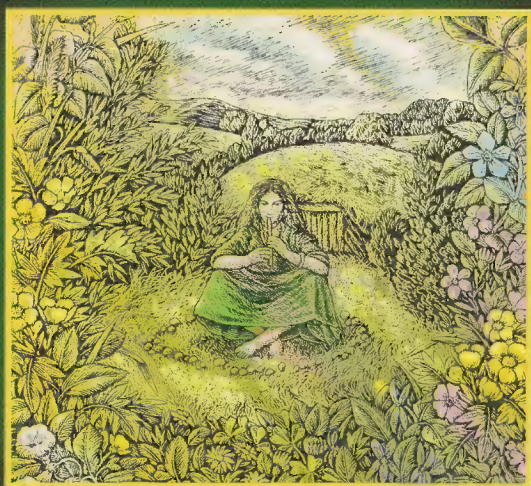


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WICCA



A GUIDE FOR
THE
SOLITARY
PRACTITIONER

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM

INCLUDES AUTHOR'S BOOK OF SHADOWS

About the Author

Scott Cunningham practiced elemental magic for over twenty years. He authored more than thirty books, both fiction and nonfiction. Scott's books reflect a broad range of interests from the New Age sphere, where he was highly regarded. He passed from this life on March 28, 1993, after a long illness.

WICCA

A GUIDE FOR THE
SOLITARY PRACTITIONER

SCOTT
CUNNINGHAM



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This book is dedicated to the forces that watch over and guide us—
however we may envision or name them.

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Preface

THIS BOOK, THE result of sixteen years of practical experience and research, is a guidebook outlining basic Wiccan theory and practice. It is written with the solitary student or practitioner in mind; there are no coven rituals or magical group dynamics described herein.

The Wicca as described here is “new.” It is not a revelation of ancient rituals handed down for thousands of years. This does not invalidate it, however, for it is based on time-honored practices.

A three-thousand-year-old incantation to manna isn’t necessarily more powerful or effective than one improvised during a private rite. The person practicing the ritual or spell determines its success.

If centuries-old incantations are nothing more to you than senseless gibberish, chances are the ritual won’t work, any more than would a Shinto ceremony in the hands of a Methodist. To be effective, rituals must speak to you.

Rituals are at the heart of Wicca for some, and are pleasant adjuncts to Wicca’s philosophy and way of life for others. In Wicca, as with every religion, ritual is a means of contacting the divine. Effective ritual unites the worshipper with deity. Ineffective ritual kills spirituality.

There are rituals in this book, yes, but they’re guideposts, not holy writ. I wrote them so that others, using them as general guidelines, could create their own.

Some people might say, “But that’s just your stuff. We want the *real* Wicca! *Tell us the secrets!*”

There is not, and can never be, one “pure” or “true” or “genuine” form of Wicca. There are no central governing agencies, no physical

leaders, no universally recognized prophets or messengers. Although specific, structured forms of Wicca certainly exist, they aren't in agreement regarding ritual, symbolism, and theology. Because of this healthy individualism, no one ritual or philosophical system has emerged to consume the others.

Wicca is varied and multi-faceted. As in every religion, the Wiccan spiritual experience is one shared with deity alone. This book is simply one way, based on my experiences and the instruction I have received, to practice Wicca.

Although I wrote it, it didn't hatch out of thin air. The jeweler who facets rough emeralds didn't create the gemstones; nor the potter the clay. I've tried to present a blending of the major themes and ritual structures of Wicca, not to create a new form, but to present one so that others can develop their own Wiccan practices.

When I began learning Wicca there were few books, certainly no published Books of Shadows.* Wiccan rituals and magical texts are secret within many traditions of Wicca, and it wasn't until recently that any systems have "gone public." Due to this fact, few Wiccans wrote books describing the rituals and inner teachings of Wicca. Those outside the Wicca (or the Craft as it is also known) who wrote of it could necessarily report only garbled or incomplete pictures.

Within a few years of my introduction to Wicca, however, many authentic, informative books began to be published. As I continued my studies, both independently and under teachers I had met, I realized that anyone trying to learn and practice Wicca solely from published sources would gain a sadly unbalanced picture.

Most Wiccan authors tout their own form of Wicca. This makes sense: write what you know. Unfortunately, many of the foremost Wiccan authors share similar views, and so most of the published Wiccan material is repetitive.

