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Sacred Cosmos

Journal of Liberal Religious Paganism



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Preface

Welcome to the second issue of Sacred Cosmos, a journal of liberal religious paganism, published by the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. The mission of this journal is to support and stimulate honest and thought-provoking dialogue about thea(o)logical, historical, and cross-cultural topics related to Earth-centered spiritual thought and practice.

Sacred Cosmos is a collection of essays and sermons that may provide new perspective on key areas of interest for those of us who teach or preach on such issues as well as those within UUism who are following a Pagan or Earth-centered path. Sacred Cosmos is also intended to present a picture of UU Paganism to those in the larger Pagan community who are interested in learning a bit more about the state of Earth-centered spirituality within the UU movement.

It is an exciting time to practice an Earth-centered spiritual tradition within the context of Unitarian Universalism. As a denomination, we have recently been challenged by our president, Rev. William G. Sinkford, to develop “a vocabulary of reverence.” Religious humanist and UU minister Rev. David Bumbaugh writes that we, as a denomination, have lost “the ability to speak of that which is sacred, holy, of ultimate importance to us.” I could not agree more, having been drawn to CUUPS out of my personal need to acknowledge and speak of that which is sacred and holy.

As pagans, we see the sacred and holy surrounding us in all aspects and elements of our daily lives. We make intentional connections between ourselves and the sacred through ritual and our daily spiritual practices. We rejoice in the evolution of a science that supports our interconnected view of the world. We are not as adept at the language of reverence as we would like to become, but we are comfortable with our evolution. And we recognize that although language is often a poor substitute for the feelings we are trying to capture, it is a tool we must master.

The essays and sermons in this issue represent our most recent contribution to the development of a language of reverence. In this issue we offer three stories—appropriate as Earth-centered spiritual traditions derive a great deal from myth and metaphor. Two stories address the development of ancient harvest celebrations and the third explores the connections between the Goddess Bridget and Saint Bridget.

“Pagan Ethics” asks how we are defined as an ethical community and suggests the Seventh Principle as providing a nature based ethic for a nature based religion. “Naturalistic Polytheism” suggests that we construct theology from experience and that this is a speciality of UUs.

The relationship between light and dark and the role of ritual in integrating the two is addressed in “In Praise of Darkness.” “Awareness is Half of Prevention” discusses awareness, grounding, centering and shielding—practices found in almost all Earth-centered spiritual traditions. And finally, the history of magick, and the world views of pagans who do and do not believe in it, are discussed in “Believing In Magic?”

Not all of the articles are of similar format, depth or academic rigor; but their very diversity of approach is indicative of the pluralistic and wholistic nature of the

Earth-centered movement within Unitarian Universalism. As might also be expected, the opinions expressed in these articles do not necessarily reflect those of CUUPS or its Board or those of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

Special thanks go to the members of our editorial panel: Dr. Mary Ann Clark, Dr. Gus diZerega, Dr. Thandeka, Oberon Zell-Ravenheart and Rev. Joan Van Becelaere. They have given great amounts of time to the demanding task of editing this very diverse body of articles. This publication would not have been possible without them. We are especially indebted to Elizabeth Fisher for her support and energy, past and present, and to Joan Van Becelaere who originally conceived of Sacred Cosmos. Robin Woodsong also deserves our thanks for doing layout on both issues of Sacred Cosmos.

On behalf of the Board of CUUPS and all of the many volunteers that work within the organization, I also want to thank you, the readers of this journal, for your interest in Earth-centered spirituality and your willingness to explore these issues with us.

I invite all of you to view the CUUPS web site at www.cuups.org or email us at: CUUPS@uua.org for more information about CUUPS and its activities. Or you can write us at:

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Blessed Be!
Mary Gelfand
President
March 2003

In Praise of Darkness

by Louise Bunn

When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360° personality. Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche. A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right; but one day we noticed that our parents didn't like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: "Can't you be still?" Or "it isn't nice to try to kill your brother." Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parent's love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: "Good children don't get angry over such little things." So we take our anger and put it in the bag. By the time my brother and I were twelve in Madison, Minnesota we were known as "the nice Bly boys." Our bags were already a mile long.

From A Little Book on the Human Shadow, by Robert Bly

Homily - In Praise of Darkness

We are on the downward slide. Light is fading rapidly, leaves are falling, and the death and decay in the natural world remind us of our own mortality. We are heading into the darkness. This time of the year is an obvious time to think about death and darkness.

As a self-identifying UU Pagan, I follow a spirituality based on the natural cycles of the Earth. I see the symbolism and metaphors for this time of year on several levels. The story we tell of Samhain is of the veil between the worlds of the living and of the dead being particularly thin and permeable. This is the time when the spirits of our ancestors return to be with us, their living relatives. The beings of the underworld, the hidden realms, are more easily accessible to us in the daylight world. I think that this is a good time to use this metaphor to think about and look at the darkness, specifically at the darkness within.

We human beings, have, buried deep in our instincts, a profound fear of the dark. Dangerous things lurk in the dark. In the darkness are all things fearsome and repulsive. There is dark within as well as the dark without.

Our own personal darkness, or "shadow," as Carl Jung described it, develops naturally in everyone. When we are born we are in touch with all parts of our (admittedly primitive) personalities. Gradually we are socialized; "Parents, siblings, teachers, clergy and friends create a complex environment in which we learn what is "good", and what is "bad."

The bag, which we heard about in the excerpt from Robert Bly's book, is the shad-

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ow or unconscious self, into which all the feelings and capacities that are rejected by the ego are exiled.

However, not all the traits in our dark treasury are negative; it also includes our undeveloped talents and gifts. Bly points out that sometimes the decent man gets put in the bag. Sometimes it's our creative self or our free spirited self, which goes into the bag. With study certain characteristics of the shadow or "dark side" becomes obvious. This darkness is not really a "side" or a shadow or a persona - it is a tangled web of complex forces, programs and effects that we repress from ordinary consciousness so that we rarely see its true nature.

We can often identify our shadows by looking at what we project onto others. When we deny a trait in ourselves, we tend to be very aware of that trait in other people. This means that we are most alert to those traits in others, which reflect our own shadows. So, we can begin to identify our shadows by looking at the things that annoy us in others.

Another way to spot our shadows is to look for things we find ourselves doing by accident. No matter how hard you try to keep your bag sealed, your shadow may leak out in a way that seems beyond your control. When we repeat patterns of behavior involuntarily, it may be a sign that our shadow is running our lives.

The traditional purpose of religion is to teach us the difference between the dark side and the light side, what is moral and what is immoral behavior. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, to which we Unitarians are heirs, those sides are cut off from one another. God is the divine light but there is no place for the divine darkness; it is seen as evil. I like the aspect of Unitarianism that unites the different facets of the Divine. As a Pagan, I like to include the dark aspects as well. This reminds me to own my own shadow.

Owning our own shadow does not mean that we should all go out and worship the dark, or even that we should let the chalice go out. It does mean that we should pay attention to the subtle gifts that the darkness can bring. Mystics have long known that the dark is an essential experience for the soul's growth; turning around, facing and embracing "the Shadow" is a vital step on a persons' or a society's path to wholeness.

Some of us may say that focussing on the shadow only makes things worse; "dwelling on the negative", they say. But the work of witnessing our shadow, with all its pain and sorrow and grief, is a descent into the regenerative darkness; the darkness that renews; the darkness of the womb; the darkness of the earth, where seeds are sprouting.

One of the ways people through the ages have found effective for dealing with scary things within is through ritual. Ritual creates a safe space in which to touch and acknowledge darkness. In most Unitarian churches I have been in we begin by lighting the chalice, and some opening words. We close by holding hands and singing. With these rituals, we create a safe space, a container, in which we come together to talk about the big things; the scary things; like life and death, good and evil. This is a way to begin to approach the shadow, but in order to really get closer to it we need to have appropriate, intentional ritual.

The purpose of such ritual would be to increase balance and connection within us, with one another, and with the world at large. By making use of myths, art, dance,

and games, we would connect with those aspects of ourselves, which are not rational, but nonetheless have wisdom to offer us. As Dolores LaChapelle, author, spiritualist and deep ecologist, points out, all of these aspects of ritual serve to connect - to keep open the essential connections within us. Mindful, intentional, ritual connects the conscious with the unconscious; the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

Ritual provides a backdrop of continuity and a buffer against change, while supporting one and allowing changes to be integrated. Properly done, ritual empowers the participants and returns a sense of wholeness, which has been altered by transition. It is process, rather than goal oriented. LaChapelle writes, “to develop a truly sustainable relationship with the natural environment it would take more than laws and appropriate technology. We need a deeper and more personal sense of connection - the kind that so far human beings have only found through ritual and ceremony.”

For those of us interested in social justice, ecology, building sustainable futures and communities and in spiritual growth, embracing and working with our shadow material is profoundly important. Lasting success in these endeavors will not come about without our turning to face the shadow—both individually and collectively. Discriminating wisdom comes from a deep understanding and integration of our own shadow. Compassion without this discriminating wisdom leads to wasted efforts. Actions of social justice that come from a place of compassionate discriminating wisdom are bound to be different than those which come from our fear, or anger, or guilt

This is not an easy task. Jung says of integrating shadow material that “long and difficult negotiations will be unavoidable.” However, if we can come up with a more psychologically valid understanding of our own shadow material, we will know how society could be changed and we’ll be able to come up with carefully thought through and sophisticated strategies as to how it should be changed.

