

This has nothing to do with "New Age."

Footnote:The word "faith" is used here as opposed to Religion. A Faith is a non-specific religion or religious Philosophy, like Christianity. Religions within the Christian Faith include Catholicism, Fundamentalism, Protestantism, Vineyard Christianity and more.

...It has everything to do with religion.

The reason people justify the classification of things like this with such a masterpiece of euphemism is simple: This religion, My religion, is uncommon enough to be passed over by most, and common enough to scare the proverbial "Hell" out of those who fear any change (and have such a thing to be scared out of.) We are everywhere, and if the idea of a non-Christian baby-sitter or doctor frightens you, then be frightened.

The mythical "Agressive New Age" of fundamentalist fret, where militant lesbian vegans rule over men enslaved as breeders or sorcerers plot massive role-playing games to get inside children's minds, does not exist. It was made up to frighten people, but frightening is harming, and we do not harm. We have no hidden agendas, no schemes, no secret societies, no passwords... our "secrets" are open for all. We are normal citizens, your children, parents, neighbors, teachers and friends, no more or less "evil" or "scheming" than anyone...maybe even a little nicer, a little saner, a little more polite. I am sure there are a few misguided Wiccan souls out there with delusions of grandeur or who are in serious need of "attitude adjustments," but personality and insanity transcend religion, "there's one in every bunch." We are not stereotypes. Most of the shared beliefs of Wiccans are here for you to see. That's it. No secrets. Obviously I haven't included in depth detail about every ritual... that's insane, I couldn't create a disk or book large enough to fill with everything about Wicca.

Like Judeo-Christianity and other world faiths, Wicca is a religion that is divided into sects. The sects within Judeo-Christianity range from vastly differing broad groupings (i.e.: Jewish, Catholic, Protestant) to the individual or small sects of various temples and churches (Wesleyan, Seventh-Day Adventists, Southern Baptist, American Baptist, etc.) The sects of Wicca are called "traditions" (or "trads") and are equally as diverse. A tradition usually includes family and personal beliefs, passed down through the years, or the beliefs and values of a group of people. Most Wiccan traditions fall into one of three categories, although borrowing between trads is fairly typical. These categories are Gardnerian based, Dianic based and the many Fam-Trads, which are based on the practices of families which may go back hundreds of years.

Gardnerian traditions and those traditions which have sprung out of Gardnerian traditions are based on the books of and practices detailed by Gerald Gardner, but the term "Gardnerian Tradition" also applies to many Fam-Trads which pre-date Gardner and seem similar to those practices described by him. Most modern "Gardnerians" actually practice an eclectic amalgam of inflexible early twentieth-century Wiccan beliefs from Europe, incorporating various Fam-Trads in their quest for the "Original" Wicca. The oldest proof of a pre-Gardnerian tradition mentioned in this book, the Marchand Fam- Trad, dates (at least) to 1930, but has only considered itself "Wiccan" since the seventies. This is typical of the older trads, many of which have changed to fit a "Wiccan" mold in the past forty years.

Fam-Trads range from the well known to the obscure. Some are strict, like the Marchand trad which has an epic poem that details both the history of the family and the rules of Ritual in explicit detail. Some, like the Tomas Family Tradition, have no written rules and consist of the teachings of one person's lifetime. The history and size of a trad doesn't matter in Wicca, although it can feel nice to have a huge group of colleagues and a stack of books to refer to. Some trads claim lineages thousands of years old and some are being created right now, but the beauty of Wicca is that neither is more legitimate. For this reason, size, which can mean the difference between "a cult" and "a real church" in Christianity, doesn't matter in Wicca. Some traditions consist of only one or two individuals, and the largest have thousands. In Wicca, it is

the shared beliefs, not their age or the number of believers, that make a tradition.

Universal Eclectic Wicca, which this book is about, is a broad-based tradition, originally created to bring together the followers of several different groups whose leaders had learned from the same training circle. Although none of our covens were alike, we decided to write a "tradition" encompassing all of our beliefs. This is the result of that work.

To the Skeptic, reading with the purpose of ridicule or damnation, I ask you to remember that this is not some freak cult...this is our religion, respect it as you respect your own, for our beliefs are as deeply held. I charge the Christian skeptic to read Matthew 7:1: "Judge not" and bide by it.

To the traditionalist, the Wiccan who says, "No, It must be done this way," I say "Grow," our similarities outweigh our differences. This may not be YOUR tradition. I never said it was.

To all, I challenge you with our Affirmation of Acknowledgment... Wiccan, Christian, Jew...whatever. Now is the time to love all mankind in peace.

Chapter One: Achieving the First Circle
Eclectic

defines eclectic as "selecting or selected from various sources." Universal Eclectic Wicca (UEW) is based on not one or two sources but an infinite number of sources... any source its students find useful. Much as the "Witch-Cult" grew and changed with the addition and subtraction of various people throughout the British Isles, our modern Wicca, fueled by the rapid changes of the communication age, grows and changes with the people we meet through networking and a free press.

Could Gardner, or a more recent author, have predicted the ritual on Gallows Hill in Salem, Massachusetts in 1992, where Pagans of every creed and color marched to honor those persecuted in the name of religion? Could the shamans of the Hunted Years have predicted the thousands of non-native seekers abandoning their "European ways" to become one with the spirits of the land? Could any of us predicted the vast Pagan community of the Internet? In order to understand the changes in Wicca, we must make the realization that no one was born without the ability to contribute to humankind, that each life, no matter how insignificant, creates some small change. A humankind without change is an ugly thought, indeed. An old bardic law reads "Ever changing, ever learning, ever growing," and that is our modern Wicca. We live in a beautiful time, for all its strife and hardship, and the pace of change is always growing. As children, my grandparents had no television, my mother (despite her dependency on it now) had no computer... I cannot comprehend my life without either. Who knows what my son will have at my age?

The changing nature of the world calls for flexibility, not just cultural flexibility, but spiritual flexibility. Religion that is static ceases to be religion and becomes something frightening, so we must be constantly vigilant in our preservation of our open-mindedness. Fear of change is the greatest cause of persecution in our history, especially the history of North America, the cradle of modern Eclectic Wicca.

From the Zapatistas to the Inuit, the makeup of this entire continent is a list of the oppressed. Many of the first settlers were escaping persecution when they came here and dished it out to the indigenous people by the shovelful. Many found their religion focusing not on their god(s), but on their persecutors, and to this day, entire sects of religions talk of nothing but "Not letting 'em get to us," and spend hours weekly trying to prevent change. The most frustrating aspect of this "fear of change" is that it is more consuming within the groups who face the least persecution, the world of the professional white male, and his affluent suburban Christian community. Contact with harsh world of the underprivileged seems to give those persecuted daily better things to do than worry about conspiracies or form militias. Those currently persecuted can only look at those who have fallen and try to be stronger, focusing, not on the past, but on the future and the change it promises.

When no longer persecuted, Churches must change or face becoming focused on the past. If they fail to change, walls of fear and misunderstanding can rise up, cutting the Church and its

members off from reality and allowing insane, corrupt or downright evil leaders to run their lives. From Jim Jones to the Televangelists that bilk senior citizens out of everything they own, it is a scenario that replays itself every few years. Careers, lives, even souls are destroyed in moments while we just shake our heads and mourn more "freaks" who have followed a leader we don't understand.

"It is an "Us" and "Them" and anyone who isn't with the church is against it," a former fundamentalist told me of her experience, shortly after leaving such a church. "We're no longer a church, but a set of issues...if you're not anti-gay, anti-choice and anti- woman, you are not welcome." This same person noted a frightening trend: "Not once were the teachings of Christ not attached to the church's political agenda. We were buffeted with tales of the past, and how everything is corrupted." "That wasn't a church," she added, "That was a conspiracy cult."¹ The perceived persecution, at worst, can become real persecution. There is a metaphysical "law" which says "Belief creates Reality." Nowhere does it come into effect more visibly than when the cycle of persecutor and persecuted becomes continuous. Take the example of David Koresh's Branch Davidians: Thinking themselves persecuted they began to prepare for a "war." Their preparations led to their persecution, and then their war happened. The force of belief is very powerful.

To prevent becoming another conspiracy cult, Wicca (or any religion) must be eclectic, and take from all of its members. The myth of the Manna of the Athamé provides a parable for our eclecticism, and perhaps was one of our ancestor's way of telling us this.

The Manna of the Athamé 2

...From the smoke of the fire a woman's form arose, the image at once of the sacred mother and The Christians' sacred virgin of Christ. The nine daggers, one broken, danced afore her like a circlet of silver. To each of us, eight in all, the daggers flew, and we felt that they were ours. The Woman raised our brother's broken dagger and we saw it reformed with a beam of moonlight made hard . She then bade us pass the daggers thrice around, hilt first, so all touched hilt and blade. The third time, I saw the sigils of my Sisters and myself upon the blades, hanging for a moment as if traced in quicksilver and then melting, fading into the blade. " The great sword lives in each of you now, and you in it, a part, as are all who touch the holy instrument, a part of it, as are all who have touched them, and them, and so forth." She spoke, each word hanging briefly in the air like a fractured rainbow. "Let none touch, even see the Blade that are not worthy, be they of The Faith or Christian, for destruction comes to those who do not use caution in their choice of compatriots. Yet seek, if you may, the honorable and true, that your blade, and theirs bear the marks of their goodness." "Ware those who seek to become a part without inquiry," she charged us, "lest you allow them to taint life and faith and dishonor Your brother, and those of his blood, or the blood of those slain that you may carry such tools. For that which you are colors that which you touch, and the actions of one are the constant to those who know not all."

In this story, there is a sort of psychic residue left by each person who touches the blade, much as a person's residue in Wicca relates to us all.. The Goddess figure in the story warns us to be selective in who we trust, that if the public meets only one of a group, it is that person who the group is judged by. Certainly the works of Scott Cunningham, Gerina Dunwich, and the like do Wicca a great honor when used as examples, but negative examples exist.

Many people believe that Modern Wicca, in its earliest incarnation, was created in its entirety by Aleister Crowley. Even Gardner, in the aforementioned work, acknowledges that possibility, while proposing the idea that Crowley learned from Witchcraft. ³ No good interpretation of the works of Crowley is complete without at least an overview of the writings of the founders of early Modern Wicca. Similarly, an understanding of early twentieth century Wiccan authors is only reached by understanding the paradigm created by Crowley and his contemporaries.

Unfortunately, an uninformed overview of Crowley can create wild ideas in those searching for a way to condemn Wicca. Certainly his philosophical fingerprint was apparent on the blade of Wicca when an Northern New York Christian Activist referred to Wiccans as "Followers of the

dark Magician Crowley who claimed to be Satan himself."

Caution, therefore, is the guideword in our Eclecticism, what we include reflects what we are. This does not negate its importance! A religion comprised of someone else's rules falls into inevitable decline. We must be inclusive and warm, just as the ancient peoples who practiced the foundations of Modern Wicca were. Like them, we must welcome and process new ideas while maintaining the old.

Eclecticism in Wicca is not, as some traditionalists have claimed, a loss of our ancestral history as Wiccans, but a celebration of the History we are making now as humans. By embracing Eclecticism, we are merely doing what was done before.... improving. The earliest Witches did it, the Witta, Shaman and Druid. In a natural religion, eclecticism and evolution are unavoidable. It is not our way to fight nature.

Chapter One: Achieving the First Circle, continued

Part Two: Universal

As I walked into a class he was teaching, a friend and metaphysical scholar had written the following in a bold hand across a wall of blackboards in a run down high school. The students, waiting for a question and answer session on Wicca, read:

CONTEMPLATE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

1. Matter exists in every galaxy, it is universal.
2. Air is a need we all share, it is universal.
3. That screwdriver works on all screws it is universal.

Three meanings, one word. This isn't that uncommon in the English language. Universal means ever-present, everywhere, throughout the universe. It also means the Entirety, everything that was, is or will be. It also means usable by and for everything.

Wicca conforms to all of these definitions. It is ever-present, if we could travel to any location, at any point in time, Wicca, that is, the laws and beliefs that comprise Wicca, would still be in effect. Obviously the ethics would differ from situation to situation, but the basic religion would stay the same. Wicca is not limited by one's location.

At the same time, Wicca encompasses The All, and The All is encompassed in Wicca. Unlike many faiths, we do not believe the soul has a part of divinity that is separate from our body and mind. While philosophers like Plato taught that the divinity manifested by the unity of the various parts of the Psyche/Soul was a state to be achieved 2, we teach that total integration is there from the start, giving us unlimited power, control of our own destiny and the Will to do anything, best described in the catchphrase from Robert Heinlein's "Stranger in a strange land." coined by The Church of All Worlds :

"THOU ART GOD"3

We are God(dess.) This does not mean we are not human, or better, only that divinity, with all its meanings, is within us, a part of us. In Wicca, this is sometimes called Manifest Divinity, and means that everything is divine. Each moment in life is viewed spiritually, so each ordinary thing becomes a lesson, with work, the littlest things have huge revelations, as shown in this tidbit from The Green:4

THE DONUT

Inspiration comes from strange places, in this case, a donut.

Not just any donut, but a plain donut....lonely, boring, brown, tasteless, perfectly normal and sitting there in a box that started out with nine, three cinnamon, three sugared, and three plain.

For two weeks, this donut sat alone in a box at my lover's parent's house, unwanted and unattended. When it disappeared, box and all, I was too embarrassed to ask where it had gone, so I didn't, just let it lay, and thought on it. You know, I felt sorry for that donut, deprived of a sweet coating, it dried out, aged, and was thrown away, just because it wasn't special.

That donut was like humankind, like too many people who brush up against the cinnamons, sugared and chocolate glazed to get a sparkle of difference, a dusting of significance, or, worse yet, they gaze up at heaven waiting for some celestial custard filling, or Raspberry Cream, or

Dutch Apple Mousse to make them different, special, IMPORTANT.
You know, there is a beauty in a plain donut.

There is no distinction made between the spiritual and the physical...Everything is divine, a lesson. Everything is Wicca.

The universality of Wicca also means that Wicca can be used by all and anything can be used in Wicca. As long as the Five Points of Wiccan Belief are there, and the other basic beliefs are met, any religion can be called "Wiccan," there is Wiccan Druidry, Wiccan Judaism, even Wiccan Christianity.

The laws of Wicca are relevant to ALL religion (even Satanism is reined in by Wiccan laws, and I can show you former Satanists with the Karmic debt to prove it.) This is because the laws of Wicca are not merely Wiccan but, Universal, like the laws of physics or Magick.

Those laws that are metaphorical, such as the law of return or Karmic law, when proven by physics such as "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction", or laws of physics with extraordinary proofs, are said to be metaphysical. Metaphysical laws, while often discounted, can be proven, with experimentation, as surely as can gravity.

Universality also means that we are all, Dianic, Gardnerian, Eclectic or what- have-you, practicing the same thing, Wicca...All One Wicca. This does not mean that each tradition is unimportant, only that all traditions are equally as important, whether comprised of one, or one hundred coveners.

Rather than divide our members into Solitary and Coven Practitioners, in Universal Eclectic Wicca, we have what are called "Circles." These circles represent two things: How much you know about Wicca and How much time and effort you put into your religion, the community, and your "learning quest." (The learning you have already done probably places you within a circle, but small projects are asked of students wishing to switch into Universal Eclectic Wicca. These are usually papers, or debates, or in- depth conversations to determine how much you know.) The variances in your beliefs and the next Wiccan's are vitally important so don't...do not, try to think like the next guy. Begin to let your philosophies wander, if you create something that isn't Wiccan, oh well, our loss. Being "Wiccan" is not the goal here, being yourself is.

All religion is created by humankind, regardless of its inspiration. Your religion is your religion, and mine is mine. We may use the same words, rituals, etc., but unless every way you think is the same as mine, our religions are individual. All religion is limited to one practitioner, even if we call the practitioners of similar religions by the same name, Kat MacMorgan's personal Wicca is not Tamryn's Wicca, or Lady Diana's Wicca, or John Q. Pagan's Wicca, it is the religious belief within her soul, much of which cannot be expressed in words. This fierce individuality is reflected strongest by our deity concepts, our worship of Gaea, or Diana, or Apollo. Although we may even call a God or Goddess by the same name, how can I know exactly what (s)he looks like to you? The faces of the gods are shown differently to each person, and the same name, and even the same image is different from one person to another. This is what I like to call a "What is blue?" dilemma. We know that blue is the color of something, but how do we know that my brain doesn't see blue things as a color you'd call red? How do you explain blue to a blind person...YOU don't, you just know it is blue. Perception is never identical, although the level of perception may be. My "god" may be female, or blond, or dark skinned, or called "Jayne Dough," but it's my inner god, and my inner religion, and it doesn't need to mean anything to you.

A few may feel strongly that the Gods have only one name, and one face, and as a priestess, but mostly as a Metaphysicist I believe that's true. However, human beings are limited in their ability to perceive things by the dimensions they exist within. We can only comprehend those things with length, width, depth and time and our linear temporal existence (meaning that we move only one way in time in these bodies, forward, without the ability to go backwards or circumsect) limits what we know of time. Thus, beings of more than these four dimensions would be impossible to grasp in their terms, and our own inadequacies would be filled by our imaginations, creating our personal names and faces of God(s).

The gods are no more upset by our inability to perceive their Entirety than one is by a blind

person perceiving without sight. It is simply lack of a sense, a fault of our species. We can work to better understand the gods (lose the obsession with linear time first) with the senses we do have merely by applying the Hermetic maxim "As Above, So Below." By noting the effects of our works on "lesser" creatures and creations we can glean, to a degree, what is going on "upstairs", and I wouldn't put it past the gods to have a hand in assisting us.

Universalism includes everything in one broad sweep. The religion, its laws, its gods are universal in scope and usage, and our ability to perceive them, as limited (or unlimited) as it is, still reflects an Entirety. In our culture, it is easy to consider ourselves as unimportant as a single drop of water in an ocean. The Wiccan learns to know better...It only takes one drop to make waves.

Chapter One: Achieving the First Circle, continued Part Three: The Five Points of Wiccan Belief

While Universal Eclectic Wicca embraces a person's exploration into his or her own religious paradigm, we must draw a line between what we will accept as part of Wicca and what we won't. These limits to our religious universality are The Five Points of Wiccan Belief. Within them, we can find most of the principles of the various traditions of Wicca. These five ethics are boiled down from many traditions, and exist in almost all forms of Wicca, although the names and parables attached to them change from group to group. Practices that don't uphold these standards are difficult to classify as "Wiccan."

The Five Points are:

1. The Wiccan Rede
2. The Law of Return
3. The Ethic of Self-Responsibility
4. The Ethic of Constant Improvement
5. The Ethic of Attunement

The Central belief in Wicca, the Wiccan Rede is the oldest of known ethics, the use of various phrasings of this law in pre-Gardnerian Fam-Trads leads to the conclusion that if there once was, as some claim, a unified pre-Christian Pagan religion, this was a tenet of it. The most common phrasing of The Rede is "An' it harm none, do as you will," Which is often reduced to "Harm none." In Universal Eclectic Wicca we also have an expanded reading of the Rede which is especially helpful when describing it to people who believe in commandments and long lists of rules. It states: "If an action will cause harm, physically, emotionally, or mentally, to another person or one's Self, refrain from doing it. Strive to always be helpful and never willingly cause strife or harm to befall someone. Weigh your actions against each other, would you wish your actions taken against you? Take no action you would not wish to receive."

The entirety of Morality can be defined by the Rede, even Judeo-Christian morality. While Exodus and other parts of the Bible list "crimes and punishments," they were intended to prevent, not cause harm, the same purpose as any "laws." Christianity began with the idea of harm none, even if many of its laws were misinterpreted, slanted, and later downright perverted into bearing little resemblance to their initial statements.¹

With the exception of some of the diabolic fads, all religion is based in "goodness". Mankind is, as a rule, comfort-seeking, and thus inherently good. A man would rather craft a warm sweater than a sword, and we've known for years that a good deed is a far easier sell than donning armor and inflicting one's Will. You'll attract more ants with honey, says the fable, than with vinegar.

The Second of the Five Points, the Law of Return (also known as the karmic law) means, quite simply, that what you do affects what happens to you. If you do good, good is going to happen to you; if you do evil, that'll happen too. Metaphors for the Law of Return exist in every religion, there are ancient ones and modern ones.

Think of this law as a video game. Each time you do something good, you get "karma points", and each time you do something bad, you get "bad karma points". You'll still get attacked by life's monsters and pitfalls, but an excess of bonus points will help you recover quickly.

It's not mere metaphysical mumbo-jumbo, either. If you're a better, nicer person, you have more true friends. When you have more friends, you have a support network to pick you up and set you on your feet again. It works in the other direction, too.

In some traditions, the Law of Return is given a multiplier, good and bad are said to come back upon you three- or tenfold, but even those traditions admit that an exact retribution ratio is impossible to come up with.

Perhaps for some it's better to think of this law as a giant knob on some celestial radio. If you do good on a regular basis, you find yourself on the "good stuff station" and more of the random and semi-random events you are destined to encounter will lean in more positive directions.

The less good you do, the less your random event modifier. You'll hit the high end of the scale less often, and bad "stuff" will happen more often.

The more you act positively, the better your random event modifier (ran-mod) becomes.

Admittedly, this is most easily understood by logicians, metaphysicists, technosorcerers and computer and role-playing gamers (who greatly overlap, I might add,) but this is not a new or far-out concept. Even in those religions furthest from Wicca, "Heaven" can be achieved by doing more good than evil.

Like the Law of Return, The Ethic of Self-Responsibility is a law of metaphysics incorporated into Wicca . More than any other aspect, this turns people (especially those with damaged Wills or reduced sense of Self,) away from Wicca. It can be a scary thing for anyone not raised with it, simply, when you mess up, it's your fault.

In Wicca, there is no "The devil made me do it." We don't believe in devils, and even if we did, we don't believe any extraplanar creatures could control us, not even the gods. We make our own destiny, and set up most of our own "trials and tribulations".

"I am my own person, I am not a slave to my desires, nor am I slave to a person, drug or god. No being controls me but me."

Abuse or other trauma, drugs or body/brain chemistry can alter our perceptions of who and what we are and only by working as an Integrated Total Self, with no separation of metaphysical, emotional, physical, mental, spiritual and auric selves, can we grab the reins. Self-responsibility requires that we ask for help when we need it, that we be prepared to go to whatever lengths necessary to be responsible for who we are and what we do.

The Ethic of Self-Responsibility should be a given with The Law of Return. With this ethic you are accepting the karma or "stuff" you give yourself, good or bad. Put together, The Law of Return and the Ethic of Self-responsibility expect us to change positively, thus necessitating the fourth of our points, The Ethic of Constant Improvement.

In Wicca, we seek be "ever growing," like the bardic law. The basest of these improvements are taken care of by the Ethic of Self-Responsibility, but extending that responsibility beyond the inner self, falls into this realm.

Scott Cunningham talks of Earth Stewardship in [Living Wicca: A Further Guide for the Solitary Practitioner](#) , an important facet of Constant Improvement. Ecology is vital in a religion that reveres nature as divine, and even the simplest of chores can be turned into an act of holiness when done ecologically.

Teaching and preaching tolerance, racial harmony and reverence for art and history are also a part of this ethic, and living one's life toward peace is vital. Only by being constant in our learning, and eclecticism, do we prevent intolerance.

The Last of the Five Points of Wiccan belief is the Ethic of Attunement. Attunement, the act of becoming in-tune with divinity is the purpose behind the majority of ritual. In Wicca, we believe in three groupings of divinity:

1. The Self is divine.
2. The Gods/other powers are divine.
3. The Universe itself is divine.

1. The Divine Self (thou art god) is expressed within The Ethic of Self- Responsibility. No one is in control of the Self except for the creator of the Self, the person that "owns" the body. We see ourselves as divine, therefore, we know that we can do anything. Magick becomes possible through faith in the Self, because faith is magical, as detailed in The Psychology of Religious Experiences (Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, 1965):

"The magic of faith - is it religion or magic? The question has broken down into tautology. Faith that we can do the superhuman, such as killing or healing another person by suggestion, gives us power to do what is beyond ordinary human powers. Through faith we do control the uncontrollable - some of it, a little. Where there is faith, there is religion. Not intellectual assent but faith, deep emotional acceptance, makes a Catholic or a Voodooist. Those who have "lost their faith" often speak of the loss as though they had lost their sight or hearing, a faculty of some sort that made them able to do things to themselves and for themselves which they cannot now do. They are quite right; they have lost a real potency, a real power of control. So I must say that, to call a belief "superstition", a ritual "magic", is only to pronounce a value judgment. These are religious beliefs and acts which the person calling them "superstition" or "magic" does not like. In calling them so, we are... limiting "religion" to what we ourselves approve."

Our rites of Attunement to the divine self include the practice of Ritual, and occasionally, High Magick, but also includes meditation, dance, drumming and anything else that makes us feel "in touch" with our Selves.

2. The Divinity of the Gods, or the "Other Powers" defies immediate explanation as do the gods themselves. In Wicca, our gods are more like parents, the Divine Father and the Great Mother, and less like the fury-fueled jealous God of Christianity. Our rites of Attunement to the Gods are nearly all celebratory in nature, with the more intensive rituals combining the divinity of the gods with the divinity of the Universe in worship of the lunar and harvest cycles.