Also, most of these books are geared toward coven-(group) oriented Wicca. This poses a problem for anyone unable to find a minimum of

* See glossary for unfamiliar terms.

four or five interested, compatible persons to create a coven. It also lays a burden on those who desire private religious practice.

Perhaps my true reason for writing this book—besides numerous requests—is strictly personal. I not only wish to present an alternate to staid, structured Wiccan books, I also want to return something for the training I have received in this contemporary religion.

Although I occasionally teach, and Wicca always draws a crowd, I prefer the medium of printed words to point out some of the things I have learned. Although nothing can replace one-on-one teaching, this isn't practical for all those desiring to learn.

And so, several years ago, I began jotting down notes and chapters that eventually became this book. To avoid becoming too narrow-minded (Sybil Leek once said that it was dangerous writing about your own religion—you're too close to it), I've had Wiccan friends read and comment on early drafts to ensure that the picture of Wicca presented here isn't too limited or dogmatic.

Please don't misunderstand me. Though this book's goal is a wider understanding of, and appreciation of Wicca, I'm not proselytizing. Like most Wiccans, I'm not out to change your spiritual and religious beliefs; it's none of my business.

However, with the continuing interest in nontraditional religions, concern over environmental destruction, and a wide interest in the Wiccan religion, I hope this book partially answers one of the questions I'm most commonly asked: "What is Wicca?"

Linguistic Note

Much disagreement concerning the exact (and original) meaning of the word “Wicca” presently exists. It’s not my intention to enter into or add to such discussions, but I don’t feel that I can use this term without defining it. Therefore, “Wicca” will be used within this book to describe both the religion itself (a loosely organized pagan religion centering toward reverence for the creative forces of nature, usually symbolized by a goddess and a god), as well as its practitioners of both sexes. The term “Warlock,” though sometimes used to describe male practitioners, is virtually never used by Wiccans themselves; hence I’ve avoided it here. Though some use “Wicca” and “Witch” almost interchangeably, I prefer the older, less-encumbered word “Wicca,” and so use it almost exclusively.

Introduction

WICCA, THE RELIGION of the “Witches,” has long been shrouded in secrecy. Anyone interested in learning “the Craft” had to content themselves with hints from books and articles. The Wiccans wouldn’t say much, save that they weren’t looking for new members.

Growing numbers of people today are dissatisfied with traditional religious structures. Many are searching for a personally involving religion, one that celebrates both physical and spiritual realities, in which attunement with deity is coupled with the practice of magic.

Wicca is just such a religion, centering around reverence for nature as seen in the Goddess and the God. Its spiritual roots in antiquity, acceptance of magic, and mysterious nature have made it particularly appealing. Until recently, the lack of public information concerning Wicca and its apparent exclusivity has caused much frustration among interested students.

Wicca doesn’t seek new members. This has been a major stumbling block to those wishing to learn its rites and ways of magic. Wicca doesn’t solicit because, unlike most western religions, it doesn’t claim to be the one true way to deity.

With growing numbers interested in practicing Wicca, perhaps it’s time to allow the full light of the dawning Aquarian Age to illuminate these ways. To do so is not to trumpet Wicca as the salvation of our planet, but simply to present it to anyone who cares to learn.

There have been many obstacles. In the past the only way to enter Wicca was to a) contact an initiated Wicca, usually a coven member, and b) receive initiation. If you didn’t know any Witches you were out of luck, for initiation was an absolute prerequisite.

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Today, times are changing. We are maturing, perhaps too quickly. Our technology outpaces the wisdom to utilize it. Vast unrest spreads over the globe, and the threat of war looms over most of the more than six billion persons alive today.

Wicca as a religion is changing too. This is necessary if it is to be more than a curiosity of an earlier age. The heirs of Wicca must point their religion firmly to the future if it is to have something to offer coming generations.

Since we have arrived at the point where one mishap could end our planet as we know it, there has never been a time when Wicca as a nature-reverencing religion has had more to offer.

This book breaks many Wicca conventions. It has been structured so that anyone, anywhere in the world, can practice Wicca. No initiations are required. It is designed for the solitary practitioner, since finding others with similar interests is difficult, especially in rural areas.

Wicca is a joyous religion springing from our kinship with nature. It is a merging with the goddesses and gods, the universal energies that created all in existence. It is a personal, positive celebration of life.

And now it is available to all.

