

THERE IS NO SIMPLE NOR SINGULAR definition of modern Paganism (also be referred to as Neo-Paganism). Essentially, it is an umbrella term referring to a diverse, colourful and ever-evolving tapestry of beliefs. Some Pagan paths are organised and well-established; others are unique and personal.

Words such as ‘Pagan’, ‘Witch’ and ‘Heathen’ have been reclaimed from any negative taint history may have given them. All Pagan paths are positive and life-affirming, despite the vast and diverse population the word Pagan or Witch might cover.

The following explanations are not conclusive but are meant to give a sense to the general reader of the diversity of belief within Paganism:

WICCA:

A modern Pagan religious/spiritual path founded in the early 20th century in Britain, now found worldwide. Wicca has a distinct set of rituals, customs and beliefs that differentiates it from other kinds of Paganism and has itself influenced a lot of other paths. It is possibly the biggest and most publicly visible kind of Paganism in the western world. Wicca can cover a vast spectrum, from the strictly traditional to free-form eclectic variants. This vast spectrum has a more or less mutually shared core structure of belief and practice used at individual or coven discretion. e.g. a God and Goddess, Casting Circles, Drawing Down the Moon, Sabbats, Esbats, Skyclad, Law of Three-Fold Return.

[For more information please refer to PAN Inc’s ‘*Wicca & Witchcraft: Which is Which?*’ brochure]

TRADITIONAL WICCA:

Usually refers to Gardnerian, Alexandrian or another form of Wicca, usually predating the 1970s. Traditional Wiccans are often oath-bound, therefore formal training and initiation is usually a requirement of participation in a coven.

ECLECTIC WICCA:

Using the core structure of Traditional Wicca and often incorporating non-Wiccan components. The eclectic or syncretic elements might come from other Pagan paths and beyond. A lot of Eclectic paths, both Wiccan and Pagan, have their origins in the 1970s, a time when there was a lot of interest in alternative beliefs and resulted cross-pollination between Paganism, the New Age movement and the introduction of Eastern ideas to the West.

RECLAIMING TRADITION:

One of the most famous traditions to come out of North America. Founded by Starhawk in the 1970’s, this is a very organic Pagan path which, in its early days, overlapped with the Women’s Spirituality and Goddess movements. Like many

eclectic Pagan traditions it uses the core structure of Wicca as a base for an ever-evolving, progressive tradition.

WITCHES & WITCHCRAFT:

A very broad and complex term. The generally understood Pagan notion of a modern Witch is a *wise man* or *wise woman* who uses *the craft of the witch* — meaning simple rituals, folk magic, herbal knowledge, etc — for the purposes of healing, blessing and so on. Practitioners might also refer to themselves as Kitchen Witches or Hedge Witches. Witches might also be Wiccans. There have been lots of different ‘witchcrafts’ throughout history and throughout the modern world still. No one has exclusive claim on the word. Historically, *workers of witchcraft* didn’t call themselves ‘witches’. Usually such non-English words were translated universally as ‘witch’ despite differing beliefs, cultural backgrounds and geographic distance between practitioners.

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DRUIDS & DRUIDRY:

Another complex term with a variety of meanings that could refer to historical Druids of ancient Celtic Europe or a variety of contemporary spiritual paths. Historically, the function of Druids were those of priests, judges and teachers. During the 18th century the notion of Druidry became heavily romanticised and thusly reinvented. This revival influenced modern Pagan Druidry. Druidry is also not always exclusively ‘Celtic’, nor is it an ongoing ancient practice.

What is a ‘Druid’?:

- Some Druid paths carry on what the 18th-century Druid revival began, however such groups are not always strictly Pagan.
- Other Druid paths are more eclectic and syncretic and use a variety of elements, particularly Shamanism, to create a new body of rituals and lore. The focus is strongly on personal experience and progressiveness.
- A third example, which overlaps with Celtic Reconstructionism (see ‘*Reconstructionism*’ right), relies on using contemporary academic thought as a resource to gain insights into practicing a historically-conscious kind of modern Druidry.

There are a wide variety of modern Druid groups all with their own aims and intentions. Two well-known organisations are the ADF (*Ár nDraiocht Féin*) in North America founded by Isaac Bonewits in the 1970s and the OBOD in Britain, which was founded in the early 20th century by Ross Nicholls. Nicholls came into contact with Gerald Gardner and there is speculation of a cross-pollination of ideas between the two men. However Nicholl’s Druidry did not really take off until after Gardner’s Wicca — but there is often an overlap between the two paths today.

CELTIC PATHS

Celtic, in a modern sense, refers to the cultures of Scotland, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Wales, Ireland and Brittany (north-

coast of France) however it can also refer to the historical peoples of Celtic Europe.