William Irwin Thompson, a cultural historian, in his essay “Gaia and the Politics of Life”, writes: “one cannot “fight evil” in a simple conflict against conditions, acts, or beings. One has to transform the structure of consciousness and not simply move its contents about in various adversarial positions.”

He adds:

“At that central point which is also the center of our own consciousness, we can draw our shadow inward and no longer project it outward on some hated enemy, an enemy that conveniently allows us to ignore our own inner capacity for evil.”

We mustn’t confuse the false perception of evil in others (our shadow) with real evil, because there are real evils in the world. However we won’t fight it well or wisely without the wisdom to recognize it. To use a Christian metaphor, we will not be able to take the mote out of our neighbor’s eye without first removing the beam from our own. Understanding is a necessary first step.

In his essay, “Meeting the Dark Side in Spiritual Practice,” Buddhist teacher and author William Carl Eichman writes:

“If you undertake a spiritual practice you will be confronted by your dark side. This is an axiom. The spiritual quest is dangerous, just as the books say. Seeking the truth means experiencing pain and darkness, as well as the clear white light.”

In order for there to be renewal there first must be dark. The container must be empty before it can be filled. Order and light can only come after primordial chaos

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and darkness. In the dark are not only where things decay and rot but also where they gestate; where newness ferments and percolates into being.

American essayist and poet Wendell Berry writes:

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know dark, go dark.
Go without sight, and find that the dark too blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.”

It is important to acknowledge our own darkness; to mourn, and to let go, so that there is clear space in which to welcome new life. Let us celebrate all the darkness and light within us.

It’s a terrifying path to wholeness. Yet we must all touch darkness and death to find a source of true renewal.

AUTHOR BIO:

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Sacred Feasts: A Reading from Princeton's CUUPS Lughnasad service of 2000

By York Dobyns

Throughout the Western World, Christian churches on Sunday morning celebrate a sacred feast. Some denominations celebrate it every week; others, only on a few special days of the liturgical year. But in almost every denomination, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is thought to hold the essence of the Christian experience.

But the sacred meal is not uniquely Christian. The earliest Christians were themselves tapping an ancient, potent symbolism when they made a shared meal the centerpiece of their religious ritual. The act of eating together forms a bond, whether between friends, lovers, family, or an entire community.

The sharing of food is a behavior found in all human societies. The remnants of communal hunting camps and cooking fires suggest that it is a practice older than our own particular species of human. Yet it is a practice quite rare among our close primate relatives. Chimpanzees will share meat, on the rare occasions when they go hunting for it. Otherwise, food in a primate band is mostly a matter of what you can grab for yourself, and keep anyone else from snatching away! This odd act of sharing food with one another was one of the things we learned on the way to becoming human.

So it should come as no surprise that shared meals enter religious life. Special foods and special occasions for eating them have been elements of our religious practice for as long as we've been practicing religion. (So when are we going to get it right?) In many Earth-Centered traditions, the "Simple Feast" is an element of every ritual: a simple meal, some kind of baked good and some kind of beverage. Passing around the food and drink is a reminder that we're all in this together. Eating and drinking is a calming, soothing activity (many Pagans would say "grounding") that helps us regain our emotional equilibrium after a period of intensity. And eating sacred food, in sacred space, helps to remind us — if I may borrow a familiar phrase — of the interdependent web of existence, of which we are all a part.

Our lives depend on the bounty of other living things. Food is not something that we build in factories or mine out of the ground. Food is something that grows, in pastures and fields and fisheries, or in the wild. Everything that nourishes us was once part of a living plant or animal. Every bite we eat affirms the fact that we are part of a whole living world. Eating a sacred meal in sacred surroundings is a chance to pause and remember that affirmation, and feel your connection to all the

life around you.

The foods we've brought today are chosen with that connection in mind. This is Lammas, or Lughnasad, a festival of the beginning of harvest. Lammas derives from an Old English phrase for "loaf-mass," but the Catholic Mass of the Loaves was driven by the same force that inspired the Celtic Feast of Lugh. This is the time when the first of the grains begin to ripen.

And thus, Cakes and Ale, a food made from grain and a drink made from grain. The ale is home-brewed, which means that, aside from labor-saving innovations like plastic tubs and prefabricated bottles, it's made the same basic way that people have been making beer since it was first invented. We don't know exactly when that was. We do know it's been a long, long time. The Sumerians drank beer, apparently straight out of the pot it fermented in, since they used a kind of drinking straw to avoid getting mouthfuls of sediment. The art of beermaking has spread around the world and been adopted by almost every civilization, with their own special regional twists. In eras that predated modern knowledge of sanitation and hygiene, beer provided a safe drink when water was untrustworthy. People might not have known about boiling water to get rid of germs, but they did know that you have to brew beer just so — so that only the yeast grows in it — or it doesn't come out right. The European colonists who came to the New World, considered their beer a vitally important part of their supplies, and running out of it was a dire prospect indeed. But, if you've ever watched television, or walked across a college campus on a weekend, I certainly don't have to tell you how much people love their beer.

Bread and baking, of course, are at least as old as beer and brewing, probably older. The domestication of grains was the beginning of agriculture. But what do you do with a cereal grain? It's tough, and not very tasty raw. There's usually a hull of some kind that you need to remove.

Let me take a moment to tell you a story, as a friend once told it to me. This happened on a camping trip, where many people had pitched tents close together. One of them thought he would get a head start on the next day's breakfast, by boiling his grits the night before. Grits, I should explain, are a kind of porridge made from corn. So our hero fixed his pot of grits and left it hanging in the cooking area overnight.

Comes the morning, and our hero goes to get his convenient pre-cooked grits. He takes hold of the stirring spoon, which he left in the pot the night before, and tries to stir it up. The spoon handle doesn't budge. He gives it a mighty heave, and pop! — He lifts the entire mass right out of the pot, a round white lump still solidly stuck to the spoon. One of the other campers gawks at him. "What on earth is that thing?" He waves it at the speaker, and replies, "This, sir, is a grit."

I like to think that baking was discovered in something like that way: somebody left his or her porridge to cook way too long, and found out that the solid mass was still edible, and even tasty. However it was discovered, bread is with us to stay. The only really fundamental advance in bread technology was yeast, which made bread rise and get soft and fluffy inside; everything else we've added to bread in the last six thousand years has pretty much been a frill.

So, for this day, this Loaf-Mass, this Lughnasad, we bring to the sacred circle our bread and our beer. We bring foods made in ancient ways, to share among ourselves in a custom as old as humankind. We eat and drink in the sacred circle, to remind ourselves that we are a part of all life, and that all life is sacred. In sharing, may you never hunger. In sharing, may you never thirst.

Author Bio

Having been raised by anthropologists, York Dobyms grew up with an awareness of the diversity of human cultures and lifeways. He completed his Ph.D. in Physics in 1987, the same year he learned of the existence of Neo-Paganism, and has been a practicing Wiccan since 1992.

Once Upon A Time In Mesopotamia: A Reading from Princeton's CUUPS Lughnasad service of 2001

by York Dobyns

Once upon a time — upon any time more than about 8 thousand years ago, to be exact — all humans everywhere lived much the same way. We lived in small bands of closely related families. We hunted wild game, fished in rivers, lakes, or oceans, and gathered any and every edible plant we could find.

Our ancestors had lived that way since before we were quite human. Even after we had become modern humans, *Homo sapiens* — people just like us, people who could put on jeans and a shirt and walk down any Princeton street without drawing second looks — lived that way for a very long time. The culture that drew paintings on cave walls in Europe was stable, not for millennia, but for tens of millennia. The style and symbolism of those cave paintings is recognizably the same, even though a span of at least twenty thousand years passed between the oldest and youngest paintings known. When those latest cave-painters worked, the oldest paintings were already five times as old as the Pyramids are today, and yet their artistic tradition was unchanged.

But, after tens of thousands of years of stability, something odd happened. It was only about eight millennia ago — not very long at all, by the standards of the cave-painting culture. Our way of life has changed more in those eight thousand years than in the twenty thousand, or in the hundred thousand, that went before.

It happened first in the Near East; in spots scattered over Mesopotamia and nearby lands. People living in fertile, well-watered plains were collecting abundant food from wild plants that grew in profusion. One of their staple foods was the edible seed of wild grasses. Then as now, grass grew quickly, spread enthusiastically, and seeded abundantly. It was a bonanza of readily available food.

Maybe it happened by accident, as some seeds were dropped in the gathering process. Maybe it was deliberate, as food-gatherers set out to improve the supply. We may never know all the details. What we do know is that, in a remarkably short time, we learned a whole new way to get food. We could plant seeds so that they would grow where we wanted them, instead of having to search for plants wherever they might happen to be growing. We could care for them — bringing them water, fertilizing the soil, weeding out competitors — so that they grew in such profusion that no wild plant could rival them. After thousands of years — thousands of generations — of finding food, we learned how to make food grow, and our world has never been the same since.

And it was those grasses that led the way. Wheat, barley, rye, oats, rice, millet,

even maize — they're all grasses. They weren't all discovered at the same time. Some of them have become very different from their wild ancestors, through thousands of years of selective breeding. But they're all grasses — or grains, as we call the domesticated versions we like to eat — and even today, they dominate humanity's food supply.