Section I

Theory



Wicca and Shamanism

SHAMANISM HAS BEEN defined as the first religion. It existed prior to the earliest civilizations, before our ancestors took the first steps down the long journey to the present. Prior to this time, the shamans were the medicine people, the power wielders, male and female. They wrought magic and spoke to the spirits of nature.

The shamans were the first humans with knowledge. They created, discovered, nurtured, and used it. Knowledge is power; women and men who possessed it in those far-flung days were shamans.

How did shamans capture or discover this power? Through ecstasy—alternate states of consciousness in which they communed with the forces of the universe. Early shamans first attained this state through the use of such “tools” as fasts, thirsts, self-infliction of pain, ingestion of hallucinogenic substances, concentration, and so on. Once mastered, these techniques allowed them to gain awareness of other, nonphysical worlds.

Through such “awareness shifts,” all magical knowledge was obtained. Conference with spirits and deities, plants and animals opened up new vistas of learning. Among their own people, the shamans often shared some of this knowledge but reserved the rest for personal use. Shamanic lore wasn’t for public consumption.

Later, shamans advanced in the use of tools to facilitate these awareness shifts, marking the advent of magical ritual. Shamans around the world still use tools such as drums, rattles, reflective objects, music, chants, and dance. Indeed, the most effective shamanic rites are those that utilize both natural and artificial tools—a sighing wind, roaring ocean, flickering firelight, steady drumbeat, hiss of rattle. These, combined with darkness

and chants, eventually overwhelm the senses, forcing a shifting from awareness of the physical world to the vaster realm of energies. Such are shamanic rites that exist to this day.

From these primitive beginnings arose all magic and religion, including Wicca. Despite current controversy as to the “antiquity” of Wicca, it is spiritually descended from such rites. Though refined and changed for our world, Wicca still touches our souls and causes ecstasy—awareness shifts—uniting us with deity. Many of the techniques of Wicca are shamanic in origin.

Wicca, therefore, can be described as a shamanic religion. As with shamanism, only a select few feel compelled to enter its circle of light.

Today, Wicca has dropped the ordeals of pain and the use of hallucinogens in favor of chanting, meditation, concentration, visualization, music, dance, invocation, and ritual drama. With these spiritual tools, the Wicca achieve a state of ritual consciousness similar to those attained by the most brutal shamanic ordeals.

I deliberately used the term “alternate states of consciousness.” Such changed consciousness states aren’t unnatural, but are a deviation from the “normal” waking consciousness. Wicca teaches that nature includes a broad spectrum of mental and spiritual states of which most of us are ignorant. Effective Wiccan ritual enables us to slip into such states, allowing communication and communion with the Goddess and God.

Unlike some religions, Wicca doesn’t view deity as distant. The Goddess and God are both within ourselves and manifest in all nature. This is the universality: there is nothing that isn’t of the gods.

A study of shamanism reveals much of the heart of magical and religious experience in general, and Wicca in particular (see bibliography for recommended books). With ritual as a means to enter ritual consciousness, the shaman or Wicca constantly expands his or her knowledge, and knowledge is power. Wicca helps its practitioners to understand the universe and our place within it.

At present, Wicca is a religion with many variations. Because it is such a personally structured system, I can only state generalities about its creed and form here, filtered through my experience and knowledge, to create a picture of the nature of Wicca.

Wicca, in common with many other religions, recognizes deity as dual. It reveres both the Goddess and the God. They are equal, warm, and loving, not distant or resident in “heaven,” but omnipresent throughout the universe.

Wicca also teaches that the physical world is one of many realities. The physical is not the absolute highest expression, nor is the spiritual “purer” than the base. The only difference between the physical and the spiritual is that the former is denser.

As in eastern religions, Wicca also embraces the doctrine of reincarnation, that much-misunderstood subject. Unlike some eastern philosophies, however, Wicca doesn't teach that upon physical death our souls will reincarnate in anything other than a human body. Also, few of the Wicca believes we began our existence as rocks, trees, snails, or birds before we evolved to the point where we could incarnate as human beings. Though these creatures and substances do possess a type of soul, it's not the sort we humans have.

Reincarnation is accepted as fact by many millions in the east and west. It answers many questions: what happens after death? Why do we seem to remember things we've never done in this life? Why are we sometimes strangely attracted to places or people who we've never before seen?

