ABSTRACT

A Coming Home:

Neo-Paganism and the Search for Community

by Loleta B. Collins

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the cultural responsibility Western suburban life has when it comes to creating a desire for community. This study demonstrates the rejection of suburban culture throughout modern U. S. history and shows how this rejection has lead to the revival of Pagan religions. These Neo-Pagan traditions have arrived as a response to homogenized suburban life, and as a reaction against the stereotypes set forth by Christianity. This investigation was accomplished by using methods of Comparative Religious studies to analyze the trends in contemporary Paganism. The trends studied include the Neo-Pagan presence in written works and in cyberspace. Furthermore, this paper sets forth the idea of contemporary Paganism as a reaction to Post-Modernism, which becomes the foundation for future studies.
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The return of Halloween usually means the required airing of "Frankenstein," "Dracula" and just about every other horror flick known to American culture. Each year, television has done its best to continue this tradition, but the 1997 season brought something new, something a little different. In the midst of the frivolity of trick or treat and the horror of the haunted houses, cable networks began airing numerous shows recounting the history of the season. From the History Channel's *The Haunted History of Halloween* and *In Search of History: Witchcraft* to Lifetime's *Intimate Portrait: Witches*, show after show included, indeed often concluded with, interviews with modern pagans. Judging from the topics of one week's worth of television, paganism has become quite popular. Pagan beliefs such as Witchcraft are treated not as a target for hysteria, but rather as legitimate religions suffering from bad publicity. The holiday season helps to highlight what has been a growing trend in America: the return to Pagan beliefs and religions, by large numbers of people.

Who are the people that turn to such non-traditional religions like Witchcraft? One look in the bookstore and one can find row after row of books on New Age, Witchcraft, Neo-Paganism and almost any other type of spiritual quest imaginable. What are New Age, Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism? What concepts do these movements contain that appeal to so many people, and why is all of this happening today? Even with the abundance of books, videos, Internet sites and various media
available, there is no single reference work in which the answers can be found.

However, by creating a collection of associated works, we can gain an understanding of this trend and show how Neo-Paganism provides its followers with a community where they can be themselves.

*Life Most Post-Modern*

One question seems to be chronically overlooked in the discussion of contemporary religious movements: Why Now? What in today's world has brought this resurgence of "paganism"? In studying contemporary religious movements we continually stumble over one common denominator: media. Whether books, compact discs, the Internet, videos or television, virtually every religion today has some links with popular media.

Media reflects the culture around it. However, it also creates the culture. This is a bit of a simulacrum, a functioning copy of something that never existed in the first place. In other words, the media (television, books, the Internet) create and distribute ideas that may or may not have already been in place. For example, the media produce a television commercial that portrays a general feeling of discontent. Perhaps that discontent actually existed in village A, but village B had never thought about it. Then village B sees the commercial. They begin to wonder about that discontent and soon they begin to find the discontent. Was that discontent merely hidden or was it nonexistent prior to the media exposure? The answer will never be known. What is known is that village B now has a different take on the world around them and they will now seek to model their lives to match that new mold.
It all comes back to the media. People are bombarded with images and ideas day in and day out. All of this massive onslaught of information causes people to seek out what is important. They then turn to the very media that brought them the confusion, in search of ways of sorting it all out. They use magazines, Web sites and books to seek their answers and to seek other seekers like themselves. They in turn, create communities of liked minded individuals who, a generation ago, would not have known they empathized with one another. Many of these communities call themselves Pagan.

New Pagans or New Age?

Before clarifying the differences between the New Age movement and the Neo-, or New, Pagan movements, it would be useful to have a definition of Pagan. The word itself is from the Latin pagus meaning 'rural' or 'from the countryside'. It was incorporated by the Roman soldiers as a derogatory term (paganus), used to indicate civilians or those who were not soldiers. Christians contemporary with the Roman soldiers picked up the usage for referring to those who were not members of the army of Christ, in other words, non-Christians. (Jones & Pennick 1995, 1). Pagan is most often used "to refer to Nature-venerating indigenous spiritual traditions generally, and particular to that of Europe" and consequently, the areas colonized by Europe including Australia and the Americas (2). The prefix "neo-" is added to indicate the modern revival; however, many Neo-Pagans do not add the "neo-" and choose to simply call themselves Pagans. This taken into account, "Neo-Pagan" could be translated as New Nature Worshipper.
Much of the confusion over Neo-Paganism comes from the tendency of many people to automatically register "Neo-Pagan" as equal to "New Age". The two terms are not synonymous. This misunderstanding of Neo-Paganism is due to the number of beliefs held in common by Neo-Pagans and New Agers, as well as to the overall lack of institutionalization in either group.

There are many beliefs held in common between New Agers and Neo-Pagans and the appeal of these groups seem to attract the same people. The same areas experiencing growth in New Age ideologies also experience growth in Neo-Paganism (York 1996, 2). Both groups have a general distrust of institutionalization and both place a high value on allowing the individual to seek his or her own spiritual path. Indeed, it seems as though the goal of both groups is to create a community where the individual can belong without having to sacrifice individuality.

The difference between New Age and Neo-Pagan is not found in their "agenda," but in their root beliefs. New Agers are an inclusive group that includes a myriad of activities and beliefs. The main theme of the New Age movement can be summarized as a pluralistic association carrying millennial undertones. New Age beliefs can and are supported by members of almost every religion. Catholics as well as Fundamentalist Protestants can be found at the local herbalist. Many followers of typical American Christianity find no trouble combining New Age beliefs and the Bible. The New Age movement is more of a philosophy for living rather than a religion.

The first unifying factor of this movement is its diversity of followers and the goal of unity, harmony and oneness. New Age is a term that was coined in the
1800s. It was originally used to indicate ideas and beliefs held by various Spiritualist and occult groups in Europe. Many New Age beliefs arrived in the United States as early as the 1830s ("New Age Movements" 1995, 768). In America today, New Age beliefs include the holistic health movement, astrology, UFO cults, theosophy, spiritualism, Neo-Paganism, Transcendentalism and many others. It is clear from this list, that the New Age movement is not a single movement, but rather a grouping of a wide variety of beliefs and practices.

Since New Age beliefs are not regulated in any aspect, acceptance of all aspects of the movement is not a requirement for participation. Indeed, the New Age movement finds its many supporters by having an eccentric range of beliefs. The root beliefs of contemporary New Agers include environmental issues, racial equality and gender equality. This contemporary phase of the New Age Movement seems to find its voice in several best-selling books: Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy*, Fritjof Capra's *Tao of Physics*, Lyall Watson's *Lifetide*, and Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life*, are some of the works which have helped standardize the New Age beliefs of today. (O'Hara 1991, 147).

The second unifying theme is the millennial theme that underlies the New Age. The term New Age heralds the arrival of a new age of human evolution. While the name is euphemistically nice, there are decidedly millennialist tones to the New Age movement. The basic theme of the New Age can be summarized as: Through the work of enlightened individuals, society will be changed into a new golden age of unity, enlightened thought and world peace. The unifying factors of the New Age movement also include a political agenda. The New Age approach to politics can
generally be described as being "a left-of-center political agenda, while favoring a right-of-center approach to political issues" (Kyle 1993, 297). In other words, New Agers still feel the pull of the ideas born in the 60s counterculture; however, they have become convinced that the solutions to these ideas are not radical movements. They instead turn inward for solutions to the problems of the world. Issues including the environment, racial and gender equality and even the old 60s favorite, nuclear disarmament, are some of the central problems to be dealt with according to New Agers. Today, they deal with these problems through decentralized and more personalized networks rather than protests and love-ins.

This change in approach is more effective for most New Agers as the movement's members tend to be affluent, generally middle-class or above, college-educated and in good paying jobs. In other words, the New Age movement seems to have the financial backing to accomplish its goals.

As we have already seen, the New Age movement is very inclusive by nature. It is because of the wide breadth of the New Age movement's ideas that we find Neo-Paganism is grouped with it. If Neo-Paganism is to be grouped as part of the New Age movement it is because of the similar belief in a new forthcoming world paradigm: "It is the expectation of a major and universal change being primarily founded on the individual and collective development of human potential that is what links together the disparate components identified as New Age" (Kyle 1995, 4). But even in the expectation of change, there are significant differences between Neo-Pagans and New Agers.
For New Agers, this new Golden Age will be brought forth in a fashion that rivals that of Christian millenarian beliefs in a dramatic paradigm shift. The New Age will be the age of true enlightenment and all must work to make sure it is ushered in soon. This millenarian thrust is one of the biggest dividing points between New Age and Neo-Pagans. The Neo-Pagans have virtually no millenarian undertones. According to their beliefs, it is this world which a person must work to improve, not some future world to come.

This difference in beliefs causes many New Agers to criticize Neo-Pagans for lacking "a proper spiritual perspective" as "reality is to be found on the spiritual level behind apparent changes of the physical." This means the New Agers believe that the world around them has no real relationship to the spiritual world that will be brought in with the coming paradigm change. The Neo-Pagan response is that this belief "constitutes a sort of whitewash. Suffering is real, death is real - although the spiritual is also real" (York 1996, 167). In their turn, the Neo-Pagans assert that the New Agers are not grounded in their beliefs and quests, as we must find our place in the here and now, not some world to come.

The easiest way to differentiate between New Age and Neo-Pagan is to look at the groups' outlook. New Agers look toward the future and call their Search an awakening. They seek to find the individual's place in the community found in the future Golden Age. Neo-Pagans on the other hand, feel that in order for the individual to find their place in the community, without sacrificing individuality, one must look past the great homogenizing force of Christianity back to a time before its
universalizing nature pervaded the world. Neo-Pagans find their answers in the
traditions of the past and call their Way a _re_awakening.