One of the first things that we learned about grain is that you can grind it to powder, mix it into a paste with a bit of water, and cook it over dry heat — that is, bake it. When you do this, you get a tasty, chewy, nutritious material that is much more pleasant than plain cooked grains. In other words, you get bread. The ancient Mesopotamian peoples appreciated bread so much that it became a generic term for food. Bread was the staff of life to the Hebrews, who claimed descent from a Mesopotamian ancestor. But the importance of bread didn't spread by inheritance alone: in Indo-European cultures from Greece to Ireland, the sharing of bread became a symbol for hospitality itself — a sacred obligation between guest and host.

The Mesopotamian cultures also discovered that you could do something with grain besides eating it. You can drink it instead. Brewing beer from grain preserves much of the grain's nutritional value. It gives you a safe beverage that you can be sure hasn't been contaminated by anything unhealthy (if it was, the beer didn't come out right). And, of course, it contains alcohol — which must have been especially welcome to laborers after tending those endless grain fields from dawn to dusk.

Another of the many changes that came with growing our own food was the phenomenon called harvest. Ripe grain is accessible on the stalk only for a short time. Once collected and stored, especially in a cool dry place away from light, it can keep almost indefinitely — but you have to gather it when it's ripe, or it spoils. Unlike food-gatherers, grain farmers must gather a tremendous amount of food, all at once, and then store it for future need, until the next harvest comes in.

Fortunately, the harvest season tends to be extended by several factors, such as staggered plantings, harvesting plants that are already edible though not fully mature (this is where corn-on-the-cob comes from), and reliance on multiple crops that mature at different times. So harvesting stretches over a considerable part of the year. In most temperate countries, the earliest part of the harvest season begins in late summer, midway between Summer Solstice and Fall Equinox.

The oldest celebration we know for this date is the Celtic feast of Lughnasad; the wedding feast of Lugh Lamfada, a solar deity. It was a festival celebrating the first fruits of early harvest. When Christianity conquered the Celtic territories, Lughnasad was replaced with Lammas: Loaf-Mass, a harvest festival in a Christian context.

And so, as we gather to mark the Sun's passage through another sector of the Wheel of the Year, we gather to celebrate the beginning of the grain harvest. Earth-Centered worship has a strong tradition of including a symbolic meal as part of a celebration. On this holiday especially, we choose to honor the grain harvest — and the role that grain has played in making us who and what we are today — with a

food made from grain and a drink made from grain.

As we eat and drink grain in partaking of Cakes and Ale, let us remember the days when we were hunters who painted pictures in caves. Let us remember that the whole span of time since the beginning of civilization and history could comfortably fit, several times over, into that earlier era of hunting and gathering wild foods. Let us remember the innovators who first learned to grow their own food, and appreciate what a difference a grain makes.

Author Bio

Having been raised by anthropologists, York Dobyms grew up with an awareness of the diversity of human cultures and lifeways. He completed his Ph.D. in Physics in 1987, the same year he learned of the existence of Neo-Paganism, and has been a practicing Wiccan since 1992.

Pagan Ethics: The Law, The Epiphany, and The Web

by Marion Mason, Ph.D

As the Pagan community grows larger, and as we strive for legal and public recognition, people inside and outside of the community are asking, “What beliefs or characteristics define an individual as Pagan?” I would like to focus on this discussion as it is progressing within the Wiccan community. One potentially defining Wiccan characteristic, the belief in the Threefold Law of Return, is now facing analysis and debate.

Almost any introduction to Wicca or Witchcraft will include the Threefold Law as one of the basic beliefs. This law, similar to the Eastern concept of karma, holds that the energies an individual sends forth (whether good or bad) will return back magnified three times. According to *The Encyclopedia of Witches & Witchcraft* (Guiley, 1999) the origin of the Law is not known, though it is often associated with the work of Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente. The earliest recorded reference in print appeared in 1970 in Raymond Buckland’s work *Witchcraft Ancient and Modern*. Buckland was instrumental in bringing Gardnerian Witchcraft to the United States. Guiley (1999) also indicates that while some Witches support a magnification of three, some have indicated two, some seven, and others are not concerned with the intensity of the magnification.

Phyllis Currott, in her recent book *Witch Crafting*, expresses passionate dissatisfaction with the Threefold Law. Currott calls it “an inadequate, inaccurate, and inappropriate basis for Wiccan ethics” primarily because the law emphasizes the threat of punishment as the motivation for doing good (2001, p. 180). The alternative she advocates is based on the transformation resulting from a true mystical encounter with the Divine. Currott believes that, “All of our behavior, our magic, and our ethics flow from this epiphany that the Divine exists within ourselves, in others, and in the world” (p. 181). This epiphany brings such a radical transformation that, as Currott further explains, “You would simply never harm, or manipulate someone else because you recognize that they are an embodiment of the Divine” (p. 181). For ease of reference I will refer to Currott’s view as the epiphany model.

In this article I will explore the Threefold Law and the epiphany model as they relate to the psychological theory of moral development. The levels of moral reasoning proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) have served as the foundation for a great many research investigations designed to understand the way individuals develop meta-rules for determining right and wrong. This theory is concerned with our moral reasoning, which is how we determine *why* we should or should not act in a particular way. Research in this area indicates that as we age our preferences

for particular meta-rules often change. Kohlberg described these changing preferences as stages reflecting up to six different meta-rules. Some psychologists have maintained Kohlberg's view that these moral meta-rules are stages developing from immature to mature or advanced, while others describe them as options we may choose from to fit a particular context.

Based on the insights gained I will then explore the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) seventh principle as an additional or alternative Wiccan ethic. The UUA's seventh principle, *We covenant to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*, might better articulate a Pagan perspective and may satisfy both those who hold to the Threefold Law and Currott's epiphany model.

Moral Development: A Preconventional Perspective

Kohlberg characterized the first two stages of moral development as embracing a "preconventional" perspective. In this mindset we focus on maximizing our pleasure and avoiding punishment in the current moment. An individual in the preconventional mindset would try to resolve a moral dilemma with questions such as "Can I get away with what I really want to do?" and "If I follow the rules or expectations (or if I don't), what is in it for me?" (or how severe is the punishment?). In this case the enforcer of the predetermined rules and any subsequent punishment is a powerful, external authority.

A literature review of the more popular introductory Wicca books will show that the Threefold Law is often applied in the context of spell-work or spellcasting. Wiccans, like many Pagans, are continually disabusing the public of the notion that we are evil people determined to cause trouble for those we don't like. In response to this misperception we often quote the Threefold Law as a Wiccan prohibition to evil deeds. Starhawk and Valentine, in their recent book *Twelve Wild Swans* (2000), describe it this way:

This is the basis of the Law of Threefold Return. It's like a simple and direct karma postal service: whatever energy a Witch sends out in a spell returns to her three times ... So, not just because of moral scruples, but out of concern for our own health and happiness, we never make spells with an intent to do harm, unless we are willing to be harmed three times as much. (p. 195)

Applied in this way the Law of Threefold Return provides a formula that gives consistent, direct responses to the dilemmas of the preconventional perspective. The amount of personal gain or the severity of the punishment is clear.

The appeal of the Threefold Law to a preconventional perspective is at the heart of Currott's criticism. She states

The primary problem is that the Threefold Law is basically a theory of punishment: I won't misbehave myself because if I do, something (three times) worse will happen to me; therefore I behave myself because I don't want anything bad to happen to me. (p. 180)

While I would agree with her that the Threefold Law does fit this preconven-

tional view of the world, I would also point out that psychological developmental theory would suggest that human beings begin their understanding of ethics, morality, and rules in this way.

Research has demonstrated that these preconventional meta-rules are commonly observed in children; however, adults can make use of them as well. As stated earlier, one of the ongoing debates in moral development research is whether Kohlberg's stages can be linearly ordered from immature to mature or whether they are options. I think the latter view is worthy of consideration, and I offer this example in support of the notion that we often choose the meta-rule that fits the context. It seems safe to assume that most, if not all, of the people reading this article are capable of employing a more sophisticated ethical guideline than "What can I get away with?" I would also guess that many reading this article regress to that very meta-rule when driving. The common driving dilemma of "Can I get away with what I really want to do?" which is to drive faster than the speed limit, is often resolved by one's estimate of the probability of punishment (i.e., getting a ticket) rather than, for example, one's obligation as a citizen to obey the law or a society's need for order to avoid chaos. This example shows that sophisticated, educated adults may choose to use a preconventional meta-rule in some situations. This is important to remember when considering that some adults choose to use the Threefold Law.

While I appreciate and respect Currott's position, there are difficulties in using her epiphany model as a norm for Wiccan ethics. As with all accounts of mystical experiences, Currott's epiphany model is difficult to articulate because of its indescribable, mysterious quality. This ineffability is one of the defining characteristics of a mystical experience as established by William James, one of the founding fathers of psychology (cited in Wulff, 1997). This phenomenon is similar to that of a parent who says, "I can't adequately describe in words the experience of watching my child being born." It appears that those who have had such transcendent moments cannot find the words to communicate the qualitative change and depth of transformation they have experienced. If we try to use mystical transformation as a basis for Wiccan ethics we will face problems in communicating our ethic to others. In addition to difficulties with articulation, Currott's epiphany model creates an ethical void for those who have not had such a transforming experience with the Divine.

The lack of clarity creates confusion when the epiphany model is applied to Kohlberg's levels of moral reasoning. The self-focused preconventional meta-rules may be so at odds with this abstract, mystical experience that the two are incompatible. The individual with a preconventional perspective who has not had such an experience will likely prefer a rule similar to the Threefold Law that speaks to dilemmas involving personal desires. While a coven teacher may try to explain this epiphany experience to a preconventional student, the student will find it less relevant. To illustrate I will return to the common driving dilemma, "Can I get away with speeding on this road?" The driver who has experienced a near-death automobile accident will likely consider that experience when tempted to speed.