Surely, reincarnation can't answer all these questions, but it is there for those who wish to study it. This isn't something that should be believed. Through contemplation, meditation, and self-analysis, many come to the point where they accept reincarnation as fact. For more information on this subject see chapter 10, “The Spiral of Rebirth.”

The Wiccan ideal of morality is simple: do what you want, as long as you harm none. This rule contains another unwritten condition: do nothing that will harm yourself. Thus, if you as a Wicca abuse your body, deny it the necessities of life, or otherwise harm yourself, you're in violation of this principle.

This is more than survival. It also ensures that you'll be in good condition to take on the tasks of preserving and bettering our world, for concern and love for our planet play major roles in Wicca.

Wicca is a religion that utilizes magic. This is one of its most appealing and unique features. Religious magic? This isn't as strange as it might seem. Catholic priests use "magic" to transform a piece of bread into the body of a long-deceased "savior." Prayer—a common tool in many religions—is simply a form of concentration and communication with deity. If the concentration is extended, energies are sent out with the thoughts that may in time make the prayer come true. Prayer is a form of religious magic.

Magic is the practice of moving natural (though little-understood) energies to effect needed change. In Wicca, magic is used as a tool to sanctify ritual areas, and to improve ourselves and the world in which we live.

Many people confuse Wicca and magic as if the two words were interchangeable. Wicca is a religion that embraces magic. If you seek only to practice magic, Wicca probably isn't the answer for you.

Another fundamental point: magic isn't a means of forcing nature to do your will. This is a completely erroneous idea, fostered by the belief that magic is somehow supernatural, as if anything that exists can be outside of nature. *Magic is natural*. It is a harmonious movement of energies to create needed change. If you wish to practice magic, all thoughts of it being paranormal or supernatural must be forgotten.

Most Wiccans don't believe in predestination. Although we honor and revere the Goddess and God, we know that we're free souls with full control and responsibility of our lives. We can't point at an image of an evil god, such as Satan, and blame it for our faults and weaknesses. We can't blame fate. Every second of each day we're creating our futures, shaping the courses of our lives. Once a Wiccan takes full responsibility for all that she or he has done (in this life and past ones) and determines that future actions will be in accord with higher ideals and goals, magic will blossom and life will be a joy.

That perhaps is at the core of Wicca—it is a joyous union with nature. The earth is a manifestation of divine energy. Wicca's temples are flower-splashed meadows, forests, beaches, and deserts. When a Wicca is outdoors, she or he is actually surrounded by sanctity, much as is a Christian when entering a church or cathedral.

Additionally, all nature is constantly singing to us, revealing her secrets. Wiccans listen to the earth. They don't shut out the lessons that she is so desperately trying to teach us. When we lose touch with our blessed planet, we lose touch with deity.

These are some of the basic principles of Wicca. They are the true Wicca; the rituals and myths are secondary to these ideals and serve to celebrate them.

The Standing Stones Book of Shadows (ritual book) included in section III is a guide to constructing your own ritual. Because these rituals are outer form only, you needn't be chained to them. Change rites as the mood strikes you. As long as the rite attunes you with the deities, all is fine.

Don't shut out the physical world in favor of the spiritual or magical realms, for only through nature can we experience these realities. We are here on the earth for a reason. Do, however, use ritual to expand your awareness so that you are truly at one with all creation.

The way is open. The ancient Goddess and God await within and around you. May they bless you with wisdom and power.

The Deities

ALL RELIGIONS ARE structures built upon reverence of deity. Wicca is no exception. The Wicca acknowledge a supreme divine power, unknowable, ultimate, from which the entire universe sprang.

The concept of this power, far beyond our comprehension, has nearly been lost in Wicca because of our difficulty in relating to it. Wiccans, however, link with this force through their deities. In accordance with the principles of nature, the supreme power was personified into two basic beings: the Goddess and the God.

Every deity that has received worship upon this planet exists with the archetypal God and Goddess. The complex pantheons of deities that arose in many parts of the world are simply aspects of the two. Every goddess is resident within the concept of the Goddess; every god in the God.

Wicca reveres these twin deities because of its links with nature. Since most (but certainly not all) nature is divided into gender, the deities embodying it are similarly conceived.

In the past, when the Goddess and God were as real as the moon and sun, rites of worship and adoration were unstructured—spontaneous, joyous union with the divine. Later, rituals followed the course of the sun through its astronomical year (and thusly the seasons) as well as the monthly waxing and waning of the moon.

