

Wicca

Wicca is a nature based faith centering around the five elements of nature: earth, air, water, fire, and spirit. The primary symbol associated with Wicca is the pentacle, a five pointed star, usually drawn with a circle around it. The pentacle is drawn using one single line, which is representative of the Wiccan belief that all things in the world are connected by energy. Each point of the star signifies one of the five elements. Each of the four earthly elements has a cardinal (compass) direction associated with it: Earth = North, Air = East, South = Fire, and West = Water. These directions are used when calling in the elements for ritual purposes (more on that in a bit). From what I've seen most Wiccans refer to themselves as "witches" even the males, though I believe some males will refer to themselves as wizards (it just doesn't seem to be as prevalent). And since there are a lot of pagans that aren't actually Wiccan, but that do celebrate a lot of the same holidays (such as the Druids), they do not refer to themselves as Wiccan or witches. (All Wiccans are pagan, but not all pagans are Wiccan).

Many Wiccans (and pagans in general) feel called to this path, and find solace in nature. Wiccans tend to feel connected to the world around them, especially in nature. Many people like Wicca because it is not a patriarchal faith, and instead counter-balances the masculine and feminine in the workings and rituals. The best example of this is Mother Earth and Father Sky. Even with the elements they have masculine or feminine energies attributed to them, so Air and Fire are typically viewed as masculine and Water and Earth are viewed as feminine. Typically Wiccans view the spirit element as the representation of the soul, and believe in reincarnation (though again I'm sure there's many different ideals here).

There are many different types of Wicca, though I would say the most common tend to be Family Tradition, Dianic, and Gardnerian. As such there is no real set way to practice Wicca, and the way people practice will vary depending on their tradition and individual preferences. Some people choose to be solitary practitioners. Others elect to join a coven or a specific tradition, which usually requires an initiation.

Whatever the chosen method of practice, most Wiccans practice "white magic", which is meant to channel energy for positive purposes. None of the spells cast by these Wiccans are intending to harm anyone, and most rituals or chants will have a disclaimer inserted to prevent any unintended harm from occurring. This is not to say that no Wiccans practice "black magic" it's just that those individuals are typically shunned or avoided by the mainstream Wiccan community. Within Wiccan there is a "Law of Three" that states that all energies sent out will return to the sender threefold. This is mostly referring to the very specific energy that is channeled and cast during rituals, but many Wiccans also apply it similarly to the western idea of karma, meaning every thought, action, feeling, and of course spell will come back to you 3 fold. So someone with positive energy will generally receive positive energy back, and someone with negative energy will generally get negative energy back. Another key ideal is the Wiccan Rede, which is most commonly summed up with two words: HARM NONE.

The majority of Wiccan rituals center around the 8 Wiccan holidays, which are evenly spaced throughout the year. In Wicca the year is viewed as a wheel and the holidays are viewed as

spokes on the wheel, which are punctuating specific transitions throughout the year. There are four greater sabbats: Imbolc (Feb 2), Beltane (May 1), Lughnasadh (Aug 1), and Samhain (Oct 31), and four lesser sabbats: Eostra (Spring Equinox), Litha (Summer Solstice), Mabon (Autumn Equinox), and Yule (Winter Solstice). Other rituals may be performed based on the phases of the moon (specifically the full moon or the new moon usually). Also Wiccans may perform individual rituals (spells) for specific needs that arise, and they will try to time those rituals based on the goal of the spell. When casting spells specific candles, colors, oils, gemstones, rocks, ribbons, etc will be used. Each item is thought to have specific attributes that make it ideal for specific types of rituals.

During most rituals representatives of the four elemental directions will be called in. Also representatives of the three realms (the ancestors = the lower plane, the nature spirits = the earthly plane, and the shiny ones = the heavenly plane) will also be called in to open up the axis mundi (or the connection between the three realms). If there is a specific deity that may be beneficial to the working, they may also be called in as well. Once all the desired energies are called in there will be a circle cast around all the participants. The intent of the circle is to act as a semi-permeable barrier during the working to allow "good" energy to enter while keeping "bad" energy out. Good and bad here is not necessarily good and evil rather it's viewed in terms of energy that is complimentary to the working vs energy that is incompatible with the working. During the ritual there is often a guided meditation to channel the energy for the desired purpose. Blessings are offered to all the entities to encourage them to aid in the working, many times there are many different blessings offered to the energies and deities. After all the blessings have been given there is usually some type of blessing cup (containing some kind of liquid from water to wine) passed around, so that you may ask for blessings in return. These are usually individual requests and will vary from individual. Once the working is done the energies are dismissed in the reverse of the order they were called in and the circle is closed. In truth there is no "right" or "wrong" way, and every ritual is different, even if the overall theme is the same.