However, for the driver without such an experience, the driving dilemma will most likely be settled by estimating the likelihood of getting caught. While numerous awareness groups continually remind us of driving hazards, the average driver, not having had a life-changing driving accident, will prefer a more familiar meta-rule.

The seventh principle, *to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*, offers direction and guidance for the pre-conventional perspective. While this mindset remains focused on personal pleasure and avoiding punishment in the moment, the seventh principle reminds us that we are interconnected. When applied in a pre-conventional way the seventh principle shares similarities with the Threefold Law of Return. The seventh principle isn't specific in that three times what you send out will come back to you, but it does lend itself to the notion that whatever I do to another part of Nature (human or otherwise) has an effect on that entity and the entire interdependent web, including myself and those that come after me. As Starhawk & Valentine (2000) point out, it is in my best interest to do what is best for the interdependent web because I am a part of it.

Moral Development: A Conventional Perspective

Conventional moral reasoning, according to Kohlberg, is defined by a shift from a focus on direct personal gain or punishment to an indirect personal satisfaction that comes from winning the approval of significant people. While operating in this mindset individuals often choose a course of action based on what a trusted friend, teacher, or advisor suggests. This perspective also considers group or societal expectations for individuals in a particular role. When facing a moral dilemma the conventional perspective may consider questions like "What does my boss think a *good* employee should do?" or, as another example, "What should a *good* coven member do?"

Pagans with a conventional perspective might trust the Threefold Law of Return because of the significant people who support and promote it. They may view the Law's credibility as based in the fact that it is attributed to Gerald Gardner or Doreen Valiente, that it has been the traditional rule for solitaries and covens for many years, and/or that many Pagan authors and leaders support it. In response to a challenge to the credibility of the Threefold Law the conventionally minded Pagan will consider "What does my most trusted book author think about it?" or "What does my High Priestess or High Priest think of it?"

The Pagan using conventional moral reasoning will also be concerned with role expectations and fitting into the group or coven. Vivianne Crowley, in *Wicca* (1996), discusses the Threefold Law in its relational role. She describes the Threefold Law as a part of the second degree in Witchcraft where one begins to take on the role of teacher. She states:

This is the Three-fold Law. In our lives and in magical workings we do not merely reap where we sow: the effect is cumulative. Where we have given good, it shall return to us three-fold; where we have done harm, then we must

face the three-fold consequences. If we become teachers and leaders after the second degree, then we enter into a realm where we will have to take responsibility for others. We must then be trebly sure that our practice of the Craft is ethical and true, because we are moving into a realm where our actions can affect other people and influence in turn how they practise the Craft. The effect of our actions becomes cumulative. (p. 200)

Thus the Threefold Law of Return, based on its popularity and continued recommendation, will meet the criteria of a meta-rule for conventional moral reasoning. The conventional mindset is less concerned with the qualities of the Law itself, but rather trusts the credibility of those who recommend it as a personal and a group meta-rule.

Just as with the pre-conventional level, Currott's epiphany model could be the source of frustration and confusion for the conventional mindset. When seeking a trustworthy friend or teacher, how can a Pagan student judge which teachers have had such an ineffable experience and which ones haven't? What litmus test does one have for the charlatan who claims such an experience? On a personal level, the Pagan who has experienced the epiphany Currott describes may find that the conventional framework does not fit well. This perspective is looking to outside sources for inspiration and guidance while the epiphany model turns us inward to our conscience. For those without an epiphany the question remains, "What does a *good* Pagan do until he or she has had such a transforming experience?" The conventional perspective finds external guidance more salient than an internal transformation, thus there exists the potential for great frustration when those significant others, people like Phyllis Currott, an admired and trusted mentor through her books and workshops, tell us that we need to have, or should have had, this transforming experience.

In comparison, the seventh principle does give us some guidelines by which the Pagan in the conventional mindset can choose morally helpful friends and mentors. Is the advice this teacher gives consistent with the call for affirmation and respect for the interdependent web of all existence? Do I find respect and concern for the interdependent web embedded in the information I'm given to learn? Am I treated with affirmation and respect as a valuable part of the web? As Vivanne Crowley (1996) suggests, when we become a teacher our actions are magnified by virtue of their continuing influence on our students. The seventh principle extends the Threefold Law by reminding us that workings of a small group reflect the larger interconnection and interdependence of the grand web of all existence. The seventh principle also gives insight into another salient concern of the conventional mindset, that of role expectations. Here the seventh principle suggests that a *good* Wiccan is one who acts in a way that affirms and respects all entities in the interdependent web.

Moral Development: A Postconventional Perspective

The third of Kohlberg's levels is that of postconventional moral reasoning. It is

here that individuals change from seeking advice and rule-based guidance from those they trust and admire to relying on a personal sense of responsibility or obligation to live in a way that is consistent with one's highest principles or values. When faced with a dilemma an individual with a postconventional view will try to determine which values or principles are involved, if some of those principles suggest competing courses of action and if so, which principle will preside over the others. For example, suppose an employer frequently voices disparaging remarks about non-Christian beliefs in the presence of a Pagan employee. Rather than focusing on the meta-rules of pre-conventional thinking, "Can I get away with what I really want to do?" or conventional thinking, "What does my teacher or mentor think I should do?" a postconventional perspective would focus on the principles or values involved. This Pagan employee might consider freedom of speech issues (for both the employer and the employee) and a personal sense of responsibility or obligation to give an accurate view of his or her personal beliefs.

In order to shape the Threefold Law in a way that meets the needs of the post-conventional mindset we need to move away from the literal magnification of three and focus on the abstract principle involved, thus it becomes a Law of Return. This cause-and-effect law then urges us to consider the principles by which we live because our thoughts, words, and actions will have an effect on others and then directly back on ourselves. The Law of Return does not give us direction in terms of *which* principles or values should become primary. Kohlberg, whose work was shaped during the 1960s in the United States, emphasized justice and fairness as the primary principles. One of Kohlberg's well-known critics, Carol Gilligan (1982), developed a theory of women's development that emphasizes a morality of care and nonviolence both towards others and towards one's self. When applied to the postconventional mindset the Law of Return is quite similar to the Golden Rule. The only guidance the Law of Return gives is that I should send out whatever I want to receive back.

Curott's epiphany model is perhaps best suited for the postconventional mindset. Part of the task of postconventional moral reasoning is to choose one's highest principles and then to fully implement those principles in daily life. The type of transcendent, transforming experience that Curott describes could clarify one's hierarchy of values. While this restructuring of values may take place internally and experientially, the transformed Pagan will still have to work around the issue of ineffability. Without articulation this becomes an ethic based on intuition and conscience, useful to the one transformed but difficult to explain or teach to others. Finally, there remains the dilemma for the Pagan who has not had such an experience but seeks an ordering of principles in a postconventional way.

Whereas the Law of Return and Curott's epiphany model fall short of providing the Pagan with a clearly articulated principle, the seventh principle tells us to live in a way that affirms and respects the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This principle centers our ethic on the health and well-being of all existence. Our interdependence is not limited to our coven, community, country, or even our species. This principle encourages us to pull back from our

egocentric and anthropocentric focus to embrace the full web of all existence. This consistent with Currott's description of the insights gained from the mystical experience when she writes, "All is holy, and all that is holy is to be treated as sacred" (p. 181).

The final phrase of the seventh principle, "of which we are a part" adds a dimension that is missing in Kohlberg's model and the Threefold Law of Return. This phrase tells us that we are *all* a part of the interdependent web and yet we are *only* a part of it. First we are affirmed as having value and worth because we are a part of the interdependent web that is sacred. All living entities, no matter what characteristics they have or labels they wear, are valued. At the same time, this phrase directly reminds human beings that we are *not* the supreme commanders of the interdependent web, nor are we necessarily the most important part of all existence. We are simply *a part* of the web.

Whereas the seventh principle elevates the healthy functioning of the interdependent web as the standard, both the Threefold Law and Kohlberg's theory elevate human desire and egocentrism to the role of arbitrator of good and bad. The Threefold Law of Return gives the individual the power to determine what qualifies as positive or negative energies sent out in any given situation. The pre-conventional perspective determines good and bad based on self-gratification and avoidance of punishment. The individual in the conventional mindset will choose the external significant others, authorities, and group norms to follow. Even in Kohlberg's postconventional reasoning the individual determines which principles should take prominence over others.

The seventh principle removes our desires from the role of arbitrator and asks us to consider the well-being of the whole interdependent web of all existence, of which we are but a small part. This emphasis on the ecosystem of the entire interdependent web is consistent with Currott's epiphany model. Her support for this can be seen in her discussion of good and evil in the following example:

If you are walking in the jungle, and a tiger should decide to eat you, that doesn't make the tiger evil, it makes him a tiger. And it makes you lunch! Unquestionably, that's a tragedy for you and those who love you, but there's no cruelty or evil in the tiger's actions (p. 187).

In this example the person is not the judge of what is good or evil. Currott's example reminds us that we are not the centerpiece of creation to be protected at all costs, but we are only a part of a larger organism, an interdependent web.