Today similar rites are observed by the Wicca, and their regular performance creates a truly magical closeness with these deities and the powers behind them.

Fortunately, we needn't wait for ritual occasions to be reminded of the Gods' presence. The sight of a perfect blossom in a field of bare earth can

instill feelings rivaling those of the most powerful formal rite. Living in nature makes every moment a ritual. Wiccans are comfortable in communicating with animals, plants and trees. They feel energies within stones and sand, and cause fossils to speak of their primeval beginnings. For some Wiccans, watching the sun or moon rise and set each day is a ritual unto itself, for these are the heavenly symbols of the God and Goddess.

Because the Wicca see deity inherent in nature, many of us are involved in ecology—saving the earth from utter destruction by our own hands. The Goddess and God still exist, as they have always existed, and to honor them we honor and preserve our precious planet.

In Wiccan thought, the deities didn't exist before our spiritual ancestor's acknowledgement of them. However, the *energies* behind them did; they created us. Early worshippers recognized these forces as the Goddess and God, personifying them in an attempt to understand them.

The Old Ones didn't die when the ancient pagan religions fell to Christianity in Europe. Most of the rites vanished, but they weren't the only effective ones. Wicca is alive and well and the deities respond to our calls and invocations.

When envisioning the Goddess and God, many of the Wicca see them as well-known deities from ancient religions. Diana, Pan, Isis, Hermes, Hina, Tammuz, Hecate, Ishtar, Cerridwen, Thoth, Tara, Aradia, Artemis, Pélé, Apollo, Kanaloa, Bridget, Helios, Bran, Lugh, Hera, Cybele, Inanna, Maui, Ea, Athena, Lono, Marduk—the list is virtually endless. Many of these deities, with their corresponding histories, rites, and mythic information, furnish the concept of deity for Wiccans.

Some feel comfortable associating such names and forms with the Goddess and God, feeling that they can't possibly revere nameless divine beings. Others find a lack of names and costumes a comforting lack of limitations.

As stated earlier, the Wicca as outlined in this book is “new,” although built upon established rituals and myths, firmly rooted within the earliest religious feelings that nature aroused within our species. In these rituals I've used the words “the God” and “the Goddess” rather than

specific names such as Diana and Pan. Anyone with a special affinity with particular deities should feel free to adapt the rituals in section III: *The Standing Stones Book of Shadows* to include them.

If you haven't studied non-western polytheistic religions or developed a rapport with divinities other than those with which you were raised, start by accepting this premise (if only for the moment): deity is twin, consisting of the Goddess and the God.

They have been given so many names they have been called the Nameless Ones. In appearance they look exactly as we wish them to, for they're all the deities that ever were. The Goddess and God are all-powerful because they are the creators of all manifest and unmanifest existence. We can contact and communicate with them because a part of us is in them and they are within us.

The Goddess and God are equal; neither is higher or more deserving of respect. Though some Wiccans focus their rituals toward the Goddess and seem to forget the God entirely, this is a reaction to centuries of stifling patriarchal religion, and the loss of acknowledgement of the feminine aspect of divinity. Religion based entirely on feminine energy, however, is as unbalanced and unnatural as one totally masculine in focus. The ideal is a perfect balance of the two. The Goddess and God are equal, complementary.

The Goddess

The Goddess is the universal mother. She is the source of fertility, endless wisdom, and loving caresses. As the Wicca know her, she is often of three aspects: the maiden, the mother, and the crone, symbolized in the waxing, full, and waning moon. She is at once the unploughed field, the full harvest, and the dormant, frost-covered earth. She gives birth to abundance. But as life is her gift, she lends it with the promise of death. This is not darkness and oblivion, but rest from the toils of physical existence. It is human existence between incarnations.

Since the Goddess is nature, all nature, she is both the temptress and the crone; the tornado and the fresh spring rain; the cradle and the grave.

But though she is possessed of both natures, the Wicca revere her as the giver of fertility, love, and abundance, though they acknowledge her darker side as well. We see her in the moon, the soundless, ever-moving sea, and in the green growth of the first spring. She is the embodiment of fertility and love.

The Goddess has been known as the Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Gods that Made the Gods, the Divine Source, the Universal Matrix, the Great Mother, and by countless other titles.

Many symbols are used in Wicca to honor her, such as the cauldron, cup, labrys, five-petaled flowers, the mirror, necklace, seashell, pearl, silver, emerald . . . to name a few.

