

WICCA

Description:

Wicca is a nature-based, pagan belief system founded in the mid-20th century. Wiccans worship Nature, often personified as Mother Earth and Father Sky. As polytheists, they can use many different titles for their deities. Many Wiccans will choose particular Gods or Goddesses from different religions around the world and use those Deities for personal devotions. Many Wiccans meet within a coven, which is a small group of people. Each of these covens is autonomous and usually extremely different from one another. These covens can be mixed gender, all male, or all female, and can be large or small. Similarly, covens will use particular Deities as the main focus of their coven. It is extremely important to know that Wiccans do not worship or recognize the concept of "Satan," "the Devil," or any other entities of that nature. Wiccans see "Satan" as a symbol against Jewish and Christian traditions. Although Wiccans do not use the Bible, they regard Christianity and Judaism as a world mythical system which deserves as much respect as all religions.

Most Wiccan groups also practice magic, in which they direct and use "universal energy" to affect an entity to a desired result. Some members spell it as "magick," to separate it from sleight of hand entertainments. Most, but not all, Wiccans use the rule of Threefold Return: any positive magick directed towards someone will come back as three times the benefit to the caster, while any negative magick directed towards someone will result in three times the harm to the caster. This rule results in a large sense of personal responsibility and individual decisions. Wiccans often employ means such as dance, visualization, hypnosis, and chant to focus this psychic energy for the purpose of healing, protecting and aiding members in various events. Many Wiccans believe in reincarnation. Some understand reincarnation as a literal belief of death and life, while others understand reincarnation as a symbolic model that guides Wiccans through the cycles and changes within their lives. However, neither reincarnation nor any other literal beliefs can be used as a test of an individual's validity of participating in Wicca.

Wiccans trace historical origin to the reconstruction of Nature worship in tribal Europe, which revived in the early 1930s. The works of early twentieth century authors such as Robert Graves, Margaret Murray, and Gerald B. Gardner began the renewal of interest in neo-paganism, which is the religious movement that incorporates rituals from traditions outside the main religions. Gerald B. Gardner popularized the movement by declaring himself a witch in public after the repeal of anti-Witchcraft laws in Britain in 1951. In 1962, two of his students, Raymond and Rosemary Buckland, spread Gardnerian Witchcraft in the United States. In 1975, a group of covens secured legal protections and the benefits of church status by forming the Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), which has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The CoG does not oversee the Wiccan religion; however, it is the largest single Wiccan organization.

Dietary Requirements:

- Because of the focus on Nature in the religion, many Wiccans are vegetarians out of respect to Mother Earth. However, Wiccan diets are non-restrictive apart from personal choice.

Medical and Health Requirements:

- No medical restrictions.
- Most Wiccans believe in the efficacy of spiritual and psychic healing when done concurrently with standard medical treatments. As a result, many Wiccans will request that other Wiccan personnel be notified and allowed visiting privileges, considered as immediate family, including access to Intensive Care Units.
- Many Wiccans also believe that healing energy can be sent over long distances. In the case of a serious medical condition, the patient's coven should be notified.

Scriptural and Doctrinal Sources:

There is no set sacred text for Wicca. However, Gerald Gardner's teachings are accepted by some as the text of Wicca. Gardner wrote a Book of Shadows (BoS), which is a book containing religious texts and instructions for rituals within Wicca, for his coven. Gardner's BoS led the way for Wicca, but did not dictate the vast majority of the religion. In addition, different covens create new BoS's for their members; because of this, each BoS is distinguishable and separate from the others.

Rituals:

- The Initiation involves the rebirth of a person as a Wiccan; a new name is adopted.
- A Wiccaning welcomes a baby into the craft of Wicca; however, it does not obligate the child.
- A Funeral Ceremony is a requiem for a Wiccan who has died, and the coven will act as godparents for any of the Wiccan's children.

Moral Code:

- The moral code of Wicca, known as the “Wiccan Rede” reads “an it harm none, do what ye will.” In modern English, this interprets to, “If it harms none, do what you will.”
- The Rede emphasizes the individual’s responsibility to prevent harm to others and creates personal responsibility.

Devotional Practices and Services:

- Daily prayers are not required.
- Most Wiccans worship in groups. Solitary Wiccans and those that are separated from their coven may choose to worship privately or form new groups on religious occasions. A small amount of Wiccan covens worship in sky clad (nude) as a sign of attunement to Nature. It is important to note that the vast majority of Wiccans worship completely clothed.
- Many covens bless and share wine during the ritual.
- Due to a lack of central authority, most Wiccans choose when, how, and what their devotional practices are.

Clergy, Organization, and Government:

- Most Wiccan groups have no central leadership. The CoG, a Wiccan organization that includes solitary Wiccan practitioners and affiliated covens, elects a First Officer, which has a constitutional limit of two consecutive terms.
- The First Officer acts as a face for Wicca, however, does not dictate the direction in which the religion will move.
- Some covens are headed by a “High Priest” or a “High Priestess.” These ministers act as leaders and teachers for coven members.
- There are a large amount of distinct “Traditions” of Wicca, which act as different denominations of Wicca.
- Strict adherence to the patterns of Wiccan “Traditions” does not dictate the validity of a particular coven.
- As well as this, there are many solitary practitioners, who may have been initiated in a coven or self-initiated.

Major Celebrations and Observances:

Wiccans celebrate 8 festivals known as “Sabbats” to become closer to the seasonal rhythms of Nature. These festivals are:

- Imbolc/Brigit (celebrates the turning of winter to spring): January 31st
- Ostara (celebrates the Spring Equinox): March 21st
- Beltane (celebrates the turning of spring to summer): April 30th
- Litha (celebrates the Summer Solstice): June 22nd
- Lunasa/Lammas (celebrates the turning of summer to autumn): July 31st
- Mabon (celebrates the Autumn Equinox): September 21st
- Samhain/Sowyn (celebrates the turning of autumn to winter): October 31st
- Yule (celebrates the Winter Solstice): December 21st

In addition to these main festivals, most covens meet at each Full Moon and again at New Moon. These dates are not strict and rely heavily on particular covens and “Traditions.”

Dress Requirements:

- None.

All information is extracted from the following sources.

Wicca. (2013). Retrieved from <https://wicca.org/>

Wicca. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

Drawing down the Moon. Adler Margot (1986). Retrieved from <http://www.gale.com/>