3. The Divinity of the Universe is subdivided into three groups. In *Gaeism*, the Planet Earth is a creature and each individual being, plant, animal or mineral is a part of that being, which is usually, but not always, named for the Goddess Gaea or Gaia. In *Animism*, each thing be it a windstorm or a rock, has a spirit of its own. In *Cyclic Totality*, or *Cyclicism*, it is the laws of the Universe which are divine, be they the cycles of celestial decay, or the harvests, or the birth-death-rebirth of the nitrogen cycle.

The combination of these three forms of Universal divinity are used in Wicca in varying degrees with lipservice, if not full ritual given to every subgrouping.

The Five Points of Wiccan Belief are the basis for Universal Eclectic Wicca, and a project providing "proof" of one's literacy within them is the only requirement expected of a student who wishes to practice within the First Circle. If you wish to use this book as a lesson plan for the First and Second Circles, I suggest that you use a two or three page paper focusing on a current issue as a project before you start. Analyze the issue against the Five Points of Wiccan belief, and ask a sympathetic teacher, fellow Wiccan or friend to read it.2

Have the person reading your paper ask the following questions of it:

- Are each of the Five Points mentioned?
- Does the author make his or her point clearly?
- Does the author make judgements based on the points, or merely state the facts of the issue?
- Whether you agree or not, does the author make a good case?
- Does the author show an effective working knowledge of the Five points?

In a coven or training circle, the proof of knowledge usually focuses on a few questions asked by a leader and responded to by the student, questions are then asked by the other students, and defense of your point is expected. A paper is often easier than defending to a coven, because coveners and students always seem to find the one or two things you missed.

Once you've completed this task, you've achieved the First Circle....Congratulations!

Chapter Two: Redefining our Spirituality

To the "new" Wiccan, that is, the vast majority of us who are not born into the religion, a lot of the so-called "simple" terminology had been beaten and burned out of us, their meanings so lost in intolerance that we cannot use them without feeling at least a little betrayed. It is one of our first steps, therefore, to "reclaim" the terms of our relationship with divinity. "Religion," "sacred" and "spiritual" all mean more than Christ or "The One God," but it can be hard for some to realize this.

An easy example is our early teachings. Now, with the exception of a few well-intentioned years in the beginning, I was fortunate enough to go to a public school where the Judeo-Christian beliefs were only slightly pushed, like in the Pledge of Allegiance, and I was allowed to explore the various religions of other cultures. My earliest interests were the Greek Gods, especially Demeter, but they were never listed as a "religion" dead or alive. Everything that wasn't Judeo-Christian was either "mythology" or "philosophy" and any religion based on those things was either "romantic" or "uncivilized," and always, always, just plain "silly." So for years, while at night I dreamt that a far off Demeter heard my hushed prayers, I beat myself up over it, why was I silly? Why was I childish? How could I glean faith from an Archetype? When I first really began to study Wicca, my teacher said four words that have held immense importance for me. "Everyone may be right."

Try the following visualization: Imagine a great sphere, just slightly smaller than infinite. If you zoom close enough to the sphere, you'll notice that it's actually made up of billions of little hexagons, and that each hexagon faces a different direction, like facets of a huge jewel. The sphere is all one thing, but each facet, viewed from close enough, seems to be independent of it. Truth is that sphere, and those facets all are created by truth, and have an equal portion of truth. There is room for many different truths in the universe, and limiting ourselves to seeing one facet is limiting ourselves to missing the beauty of the whole thing. Personal truth may be merely one facet of this great object, yet it is no more or less important than any other facet. Before you begin looking at the sphere, look at your facet. The sphere will come, but for now, onto this quest.

-The Learning Quest-

Picking up this work probably indicates that you already have found your way to the learning quest...ALL of Life is The Learning Quest, a journey from birth to beyond in which the goal, the holy grail, so to speak, is to learn.

By the time we're teenagers, we understand most of the tangible world, and our basic knowledge of things like physics, biology and the other sciences has given us the tools to understand the rest. A learning lull develops, where our primary negative reaction to so-called "new" information can either be A. "Tell me something I didn't know." or B. "Tell me something I couldn't have figured out for myself." The teenage attitude then of "I know it all" which frightens parents so, is justified because, compared to the rest of his/her life, the teenager does know it all.

In our last years of high school, and into our twenties the learning lull causes us to seek out a new side, a new direction. Similar lulls happen after life changes, marriage or divorce, or for no apparent reason, something we often call a "mid-life crisis." For some, further research into something we already "know" is enough to satisfy this vanderjahl, but for many a whole new thing has to be sought, and spirituality is the perfect "new quest."

We all make mistakes along the way, some small, some great big ones. The importance is not how "perfectly" the quest goes, but how much we learn from however it goes. A record of your quest is fundamental to this learning.

If you don't already keep a journal, start now. Write at least every other day. If you can't find something worth writing about, try a ponderance (Appendix H) or use meditations from any number of religions. Make lists, do freeform poetry, you'd be amazed by how much nonsense makes sense later in life.

Most importantly, be yourself. Don't try to write the Diary of Anne Frank, or great memoirs to be

published after you die. If it helps you, tag a note to your journal addressed to your spouse, parents, or kids, asking them to destroy it upon your death. If you feel you "must" leave something behind of great importance, write it separately, but keep a journal for yourself, and keep it casual and truthful.

-Sacred-

Many of us grow up with a slanted idea of what is sacred. We were told that this statue or that space was sacred and thus APART from ourselves. One of the first steps toward redefining our spirituality is to "give up" our previous notions of things like "what is sacred?" and create new definitions. Sacred must cease to be separate, for we devalue things kept from us, and it must begin to mean something more, something different.

Our new Sacred could be defined as "Those things which, by bringing us closer to ourselves, bring us closer to divinity." A child is sacred, a grove, a hiding place where we once kept our toys and games, an engagement ring, a necklace given by a dear friend, all these things are personal relics, as important as a scrap of some saint's skin or a sliver of so-called crosswood. Perhaps these things are made even more sacred by their general normalness, a pair of old slippers, for instance, that bring comfort, joy and a feeling of being "at home" are sacred by their very nature, like the warm wishes of The Gods intended just for you.

The student of Wicca must reevaluate "sacred" under these rules:

#1: Do I consider it sacred because I need it??

Those things that are vital...shelter, food, water, are sacred to everyone, and we should respect and honor them as sacred, but a more personal "sacredness" is what we're seeking.

#2: Do I consider it sacred because I've been told it is?

These things may be sacred to others, but if your only reason for considering them as personally sacred is because someone has told you so, it is probably not sacred to you. This doesn't mean you shouldn't respect another person's sacred items, just that they have no sacred meaning for you..

#3: Is it religious?

Like the things above, these things should inherently hold some respect, however, those things that are not of your religion are probably not sacred to you. If they have non-religious value (a grandmother's rosary, for instance) then that value should be why it is considered sacred, not what it represents.

#4: Does it call to mind a belief, friendship, or other undefinable part of my Self?

Items like this range from Totemic relics to things that appeal for no apparent reason, many people consider these things explanatory of their life. Some of these items, rocks, feathers, baubles, may have no apparent value, others may have obvious emotional attachment, like an engagement ring. Others may appear ordinary, but be far from it, like the feather you found the day after Eagle spoke to you or the stick from the tree that died at your parent's house, but have great meaning. Like a journal, creating a collection of sacred things tells you about yourself....for many Wiccans, these things become altar decorations, or are placed around a circle to lend their power to the proceedings.

These things are powerful, and we can use them to learn so much about ourselves. Tamryn, a colleague of mine, once gave his students the assignment of listing personally sacred things, and giving a brief description of why they considered those things in that way. Students listed things like their children's baby teeth, musical instruments, gravestones and old love letters. With each list, students wrote how the assignment made them feel, and the surprising majority felt that they had "learned" something about themselves. This is just one example of the soul-searching we ask of our students, a single method of revealing the inner mysteries and a step toward

understanding the greater universe. This type of seeking, simplified in the command "Know thyself" is vital to learning any religion. Let me take this moment to remind you that if at any time you find that the religion you are in is making you feel uncomfortable, change it, and if it resists change, fight, or seek again. At least in our human race, you know you best...the goal is to know you better.

Chapter Two:Redefining our Spirituality, continued

-Spiritual vs. physical-

A necessity in our lives is the finding of the spiritual in the physical. When we don't, we run the risk of becoming "Zombies" who've lost touch with their spirituality. Mundane life is very much like cholesterol, and a diet of nothing but the mundane is as likely to kill you as daily bacon and eggs. The inability to create an everyday spirituality is at the root of a good deal of society's problems. By becoming a living example of how life is lived, we can undo these societal ills, and be a better person for it.

In reaching for the perfect Integrated Total Self, we are beginning to take control of our lives, and our world. The importance of this and the self-respect that comes with it is immeasurable, and the healing it brings is a necessity in a world with all the faults of ours. By acting each minute as a religious/spiritual being, we fully realize the beauty of what we can be, and the initial framework of this spiritual living are The Five Points of Wiccan Belief. (By my nature, as a Wiccan, I relate an everyday spirituality into Wiccan terms, but it is essential, regardless of religion, to the well-being of humankind.)

Living the Five points of Wiccan belief:

LIVING THE WICCAN REDE: Upholding the Rede can be a big part of living each day as a Wiccan. For the most part, living the Rede is obvious, just don't cause harm, but let's face it, "don'ts" aren't enough. We know what not to do. The following are some to-dos:

-Tell the truth, and give up the facades we develop to deal with that which we dislike. Get emotional, cry when you have to, and above all, learn from your mistakes.

- Do things for no purpose other than being kind and creating a better universe. In Universal Eclectic Wicca we require community service of our members, but very few members need to be pushed that way. Random acts affect the Universe. Imagine how you've felt when a parking meter's been paid for you. Well, go out and pay some meters, for cryin' out loud!

-Slow down and smell the roses. Take a "time out" for beauty each day. Visit a museum, sniff a flower, contemplate your love interest. Beauty and love are like vitamins for your spiritual body.

-Stop complaining and DO something. If you complain about politicians, but you don't vote, you are a part of the problem . If the smog bothers you on your drive into work, maybe you need to stop driving into work! If you like to walk through an uncluttered park, then pick it up!

-Respect each person equally whether 18 or 80, whether family or foe. If you feel you must give more respect to "elders" realize that each person is an elder compared to someone else. Give an extra degree of respect to those who've taken the time to listen to their inner selves and show the wisdom to prove it, regardless of age. With age comes wisdom, but only when it's nurtured. The older person who has spent their life gathering wisdom instead of wool is the true "elder."

I've met many an 80 years old without enough wisdom to fill a thimble, and a few toddlers who've made me rethink my actions. A person's genetic relationship to you, their age or what they've "done" for you does not make them better than you. If ever someone does not treat you with human respect, demand it, it is your birthright, it is part of being a human being, and even the most vile human out there deserves basic human respect, even if we sometimes must take many rights away to protect the rest of humankind.

-Realize people make mistakes, forgive, but do not forget, an "I'm sorry" without a promise of change is not an apology.

-Notice disturbing trends in your behavior, what do you do that's negative? What problems do you have with your friends, your community. What do you need to change?

LIVING THE LAW OF RETURN AND THE ETHIC OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY:

These two things, when put into everyday life, are inseparable...and simplistic: 1.) Realize each action has consequences. 2.) Don't commit an action that you are not ready to deal with the consequences of. 3.) Take control of your faults and possession of your doings. 4.) Don't take the law into your hands unless that's your job. 5.) If something is wrong, change it, within the Rede and within the law. 6) Unjust laws must change. 7) Know the Whys of the laws of your land. The Constitution is listed in the appendices of this book, sit down and read it.

LIVING THE ETHIC OF CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT:

Again, this is fairly simple...Strive toward positive change at all times. Don't stop learning. Fix what's broken. Improve the Earth.

LIVING THE ETHIC OF ATTUNEMENT:

We live by the Ethic of Attunement by setting aside a period of time on a regular basis (once a day, once a week, whatever) and using it to attune ourselves to the Three-fold Divinity. This attunement may be prayer, an offering, sacred time in a garden, or the performance of Ritual. We keep in mind at all times that what we do affects everything about us, just as tossing a stone in still water affects it for meters in any direction.

OTHER ways of living each day spiritually are less religious, PAY ATTENTION is my favorite. Remember that to be a good person is always better than being a bad person. Any child can tell you why heroes are better than villains, they're BETTER! High Wiccan Law? no. Simple common sense.

-Morality-

STOP!!! Don't run away. I know, Morality is another one of those bad words we aren't supposed to use, ever. Well, guess what, we need to reclaim our morality, and quickly...

What does MORALITY mean, anyway??

Morality is, very simply, living our life ethically, within the of our religion and our philosophy. It is living our life with MORALS, ideals and archetypes which, by example teach us the difference between right and wrong. Again, the effect of the journal is felt here, so get it out and have your pen ready...okay. Ready?

#1: Jot down 10 things that you feel are "wrong" to do...ever.

#2: Jot down 10 things that you think are SOCIALLY wrong with our culture.

Now, using the Five Points, and your other beliefs, ask yourself the following questions about each of these items.

Why is it wrong? Does it fall into a larger category of wrong-doing (i.e.: lying, injuring?) If so, create a heading on your page with the title of the larger category and list all of your items with that specification. What would cause this problem to be eliminated or greatly reduced? What simple rules can I follow to prevent doing these things?

Now, on a blank page, turn the above material into "I will not" statements. For example:

Wrong: Religious intolerance.

Social Wrong: Persecution of non-Christians in supposedly non-religious government.

Answers: These things are wrong because they cause harm, and put a single group's beliefs above everyone else's.

MORAL DISCOVERED FROM THESE FACTS: Religious persecution is harmful. Will not statement: I will not prejudge someone based on their Religion.

When you have finished your will not statements, re-read them. This is a good deal of your personal code of ethics. Add will-not statements that you feel are missing, then label the page "Code of Ethics"

Following these ethics is living a moral life...not so bad when you think of it now, huh? The best thing about this moral code is that it can change when it has to. It is not a morality served on stone ala burning bush, so you can disagree with yourself on some things when you change...and we DO CHANGE.

-Karma Happens-

The Wiccan belief in Karma can easily be used by the confused as a tool of victimization, and to say I've never heard a so-called Wiccan say that an innocent victim deserved their trauma would be an outright lie. Things happen, and very often they are not in our control. One of the reasons that many of these people will give for blaming the victim is "past life karmic debt"...that's just excrement! Most of what we are taught about "past- lives" doesn't point to such things, and if they did, I don't think reincarnation would be incorporated into Wicca so often. Sure, reincarnation into a miserable life may be punishment, but most reincarnationists say that you are reincarnated into a non-human as punishment, or into a human life that is pre-doomed, and you can always "escape" debt with work.

When something bad happens, the only reason that may exist is the need for a celestial "wake-up call," a lesson, so to speak. Some abuse survivors, when asked what they would do if they could "erase" the abuse from their past actually say they wouldn't... not because what happened to them wasn't bad, but because what happened to them made them what they now are, and what they are now isn't bad. Facing trauma is a way of learning hard taught lessons, and the skills learned in surviving these trauma are incredibly valuable in our lives. We've all seen the stereotype of the kid who "has it all" and unknowingly creates strife to learn how to deal with other problems, for many of those who believe in reincarnation, the trauma you live is merely that strife you've created to learn.

A negative cycle is created by this idea that karma, and reincarnation for that matter, are temporally linear. With that thinking, anything bad must be your fault, if not for a wrong you've done, than something you've brought upon yourself for any number of other reasons, and STILL your fault. This is just plain wrong, and in believing this you are contributing to trauma, and adding into your bad karma pool. Yes, much of what happens in your life can be attributed to something you have done, but not all of it.

These master lessons, especially the unavoidable ones, may appear without any fault of your own. Three major reasons for this "uncalled for" karma exist. The first is the simplest, you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Did you ever notice that when you hang out with the wrong crowd you get dragged unwillingly into whatever happens to them? This type of karma is called "Sympathetic Karma," what that means is that through no fault of your own, you feel the effects of another's karmic baggage. This person may be your friend, a passing stranger, whoever, and there is nothing you can do about this except to be careful who you hang out with, good advice for any reason.

The second type of this Karma is not really Karmic at all. Have you ever heard someone having a bad day say "I have the feeling someone is trying to tell me something?" That is an example of what we call "Unconscious Intervention," what that means is that something, be it an extra-personal being or your subconscious, is saying, "Hold it, we need to teach you a lesson and we need to teach it now!" Unconscious Intervention is usually recognized by the immediate effects, summed up in a "I'll never do that again" type statement. A blatant example of this happened to a friend who was mugged. She had frequented a nightclub in a bad part of town, and was walking there one night against the advice of friends when she was jumped, and her purse stolen. On any other night that she had walked, she would've had her purse full of credit cards, her phone card and cash, but she had accidentally left her wallet at home, causing the loss of the purse to be only a minor incident. From that day forward, she never walked that route alone, the lesson had been taught.

The third type of karma, and perhaps the most difficult to grasp is Preactive Karma. That is, karma for things you haven't done yet. This all goes back to our belief, upheld by science, that time is not linear, despite our linear movement within it. What this means, in theory, is that you may be getting "whapped" by negative karma you haven't earned yet. I'm not saying that this means you are predestined to earn this karma, but this can mean that if you continue on this path you will earn it. Not changing your life after such a warning can be very detrimental to your spiritual and maybe physical health. It is my opinion that when these events are preactive, we generally know it, know why, and are capable of change.

By exercising the Integrated Total Self and living morally, we control the controllable karma, and learn from why we can't control the rest. By acting on our morals, and becoming terminal do-gooders, we alter our ran-mod, and karma becomes more friendly. In Universal Eclectic Wicca, members are asked to contribute at least four hours a week to community service exclusive of their coven. This may involve environmental or social issues, or just be simple acts of goodness, but each time we do good, we get good, it's just that easy.

-A Culture of Guilt-

Forgiveness is difficult in a culture as steeped in guilt as ours, and let's face it, scapegoating, name calling and the blame game are our national pastimes. One has only to turn on any television and skip a few channels before we see the talk show with the dubious topic of "why I can't forgive _____." We have become SO wrapped up in condemning our fellow man that we've forgotten the importance of forgiveness. We all make mistakes, and I'm afraid I have to quote Christ here and say "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" (Punchline: "Thwapp...Awww Mom!")

The first forgiveness needed to move toward change is SELF forgiveness, and from there, we move on to fixing our wrongs. For some, the simple acknowledgment of "I messed up" is enough, but for many others, forgiveness is to be divided into specific penance, and the basic Wiccan recipe for penance is fairly simple. Repay thrice over what you have taken, but never twice in the same way. For instance, if you have damaged someone's car, first pay for the repairs and any other monetary repercussions, secondly, find something you can do for the person without being noticed, and lastly, keep a watchful eye on that person and present yourself in a time of need, perhaps more so than you normally would.

If you feel you must, keep a running total of "debts owed" in your mind, or even in your journal. When you get the chance, pay off those debts, but don't write off the person afterwards...merely use them as a path to discovering your helping niche.

More importantly, though, stop trying to be perfect, no one is falling for it, and it's doing you no good....just be yourself, and make that as good as possible!

Chapter Three: The Powers of the Universe

-The 4+1 Elements-

The power that Wiccans believe inherent in all things is broken down into The Four Elements, which, combined with a fifth, Spirit, make up the basic building blocks of our nature. These elements are EARTH, WATER, AIR and FIRE, and they correspond to the four states of matter. In Wicca, these elements also are linked to compass points, called "quarters" and the "cardinal" colors, and are said to represent divine/metaphysical action.

AIR

Quarter: East

Color: Yellow OR White

Altar tool: Censer

Sphere of Influence: Cleansing

FIRE

Quarter: South

Color: Red

Altar tool: Candle/Athamé, Torch (varies by trad)

Sphere of Influence: Justice, Vengeance or Masculine power

Water

Quarter:West

Color:Blue

Altar tool:Water,Goblet

Sphere of Influence:Comfort,support, relief of pain or Feminine power

EARTH

Quarter:North

Color:Green or Black,Brown(varies by trad)

Altar tool:Saltor pentacle

Sphere of Influence:Grounding, Focus

The above represents the most common elemental correspondence, but it varies greatly depending on sect and location. One group on the Northeastern New England coast places Water to the East and Air to the West, to recognize the power of the sea and the land winds near their homes. Although most Wiccans begin their Rituals to the east and circle around to represent the passage of the sun, many choose to begin at the North or South, and a group of Bardic Wiccans that I know go North to south to east to west and around, to represent the wandering of the ancient Bards which always brought them home.

In Universal Eclectic Wicca, the elements also represent states to achieve, and in larger circles and some private ones, the elements are invoked as examples of our inner power, "That we may be" like that element. Visualization¹ is often used to "initiate" the Wiccan to the path of that element, and the inner powers or "states" discovered are used in Ritual and everyday life. These visualizations include each element, with a focus on the power of one and the state to be achieved. In group situations, these visualizations are read by one person, often with drumming or instrumental music in the background, at home, a tape player should be used to record the words of the visualization until you no longer need them. Wear comfortable clothes, even use a blanket if you wish, and lie on your back with your hands on your stomach. Breathe in slowly, then hold the breath for three seconds, then slowly exhale. You should feel your stomach rise with each breath, if not, put a book or some small weight on your stomach and practice making it move up and down slightly with your breathing. Don't worry about doing the visualizations NOW, just slow down, be still, and wait for it to come. You may wish to practice these breathing techniques without visualization for a short time each night until they become comfortable....if you fall asleep at any point, don't fret, it just means you reached a VERY intense point of relaxation, and you probably needed the sleep more than you needed the visualization.

Distraction during visualization should be avoided, and this includes "Ohmigods I gotta go to work in two hours" so practice visualization with a loose schedule, and turn off the television and the radio. After a while, the states you may achieve through visualization may become instant, and then distraction doesn't matter. Feel free to change any aspects you feel uncomfortable with in the visualization. If sitting in a chair or a Yoga stance works better for you, then do it. These are all suggestions, none of this is written in stone.

-Grounding:The Earth Visualization-

Lie flat on your back in a field, if you do not have access to a field, lay on a floor and first visualize through the steel, wood and concrete. Feel yourself falling until you are lying in the dust below your foundation, and "Touch" the permeable earth that's there....

Reach through the earth into the tiny worm holes permeating the soil. Feel each nerve on your finger extend forward like a root hair system. You cannot move your fingers.

The creatures of the soil, things you once feared perhaps, pass over you, through the strands of your hair. Your hair grows impossibly fast, rooting itself to the ground, entangling itself with your fingers. You cannot move your head...

An energy tingles in your chest, and all the stresses and anxieties grow out as roots through your body and hairs, strengthening you, reaching miles and miles down to an underground lake. You feel from above as each root plunges into the earthwarmed water, and as the very last root

plunges in, you feel a bitter cold taking over the rest of you, trying to suck every inch of warmth from your bones. You feel the cold sucked through the rest of your body toward the roots, heat slowly returning to your face. You see the cold sucked into the water, forming a silverish slick which bubbles slowly as the pure water milks it from your roots.

A wind springs up in the underground cavern, twisting the ends of your roots and tossing the silver about frantically, painting the walls with it and throwing your roots around viciously. Only the knarled roots of your worries are affected, twisting, bending, but never breaking, still holding you as firm as you need.

Without warning, the wind subsides. The silver light covers everything except the water, which is clear once more. The rocks, your roots, even the walls of the cavern all glow with the light.

The warmth of the lake pushes into you, replacing what the storm drained. You feel the pulse of the water, though you...though the earth...the beat rushes through every inch of you, and you begin to notice the light flowing, moving with the pulse, slowly creeping toward you. A closer look shows the silver light to be thousands of bioluminescent creatures, no larger than fleas, and they swarm silently to you, covering you in a living, pulsing shield.

A column of steam rises from the water, and you feel the heat blocked by the creatures. They melt into every inch of you as the steam and water buffet you, keeping you from burning and tempering into a solid coat of light. Your stresses thus transmuted, the steam stops, and your roots slowly retract, bringing the light into your body...you feel it just beneath the skin, a tingle of deeper strength. As you open your eyes, you know it's there...you are aware of the difference, and this feeling, this memory is forever. You are changed...you are grounded.

Many (but not all) people experience grounding the first time they practice this visualization. It is not actually a "metamorphosis," but a way of rerouting power into a force you already possess. For some, merely lying in bed, or any other "personal" place, is a way to achieve this state...experiment. When you achieve that "anchored" feeling, try to remember the sensation in detail. Practice will make it come easier.

-The Womb:The Water Visualization-

For this exercise, you want to lie on your back, with your arms crossed over your chest. The Healing state we're attempting to achieve here is the "mental pure" state that some rituals, especially healing rituals call for. If you have already achieved a grounded state, try grounding yourself before attempting the visualization. Transference from one state to the next is easier than transference from "everyday" action to Metaphysical action. I've listed the states in order of easiest to hardest for this purpose.

(If you have a tape of ocean waves, play it now, if you have an Ocean Drum, try sitting in a comfortable chair with the Ocean Drum on your lap and slowly rock in a circular motion, if you have no way to hear waves, you'll just have to listen to your heartbeat and imagine the rushing in and out of sound.)