Neo-Pagans further differ from New Agers, not in their hope for a new,
unified world, but in the religious beliefs they hold. A person can be considered to
be a New Ager by patronizing the local holistic healer and desiring to better the
world. But that same person may also be a devout Baptist. To these people, there is
no conflict between the religious beliefs of their Christian faith and the basic ideas of
the New Age Movement. A Neo-Pagan, on the other hand, would not also be a
practicing Baptist. The basic beliefs of the Neo-Pagans lie in their not recognizing
the Judeo-Christian god. Instead, they are more often polytheistic, believing in
multiple deities. Other views of Neo-Pagans include Pantheism (the belief that
everything is some form or another of the divine) and henotheism (the idea that there
are many gods that exist under the supremacy of one great god). Monotheism is not
a prevalent idea in the world of Neo-Pagans.
Chapter One

The Origins of Neo-Pagan Thought

Once we understand how Neo-Pagans differ from New Agers, the question of origin arises. Many of the ideas of these movements are not "new" at all. Indeed, the fundamental ideas of contemporary Pagans are quite old. According to Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, the intellectual origins of Neo-Paganism lie in the heyday of modern thought known as the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, also called the French Enlightenment due to its Parisian origins, began in the mid-eighteenth century.

The major characteristics of this era included a general feeling of skepticism. This skepticism found focus in the religious, social and political arenas. Empiricism, the belief that all knowledge must come from sense experience, was the rule of the day. Prior claims of religious revelation were thrown out in favor of the new scientific understanding brought forth by the works of Newton. There was a general dislike of the hierarchical religions like Judaism and Christianity on the basis of these religions' lack of respect for nature, the laws of the natural world and for their "hierarchical structures that deny individual autonomy and self-worth" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989, 82). As this quote indicates, the Enlightenment was also party to a large amount of human-centric thought.

An excellent way of understanding the connections between the Enlightenment and the resurgence of Paganism is to look at a quote regarding the ideas of the Enlightenment: "Between the total critical skepticism of Bayle and the monumental scientific achievements of Newton, it seemed to some early eighteenth-
century thinkers that a new illumination was taking place, one that would make it possible to solve some human problems and eliminate many others" (Popkin 1999, 464). This quote is ironic, as it appears to be true when applied to the cultural beliefs of the contemporary era. For example, change a couple of words and you end up with the perfect summary to the Enlightenment-Twenty-First Century connection:

Between the total critical skepticism of Post-Modernism and the monumental scientific achievements of the computer age, it seems to some early twenty-first century thinkers that a new illumination is taking place, one that will make it possible to solve some human problems and eliminate many others. The only difference that two hundred years of human history has made seems to be the name, as what was formerly leading us to an age of Enlightenment is now leading us to a new Paradigm.

Comparing the general beliefs of the Enlightenment to the beliefs held today, it is reasonable to consider Neo-Paganism as a religious tradition(s) born in the age of Enlightenment. However, even with this heritage, the Enlightenment cannot be home to all of the ideas of the Neo-Pagans. In fact, the Pagans of today have a few complaints about their intellectual predecessors, the main one being the infallibility of Reason. The thinkers of the Enlightenment placed far too much emphasis on reason and empirical knowledge to suit modern Pagan's tastes. Neo-Pagans generally regard the Enlightenment's "Religion of Reason" as just another form of intolerant monotheism. Another, and perhaps the largest disagreement, is the focus of this Religion of Reason: Absolute Truth. True to the Post-Modern atmosphere of today, Neo-Pagans accept the existence of a multiplicity of truths. As Post-Modern philosophy dictates, there are as many possible truths as there are ways of viewing
those truths. No one person, religion or philosophy has the sole rights to THE Truth.

This is due to the fact that there is no such thing as THE Truth to Post-Modern philosophy. Post-Modern philosophy states that people construct their culture by a continuing process. This means that nothing is stable. Contrary to the Enlightenment idea, there are no laws of nature that will give us a key to the universe. There are no underlying structures that determine what a culture says is right or wrong, true or false. It is all simply a ride through the incomprehensiveness of humanity. Neo-Paganism is truly a product of the later twentieth century, for "like post-modernism, they have only one form of intolerance: other forms of life that are intolerant and authoritarian" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989, 95).

Obviously, there are components to Post-Modern thought and Neo-Pagan beliefs that do not arise from the Enlightenment. There is an extra-intense level of skepticism that underlies Post-Modern thought that did not come from the Enlightenment. Characteristics such as these find their origins in the criticism of values brought forth by the controversial philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche pointed out that his main concern was simply to bring these questions about human values to our attention. He had no desire to become one of the traditional philosophers who falsely acted as though they were the "unriddler of the universe" (Stumpf 1994, 421). Nietzsche set out to prove that in human values, there are no facts, merely many different interpretations. It is this borderline nihilistic approach to the world around him that has endured Nietzsche to Post-Modernists. Nietzsche successfully "developed a conception of the basically antagonistic relations between knowledge, science, and life" (Popkin 1999, 563). Many Post-Modernists believe
that Nietzsche was ahead of his time with his view that only the aesthetic dimensions of humanity are relevant to life. The Post-Modern phrase: "Look at, not into" typifies this understanding of life (Boyd 1999, 91).

Since we now understand the role that Post-Modern thought has in making Neo-Paganism uniquely a twentieth century phenomenon, it is possible to ask: At which point did Neo-Paganism begin to grow in the twentieth century, and why? The answer to this may not be very surprising. The Neo-Paganism of the 1980s and 1990s can very well be seen as one of the children of the 1960s.

Reaping the Seeds of Flower Power

Before spreading out, the 1960's Counterculture began within the very same demographic group as Neo-Paganism, namely that of the middle-class, white and often college-educated - in short the stereotypical middle-class American. This similarity in origin stems from the fact that middle-class life has changed very little in the last forty years. The same suburban hegemony troubles people today, just as it did beginning in the 1950s.

To understand the cultural basis for the Neo-Pagan movement it is necessary to first understand the origins of the discontent of the 1960s. During the 1950s the so-called "American Dream" began to take a firm hold on Americans. Thousands of people moved away from their ancestral homes, from their families and ethnic identities, to make new homes in the new communities appearing all over the country: The Suburbs.

The 1950s saw the suburbanization as well as the homogenization of America. In the suburbs, all the physical needs of a community were prefabricated.
People moving there did not need to build roads, houses and the like. There was no need to maintain a garden or a field of corn. The need for large numbers of children to help on the homesteads lessened. People moved to the suburbs, the father went to work, the two children went to school and the mother stayed home to clean house and let out the dog. Without the need to build everything from the ground up, the new suburbanites focused their energies on creating the social structure of these artificial communities. Technological advances and advancements in the standard of living helped "transmit middle class values to the middle class" (Hudnut-Beumler 1994, 16). Mothers were fed on diets of commercials and soap operas that instructed them in proper suburban life. The children learned their expected roles from teachers who taught them what it meant to live in the greatest country the world has ever seen and from schoolmates that taught them how to dress and what television shows were cool. Fathers learned the culture from neighbors and co-workers who even helped pick the appropriate church the family should belong to - for the sake of proper suburban appearances. During this time church attendance in the United States hit its all-time high. The technological advances showed everyone what it meant to be American, but these definitions also helped generate criticisms of the new communities.

Soon after the plague of suburbs had spread across the United States, disagreements with the "one size fits all" lifestyle began to crop up. People found that the new GE toaster really did not make their lives heaven and that staying at home to clean really was not all that stimulating. Worse still, many people began to realize that the teachings of the proper suburban church were not all that relevant to
their lives. The children raised in the suburbs began striking out to find relevance in
the world around them and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was born.

This search for balance between the individual and the community can be see
as a reaction to life in a modern scientific age. The people that are searching tend to
be those in the middle-class, urban/suburban range. As we have already established,
these are the same demographics that characterize Neo-Pagans, and New Agers in
general. These searchers have already obtained or have grown up with all the
practical needs that society and homogeneous suburbia is centered on. They have
essentially been born and raised living the American Dream. Having had all the
physical necessities they notice a gap in their lives and realize that none of the
"things" that they have has filled that gap. Institutions of the time reinforce the drive
for practical goals and give no ease to the feeling of need. Therefore, they begin to
look for what they need outside of the institutional boundaries. Since the search is
outside the institutional channels, it renders the searchers dropouts from the
institutionalized forms of society, including the traditional religions of their parents.

This search for identity is a collective search, which must proceed outside the
organizational and institutional channels because modern society's continued affair
with rationalism and positivism saturates these areas. In the 1950s, prestige
considerations were even related to church membership as specific churches were
joined for the main benefit of being linked with higher social-class orientation.
People joined specific denominations in order to gain class advantage or equality
while at the same time they were still trying to fulfill their spiritual needs. This
practical orientation of society ends up with the children of the suburbs often
rejecting their church on the basis of it being too practical and essentially unrelated to
the mysteries of life.

In the 1950s, society began to fail in the all-important task of supplying
adequate identity for its members. This happens when modern "progress" disturbed
the symbols that have provided identity for centuries. Science managed to take the
mystery out of much of life and "the loss of mystery in such things as sex has simply
added to the need for mystiques with which to fill the void. For many the old
formulas for 'saving' people [would] not do. A modernist cannot be satisfied by sin-
and-salvation revivalism... which requires the mystique of sin" (Klapp 1969, xi).
People had lost the air of secrecy about sin and the like, due to modern, practical
understanding. Unfortunately, modern understanding failed to provide new symbols
that are as full of mystique as those old symbols that had been lost. Since modern
society was so oriented around practical concerns, the only place to begin the search
for identity, to look for the new mysteries, was to look at non-traditional, non-
institutionalized forms of religious expression-- options that had not lost their
ambiguity.

It is this searching outside of institutional channels that are the source of the
suburban generation's difference with the generations before them. Since this
generation is still actively searching today, it can also be argued that this search for a
collective identity is one of the key factors in the popularity of Post-Modernism and
Neo-Paganism in the 1980s and beyond.
Seekers of a New Life

Once the 60s and 70s arrived, an astounding one-third of this generation had become identifiable as "highly active seekers" (Roof, *Generation* 1993, 99). These seekers are people "for whom spiritual and metaphysical concerns are a driving force.... For them, life is a journey, an adventure that leads to new discoveries, and to insights that can flow only from experience and autobiography" (79). These highly active seekers focus on concern for experimental religion, healing, harmony, renewal, transformation and quests for wholeness and tolerance. These concerns support the theory that very few people have managed to avoid the moral messages of the 1960s counterculture. The messages of tolerance, pluralism, individuality and distrust of authority commonplace during the counterculture were picked up by almost everyone, not just the people actively involved.