As she has dominion over the earth, sea and moon, her creatures are varied and numerous. A few include the rabbit, the bear, the owl, the cat, dog, bat, goose, cow, dolphin, lion, horse, wren, scorpion, spider, and bee. All are sacred to the Goddess.

The Goddess has been depicted as a huntress running with her hounds; a celestial deity striding across the sky with stardust falling from her heels; the eternal Mother heavy with child; the weaver of our lives and deaths; a crone walking by waning moonlight seeking out the weak and forlorn, and as many other beings. But no matter how we envision her, she is omnipresent, changeless, eternal.

The God

The God has been revered for eons. He is neither the stern, all-powerful deity of Christianity and Judaism, nor is he simply the consort of the Goddess. God or Goddess, they are equal, one.

We see the God in the sun, brilliantly shining overhead during the day, rising and setting in the endless cycle that governs our lives. Without the sun we could not exist; therefore it has been revered as the source of all life, the warmth that bursts the dormant seeds into life and hastens the greening of the earth after the cold snows of winter.

The God is also tender of the wild animals. As the horned God he is sometimes seen wearing horns on his head, symbolizing his connection with these beasts. In earlier times, hunting was one of the

activities thought to be ruled by the God, while the domestication of animals was seen to be Goddess-oriented.

The God's domains include forests untouched by human hands, burning deserts, and towering mountains. The stars, since they are but distant suns, are sometimes thought to be under his domain.

The yearly cycle of greening, maturation, and harvest has long been associated with the sun, hence the solar festivals of Europe (further discussed in chapter 8, "The Days of Power") that are still observed in Wicca.

The God is the fully ripened harvest, intoxicating wine pressed from grapes, golden grain waving in a lone field, shimmering apples hanging from verdant boughs on October afternoons.

With the Goddess, he also celebrates and rules sex. The Wicca don't avoid sex or speak of it in hushed words. It's a part of nature and is accepted as such. Since it brings pleasure, shifts our awareness away from the everyday world, and perpetuates our species, it is thought to be sacred. The God lustily imbues us with the urge that ensures our species' biological future.

Symbols often used to depict or to worship the God include the sword, horns, spear, candle, gold, brass, diamond, sickle, arrow, magical wand, trident, knife, and others. Creatures sacred to him include the bull, dog, snake, fish, stag, dragon, wolf, boar, eagle, falcon, shark, lizard, and many others.

Of old, the God was the Sky Father, and the Goddess, the Earth Mother. The God of the sky, of rain and lightning, descended upon and united with the Goddess, spreading seed upon the land, celebrating her fertility.

Today the deities of Wicca are still firmly associated with fertility, but every aspect of human existence can be linked with the Goddess and God. They can be called upon to help us sort through the vicissitudes of our existences and bring joy into our often spiritually bereft lives.

This doesn't mean that when problems occur we should leave them in the hands of the Goddess. This is a stalling maneuver, an avoidance of dealing with the bumps on the road of life. As Wiccans, however, we

can call on the Goddess and God to clear our minds and to *help us help ourselves*. Magic is an excellent means of accomplishing this. After attuning with the Goddess and God, Wiccans ask their assistance during the magical rite that usually follows.

Beyond this, the Goddess and God can help us change our lives. Because the deities *are* the creative forces of the universe (not just symbols), we can call upon them to empower our rites and to bless our magic. Again, this is in direct opposition to most religions. The power is in the hands of every practitioner, not specialized priests or priestesses who perform these feats for the masses. This is what makes Wicca a truly satisfying way of life. We have direct links with the deities. No intermediaries are needed; no priests or confessors or shamans. *We are the shamans.*

To develop a rapport with the Goddess and God, a necessity for those who desire to practice Wicca, you might wish to follow these simple rituals.

At night, stand or sit facing the moon, if it is visible. If not, imagine the fullest moon you've ever seen glowing silver-white in the inky blackness, directly above and before you.

Feel the soft lunar light streaming onto your skin. Sense it touching and mixing with your own energies, commingling and forming new patterns.

See the Goddess in any form that you will. Call to her, chanting old names if you wish: Diana, Lucina, Selena (pronouncing them as: Dee-AH-nah, Loo-CHEE-nah, Say-LEE-nah). Open your heart and mind to the aspect of Goddess-energy manifested in the moon's light.