Breathe in, and let that breath be the slow roll of the waves coming in to shore, breathe out, feel it roll away let this continue, the rolling in and out, until you begin to feel a lightness around your body...imagine the soft feel of body-warm water as it laps at your toes, your feet, your ankles, lifting them from the ground and gently pulling you into the water. Your legs, hips, back, touch the water as you float up, carried on the surface of the water effortlessly, and at once, you're floating, carried by the warm water with no fear of sinking. The Waves increase in speed, pulling you further from land with each new downbeat, and you begin to feel the sun beating upon you, trying to sink you beneath the waves with a heat you feel like a physical pressure. The water beneath you rumbles in fierce protectiveness, and you are rushed upward toward a deep blue sky. Impossibly light, you are tossed off of the cresting waves and into the sky, where you gently lift into an updraft, then spiral down onto a outstretched arm of water, which caresses your body as you land, pulling you down beneath the waves. Your first breath as you sink is difficult, but your body readjusts to the act of water breathing, remembering pre-infancy instinct. The warmth fills you, inside and out, as you are tossed gently, current to current. The water gently flows through your hair, pulling away the dirt of the common world and leaving you pure and innocent.

You see yourself rushing toward the skin of the water, the sunlight playing on it like a fragmented mirror, that seems more and more solid as you flow closer. You hit the barrier, and feel it refuse to yield. The pressure builds up behind you, pushing harder, and you are thrust out, taking your first breath of air violently and loud, the pressure exploding from your body. Pulled on by a million gentle fingers, you are carried to the shore, where the earth grows solid beneath your feet. You are truly reborn.

As with the other visualizations, this is only a suggestion, a technique that may or may not help you experience this sensation. Again, we deal here with the difficulty of our languages, for these states, being personal and varied, are indescribable as well.

Chapter Three: The Powers of the Universe, continued

-Astral Consciousness: The Air Visualization-

Air is not only an element of purification, but is also the element of the free mind. For that reason, students of astral projection often use visualizations as "launching boards" into their astral travels. I make no claims about the validity of Astral Travel, because there is no strict definition of it, and no grounded scientific proof. In no way am I saying it does not exist either, discussion of such levels of metaphysics are best left to metaphysical tomes, not books on Wicca. Let me reiterate here, that Magick, Metaphysics and "New Age" practices are something many Wiccans do, but are not part of the actual religion. Ritual Magick, which is really advanced prayer, will be covered in a later chapter.

Self-hypnosis is recommended for this visualization, or a period of meditation preceding it. If you find that the imagery makes you uncomfortable, but not enough to want to not do it, you may wish to cast a circle (next chapter) or wear a "protective" piece of jewelry. Another idea, carry a small stone in your hand, to remind you of "earth" The deep breathing you do here should be enough to keep you from feeling "weird," but if you feel that you are out-of-body prone, do what you need to do to ground yourself or give yourself "protection" from a possible negative experience. If you have enough Metaphysical background to enter "Reverie" while performing this visualization, all the better for you.

Begin with the breathing you've used in other exercises, but with each exhale, feel your extremities slowly begin to go numb...first your fingers and toes, then your hands and feet, all the way up to your neck...try not to move these numb parts, but let twitches, and other unconscious movements happen. When only your head seems moveable, visualize a network of threads of light holding you down. You can feel these threads holding down your power, but as you assert yourself, the tiny threads begin to snap, your body slowly raising as each thread ceases to hold you down. You float carelessly through the air, turning to see your motionless body lying on the floor behind you. You smile, and a few seconds pass before the smile reaches your face below you. You notice a silver umbilical cord tying you to your body, which is safe on the guardian earth, without a further care, you turn and drift up, through the rafters, the roof, whatever, into the night sky. You push yourself up, (optional: past the lights of the city, the smog and heat until you come to pure air) into a black sky dotted with millions of stars. A wind, carrying an electric charge so fierce that you can smell it, pushes you around until you are inches away from a wall of glowing light, which shimmers with pulses of color like minute lightning flashes. You reach out and touch the wall, and are sucked into a fast moving stream of light and air, which carries you impossibly fast. From your position within the wall, you can see the semi-sphere of a far-off earth, blue-green and brown behind you. The lights of cities twinkle like Christmas lights, adding to its splendor, and a network of paths similar to the one you are on encircle it in a warm net. You step out of the wall into another and are pulled in another direction, toward black clouds which butt up against each other in angry protest. You enter these clouds, dropping out of the energy stream, and feel the caress of lightning as it passes through you. A weight begins to fill you, and you drop several inches, the pressure strong enough to make you feel as if you're about to explode. With a great rip of thunder, the rain begins and the pressure begins to ease, the water pouring through the clouds and through you onto the ground below. Rained out, you

feel a little drained, so you hook the energy stream once more, feeling its energy revitalize you. You float some more, allowing yourself to be tossed about by the wind and the energy fields, until you see a circle of stones beneath you, like Stonehenge, only smaller. You touch upon the stone at the center of the ring and feel an energy from it, similar to the one in the wall. you allow yourself to join with the stone's energy for a moment, then press off once more, finding an equilibrium between the draw of the earthy stone and the airy fields of energy. You point a finger at the stone, and a line of energy crackles from your hand and reaches it. You can see energy from the stone trickling into the line, and feel it filling your hand, with your other hand, you create a line between your body and the energy field above you, and for a few moments, you are pulled by the two forces, which yield to you and begin to strengthen you. After a few moments, you allow the lines to disintegrate, knowing you can draw in no more power. You place your hands palm to palm and a globe of energy forms around you. You concentrate for a moment, noticing the umbilical that stretches the miles to your body. You watch as it detaches from you and attaches to the bubble. There is a sucking sound, and your ears pop, and you find yourself standing above your body. You stretch out your hands, and the bubble melds into the body as energy crackles from your hands and is pulled into the body. You allow your left hand to drain itself dry, and then watch as your right hand begins to disintegrate, fingers, arms, shoulder, all forming into lines of light, you look briefly before you allow yourself to be fully drawn back, and notice the smile is still there, peaceful, and serene.... You notice as you regain control of your limbs that the little threads do not reform, you've escaped them, and if they come back, it will be at your request.

-This is only a test...The Fire Visualization-

The Fire Visualization creates the mindset of a challenger, a very powerful thinking and feeling method, which we train ourselves in. The Fire consciousness is usefully invoked at any time where we must be grounded through pain, or even in so called "lesser stresses" like exams, or defending a thesis. There is a feeling of being drawn or directed in this visualization, like the soul has more important things to do than the body. This can help put you into perspective about your life. Are your greatest worries really as bad as all that?

Begin this visualization like the others, only be sure you're warm when you do it. a friend of mine suggests using the visualization while tanning, but I love my skin too much to try. This visualization is best done during the day, although a more imaginative person might imagine traveling around the world before rising into the sun. If, at anytime, you are uncomfortable, then change the visualization. remember, never do anything you don't want to do!

You feel your body dissolving, breaking down into spherical molecules of black carbon. You are, all at once, more aware of your being than ever. Your heart still beats, your lungs still breathe, but you are made of millions of seething particles. Breathe deep and let the particles float like a flock of swallows into the sky. You curve, you undulate, but all the while you are one, held together by the invisible threads of molecular bonding, You are a great cloud of smoke across the sky, turning the sun blood red as it passes through you. You stand, at once, both under and above yourself. You touch the molecules of smoke and they cling to your mind's fingers, lifting you up, up into the blood red sunlight. Your mind's eyes close for a moment and they are the red of your eyelids, when you open them again you see only the sunlight, impossibly close and impossibly red. The sunlight illuminates your particles as they lift your mind's body toward the red sun, and impossible carpet of red and gold that warms as you approach the sphere. You feel your blood pounding and notice it's the pounding of the sun. In, hold, out, you breathe, red, gold, orange, it flashes. The beat grows louder. Red. Orange. Gold. You stretch your fingers toward the sun and they are tinged with the clear white of diamonds and quartz, the color drained away into the pounding sun. Your body tingles with the heat, like a hot shower after a cool swim, and you breathe through it, in, out, in, until the heat becomes soothing instead of harsh. The colors change, Red. Orange. Gold. Violet. White. Blue. The heat is so intense it actually cools you. This is the heat of wintergreen, of menthol, and the dust of your magic carpet

is the crystal blue-white of ash so pure it resembles snow. A yellow haze forms between you and the sun, so large now that you can see nothing else. The yellow haze comes closer and you see that it is a wall of pale fire, it's color the color of fresh lemons, tinged on the outer edge with the blue-white of the hottest flames. With a whoosh you pass through it, and it clings to you like some kind of membrane. The sun is now the deep red color of burning coals and you turn, feet towards the sun and gently float to the surface, held aloft for ages by the heat while pulled forward by the inescapable gravity. Your feet touch the spongy surface of the sun, and you feel no more than the deep heat of your blood. The pounding turns metallic, and you walk towards it. A being of pure fire appears before you, hammering a crystal blade at a forge. He points behind you and you see your footprints lingering on the sun, a patch of black-red coals that ignite slowly into the red of the flaming ground beneath you. You turn back to him and he holds the sword out to you, hilt first. You take it, and he turns into a giant lizard of flame, the great salamander. He roars at you, and you recognize it as a challenge. The sword pulses in your hand as the salamander swipes at you. You dodge and he swishes his lizard tail at you, you dodge once more and swing the sword in a wild arc at the creature. In the moment of connection, the salamander's lizard-like face is aglow with pride in you, his student. His head connects with the blade and disappears in a puff of white smoke. The body fizzles away in a cloud of steam and you find yourself walking through dense orange-tinged fog. The ruins of a great marble temple are before you, and you step up upon a marble dais, soft and cold beneath your ash covered feet. A woman, clad in a white gown nods at you and holds her hand out. You give her the sword and she gestures for you to reach into a small well and remove the huge gem that lies within it. As you lift the gem a jet of white flame pushes you up, up into the sky and away from the surface of the sun. The gem pulls you into blackness, and then, slowly, you approach the earth. The blackness turns to blue as the gem points your feet towards home. It quivers in your grip and pulls away from you, and you find yourself plummeting back toward the earth and slamming you into your body as the gem climbs deeper into space.. Before you can breathe another breath, you see the gem, through the roof, through the sky, as it explodes in white hot fire and a star appears in the heavens. Your star.

This visualization is optional, more so than the others, in a Universal Eclectic Wicca Circle, instead of using visualization to "discover" the fire consciousness, we usually suggest a "test" of some kind, a fear one might need to conquer. A "trial by Fire" often has very little to do with the actual element, and more to deal with what is called its "Sphere of Influence." The Sphere of Influence of an element includes the spiritual and mythological meanings a person attributes to it..

-The Pentacle and the Lesser Elements-

The four elements have a great deal of symbolism attached to them. Individually, they are often represented by shapes or other symbols. Circular symbols, like the ones below, are often used in place of the names of the elements when writing a ritual. When writing in a runic alphabet without capital letters or writing in a second language like the Latin, French or Gaelic, this can make it much easier to distinguish between a fire (*light a fire*) and Fire (*Light a candle to represent Fire.*)

Spirit, the Fifth Element, is usually not symbolized. This could be because it is not a part of the boundary of the Circle or because many traditions don't consider Spirit as something invoked by the person casting the circle. It is a more ethereal element, brought to the circle by the practitioner and symbolized by the altar. When represented as a group, the five elements are often symbolized by the pentacle.

In some traditions, The areas between the points on the pentacle encompass what are called the

"lesser" elements. "Lesser" Elements are combinations of two Greater Elements, although a sub-element is often implied, for instance, smoke, which is suspended pieces of solid matter (earth) is said to be of Earth and Air, but a sub-element of Fire can be implied. In some Fam-Trads, there is mention of the Ever-Continuing Pentacle. In its basest form, this pentacle can be begun by forming a second pentacle within the first, with each of its lines the "children" of the elements. It's important to notice that the Circle or pentagon around the pentacle also represents a series of lines and elements. The following is generally agreed to be the First set of "lesser" elements invoked in some Wicca, but there is little if any corroboration between trads of the lesser elements beyond them.

I've only seen a few Wiccan circles where the "lesser" elements were invoked, and they were either weather-related or large group circles where invoking each of these elements gave more people more to do. They are useful, however, when planning circles relating to things like rain or storms. A blessing ritual I know of has protected one house in a tornado-prone spot for years, and the words "fire" and "spirit" are carved in Theban script on a friend's lightning rod...Do they work? Statistically, we really don't have the numbers to say, but no one offers a "charm" or "spell" as a panacea. My friends in Tornado Alley in Kansas still have a very solid house and a storm cellar, my friend with the lightning rod didn't write the words on his roof to keep the lightning away, because that just wouldn't have worked.

Another friend summed it up this way... "If you see a zealous Christian walking into a Lion's den, you know he's got a lot of faith. If you see a Wiccan walking into a lion's den, you know he's a lion tamer." Now, this isn't meant as a slam against Christians, nor do I believe all lion tamers to be Wiccan, this just illustrates an aspect of our religion. In Wicca, we believe that the Gods fully intend for us to have a plan B, and that using that plan is a part of living within our Religion. The knowledge of things like lightning rods and structural damage capacity are tools to forge our plan Bs... tools given to us by the Gods, and/or the Inner divinity. Using these tools expresses their holiness.

The Elements are also tools, tools that we use to make things work "that much more" in our favor. We do not try to control the Elements, or anything else for that matter. Many feel that the use of Ritual Magick, which is merely advanced prayer, is an attempt to supersede God, and wrest power for ourselves. Yes, we do seek power and control, but only power and control over the one thing we have the right to control...our Self. Remember, Control of other people/things destroys their Will, destroying the Will is causing harm....Wiccans do not harm.

Chapter Four: The Wiccan Circle

-Sacred Space-

In Chapter two we redefined the word "Sacred" as meaning "those things which, by bringing us closer to ourselves, bring us closer to divinity." In our culture of over- population and possessiveness, the idea of space as sacred is pretty hard to grasp. In Wicca, we believe that everything is sacred, especially the land, and our belief is that you can buy land, but you can't own it. The idea of an area as sacred and therefore "special" is hard to grasp in a standard context, and we find ourselves once more with the spiritual blue pencil, editing the dictionary in our heads.

In Wicca, sacred space comes in two distinct types. The first, a new trend, involves the buying, salvaging and naturalizing of land, or the act of buying and "setting aside" land in trusts and private parks. There is a land rush going on, and one need only look at the side of any highway to see buildings where fields were a year, even a month ago. The purpose of "entrusting" land is to assure that our children have land and that we have oxygen. One group of people buying land

has stated that if we each buy one square mile of land and allow it to produce oxygen with indigenous plants and organic gardens, we can grind the outward growth of cities to a halt, making communities turn inward to restoration of dying neighborhoods and reuse of damaged land. Their theory works like this: When you drive along an interstate and see a few acres for sale here, and a few acres for sale there, don't look at it and say "I'd buy it, but I don't want to live next to a highway," say, "I better buy it before some fool stops that oxygen from undoing some of the damage of this highway." Don't look at unused land as needing to be put to good work, see it doing its job. By buying it, and not building on it, we are putting it to the best work there is.

The second, and vastly different form of sacred space that Wiccans use is "worship space," our temples or churches. Wicca needs no buildings for its practice, because the "circle" or temple of Wicca can be built, used and taken down in mere moments...It is a building made of energy, belief and Will, and can be outside, inside, underground or wherever else the practitioners wish it.

Many Fam-Trads state that the reason for the moveable church is a matter of persecution or politics, the need to hide when the preachers come and act like good Christians. This may well be true, but if it were the whole truth, Wicca would now operate out of churches as surely as any other minority religion. Other people simply say it's a matter of money, and that Wiccans, as a population, just don't have the funds. This, too, may be true, but the most definite reason for this transportable church is probably the Wiccan belief that, since all the world is sacred, all the world can be used as a church.¹

If you asked fifty Wiccans "what" a circle is, you'd probably get a hundred answers, half of which would seem to conflict. The Wiccan Circle defies total explanation. In its simplest form, it's an area marked out, declared in a ceremony, and used during a ritual as a "place." In metaphysical terms, the circle is a place where the physical world is left outside and the Spiritual world is as touched upon as much as it can be by physical beings. The Circle contains the power or energy "raised" until it is released, and keeps negative energies out. It is marked out through varying methods, a few of which I'll detail later in this chapter.

The average Circle is open to all, and all those who stand within are charged "Let none be here but of their own free will." and "Let none leave but with good reason till the temple be cleared."² The Circle is a receptacle for energy, and "leaving" in the middle of a ritual without good reason is not only a faux-pas of the Wiccan culture, but is said to "disrupt" those energies gathered within. Only when "let go" by those within the circle do the energies have direction, and only by being gathered within the Circle do the energies achieve the "critical mass" needed to be pushed toward that direction. In a religion that believes energy inherent in all life, the idea of a circle to "contain it" may seem absurd, but did you ever try to drink a rainstorm? Only by using a cup can we gather enough water to quench our thirst. The Circle is the cup we contain those energies in. Starhawk, in Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, refers to the casting of the Circle as "an enacted meditation," which "resonates through layers of meaning to awaken an aspect of ourselves."³ Indeed, the Circle is the home of the Spiritual Side that we need to integrate to become "whole" entities, and the practice of Ritual is to that aspect of the Total Self what food is to our physical body. The Circle is the gateway to the Elemental States detailed earlier, a mental and subconscious trigger that tells our inner selves to "pay attention, this is important." Casting the circle is like tapping into our soul and letting our inner thoughts and feelings rule us instead of society's rules, at least for a time.

When you find something that "works" for you when casting a circle, try to integrate that aspect into the casting of every Circle. I'm not saying that a perfect set of words or gestures will work every time, but a few things used most of the time can enhance the experience for you, and help you achieve that inner "holy" state the circle calls for, these can include:

- Wearing a special garment, like a robe, or going Skyclad,
- Wearing your hair differently or Ritual face/body painting.
- Special Jewelry only worn in circle, or almost always worn, but only visible in circle
- Special anointing oils or perfumes, such as clary sage oil, or washing first with a certain kind of

soap.

-Special incense or smudge used every time, but never used "outside" of the circle.

-A special place where your circle is cast, or certain tools you use often.

Avoid using the same words every time you cast the Circle, and if you do have a special relic, don't feel that you can't do a circle without it in a pinch. Substitution and adaptation are a big part of Wicca, and are nothing to be ashamed of. Remember, as long as you are following the basic tenets of Wicca, you are as Wiccan as anyone else, and NOTHING makes you any more or less "right." If it works for you, it's right for you.

-The Five Questions Usually Asked by Someone about to Cast Their 1st Circle

In my years as a student, and later as a priestess, I've heard these questions asked more than any others by people who want to cast a circle but are afraid that they'll get it "wrong:"

#1: How do I know I have "the stuff" to cast a circle, don't I need to be initiated to have the power to do it? When does the Priest/Priestess "give" me the power for this?

If you are alive, you have the power to cast a circle. In an initiation, you are not "given" power. In some circles, the initiation may include some directions for raising and using this power, but Universal Eclectic Wicca has no mandatory "initiations." We believe birth to this planet is initiation enough. A dedication rite (see part three of this book) is more than suitable. Initiations are only provided at special request, usually in instances where the student has had a traumatic life experience and feels a need to be "reborn."

When an initiation is done, it should be an initiation into a new life, not into Wicca or a tradition of Wicca. An initiate should always be able to take him/herself out of the religion without denying the new life they've made.

#2: How do I know if I'm getting it right? OR #3: How do I know if I'm doing it wrong?

Like breathing, casting a circle for ritual use is a natural body/mind function that can't truly be done WRONG. With practice, further visualization, repetition, research and the inevitable change, your circle will grow to metaphysical perfection, but until then, you still can't get it "wrong." If you intend to pursue Ceremonial Magick, you may have very intricate Circle rituals, designed to protect you from "the forces" you are working with. That's that set of beliefs, not Wicca. A Wiccan circle can be as complex or as simple as you want. It's YOUR call.

#4: What if I have to leave during the Circle?

It happens. About 1/4 of UEW's current standing Clergy are doctors, so it probably happens more to us than to most. In a personal circle, it's best to end it, go do what you need to do, then re-cast when you're done. In a group circle, it's best to be "let out" by the person who cast, but larger circles are uncomfortable to disrupt. It's best to plan for these contingencies with the person casting the circle, and get permission to leave if something comes up. Most of the time, the circle is left through a "door" cut in the side of the circle with the Athamé, and repaired from outside by being "undrawn" and sealed with a pentacle drawn in the air above the cut. In the event that the person who created the circle has to leave, a second should take over leading the circle, someone chosen ahead of time to prevent the moments of inevitable chaos that "taking over" involves.

With the caster's permission, trace a door in a rough oval or rectangle in the air of the circle with the Athamé or right hand, if you're left handed, or ambidextrous, you may wish to use both hands, or use the left...in some circles, they believe that left handed people work energies backwards, and your priest(ess) or teacher may ask you to cast your circles counterclockwise and other such reversals. Since our circles incorporate the land, I don't think handedness is that important. Although some Wiccans in the southern hemisphere may work differently, I think that Clockwise is the way to go for most of us. After you've stepped through, close the door by

retracing the shape with the Athamé or hand and visualize the undoing of the cut. Depending on your group, you may then trace a pentacle or a Celtic cross to strengthen the weakened space.

#5: What degree do I need to achieve to cast a Circle for a coven?

You can cast a circle at any degree, but casting a circle for a coven in Universal Eclectic Wicca is done by whoever the coven feels comfortable with, usually a second or third circle member or a Priest(ess.) It's generally a question of experience, if you know how, do it for a group, if you don't, practice at home. As with anything in Wicca, if casting for a group makes you uncomfortable DON'T DO IT.

-The Circle ...Guidelines

Almost every Wiccan circle follows a set of guidelines, sometimes sarcastically called a "recipe." Think of it as a list of ingredients and an order of operations. No matter what tradition you belong to, chances are you cast your circle along these lines:

Physical Demarcation of Boundary: Chalk lines, string, colored tape and other ways of physically "drawing" a circle on the ground. This also includes placing of the altar in the center or east of the circle and using candles to mark out the boundaries.

Announcement: the priest(ess) or caster announces the intention of the Circle and sets rules, often reciting the Wiccan Rede or a Charge specific to their tradition.

Creation of Elemental Boundaries: Lighting of the candles to represent the elements and especially Fire, lighting incense to purify and invoke Air, use of Salt (earth) and Water. Usually this also involves walking around the circle, another way of physically marking the circle.

Visualization/creation of Metaphysical Boundaries: Usually this is done by tracing the circle in the air above the physical boundaries, while visualizing white or blue light surrounding the circle.

Welcoming of Coveners:(omit in solitary circles) Most Eclectic trads cast the circle with the coveners already inside the area, to avoid weakening the circle by cutting a door in it. At this point, the Coveners in these trads are generally greeted by the leader/priest(ess) with a handshake, hug, kiss, whatever, (again, this is by tradition.) In the other trads, this is when the circle is opened and the coveners are let in.

Welcoming of Gods: This is when the Gods are invited into the circle to be a part of and bear witness to the rites. Never DEMAND of the Gods, it's just not the way we do things. In a Universal Eclectic Wicca Circle, the "General Gods," the LORD and LADY are welcomed here. When the term "Lord and Lady" are used, the individual is encouraged to insert their Patron/Matron Gods, keeping in mind that all gods are facets on that gem of truth we mentioned earlier and it is impossible to welcome in a part without welcoming in the whole.

Announcement of Completion: The caster announces the circle is complete, and warns people to not leave without reason until it is dissolved. Usually the caster then says "so mote it be," which means essentially "so it shall be," or "make it this way," all of which are definitions of the non-Wiccan term "amen." In groups who are comfortable with it, "Amen" is a reasonable replacement for "So mote it be," but So Mote It Be is a term which earlier Wiccans and Magickians used and it somehow seems to reach deep inside of us. I, personally use, "May My Will and Thy Will be one," and maybe I'll explain it in depth sometime, but not now. I don't feel I can stress enough the importance of doing what works. If Amen carries power for you, then use it.

Chapter Four: The Wiccan Circle

-THE TOOLS-

In Wiccan practice there is a set of tools commonly used in Ritual. Substitutions are encouraged, so next time you're bummed out about not being able to afford that obsidian Athamé at "Ritual Stuff is Us," remember the First Witches and think, "ya know, what did they have?" I've listed the tools from most often used to most obscure, with common synonyms and easy pronunciation.

Athamé: "Eth-uh-may" spelled with or without an accent also called the Right-handed knife, Black-hilted knife, Sorcerer's knife, the Blade, Dagger, air dagger, skytooth, excalibur (meaning sword of quality, I am told,) and probably a couple hundred other names. This is the "mule" of Ritual items, the most commonly used item that can be used as a substitute for many others. It is a dagger that is usually triangular and double bladed (in places where double-bladed knives are illegal, many Wiccans leave one side of the blade "thick" or unsharpened, since the knife is not used as a weapon, and usually isn't sharpened completely anyway, why bother with a court case when neglecting a whetstone makes it legal?) It is almost always made of metal, different trads call for iron, copper, steel or silver, but since Universal Eclectic Wicca operates on a belief of personal divine aspects, the M/Patron Gods, it would depend on personal attunement. For a follower dedicated to Diana the best knives are probably silver, for Thor, probably steel. (one Thor sect I know uses a hammer instead of a knife...big surprise.) Some Gods won't be that obvious, feel free to experiment. Size varies from about 8-16 inches. The Athamé is never used as a weapon, although some speak of "Traitors" to the craft being slain by their own blade. I find this very unlikely since most of the older trads speak of "Nemesis taking her own," or another form of "karmic" retribution. Used instead of : wand, hand, sickle, sword, bolline, staff

Hand: located on the side of your wrist opposite your arm, usually used in ritual with the first two fingers extended and the thumb holding the other two, I've included "hand" as a tool because it's used so often and is considered to be "different" when used this way. When using your hand instead of an Athamé or wand, visualize it as a focus point for all of your energy. The hand has the unique benefit of being the one tool you probably already have. Used instead of: Athamé, wand, sword, cord, goblet, anointing stick, staff.