It is worth noting that the "moral messages" mentioned above are essentially the very same concerns of contemporary New Agers and Neo-Pagans of the 1980s and 1990s. This is because many of the people participating in these movements today are the very same people who were part of the counterculture during the 60s and 70s. The sense of individuality that came to the forefront in the 1960s is still playing a role in people's lives today. It leads people to try to find spiritual meaning through personalized quests or acceptance of bits and pieces of religious traditions. Many people today simply label this type of personalized spirituality "cafeteria style" or "eclectic" religion. This eclectic type of religion is another characteristic of many New Age and Neo-Pagan groups.
While the post-suburban generation is searching for individuality, this search, oddly enough, is not antagonistic to the search for community. Today's spiritually restless searchers want the freedom to find "a more satisfactory balance between self and community" (Roof, *Generation* 1993, 257). Many Neo-Pagans are examples of this search for balance, which is exemplified by new forms of religious communities that allow for personal expression and personal enrichment (256).

It is this idea of finding a community of like-minded individuals that appeals to so many of the suburban generation. For years they lived in a homogeneous culture of middle-class American ideas and values. Now, many people have decided that their ideas and values are not the same. Now, many people have decided to find their place, their community. They are finding their communities in Neo-Pagan groups. There are many different Neo-Pagan groups with many different focuses. This variety allows for people to seek out the group that appeals to their own feelings. The general feeling of equality among all religions that is found in Neo-Pagan movements allows adherents to be completely comfortable being themselves. They have found a community, yet it is a community of individuals.

While it may be possible to track the intellectual history of the Neo-Pagan tradition back two hundred years, many Neo-Pagans themselves disagree with this scholastic, indeed, empirical approach to their history. They have a much different view of the origins of their religions. Each religion within the larger Neo-Pagan movement has its own understanding of its origins but they do share one commonality: Neo-Pagans believe their religions all predate Christianity.
Beyond this one constant, several other characteristics can be found in the larger Neo-Pagan community. The premier emphasis is Nature. Neo-Pagans are essentially concerned with Mother Earth. The level of this concern varies from group to group and can range from ritual recognition to extreme levels of "hard" ecology. Many of the major Neo-Pagan groups merely recognize Nature as equal to mankind. The cardinal points and Mother Nature herself are recognized and called upon in ceremony. This respect for nature is carried over into the general acceptance of eight major celebrations, which are based on the seasons. These Nature-based ceremonies may take place in the woods or even in cyberspace. It matters not where you are, only where your mind is.

Following along the same lines, most Neo-Pagans tend to be animistic. They view the entire world as alive with spirits. These spirits deserve to be recognized or even worshipped. Neo-Pagans are usually polytheistic. They believe in a multiplicity of deities. These deities may be the ancient deities of the pre-Christian eras, or they may even be newly divined beings such as the Neo-Pagan interpretation of Lovelock's Gaia.

Neo-Pagans also view the world's religions as equal. The general view is that there are many spiritual pathways to the divine. This said Neo-Pagans feel that, while all religious traditions are valid, there is more than a little distaste for monotheistic religions. Neo-Pagans view monotheistic religions as intolerant of personal spiritual quests. Therefore, the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and even Baha'i are viewed with general discomfort.
Continuing with their disagreements, most Neo-Pagans are unified in their views on Heaven and Hell: There is no such thing. While most Neo-Pagan groups have some version of an afterlife, the idea of an eternal lake of fire is nonsense, especially when there is no proof in the Natural world for such an occurrence. Neo-Pagans find their lives inspired by the world around them. Heaven or Hell is now, in this life and it is up to each person to make it one or the other. This leads to the general ethical code of Neo-Pagans. The movement promotes personal responsibility for all actions. This is most easily seen in the Neo-Pagan creed: Harm none, do what thou will.

As it has been indicated, Neo-Paganism is very decentralized. There are very few Neo-Pagan groups with ruling hierarchies and even these operate on a decentralized format. Most groups follow a general pattern of small, loosely structured and autonomous groups. This format of autonomy allows for seekers to explore many different groups in order to find the one community that fits the individual seeker. In order to gain a better understanding of these Neo-Pagan groups, a brief study of some of the most popular religions will now begin.
Chapter Two

The Druids

The first Neo-Pagan group we will look at is also the oldest. Not just by the believers' standards, but by the standards of the scholars as well. The Neo-Pagan religion of Druidism finds its origins in the philosophical movements of eighteenth century Europe. And even this was a revival of an earlier religion.

The Mythic Precedent

By all historical accounts, Druids were the names given to religious, political and/or scholastic leaders of the native tribes of the British Isles. Their presence is even recorded by Julius Caesar in his first chapter of *The Conquest of Gaul*. Caesar remarks that they are one of the two privileged classes of Celtic, or Gaelic, society. He goes on to say that members of this class of people were the officiators at religious services and act as judges in everything from daily disputes to religious questions. Caesar also notes with some interest that "the Druidic doctrine is believed to have been found existing in Britain and thence imported into Gaul; even to-day those who want to make a profound study of it generally go to Britain for the purpose" (Caesar 1981, 32).

The Celtic culture was comprised of numerous tribes that were spread throughout northwestern Europe. The culture was essentially a rural, farming community with the bulk of the population engaged as farmers. The communities also held members of the chieftain/warrior class, the artisans and the religious class.
Some tribes were also known to possess slaves, but this does not seem to be a universal practice (James 1993, 52 - 3). The farming masses worked on subsistence level; however, it was for the subsistence of the entire village and not just for the individual family. The farmers were responsible for providing the staple foods for the villagers employed in other areas. They made it possible for the warrior classes to hold their summer raids of neighboring peoples, much to the chagrin of the Greco-Roman world. This firm foundation allowed for a diversity of skills to be developed, from the artistic to the philosophical.

It was from this agriculture-based culture that the Druids arose. They were astronomers, philosophers, priests and judges. They kept their knowledge secret, only passing along rites and rituals to initiates and never writing it down. The only knowledge the modern world has of the Druids, comes from comments written down by outsiders.

Due to the little direct evidence, it is impossible to say whether Druidism was present throughout the Celtic world. More likely, the Druids were localized. This idea stems from the knowledge that the gods of the Celts were also local and often not shared by all tribes. Whether localized or universal, the Druids, however, were not the only religious caste in ancient Celtic society. There were other groups, called Vates or Ovates that are also mentioned by neighboring cultures. Whether this was simply another name for the Druids, or another sect entirely is not known. What is disconcernable is that Druids were found in Gaul (modern-day France) and the British Isles. Their tradition is also different then that of the Germans. This seems to indicate that the Druid tradition originated in Western Europe. Indeed, Caesar
reports that his information has the religion of the Druids originating in Britain.

Caesar also reports that the Celts worship many gods, but Mercury was their favorite. The likelihood that the Celts were worshipping the Roman god Mercury is quite slim. It is more likely that Caesar simply identified one of the local deities, such as Smertrios, the tutelary deity of the Treveri nation, with a deity more familiar to him (Caesar 1981, 32 - 35).

**The Religion**

The coming of Christianity to Europe eventually drove the religious ideas of the Celts out of sight. There is a considerable amount of discussion on whether these ideas simply went underground or if they were actually exterminated. Many people claim to have held on to their ancestors' traditions throughout the centuries, but proof rarely follows these claims; however, come the seventeenth century, Druidism was reborn.

Druidism in the Age of Enlightenment was different than both contemporary and ancient Druidism. This form of Druidism was more of a philosophy-based gentileperson's club. It attracted members of the upper class gentry and even included the likes of William Stukeley, William Blake and the Princess Dowager Augusta (Nichols 1975, 103 and Green *Druids*…1997, 142). The attractiveness of Druidism was not so much its religiosity as its historical relevance to the people living then. Druidism provided proof that pre-Roman Europe was not just a savage wilderness, but that people were descended from a noble lineage of philosophers and priests.

Modern Druidism began in earnest with the 1960s Counterculture. While the movement has been established since the seventeenth century, it was generally a
philosophical and even a social movement. It was during the exploration times of the
post-war era that Druidism came into the realm of Neo-Paganism. With the many
searches for identity occurring in the United States, many typical suburbanites began
searching for their identity. The problem was that the typical suburban resident was
Caucasian with a mixed heritage arising from decades of cultural blending. This
created a group of people who could not readily trace their heritage to any point
behind the general description of "European."

In their search for identity, they stumbled upon the idea of Druidism. This
was touted as The Original, Pre-Christian Religion of Europe. Druidism became
popular as people realized that they did not need a description beyond "European," as
Druidism belonged to all of Europe.

The Druids of ancient Europe were not typical priests. They believed they
were on the same par as the gods. This belief comes from the type of gods that were
worshipped by the Celts. The gods of the Celts were not the typical all-powerful
deities. They were animistic-based deities that were almost always part of some
mystical group of people that came to the land before the arrival of the Celts. They
were human-like and yet they possessed extra powers. They were associated with
specific sites including springs, megaliths, mountains and rivers. These gods were
part of the daily life of the Celts, almost as if they were invisible parts of the village.

The gods of the Celts were numerous, but not universal. They were
temperamental, unpredictable and even un-trustworthy. They demanded honor and
respect from the people in the forms of rites, rituals and even sacrifice. Much has
been made of the ancient Celtic use of human sacrifice. Caesar explains, "they have
regular state sacrifices of the same kind. Some tribes have colossal images made of wickerwork, the limbs of which they fill with living men; they are then set on fire, and the victims burnt to death" (Caesar 1981, 33). While modern archaeological evidence has suggested that human sacrifice was actually practiced in many parts of Celtic Europe (refer to the Lindow Man as an example) proof of such an elaborate mass burning has yet to be found.