Repeat this daily for one week, preferably at the same time each night.

Concurrently with this exercise, attune with the God. Upon rising in the morning, no matter how late it is, stand before the sun (through a window if necessary; outside if possible) and soak in its energies. Think about the God. Visualize him as you wish. It might be as a mighty warrior rippling with muscles, a spear upraised in one hand, the other cradling a child or a bunch of dew-dripping grapes.

You may want to chant God names, such as Kernunnos, Osiris, Apollo (Care-NOON-nos, Oh-SIGH-ris, Ah-PALL-low) as with the Goddess.

If you don't wish to visualize the God (for visualization can impose limitations), simply attune to the energies pouring down from the sun. Even if clouds fill the sky, the God's energies will still reach you. Feel them with all your magical imagination (See chapter 11, "Exercises and Magical Techniques").

Let no thoughts but those of the God disturb your reverie. Reach out with your feelings; open your awareness to higher things. Call upon the God in any words. Express your desire to attune with him.

Practice these exercises daily for one week. If you wish to explore the concepts of the Goddess and God, read books on mythology from any country in the world. Read the myths but look for their underlying themes. The more you read, the more information you'll have at your fingertips; eventually it will merge into a nonstructured but extremely complex knowledge bank concerning the deities. In other words, you'll begin to know them.

If, after seven days, you feel the need (or the desire), continue these exercises until you feel comfortable with the Goddess and God. They've been in us and around us all the time; we need only open ourselves to this awareness. This is one of the secrets of Wicca—deity dwells within.

In your quest to know the gods, take long walks beneath trees. Study flowers and plants. Visit wild, natural places and feel the energies of the Goddess and God directly—through the rush of a stream, the pulse of energy from an old oak's trunk, the heat of a sun-warmed rock. Familiarizing yourself with the existence of the deities comes more easily through actual contact with such power sources.

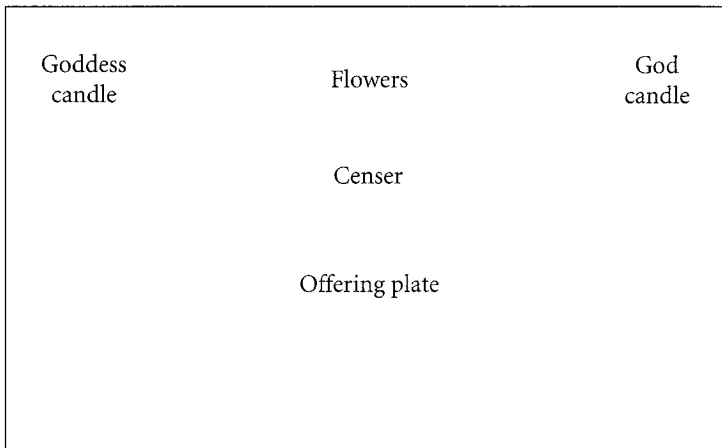
Next, when you've achieved this state, you may wish to set up a temporary or permanent shrine or altar to the Goddess and God. This needn't be more than a small table, two candles, an incense burner, and a plate or bowl to hold offerings of flowers, fruit, grain, seed, wine, or milk. Place the two candles in their holders to the rear of the shrine.

The candle on the left represents the Goddess; that on the right the God. Colors are often used to distinguish between the two; a red candle for the God and a green one to honor the Goddess. This ties in with the nature-associations of Wicca, for green and red are ancient magical colors linked with life and death. Other colors can be used—yellow or gold to honor the God, and white or silver for the Goddess.

Before and between these candles place the incense burner, and in front of this the plate or offering bowl. A vase of seasonal flowers can also be added, as can any personal power objects such as crystals, fossils, and dried herbs.

To begin a simple ritual to the Gods at your shrine, stand before it with an offering of some kind in your hand. Light the candles and incense, place the offering in the bowl or plate, and say such words as these:

*Lady of the moon, of the restless sea and verdant earth,
lord of the sun and of the wild creatures,
accept this offering I place here in your honor.
Grant me the wisdom to see your presence in all nature,
O Great Ones!*



Layout of the shrine

Afterward, sit or stand for a few minutes in contemplation of the deities and of your growing relationship with them. Feel them inside and around you. Then quench the flames (use your fingers, a candle snuffer, or a knife blade. Blowing them out is an affront to the element* of fire). Allow the incense to burn itself out, and continue on with your day or night.