Wand: a length of wood, either 13 inches long (the number of full moons in a year) or the length from the user's elbow to the tip of his/her longest finger. A wand should always be made of wood, although whether that wood is stripped of its bark or shaped in any way is up to its crafter. Ash, Yew, Oak, White Pine, Apple, Hawthorne, Blackthorn, Birch, Willow and Rowan are the most common woods used in wand creation, and a wand of lightning struck wood is supposed to be exceptional. Used instead of: Athamé, hand, sword, staff. A unique wand, the Priapic Wand, is used in the fertility festivals and Handfastings of some trads. Its use seems to have greatly declined in the past ten years or so, but it still is the standby at Handfastings. Its use is included in the rituals of many eclectic groups across the country. Named for Priapus, the Roman God of Procreation, the wand is *"The length of a man's arm with the last bit the size and shape of a male member (phallus)"*¹ for this reason it is sometimes referred to as the Phallic Wand. Other forms of the Priapic wand end with an acorn or pine cone, and are used as symbolic phalluses. Feminist Wicca seems to prefer these alternate forms. Also called the Maypole Wand or the Male or God's Wand.

Sword: The Wiccan Sword is a larger version of the Athamé, and it used for many of the same purposes. There are two types of Wiccan Swords, the Coven Sword, which is used in group rituals by a leader or priest(ess), and a personal sword, which is usually used instead of an Athamé for drawing solitary circles. It is never used as a weapon, although in older times a person's own battle sword was their sacred weapon, and since they were ALREADY killing with it, often defensively, they considered those deaths to be sacred.

Evidence of sword rituals range from the way a Marine polishes a sabre to a Knighting, and the sword has always symbolized more than metal...it is the sword of justice, or peace, or vengeance. It is used to draw a circle in the earth to protect those within and to break the handfasting cord, and the "giving" of the coven sword to a leader or priestess is a profound act of love and trust. Many feel that the only sword used in ritual should be a "Wiccan Sword" crafted according to their tradition and using certain metals and symbols. Unfortunately, finding a "Wiccan Sword" is near impossible. I know of three Smiths who craft them, and NONE of them are easy to find. I assume that there are many others out there, and that a few words asked at renaissance faires may help you find one. A "regular" sword will also do, and one of the most beautiful I've ever seen was a Civil War-era sabre etched with symbols for freedom, including a portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Don't be afraid to include Christian heroes in your practice,

or to experiment. Remember...All religion is eclectic by design. Your personal sword should represent yourself.

Unlike the Athamé, which can easily be created or altered into existence, I've always felt that the sword will "come to you," either as a gift or as a "karmic occurrence" (like finding it at a flea market or garage sale just when you have the money.) I also feel that there is NOTHING wrong with helping Karma along (you can't find it if you don't look,) but don't obsess on finding a sword, patience is a Wiccan virtue too.

Staff: Like the Sword, the Staff is essentially a larger version of another tool, the wand. It is sometimes used to draw the circle in the earth, but it seems more important as a walking stick than anything else. In at least one bardic tradition, the staff is a mark of level, with the larger staff a mark of a high rank. In some Native American-flavored trads, the staff is the Speaking Stick, passed around the circle so each member may speak without interruption, coupled with eagle, falcon, or seagull feathers (depends on area), the staff is a Prayer Stick, and the animal spirits deliver the messages to the sky. (As long as a Wiccan incorporating Native aspects into his/her rituals is not claiming to practice an indigenous religion, most people have no arguments against them. In North America, the power of indigenous religion cannot be put aside. For most of us, the spirits of the land are coming alive, and if those spirits are those of Elk, Eagle, Buffalo and Coyote, maybe it's because we've listened hard enough.) Used instead of: Wand, Sword, Athamé

Censer: The censer is a container in which incense is burned. The censer sits on the Altar, but is walked around the circle, for this reason, many prefer Hanging Censers. A simple hanging censer can be made with a brass planter (preferably one with "feet," if you can't find a footed one, double the sand.) Take the planter, and use a hammer and a sharp nail (a long carpet tack works best) to place 3,4, or 5 holes evenly spaced around the lip. Use open brass rings, available at hardware and craft stores, to connect the holes to lengths of 1/4-1/2 inch thick brass chain. Gather the equal lengths into a slightly larger ring, and connect that to an additional loop of brass chain. Fill the planter with 1/4 inch of sand, and burn cone incense or charcoal and resin incense in it. The burning of the incense purifies the air and helps to bring on the correct mental state for circle casting. Used instead of: Smudge

Robe: The robes worn for ritual in Universal Eclectic Wicca circles are almost always white or off-white, and made of cotton or other natural fibers. Black robes invite too much negative publicity, but are fine for private circles. Our use of white is symbolic of our belief that we incorporate all the aspects into one whole, like white light is, in reality, all colors. In the Third Circle, some people choose to wear a special colored robe to identify them immediately as a master of a path. Although considered "outmoded," the colors still stand at festivals and larger gatherings, they are: Artisan: Brown, Bard: Sky Blue, Scribe: Black, Seeker: Red (Rust for Seeker/Druidic or "Geomancer"), Councilor: Dark Blue for councilor, Green for teacher. Priest(ess): either Violet or one of the other path colors with bands.

For certain festivals, like Beltane, people dress in brightly colored robes, with ribbons and flowers everywhere. This is widely different from coven to coven.

Skyclad, which means "clad only in the sky," is another way of dressing (or non-dressing) for rituals. Although fundamental to Wicca in the eyes of some trads, for many people, Skyclad is not an option. Going around unclothed is a state we should find natural, but our culture, and its mistreatment of every person who looks different, has destroyed the ease we should have nude. A few well-intentioned people feel that the way to fix a person's discomfort is to "shock" them, or make Skyclad mandatory, so they have to choose between being Wiccan or going in the buff. The kind of trauma this causes to the student needs to constantly be "undone" by other Wiccan teachers, and frankly, we don't need the additional stress. The following is from a letter to members of Religion: Other, which does not admit groups where going skyclad is mandatory:
It is as difficult for a survivor of sexual or similar abuse to go skyclad as it is for a deaf person to hear....If a coven CANNOT make itself available to those with different needs, we cannot make ourselves available to that coven. We are BY NO MEANS saying that those covens are to suddenly CEASE to act skyclad, only that it should be on a member by member basis, with no

explanation needed. It is not right that society has made it difficult for so many to be comfortable nude....but it is still a fact, and ignoring it does no good. For many, the "state" achieved by removing clothing is not a positive state, and making that a requirement is a good way to make an enemy. If the person's problem is SO bad that the idea of OTHERS being nude causes trauma, we will do our best to find another coven for that person.

Our recommendation is that group rituals be robed, and personal rituals be skyclad. If even the idea of being nude ALONE bothers you, you should probably re- evaluate why, and go robed until such time as you feel comfortable.

In groups where skyclad rituals are preferred, there should be no special attention paid to those who are not skyclad, just as one would pay no attention to a birthmark or scar. Acceptance helps healing.

Cord: The use of the cord in Wiccan rituals has become so uncommon that it is listed here only because of its inclusion in many other books on Wicca. Most cord ceremonies are Magickal, and non-religious in nature, although some of these magickal rites are added to rituals. Like Tarot cards and astrology, use in a ritual does not make the cord innately religious. While its use in Magickal practices is widely known, in religious practice the chief property of the cord seems to be as a nifty belt. In my family, my lover and I have two cords which we use to belt our robes, when we are handfasted, these cords will bind us. We've tied them into floral wreathes on our door for Beltane, hung them on our "Chankayulmas" tree and about a million other things. They are a deep symbol of our faith, and help to make the act of dressing for ritual into a holy act unto itself. The cord is supposed to be the user's height, although some traditions say 63 inches. Bolline or Boline: also known as the white-handled knife or Goddess knife. Generally used for cutting herbs, cords, sacred cakes, etc. I admit a lack of knowledge of this tool, we always used the Athamé for most of these things. In the traditions I know, a sickle was used to cut herbs, however, in Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft⁵, a similar tool is called a Boleen. In the same book, a Burin is said to be sometimes be called a white-handled knife, and I've heard this too, even though the burin isn't really a knife, but a tool (sometimes made of bone) for engraving. Many ceremonial magicians call their "Magick" knife an Athamé, and many ceremonial magicians who are ALSO Wiccan call their (ritual) Athamé a Bolline. This is an example of how the necessary eclecticism of Wicca can produce differing results, each one just as legitimate.

Used instead of: Athamé, sickle.

Salt: The salt used in ritual represents both Earth and, when mixed with water "The seed of life" or semen. It is purifying, male and grounding in this form. HOWEVER, (didn't ya just expect a however?) in some trads, salt, or salted water, represents the tears of the birthing goddess, which were shed and became the sea. I prefer to think of salt in scientific terms, as the chief component, along with water, of our body. It is also a natural crystal, as beautiful as quartz (you may need a microscope to fully grasp that.) Another common Wiccan belief: Salted water is the union of male and female into wholeness...the blood. OR The sea is the blood of Gaia, thus salt water is sacred....this list goes on. For every trad that gives a unique reason for the use of salt, there are 4 or 5 that give no reason at all, I prefer to tell people to find their own...Consider it "a Wiccan Mystery." Note: Sea Salt is the preferential vehicle here, although in certain parts of the world "Lake" or "Earth" salts are probably better.

Oil: Anointing oils are usually vegetable based, and are charged with energy and used to convey that energy to something else. In one rite, for instance, Clary Sage is used to anoint the head of a Priest that he may think his way through a difficult scenario. Oils for clear thought are commonly used on the forehead of members of a circle. Sage, Jasmine and Pine are common.

Used instead of: Smudge (ash).

Cauldron: Although relics point to the use of heavily sculpted bowl-like cauldrons by The Ancient Druids, its use in Wicca has dubious beginnings. Most non-Druidic traditions and Fam-Trads do not use Cauldrons, and most of the Magickal traditions that Wicca shares roots with use a wooden bowl or a flat scrying dish (filled with water) on a tripod. If the cauldron was used in early traditions, it was used because it was a big household implement, not a great metaphysical tool.

A cauldron is bulky and seems to be a sharp turn from the idea that the Wiccan circle is a portable church. Apart from being a really cool way to brew herbal concoctions, and for cooking those big feasts and doing your laundry, the huge iron cauldron is rarely used in Wicca these days. If a cauldron is present in a ritual, it is usually an 8-12 inch diameter "replica" from a mail order catalog or New Age store. When you examine Rituals calling for cauldrons they are often used only as a place to light fires without burning your house down or a place to put candles so they won't blow out. Other uses such as holding water or items to be "charged" with energy can be done by the chalice or atop a pentacle (easily made out of clay or carved from wood) I won't say that a cauldron is useless, but because they seem to be a leftover of a bygone "shock-the-public" form of Wicca, they seem better sent off to the Local High School for their next production of Macbeth than used in a ritual.

When lighting a small fire indoors a cauldron can be vital, but good cauldrons are SO hard to find that I feel a necessary substitution should be made in advance. Those same brass planters previously mentioned often appear in larger versions, holding about 2-3 cups of liquid, many of which are shaped like small cauldrons. For an instant cauldron fire that won't set off smoke detectors, place a small piece of stiff (wired) candle wicking in the center of a cauldron-planter filled 3/4 of the way with wax crystals or pellets (these are tiny spheres of wax used instead of block wax by some candle makers, these are widely available at craft stores at reasonable prices. There is no need to melt the wax, just sprinkle a little scented oil or powdered herb near the wick and light...a cauldron candle. If you have the time, you could use block wax and regular candlewicking, too. For rituals calling for a cauldron full of water, seeds or flowers, use your chalice, a big bowl or pot, or (if you just must have that "witchy" look) one of those awful black plastic cauldron thingys that people put in the middle of their lawns as planters. Improvise! Used instead of: Chalice, Pentacle, Firepit, Censer.

Chalice or Goblet: Sometimes called a grail, the goblet holds the sacred wine or water, or salted water. I saw a beautiful ritual where the priest and priestess of a coven poured took two goblets full of wine from a big plastic cauldron and poured all but some of the wine into the goblets of two coveners who kept some and poured the rest into the next person's, who kept some and poured the rest into another, so that the two streams went around to meet in the middle with the coven's newest member, who offered a toast to the gods and was welcomed by the circle. The benefit of this, I was told, as opposed to the more usual drinking from one mug, was that no germs were passed. On a day without a newcomer, the streams would continue until a small bit was poured to the priest and priestess. I've never seen a coven since that could do it without spilling all over the place, but it was still beautiful. Of course, apple juice or anything else can be used in the ritual instead of wine.

Sickle: (see Bolline, above) The sickle is used to cut sacred herbs at certain moonphases. It represents "Cronehood" and is often given to a menopausal covener as a recognition of a new life phase. I think the modern usage of the sickle as the "Grim Reaper's" tool makes this a bit too morbid, but many feminist Wiccans disagree. Used instead of: Bolline, Athamé.

Smudge: In European practices, herbs were thrown on the fire to produce clouds of scented smoke. Smudge, which is either a bundle of herbs for burning or the ash of sacred herbs used for anointing, is borrowed from Native American Practices and can usually be held in the hand instead of thrown on a fire. For a nice change, burn rosemary instead of the traditional sage or sweetgrass. Stick incense can be used as burning smudge, it'll do in a pinch, but the ash is fairly worthless. Used instead of :Censer, oil.

Pentacle: A piece of clay, wood or metal used on the altar as a decoration and a place to put items to be "Charged" with power or purified. Purists often use wax pentacles which are broken or thrown in a fire afterwards to honor those who had to hide their religion. Many own and use metal or clay molds to make these pentacles, which seems to defeat the purpose. Used instead of: Cauldron.

Crown of Stars and Horned Helm: The Crown of Stars is worn by the priestess in a ceremony invoking the Goddess, the Horned Helm is the masculine form. They often represent Herne or Pan, and Diana, and are omitted by trads using other gods. A Crown of Stars shows the crescent

moons and the moon full, or a horned moon, often with stars around the band. A horned helm is usually what could be called a "Viking" helm, or the "Helm of Herne" which uses a deer's head and neck. Anti-hunting and/or vegetarian Wiccans tend to frown on this.

God(dess) figures: Representations of the deities of choice of the solitary, these range from statues to tarot cards. Any personal object that represents one's deities or belief can be placed on an altar to lend it's power to the proceedings. In group situations, we recommend only a pair of candles, so that the personal gods of the coveners aren't in any way suppressed.

Anointing stick: A piece of greenwood, with one end mashed, used to apply oil to things.

Book of Shadows: Also called "The great tome." A Wiccan's private book of rituals and other such things. I call mine a "Book of Light" because what I do is "out there", open for anyone to see. In the Burning times, it would not have been so. I've included the Book of Shadows as a ritual tool because some use it in the rituals. A Book of Shadows is like a journal of the sacred aspects of life, rituals, the names of coveners, the laws of Wicca. In groups where one of the MANY versions of the "Charge of The Goddess" is read, it is usually on page one.

<IMG="INDENT.GIF"The Charge of The Goddess used by most trads was written by Doreen Valiente, and only recently has been portrayed by "Fundamentalist Wiccans" as an actual event (not a story) and disagreement with this idea could land you in a shouting match.. I dislike the whole notion of the words of one person's Goddess being spoken as an absolute truth....If Christianity, which had access to libraries and monks, and all sorts of stuff like that can't keep a single statement of the Bible the same for hundreds of years, how can one believe Witches, running and hiding at all times could? The Charge of the Goddess should be seen like all Wiccan literature as an inspirational piece of writing, not as "The word of the law put down for all to see." The level of belief in the words of the Charge should not be linked to a belief of its history. I've included two "Eclectic" versions of the Charge in the back of this book because this book is about a type of Eclectic Wicca. This should not be taken as a "slam" against more standard versions of the Charge, only as portrayal of lesser known works of Pagan inspirational writings.

Other: I haven't included candles, matches, a fire extinguisher, altar cloths and numerous other items which are common enough in their usage to be fairly self-explanatory. The altar is the table or whatever upon which these things all sit. My favorite altars open up to stow all the ritual gear and become a nice place to put a vase, a fishbowl, whatever. Some people feel an altar should be free from metal or plastics, but man is a part of the earth, so thus man-made is as much of the earth as anything else, and metal, why, that's very earthy. I think it's mostly a matter of taste...it's hard to feel holy about a bright pink milk crate

Chapter Four: The Wiccan Circle

-Casting a Circle-

The following is a solitary circle, a multi-use circle will be given in Book Three: "A Book of Light."
Casting the Circle: Caster places white or appropriately colored candles at the compass points, the altar is at the center of the circle. A small white or beeswax candle, two larger candles, the censer with unlit incense, the Athamé, a dish of salt, a goblet of water, small cakes or cookies for "cakes and ale," a goblet of wine, an offering dish and any items for work to be done within the cast circle. The caster takes a short moment, eyes closed, to become "At peace" before standing before the altar. The small candle is lit, and the caster walks toward the east. (S)He lights the yellow or white candle from the small candle, saying "Here I call forth the powers of air from the east, that I may be like the air, unfettered and pure." (S)He takes a moment to remember the air visualization, and to contemplate the meaning of the east, air and freedom before continuing onward. (S)He lights the red or white candle to the south with the small candle saying, "Here I call forth the powers of fire from the south, that I may be like fire, enduring all hardships to become strengthened."

Here the caster recalls his/her own "trials by fire" and contemplates the possibility of more, the meaning of the words spoken is thought on, and the caster continues. (S)He lights the blue or white candle to the west, saying, "Here I call forth the powers of water, that I may be like water,

supporting and protecting all that I encounter," Here the caster contemplates the water visualization and the meaning of the west in his/her life. (S)He moves on to the North, lighting the green or white candle. "Here I call forth the power of Earth, that I may be like earth, grounded at all times." Here, the caster grounds and thinks before moving to the east to say. "Welcome Air, Fire, Water, Earth, shine your light and lend your strength to this my circle to night/day."

Still moving clockwise, caster returns to altar, and lights incense saying. "Negative forces begone, you are not welcome here." (S)He breathes deeply of the incense and banishes away negative forces within before circling clockwise thrice with the censer, visualizing hate, jealousy and the like fleeing from the smoke. (S)He returns to the altar, picks up the Athamé and picks up a measure of salt with its tip. Inserting the tip of the blade into the water (s)he says. "As man to woman so blade to chalice, I purify this water with love, light and power. " The caster then walks around the circle, sprinkling the salted water about the circle thrice. Returning to the altar, (s)he raises the Athamé to the sky and visualizes a beam of blue light filling it, (s)he then walks once around the circle, using the Athamé and its light to "cut" a space between the worlds. This done, (s)he moves to the altar and lights the two candles. "Lord and Lady, I invite you to this my worship, that you may look upon my devotions and celebrations and be heartened and strengthened by them." The caster turns toward the west and announces. "Now is my circle cast, unbreakable and without harm. Thus is sacred space decreed, and no act goes unnoticed. So mote it be.

Rituals such as healing, minor Magick and celebratory rites then take place, followed by "cakes and ale" in which the Lord and Lady are invoked into food and drink and ingested, much as with the Catholic sacrament or the similar rites of numerous indigenous people in which certain foods or drinks are prepared to invoke gods within the body or within the food. A typical blessing of the cakes and ale may be as simple as "Now I partake of your bounty, that I better appreciate my own," to elaborate acts with chalices, Athamés or songs. I always "share" the food and drink with the gods by leaving the libation dish outside overnight. The food always disappears...Whether it is absorbed into nothingness, or pecked by birds and our local stray cats, I don't know, I also don't care, who the gods wish to share with is up to them. During Cakes and Ale, thank the gods for their attention...don't tell them "you can leave now." If you order the gods around like some petty astral spirits, expect to be ignored. Always invoke your Will as it harmonizes with the Will of the gods, never exert Will over the gods. Give as you wish to get, in ritual as well as life.

Closing the circle: Thank the Gods for their attentions, snuff their candles. Dismiss individually each element and thank it for lending its strength, Walk around the circle, drawing the blue light back into the Athamé, breathe deep, and take some of the power back. A closing statement usually follows, ending in, "The Circle is open, but ever unbroken...So mote it be" 1"

I can't stress enough the beauty of personal rites. Many good books and teachers are out there with great rituals, but you know you best. Personal sacred space is just that, personal, and I can't presume to tell you what'll work for you. I've given you the tools, use them.

Chapter Five: The Wiccan Gods

In Universal Eclectic Wicca, there are two sets of Gods, the first being the Lord and Lady, who represent the natural duality of the universe and are "unnamed." The Lord and Lady are invoked in public group rituals unless the members of a group all agree on a name for them for ritual use. Commonly, groups that have "become" Universal Eclectic Wicca organizations maintain all of their rituals unchanged, adopting our laws and ways of teaching, but in large "festival" situations, the term "Lord and Lady" will replace their chosen names so that any person who is familiar with Universal Eclectic Wicca will feel at home in a ritual they lead.

The Lord and Lady, put in that order not because of some patriarchal plot, but because of its easier to speak rhythm, represent all of the aspects of the divine force tied into one dual-divinity. In drawings, the Lord and Lady are a two sided face, like the Roman god Janus, with one side male and the other female. They are inseparable, a single coin with two sides, and each side made up of a billion facets. To say "Lady" is to pay tribute to one side of that coin, to say Lord and Lady is to pay tribute to the coin as a whole. Universal Eclectic Wicca is dualistic in that way...we do not consider groups who worship a "Goddess" without a "God" as ANY MORE Wiccan than a group which worships a "God" without a "Goddess."

A case can be made here, and it often is, that the "God" has been being worshipped for two thousand years, to the exclusion of the Goddess. There are two very legitimate reasons to not use this as an excuse to exclude the God. The first is the simplest, two wrongs don't make a right, another kindergarten axiom that hasn't ceased to apply. The second is a bit longer, put simply, the God worshipped by the Christians IS NOT the Wiccan God, and the fact that he is not dependent on a feminine force proves this. The Gods of Wicca are interdependent, male needing female, female needing male. 1 I am not saying that a celestial therapist is needed to alter some great co-dependency crisis in the heavens, merely that The Gods are incapable of creation separately. Yes, they can replicate, and I'm sure when we find a way to create egg-egg and sperm-sperm embryos, we, too, will be able to replicate into little beings exactly one-half of our selves, but actual DNA crossover won't be as effective, and an all-woman, or all-man community would find its gene pool getting smaller and smaller and smaller, until it died out...interdependency in action. True unique creation requires more than one sex, from the smallest one-celled creatures to human beings, so the belief in a single creator, or creatrix, just doesn't hold up to the axiom shared by Wiccans and Hermetic philosophers, "As above, so below." A philosopher once told me, "If you are looking out of a window at the calm waters of a lake, and you cannot see the moon behind you, study its reflection." We are the reflections of divinity, and at least for now, the reflection it casts is two-sexed.

-The Faceted Divinity-

We interact directly with the Gods, they interact directly with us, but the facet of their totality that we see is dependent upon any number of social, personal and experiential factors. In Wicca, the priests are not there as liaisons to the Gods, but as tour guides to inner development. No one needs a priest(ess) in their livingroom 24-7, many books (often written by priests) can provide answers to simple questions about Wicca.

In your journal right now, I want you to dedicate the last five pages as a "Resource Guide." In those pages, write down books, people, websites, whatever has helped you in the past, keep a list of phone numbers and organizations which appeal to you. If you subscribe to an on-line system, try using a netsearch, index, table of contents, "GO" or keyword feature to find Wiccans, Druids and other Pagans that also subscribe. Our flexibility has created a world-wide net of Pagans that are out there recommending and advising on everything from robe color to Neo-Rastafarianism. If you don't have a computer, see if your local library has an on-line service, if it does, you may find that the hourly prices are fairly reasonable, and A LOT of information can be downloaded in one hour.

We all find, create, and respond to experiences differently, and as you search for the meaning of divinity, you may well find that a certain god and/or goddess appeals to you. This is why Universal Eclectic Wicca supports the belief in Personal Gods. The idea of gods as impersonal, unchanging statues is archaic and unlikely. We see so much of our lives differently, why can't we believe we view the unviewable

differently? These Gods, called Patron (and sometimes Matron) gods, are the aspects of divinity that appeal to our inner spirituality. A very loving person, for instance, who is very sensuous and sexual, may celebrate the aspects of Pan and Aphrodite. A person who is really interested in dreams and the night may choose Morpheus, Somnus, or Nyx. A sailor may begin each voyage with a prayer to Aegir, Mannanon MacLir, Neptune or Amphitrite. When a person replaces "Lord and Lady" with Patron gods, he isn't excluding Gods, he is focusing his energy in one or two particular directions. It's similar, in a way, to putting "ATTN." on a letter to a large corporation, without it, the letter would eventually get to the right department, but with it, you have a better chance of having it received quickly and answered.