The seventh principle clearly articulates a Nature-based ethic for our Nature-based religion. The Threefold Law of Return does not clearly express the interconnectedness of all living things. The point of the Law is that I get in return whatever I send out. While Currott's epiphany model implies the move away from an anthropocentric ethic, she tends to emphasize the term *Divine* rather than elevate the term *Nature*. This is illustrated in her definition of a Witch as "someone who is aware of the Divine Presence in all things" (p. 70). In contrast to the Threefold Law and Currott's epiphany model, the seventh principle clearly elevates all existence, all of Nature, to the peak of our hierarchy of values.

Summary and Conclusion

The Threefold Law of Return has recently been challenged as an appropriate Wiccan ethic by Phyllis Curott, who proposes an epiphany model as an alternative. While the Threefold Law can be adapted to fit all three of Kohlberg's levels, it appears to be primarily a punishment-avoidance ethic best suited for pre-conventional and conventional perspectives. Curott's alternative, the epiphany model, an ethic based on a mystical, transformative experience, seems best suited for post-conventional perspectives in that it can serve as a powerful tool in restructuring and reordering one's principles. Unfortunately, the epiphany model does little to help the Pagan with any of Kohlberg's levels prior to experiencing such a transformation.

In this discussion of Wiccan ethics I suggest that we further explore the UUA's seventh principle as a powerful yet flexible Pagan ethical guideline. The seventh principle can be adapted to fit Kohlberg's levels, enhances and expands the Threefold Law, and is consistent with Curott's epiphany model. In addition, the principle adds a unique dimension by elevating affirmation and respect of the interdependent web of all existence above human desires. And, perhaps its most powerful recommendation, it provides this Nature-based religion with a Nature-based ethic.

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Naturalistic Polytheism and Our Patron Goddess

by Tom Tadfor Little

I wish Henry Nelson Wieman had been a polytheist. If he had been, UUs might have less of a “theological identity crisis” than we do today.

It seems Wieman is well known to most UU ministers, but is sadly obscure among the broader membership. A Presbyterian-turned-Unitarian, Wieman was an inventive theologian who worked within the tradition of religious empiricism, maintaining that a theology could be built up from human experience, in a manner analogous to the way science builds theory from observation and experiment. What type of experience forms the basis for theology? Wieman’s central insight on the subject was this: that human life may be transformed for the better, and if we can identify the agency of such transformation we have identified God.

An empirical definition of God such as this carries with it a very stimulating implication. For “that which transforms human life for the better” need not, upon investigation, turn out to be anything supernatural. In fact, the definition leads us (as it led Wieman) to see God as a natural process occurring within this world. God, in fact, becomes *something we do*. Although distanced from supernaturalism, Wieman’s naturalistic theism nevertheless preserves a religious aura around its God, because the transformative experience through which God is known is itself full of profundity and a bit of mystery.

In conversation with UUs today, I find many of us are intuitively attuned to some variety of naturalistic theism, even without ever having heard of Wieman or the theological position he represents. We may be unsure whether it is fair to use the word “God” to refer to a human or natural process, rather than a transcendent being. But the concept goes down smoothly enough, even when the word catches. I even have a sneaking suspicion that the notorious theological diversity amongst us today would seem much less conspicuous if we were all familiar with the vocabulary of naturalistic theism, which anchors religious language in the sturdy stratum of human activity.

So is Wieman’s God our God? I don’t quite think so. But I do think we have a god, or rather a goddess, and that we can learn to see her more clearly by following Wieman’s lead. Wieman’s theology runs into problems (for me) because he seems constrained to find a God who is unique. For him, there must be one and only one agency for true human transformation. Furthermore, he seems to require a God powerful enough to effect this transformation whenever it is present. God must be both necessary and sufficient for transformation. But as soon as one gets specific

about what particular natural process brings about the transformation of human life, it is easy to find counterexamples. If the process is defined too narrowly, one can find transformation occurring without it. If it is defined too broadly, one can find many cases where it fails to achieve the goal. So Wieman turns away from his empirical program, and his research into the nature of God seems always in danger of falling into tautology. I hasten to point out that I am no theologian; these are just the impressions of an armchair philosopher.

It seems to me that if Wieman had taken a truly empirical approach, he might have discovered that the transformation of human life for the better happens through a variety of different processes, none of which is always effective. In other words, he would have found that there are many gods, and none of them are omnipotent. “Naturalistic polytheism” seems a suitable label for such a theology.

Polytheistic gods, like cable TV stations, can find a market niche and exploit it to the hilt. They have character. I think there is something both delightful and profound in the way a goddess like Athene, for example, could crystallize and personify the character and values of the *polis* for whom she was the patron. Free of the burden of being the unique and universal deity of the cosmos, she could get right to work with her own unabashedly Athenian way of transforming human life: through knowledge, art, democracy, military skill, and a kind of haughty independence befitting a motherless virgin goddess.

UUs, as individuals, certainly find transformation through many different processes—we serve (and are saved by) many different gods. But is there a distinctively UU god, a particular transformative process that we partake in collectively, our special patron in the naturalistic pantheon?

I think there is, although I don’t claim to have a detailed empirical model. It’s just a hunch, or a roughly drawn outline. Our patron deity is defined by the nature of our relationship with her, and I see that relationship as symbiotic, a cycle of mutual support.

First, there is the phase of the relationship that we initiate, through what we do as UUs. I think two essential components of “what we do as UUs” are *debate* and *reflection*. It is terribly important to us to struggle with new information and novel points of view. We cringe at the thought of ignoring or dismissing uncomfortable ideas, we feel compelled to thrash them out in debate, and then go away and consider privately what we need to take to heart. We’ve been that way since the time of Servetus, and we still are. (And if you disagree, you only prove my point!) I think that when we do this, we nourish our patron deity.

Second, there is the phase of the relationship in which are the recipients, not the initiators. Somehow, when things are working right, we come away feeling richer. For me, that richness encompasses two dimensions: *inspiration* and *community*. We feel inspired, excited with new ideas and new possibilities for making life better. We also feel supported and sustained by the feeling of being part of a human community, a reservoir of compassion and strength. These are the ways our deity nourishes us.

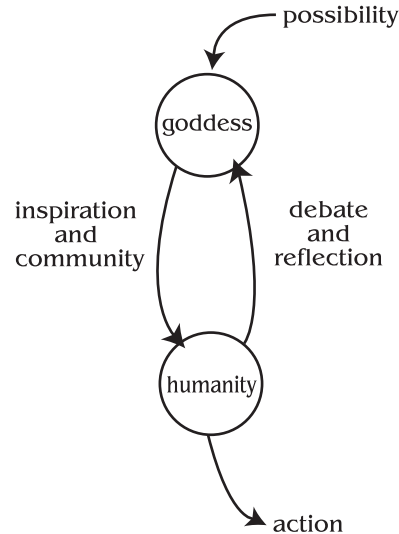
Transformation of human life for the better becomes possible when the gifts of

inspiration and community are bestowed upon us. In fact, when they are abundant, we are able to carry them out into the larger world. The UU passion for political and economic justice is fueled by the strength of our inspiration and our community. It depends on the motivating synergy of our special way of being together. A UU church, of course, is not the only thing that can motivate people to make positive change. But for naturalistic polytheism, there is no need to assert that our patron deity is unique, only that she is effective!

The model implies that our patron deity is a process that converts debate and reflection into inspiration and community. How does this happen? What is the mechanism? I don't really know, and in fact, I'm happy to let her retain a certain aura of ineffability. (She is a goddess, after all.) I like to think that what this process does, somehow, is to mine the infinite domain of Possibility, probing the unknown and the imagination and bringing back a gem or two to fuel our personal and collective enrichment. Certainly debate and reflection are proven tools for expanding one's set of options, and it is the emergence of new options for making life better that seems to keep so many of us engaged and active in our religious communities.

The "symbiotic theology" of this model helps explain some of the peculiarities of UU worship services. In classical theism, there is no clear need for closed loop, rather there is the descending grace of God, which may transform us and perhaps find expression in good works. The God of classical theism does not require a particular program of human activity for his continued well-being and existence. In a UU service, though, the most pressing need is to initiate our special transformative process itself, to invoke our goddess and give her some raw material to work with. So our sermons are constructed to challenge us, to stir debate and reflection, to strike out from the comfort of the known into the unpredictable world of the possible. If we do this, then we have done what needs to be done to set the process in motion. We may also augment this with more ritualistic components, bringing our attention to the gifts we receive in return. Our flaming chalice, indeed, exquisitely combines in a single symbol the ideas of inspiration and community, candle and hearth.

Some may be made uneasy by my personification of the "UU transformative process." One can certainly argue that the ideas of naturalistic theism yield up a God that is more "it" than "he" or "she." My primary motive, I suppose, is ultimately esthetic. I like the poetic and symbolic aspects of religion; they help move



the matter out of the impersonal world of academics and into the personalized landscape of imagery and feeling. But I also have a bit of an agenda. I think we UUs tend to be quite keenly aware of our own role in initiating this transformative process. *We* debate; *we* reflect, and in the end *we* act to improve human life. But we may take the completion of the cycle for granted, feeling that the opening up of possibilities, the inspiration, and the sense of community just *emerge* automatically from the process. I think there is religious value in stepping back and appreciating what extraordinary gifts these things are, and appreciating that the output from this process nourishes us. Somehow, we're getting a surplus, an abundance, back in exchange for our efforts. Not only does the process depend on us, but we depend on it. Without it, we would be less than we are. Gratitude is an appropriate emotional response, and I think that urges us toward God-as-thou rather than God-as-it.