If you wish, go before the shrine once a day at a prescribed time. This may be upon rising, just before sleep, or after lunch. Light the candles, attune and commune with the Goddess and God. This isn't necessary, but the steady rhythm set up by this cycle is beneficial and will improve your relationship with the deities.

Return the offerings left on the shrine to the earth at the end of each day, or when you bring more to leave.

If you cannot erect a permanent shrine, set it up each time you feel the need to use it, then store the articles away. Make the placing of the objects on the shrine a part of the ritual.

This simple rite belies its powers. The Goddess and God are real, viable entities, possessing the force that created the universe. Attuning with them changes us forever. It also sparks new hope for our planet and for our continued existence upon it.

If this rite is too formalized for you, change it or write your own. This is the basic thrust of this book: do it your way, not my way simply because I've set it down on paper. I can never fit my feet into someone else's footprints on the sand. There's no one true right and only way in Wicca; that thinking belongs to monotheistic religions that have largely become political and business institutions.

Discovering the deities of Wicca is a never-ending experience. They constantly reveal themselves. As the shamans say, "Be attentive." All nature is singing to us of her secrets. The Goddess constantly draws aside her veil; the God lights us up with inspiration and illumination. We simply don't notice.

* See glossary.

Don't worry what others might think if they knew you were attuning with a twenty-thousand-year-old Goddess. Their feelings and thoughts concerning your religion are of no consequence. If you feel the need to shelter your experiences from others, do so, not out of fear or embarrassment, but because we're truly all on separate paths. Everyone isn't suited to Wicca.

There are some who say that we (and anyone else who won't follow their rituals or embrace their theology) are worshipping Satan. Not that we know it, of course; Satan is too tricky for that, according to these experts.

Such people can't believe that any religion but their own can be meaningful, fulfilling, and true to its adherent. So if we worship the God and Goddess, they say, we're denying all good and are worshipping Satan, the embodiment of all negativity and evil.

Wiccans aren't so close-minded. Perhaps it's the greatest of all human vanities to assume that one's religion is the only way to deity. Such beliefs have caused incalculable bloodshed and the rise of the hideous concept of holy wars.

The basis of this misconception seems to be the concept of a pristine, pure, positive being—God. If this deity is the sum of all good, worshippers believe that there must be an equally negative one as well. Thus, Satan.

The Wicca don't accept such ideas. *We acknowledge the dark aspects of the Goddess and the God as well as the bright.* All nature is composed of opposites, and this polarity is also resident within ourselves. The darkest human traits as well as the brightest are locked within our unconsciousness. It is only our ability to rise above destructive urges, to channel such energies into positive thoughts and actions, that separates us from mass-murderers and sociopaths.

Yes, the God and Goddess have dark aspects, but this needn't scare us off. Look at some of the manifestations of their powers. From a ravaging flood comes rich soil in which new plants thrive. Death brings a deeper appreciation of life to the living and rest for the transcended one. "Good" and "evil" are often identical in nature,

depending on one's viewpoint. Additionally, out of every evil, some good is eventually born.

Any and all religions are real, the genuine article, to their practitioners. There can never be one religion, prophet, or savior that will satisfy all six billion humans. Each of us must find our ideal way to attune with deity. For some, it's Wicca.

Wiccans emphasize the bright aspects of the deities because this gives us purpose to grow and evolve to the highest realm of existence. When death, destruction, hurt, pain, and anger appear in our lives (as they must), we can turn to the Goddess and God and know that this is a part of them too. We needn't blame a devil on these natural aspects of life and call upon a pure-white god to fend them off.

In truly understanding the Goddess and God, one comes to understand life, for the two are inextricably entwined. Live your earthly life fully, but try to see the spiritual aspects of your activities as well. Remember—the physical and spiritual are but reflections of each other.

When I give classes, one question seems to come up frequently:

“What is the meaning of life?”

It may be asked with a laugh, but this is the one question that, if answered, satisfies any others we may have. It is the problem every religion and philosophical system has struggled to solve.

Anyone can find the answer through the simple technique of living and observing life. Though two people won't find the same answers, they can find them together.

The Goddess and God are of nature, both the delightful and the dark. We don't worship nature as such; some Wiccans probably wouldn't even say that they worship the Goddess and God. We don't bow down to the deities; we work with them to create a better world.

This is what makes Wicca a truly participatory religion.