The Patron gods are invoked in personal rituals, often a healing god for healing, or a ancestral god for family problems. They are central to the belief in universal religion that ALL is ONE. There are many paths to the same end, each with its own pleasures, pains and lessons, it's up to you to choose a path, or take a new one altogether... the Patron gods are a step on a path.

-The Goddess(es)-

The Goddess, forbidden to us for years by a cruel patriarchy which cast women in the dual role of helpless creature and originator of all sin, is gloriously embraced by Wicca. As the feminist movement took up her call, a wealth of Goddess and pro-woman literature was created. A generation ago, when the first books of feminist Wicca came out, the word Goddess came to our lips with difficulty. Now, even mainstream media is influenced by her touch, and crisis has caused her to be more relevant than ever.

The Goddess is alive and well in America. From her lighted torch over New York to Lady Themis in all her Washington, DC incarnations, the Goddess is around us every moment, so is it so surprising that others finally hear her call? As we witness this glorious rebirth, perhaps resulting from two thousand years of an inherently flawed social system that now crumbles and is forced to change, we are reminded of the legend of Persephone, one of the central myths in the Wiccan "Wheel of the Year:" *"Persephone (per-seph-oh-knee) was gathering flowers along a riverbank when she noticed blooms of exceptional beauty on the opposite bank. Despite the warnings of her mother to never cross the river, Persephone crossed, moving at once to the side of a large well. As she gathered the blooms, her face was reflected in the well, and her smile shown down through the well and into the realm of Hades himself, who at once decided that Persephone would rule beside him as queen of the underworld. Spurned by Goddesses in the past, Hades wasted no time and rode up through a rift in the earth, stealing Persephone away and dragging her, screaming, into his realm. He set out feast for the girl to no avail, for she swore she would neither eat nor drink, merely wait out time for the Fates to cut her cord, whereupon she would be called to the Elysian Fields, for she had done no evil in the world and was thus promised eternal bliss.*

Above, Demeter (Dem-it-er) looked everywhere for her daughter, and taking the torch of Hecate, she wandered for nine days and nights before she came to a bouquet of wilted flowers and hoof marks. She asked the fountain where the girl had gone and the sprite within told her of Hades kidnap of the girl. Knowing that none had ever been rescued from the underworld, Demeter was inconsolable, and withdrew into the deepest cave of Olympus, ignoring the crops and forests and leaving them to wither and die. Man's pleas were ignored, but Zeus, eldest brother to Demeter and Patron of Mankind could not stand the destruction and sorrow. He sent down rain, but they were not Demeter's gentle storms, they were rough-hewn thunderstorms that tore at the earth and caused more damage. He bribed, threatened and implored Demeter to

come out, but she would not listen. He bribed, threatened and implored Hades, but Demeter was his, he had taken her maidenhood, and in submission she had eaten six seeds of the pomegranate from his hand.

The leaves of the trees had turned brown, and Zeus demanded that Iris paint them so that their sickness would be hidden, and as bidden the rainbow goddess painted them red, orange and gold, the colors of her veil. Demeter seemed to become a bit heartened at the sight, and a gentle rain fell, but as she turned her face toward the well she turned cold at the thought of her daughter, who could not see the beauty of Iris's painting, and in a rage covered the ground and trees with a layer of white snow to hide their beauty. The sound of her howling in sorrow shred every last leaf from the tree and the world was plunged into darkness, with only Hecate's torch to light the day.

Zeus visited the Fates and implored their knowledge as to how Persephone could possibly be retrieved, and they declared that if the girl had not eaten of the food of the underworld she must be freed.

Zeus flew at once to Hades and demanded her release, for the pomegranate was not the food of the underworld, but food of Demeter's realm, and thus the girl should be freed.

Persephone, much changed by now, spoke with no trace of childhood in her voice and decreed that she should spend one month in Hades' realm for each of the seeds she had eaten, thus giving Demeter her daughter and Hades his queen, and to this day, Zeus' storms, Iris' painting and Hecate's torch help man to survive from the grief of Persephone's descent until the joy of her return."²

Demeter, goddess of agriculture, and Persephone, goddess of Spring, together with Gaea (usually pronounced Guy-ah or Gay-ah,) goddess of the Earth in its entirety, form the original pantheon of Greek Nature Gods, with their equally powerful counterparts Dionysus, Pan and Silenus. These three generations represent the three states of womanhood, the maiden, the mother, and the crone, a powerful image in Wicca.

Gaea was an old Goddess, sister to Pontus, the sea, and daughter of Aether and Hemera, Light and Day. Gaea, with Uranus had twelve children, the Titans, who Uranus imprisoned. With his mother's help, Cronus rose up to kill his father, and from the blood of Uranus's death wound rose the Giants, the Melian Nymphs and the Furies. After the War between the Titans and the Giants, the time of the Golden Age came, and Cronus had six children, Poseidon, Hades, Zeus, Hestia, Hera and Demeter.³

In the setting of the Myth of Persephone, we have not two, but three women, with Gaea, the grandmother, symbolized by the cave in which Demeter hides for comfort. Gaea was goddess of the Earth with a focus on the actual planet, included in her sphere are such things as earthquakes and caverns. Demeter, on the other hand was the Goddess of the Biosphere, the crust of the earth, rain, wind and agriculture. Her sphere was an aspect of Gaea's, while Persephone's was an aspect of her own, furthering the belief that power, used correctly, begets power.

The aspects of maiden, mother and Crone, or the Triune Goddess are also represented with Artemis (Art-em-iss) or Diana, Virgin Goddess of the hunt, as the maiden. She is symbolized by the crescent moon, her bow, from which her arrows (meteors,) are fired.

If Artemis is the maiden, then Selene, ancient and little known goddess of the moon and cousin to Gaea, is an ideal Mother, her fullness the belly of a woman in pregnancy. Selene is little written of beyond "Goddess of the Moon," but her powers were near infinite, as she charged womb, herb and everything else with energy. Hecate, (heck-ah-tay) the third in this triune⁴, is not truly symbolized by the moon, but by a lack of it, and a dark sky is said to be her stomping ground. It is Hecate who

points Demeter toward the Nymph who tells of Hades' acts, and Hecate's penchant for caves and earthquakes brings her closer to Gaea in nature than any other goddess. Her cauldron and her place as the mother of all Witches gives her a special place in the eyes of many Wiccans, but the witches of Hecate's creation are far from ourselves. One legend says that all witches are brewed in Hecate's caldron in groups of three, and that one day she had started a batch before realizing she was almost out of eyeballs, the one that went in the pot was shared by the three, and in return for the mistake they were given great powers and endless life. In typical Hecate fashion, the endless life didn't mean endless youth, and to this day the Stygian Witches age and age, growing in power daily, but sharing one eye betwixt the three. Mentioned rarely is the fourth face of the Goddess, Nemesis, Goddess of Balance, who is believed in by Wiccans as the force of Karma, and is ever watching, silently. If Nemesis is seen, it is only by those who have summoned her by their actions, a dubious distinction at best. While never outwardly mentioned, Nemesis is always implied, one of the reasons Wiccans strive toward positive karma. The Cult of Nemesis is a Wiccan sub- group that integrates Martial Arts into their worship and seems to be based in a small town in Quebec, whether we hear more of them or not, their affect on Wicca, like their Goddess' affect on mankind, is felt, if not understood. I should note here that I've chosen to use Greek mythology because nearly everyone should recognize at least half of the names of the Gods in these legends, whereas an Egyptian, Assyrian or Norse variation or similar myth would have much less recognition to the masses of people out there learning. I don't feel the Greek Myths are in any way better than other myths, just more accessible, the necessity of your own research, prayer and experimentation to fully understand the facets of the goddesses can't be stressed enough. Quest onward.

Chapter Five: The Wiccan Gods

-The God(s)-

The God of Wicca is represented in general as the consort of the Goddess and more specifically as the Triple-God, Son, Father and Sacred King or Hunter. A rarely used yet poignant archetype of the Triple God are the Brothers Thanatos and Somnus (Death and Sleep), sons of Nyx, and Somnus's son, Morpheus, Lord of Dreams. Morpheus, who, contrary to the "*Sandman*" of comic book fame, is portrayed as a puck-like youth with wings to deliver him from mind to mind faster, is repeatedly offered the chance to "grow up" (i.e.: become sexual,) but he refuses rather than lose his powers. In this way, Morpheus represents the ultimate "Peter Pan," the boy who never grows up.

The line drawn between youth and maturity are very sexual. If he is old enough to have sex he must pass into the next phase, and the freedoms of childhood are gone. The passage rites destroyed by Christianity have created the Christian moral dilemma of pre-marital sex, boys are boys until they are married, so what they do before then doesn't count. Unlike the changes women go through, much of a man's changes are exclusively internal, mental and emotional. In Pre-Christian society, the shaman noticed these changes, and assisted the parents. Now, direct communication from parent to child is the essential formula. Pagan parents must be aware of a son's passage into manhood and prepare him for the additional responsibilities he will now have. The tools are there, but the tools don't work unless they are used.

Representations of the two adult paths are found in Thanatos and Somnus. Thanatos is the more powerful of the two, but is "incomplete," always searching for more out

of his powers. He is cold, and like Hecate, eternally bitter toward wasted youth. Somnus, while less powerful, has three sons, Icelos, Phantasos and Morpheus, and relives his youth and early adulthood through them. Morpheus, is in fact, seen as always by his father's side, another price of eternal childhood. Another Greek triarchy are Silenus, the God of Fruit-Bearing Plants and their Cultivation, Dionysus, his pupil and God of Wine and Pan, the wild child god of the Wilderness. Silenus, the half-tipsy Satyr or Centaur (sources vary,) traveled the world with Dionysus, teaching the secrets of the vine, much as Demeter taught the secrets of grain. Pan represents untamed male youth, and is god of Shepherds, Forests and Fishing, and considered as jester to the Gods. The idea of Pan as incredibly sexually active is a modern one, as his misfortune with nymphs, dryads and the like is a large part of his legend. He represents sexual energy pent up into frustration and ready to burst. If Morpheus is the eternal child, then Pan is the eternal teenager. The lack of respect by the Gods for Pan is due to his refusal to give up his wildness, and Morpheus is likewise disrespected. Dionysus and Somnus seem to represent the ideal, an ever expanding adult teaching and learning at the same time, and Silenus and Thanatos represent the adult who stops learning and stagnates. The three archetypes are so important to our understanding of maleness, our own or another's, and in teaching them, we are raising more complete, ever-growing human beings instead of matriarchal drones with no self-esteem.

Chapter Six:Reclaiming our Identity

-Personal Identity-

Before being allowed to achieve the second circle, a student is asked "Who are you?" The question seems fairly simple, but rediscovering one's identity is difficult in a world where passage rites are shunned. The first step for many people into a "New Self" is a new name. Many birth names are like luggage that we're hauling around, and people feel liberated by changing their names. Wiccan names are beautiful acts of liberation, freeing us from any number of chains and allowing us to move on. The people most affected by your change of name are your parents, who inevitably wonder why in the name of whatever you want to change your name, which they usually feel more possessive of than you do. Explaining to them that your name was acceptable as a child but that the adult you are now is not that child sometimes helps, but I'm afraid I'm in the Wiccan majority without the guts to do it. My mother knows I'm Kat, my lover calls me Kat, my son says that his mother's name is Kat, but to her, I'm Dawn.

Dawn is a good name, just enough of the sixties in it to be rebellious without facing the hardships my friends Peace, Sky, Ocean and Lovechild must've had. A lot of Wiccans change their name to Dawn, but to me, it has baggage. Dawn was that obnoxious, selfish teenager, a phase I grew out of. Kat was a fresh start and the Wiccan community accepted that. It was a passage rite. I can go on for hours about what my names mean to me, but the summation is simple, my names aren't what I'm called, they are what I am.

I can think of three men, Christian, David and Matthew, who felt completely content with their names, and found the Wiccan community couldn't grasp it, and that's a side-effect of this new freedom that we have to avoid. Judeo-Christian names are as acceptable as any other as long as the person is content with going by that name. Men seem more inclined to prefer their birth names, and this may be because men are "nicknamed" more as a child, gaining their full name as an adult. Men also are more likely to have ancestral names, and the power in owning the name your forefathers did can't be denied.

Wiccan names are usually chosen from mythology and religion, and if, at this moment every person choosing a name abstained from Diana, anything with "wolf" in it, Morgan, Merlin, Amber and Phoenix, there would still be too many people with those names, so think about repetition in your choosing. Buckland's Complete Guide to Witchcraft has an interesting numerological spin on choosing a name, and never forget your family tree. Ancestral names are incredibly important to Wiccans trying to preserve their identity.

One way of discovering your identity is to do genealogical research, because the power of family is very significant, especially if you discover "witchy" people in your research, like the local herbalist or madwoman (who may be the local herbalist.) The discovery, for instance, that you aren't the first one in your family tree who knows the secret properties of that herb which grows locally can be refreshing. Or maybe you belong to one of the "great clans" of Metaphysics, families which, in the eyes of people who study such things, turn out generation upon generation of powerful people. Remember, though, that pride in some of your ancestors doesn't grant automatic pride to all of them. In Fact, in families where the parents and grandparents are not the greatest people in the world, finding ancestors who were "neat" gives you a chance to find something to be prideful about.

A word here must be spoken about racism, and the difference between racism and pride. RACISM is a detriment to society. If your mother or father, spouse or child is in any way promoting racism, it is your duty, as one of "The Good Guys" to try and fix that. Racism, like all forms of ignorance, is something that is added to when you allow it to occur. When a parent allows a child to become racist it is an act of negligence, and anytime that racism is brought before our children and we do not react to it negatively, we are promoting it. Homophobia, Religious Intolerance and other forms of hate through ignorance are equally as intolerable in any community, especially one which loves free will as passionately as we do. When you help someone get rid of their ignorant indoctrinations, you are not harming the Will, you are releasing it from the control of other Wills, a very important difference. Like murder and rape, ignorance is an "absolute" wrong, something no one, of any religion, should allow to happen.

Pride, especially ethnic pride, is composed of knowing your ethnicity (we are all one race...Irish, Bantu and Chinese are ethnicities of the human race) and being proud of your roots. There is no pride of color, there is pride of ancestry. We aren't proud because we were born into a family with blue eyes or brown skin, we're proud because our ancestors escaped adversity and created us. Pride isn't about what we are, although HUMAN pride is a glorious thing, pride's about what we've done, how we've suffered and survived. My maternal family's red hair and hot tempers may indicate a Scotland that England will never tame, but the pride isn't in the hair color, it's in the Celt blood, the strength of our ancestors, and it's something to be proud of. A friend of mine is English...very English, and we dispute constantly over how awful the English are, and how violent we Americans (or Scottish) are. We smile over it, and laugh. We aren't saying that we're responsible for the entirety of our nations, only that we're glad we're not another nationality because what we ARE is really cool. A mutual friend, positive that we hated each other, tried to help us by telling us all the things that the English and Americans have in common, it took nearly an hour for us to convince her that we weren't ethnocentric, and we felt equally as positive about all cultures. Our ancestral cultures are a part of us, and celebrating our similarities and differences are a wonderful part of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. Knowing what we come from helps us figure out where we are going, and the more diverse our cultural background, the more knowledge we have to draw on to become aware of our pride.

-Clan Identity-

Adoption confuses pride for a lot of people, but the family that you feel is your family should be where you place your pride, and for many of us, not just those who've faced adoption, the family isn't genetic. Clan is a strong word, it includes your family, uncles, aunts, ex-wives of uncles, ex-husbands of aunts, step-children, former wives and husbands and their family, grandparents, great-grandparents, lovers, family friends, clergy people and everyone else in your sphere of extended family, including all the "like a brother/sister to me" people you've picked up along the way.

My mother's people are an easily defined clan, and, since their ethnicity is primarily Scottish, the term "Clan" comes easily to them. Anytime a large number of the family was together when I was growing up, someone would say "look, the whole Campbell Clan is here."¹ (Which isn't true, because Clan Campbell has many more members than just our little section of family.) It was a word which I always understood, and as I explored my ethnicity, reading of all the Irish and Scottish legends I could find, I discovered that Clan meant so much more than extended family.

A "Wiccan" Clan is usually composed of several families practicing as a coven or whose members practice as a coven. Rules defining who is and who is not clan vary from culture to culture, from tradition to tradition. One tradition put it this way: "Clan members are your family and friends who share your religion and traditions." In addition, some clans include present and former coven members or are actually large groupings of several covens or families that are gathered under one name for one purpose, be it unity, a political project or just an attempt to form community.

The Clan system can give pride in family to those of us who, for whatever reason, can't feel accepted by our natural family. In these instances, Clan consists of both Wiccan and non-Wiccan members focused in general around a family unit. What is often created is an extended family with its own rules which govern such things as relationships and responsibilities. Your clanspeople, or clansmen and clanswomen, are your immediate community and are the people you consider "family." I'm not saying you should give up your birth families, quite the contrary. The more people you can turn to in time of need, the better off you are in a crisis. Recreating the Clan system offers a structured alternative family focusing on unity and independence, and often provides a positive environment in which to raise children.

Children who grow up within a clan have a sense of identity, and, in larger clans, a peer group of "safe" kids to play with. The unified family, with its open and frank discussions about personal rights, reduces child abuse by making the solitary necessities of abuse impossible. By creating a large family group, with well-stated rules for conflict and mediation, the Clan heals its members of detrimental upbringing and produces new members with a sense of Self and morality uncommon in today's society.

The ultimate outgrowth of the clan is the intentional community, and Wiccan intentional communities that grow their own food and raise sheep and the like are experiencing a rebirth that lays the communes of the sixties to waste. As a whole the Wiccan population is artistic, above average, computer literate and multi-skilled, and when a lot of people with those talents gather in one place the effect is, well...Magick.

-Religious Identity-

Many Wiccans can't get over their lack of religious identity. There is no unifying belief or standard that can be pointed toward and said of "That's what I am," and to a degree, that's beautiful. A problem occurs however, in the treatment of people by

Wiccan Clergy. Religion:Other, An Alliance of Alternative Religion, is one of several organizations that publishes a charter which includes strictures on what a Wiccan priest should or shouldn't do. The purpose of Religion:Other, and other groups isn't to tell anyone that they are practicing their religion incorrectly, only that they need to consider the affect of their actions upon the Will of other people. Freedom of Will is covered by the Wiccan Rede and The Ethic of Self-Responsibility as clearly as Freedom of religion is covered under the US Constitution and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Religion:Other Code of Ethics and Charter:

Part Two: Organizational Strictures

#1: All groups represented by RO must follow the Wiccan Rede: "An it harm none, do as you will," whether Wiccan or not. This includes not only physical harm to individual people, but "Brainwashing," body altering, and animal sacrifice.

#2: No group represented by RO may charge education fees, or any fees beyond supply fees (supply fees include rent of a space to hold meetings, candles, food and books, but NOT advertising.) Likewise, no group represented by RO may designate a store or crafter from whom supplies MUST be bought. The sole exception to this are groups belonging to larger, national or international organizations, these groups should charge the minimum possible to cover membership fees, or nothing if no fees exist.(Addendum to Article 2: 1 April 94: Groups charging fees and putting those fees visibly back into their religion are hereby excluded from statement one of article 2 provided that exceptions are made for those unable to pay any said fees.)

(Addendum#2, Article2, 1 January 95: Classes not relating directly to the religious practices have never been included under article #2)

#3: All groups represented by RO must exclude minors from religious activities unless the parent or guardian accompanies the minor or gives written consent for the minor to attend. Rituals at which people under the age of eighteen are present may not be performed "Skyclad."(Addendum to article 3:1 January 95 Minors may attend Skyclad rituals if the minor, the minor's parent(s) or guardian(s) and the entirety of the group give written consent....It is still not recommended.)

#4. If the priest or priestess of a group is under the age of eighteen, he or she must be supervised by a person of at least twenty-one years of age.

#5. If the leader of a group has say over the personal lives of his/her followers beyond the realm of advice, or should claim to be a messiah, re-incarnation of a god or of a person, or otherwise super-human and demand worship, RO will NOT, under any circumstances, refer people to, protect, advertise or in any way endorse said group.

#6. RO will not endorse or represent groups that demand that its members go Skyclad, demand oaths of fealty or obedience, or expect sexual favors from its members, including those groups that expect members to be involved with sexual rites to "advance" within the circle. Likewise groups demanding self- or other-mutilation (i.e.: tattoos, body piercing) or drug use, cannot be endorsed or represented.

#7. Sexual rites must be consented to by both parties; a minor, under law, cannot give consent. Such rites may not be attended by minors, and any participation by anyone must be voluntary, without penalty for those who choose not to attend.

#8. Represented groups may not discriminate on ANY BASIS, including sexual orientation, age (see #3,) race, religion (those opposing an organization or educator's views in an obstructive or offensive manner should be asked to leave,) political ideals, past religious history, or sex (unless the organization advertises as women only or men only, with no exclusion of those who may have started life with another, no, or both gender(s).)

#9. RO will represent only Pagan organizations as being non-Judeo-Christian, as such, no organization basing its beliefs on a Christian Mythos, including Satanism, will be represented. (addendum to Article 9-1 January 95: Pagan Judeo- Christian organizations will be endorsed on a group by group basis if all other articles apply and the President, VP and Representative of said group's area agree upon said representation and endorsement)

#10 (Amended 1 January 95) Those groups whose purpose is to convert, or who preach an "Only way" and do not extend basic respect to those whom they disagree with will be excluded from RO's membership. We believe such actions to be contrary to The Wiccan Rede and thus contrary to Article #1. '2

The strictures listed above are pretty standard as such things go, and if a Wiccan clergy person, OR ANYONE ever tries to get you to do something that you feel wrong about, then get away from them, fast.

Forging a personal religious identity can't be given a formula. Creating a moral code, discovering your patron and matron Gods, creating basic rituals and keeping a journal are first steps, though, and when the time comes when you can honestly say "I know who I am," the second circle is ready for you. Sure, a task is usually asked of someone who wishes to achieve the circle, things like creating your first ritual or giving something back to the coven. If you truly want to give something back to Wicca at this point, I suggest, if it's possible, coming out of the closet as a kind, gentle and Wiccan Wiccan. Others decide what Wicca is by example, and for many people the extent of example are two or three weirdoes busted on the national news for raping little girls and calling it "Witchcraft". We know that they are not Wiccan, but how can other people make informed decisions without accurate information? Our country, at least, protects you from religious persecution, and there is a huge community out there that wants to help but is afraid. Stand up...Because if you don't...who will?

THE OATH OF PRACTICE

I, name, or "craft name, also called mundane name", swear to live my life by the Five Points of Wiccan Belief, taking responsibility for my actions and educating of my religion when asked. I will not turn any in need of help away without good cause, nor will I allow slander and misuse of Wicca to go unchallenged, because someday I may have need of help or be slandered.

Within my practice, if I teach, I ask nothing in return, and expect nothing in return but the respect that I, as a teacher, deserve for the time and effort I put into each student.

I take some responsibility for those I teach, and if I find I have taught them incorrectly, it falls to me to undo the wrongs done.

I affirm that I practice Wicca, and all aspects of my practice, with a free Will, and I will never deny, or in any way restrict the Will of a student.

I am fully aware of the ramifications of this Oath and I sign/swear it before the eyes of The Lord and Lady in truth. So mote it be.

Name(s)_____Date_____

Chapter Seven: The Second Circle and The Wheel of the Year

-The Second Circle and the Oath-

In a coven, entry to the Second Circle is usually a two-meeting process. In the first, the student announces that he or she wishes to be part of the second circle. (S)He demonstrates knowledge

of the aspects of the First Circle or has been told by a teacher that (s)he has advanced into "the next stage" of education. In the next meeting, two questions are asked of the student "Who are you?" and "What do you bring to the Second Circle?" The student answers, telling the coven who/what they are honestly and with no glorification, then tells the coven what (s)he brings to the coven. My favorite answers came from one of my friend's students, who answered, "I am Nicole, I'm a human girl from the City of Buffalo in the State of New York of the Country of The United States of America, on the continent of North America, on the planet Earth, also called Terra, third planet from the star called Sol. I bring a warm smile, a shoulder to cry on, friendship, good brownie recipes and fuzzy baby hamsters if anyone wants one."

Certain guidelines as to what you "bring" to a coven must be established. A coven may not demand, or even expect, material goods (even fuzzy baby hamsters.) What you bring is an aspect of yourself that you are proud of, and this is your chance to show it. "I'm a good counselor," " My couch is available for crashing out," "I break up fights," and "I can do your taxes," are all things I've heard mentioned. In the Third Circle, one's study is tailored to suit their unique abilities and their desires, by declaring what need you fulfill as a Second Circle coven member, you begin that tailoring ahead of time.

Ceremonies for the Second Circle differ, a tradition in a coven I temporarily led was to bring a dish to pass upon announcing your intention, usually cookies or something like that, to represent what the coven has gained by having you as a member. An astrologer who brought "Love, insight and togetherness" made sugar cookies with frosting drawings of hearts, eyes and infinity symbols. I've been in about seven Universal Eclectic Wicca covens, and led three or four, and never encountered such a practice again, but it was a nice method of self expression for the group, in which at least six members were proficient bakers.