*The Rituals*

There is no doubting the Celts' faith in their gods. It is the type of faith that is different from that of the modern world. The Celts had faith in their gods' unpredictability. The people knew they were at the mercy of the gods and they did what they could to appease them. Human sacrifice was indeed practiced, although it seems to have been more of a last resort offering, a radical sort of piacular rite. Evidence also suggests that it was voluntary, at least part of the time: the Lindow Man was a clean-cut, healthy man who was apparently knocked unconscious prior to being garroted and deposited in a lake. The kindness of being knocked out prior to being killed and the lack of bindings leads many to believe the Lindow Man approached his end without a struggle. More commonly, the Celts sacrificed possessions to the gods. These would be swords, shields, torcs and even animals. Another offering was carvings of body parts. These carvings were made of an afflicted leg or arm, et cetera, in order to help the gods better locate and solve the problem.

Offerings and sacrifices were generally made in sacred areas such as pools, lakes or woods. Other locations for offerings include burial mounds and large
building projects. Often a new temple or even the Celtic version of the civic center would be blessed by the sacrifice of a dog or a boar. Most offerings, rituals and even the major seasonal celebrations, were carried out by the villagers. While Druids probably did officiate at the sacrifices, the other ceremonies were not necessarily presided over by the Druids.

The Druids were learned men and women. They were instructed in astronomy, philosophy and natural science. They understood the powers and places of the gods in the world around them. Although this information was not shared with the common people, the Druids knew that the gods were nothing spectacular. They knew their place and it was on a respectable level with that of the gods. What ever actually did happen when the Druids met in the dark groves of trees, it was not for worship (Myers 2000, 31).

Rituals and ceremonies during the time of the Enlightenment were often as elaborate as they were private. They were held only for those who had an interest in the affairs of the group. The rituals were intended to create what seemed like likely ways in which the Druids of old would have worshipped. And, the rituals sought to be entertaining. It was during this time that the Eisteddfod (Welsh, *session*) came into the public view. The Eisteddfod is an assembly of poets and musicians who gather together to share their work. Born in 1747, Welshman Edward Williams changed the entire nature of the Eisteddfod. He was convinced that furthering the cause of the Eisteddfod would help save the Welsh culture. In this vein, he changed his name to Iolo Morgannwg and created "historic" documents that would prove the Eisteddfod dated to the time of the ancient Druids. In his fever, he created elaborate
rituals that would take place during the Assembly (Green *Druids...* 1997, 140). Iolo was more successful than he realized as these imaginative rituals were absorbed into both the Eisteddfod as well as the Druid movements of the time, and remain even today.

The rituals of Druidism today absorb the history of earlier rituals. Modern Druids make ritual sacrifices of bread, salt, wine, and the like, at virtually every ceremony. The layout of the sacred circle and even the names of the major players in the ceremony may be taken from the mind of Iolo Morgannwg, but they are produced in a manner of highest reverence. It is believed by most Druids that the main idea is "being there." It matters not where the rituals come from (although those with a historical basis are generally more widely acceptable), what matters is a person's heartfelt participation in the ritual.

**What Druidism Brings**

Druidism during the modern era has been a readily adaptable religion. While embracing the beliefs and practices of the ancient Druids discussed above, it remains an open, tolerant philosophy. Many Druid groups do not deny the existence of Christ. Druidism does not seek to be the only religion; indeed, up until the post-war years, Druidism did not even seek to be a religion. It was merely a path for self-exploration or even for entertainment. This idea allowed for anyone to take the rudimentary beliefs of Druidism and mold them to any vision he or she sought. As a result, Druidism set on a transformation process from philosophy to religion, and one complete with many denominations.
Modern Druidism began in Great Britain, but it quickly found its way to the United States. In 1964, the Ancient Order of Druids located in Great Britain made one of the most influential splits. The Order had already split during the 1940s, creating a branch that emphasized philosophy and a branch focused on spiritual matters. Now, the Order split again: the Ancient Order continued, but the group focused on rituals, most especially, the celebration of summer solstice at Stonehenge. The breakaway population reformed themselves as the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. This group created an emphasis on education. They seek to help each individual to develop his/her spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical and artistic potential; and to cherish and protect the natural world. With a membership well over 4000, The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, called OBOD for short, has become one of the largest Druid organizations in the world. During the 1980s the OBOD began running a correspondence course to spread the word and knowledge of Druidism. The correspondence course instructs members in matters including Druidic history, the fine arts and ecological responsibility. The OBOD counts correspondence course members as nearly seventy-five percent of their membership with members participating from countries throughout the world (Green Druids...1997, 169-70).

In the United States, many people took part in the Druid groups from Great Britain, but then they began to personalize them. Groups were established ranging from The ADF (Ar nDraioct Fein - A Druid Fellowship) to the Schismatic Druids of North America. Each group contained a specific emphasis ranging from civil rights to ecology. If a Druid group did not exist for your interests, you had only to create it.
The Golden Gate Group of Druids, located in San Francisco, is a gay and lesbian order that places a large emphasis on AIDS research and support. The RDNA (Reformed Druids of North America) take on a strictly philosophical view, while ADF originated as an organization dedicated to create their religion by first finding any and all historical information related to ancient Druidism. When some members sought to move beyond the history books and into the realm of Celtic magic, the Henge of Keltria was formed.

The Henge of Keltria provides a unique look at Druidism's community making. Ar nDraioct Fein forms groves throughout the U.S. However, these groves are not all Celtic-based. ADF is committed to following the "Indo-European" basis for religion. In this tradition, each grove is expected to choose an identity, whether it be Celtic, Norse, Germanic, Hindu, it matters not. The emphasis is on historical evidence. After a while, several members of ADF decided that this umbrella approach to religion had drifted too far from its Druidic origins. Members formalized their disagreements, a la Martin Luther, by taping a list of demands to founder Isaac Bonewits's door. Soon after the Henge of Keltria was formed. Members of Keltria seek to move beyond the history books and into the realm of Celtic myth and magic (Amergin). They have received the blessings of ADF, as ADF believes there is a path for everyone, and their own path cannot possibly fit every person.

No matter what the desire -- spiritual growth, equal rights, historicism -- Druidism has the diversity to fill those needs. But what keeps all of these wide-ranging groups together under the rubric of Druidism? There are several
characteristics that each Druid group shares with its siblings. The first is the distinct respect for the Druids of ancient Europe. The original Druids are held in highest esteem for their knowledge and, possibly even more importantly, for their mystery. They are the forefathers of today's Druids and they are accepted and respected, no matter what evidence archaeology may dig up. (Refer to the Lindow Man and the popular theory that he was a victim of a Druidic ritual).

A second common belief is the respect for the environment. No matter the focus of the modern groups, they all center their religion on the natural world. Rituals are focused on the cycle of the year and the phases of the moon. Environmental causes are a strong component in many Druid groups. The OBOD has a Campaign for Ecological Responsibility as well as many tree planting events. In general, celebrations of all types are held out of doors. At dusk in the middle of the woods is a particular favorite time for their rituals. Even the cyberspace Druids hold to this love of nature, as they create their own virtual grove for synchronistic Internet rituals.

The third characteristic shared by contemporary Druids is the eight Fire Festivals. Virtually every Druid group celebrates these festivals in some form. The First is that of Samhain. As the ancient Druids believe the darkness of night always came before day, so the coldness of winter always began the year. Samhain was traditionally celebrated during the sacred month of Ruis (the Elder tree). Ruis was the thirteenth month of the Celtic lunar calendar and it usually cam in the autumn. As with all lunar calendars, the exact date changes annually; still Samhain became associated with the end of October. This holy day was eventually morphed into the
Halloween Americans know and love, but Druids, as well as most other pagan groups, are reclaiming the nature of their holiest of holy days. The other major festivals include Imbolc (oddly enough - today's Ground Hog's Day), Beltane (May Day), Lughnasadh (Lammas in the Catholic calendar), as well as the equinoxes and the solstices.

**The Outlook for Druidism**

Nature and history are the key characteristics of contemporary Druidism. This can be seen as a reaction to the years of living in the sterile, homogeneous suburbs. Perhaps this man-made, modernistic environment has developed in some people a longing for a religion that not only respects nature, but also has the courage to love her in all of her wildness. A religion that allows for humans to remain in the comfort of modernity without denying the importance of nature and her role in creating the world we know today. Druidism seeks to do just that by allowing for people to embrace their own individuality and providing them with a historical precedent that rival most major religions alive today.

Druid numbers are sketchy due to the lack of formality found within most pagan groups. However, by sampling the groups that do show membership numbers, Druidism includes worshippers numbering in the tens of thousands and hailing from around the world. In Great Britain, the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids list membership of around 5000, with 3000 of those participating in their correspondence course. While OBOD is of British origins, their members come from all over the world. There are OBOD Groves on every continent except Antarctica. The Ar nDraioct Fein is the largest of the United States' Druid groups. They list membership
of around 4000. When the other American Groves are added into this equation, the number of Druids easily exceeds 10,000 in the US alone.

While flexibility seems to be the biggest factor in the popularity of American Druidism, the calls for personal and ecological responsibility and belief in the importance of history create a religion that has already stood the test of time. The future of Druidism seems rather secure.
Chapter Three:

Wicca

The second group to consider is the second oldest of the New Pagan religions popular in the United States. The term "Wicca" comes from the Old English word "witta" which is generally translated as wise woman. This term was morphed in to today's familiar term, Witch. Like the other Neo-Pagan traditions, Wicca or the Craft, is not at all what the general public believes it to be. While Salem, Massachusetts does contain a large number of Wiccans, the visions of curses and hags, is decidedly untrue.

The Witchcraft Tradition

The term Wicca was originally used to refer to the older women, and occasionally men, who possessed knowledge of useful herbs, folk cures and the like. The witches grew out of favor as male-dominated Christianity spread throughout Europe. The Church looked down the idea of women with knowledge, especially over potentially life or death matters. As Christianity's influence grew, the wise women began to be smothered into oblivion.

As is noticeable by this history lesson, Wicca in its original form was not an actual religion. It was simply a title of respect given to a healer. Christianity can be given credit for the transformation of the folk traditions of old becoming the religion of today. As Christianity sought to strengthen its hold, church leaders sought to find ways to rid themselves of the influence of these older healers. To do so, a logical
argument was invented: Wise women heal. The power to heal only lies within God's realm. People who heal outside of Church sanction are not healing with God's permission. Their skills to heal did not come from God; therefore they must be working with the Devil.