I chose a feminine pronoun for our deity, not out of any sense of political correctness, but for rather old-fashioned reasons. We are the inheritors an ancient tradition of allegorical personification. Deities of hearth and home (community), as well as muses (inspiration) are traditionally feminine. Sadly, these two aspects of feminine divinity have usually been seen as mutually exclusive: a passive, hearth-tending mother or an aloof, virginal muse. Our goddess must be both, but she can be neither. She is, after all, fed on debate and reflection. If you think of successful mothers in reality, not myth, you find a personality seldom acknowledged in art or literature. She is alert, vigilant, intelligent, proactive, and inventive. She is a constant teacher, learner, and companion, as well as caregiver. She resists every temptation of favoritism. She knows that redirecting attention works better than threats. She knows when things are too quiet. She knows there's no surer recipe for catastrophe than a bored child. And she makes you want to do your best.

Such a personification of our patron goddess is certainly a liturgical resource. For some, it can also be an aid to clarifying and deepening our relationship with what we hold sacred as UUs. Others may find it an unnecessary distraction. Such issues aside, though, the basic framework of naturalistic polytheism allows us to discuss those things of deepest importance to us in a way that honors their grounding in human experience as well as their religious profundity. It makes contact with many different theological orientations, including theism, humanism, and paganism. It facilitates both debate and reflection, and our goddess would no doubt be grateful for that.

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Believing in Magic?

by Merlyn

The practice of magic (or “magick” as occult magicians commonly spell it) is widespread among modern Pagans¹). For this reason, it can be assumed that Pagans believe in the effectiveness of magical practices, but, of course, there are exceptions. I will examine the world of Pagan magic viewed from two diverse perspectives. Pagans who believe in and practice magic hold the first viewpoint. They represent the dominant perspective and include Amber K (1990), Marion Weinstein (1978) and most authors of popular Pagan books. Skeptics who question the claims of magical successes made by believers in magic hold the second minority perspective within the Pagan community. Sympathetic academic authors such as Helen Berger (1999) and Tanya Luhrmann (1989) write from this later viewpoint.

Pagan witches performing magical spells believe that their wishes and spoken words directly impact the physical world (Helen Berger, p. 18). Their magic depends on a concept of this universe being an “ordered web” of interconnections where seemingly unrelated events are not chance occurrences (Berger, p. 19). Pagan witches apply magical spells to a wide range of tasks going from the mundane chore of locating a suitable apartment to finding a cure for AIDS. In *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, Tanya Luhrmann (1989) described her experiences as an academic observer of various British occult groups including witches' covens, ceremonial magicians and *ad hoc* or informal gatherings. Luhrmann, a skeptic of magical claims of success, painted a positive picture of people involved in magic and gave logical and sympathetic reasons why British middle-class professionals might reasonably believe in magic.

Defining magic

Aleister Crowley, a controversial but accomplished magician, defined magic as ‘causing changes to occur in conformity with will’ (Amber K, p 4). Earlier in the 1850s, the French occultist Eliphas Levi (Merlyn, p. 12) had first emphasized the importance of the magician’s will in achieving a desirable outcome. Crowley also said that every intentional act is also a magical act. He was the first modern person to add the “k” to the spelling of magic to distinguish his occult practices from the tricks of stage magicians. Amber K (p. 4), an author and Wiccan high priestess, provided other definitions of magic in her book *True Magick*. For example, the well-

¹ In this article, I describe only occult magic and not stage magic. I consider the two spellings of occult “magic” equivalent and have not added “k”, because it is not used in the standard spelling of magic.

known ceremonial magician, William Butler, stated that “[m]agick is the art of effecting changes in consciousness at will.” Here the consciousness of the magician rather than external events is influenced by the magic. Another definition taking a psychological approach toward magic is that of author Marion Weinstein (p. 9), who said “[t]he work of magic involves transformation and the first transformation is the shift of perception”. Weinstein further added that magic could help you get your life in harmony in its mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological aspects.

Magic is performed to transform, uplift and fully develop the self (Amber K, pp. 5-6). Only humans or other sentient creatures can change themselves to reach a fuller range of possibilities. Magic helps expedite, guide and enhance these desired changes. Using magic to effect personal changes in consciousness requires some daring, because all personal changes involve a ‘little death’ as old ways and patterns are discarded. The type of magic I have described so far is called theurgy or high magic and is used for religious and/or psychotherapeutic purposes according to Isaac Bonewits (Amber K, p. 8). Its goal is to attain salvation or personal evolution.

Thaumaturgy or low magic is a more practical type of magic. People use it to achieve concrete goals in daily life such as success in love, obtaining wealth or restoring good health. This is a non-religious use of magic according to Bonewits (Amber K, p. 8). Using thaumaturgy to obtain reasonable goals such as finding a suitable job when unemployed is fine as long as others are not hurt by the magician’s efforts. The words “high” and “low ” when applied to magic should not suggest a judgment that one is preferable to the other. Both forms of magic have co-existed and complemented each other for several millennia (Merlyn, p. 13).

Ancient Egypt: The Source of Western Ceremonial or High Magic

The Western magical tradition first developed along the Nile River in the Greek Ptolemaic (circa 200 BCE) and later Neoplatonic Roman periods (circa 200 CE) according to Berger (p. 21). This tradition viewed the world as an enchanted place, and was the dominant view in Western thought until displaced by the “patriarchal” and rationalist worldview in the 17th century (Berger, p. 23.).

Western Ceremonial Magic, the form of high magic most commonly practiced, originated in surviving ancient Hermetic manuscripts, which became available to the educated public during the Renaissance (Merlyn, p. 14). These ancient writings were attributed to a revered ancient priest called Hermes or Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the Thrice Greatest) who was believed to have lived in pre-Christian antiquity. Marsilio Ficino, a clerical scholar employed by Prince Cosimo de Medici, began translating from Greek to Latin the “Corpus Hermeticum”, a major Hermetic text, in 1453 (Knight, p. 82). The Renaissance elite understood Latin but not Greek. The magical parts of his translation Ficino called “natural” magic as opposed to “angelic or demoniac” magic according to British occultist Gareth Knight (p.82). Ficino wanted to protect himself from the Inquisition, because the Catholic Church had prohibited the conjuring of spirits. However, studying the influences of the planetary spheres on earth (e.g. astrology) was part of a ‘natural magic’ and accept-

able to the Church.

The Jewish Qabala (or Kabbalah) is a second major source of information on which the Western Ceremonial tradition is based. Starting in the 15th century, the Qabala became popular among mystical Christians. Its Tree of Life diagram provided symbols forming a “spiritual language” which the Qabalist could use to communicate with the angels and different aspects of God. Alchemy was another ancient tradition incorporated into Western Ceremonial Magic. It may be viewed as either a “primitive chemistry” used in futile attempts to synthesize gold from lead or as a spiritual discipline, which can elevate the consciousness through specific techniques of prayer, meditation or magic. Alchemy involved the manipulation of the imaginative faculty as well as chemical experimentation (Knight, pp. 53 & 76).

Ficino’s translation of Neoplatonic magical philosophy greatly impacted his society (Luhrmann, p.278). This philosophy used the Platonic triplicity (triple view) of body, soul and spirit as different entities. Agrippa, an influential 16th century occultist, described three different worlds; the base material world, the celestial heavenly world contacted by astrology, and the intellectual or ‘Godly’ world accessed through the Qabala. During the 18th century Enlightenment, Western Ceremonial Magic waned in popularity but it soon returned to prominence in the popular secret occult lodges of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was, by far, the most influential of these ceremonial groups.

Low or folk magic

Low magic or thaumaturgy, in contrast with ceremonial magic, is the folk-magic practiced by common people and is informally passed on by oral tradition. Its staples include spells for protection, blessings and the placing and removal of curses. The low or folk magician in England was commonly called a Cunningman, Wise Woman, sorcerer, and occasionally “white witch” (Baker, 178). People believed their psychic skills were inherited. The Cunningfolk often were illiterate members of the lower classes who worked agricultural laborers or at other menial jobs. They performed magic on the side in exchange for money or goods.

Historian James Baker (pp. 171-191) has summarized the beliefs and practices of the historically documented English Cunningfolk. He said there were hundreds of examples of active Wise Women and Cunningmen going from the Middle Ages to the late 19th century. Their magic was practical and solitary. The Cunningfolk, for example, never formed the secret covens of thirteen-member described by Margaret Murray and Gerald Gardner (Baker, pp. 179 & 185). Instead, they used magical practices more as a trade or calling than a religious faith. Folk magic was both traditional and flexible at the same time. Ideas borrowed over time from high or ceremonial magic included classical astrology and spells taken from the grimoires and other Renaissance writings (Baker, p. 180).

The Cunningfolk invoked the deities of the Christian Trinity, the Christian saints, the planets named after classical gods (Mars, Mercury, Saturn, and Venus), the faeries, and other assorted spirits and demons. Some people apprenticed with

Cunningfolk, while others were self-taught. Common magical tools included scrying crystals; the Bible and grimoires; wax, cloth or clay poppets; charms written on Vellum, paper or metal; divining rods; witch bottles used to hold urine, hair, or nail clippings; wands; and swords and knives that were never called the athames of Gardnerian witchcraft. Magical recipes called for animal parts, the human parts mentioned above; and fragments of vegetables, cloth, glass, pottery, metal or minerals. When spells involved an individual not present, obtaining some personal items from that person was considered necessary for success. Cunningfolk also operated as white witches and used their powers to defeat the spells and curses of “black witches,” whom they assumed existed as did the Inquisition.