The Oath is the aspect of the Second Circle which really separates the members from the First Circle. If ever a coven expects you to swear fealty or secrecy, you should wonder about their reasons. Certainly, revealing the names of coven members to modern inquisitors is bad form, but if you truly follow the Wiccan Rede you wouldn't do that anyway, so why would anyone demand that you swear not to? The Oath isn't about what you do, it's about what you are, and the responsibilities of being Wiccan. A side point of The Oath is the simple fact that it automatically rules out those people who take advantage of the word "Wicca," for their own gain. It gives us something to point to and go, "See...that's what we are, and we don't condone what they've done and we never have and we never will."

In Universal Eclectic Wicca, taking the Oath is important because if you haven't taken it you may not teach "Universal Eclectic Wicca." Certainly, anyone can teach aspects of Wicca, but within the Second Circle you gain the privilege of teaching with a defined curriculum and a network of teachers who can help you. I know I sound like an infomercial at this point, but I speak from experience. Don't, DO NOT, don't ever try to teach a coven without a curriculum, you will end up confused and frustrated, and your students' interests will be lost amid the chaos.

A physical manifestation of The Oath is a common thing among the sacred relics of Universal Eclectic Wicca coven members, and in at least one group, signing a copy of The Oath is part of their ceremony. If you are serious about Second Circle studies and are a solitary, signing a copy of the oath easily replaces a coven ceremony, and prepares you for teaching if that's your desire. If, as a solitary or coven member, you achieve the Second Circle, I want to know. As far as I know, Universal Eclectic Wicca is the first tradition with the commitment to be aware of its practitioners. We're a growing and changing tradition and we want and need the input of our practitioners. We have covens in the US, Canada and now Australia (joy!.) so we try to keep in touch via the internet. The Web address for correspondence with the Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca in Philadelphia, PA is http://home.att.net/~macmorgan_design/cuew/index.html hopefully more UEW groups will post sites soon!

-Commitment through celebration-

Entry in the Second circle means that you begin to put more "into" being Wiccan than just the

morality and the beliefs. The most visible aspect of joining the Second Circle is the inclusion of seasonal, and perhaps lunar rituals into your personal practice. At least in Universal Eclectic Wicca, and in my experience, most other covens, the celebratory rituals are open to all parties. What we mean by inclusion is not that you merely "go" to the ritual but you take part in the ritual beyond a mere audience member. For some, the Second Circle is their first introduction to the practices of the eight yearly "holy days" of Wicca, for others, it's just a commitment to celebrate, or at least be aware, when the holy days occur.

I feel it necessary to add here that we all forget holy days, or make plans without realizing it will interfere with them. This makes you a normal person, don't sweat it. An anecdote I'm fond of relating is that of Tamara, a student of mine, whose first teacher was a fairly well-known New York City priestess who'd been "brought up" by parents who were Witches, and had never been anything but Wiccan in her life. I'll shorten the story to say that she was rather stressed out, and slammed her apartment door on some kids who were dressed in costumes, "harassing her." Only when her coven showed up later that night did she remember "oh, yeah, it's Samhain," and they spent the night looking about the apartment building for the kids she'd slammed the door on.

Whenever I tell someone "Oh, no, it can't be the Solstice yet, it was just Beltane", I think of Tamara's priestess. We all get absent minded now and then, and often, it's the first sign of stress related problems. As with any circle, if you're stressed out at a holiday celebration and you feel that the celebration will add to the stress, then don't do it. Sometimes, the celebration will actually relieve the stress, so analyze and discover what's causing it first. I've actually seen references to "stress" in older Books of Shadows, it's usually referred to as "Drain" and is given as reason #1 to not celebrate any ritual where personal energy will be needed. Many rituals for relieving stress are out there, and one appears in part three of this book: "A Book of Light." As always, substitutions and personal creations are recommended.

This "commitment to celebrate" involves maintaining your religious identity, and feeding the Integrated Total Self. It's too easy in a world built on physical gratification to ignore the rest of the Self and build upon the physical. Imbalanced, fractured Self is a cause of addictions: alcohol, sexual, food, whatever, and as we balance our spiritual/physical/Magickal/emotional Selves, we feel less "pulled" by any one side and more harmonized, more integrated. By celebrating the rituals of the seasons, we are both "feeding" our spiritual, Magickal and emotional parts, and strengthening the bonds that "hold it all together." By incorporating more of our diverse parts into each ritual, we make them more than a celebration of a day and into a celebration of the Gods, the seasons, the Self and more. For this reason, a self-created ritual is especially preferable to a "book ritual" when that ritual is a celebratory one.

-The Wheel of the Year-

An understanding of the nature of rituals is important before fully defining The Wheel of the Year. There are three primary forms of ritual in Wicca. Celebratory rituals are the opposite of so-called "solemnities" such as Handfastings and funeral rites. Solemnities (which are rarely solemn,) celebrate ourselves and the various life changes that we go through. Celebratory Rituals are rituals which are held to celebrate the turning of the seasons, the glory of the Gods, and numerous other celebrational things. The third type of ritual, Working Ritual, is ritual with a defined purpose, such as healing, or releasing negative energy. Working Rituals may be to aid disasters which you are too far away to physically help, or to comfort and heal those who you can't be with. Working Rituals fulfill all the same purposes as "Praying for" something or someone, and praying is a type of Working Ritual. Remember, all ritual is merely "advanced prayer."

The Wheel of the Year is comprised of four solar or "celestial" holidays, called "Quarters" and four harvest holidays, called Cross-quarters. The solar holidays are held on the equinoxes and solstices. An Equinox (ee-kwin-ox or, alternately, e-ki-nox) is a point of intersection between the Sun's annual path and the celestial equator.¹ At those moments, the Sun is exactly over the equator and day and night are of equal length. The Spring or Vernal Equinox, called Ostara

occurs around March 21st, The Autumnal equinox, or Mabon, occurs around September 21st. The Equinoxes are considered the "First day" of Spring and Fall . A Solstice is when the sun is furthest from the equator and the day is either the longest or the shortest day of the year. The longest, around June 21st, is the Summer Solstice, called Midsummer and Litha, which is the "first day" of Summer. The shortest, around December 21st, is Yule, or Midwinter, and is the "first day" of Winter.

In ancient traditions, there were only two seasons, Summer, the light half of the Year, which was said to relate to the Goddess, and Winter, which was the time of the God. This is easily related to early agricultural society, in which the field is important for summer and the hunt for fall. A hunter/gatherer society would find the belief in the Goddess and God as near instinctual, whereas the industrialized world would find itself more disjointed and separated from "natural" belief. The idea of the "noble savage" from much early industrial age writings expresses this feeling. By writing books about African and Native American heroes from "the wild," "untainted by the corruption of society," our more recent ancestors were expressing the tortures of unfulfilled spirit. By rediscovering The Wheel of The Year, we fulfill that spirit.

The Cross-Quarters, named Beltane, Lughnasa, Samhain and Imbolc, are harvest festivals "tacked on" to the Wheel of The Year as society became more agricultural. Beltane (bell- tayne) marks the completion of planting, Lughnasa (loo-nah-sah) marks the first harvest, Samhain (so-when) was the second harvest and the time for the first slaughter, the slaughter of those animals destined for the dinner table. Yule (youl) represented the second slaughter, the slaughter of animals who would not make it through the "season of storms" and was the harvest for winter-apples, potatoes and other second-crop winter fruits. Imbolc (im-bolk) represented first thaw, the turning of the soil and was the time when animals and women alike got pregnant. Each festival had its own share of traditions and rituals, that stretched cross-culturally and religiously. Christianity, Roman invaders and Druids passed the rituals back and forth between them, and the modern Wiccan Wheel of the Year is a synthesis of these, and our diverse cultures.

-The Dying King-

A predominate myth in Wicca is the Myth of the Dying King, who is born, in this pre-Christian myth, at Yule. The Goddess rests after his birth, and the land "hibernates" resulting in the cold, harshness of Winter. She begins to awaken at Imbolc, and the infant God, the Sun, begins to exert power with her. By Ostara, she has embraced the land in fertility, and her son walks with the land, bringing forth the hidden and new-born animals. Beltane comes, and a mature God and the Goddess are joined as one, she conceives, and at the Summer Solstice, they appear together, gloriously full of power. At Lughnasa, as the sun begins to "Weaken" so too does the God . The Goddess paves the way for his death, by beginning to withdraw from the Earth so that the people know to harvest and by the Solstice, she, beginning to slow down with the increasing burden of the pregnancy, and he, steadily growing older, are equal in power. They mutually decline until Samhain, where the God dies, and the Goddess rests in preparation for the long labor ahead. In one tradition, a feast is held for the Goddess in her last month, and after the feast, she begins the arduous labor that parodies December, with periods of pain and relief, always with the anticipation of the final rebirth of the "Sun King." In this tradition, the feast was held thirteen days before Yule, to represent the thirteen months of the lunar year. In my Clan/Family, we've extended this period, and , as you may've guessed, we hold "The Final Feast" on Thanksgiving, and save our money, keeping all meals in December as frugal as possible until the big feast celebrating the birth of the God. This helps us keep in mind the "feeling" of this time of the year for our ancestors.

-The Equinoxes(Equinoxes)-

The Spring, or Vernal Equinox is also called Ostara, Eostra, Festival of the Trees, Alban Eilir, Ostra and Persephone's day, and represents the "coming to life" of the earth. Wiccan rituals of

this day often involve seed planting, dancing, egg painting (an ancient Pagan custom) and huge banquets of herbed bread, spring berries and rhubarb. Children born or conceived on Ostara are said to be healthy, strong, imaginative and "green thumbled." Ostara is the time to work "rebirth" Magicks, and an old tradition of Ostara is to call "off" debts. Some peoples believe that by "holding on" to the past, you prevent the future, so, to speed the future up, you have to "give up" the past. Unfortunately, the utility company doesn't seem to understand that. A modern way to celebrate the severing of the past is to try to have all of your December bills paid off by Ostara. Pay the bills, save the paperwork that comes with it, clip off the part you keep for your records, and burn them in a great stack in a fire set Ostara morning. Try to spend the period between Ostara and Beltane accomplishing as much as possible. Open the windows, clean the house and "finish off" the dark half of the year so that by Beltane, the year is "fresh and new." Remember, the ritual's just half of the practice!

The Autumnal Equinox, also known as Alban Elfed, Mabon, or The Feast of Second Harvest, is just that, a feast, held after the second harvest. The celebration often includes feasts of grain foods, domestic meats like mutton or beef, and apples and tender young pumpkins. Autumn is construction season where I grew up, and many Pagan groups hold "Barn-raising" type festivals, fixing leaky roofs, building temple spaces, or even working to build houses for members who may not have the money to buy or hire a contractor. This is, of course, fully dependent on the number of people you have, but a hard day of physical labor, topped by a feast, really helps citified folk to get the "feel" of a day at harvest. Children born at Mabon are generally compared to the harvest. If it was good, the child is said the "Grow tall and prosper like the grain," but a poor season usually boded badly for an infant, not because of his/her date of birth but because of the food supply, and the child was said to be lucky to survive past Yule.

-The Solstices(Solstia)-

Like the Equinoxes, the Solstices are said to be "lesser" ceremonies. The Summer Solstice, called Litha, is when the God and Goddess reign with the most power. It is a time of "high Magick" a time for feasts, dancing, games of strength and endurance and warfare (usually of the reenactment variety.) Children born on the Summer Solstice are supposed to be fiery, smart, strong, temperamental and willful, red haired children born on the Solstice are said to be "marked" by the Sun King, and will receive special blessings. Feasts of The Summer Solstice are of "orange" foods, carrots, wild berries, peaches, and any fruit which has a brief period of sweetness, especially persimmons in Southern Wiccan traditions. This is the night of Morpheus, Psyche, Demeter, Apollo and Horae. Prophetic dreams of this night are said to always come true. The Winter Solstice, or Yule, is both the celebration of Midwinter and the contemporary Wiccan's "Christmas." In my family, we have a Yule Tree², which we decorate with star and moon Santas, brooms, cookies, cranberries, popcorn, our sacred cords and all sorts of relics, a crystal from this vacation, an ornament from another. Our son is taught of St. Klaus, Woden delivering gifts from his sky-sleigh pulled by reindeer, and of the birth of the baby "Sun" God. We tell Christian friends that our family is Wiccan, that "happy holiday" and "happy Yuletide" cards are acceptable, and "Merry Christmas" is not. Frosty the Snowman, a Visit from St. Nick, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and such things can be very secular, and we bake cookies of crosses, stars of David, stars, angels, Santas, dredels, peace symbols and crescent moons and give them out in great huge batches to our friends, as "Unity" cookies. We've learned to accept "December Holidays" as a time to celebrate our Unity as a human race and our individual beauties, too, the true goal of Multiculturalism. At Ritual, we give each other handmade gifts, usually of food, and we each pick a name out of a hat and give a gift to a coven member at a feast/party on the actual "Christmas" night (face it, being alone for Christmas sucks, even if you're not Christian.).

A child born on Yule is said to have the power of the Sun God, and the mother is said to be blessed too, of especial sacredness are infants with black hair, who are said to have the powers of the storms, and very pale children born on Yule are said to come from the womb of the Goddess and be great workers of Magick. The "gift" child is often a changeling, say the old ways,

and will die by spring, but bring great prosperity to the family, not my idea of a "Blessing."
A venison Stew the night of Yule, rich with potatoes, carrots and turnips is the "traditional" Yule feast, served with pan bread and Yule Wine, which is often a cranberry-apple wine made at Samhain, or Mulled Cider. A vegetarian Wiccan meal I went to consisted of Stewed Pumpkin with carrots and a bunch of other indistinguishable vegetables and grains. As I always say, *"Whatever works."*

Chapter Seven: The Second Circle and The Wheel of the Year

-Imbolc-

Imbolc (February 1st or 2nd) is the Festival of the beginning of the end of Winter. Fires are kindled, and a light is placed in each window to show good fortune the way to the house. It is said that to turn out a beggar on Imbolc is to risk turning out the weakened Goddess in disguise. One older trad says, "Take a beggar into your house on Imbolc, give him your best chair, your best meat, your best blanket, if he stays until Ostara, you shall be greatly rewarded."
Imbolc is also the festival of the unsung deed, when we lived in sub-arctic Syracuse, NY, this consisted of sneaking out and shoveling the whole neighborhood, or driving around to jump start cars. Children born on Imbolc are said to be the "first children of Spring" and will always be one step ahead of everyone else. Feasts of Imbolc are of potatoes, turnips, bread, rabbit and venison, and are supposed to be both meager and hopeful, often using the last of the spices, salt and other supplies of the winter.

-Beltane-

Beltane (May 1st) is a festival which somehow escaped total absorption by Christianity, and, even in modern times, has been practiced almost instinctually by county folk, usually as May Day. Pink, white and red are the colors, with spring primroses, violets, pansies and crocus the flowers of choice. Irises, sacred flower of the rainbow goddess, are said to bode a glorious summer if in bloom by Beltane, and a rainbow on Beltane is a powerful mystic sign. Children, especially girls, born on Beltane are the "children of the Goddess", and children conceived on Beltane are said to have "luck and fortune beyond the world." In celebration of Persephone's homecoming, bowls of flowers are placed everywhere, and nosegays are placed on the doors of absolute strangers. Beltane is the fertility ceremony supreme, with May Pole dances, and caldrons and bowls of wine free-flowing. A word of caution here, Beltane seems to be the trigger for many powerful instincts, and the most responsible, least fertile people I know have little January children to show for it. Likewise, if you are finding it difficult to conceive, try waiting a week and attempting on Beltane. I have two glorious "nieces-who-aren't- really" as a result of a good friend taking my advice. With fertility clinics running in the tens of thousands for simple treatments, can faith, a little May Wine and a night of passion really be that risky?
"Womanhood" ceremonies, new business deals, real estate buying and other rites of passage are all for Beltane, as are the "passion" fruits, like strawberries, cherries, passion fruit and kiwi. Eating a pomegranate on Beltane is said to be in bad taste, however, and this is a basically vegetarian holiday, no meat at the feast unless it's spring chicken or the first fish of the season. The essence of Beltane is "party," starting all over and getting it right this time. No doubt of the Celebratory nature of Beltane is possible.

-Lughnasa-

Lughnasa, (August 1st/July 31st) is the feast of the first harvest, and its feast is usually of grains, corn and blueberries. Children born on Lughnasa, like children born on Mabon, are said to be like the crop that is brought in. Very little is written of Lughnasa, and it seems to be a fairly recent

holiday, appearing within the past 500 years. Often Mabon and Lughnasa are combined into great harvest festivals once everything is done, and the suggestion of defined "first" and "second" harvests conjures thoughts of machinery and single crops. More likely, Lughnasa was the beginning of the harvesting season, with Mabon its end. Lughnasa, without a doubt, is the most often overlooked festival of the year.

-Samhain-

Samhain, (October 31st) pronounced "so-When" like "so-when is Samhain?," is the holiday that has been confiscated, wrapped up in a bright pink "happy" bag and returned to us barely recognizable as "Halloween." Contrary to bizarre portrayals by Wiccan revisionists, Samhain was a time for sacrifice in the ancient world, sacrifice of those cattle and sheep that wouldn't live through winter, but also occasionally of a person, who, by "dying with" the God could sort of "plead the case" of a pleasant winter with the Celestial forces.¹ Children born on Samhain are said to be great in power but attracted to "necromancy, graveyards and other ghoulish things," and children conceived on Samhain were said to be the incarnations of unsettled dead, so sex on Samhain is fairly taboo.

It is said that the "veil" between the worlds is thinnest on Samhain, and communication with, and even attacks by, the dead are part of its mysticism. Welcoming the ancestors to the Samhain feast is common, as is wearing masks so dead enemies can't find you. Celebrations in honor of beloved people who have passed away are common on Samhain, and it is the Wiccan New Year, because of the Ancient Druidic belief that day began with the setting of the sun, and thus the dark half of the year was the beginning. New Years resolutions are made on Samhain, and it is the traditional day to raise a covener within the circle.

-Other Holidays-

Secular Holidays are practiced as much by Wiccans as anyone, and rituals for Thanksgiving, New Year's, etc. are practiced by many Wiccans as a way of "bringing home" the meanings of these days. Community, not just of Wiccan folk, but of all human kind is built on the fact that, while we are much different, we are also much the same, blessed diversity once more.

Chapter Eight: Life Changes: Birth, Marriage, Death

-Born Wiccan-

Blessed indeed are those children born "into" Wicca, who don't need to lose the Christian indoctrination of their parents. I myself, while not being "born" Wiccan, was "raised right" in the Wiccan sense, that is, given the right and ability to explore, create, and "discover" religion as I grew. When I first became involved in Wicca, the coven I was in consisted of feminist Lesbians and "Wild Men," a bizarre combination of two covens, lead by a priestess and priest who were like siblings and who were attempting to counter the Anti-man, and Anti-woman aspects of their respective covens by integrating them. From day one I learned that Wicca, like any religion, has its rocky moments, which probably saved me from the disgust and disillusionment that some Wiccans face as they discover themselves and their differences from the "norm", causing them to leave covens and organizations.

As head of Religion:Other, An Alliance of Alternative Religion, I managed to corner several Wiccans who'd left covens, or left Wicca altogether. Although the reasons given were unique, we fit many of them into ten categories, and labeled them, from 10 (4 of 30) to 1 (14 of 30) (Most of the people interviewed gave answers that included two or more categories.) It looked like this: Why I left my Coven/Group/Wicca as a whole:

10: My Profession wasn't respected by other Wiccans (4)¹

09: Nothing was being accomplished. (5)

- 08: Focusing too much on one or two people (5)
- 07: Personality clash, not coven leader (6)
- 06: Personality clash with Coven leader(9)
- 05: Did not respect my gender (10) 2
- 04: Did not respect my sexual orientation/history (10)3
- 03: Was causing too much stress in my life. (11)
- 02: Didn't respect my spouse/partner and/or kids. (12)
- 01: Expected too much of my time (14)

The Wiccan Family, with its children, deserves more respect than it gets by its community. A part of that is the make-up of Wicca, because we attract diverse populations, especially those populations "exiled" by the Christian world, we don't have as many kids. We have a large gay population in Wicca, because "love is never evil," and a large population of childless-by-choice heterosexual couples. Wiccans, as a majority, are pro-choice, pro-world type people, so when children are born to a Wiccan couple, it's usually planned, and, far too often, it's decided against. The Wiccan family with children faces serious dilemmas. Wiccan gatherings rarely have daycare, and often bringing children is frowned upon, or just an excuse to get treated rudely by inconsiderate people who have no clue about child rearing. I've been told I'm adding to the population crisis because of my son and the fact that I plan to have at least one more child before my life is up has caused rifts between my family and some of my coveners, but the answer is simple. We, as Wiccans, are going to raise peaceful, respectful children to counter all the kids being brought up wrong throughout the world. Our morality, passed generation to generation DESERVES to be continued, and the children out there shouldn't be denied it because we have so few parenting role models who are Wiccan. Far better to try than die out.

A child, raised Wiccan, taught the knowledge that can be taught and shown the way to the rest is given more clearly those tools we felt deprived of by other upbringing. Parents attempting to raise a child in this violent, Christian-weighted world deserve our respect and assistance, not further hindrances. A few weeks before this was written, I got together with two other Wiccan mothers, one a fellow priestess, the other a second circle teacher, between the three of us, we created the "Wiccan Mother's Demands" for the Summer Solstice Issue of The Green:

The Wiccan Mother's Demands:

We, the mothers of our future, in order to produce a more perfect generation, demand the following of our community, or else:

- 1: Being a mother means responsibility, sometimes we can't drop what we're doing to come to a circle, please give us advance notice.
- 2: Childcare at Wiccan Gatherings should be available, peaceful and productive.
- 3: Our children, not our covens, come first.
- 4: Our children, when they are at gatherings, are going to be noisy, playful, demanding and occasionally disruptive. They are children, that's part of their job.
- 5: We have the right to bring our children with us, and no one has the right to stop us.

For us, at least, and the few other Wiccan Parents we know, bringing our children up Wiccan means bringing our children up free, and that if that freedom causes our children to choose another religion, then so be it. My child is not Wiccan, he is a child, and religious decisions aren't his duty, being a child is. If I can balance teaching him my beliefs, and the beliefs of other people, he'll probably choose my way, but it will be a choice. The Wiccan parent, at least, knows that the smaller being that lives with them is a human being, and he has choices, too, even if they are more restrictive.

-Puberty: Womanhood, Manhood-

While we raise our children, we look forward to the trials of puberty, and start from the moment of birth to teach respect for the sexes, self-control and responsibility. One example, in a Book of Shadows of a modern trad, reads : *"At the age of about five, a child should be given something*

to take care of, something little, like a hamster, or a goldfish. If the child doesn't do what is needed to take care of the animal, demand it, and, if, after a few years, the child shows responsibility, you may wish to give him/her something larger. By puberty, the child understands that taking care of things requires work, and you've done a great set-up for a frank talk."

We need to teach our children from day one that having sex means "giving up" childhood to an extreme degree. Responsibility, self-control, and the demands of a sexual life are taught in our parables and myths, and the punishments for things like rape and excess in those myths are swift, severe and memorable. A coming of age ceremony, designed by the parents and child, should take place when the parties decide that the child is ready to be a self-responsible adult. The actual moment of transition aids a child in the "am I too young to?" decisions, and knowledge of a parent's respect and expectations changes the dynamic of the relationship completely.

Unlike Christianity, Wicca teaches automatic response, "if you do this, you will be punished now," and "this life matters, don't mess it up." By showing our children that they are responsible for their actions and they are accountable for them from day one, we teach control and responsibility. By teaching compassion, forgiveness and the ability to change, we teach divinity. It is easy for us to believe, "I am God(dess)," but what we have to teach our children is: "So are you."

Chapter Eight: Life Changes: Birth, Marriage, Death

-The Wiccan Marriage-

The Wiccan Marriage, or Handfasting, is a vital part of the religious lives of thousands of Wiccans worldwide who have decided to be joined in the eyes of the Goddess and God rather than in a civil ceremony. Few Wiccan priest/priestesses are truly licensed to do civil marriages, and a secondary wedding takes place at the justice of the peace or similar office for many Wiccan couples. The Handfasting is more than a document, however, and many choose a handfasting which marries them in the eyes of the Gods, but not the civil marriage, freeing them for non-traditional marriages that the state may not approve of:

When The Defense of Marriage Act was before the United States Congress, many congressmen and women recieved a version of the following letter from Wiccan Clergy. The letter demonstrates the ideals commonly held by Wiccan/Pagan clergy concerning same-sex marriage:

To whom it may concern:

Given the nature of the continuing debate for and against the legal marriage of Gays and Lesbians, it seems important to define what marriage is. Some people want to define marriage within strict Judeo-Christian terms. The flaw in this is that people of any religion may be joined together regardless of their religion, Marriages within Jewish and Christian faiths, within Islam and Universalism, Catholicism and Atheism are all recognized by the state, even though marriage within these belief systems all mean different things. To define marriage within one religious group, to define marriage from a particular Biblical translation, or translations, as the "Defense of Marriage Act" and similar documents attempt to do, is to deny the validity of all marriages not performed within the religious sect or sects from which this definition comes. DOMA and the like should be seen as an act not against "merely" Gay and Lesbian couples, but as an act against Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Atheism, and any religion or belief system that defines marriage with any rules above and beyond the mere union of man and woman as defined in DOMA's framers' version of Christianity. Gay and Lesbian couples have been being married religiously by ministers for years, and some religions, such as Wicca, a religion recognized by the United States (most notably in The Armed Forces' guide for Chaplains,) have objected to DOMA not

because of a secret "gay agenda" but because DOMA actively promotes denying ministers of certain faiths their right to have many of their marriages recognized by the State, effectively denying tens of thousands of people their freedom of religion. No rational person expects religions that are against homosexuality to begin to hand out marriages between same-sex couples. As always, each religion has the right to determine the qualifications to be married within their church, but the State does not have the right to limit those qualifications beyond expecting that all participants are not having their rights violated by the church. A religious marriage is a contract between those being married and the church that is marrying them, a sacred contract that is limited only by the religion's rules and knowledge that all parties are capable (i.e.: Sound of mind, of legal age and not under duress) of consenting to that contract. It is against both the letter of the Constitution and the spirit of it, in essence, DOMA tells the public that only those religions of which certain people approve may be given the full protection of the First amendment.