Not all Celtic Pagans are Druids. Some paths are pan-Celtic and eclectic, influenced by Arthuriana, Wicca, Druidry and the New Age. Others are Reconstructionist and strongly identify with modern Celtic culture and are polytheistic.

NORTHERN EUROPEAN PATHS (‘HEATHENRY’)

This covers a wide variety of cultural groups: Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, the Baltic regions, England, indeed anywhere where a Germanic tongue (such as English) is spoken. The most well-known of the modern Northern paths is Ásatrú (meaning essentially, ‘*true to the Aesir*’) however there are many more ever-evolving paths. Followers of such paths generally identify as ‘Heathen’ as it is a Germanic word. These are usually strongly polytheistic paths devoted to the Aesir and/or Vanir. Honour, truthfulness and hospitality are considered as important character traits. Runes also play an important cultural role. Despite the stereotypical portrayal of ‘macho’ Vikings, the male and female are equally important in Northern paths.

RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Refers to using modern scholarship across a wide variety of subjects (archaeology, philology, anthropology, history, etc) in an attempt to understand as much as possible about a particular culture and their historical Pagan beliefs. These type of paths might refer to themselves as Reconstructionist or Revivalist or Traditionalist — they are not always quite the same. Generally these paths adhere to religious/spiritual beliefs, practices and world-views that existed within a specific culture and aim to be modern-day counterparts to the older beliefs. Reconstructed religions are not quaint curiosities nor historical re-enactments but dynamic, progressive and as adaptable to the modern world as any other Pagan path. Also, there is often a strong and healthy sense of cultural identity and equal importance placed on male and female. Some examples of Reconstructionist religions are :

- *Religio Romana*: the reconstruction of Roman Paganism.
- *Hellenismos*: Ancient Greece
- *Celtic Reconstructionism*; also *Gaelic Traditionalism*
- *Ásatrú*: Norse/Germanic
- *Theodisc Geleafa*: Anglo-Saxon
- There are also Slavic, Baltic, Egyptian (Kemetic) and many other forms of Reconstructionism.

GODDESS TRADITIONS

A general term used to refer to any modern path where there is an emphasis on Goddesses and female divinity. There is often an overlap between Paganism and Womens Spirituality; which means that the practitioners of Goddess traditions are not always exclusively Pagan. A well known Goddess path is Dianic,

through there are many variations and approaches. Amongst Pagans, the notion of a Goddess can be considered from an animistic, duotheistic, polytheist, pantheistic, henotheist or panentheistic perspective.

GOD TRADITIONS

Less common, but happening concurrently with Goddess Traditions, are paths where there is a strong reverence for Gods and masculine divinity. This is not an oppressive movement but a parallel approach to that of the Goddess, a rediscovering of positive male energies and practices for the benefit of all Pagans. Like the Goddess traditions, Pagan Gods can be considered from an animistic, duotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, henotheist or panentheistic perspective.

GLBT PAGANISM

The inclusive and non-discriminatory nature of Paganism means that there is a representation of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Pagans right across the spectrum. There are also many Pagan traditions and groups dedicated to address the needs of GLBT Pagans. The Radical Faeries is a well-known men's group from North America. Dianic paths are very popular amongst women.

SHAMANISM

Shamanistic activities are believed to have existed throughout the world since prehistoric times. Shamanism referred originally to the traditional healing and religious practices of Siberia. Nowadays it has a broader meaning to refer to a near-universal set of practices found all over the world whereby shamans might heal, communicate with the spirit realms, control the weather, interpret dreams, perform divinations or engage in out-of-body travel. Shamanism is accepted by Pagans as being positive and life-affirming. In the West, Shamanism is often influenced by Michael Harner's 'core shamanism', however it relies on personal experience as much as written sources.

CEREMONIAL MAGIC:

Ceremonial Magic is a tradition with a very long history and a complex set of theories and practices. Some well known historical figures are Dion Fortune, Aleister Crowley and Eliphas Lévi. It's body of work is inspired largely by Hermeticism (the study and practice of occult philosophy and magic) and includes the Golden Dawn, Goetic magick, Enochian Magic, Tarot, Astrology, Qabalah (which relates to Jewish mysticism) and Thelemic ritual. Ceremonial magical societies are found throughout the world and often provide training and initiation.

Although Ceremonial Magic is not Pagan as such, it heavily influenced the early development of 20th-century Paganism, primarily Wicca and some Druidic traditions. Many modern Pagans choose to study Ceremonial Magic in order to enrich their own understanding and experience.

To join PAN Inc or for more information

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An annual membership of \$40 Single (GST Inc) or \$30 Concession. brings many benefits, including discounts at participating retailers, our regular 'Small Tapestry' publication listing Pagan events and gatherings across Australia, and regular updates on the legal and media work happening on behalf of the Pagan community. For more information, please post or email your details as follows:

Name: _____

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(Do not send money with this. A formal membership application will be sent to you via the post along with further information about PAN Inc)

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