Villagers and occasionally the local gentry visited and paid the Cunningfolk for healings, identification of thieves, successful treasure hunts, fortune telling, removing curses, and providing good-luck charms. Satisfied customers tended to remember the magical successes that conformed to their beliefs rather than the failures.

Does Magical Success Require Secrecy?

Magicians believe that their magical spells and consecrated tools will lose their power if exposed to a profane public. The term occult means hidden knowledge and often refers to the secret rites and spells of the magicians. Secrecy was emphasized in the Circle of Light coven in Massachusetts, where Berger (p. 69) participated as an academic observer. Members were told not to share details about other members’ lives outside the group. The social scientists Meredith McGuire (1994) and Mary-Jo Neitz (1994), who relied on George Simmel’s 1906 work on secret societies, said secrecy helps create group cohesion by emphasizing the insider role of group members. Secrecy also gave members permission to engage in activities considered unacceptable by the larger society (Berger, p. 69). McGuire and Neitz, each independently suggested that secrecy was more common in the hierarchical and predominantly male occult lodges (Golden Dawn as an example) than in feminist-based spiritual groups (Berger, p. 62).

The once secret traditions and rituals of the Golden Dawn order were dramatically made public when Israel Regardie published a four volume book entitled *The Golden Dawn, An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn* starting in 1937. Since then Golden Dawn materials and magical traditions have been a major source of the practices used by contemporary ceremonial magicians and Pagan witches. Regardie began his magical career at age twenty-one in 1928 when he traveled from the United States to Europe to become Aleister Crowley’s unpaid companion and secretary (King, p. 152). Depending upon his volatile moods, Crowley called Regardie either ‘the Serpent’ or ‘that worm.’ Regardie grew tired of this treatment and parted with Crowley in 1934.

Earlier in 1932, Regardie had published his first two books, *The Tree of Life* and *The Garden of Pomegranates*, which created a sensation in two surviving Golden Dawn offshoots, Alpha et Omega and Stella Matutina (The original Golden Dawn order had lasted from 1888 to 1903). Some senior members of these offshoots felt Regardie had published some of their secrets. Crowley, however, had already pub-

lished similar materials back in 1912 in his magazine “The Equinox” and the book 777. These were small privately printed editions with a limited readership. In contrast Regardie’s books were widely circulated by a major occult publisher. E.J. Langford-Garstin, a senior Alpha et Omega member, wrote to Regardie requesting that he never again mention Golden Dawn or its traditions in print.

Instead Regardie joined Stella Matutina in 1934 and began rapidly progressing through its occult grades. However, he became discontent with his training because he felt the group was in a state of decay. Many Knowledge Lectures, the source of its teaching materials for neophytes, had been withdrawn or were greatly amended because the information they contained was not understood by the current Chiefs (King, p. 154). Regardie left Stella Matutina and broke his oath of secrecy with the publication *The Golden Dawn*. Alpha et Omega then ceased operations, because further ‘secret’ magical practice based on now public rites seemed pointless (King, p. 155).

Another public source of information about Western ceremonial traditions came from the writings of British occultist Dion Fortune. One of her influential books was *The Mystical Qabalah* published in 1936. In the 1920s, Fortune had joined Alpha et Omega, which she left to found her own group, the Fraternity of Inner Light. After Regardie published *The Golden Dawn*, her group gradually changed their ceremonies so that they bore little resemblance to the published Golden Dawn materials (King, p.156).

Francis King (p.169), another British occult author, said he did not completely understand the average occultist’s passion for secrecy. It was based in part on the belief that a magical rite became ineffective when made available to outsiders. King noted, by comparison, that the Christian Canon of the Mass had been printed millions of times but still remained an effective ceremony in his opinion. In the 1980s, Luhrmann (p. 48.) found British witchcraft a still secretive otherworld using its own rich symbolic and special terms.

Magic versus science

Some scholars view magic an “alternative scientific path” and witches often cite this viewpoint to justify their magical practices (Berger, p. 23). The separation of magical practices from those of modern science did not occur until the 17th century (Knight, p. 100). At that time scientists began viewing the universe as a complicated machine, such as a clock, rather than as a living organism as had earlier philosophers and scientists. Before this splitting off of magic from science occurred, both were seen as equal components of a natural philosophy explaining the causes of observed phenomena (Knight, pp. 101-102). Several early modern scientists combined a study of magic and science. Francis Bacon, for example, in addition to being a champion of modern scientific observation and experimentation, also seriously studied magic, astrology, and alchemy (Knight, p. 102). Isaac Newton, the greatest scientist of the late 17th century, was as preoccupied with alchemy and theology as he was with physics, mathematics, and astronomy. The quest for a greater knowledge of magic and alchemy led to the development of the

modern scientific method with its objective observation of phenomena and detailed recording of experimental results.

Since the 17th century, the dominant mechanical view of nature has made it easy for serious scholars to dismiss magic as part of an outdated “superstitious” religion or “failed” science (Luhmann, pp. 347-348). The early anthropologists Edward Tyler (in 1871) and James Frazer (in 1890) believed magic arose in “primitive” cultures through an observation of natural phenomena. Magic differed from scientific observations because its interpretations of cause and effect were wrong. Later the sociologists Emile Durkheim (in 1915) and John Skorupski (in 1976) began viewing magic as a symbolic system, which distinguished between the literal and symbolic meanings attached to magical statements (Luhmann, p. 348). Magic for these social scientists was an aesthetic and expressive use of metaphors and analogies that were neither true nor false, in contrast with the conclusions derived from scientific experimentation.

Modern magic re-emerged in a 19th century world divided between science and religion (Luhmann, p. 279). Many thoughtful people wanted to preserve the claims of religion without rejecting conclusions obtained by scientific experimentation. In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was founded with a mission to demonstrate, through scientific experiments and logic, the reality of religious experience and especially the immortality of the soul. The contemporary academic Alexander Bain, who is often called the founder of psychology, however, believed the mind was completely dependent on a functioning human body and lacked any trace of a “separate, independent, self-supporting agent” required by an immortal soul.

Magic as a psychological practice

The psychologist Carl Jung provided new support for magical theory in the early 1900s. He believed that external culture could be affected by the manipulations of the unconscious mind (Luhmann, p. 281). Since then, magicians have argued that magical symbols had a real therapeutic effect on individuals, regardless of any impact on the external world. (Luhmann, p. 282). The focused will power of the magician is what makes magic work according to the psychological interpretation. Magical tools, be they crystals, consecrated athames, or hair clippings from a person the magician wishes to influence, are just psychological props of secondary importance.

One popular modern idea held by magicians is that magic operates on a different ‘plane’ or ‘level’ of existence than that of the physical world (Luhmann, p. 274). This metaphor of separate but interconnected planes or levels of existence is found in the early Hermetic philosophy, which stated that man reflected in his microcosm the complexity of the macrocosm of a universe composed of many tiers (Luhmann, p. 277). Consistent with a belief in different planes of reality is the idea that the universe studied by physical scientist represents only a part of total reality. Many different kinds of matter exist including granite rocks, imagined objects and spiritual essences. These substances interact with each other, but different natural laws are thought to govern the ‘granite-like’ objects and the ‘spirit-like’ objects. A

real-but-separate magical reality allows magicians to block off questions about magical efficacy from the probing criticisms of skeptics who demand objective proof that magic works.

In the original Neoplatonic philosophy, there was no suggestion that different rules or laws governed the mundane, celestial and spiritual worlds (Luhrmann, p. 279). Psychoanalysis bolsters this separate reality, because not all mental activity is rational or logical, but still the irrational idea or false belief can just as effectively motivate people to alter their behaviors. Another ancient Hermetic belief was the idea that any thought could be made externally manifest through intense mental concentration (Luhrmann, p. 275). Regardie said it was of utmost importance for the magician to assume that the symbols of the astral plane represented real and tangible realities (Luhrmann, p. 276). A belief in a successful outcome was an essential part of magical practice. Entering magical practice was like entering a world of 'let's pretend' where fantastic ideas might be true. One could use them for a while before often becoming persuaded of their reality (Luhrmann, p. 341).

Magic in Daily Life: Does it really work?

Magicians look for evidence in the real world to validate their belief in magic (Luhrmann, p. 122). They seek evidence of specific changes in the external world that may be attributed to their magical efforts. Magical rituals are often successful, because they are performed to achieve concrete goals such as obtaining houses, jobs, or good health where a positive outcome is likely. Magicians take these positive outcomes, which skeptics consider mere coincidence, as proof of their magical successes (Luhrmann, p. 123).

Magicians do not test the results of their practices with the scientific rigor of Popperian experimentation (Luhrmann, p. 123). In 1959 Karl Popper stated that after a hypothesis was tested by an empirical experiment, it would be abandoned if the results failed to agree with the predictions generated from the hypothesis. Instead, magicians use informal observations of magical successes to justify their beliefs. They remember one dramatic cure occurring after a ritual long after ten other failed attempts are forgotten (Luhrmann, p. 125). The more striking the favorable event, the more firmly it is remembered. A magician named Robert told Luhrmann (p. 127) about nine dramatic cases of magical success he had observed after participating in hundreds of rituals over a twenty-seven year period. Magicians become adept at seeing patterns of success, which they then attribute to their rituals. These successes then become part of the oral history of their magical group (Luhrmann, p.130). Other spiritual or mystical experiences encountered after a ritual may also be counted as evidence supporting its success (Luhrmann, p. 135). So do changes in personal feelings such as an expanded awareness of spiritual love or a sense of unity with others. In fact all changes occurring after a ritual may be attributed to the power of the magical rite (Luhrmann, p. 136). Many magicians initially retain their skepticism about magic, but they often later cite startling 'synchronicities' or coincidences such as dramatic cures and insightful tarot readings as the reason for believing in magic.