In this logic, all Wiccans are instantly transformed from healers to Satanists. The church then had the duty to rid the world of these ungodly people. The Church had managed to sort the thousands and thousands of healers from across Europe together into a single group. Where before there were Teutons, Saxons, Normans and Franks, Christians, Jews and Gypsies, they were now simply witches.

This is not how the wise women of old saw themselves, of course. Rather this is how the modern Wiccans view their predecessors. To find an actual religion of witches, we must leave behind the Dark Ages and turn to the twentieth century.

The Religion

Many theories abound regarding the actual starting point of the religion of Wicca. In her preeminent book Drawing Down the Moon, journalist Margot Adler lists the major theories regarding Wicca's origins. The first is the reaction to Margaret Murray's The Witch-Cult in Western Europe published in 1921. This work presented the idea that a fertility cult following had existed for millennia and that this organized religion had taken a beating during the Inquisition. While most scholars believe Murray's work to be "filled with errors," the book however did present modern scholars with much food for thought (Adler Drawing 1986, 47-49). Of particular interest is the essay entitled "Observations on European Witchcraft" produced by Mircea Eliade in 1974. Eliade, also finding fault with the accuracies of
his predecessors, does note that these very predecessors lead to "the rediscovery of 'cosmic religion' and the sacramental dimension of human existence… [and] the desire to reanimate the old beliefs" (Occultism 92)

Now that we have seen the academic origins, how do they relate to the actual religion of Wicca that we see today? The answer lies with a British man by the name of Gerald B. Gardner. His story begins with the 1951 British repeal of anti-witchcraft laws. In 1954 Gardner published his Witchcraft Today. In this work he tells of his acceptance into a British group of witches, a coven, during the 1930s by a witch named Dorothy. He goes on to explain how Dorothy's coven was a family tradition that was traceable for many centuries. The tradition was a peaceful, nature-based religion venerating the Goddess and the God and with eight High Holy Days.

What is controversial about this history of the Wiccan religion is not Gardner's claims of joining a coven; rather, it is the actual age of that coven. Most scholars today believe that Dorothy's coven was not a centuries-old coven, but rather a coven whose existence was not traceable prior to 1921 and the publication of Margaret Murray's book (Berger 1999, 12).

Regardless of the validity of the claim, the effects of Gardner's publication cannot be denied. Soon after Gardner's story came out, followers and members of his coven moved to the United States and brought their beliefs to America. In America, the Wiccan tradition began to develop its own American accent. Members of the latest British import began associating with other underground religions and it began absorbing influences from religions as diverse as Hinduism and Voodoo. Soon, an obvious difference developed and American Wicca became its own unique tradition.
The British followers of Wicca had always focused on the supreme pair: the Mother Goddess and the Horned God. In the United States, the tradition changed and the Horned God begins to fall into the shadows. Emphasis was now given to the Mother Goddess, but She too, was changed. No longer the archetypical mother or fertility figure, this Goddess became the manifestation of every goddess of every religion. She takes on the power of Kali, the Mabon, and Pele. She became the Durga, Athena and Isis, all combined into a single, powerful deity with power over existence itself.

This new Wicca remained in the underground of the religious world until the early 1980s when the religion received a new boost of popularity. In 1979, a Californian Wiccan by the name of Starhawk published *The Spiral Dance*. This publication may have received little attention if it were not for the publication of Zsuzsanna Budapest's *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, which arrived at bookstores just a few months later. The combined arrival of these two works signaled the arrival of Wicca as a true religion, complete with rules, rituals, doctrine and dogma.

Together, the two works affirm the identity of women as strong and influential members of the community. They offer women the freedom to step away from the patriarchal religious traditions by providing them with a basic how-to book. The authors explain how to go about being a solitary practitioner as well as how to form covens. They discuss the origins of their tradition, they show women how to be their own spiritual link to the deities and they even provide examples of rituals and magical spells. The completeness of these and later works by these
authors, has caused their writings to become the closest thing to scriptures that Wicca has to offer, and they are readily available at your local bookstore.

The Rituals

Budapest and Starhawk both tackle Wiccan rituals in their books. From the most basic of daily reverence to the rituals needed for the High Holy Days, these authors provide their readers with basic, step-by-step instructions.

Of particular interest is the collection of High Holy Days, which are called the eight sabbats. These include the two solstices, the two equinoxes and four other days known as Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh, and Samhain. These are the very same days that Druidism counts as their holiest days. It seems that these holy days and even the rituals they call for are traceable to the works of none other than Gerald Gardner. The Gardner coven seems rather obviously influenced by British Druidism, which was well established by the 1930s.

What Wicca Brings (The Community)

Wicca brings forth a community. It is a community of like-souled individuals. It is a collection of people, alienated from popular religion by patriarchy, by dogma, by hypocrisy, by any number or any collection of reasons. Wicca gives people a place to belong when they feel they do not belong elsewhere. It is a case of intimacy. Outside in the great Post-Modern world, all they see is isolation. Here, in Wicca, people are free to feel open, connected. Just as Helen Berger finds, "Wicca is a social laboratory for the development of friendship, community, routinization and the reembedding of moral issues" (127).
While Wicca creates a community, "Witchcraft is not a religion of masses -- of any sort. Its structure is cellular, based on covens, small groups of up to thirteen members that allow for communal sharing and individual independence" (Starhawk *Spiral* 1979, 28). Starhawk goes on to explain that the value of the covens is that they are a "circle of friends, in which there is leadership, but no hierarchy," and that they are "small enough to create community without loss of individuality" (210). Perhaps Starhawk's most interesting comment on community can be found in her "Notes on Chapter Thirteen." Here she comments further on the individual and community and reminds the practitioner:

To build a true community that fosters diversity, in a country of diverse races, classes, and cultures, we must also confront the ways in which we have internalized divisions that keep us apart -- our own subtle racism, our discomfort with differences, our assumptions that our style of life or use of language or level of resources is the norm for everybody and that those who differ are deviant. We need to notice ways in which our community fails to reflect the diversity around us and ask if we are subtly excluding people. And perhaps our theology needs an "option for the poor" as has developed in Christian liberation theology. That is, we need to ask: What are the interests of the most oppressed in this situation, and how can we serve them? For if we are all interconnected parts of the body of the Goddess, then pain in any part, no matter how small or how far away, is in some measure felt by us all. (249-250)

As this note points out, diversity within the community is something to be strived for by followers of Wicca. Oppression of diversity will be, and should be, noticed and corrected.

*The Outlook*

Much like its Druid predecessors, or should we even say ancestors, Wicca has been experiencing a steady rise in popularity. The Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance has researched the number of Wiccans in the United States in an attempt...
to find out how many practitioners are in the Craft. Their answer to this query: "We have a hunch that few estimates are accurate within fifty percent" (Robinson 2001). Translated, Religious Tolerance has found that there are somewhere between two thousand and ten million Wiccans in the United States. The massive variation comes from several factors that include lack of organization and fear. While fear of persecution keeps many Wiccans in the broom closet, various demographic sources have provided an estimate of over 750,000 practitioners in the U.S. (Covenant of the Goddess 1999). In addition to this large number, Wicca is listed in multiple areas as one of the fastest growing religions. The Pagan Federation of the U.K. reported that in 1999 they were receiving an average of one hundred inquires a month into the religion of Wicca. They offer this as an explanation for the popularity: "Spiritually, people want more than the paternalistic 'I will tell you what to think and what to do' attitude. As a race we are maturing. We want to make our own decisions about our own morality. We don't believe in indoctrination" (UK Pagans…2000).

Wicca allows people a choice. They are allowed to think, to go where they want to go and socialize with whomever they like. This appeals greatly to people living in a country known for its freedom: Finally, here is a religion that I can belong to and not be criticized for being me.
Chapter Four

Goddess Worship

Even "Goddesses watch the clock, too!" touts a recent *The Pyramid Collection* catalogue. The company is advertising their "Goddess wall clock" for sale at a modest $39.95. It is found in a section which also offers a goddess ring, a "Pentacle of the Goddess pendant" and a "Goddess Diffuser Set" for aromatherapy. (1996, 46). *The Pyramid Collection* is just one of many companies offering products designated for Goddess devotion. Such product specialization offers proof of the growing popularity of Goddess worship. It also leads to the question: what exactly is Goddess worship and why has it become so popular?

*The Mythic Precedent*

To have some sense of authenticity, every religious movement must have some sort of mythic base. As the Goddess movement formed out of Neo-Paganism, it only seems appropriate that the mythic foundation of Goddess worship would also find its source in Neo-Pagan myth. The mythic precedent for the Great Goddess comes out of a combination of pre-Christian beliefs and feminist revisionism. The basic myth, or "monomyth" as Dr. Fry labels it, is as follows.

The earliest divinity ever worshipped was a mother goddess, since people were convinced that it was only the women who had anything to do with producing offspring. The belief that men did not have a role in reproduction "must have given women a predominant social role in the worship of a goddess, or at least a divinity
with female characteristics" (Markale 1986, 13-14). Therefore, in that prehistoric era, women were considered to be the intermediaries between the general population and this feminine deity. Goddess worshippers believe this to be the reason why the prehistoric statue, Venus of Willendorf, does not have a face: "She had no face because She isn't human, but a Force" (Budapest 1989, 287). From this humble beginning as reproducer, the Great Goddess arises. She is a supreme deity, much like the Judeo-Christian God, but She "is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world, She is the world.... She does not legitimize the rule of either sex by the other and lends no authority to rulers of temporal hierarchies" (Starhawk *Spiral...* 1989, 9). The Great Goddess is not some abstract, withdrawn Force, She is Mother Earth. Women, being her intermediaries, were/are responsible for making sure that all love and respect the Mother. This wondrous society was a place "where it was customary to run around all day bare-breasted and free; where rape was practically unheard of and punishable by death should it ever occur; where women were worshipped by their children if they had any, and worshipped as an expression of the Goddess whether they had children or not" (294).

