

INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft is, essentially, the use of folk magics; the use of charms, herbs, incantations, simple rituals, etc for a particular effect such as healing or blessings.

Anthropologically speaking, Witchcraft is a near universal *phenomenon*, found in every culture and throughout history. It is **not** a distinct or universal *religion* as such. It usually exists within a larger cultural or religious situation — such as Paganism and/or Wicca — and the rituals, symbols and customs therein.

Therefore, a modern Pagan can practice Witchcraft and be a Witch independently of Wicca. Many Wiccans also practice Witchcraft and are Witches, but many Wiccans also do not practice Witchcraft nor consider themselves Witches.

Wicca *is* a distinct religion; it has theologies, rituals and customs of its own. This differentiates it from other Pagan and non-Pagan belief systems. Wicca draws its name from an older word for ‘witch’ and hence the common confusion between Wicca and Witchcraft. Wicca can be traced back to the early- to mid-twentieth century and is usually accepted as being founded by Gerald Gardner.

Claiming to be Wiccan without attempting to learn the heritage and origins of the Wicca can often mean missing the point of it altogether. Further, there is a risk in being unable to adequately defend Wiccan beliefs or educate others about the history and the heritage of Wicca.

If a seeker on the Pagan path wishes to become Wiccan, ensure that the beliefs and practices of Wicca (and the particular tradition of Wicca) are in alignment with what the seeker requires from a Pagan belief system. Some traditional teachings of Wicca state that it takes a year-and-a-day before initiation into Wicca can happen, so the student will be expected to study as hard and as seriously as they would in conversion to any other religion.

This “year-and-a-day” is not necessary for becoming a Pagan or a Witch. If a person wants to become a Pagan or a Witch they could perform a rite of self-dedication; a simple ceremony where they may dedicate themselves to their chosen Deity/Dei-

ties or their Pagan path. This ‘rite of passage’ symbolically marks their commitment to their personal Pagan path.

Many spiritual and occult paths have the ultimate aim of personal transformation. Pagans, Witches and Wiccans can equally achieve personal transformation.

A practitioner of Wicca, either male or female, is a *Wiccan*. A practitioner of Witchcraft, either male or female, is a *Witch*. Though many Wiccans and Witches may prefer to exclusively worship a Goddess, a God or both, this does not necessarily imply any gender inequalities within Paganism as both are held as sacred. Essentially, there are 3 main categories of Witch:

- Pagan Witches, those who are not Wiccan
- Wiccans who are also Witches (however not all Wiccans consider themselves as Witches)
- Non-Pagan Witches (which is beyond the scope of this overview).

However, as they potentially might all refer to themselves as “Witches”, the need to understand one from another is important for clarity and to help recognise a suitable personal path.

Not all Wiccans are Witches

Not all Witches are Wiccan

Not all Witches are Pagan

All Wiccans are Pagan

Not all Pagans are Wiccan

Not all Pagans are Witches

MODERN PAGAN WITCHCRAFT

Modern Pagan Witchcraft is a broad term, covering many different types of beliefs and practices. Despite the varieties, it is a positive and life-affirming path for the individual. The definition of Witchcraft is an entirely personal one; each Witch or collective of Witches will often have different opinions to the next.

The arts of “Witchcraft” can refer to many things, most commonly the practice of divination, spellwork, healing, soothsaying, herbal knowledge, midwifery, and so on. Often there is an overlap with many shamanistic practices. These are all traditional and venerable practices and abilities. Any negative taint on the

word Witch or Witchcraft is a relic from history and is nothing to do with modern approaches to Witchcraft or Wicca.

In a modern Paganism, Witchcraft practices could be done to honour a particular season, for good health, for agricultural or domestic blessings, in honour of a Deity or ancestors, to be guided/protected by deities, or for insight when making life-changing decisions.

Most Pagan Witches today adopted Witchcraft in adulthood. Often they feel their childhood experiences are harmonious with their adult Pagan beliefs. However in future, it will be more and more common to find people who are reared as Pagans, Witches or Wiccans from birth by their parents and wider families/communities.

WICCA

Wicca is a distinct Pagan religion with many different traditions within. It was founded in the 20th Century by Gerald Gardner, who was inspired by the theories of Margaret Murray, notions of reviving pre-Christian traditions, Ceremonial Magic and Freemasonry, amongst other things.

It is the most visible of the different Pagan paths as it’s had the most exposure to the general public through media reports, movies and popular tv shows. The two words, Wicca and Witch, are often used interchangeably but any representation in the media or by the entertainment industry does not necessarily reflect everyday Wiccans or Witches.

Despite the range and difference in Wiccan traditions, Wicca can be summarised to include some of the following (though this is not conclusive):

- the law of Threefold Return
- the Wiccan Rede
- a God and a Goddess
- 8 holidays of the Wheel of the Year (Sabbats)
- celebrate Full Moons (Esbats)
- create sacred space though casting a Circle

It must be remembered that not all Wiccans utilise Magick and not all Wiccans consider themselves

'Witches'. All Wiccans are Pagan.

In Australia, Wiccans usually cast their circles anti-clockwise (sunwise) and celebrate the Sabbats according to the southern seasons, but there are some who might prefer to keep to the traditional Northern Hemisphere directions.

Wicca is often described as a modern day initiatory Mystery religion. Many traditions may require a would-be Wiccan to be initiated via a coven, however many Wiccans also recognise and accept self-initiation/self-dedication as valid entry into the path.

Traditional Wicca: Usually refers to Gardnerian or Alexandrian Wicca. The practitioners practice Wicca as laid out by Gardner or Saunders with little deviation.

Eclectic Wicca: Wiccans who incorporate practices or techniques from non-Wiccan and sometimes non-Pagan sources.

RECOMMENDED READING

Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium
by Vivianne Crowley (Thorsons Publishers)

Witch Crafting: A Spiritual Guide to Making Magic
by Phyllis Currott

There's A Witch in The Boardroom
by Stacey Demarco

Practicing the Witch's Craft
Edited by Douglas Ezzy (Allen and Unwin)

Progressive Witchcraft: Spirituality, Mysteries, and Training in Modern Wicca
by Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone (New Page)

The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft
by Rosemary Ellen Guiley (Checkmark Books)

Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia
by Lynne Hume (Melbourne University Press)

*The Triumph of the Moon:
A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*
by Ronald Hutton (Oxford University Press)

*Which Witch Is Which? A Concise Guide To
Wiccan And Neo-pagan Paths And Traditions*
Compiled and Edited by Patricia Telesco (New Page Books)

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:

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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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