You don't have to agree with Same-sex marriage to disagree with DOMA, but the carefully practiced division of the public into "good, moral folk" and "godless liberals" must be seen through like the tactic that it is, a mere method of telling people what's good to think and what's bad to think. My morality, my thoughts and my beliefs are not regulated by or registered with the Congress of the United States, and although I disagree with the tactics of secession "Freemen" groups, I am more than willing to fight the Government if they ever expect me to join their church, think their way and do their bidding like a mindless Jesse Helms clone. I am an American, patriotic and proud of my country, and I will not watch the Constitution be destroyed in the name of "defending marriage."

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There are two main types of Handfasting, mostly based on practices of the ancient Celts. The first, which appears to be unique to Wicca in the modern age, is the "Year and a Day" handfasting, which is renewed (or not) every year and one day. The commitment here is not temporary, but, at the end of the period if the couple can not honestly say that they still love each other, they begin proceedings to fix or end the marriage. A Priest(ess) will advise participants in this ceremony to not have children unless a contract stipulating custodial rights is created in advance.

The Second handfasting is much like the Judeo-Christian marriage, and is for "As long as love shall last," as opposed to "till death do us part." The reasoning behind this is two-fold, firstly, Wiccans believe a marriage without love is a sham, and should be dissolved as soon as possible. Secondly, Wiccans don't believe that death "parts" lovers, and many Wiccan widow(er)s talk about "feeling" their spouse, who often convinces them to "move on." Sometimes, a year and a day handfasting is required before a priestess will handfast a couple indefinitely.

In order to be married in Universal Eclectic Wicca, and many other Wiccan traditions, a couple is asked to interview with the Priest(ess,) first as a couple, and then individually. The purpose of this is not so that the Priest(ess) can veto the handfasting, but so that (s)he can find hidden issues the couple may have, and help them decide if they are really ready to "take the leap."

An old tradition currently being adopted by the masses, the pre-nuptial agreement has existed in Wicca as "The Contract" for time eternal. This is fairly self-explanatory, a couple sits down and hashes out the contingencies for divorce and the rules for marriage. Part of the Contract is the Mediation Commitment, a statement in which the couple makes the commitment to take any decision that alters the contract to mediation with a neutral third party, preferably the priest(ess) or coven scribe who helped write the contract.

Once that is taken care of, the marriage takes place, often incorporating any number

of varied traditions into each ceremony. Commonest is the "broom jumping" of poverty/slavery weddings, with the broom then decorated and hung on the couple's door to announce their handfasting to the community. Handfasting actually takes its name from the act of binding the couple's hands with their cords or a special handfasting cord, often woven from two-colored fabric. Many priest(esse)s actually schedule "check-ups" to insure a healthy marriage, and take a much more active role than most clergy.

Choosing a "civil" marriage to back up your spiritual one is a delicate choice. On one hand, you gain a document and recognition that you are married by the government, this can help taxwise and insurance-wise and is especially helpful if you wish to adopt your spouse's name, however, the primary purpose of the marriage certificate is to make money, and by choosing to be married by a religious ceremony and not a civil one you are not only saving money, but lodging a form of protest. Until such time as alternative marriages are recognized by the government, a "civil" marriage is spiritually worthless.

-The Wiccan Divorce-

Inevitably, any discussion of marriage needs a discussion of divorce, and Wiccan marriages are no different. A good point about having a religious-only marriage is that the divorce fees, which generally have a minimum of one-hundred dollars, are avoided. This does not mean that the marriage just picks up and dissolves. Many psychologists who don't shun all things even remotely religious recommend a "ceremony" for divorce to aid in the grief process that divorce causes, and more and more Judeo-Christian churches (those recognizing divorce) are adopting them. We've always had one, and it's called a Handparting.

Handparting, like Handfasting, isn't taken lightly, although many Handfastings that fall apart "peacefully" don't truly need to be parted, and the couple goes their merry ways, simply affirming "it's over" to all parties involved. With a Year and a Day Handfastings, it is customary to call the friends, clergy and family and tell them you've opted not to renew your Handfasting at the end of the term, a Handparting is only done in matters of extreme difficulty in these cases, and is made more difficult when the parties don't follow their wedding contracts. In long-term Handfastings gone sour, the participants are encouraged to Handpart ritually for psychological purposes, but again, if an easier form of "breaking it off" works for you, than do it. I feel it necessary to say here that marriages, Wiccan, Catholic, whatever, are held together by words and love, and that no Magickal act makes a couple inseparable. People change, and the person you handfast with may not be the same person ten years from now. As we grow, and change, handpartings happen, and filling your handfasting with talk of "eternity" and "through all our lives and incarnations," is damning any possible Handparting to increased difficulty. Earlier, I mentioned "plan B's," this is another example of one, and jeopardizing it in advance doesn't make marriage anymore secure. If you love each other so much that you wish to be together until the world ends, then stay in love, and be handfasted, "as long as love shall last." Who needs a greater time period than that?

When a handfasting goes sour, many Wiccan Priest(esse)s expect a trial separation of those they've Handfasted, a sort of "trying it on for size," similar in makeup and reasoning to the trial Handfasting, this prevents unnecessary Handpartings. Handpartings that are finalized require an interview, contract and mediation, just like the Handfasting, and is taken very seriously by the Wiccan population, but unlike a state divorce, a Handparting can easily be tailored individually, allowing the participants more leeway in their decisions. Often, a Handparted couple with children

will stay together as friends under the same roof to raise their children together, with a good contract, respect and prayer, anything is possible.

-The Later Years-

In many traditions, passage rites mark the passage into later maturity, but some feel that the emphasis placed on "cronings" and similar rituals lessen the experiences for people at other stages of life, or even discredit those people. My own teacher, newly young at 64, flat out refused a "croning" by her coven, saying "age is but a pair of dates and the length between them, and if cronings are indicative of experience, why offer it now, not ten or twenty years ago?" If a person desires one, and is willing to seek out the ritual in a tradition that "officially" provides such rites, then the priest(ess) should assist in all ways possible, but should refrain from recommending it. One person, upon recommending it of Bell Coven's oldest member received a sandal upside the head, shot from about 30 feet by someone who most people would describe as a "little old lady" with perfect accuracy, who screeched, "call me a crone again and the other one's going somewhere worse." I have seen women who revel in the title, but since Universal Eclectic Wicca teaches that experience and active learning (not just age,) create wisdom, much of the "point" of such rituals is lost.

-"The Final Ritual"-

Perhaps at no time in our life does religion count more than the moment when we realize we're dying. I remember a dream I had, early on in my studies, I was in the elevator of the CN tower (I despise elevators) and had gotten in at the top with a Catholic priest and another Wiccan. At the moment the doors closed, the cable snapped and we were all going to die in five minutes (crashing in elevators in dreams is slow, I guess). The other Wiccan and I immediately prayed to either be rescued or die painlessly, then I turned to the priest and confessed everything I'd ever done that was non-Catholic in my life (I don't know how, but I condensed it to a few phrases,) and, upon confession demanded a really quick penance (the priest said that conversion was enough,) and I was "forgiven." Then, I woke up.

I immediately went to my priestess, near sobbing, I didn't understand what my subconscious was saying, was I not really Wiccan? Was I a closet Catholic? What happened after I was forgiven, did I die? She told me to meditate on the meaning of that dream before bed, and sure enough I had the same dream, only we were rescued mere seconds after the dream had ended before. As we got out, the other Wiccan (my conscious) looked at me, confused, "you've one of the most devout Wiccans I know, what happened in there?" she demanded. The dream me thought for a moment, then said, "well, if we had died, and he was right, I saved my butt, if he was wrong, I know our Gods would understand." The priest came up to us at that point, and the dream me felt embarrassed for having said that in front of him. I tried to stutter out an apology, but he brushed it off, saying, "That's okay, everyone is Catholic right before they die," then I woke up again.

I've told numerous students this dream, finding that while aspects of it were fairly unique, similar issues had been brought up in the dreams and dialogs of numerous Wiccans. Confession, and the idea that a few words and actions will settle all of our post-life problems, is very appealing. Wicca is one of the few religions that doesn't say, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what happens after we die. In general, Wiccans believe in reincarnation, that the soul goes on to be "born again" into a new body, to learn new lessons and continue its learning quest, but we don't promise that we have the answer. There is simply very little proof. Out of body experiences of Christians sometimes include women instead of Jesus, and Jesus has appeared in the out of

body experiences of Wiccans, always smiling and embracing them, so even the "beyond a shadow of doubt " beliefs of new age Christians don't ring true. I'll put it simply, we don't know.

To prevent the detriment of the growing graveyard, many Wiccans choose cremation after donation as their method of choice once they die. This allows the parts of the body that can give life to go on, and the parts that cannot are reduced by the cremation process. The ashes are traditionally mixed with soil in which a tree is planted, many people choose to have a plate placed near or on the tree, or a memorial bench with an inscription beside the tree. The actual planting ceremony is written by friends, family, and occasionally pre-written by the planter. One is included in Book Three: A Book Of Light. It's best to look into the legality of this in your area before you perform a planting, in many places, an urn is required and in others the ashes may be planted in a graveyard, but not on private land.

Chapter Nine: Ethics, Situational Ethics and the "T" word.

Earlier, we talked of the Five Points of Wiccan belief, and forging a personal morality. Ethics are beliefs, morals and teachings all rolled into one, a sort of catch-all phrase for what we believe to be true. Occasionally we ask, "Is something Ethical?," but ethical merely means that it follows, or is like ethics, and ethics can be bad or good, so we need a personal definition of "ethical" in hand before we try to determine whether or not something is ethical.

One definition of Ethical contains only those ethics that are "Good," or "Right," but the difference between "good" and "right" raises the question of the worth of wondering "what is ethical?" again. With these this statement well in hand, a student once leveled a lecture of mine. "Why talk about ethics at all in a discourse on Wicca?" he asked, "It's covered by the Five Points, isn't it?"

To a degree, I've already said all there is to say about ethics, and put it in such a way that you can glean the rest from personal experience. The Five Points of Wiccan Belief are a circle, The Rede implies the Karmic Law implies Self-Responsibility implies Constant Improvement implies Attunement implies The Rede, constantly rotating, developing new levels of interdependency and individual strength. To a degree, any discussion could end there, "these are the five Points, boom, you're done," yet the feeling of "something missing," would continue.

In the past, I have asked people, "which is better, to be good or right?" This is one of the prime questions of Wiccan belief, often asked by Wiccans of Christians. We cannot comprehend that a God would set down a set of rules that were restrictive to the human race, and condemn that person for a matter of semantics. To an extreme degree, the ethical Wiccan believes in right and wrong, and in what we like to call "Basic Human Truths." Basic Human Truths are those things that nearly every culture considers right, beyond a shadow of a doubt, things like helping those in need and respecting everyone equally. Cultures with fewer Basic Truths, and thus fewer basic rights, are usually ruled by the corrupted few, and the subjugated masses are miserable, regardless of religion.

To the Christian, settling North America, the indigenous peoples were "wrong" because they weren't Christian, and when starving Puritans were helped by natives, the reasoning the Plymouthites gave was along the lines of "God is acting through them," or, " they've learned to be Christian by watching us." More likely, the Puritans were recipients of a Basic Truth, "You don't let your neighbor starve, no matter how crazy he is." While Wicca is pacifistic, most Wiccans believe in the upholding of truths, in basic human rights, and most of us would willingly die if it would save or return the human rights of another person. There is a large population of military Wiccans, who are asked "how can you be a part of the industrial war machine and still be Wiccan?," and this is simply not fair. The military Wiccans are fighting for human rights and they deserve our respect, not our criticism, many of them do what we aren't brave enough to do for ourselves. As we grow, and our population swells, the minority of good-intentioned but

judgmental Wiccans will need to unlearn their Puritanical traits and decide to be "good" instead of "right."

It IS better to be good, even if you're not right. It was better to kill Nazis to save Jews, Rom, and everyone else imprisoned in World War Two than to allow the Nazis their right to condemn "criminals." Technically, many countries in World War Two weren't being "right" by fighting Hitler, it wasn't "our" business, but to be "good" we needed to act, not in the name of God or Country, but in the name of Humanity. Humanity is something we all share. Admittedly, if a Vulcan starship pulled into the UN parking lot and said, "there are other worlds out there," the rest of humanity would become a lot more unified, but I don't predict that for another few years, if ever, so if we can begin thinking on a planetary level now, think of the welcoming committee.

-Politics-

In at least two books on Wicca, I've seen the question, "Is Wicca Political?," both times, this was answered "No." This is WRONG. Wicca is a religion and religion, courtesy of the Radical Right, is now political. As Wiccans, we have to get involved in the preservation of free speech and the right to practice our religion, the salvation of the earth and keeping prayer OUT of public schools. We need to vote, because no vote means no voice, and our voice, shouting, crying or singing, needs to be heard.

-Situational Ethics-

When "desperate times call for desperate measures," we invoke what are called Situational ethics. In Wicca, Situational ethics often include actions that break the Wiccan Rede, because the Wiccan Rede is so all-encompassing. I have, you have, and we will in the future. There is an actual way of evaluating the situation along Wiccan guidelines, developed by myself, Tamryn and Lady Martia of Bell Coven, it is: Wiccan Situational Law

The Rede is the law of the Gods, and in our growth and education, we are presented with the occasional moment where the Rede does not apply. These moments are:

- 1: When Harming one saves many.
- 2: When Harming the Self saves many.
- 3: In cases where a person's justifiable Will may be against the law, or the Spirit of the Law.
- 4: When Basic truths/Human Rights are being Violated.
- 5: Other moments similar to those above not fully defined but still containing "Just cause."

Actions defined by Situational Ethics must be taken only with full knowledge and acceptance of The Law of Return and the Ethic of Self Responsibility, and are the actions of an individual and group actions must be decided on an individual basis.

Most Wiccan Clergy are grilled on Situational Ethics and are good people to talk to when the decision just can't be made alone. No Wiccan Clergy member would EVER try to make your decision for you, however, so go with the knowledge that the decision will be yours.

-Teaching, the Dreaded T word-

The decision to "widen the circle" by teaching is not to be taken lightly. It's very easy to get "burned" by people who practice their form of Wicca without the benefit of morality. Expect at least one student in every bunch who is going to steal your books and glean no amount of morality from you. If you don't get one, consider yourself lucky, and if you get more than one, reevaluate how you are finding your students, or maybe your karma. I can say happily that such students never STAY in Wicca, because their antics aren't condoned and the instant "wave your magic wand," type of power they desire isn't found here (or anywhere else, although some groups advertise it.)

Teaching is a part of learning, so teaching in order to learn is important in Wicca, and a group of

equals in a sharing circle is as good, if not better than the a lecture set up. You are "good enough" to teach when you feel ready to, so try, experiment, and if you fall, get back up. Many Universalist Unitarian churches rent rooms, and I recommend teaching outside your house (classes at home can be disastrous,¹) so you may wish to look into such things.

Networking, sometimes called "Web Weaving," is important to anyone teaching, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with asking a student for references and checking them. Always keep a record of the students who've burned you, and warn anyone who asks about them. Feel free to use euphemism instead of accusation. "Well, all my books went missing when he was here," won't cause a lawsuit and "he stole all my books," might.

Never start a class with "friends" if it's going to be the sit and teach type, because the stresses of the teacher-student and "friend" relationship can be straining. Friends are friends, not students, so teach them as equals and let them teach you. My experience has taught me however, that when a student decides to become a teacher (s)he knows exactly how (s)he wants it done, and no amount of advice can change that. I'll let you do as you will, then, with one last warning from an old Book of Shadows, "When thrice asked of secrets or Magick by the same student, when rushed towards those things mystical and potentially powerful, remove that student like a cancer from your class, lest all your students be unbalanced by greed."

Chapter Ten:Magick

(I should mention here that Magick and Wicca are not inseparable, some Wiccans use Magick, some don't. The Gods give us tools, this is one of them.)

What is Magick? Well, there is the Wiccan stock answer (let me pull it here from my bag of standard trinkets...) "Magick is the art of getting results."¹ Of course, there is the more impressive "Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will," of Crowley's Magick in Theory and Practice, but unless you wish to impress that really cute Metaphysicist at work the first one's easier. I chose to define the Magic used in Wicca with Wicca in its definition "Wiccan Magick is change, directed by the Self, empowered by the Will and decided by Morality." An old name for alchemists and Mages alike is transmuter, one who transmutes (alters) one thing into another. The practice of Magick is taking one thing, and creating another.

There are four broad groupings of Magick in Wicca, along with Ceremonial and High Magick, which, while done by many Wiccans in ritual, are not religious in nature. These are Celebratory Magick, Ritual Magick, Healing Magick and personal magicks.

Celebratory Magick, Magick done in ritual to honor the Gods, is advanced prayer, as is Ritual Magick, which is the Magickal aspects of our rituals and ceremonies (to clarify, Ritual Magick is done at ceremonies, and Ceremonial Magick has nothing to do with Wiccan ritual practice.)

Healing Magicks are self-explanatory, and Personal Magicks combine Celebratory, Healing and Ritual Magicks with "lesser" or "low" Magick for personal reasons. A example of Personal Magicks in a non-Wiccan setting are novenas published in community newspapers. They usually invoke St. Jude, and follow a ritual whereby the novena is prayed for a set number of days, then published, and the prayer comes true. This is a bit "hokey" for most Wiccans, but I know of two Catholo-Wiccan trads using Catholic saints that use novenas much as other Wiccans use wish-burying and similar rituals.

Celebratory Magick usually is power raised in the circle, directed toward the earth for its own usage, or directed toward a god or goddess as a sort of token with a prayer. Think of Celebratory magic and regular prayer like a delivery service, anyone can deliver a telegram (prayer), but Celebratory Magick is like delivering a singing telegram, complete with flower bouquet and four-part harmonies. We wish to show praise, glory, welcome and love for our Gods...how welcome is an intoned ceremony, complete with stifled yawns and rampant boredom. The Gods want us to be happy, to survive to the fullest and best of our abilities. "If I can dance wildly beneath the full moon, the sand between my toes and my shouts of joy echoing in the night air, how divine, how

perfect, how holy."²

There are primarily two branches or "sciences" of Magick used in all Wiccan Magick, Sympathetic Magick, which involves doing a symbolic action to achieve a real action, and Dynamic Magick, which involves using the body's powers in a non-standard way. A few Sympathetic Charms are given in part three, but a good lesson on sympathetic Magick can be found in any discourse on Wicca, and I'll leave talk of it to those with expertise. Psychic abilities, Healing touches, etc., are mind/body dynamics, as are all of the "untapped" powers locked within the Self.

The "Self," or "Integrated Total Self," which we spoke of earlier, is the entirety of the mentality and personality of a being. "Will," "True Will" or "Total Will," is the force of the Self. One of my students came up with the term "ITS Will," to remember the two and their relationship. You must understand that "The Will is the slave of the Self, and has no limitations."³ With that in hand, and a healthy dose of morality, the Wiccan improves his/her life as much as (s)he can. Strength of Will improves the level of "can", as does belief, but it seems that, as you grow in Will, you need less and find more enjoyment in the smaller things, so it's a bit self-defeating.

I had the good fortune to "Fall in" with a group of Metaphysicists, nicknamed "the old men" because most of them were over 50 and argued over Metaphysics as easily as they argued over Talmud, and since, of the eight, seven were Jewish and the eighth a self-proclaimed heretic, Talmudic arguments came easily. Like a kid in a fantasy novel, I ducked into a coffee shop to get out of the rain and heard this whispered argument in the corner where four of the men were sitting. Being nosy, I got a drink, sat at the table next to them, put on my headphones (which were off) and pretended to read my book, listening intently.

Now, as a teenager, I'd tried Satanism, I think most of us do when we realize "conventional" religion doesn't fit us. From there, I went into a very "dark" neo-goth Crowley sect and wore all black, but I was the only female there, and I quickly realized that being the love object of a batch of intelligent but wasted (in more ways than one) teenyboppers was not my idea of study, and I'd read in passing more Crowley than they'd read in "serious study." At the time of the "meeting" with the old men I was absolutely lusting for intelligent metaphysical conversation, but my tea was gone, and I had to go back to the counter for another.

Providence, or maybe the rituals praying for serious discussion, stepped in, and while I was at the counter, one of "the Old Men" told the woman they were out of sugar at his table. She was busy as hell, so I grabbed the sugar carrier from a nearby table and told her "Finish what you're doing, I'll give them this one." I had several pieces of jewelry made by a boyfriend in copper and I was wearing a thick bracelet on my right arm with various metaphysical phrases and symbols of protection upon it, and a few choice phrases from metaphysical tomes.⁴

I purposely stretched my arm a few inches from the guy's nose to place the sugar carrier on their table, repeating "notice it, notice it, notice it," inside my head, and sure enough, he saw it, and asked me about it. I asked him if he knew what it meant, and he said yes, and asked if I did, and I translated. I'll tell you right now, a few nights before I had Jonah, a good friend and Clansman, write the inscription out for me, because I could not read the Script. I bluffed my way in, though, with a few choice Crowley quotes, a bit of Hermetic philosophy, and a mental note to "do my homework" if they invited me back. I was asked to pull up a chair...it was the first of several times. I learned that year two vital lessons, Magick WORKS and as a rule, Metaphysicists are sexist pigs, and the older they are the worse it is.

If you wish to do "more" magically than the simple healing charms and such, begin your "training" by fixing the damaged Will and the damaged Self. Get rid of your addictions (smoking, too) by affirming that you Will to not have them. If you find you cannot quit, your Will is weaker than the addiction. I've been "hooked" on things before, and by inflicting my Will, I stopped. Anyone can, it's just a measure of the ethic of Self- Responsibility. It's willpower, and if I have one thing, it's willpower. I've "detoxed" people by going for the ego, and if anyone out there is addicted I'll tell you right here that I'm a coward, a great, shivering coward who cries at movies and is so agoraphobic that the forest at night scares me half-witless, and I was strong enough to quit...what's your excuse?

Once your Will is beginning to heal, test it and strengthen it with little affirmations of Will, like

conquering fears. Most of us are walking wounded, by affirming the Will, you heal some wounds and keep from becoming walking dead. I'll warn you right now that as you grow and learn in metaphysics, you will begin to detest it. The stronger you become the more you know, the more you know the less you like. I cannot stress enough how much better it is to gain enough power metaphysically to have Total Self and Total Will and choose to use them only for inside improvement. I've seen so many good friends go into the "Death" of knowledge that I wouldn't wish it on anyone. Many of us, strong Will or not, don't live through that stage of development, and frankly, I think most of us don't want to.

If you use your Will outside of a religious and moral context, it's not Wiccan, and a decision may come as you grow in Metaphysics that morality isn't a question anymore, but a hindrance. I would never be so bold as to tell anyone that they are wrong, but if it gets to this point, take a mental "vacation" for a few weeks, do no Metaphysics and no ritual, then read over your journal(s.) You may find that your changes are the work of an outside force, maybe a "teacher" and that you need to "adjust" your path. Balance reigns supreme in Metaphysics and nature, and a slow descent into darkness or over-zealous goodness will begin to cause harm.

As we integrate our Self, we need to improve all of it to stay "balanced." Just as you wouldn't hammer a nail with a rusted hammer with a loose head and a broken handle, doing Magick with an imperfect tool (Self) is dooming the act to imperfection. Improve the body, improve the mind, improve the Karma, improve it all. It's not easy, but remember Constant Improvement. An essential if you plan to incorporate Magick into ritual is that you know what you believe and why, and that you've answered many of your basic life-questions.

-Ritual Magick-

There are three Magickal acts in most Wiccan Ritual (and for detail beyond what I give, I suggest <http://barnesandnoble.bfast.com/booklink/click?sourceid=361455&ISBN=0875420508> > Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft

<http://barnesandnoble.bfast.com/booklink/click?sourceid=361455&ISBN=0875420508> >, chapter 11, and on Magick in general, Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice* is indispensable.) These three acts are Casting the Circle (detailed in Chapter Four, and in Part three of this work, named "A Book of Light",) Forming the Cone of Power and Goal-directed release, and Drawing Down the Moon/Sun. Both Drawing Down and Cone of Power Magicks require your confidence in the Circle you've cast, so practice.