In this purported world where all worshipped the Great Goddess, women were at the least equal to the men, possibly even ruling over them in a sort of peaceful coexistence. But this prehistoric matriarchy did not last. At some point, around the time of the agricultural revolution, men began to realize their role in the reproduction process and that began the patriarchy, which exists to this day (Markale 1986, 14). Many surmise that this change in power would not have occurred had the
women been more less trustful. Instead, "they were beauty-oriented, not war-obsessed, and thus were easily overrun and sacked in the cruelest sense of the word. Budapest continues to point out that "matriarchy was deposed mainly because of our lack of suspicion about our sons. We really did not deal with the possibility that they would rise up and kill us... Matriarchal women had no defense systems. They didn't even have swords, although they did use wands" (Budapest 1989, 294).

According to this feminist view of history, when the men took over the world, they took over the Goddess religion as well. They renamed Her "God" and made Her into "Him." The men took the places of the Goddesses, priestesses and took over the rituals and ceremonies that were dedicated to Her. They took the scripture surrounding the Goddess and replaced all references to Her with references to "Him." Women who continued to worship the Goddess, even in secret, "were labeled witches and made legally subject to torture and murder by the male establishment" (Walker 3). This remained the norm until the second wave of the modern feminist movement when some women realized that they did not have the spiritual guides they needed. They began to scrutinize the "male claims to authority in the creation of rituals as well as in all other theological matters" (Walker 1990, 4). This questioning of patriarchal religion, lead to the rediscovery of the ancient ways and the Great Goddess.

Knowledge of this prehistoric matriarchal system had been lost for thousands of years. When modern women "discovered" the existence of this matriarchal era, they were first saddened by the loss of such a system but then "that sadness soon changed to anger and blame: it was the patriarchs who destroyed the records, burned
the women, and set humanity on a collision course with self-destruction" (Weaver 1995, 57). Modern women resolved that the problems of today's world are the results of thousands of years of disrespect and mistreatment of the Great Goddess. Today we are seeing "the punishment for matricide [which] is foul air, poisoned food, ecological disasters (earthquakes, famines, hurricanes and drought). Mother is not happy, and She will not take this anymore" (Budapest 1989, 293).

As with all mythic beginnings, there are problems with the foundation myth of the modern Goddess movement. The biggest problem is the simple lack of proof. There is no historical evidence, either written or as artifacts, for the existence of prehistoric matriarchies or even the worship of a single Great Goddess rather than a general variety of goddesses. The evidence for such a matriarchal world comes mainly from the feminist scholars who have reinterpreted ancient history to find signs of a Great Goddess. The problem with such reinterpretations is that the feminist scholars are not trained in ancient history or archaeology. However, it is imperative to point out that the lack of physical evidence is not as important as the myth itself. While such a myth "offers a religious alternative that rests on a utopian vision rather than a historical one," it provides a positive goal for many people to work toward in today's society (Weaver 1995, 57, 61).

So, if the idea of a single Great Goddess did not in actuality exist in prehistory, where did the idea come from? The answer is rather simple; She "is a modern creation, the female counterpart of, although totally independent from the Judeo-Christian God" (Lefkowitz 1993, 267). Even other Neo-Pagan groups are skeptical of the roots of such a single Great Goddess: Margot Adler, a practicing
Wiccan, notes that the idea of a Great Goddess is contradictory to the general Wiccan view of a polytheistic world. Adler describes the belief in the Great Goddess as "a kind of monotheism that only differs in gender from the religions modern Pagans have rejected" (Adler, "A Response" 1989, 229).

Just as within Wicca, the occurrence of the Goddess movement, after centuries of Christian dominance, can be said to have its origins with Gerald Gardner. In the 1940's Gardner announced that he had found a coven of witches who had been practicing in secret for centuries and, therefore, had been able to keep their religion alive (Fry 1993, 66). Gardner's book about this coven became part of the foundation of the modern revival of paganism as well as the modern witchcraft religion known as Wicca. During the 1960's and 1970's the growth of the feminist movement, the rise of the Human Potential movement, and the Sixties Counterculture all added strength to the Neo-Pagan movement ("Neo-Paganism" 1995, 766).

The Religion

There are two main approaches to viewing a Great Goddess. The first view is polytheistic and is the view held by most Neo-Pagan groups including many of those involved in Wicca, Druidism, Greco-Roman revivals and other similar groups. This view sees the Goddess as one of many deities. Margot Adler maintains that the Goddess movement is one that "honors the Goddesses of a thousand cultures" (Adler, "A Response " 1989, 98). In her classic work Drawing Down the Moon, Adler notes that those who follow the path of Wicca generally worship a Goddess and a corresponding God while most Goddess worshippers are usually monotheistic in that
they worship the Goddess as the only deity (Alder, *Drawing...* 1986, 35). Adler says that she prefers the polytheistic view because it allows for a variety of views to coexist: "polytheism has always included monotheism, or henotheism" (Adler, "A Response" 1989, 98). The followers of the henotheistic view, worship a single Goddess but they also maintain that that particular Goddess is one of many different deities.

In contradiction to the polytheistic view comes the view of many who see the Great Goddess as a single being who encompasses all other things. Paula Gunn Allen explains that this view is partially due to the times we live in: "modern women's attempts to discuss Goddess spirituality are of necessity influenced by the patriarchal monotheistic religious systems we live under" (Allen 1991, 31). It is the single Goddess view that many feminists have adopted precisely because it is a polar opposite to the "patriarchal monotheistic religious systems" of today. One former witch has even come to describe the idea of a single Great Goddess as no longer even Neo-Pagan "but a radically dissenting type of Christian sect.... [She] is merely a 'de-Christianized' and backdated 'version of Mary'" (Adler *Drawing...* 1986, 174). Most followers of the Great Goddess do not agree with this view, of course. They have instead adopted a Jungian approach to viewing the Goddess.

C. G. Jung, a Swiss psychoanalyst, developed the theory that everyone is influenced by an inherited, collective unconscious. This collective unconscious contains archetypes, "powerful inner forces" that influence a person's behavior (Bolen 1984, 4). Dr. Bolen puts forth the idea that the deities of Greco-Roman pantheon can personify these archetypes. The followers of the Goddess movement
take it one step further and argue that the archetypes, personified by various deities, are in actuality various aspects of the One - the Great Goddess. They take all of the traditional attributes of the archetypal Mother Goddess: "smiling, wise, benevolent, graciously nonconfrontational Ladies" but then they add to them. They add a touch of realism: imperfectness, anger, and other pieces of real life. The Goddess they end up with is one who "gives abundance and blight, lush weather and foulness, laughter and loud screams.... Cruel and kind mother, warrior, virgin, hag, goddess of sex and fertility, the one who makes the land fruitful or barren, mother of seasons, the one who protects the flocks and seeds" (Mor 1990, 34). While it is this archetypal Goddess that gives followers of the Feminist Spirituality movement their sense of mythic beginnings, "ultimately, we don't decide who or what the Goddess is, we only choose to what depth we will experience [her in] our lives" (Starhawk, "Roundtable" 1989, 106).

The Rituals

It is the experience of the Goddess that seems to be most important to the understanding of the Goddess to the followers of the more monotheistic view. It can be said that "it is not necessary to 'believe in' any goddess in order to accept the power of goddess symbols or to experience that power in ritual;" indeed "ritual comes first and myths are second" to this movement (Neitz 1990, 356). It is the ritual wherein most women find the experience of the Goddess "where contact with archetypal reality, with the deep places of the mind - with 'gods', if you will- becomes possible" (Adler, "A Response" 1989, 109). In this ritual experience, women find that they are accepted as women, both from others in the group as well as by
themselves. The women learn that they have an aspect of the divinity within
themselves: "The woman in the ritual becomes the Goddess" (Fry 1993, 70). One
woman explains the ritual process as a place to heal: "Sometimes it takes a lot of
energy just to make it from day to day. Our group offers me just about unequivocal
support. It's a way to recharge my energy, to come out refreshed and ready to cope
with the world" (Neitz 1990, 363).

What the Goddess Provides

There are approximately 100,000 people in the United States today who
worship the Goddess (Unger 1990, 42). Neo-Paganism attracts rather well-educated,
white, middle class Americans and the Goddess movement enjoys the same crowd,
but also attracts thousands of feminists (Fry 1993, 69-70).

In the mid-twentieth century, Betty Friedan's fundamental work The Feminine
Mystique told women that it was all right to be dissatisfied with the roles that had
been established for them. Many women and even some men took to heart aspects of
feminist views and began searching for some type of balance between the feminine
and the masculine in their lives. This search for balance also began to be played out
in religious circles. Women, who were dissatisfied with their role in the Christian
religion's traditions, found that they could do more than no longer participating or
simply ignoring the problem. They began meeting together to discuss the spiritual
aspects of their lives. They began to rediscover the roles women had played in the
pre-Christian world and many women found these roles appealing. They started
forming groups or joining groups that had existed in an almost underground world --
groups that venerated the female aspects of life. These groups were "drawing from
the Goddess religions of antiquity, from the frank Mother worship of the pagan or the primitive, and from their own personal sense of what is both spiritual and fundamentally female" (Walker 1990, 4).

For thousands of women, this meant leaving the male-dominated Judeo-Christian scene completely. These women found that the Neo-Pagan movement's emphasis on goddesses offered them the meaningful roles they sought. They found the idea of Goddess to be "a focus of their long-suppressed intuitions and a major symbol of their self-empowerment. She is the Mother who accepts their feminine personhood, in contrast to the Father who rejected it" (Walker 1990, 4).

Many women joined or created their own women-centered spiritual groups, some following the path of Wicca and others forging new trails. Many of these women's groups took on the role of therapies as they began to "incorporate healing as a means through which female spirituality can be reconstructed and expressed" (Jacobs 1990, 374). This healing, whether for depression, abuse, or a number of other problems, works to allow a woman to "understand and gain the feeling inside of what it would be like to be that strong, to have that kind of sense of self and wholeness, to act as the strong Goddess of old" (Fry 1993, 71).

