even a small library that provides everything from diagrams to shopping lists. Believe it or not, this is how I started with several of my favorite hobbies.
- Investigate any local classes being offered. Most craft stores, large or small, offer classes in crafts like sewing, beading, knitting, candle-making, and more.

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