The Cone of Power is raised energy focused on a point above the exact center of the cast circle. The Energy may be raised by chanting, dancing, toneing or any other form of power raising that works for you (there are five ways listed in Part Two of this book labeled: "A Grimoire".) Once the cone is begun, the energy is increased and increased until it eventually explodes from the tension point of the top of the circle and is directed, usually by visualization, towards a goal, either something personal, like the healing of a friend or the acquisition of a new job, or something esoteric and spiritual like "gifting" it to the Gods or the Earth. By using visualization, imagination or well-trained "other sight" one can see the power as a field of swirling light which fills the circle and is contained by the Metaphysical boundaries of the Circle and the Will of the Circle's caster(s.)

Drawing Down The Moon and Drawing Down The Sun are trad-related rituals in which the Gods are invoked into a person. Usually this involves an elaborate ritual, with the reading of one of the versions of the Charge of the Goddess, and similar male charges are read for the solar versions, and the "gods and goddesses" that speak within the ceremony are from books, but I have seen the occasional Ecstatic Wiccan group where the person who has the Gods "drawn into" them actually seems to "channel" another being who speaks to the coven, and once, on a Beltane night, Lady Martia, a very respectable and not easily excitable Wiccan Priestess of some forty years, began to recite the Charge and was seen to change drastically before about thirty people, and cease reading it. A surprised look on her face, this priestess told us how pleased she was that we kept our rites that evening, and told a coven member who was infertile that he and his

wife would have a child by Imbolc, whereupon the priestess fainted, and didn't come 'round for several minutes.

I suppose if I were reading that, I couldn't believe it, but I was there, and I believe (as does Mart,) that we met a Priestess of old that night, (no one thinks it was a Goddess, although I've heard stories of Goddesses and astral beings jumping in to ceremonies and interrupting them to give important news, warnings and the like,) and she approved, so we must be doing something right! (Their child, a boy, was conceived that night or thereabouts and born January 20th, 1995) Magick, like any science, requires ethics, and practice without ethics or in the form of Magick for Magick's sake may result in any number of problems. As with any science, use caution in your experimentation and start small.

Chapter Eleven: Religious Unity and Community

Studies within the Second Circle also focus on the part that Wicca and the Wiccan play in the greater society. A key element of this is the extension of Wicca beyond personal religion and into societal religion. What this means is, as we become more active RELIGIOUSLY, we have to become more active SOCIALLY. Like so-called "Mainstream" religion, as Wicca grows (and it is growing,) it needs to provide more for its internal community. I've seen many the case of priest(ess) burnout from Wiccan Clergy trying to provide the same services that the other religions provide without the benefit of a huge congregation and "required" donations.

Priest(esse)s are already our counselors, and most of them provide other services related to their secular professions. I know of Wiccan clergy who are midwives, doctors, lawyers, bankers and architects, and our community is fairly good at internal referral, but other needs met by larger churches are denied to us.

I've been homeless, and had to sleep in a shelter, and get my meals served with a side of Jesus, and let me tell you, it made it hard to not feel oppressed. I've had to grovel at the feet of their God to stay alive and feel nauseous to my very soul while pretending to pray, so housing the Wiccan homeless and feeding the Wiccan poor are very real concerns of mine. In the Christian community, "Taking care of your own" is a status quo, but too often we believe that we do not have the resources needed to provide. The Wiccan community is huge, and those resources are there.

An example from real life is a woman we'll call "Sara", who had an old barn in the back forty which connected to the road a mile up from her house. "Yolanda" was a woman with three kids and an abusive husband, and was an expert at redecorating, and had learned such things as sheetrocking and laying floors. Zach, Sara's husband was an electrician, and had rewired the barn, which already had a hookup with the house lines, and with Sara's help, he altered the plumbing, putting in a second toilet and a shower upstairs and they created this wonderful tiled bathtub from an old water trough and put it in the large tack area of the barn, demolishing the little bathroom to its left and creating an expansive bathroom complete with a stained glass window made of whole old bottles set in a panel of plastic, (The broken and then sanded shell of one that faces outside now houses a bird's nest you can watch from inside without disturbing the birds.) Yolanda and Zach spent the summer vacation laying floors while Yolanda's husband was away on assignment, and that winter Zach added a new furnace to his own house, using the old to heat the barn, which they insulated and turned into one of the most gorgeous four bedroom barn conversion houses I've ever had the pleasure to be in. Yolanda, after a fight that left her with a sprained wrist, black eye and worse, packed up the kids one morning and moved in, finally having a safe place from which to settle their divorce, tucked away on a back road that friends could monitor once the restraining order was issued. After things were settled, Yolanda and her kids moved to a larger house in a city, but to this day Wiccan (and Gay and Lesbian) women and men fleeing abuse have stayed in the barn, earning their keep by doing chores and

working the land. Zach and Sara's large covens provide food and necessities to the barn, and have a network to provide aid when needed, and this has caused the covens to grow, even in a conservative area.

The total cost of refurbishing the barn, with donated and recycled supplies was about two thousand dollars. Divided between the forty-two members of their two covens, this came to about 48 dollars a piece over six months. I'm not saying we all need to build barn houses, but how hard would it be to start a food basket program for impoverished coveners? We cannot expect the Christian Churches to pick up tabs for us, although dire circumstances may turn us to them, and certainly any program of ours would welcome any in need, not just Wiccans...without strings.

Providing help to our own in need is especially important as the federal government pulls the rug out from under aid programs, and as churches tighten their belts you can bet that anyone not belonging to mainstream religion is going to slip through the safety net. Since we don't "recruit" like other religions, Wicca needs to take care of its members or risk eventually losing more than we gain.

-A Religion of Good Guys-

Part of being Wiccan is dealing with the ideas of the mainstream churches and healing old wounds. I, and a great number of my coven members choose to call ourselves "Wiccans" not "Witches." This doesn't mean we practice a different religion, or that we're going with the stereotype of the Wicked Witch of the West, and it doesn't mean we're "weak" or selling out. I am not a Witch, I've said that before. I don't even like the term Wiccan, but Wittan (wise one) isn't recognized,¹ so I take the lesser of two evils. If you study the word, and look at serious secular discourses on its meanings, (not pop etymologies) you'll probably find that "Witch" and "Wiccan" don't come from Weiq, to shape or Witan, from whence we get "wit," but Vic/Vicce/Vicca, meaning evil strength, from which we get "Victory," "Vice," and a bunch of other double-sided words. When you say Witch, you fill the unknowing ones' heads full of stereotypes, when you say "Wiccan," they either ask "what?" or have heard of it. Why bother with baggage we have little claim to? Even those executed "for Witchcraft" were rarely Witches! It'd be like the Gay/Lesbian, Polish and Rom/Romani/Gypsy populations saying "we're Jewish" because millions of them were killed in Nazi concentration camps too. Yes, the persecution of the Burning Times was bad, yes, it was an excuse to root out non-Christians, but most of the Wittan were spared because of talents they'd perfected from day one. Belief creates reality, we need to cease believing doors will slam and start turning the knobs!

By asserting our religious selves, and acting in unison with other religions, Wiccans gain a voice. One politician I spoke to about school prayer (she was against it already,) said she had "Not realized" the impact that such prayer would have on non- Judeo-Christian religions. The Radical "Conservative" Right says with one side of its mouth that a minority has the right to affect a change, and with the other side it tries to restrict all other minorities. Open your mouth and shout! We are here! We are ready! We're the Good Guys, too!

A pamphlet handed out to Fundamentalist Christians by our organization contained this phrase, "Once we've rid the world of child abuse, murder, rape, lack of respect, hunger and strife, then, if you still feel that way, you can try to convert us, but for now, let's get our priorities straight. If we can't work together toward the same goals, we can at least not hinder each other." Wiccans need to work side by side with those who agree with our causes, and prove that we don't have some vast "conversion agenda." To us, the idea that we're laying in wait to turn the reins of the world into the hands of some feminist overseer and indoctrinate children into sexless, nationless clones with mandatory abortions and sex-filled free love schools seems bizarre, even insane, but there are vast numbers of people who actually believe this! Perhaps you've even accidentally picked up their books or perused their websites? If you have, you understand that the only PR that Wicca gets is created by our enemies, and that wonderful books like those of Scott Cunningham and others that SHOULD be read by non-Wiccans aren't! A good part of this is this

idea of the "New Age" I spoke of earlier . It is a figment, a thing dreamed up to classify us as fads, a way that those who hate us use to illustrate Wicca, classing it as a "Pet Rock," something that they can ignore because in a few years it will be gone. As we grow and swell in numbers, as our secrecy ends, as we lay claim to the pre-Christian past and show that we are not the New Age, but the Old Age coming out of hiding , we can ask "Who's the Pet Rock now?"

Chapter Twelve: Narrowing Your Field

Although most people in Universal Eclectic Wicca remain in the Second Circle indefinitely, there are a few who choose to narrow their field and dedicate themselves to one or two aspects of The Craft. These people form the "Third Circle" of UEW.

Unlike many Gardnerian-based trads, UEW's Third Circle is not seen as the inevitable conclusion to studying Wicca. It is the Second Circle of UEW that Corresponds to the "Third Degree" of other trads, with all the powers that go with it. a Second Circle leader may even become a lay-minister, a type of non-ordained Priest(ess). The Third Circle is both difficult to attain and time-consuming to belong to, hardly the place for the majority of us, who need to keep real, secular jobs or starve away in the wilderness.

In order to become a part of the Third Circle, you are asked to make a Unique contribution to Wicca as a whole. The creation of a Pagan Alliance, a series of articles in Pagan magazines requiring work and research and writing a book are all examples of "Unique contributions." The point of the contribution is not to further Wicca, but to expand the contributor. If one discovers nothing new in his/her creation, the point of it has been lost.

There are Five "schools" within the Third Circle, called paths. Most people who narrow their field of study do it within these paths, The Way of The Scribe, The Way of The Bard, The Way of The Artisan, The Way of The Counselor and The Way of The Seeker. The Five Paths are similar to the techniques of at least one Druidic School, and were originally created by Tamryn Wyrmsstar and The Brothers of The Wolf Moon based on their experiences with several Druidic, Neo-Druidic, Shamanistic and Wiccan traditions which they originally incorporated into Wolf Moon Wicca, a defunct all-male trad which, in its literature said it "Picked up where the Dianic tradition dumped us." Originally based on the thought that "every man has his own face," the Five Paths are traced by its members to a Gaulic (not Gaelic) Fam-trad of surviving Druids who gathered in five groups of five and one "master circle" which consisted of the leaders of each group. The Five paths, Mage, Hunter, Scribe, Bard and Smith, reflected the practices, passed down father to son of these groups, and each member of the group was a master of their path.

In Universal Eclectic Wicca, we changed the "Mage" path, which supposedly has also been called "Alchemist," to "Seeker" to represent the modern Alchemists who range from hard-core metaphysicists to lab technicians to investigative reporters, anyone who uses a science to discover something "new." Likewise, "smith" was both outdated and too narrow a grouping, so we changed it to Artisan to include anyone who physically creates "stuff" with his talents. Scribe and Bard are relatively unchanged, although the subcategories of both are numerous from group to group, and "Hunter" didn't sit well with the vegetarian membership, who were nice enough to abstain from our ritual hunts on sacred (preserved) land without faulting those who chose to participate. We added the category "counselor" because of a trend we

noticed of people who seemed to be poor at leadership positions but great as listeners, and subdivided it into teacher and counselor.

The Scribe, called First Path, includes those who choose writing as their expression and those who organize the coven and its works into a unit. In "deep" ritual situations, the scribe's robe is black, often embroidered with multi-colored runes representing knowledge and Gods of the Mind and knowledge. Appearing in the World of the Scribe is the "Cult of Psyche Arisen", which consists of at least four people with fascinating views. If ever I convince them to publish their Book of Shadows or at least let me adapt it, maybe we'll know what's going on inside their brains, if not their rituals.

The Bard, called the Second Path, is the bringer of knowledge and the bearer of news. In ritual, the Bard is drummer, storyteller and any number of other expressive parts. I admit that I have a certain fondness for this path, having worn the Skyrobe at my first Third Circle ceremony. The Skyrobe, the ritual Bardic robe is a light blue, often with embroidered Celt/Pict-like knotwork. Occasionally, a Coven led by a Bard chooses to practice one of the Bardic trads, and all of the members are trained toward the Third circle and the Skyrobe. This type of Bardic Wicca is just one of a number of Universal Eclectic Wicca sub-groups and one of the infinite possibilities for specialization within the trad.

The Artisan, The Earthrobed Third Path, is the creator, the one who works with her/his hand to form the objects used in Ritual. The Artisan's talents range from chef to gardener to weaponsmith, and vary widely from person to person. One Artisan I know says he is a person who "gave his heart to Wicca years ago and now needs to plunge both hands into it and make it grow." Of Universal Eclectic Wicca Third Circle members who consider themselves "Druid, non-Wiccan," just under one half are Artisans, most of the rest are Seekers.

The Path of The Seeker, the Fourth path, seems to attract the lion's share of Metaphysicists and "standard" scientists. In the trad from which we learned of the Seeker, he is the Mage, discovering new things to teach the coven. Two important subgroups currently are formed on The Seeker's Path, The Mage, one who has dedicated himself to Magick, and The Geomancer, one who has dedicated his Magick to the study/healing of the Earth. Another name for Geomancer is Seeker-druid, and was "added" by the initial members of Universal Eclectic Wicca, who, as I've said, brought a lot of their Druidism into Universal Eclectic Wicca.

The youngest path in Universal Eclectic Wicca is The Path of The Counselor, which has existed for about two years and is generating some excitement and reshuffling in the Circles. Originally, The Counselor was an inactive priest(ess), but a large number of people appeared who wanted advisor or teacher positions but not leadership, and this Path appeared to us with them. Many Third Circle Counselors become non-ordained priests or advisor to a Priest. In Ritual situations where a coven has decided to use the traditional robe colors, counselors either wear deep, cobalt or navy blue or emerald green. The green represents the fertile mind sown by a teacher, the deep blue is a combination of Bard and Seeker, a person whose job it is to keep the community aware of the new developments and discoveries and use tales of history to help with present day situations.

I find it hard to believe in a tradition in which you cannot achieve a position without contacting a High Priest and traveling to undergo some rite in which you magically "Become" what you know you already are. In Universal Eclectic Wicca, the Third Circle is the only "Certified" Circle, and the reason for this is unfortunate, but simple. There are people out there who "claim" to have a degree but don't. I don't mean the people who belong to strange traditions or have trained themselves, I mean people who say "I am a umpteenth-degree whatever with this tradition," without ever gaining that degree. In Universal Eclectic Wicca we ask that a person seeking a

Certificate of the Third Circle be interviewed by a Priest(ess) and that that person sign a document that says that they will follow the Rules of Universal Eclectic Wicca. This can be done over the phone and by mail when needed. When The Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca has the person's signed Declaration of Intent and a copy or picture of his/her Unique contribution the priest(ess) receives a Certificate, which has a eight-digit random number attached to it. The only numbers on file are those numbers we've issued, and the name on the certificate is the only name those numbers will go with. This system isn't perfect, but it does seem to make fraud a little less prevalent in Universal Eclectic Wicca than in some traditions I won't mention.

-On clergy-

Universal Eclectic Wicca has three types of clergy, Lay Ministers, Elected Priests and Ordained Priests. Regardless of title, all Clergy are elected by their coven, either in pairs or separately. Positions are held for a year and a day, with elections held the day a term runs out. Regardless of a person's clerical title, someone who is re-elected for ten years straight is said to be a "High" Priest(ess) OF THAT COVEN and is expected to step down for at least a year and let another hold the reins, acting as an advisor to the coven's leader. Before a person can ask for a vote and be considered for the position, (s)he needs to prove that they haven't merely sat around "being" a priest(ess) and that they've provided a significant service to the coven. A leave of absence by a priest or priestess with a theological purpose, such as studying for a degree relevant to their position or writing the tradition's textbook allows "time off" for those holding the position of Priest(ess) without loss of title. Likewise, anyone who has ever held the title is still called a "priest(ess)", although not many choose to do so.

Many Universal Eclectic Wicca Covens have no Third Circle Members, their leaders, Second Circle members who've been elected to the coven leadership are called "Lay-Ministers." A Lay-Minister can do everything a Priest(ess) can do except teach people above the Second Circle, perform civil Handfastings or mediate Handfasting contracts. The majority of UEW's coven leadership are Lay-Ministers. Lay-Ministry allows for a lessening of accountability to the coven and is the more effective position for those without the time to dedicate to intense Theological discourse, crisis intervention and everything else the coven might require of them.

Elected Priest(esse)s are Third Circle members who have been elected to Coven Leadership. Their position as a member of the Third Circle allows them to teach other people at that level, as no one in UEW can teach beyond their own level. Elected Priest(esse)s may perform Handfastings, but they are not recognized by the state. Elected Priest(esse)s whose secular careers as Family Lawyers, Social workers or Professional Mediators give them special talent in mediating a handfasting contract may do so, but those without such experience may not.

Ordained Priest(esse)s have gone a step beyond election. Ordination varies from State to State, and place to place and it is the ordained Priest(esse)s whom the state recognizes as Religious Leaders. While many states have ordination procedures that the candidate will have to follow, The Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca has guidelines which must be met before we allow someone to become ordained. I will be frank with you, these ordination Procedures were not in place when I first became a Priestess, if they had been, I would not have been ordained. I am pleased to say, however, that I have since gone through each and every one of these requirements. **Ordination Procedures of The Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca**

"Candidates for Ordination must be Third Circle Members who've been elected to two terms as coven leader. One of these terms may've been as a Second Circle Lay-Minister. The Candidate

must've studied for at least one year each in any two of the main paths of The Third Circle, either under an Ordained Priest(ess) or under a Third circle member of that path. The Candidate must be sponsored for Ordination by an Ordained Priest(ess), this Priest(ess) will serve as the Candidate's Advisor throughout the proceedings. In addition to these ecclesiastical requirements, the candidate for ordination must be a High School Graduate with a true diploma, GED graduates are taken on a case by case basis and even then, very rarely. The candidate must demonstrate an in depth knowledge of Wicca, Universal Eclectic Wicca and Comparative Theology by discourse before a council consisting of a pre-first circle student, graduates of the First, Second and Third Circle and an Ordained Priest. In addition, the candidate for ordination must've completed at least 18 hours of college-level course work in Human Services, the Social Sciences and/or Comparative theology, in order to count toward ordination, this course work will not be counted if the final and/or cumulative grade was less than B (3.0). Before The Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca will recognize a Priest(ess) as "ordained" (s)he must complete several tasks requested by the ordained Priest(ess) advising him/her. These tasks must be designed to help point out and correct a fault or weakness in the candidate's style of Leadership."

As you can see, ordination is not for everyone, and by no means should anyone ever feel "Pushed" in that direction. As always, whatever works for you is the best thing for you to do.

In the Third Circle, much of your study is self-directed, and those who like to have tasks, hard or simple, set out before them in neat little rows are warned out of the Third Circle. I admit, however, that I have seen a few Scribes who were more "secretary to this or that priest" than "Scribe." One assumes that such arrangement is by choice.

You may've noticed we speak more of "covens" in the Third Circle, this is because we believe that advanced work in Wicca requires an expanding circle, people to bounce your ideas off. It may take years before you find even two people who you wish in your coven, but a coven of three is better than solitude at this level, so a coven of three it is.

A coven in Universal Eclectic Wicca isn't always a group of people gathering to do their rituals together. A UEW's definition of coven also includes bands of solitaires gathering together for discussion and decision making, and one should by no means feel that they need to give up anything to join a coven. If it isn't a mostly positive experience (every coven DOES have "off" days,) then leave. Likewise, don't make the mistake of "holding together" a coven that has no "chemistry," it only leads to anger on the part of the ill-suited coven and the ill-suited priest(ess.) Unfortunately, I speak from experience.

Chapter Thirteen: Personal Remembrances.

Well, there it is, all of Universal Eclectic Wicca in its entirety, with some omissions of course,(I could spend a whole chapter on "septs" the traditions within the tradition, but I think you've had enough of me by now!) and some nice little additions courtesy of Tamryn Wyrmstar, who has decided to use his old craft name to preserve his identity and Jonah Windsinger, who also declines to speak openly. You may be wondering how, or why even, the task of writing this work came to me, I mean, I've been a priestess since 1992 or so, and my initial priestesship was held in dispute by my coven for quite a while. I was a relative newcomer to Wicca, although I feel my mom raised me more Wiccan than she knew, and the coven had a hard time with my "sailing" into the Third Circle.

I've always been a tad mentally hyper-active, I get one thing in my mind and I block everything else out. I breathed UEW in when I encountered it. It said, I discovered, everything I'd been saying for years. I won't deny that my personal introduction to Wicca was less than spectacular. The first book anyone gave me on Wicca was *The Spiral Dance*, and I knew that the traditions and practices just weren't written for the earthy Yankees of the snowbound northeast. Thankfully, I had a very cool Dianic Priestess go, "well, maybe this isn't the right way for you." She introduced me to a woman from my area who I'd met in passing about a million times. This woman, a Gardnerian Priestess, was creating a tradition after leaving the Gardnerian group she'd been with since the sixties, and she'd gathered up a microcoven of dissenters who immediately loved me to death. I remember sneaking out to go to rituals, even though, in retrospect, my mother probably would've let me go, and running to my teacher's house after high school so that I could have a lesson, then be driven home in time to pass the bus and get in before mom called to check on me from work.

I've had some of the best discoveries of my life since then, like finding out that the girl in High School that I wanted to tell so badly that I was a Wiccan, and training to be a priestess, was the daughter of a Wiccan Priest and wouldn't have laughed at me at all. Or discovering that a Priestess named "Stardancer" was actually a friend from High school and that my leaving a copy of a book on Wicca at her house was what started her. I went to Boston and discovered a coven with the same name, trad and difficulties as ours, and again and again found myself swept away in this beautiful group of people.

I left Wicca for a few years because the Coven I'd trained in had disbanded with our priestess' move to California, and I faced personal crisis after crisis, finally turning back to Wicca after the birth of my son. When I came back, I thought at first that the changes I noticed were in "everybody else," but slowly, I realized that I was noticing what people had blocked out for me, or that I had managed to block out for myself, that Wiccans had a dark side, and that it infused everything with those same superficial attitudes I hated in High School. Covens were popularity and manipulation organizations for the most part, but even with a shelf full of Buckland, Cunningham, et al, I didn't feel right with solitary Wicca.

I achieved the Third Degree of the tradition that would become UEW in a ceremony with a priestess who was "in town," and a few weeks later was offered the position of Priestess, I declined because I couldn't stand what I was seeing in Wicca and had begun to look elsewhere. Somehow, I ended up being in a coven who's leader "seemed" better than all of the others I'd met, and it took that same woman who brought me to Wicca saying, "why do you follow him if he treats you like crap?" for me to realize that I was really suffering in this coven, and steadily beginning to treat myself as badly as I was being treated. I realized then that there is a major generation gap in Wicca, the "old" Wiccans, who resist change, and the "new" Wiccans who are the children of the sixties and know nothing but change. I got out.

I formed a horrible coven. I was messed up, my coveners were messed up and we left hating each other. It happens. I grew from it, returned to my first priestess and "took the step," becoming UEW's youngest priestess. From my new position, I launched "RELIGION: Other, the Central New York Pagan Alliance." I was told I was corrupt, power hungry and "had no right" gathering people together, but the solitaires spoke. "Thank You for our voice back," they said, and when a man claiming to be Wiccan seduced his 16 year old members it was Religion: Other that called the Police, Religion:Other who shut him down and Religion:Other who warned the world.

That was my first trial by fire. I went to bed every night for two weeks with tears in my eyes because if RO had been more "out there" it wouldn't have happened. Not long after, a metaphysical bookstore gave us a list of people, who we called and sent information packets to. For legal reasons, we've always listed the person, organization, etc. that refers people to Religion:Other, but the store took offense at us using their name on the form letter. To this day the store, which also sponsors very pricey courses in Wicca, refuses to keep our signs on their "public" bulletin board, the fight with them, which left me nauseous with anger at their blatant lack of respect for their own community, was the second trial by fire, but RO went on.

It got nasty, I'm sorry to say, and for a while I was the victim of a nasty whisper campaign I later discovered to be the work of the same person who RO had ousted. Most of the whispers were ignored by everyone, but I was confronted on a few of them. Yes, when I was in High School I tried Satanism, no, I am not a Satanist, no, I never performed any kind of sacrifice, and neither did any of the Satanists I hung out with. It was a group of kids getting wasted and talking backwards, it lasted two weeks in summer, I was there for two days of it and left because I had no interest either in drugs or the "group's" leader. I thought that those rumors and the need to defend my past was a trial by fire, but it wasn't.

My last trial by fire came when the Coven I had been in announced that five of the original members, including my priestess and two close friends, were HIV positive, as was a good chunk of the coven they had come from, where unprotected sex Magick (in the eighties) was a common occurrence. When I wrote the first draft of this work, we'd already lost one person, and the others had "withdrawn" from their friends with the idea that this somehow made it easier on us. By the Will of the Gods, I've tested negatively repeatedly, probably because I became of age into an AIDS aware Wicca, and to this day the guilt I sometimes feel of "being spared" burns inside far worse than any other pain I've faced.

Perhaps wrongly, I feel I was spared in part to carry on the legacy, I was always the kid of our coven, the dreamer. My priestess, who has since passed on, cried when I read her the rough draft of All One Wicca because it represents her dreams and mine, mingled into reality.

The idea of Unity, of peace and friendship may be a dream right now. Divisiveness is rampant, and it may be years, or even decades, before we fully realize the dream of those who went before. Won't you join us in the dream?