With benefits like these, the idea of Goddess worship began spreading beyond the Neo-Pagan boundaries until "today, many women who become involved with the goddess movement do so with very little knowledge of the rest of the Neo-Pagan movement" (Neitz 1990, 367). While some Neo-Pagans complain that the more political feminists are using Goddess worship for their own gains, these feminists maintain that it is actually a case of Goddess using them to spread Her word (Adler,
Drawing…1986, 226). Either way the result is that the Goddess movement, while asserting a Neo-Pagan birthright, has moved past Neo-Paganism into the larger realm of Feminist Spirituality.

The Outlook

Goddess worshippers with a more feminist agenda are considered in a slightly different light than other groups trying to revive the "Old Ways." Yes, Goddess worship and other Neo-Pagan movements share the same foundations, but the other pagan groups seem a little cautious about including the Goddess movement in their array. Is Goddess worship truly an emergent religion- does it really have its roots in pre-Christian eras or is it just a feminist aspiration? Quite often, Neo-Pagans feel that the rationale and history of the Goddess movement seem to be too much of a determined opposite of Christianity to be truly an Old Religion. The decision as to whether or not the Goddess movement is truly an emergent religion may come down to a question of intent: is the modern Goddess movement an attempt to revive a long-dead religion? Based on the lack of supporting evidence, the answer ranges somewhere between probably not and no.

This lack of proof of pre-Christian origins pushes the Goddess movement out of the usual Neo-Pagan category of re-emergent religions. This does not, however, deprive the movement of its usefulness. The Goddess movement is an attempt to create a religion suited to the needs of certain members of today's society. Here, in regards to the world around them, there seems to be an underlying agreement among both typical Neo-Pagans and feminist Goddess worshippers. Both groups seem to believe that the shortcomings and horrors of the world are a direct result of
patriarchal religions' failings. These groups believe that the only salvation for the world as a whole will come from a return to the earth-honoring traditions held by both Neo-Pagans and Goddess worshippers. As a concluding thought, Professor Weaver reminds us that "unlike traditional Western religions, which are grounded in historical events, utopias need not have connections to a real past in order to provide hope for a real future" (64).
Native American Spirituality is interesting as it has two dialectically opposed sides. The rebirth of Native American spirituality can be seen first in the resurgence of traditional beliefs within the various nations of Native Americans, henceforth referred to as the First Nations. The second rise of Native American spirituality is found with the creation of a new religious movement that can be termed the Rainbow Tribe or the Red Road.

The key difference between these groups is the membership: Traditional Native American spirituality focuses on returning to the pre-Columbian beliefs of the First Nations. We see the rebirth, or resurgence, of Algonquin religious beliefs, of Cherokee, of Dine', Manitoba, et al. We witness the reclaiming of native traditions, of powwows, sweat lodges, peyote use and even of the Sun Dance. These traditions have been recovered from history and are beginning to take their proper places among the First Nations.

The second of these two movements is that of the Rainbow Tribe or the Red Road and it is this path that can be studied as a new Pagan movement. This is a spiritual path that invites all people of the earth to learn the ways of the First Nations. Adherents try to follow the "Red Road", an idea derived from Black Elk Speaks. This belief seeks to reunite humankind with the natural world. The goal is to teach all people ecologically based ways of respecting nature in an attempt to save the world from environmental destruction. This path is one that will lead to a new
community of non-prejudiced, ecologically minded individuals who will work together to make Mother Nature whole once more.

The followers of this path hold that action and responsibility must be taken immediately if our world is going to be saved. This emphasis on immediate change, or else, helps to push this group closer to New Age than Neo-Pagan; but the central focus is still on creating a better way of life in the here and now. This is going to be achieved by returning to the traditions of the past - a key characterization of Neo-Pagan thought.

The key difference between the Rainbow Tribe and the religions of the First Nations is the ecological and somewhat millennialist tone tied to the Rainbow Tribe as well as the membership. The religions of the First Nations are only practiced by members of those very Nations - Caucasians need not apply. The First Nations' version of Native American Spirituality also tends to take offense at followers of the above mentioned Rainbow Tribe: many Native Americans who follow the ways of their ancestors feel that the followers of the Rainbow Tribe should instead look to their own culture for a sacred past.

*The Religion*

It has been called the Red Way, the Red Road, Natural Way, the Way of the Light, and the Great Awakening. But perhaps the best title is that given it by author Jamie Sams: the Rainbow Tribe. She says the adherents "will be called the Rainbow Tribe, for they are the product of thousands of years of melding among the five original races. These children of Earth have been called together to open their hearts and to move beyond the barriers of disconnection" (McGaa 1992, 1). The members
of this tribe have united their search for truth with their search for freedom and have found that the goal "harmony with the universe" is within every individual's grasp (Allen 1991, 84).

The philosophy behind the Natural Way of the Rainbow Tribe is simple. Their daily life is normal: "Rainbows work, thrive, vote, pay taxes, abide by laws, are drug free, abstain from or touch little alcohol, and do what almost everyone else does legally in this land" (McGaa 1992, x). Their religion recognizes that all things animate or inanimate, are products of the Great Spirit. In this they establish themselves as a nature-respecting culture. They believe that "growth comes with an increasing awareness of and respect for Great Mystery in all people and things... Growth comes through tolerance for the infinite variety of ways in which Great Spirit, the Infinite, may express itself in this universe" (McGaa 1992, 4). As with the vast majority of Neo-Pagans, tolerance of others and their ideas is key.

It is already obvious that the Rainbow Tribe is monotheistic. The list of names for this deity includes the Infinite, High Power, Prime Mover, Creator, and the ever-popular Great Spirit. There is no description of the Great Spirit. There are no statues or anthropomorphic views of the Ultimate Force. This is because the Rainbows "believe that it is rather foolish to attempt description of the creator of space and time - things our two-legged minds can not totally comprehend." With this in mind, the term Wakan tanka Lakota for Great Mystery, becomes popular as it "leaves adequate latitude to avoid an argument" (McGaa 1992, 3-4).

Many First Nations tend to be polytheistic; however, the Rainbow Tribe has created some revisionist history in order to create a religion suited to its members.
The Native American spirituality movement has taken the instance of hundreds of independent religions found in North America and combined them into one. According to the Rainbow Tribe, there may have been a multiplicity of spirits, possibly even recognized as a polytheistic, they were however, simply various representations of the Great Mystery. The Rainbow Tribe maintains that Native Americans believe in a Spiritual Essence, called Orenda by the Sioux, within all animate or inanimate beings. This Essence is the place where the Great Mystery lives. Therefore, the Native Americans are seen as monotheistic with spirits, that is, where the Great Mystery lives, found within all things.

The Rainbow Tribe does not limit itself to the idea of the Absolute when it comes to differing with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The "Rainbows abhor a spiritual hierarchy, especially an all-male priesthood. They prefer a balanced female-male approach to ceremonial conduct, with a definite assertion that woman will equally lead Ceremony and share a leadership role in Rainbow cultural matters" (McGaa 1992, 49). This approach is also a modern twist to the original traditions of the First Nations among whom women held much power, but were still limited let alone balanced.

Even the idea of Hell has been rectified: "There is no evidence of a hell (or a devil either) in nature; therefore, most traditionals do not swallow this belief of the white man" (McGaa 1992, 10). Instead of the tales of hell and damnation passed on by Christianity, the Rainbow Tribe seeks to pass on Medicine Stories and Tradition, "so that we may continue to dance the Dance of Creation, bringing inner peace and, therefore world peace" (Sams 1988, 7). The many doctrines and dogmas are viewed
as "man-designed religious fears employed by the old eclipsing regimes which have no hold over the Rainbows" (McGaa 1992, x).

While the traditional fire and brimstone hell does not exist in the Rainbow Tribe's belief system, the idea of an afterlife is present. It is believed that "Wakan Tanka [Great Mystery] made everything in the form of the circle and therefore, the circle symbolizes that life was unending" (McGaa 1992, 9). Unending is meant in the respect of life continuing in a different world than the mortal. The Rainbows have accepted that their afterlife will be based on a person's actions in this life. The belief is almost karmic in the understanding of how bad deeds are punished and good deeds rewarded. In the Rainbow's world, all actions are committed to memory; therefore they will be with you for eternity. The Rainbows recognize that "it is your mind and nothing else that you will take with you to the spirit world when you leave here" (15). This approach has a certain moral advantage when you compare it to the Judeo- Christian idea of sin. In the Jewish and even more so in the Christian traditions, there exists a belief in repentance. McGaa recognizes "Christians believe they can be forgiven for all their misdeeds no matter how harmful to others" (13). Following this belief, a man could kill another and yet be completely absolved of the crime. Members of the Rainbow Tribe believe that the Judeo-Christian traditions have established a sort of get-out-of-hell-free card that people have been abusing for far too long.

**The Rituals**

In their religion, the Rainbow Tribe has seven ceremonies called the seven Mother Earth Ceremonies. These were originally the Sioux ceremonies of the Sweat
Lodge, the Vision Quest, the Sun Dance, the Making of Relatives, the Keeping of the Soul, the Womanhood Ceremony, and the Throwing of the Ball. Two ceremonies have evolved to replace some of the original seven: the Peace Pipe Ceremony and the Spirit Calling Ceremony. These ceremonies "convey a meaningful relationship with Mother Earth and all the rest of the Great Spirit's creation," thus emphasizing the relationship with others in the group (McGaa 1992, 18). At all of these ceremonies, women traditionally enter first and are quite often given the place of honor to sit.

The most common ceremony is that of the Sweat Lodge. This ritual takes place inside either a temporary or permanent sweathouse and generally lasts though the entire night. There are set duties that are prearranged such as the fire man, the chief drummer and of course, the Roadman who leads the ceremony. Inside the sweat lodge, the participants are seated upon Mother Earth and with Father Sky present; they beseech the four directions and the ceremony progresses. The ceremony will include songs, prayers and drumming. Other rituals may be added to the sweat lodge but one thing is never added: peyote. The Rainbow Tribe is not the same as the Native American Church. The Rainbow Tribe follows what adherents view as the traditional beliefs of the First Nations, with special attention to the ceremonies of the Lakota Sioux. The Rainbow Tribe insists that the "Holy Persons of the Sioux tribe deplored the use of any and all hallucinatory substances." The Sweat Lodge, just as any ritual of the Rainbow Tribe, is completely stimulant free, caffeine included (McGaa 1992, 42).

Another ceremony that has been in public view for some time is that of the Vision Quest. In this ceremony, a warrior is purified in the sweat lodge and then
finds a desolate area where he waits for a vision. This wait can last from a couple of hours to several days, during which the seeker is not to eat, drink or sleep. Instead he is to concentrate upon obtaining understanding. After he receives his vision, he returns to the sweat lodge where the vision is interpreted. Then there is a feast for all these helping and supporting.

The biggest misunderstanding involved with the Vision Quest is the role of the women. According to the Rainbows' understanding of traditional Lakota beliefs, women take part in a different ceremony called a Healing Quest. As a general rule, women do not go on Vision Quests. A woman's Healing Quest takes an entire year of preparation. During this year, the woman has a minimum of three days of silence and retreat every month. These days should fall during her Moon time or during a full or new moon if she is no longer menstruating. During the Moon time retreat, the woman only participates in personal and natural activities. This is so the woman can be filled with thanksgiving and self-expression. The goals of the retreat are visions and creativity. In order to allow the creativity and visions more freely, the Moon time retreat "is not a time to create any kind of stress for the body, mind, heart or spirit." This is the complete opposite of the men who must endure multiple stresses during their Quest. The reason for this difference is the belief that "women suffer enough during Moon time cycles, pregnancy, labor and birth" (Sams 1988, 12-13). Through the very nature of their gender, women are born into the vision receiving state of mind that men must endure hardships in order to reach. During her retreat, the woman "opens herself to receive the Mother Earth's strength and nurturing to replenish her body" (Sams 1988, 12-13). After a year of retreats, a woman learns that
she can trust herself. She then makes her sacred space where she stays for three days and nights, giving thanks and receiving her vision. Her rewards are in finding connections with her Orenda, "her body's rhythms, the Great Mystery, her Totems, the Spirit World, Grandmother Moon and the Earth Mother." Completion of the entire process allows a woman to receive from Earth Mother the same nurturing she gives to others. It also "teaches women to honor and love themselves and their roles in life" (Sams 1988, 16).

For the past two decades, the Rainbow Tribe has held a two-week annual camp during the summer. These camps promote many sorts of activities ranging from music to yoga and tai chi. They include lectures on everything from vegetarianism to biodegradablility. And they attract many members of the Rainbow Tribe.

There are several interesting aspects to these annual retreats. First are the "A" camps, with the "A" standing for Alcohol. These are camps set up on the fringes of the main camp. They seem to be tag-a-longs rather than true members of the Rainbow Tribe, especially when you consider that the Rainbow Tribe, en mass, is non-alcoholic. Regardless of their views of the "A" camps, the annual gatherings still take place and they continue to accept the existence of these fringe members. The Rainbow attitude of, "to each their own", seems to apply even to groups who are often criticized for giving the whole a bad reputation.

The second unique factor of the annual camps is the on-going legal battles with the National Park Service. The camps are arranged to take place in the middle of various National Parks - not at campgrounds, but deep in the forests in as primeval
a setting as possible. Generally, this is not a problem, just pickup your camping permit at the rangers' station on your way in. Herein lies the conflict: Many of the Rainbows feel they should not have to get a permit, so the camps take place illegally. Their willingness to disobey what they deem as useless laws and their willingness to congregate in the face of persecution, appears to be a determined attempt to relive the Sixties: a sort of controlled destruction of rules to parallel the release received at such events as Mardi Gras or Carnival.

There is one exception to this parallel however. At the end of the annual campout, when everyone has left, there is virtually no sign of the two-week human invasion. It is a matter of pride to the Rainbows that they care for Mother Earth. They leave the areas as close to original as possible, an impressive feat for camps that attract around 20,000 people each year (Bentley 1996).

During any of the Rainbows' ceremonies, two events never take place: hallucinations and sacrifices. Possibly due to the high respect of nature, death sacrifices are considered wasteful and a sure way to anger the spirits. The aversion to hallucinogens is understanding the "Rainbows realize that the ecology of the planet presents a much higher calling - and one that demands a clear head" (McGaa 1992, 9). For this very reason, members of the Native American Church and the Peyote Church are not permitted into the Rainbow Tribe without first ceasing peyote use.

What the Religion Brings

Native American Spirituality occupies a special place among Neo-Pagan traditions: The emphasis is on ecology while the deities are secondary. What matters is what you do and when you do it. The Rainbow Tribe is concerned with unity and
seeing that unity is directed toward the world around you. The tradition brings with it a strong sense of individual responsibility. This responsibility extends not just to your own actions, but also to the actions of the world around you. It is up to each and every individual to do his or her part. The Rainbows believe that with every person maintaining him or herself, the world will simply fall into place.

The Rainbow Tribe is its own unique community. It has a touch of Hippy, a dash of Yuppie, and a pinch of Ecologist all wrapped into a single pup tent. The participants in this group have meandered into a flowing stream containing thousands of others who seek the same view of the world's future: they have found their way into the peace-loving, nature-revering world of the New Pagans.

Outlook on the Future

The Native American spirituality movements like the Rainbow Tribe seem quite likely to succeed. Of course, this will not be on the same scale as Christianity and Islam, but after surviving under the convert-or-die tactics of Christianity for four hundred years, the ideas embraced by the movements would appear to have the strength to live on. While the Rainbow Tribe seems to be a tradition born of the Sixties, its beliefs and dogmas come from much older traditions. These traditions are alive and well, and they show no signs of lessening.

The biggest advantage the Rainbow Tribe has on its side is its structure. As with most Neo-Pagan religions, the Rainbow Tribe is one that easily accommodated other religions, thus allowing the followers to be members of more than one group. Unfortunately, "the structure of Christianity is such that it insists on all-or-nothing
conversion" (Hopfe 1987, 46). This idea seems to be slowly easing off as more and more members of mainstream religions adopt the philosophies of the Rainbow tribe.

Without having an organized structure, or even an official website for that matter, it is surprising to learn of the popularity of this spiritual tradition. It attracts members of other Neo-Pagan traditions who feel quite at home at Rainbow meetings. As a pagan tradition, the Rainbows are free to belong to as many religions as they need. Therefore, there are Christian Rainbows, Wiccan Rainbows, Druid, Heather and Goddess Worshippers all being counted as part of the Rainbow Tribe.

The Rainbow camps draw 18-20,000 campers each year. This leads to estimates of 40,000 or more participants in the Rainbow Tribe - participants, not members, as the Rainbow Tribe has no central or even local membership arenas. There are no annual dues and there are no weekly requests for money. With the variety of beliefs, the openness to all and the reverence of Mother Earth, this tradition continues to grow and to accept all who want to belong.
In his look at Occultism, Eliade states that the many pushes toward various pagan traditions are all interconnected. They "all have to do with the same fundamental drive: to go beyond one's parents' and grandparents' world of meanings and to recover the lost significance and beatitude of the 'beginnings' and thereby the hope of discovering a new and creative mode of existing in the world" (Eliade, Occultism…1976, 92). This is definitely a large part of the drive toward Neo-Paganism, however, it is not the whole story. This view does not take into account the desire for an improved world, the fear in the face of Post-Modern nihilism or "the essentially life-denying negativeness of the Christian ethics" (Stumph 1994, 424).

Perhaps the years of living in the sterile, homogeneous suburbs has created a longing for a religion that not only respects nature, but also has the courage to love her in all of her wildness. Raymond Knows begins his first chapter with the title "The Quest for Vision" and it reads:

The age in which we live is urgently seeking for some new vision of life - 'almost advertising for it.' Something, it is evident, in our accustomed way of living has gone seriously wrong, and has brought widespread disaster with it. And the conviction is deepening that our plight is ultimately due to a lack of vision. 'Where there is no vision the people perish.' Today the correctness of this insight is receiving fresh confirmation and what was once the utterance of a seer is now expressed by many representative voices of the multitude. People whose security and means of livelihood have largely perished are coming to realize that there is a vital connection between their ideals and their welfare. In a time of material abundance we did not seek the real ends of life for which all things are to be used, with the result that these things have been stripped from us by our own incompetence. Life had become impoverished primarily
because there was no directing, spiritual idea. With the destruction of material power, men are everywhere awakening to a critical searching of heart and mind. There is a longing to understand better the vast forces which now seem beyond control, and to find the way to gain mastery of them. The need is felt to lay hold of a purpose which will release capacities and guide acts toward a new goal or endeavor. The highest quest seeks an answer to the question, What is life for? (3)

The main reason for the popularity of Neo-Paganism in America is that it is a source for communities that value individuals. People drawn to Neo-Paganism are searching for a place to belong, but a community where they do not have to succumb to set of patterns telling them who they should be. Neo-Pagans want to be individuals but still be part of the whole. Many people find that this is not conceivable, or is simply not happening in the established religious communities. When individuality is sacrificed for community, many turn to other groups that seem to have found a solution to this problem.

The Neo-Pagan groups find this solution in the foundations of the various organizations making up the movement. Oberon G'Zell explains that his turn to Paganism came from his disenchantment with his Protestant upbringing. He notes that he felt "somewhere along the line I had a sense of not being who they were talking about. And of being 'a stranger in a strange land." That was it. I went searching for my people, my culture, my religion, and for my roots. For my tribe" (Bond & Hopman 1996, 218 -219). For him this search resulted in his founding the Church of All Worlds. Several Druid organizations, like Isaac Bonewits's Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF) are founded on the search for scholastic research and intellectual growth. Often Goddess worshippers are drawn together on a foundation of feminist beliefs, while other Goddess worshipers and Wiccans form communities
based on sexual orientation. Many Native American-based belief systems are communities based on ecology. The list of foundation reasons could be quite long but there is one underlying theme: the search for a community of individuals

From its intellectual origins in the Enlightenment to its recent Post-Modern coming-out, Neo-Paganism has allowed like-minded people to express their own individualities amongst friends. Modern pagan groups come together in the search for a community of individuals, but a community nonetheless. It is this point that is the reason for Neo-Paganism's popularity now and probably its popularity in the future.
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