When a magical ritual fails to produce the desired result, it is often attributed to faulty technique, not a faulty theory about magical efficacy. Another common explanation for failure in magic is the weakness of the magician's will or a failure to believe a spell will work (Luhmann, p. 139). Luhmann described a particular spell performed to alleviate a friend's suffering after hospitalization. Afterwards, the coven performing the ritual considered this spell a failure. Months later when she circulated some draft chapters of her doctoral thesis that expressed her skeptical views about the parapsychological including magic, the group's high priestess then said Luhmann's presence as a skeptical observer was the cause of failure. This woman was outraged by the skeptical tone of Luhmann's chapters, although other coven members disagreed with her. The coven eventually split into two groups partly over the issue of her presence (Luhmann p. 139).

Summary

In conclusion, many of today's magicians rebel against the idea of an objective truth and assert that true knowledge lies beyond 'mere' intellectual understanding (Luhmann, p. 344). Within this subjective intellectual environment, it is impossible to conclusively say that magic does or does not work.

My personal magical practice consists of protection techniques such as those described in *HexCraft* by Silver RavenWolf (pp. 167 -191). These have helped me increase my assertiveness in difficult situations at work or while on travel. I now carry a small "divinity" stone in my pocket to absorb all negative influences. Is it magical success when I call upon unseen powers to help me assume an assertive "god-aspect" and thus act invincible? Or is the visualization of myself as a powerful individual just a result of my practicing certain psychological exercises (camouflaged as magical spells) to build self-confidence? I believe both explanations can be simultaneously true. One explanation is based on my acceptance of magical success happening on a different plane of reality, the second one satisfies the rational side of my mind, which demands concrete "scientific" explanations. Gareth Knight (p. 196) stated that "[t]he only guide to truth in all of this [magic], as in religious faith, lies in first-hand experience." Abalancing of personal beliefs with some healthy skepticism is probably the best approach for evaluating all claims of magical success.

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Author Bio

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Awareness is Half of Prevention:
*How To Take Care of Yourself with Awareness,
Grounding, Centering & Shielding*

by Crow Swimsaway, Ph.D.

Introduction:

In spite of the popularity of shamanic ideas among pagans there is still relatively limited knowledge and understanding of what shamans, either tribal or contemporary Western, are all about. A major aim of my work over the last 20 years has been to share my knowledge and experiences as a contemporary shamanic teacher and practitioner with almost anyone who would listen to or read my words.

While I have written numerous articles and taught countless workshops, the following material is an excerpt from the first book-length work I have produced about shamanic healing. The Book about Shamanic Extraction is a comprehensive examination of one quite amazing shamanic healing technique as it has existed for millennia and is still practiced with very good effect today.

The material which follows, taken from one of the final chapters of the book, is of special value and interest to pagans, indeed, to everyone in today's challenging world, because it describes a number of practical approaches to avoiding the attacks on our body/mind/spirit which can result in the dangerous and painful intrusions which it is the objective of shamanic extraction to remove. Better awareness and protection than making repairs after the fact!

Grounding, centering and shielding are part of most tribal shamanic practice. One major reason that they are found so commonly is that they are part of the essential system for protecting the shaman at work. From the challenges outlined in the stories of shamanic healing told above you can easily understand that there are times when the shaman needs all the help and all the protection she or he can get to be able to survive the dangers of the work intact and achieve maximally effective healing for the community. But does all this apply to us, as ordinary folks in our present day world? Perhaps, before reading this book, you had not given much thought to the risks that surround you virtually every moment of every day. Personally, I am and always have been by nature a very positive and optimistic person, hardly paranoid at all, and always ready with my lemon squeezer for some good fresh lemonade when the world tosses me a lemon. In addition to my generally positive expectations I have also learned that there are a bunch of lemons flying around out there and ducking is often much easier and more pleasant than getting hit and then having to make the best (lemonade) out of the mess. Lemons? Yes, that is a cute metaphor for the less pleasant things that life can throw at us. Here I

use it to refer specifically to the kinds of external and internal impacts which we know do cause intrusions.

Chapter 6, *Why Intrusions Happen*, has discussed these factors in detail. Review that chapter and decide if you personally find it easier to learn how to avoid intrusions or if you prefer to live with the pain of the intrusions and then seek out ways to have them removed.

Awareness

Having read this book you are already well on your way to achieving maximum protection for yourself in your daily life. That is, just knowing about life's potential dangers makes it much easier to avoid them. Looking again though the ways in which intrusions happen will alert you to situations to consciously avoid.

Media

Violence in the media is such an obvious example! If you constantly subject yourself to the daily media, especially in television news and any other format which continuously and predictably blasts it in your face, you will be shocked by what you see and you will be open to intrusive energies. If you need that kind of experience on a daily basis, I suggest that you examine that need and its implications for your continued health and healing.

Recreation

Do your preferred forms of recreation include regular witnessing of violent sport events? Is watching a racing car crash that kills or maims two drivers worth the short shot of adrenaline you get from it? Consider the psychic and energetic cost to you of carrying that image in your mind for days or weeks and the intrusion that may well go along with it.

Relationships

Awareness and avoidance of violence in relationships is harder to develop than reducing our "need" for news or sports. An over-reactive parent or loved one is much harder to avoid than television or the sports stadium. Yet, if necessary for your safety and sanity, you can take a lesson from my young actor client, Charles, and take steps to separate yourself from that kind of violence in your life. While changing some one else is almost never a successful enterprise, it may be possible to help another, whose life path has brought them to generate a great deal of violence or other negativity, to enter into their own healing. It is worth a try.

Substance Use or Abuse?

Involvement with the subcultures of alcohol, marijuana and other drug use tends to open us to greatly increased possibilities of intrusive energies entering our lives. This is partly because many of the persons (and places) involved with substance use are not positive and pleasant nor do they have our best interests in heart or mind. Bars and drinking parties hold the potential for violence and/or intense and uncon-

trolled expression of emotion. Alcohol opens us and reduces our sense and control of our own boundaries, thus making us more susceptible to any intrusive energies which may arise. (Substance use, because of the openness and large supply of unbounded energy it promotes, invites and delights discarnate spirits looking for a home.) It is widely said that marijuana and other “psychedelic” and “entheogenic” substances induce peace rather than violence and that may be so. They are certainly capable of exposing us to emotional, psychological and psychic intensities which, if we are not prepared, can cause intrusions. Set and setting are, of course, crucial to safe and successful involvement with any mind-altering substance. Coming to substance use with a strong, positive and happy mind-set and taking part in the substance in a safe, serene and supportive setting will decrease the likelihood of negative effects including intrusions (if not legal problems).

To reinforce the position taken here, the following very thoughtful material about violence, its effects and what you can do about them, from Norman Shealy and Caroline Myss, *The Creation of Health* (1993) is included at this point:

We are a violent species - not by nature, but by choice. We have become so addicted to violence that we are no longer able even to realize our addiction, much less appreciate the impact violence has upon the human spirit and the physical body.

We entertain ourselves with violence and we communicate to each other in violent words and, very often, violent acts. We permit violence to animals and to the environment. Worst of all, we consider these endless acts of violence as an acceptable part of human nature, as if we cannot be held responsible for them.

Television brings the violence of war into our homes in the evening news reports, but can we actually emotionally distinguish this very real violence from the entertainment that follows the news programs?

We live in a culture laden with victims of child and spouse abuse, interracial abuse and abuse of the poor. The homeless on our streets are victims of economic violence. Our schools are filled with violence and the streets with gang warfare.

This is only a comment on the abundance of visible violence. We are also invisibly violent. Thoughts of anger, violence and judgment wage wars inside of us destroying our spirits and our bodies.

While we may believe that we are designed to handle violence and that it is a given part of the human experience, that is not so. We have simply become so acclimated to this distortion of our own basic nature that we no longer realize that we have become poisoned.

My personal belief is that we are a species filled with violent

illnesses because we ourselves are filled with violent emotions. Violent energy within a person destroys both internally and externally. The violent energy that exists within a person's energy system is a major contributor to the creation of disease in that person's body though it remains a medically unmeasurable factor. (125-126)

Because thoughts are power, develop a quality control check-up on yourself on a regular basis. When you feel that too much negativity is present in your system, do something to heal yourself immediately. Pay attention to the law of cause and effect, and study the consequences of your actions, words and thoughts, realizing at all times that you are the creator behind that which you are studying.

Heal your own addiction to violence in any and every form: actions, attitudes, words, habits and thoughts. Our violent natures create our violent politics, weapons and all violent human actions and interactions. We all have violence in us. Remember our world is a violent world, and these proclivities have entered into us through the very air we breathe. Remember that violence breeds disease and destroys the human emotional system. (382)

Being Positive

While intensity can be a very positive part of our experience of the world, violence seldom is, whether it is physical, emotional or psychic, or some blending of the three. This applies to harsh events which come at us from outside. It also applies to our own thoughts, feelings and behaviour. I do not know of any person who is always in control of every aspect of themselves. Still, if we can have enough awareness of self to catch our own negativities as they begin and are able to gentle them down, we will find ourselves in distressing situations much less often. Mild and gentle thoughts, feelings and, especially, speech and actions invite others to be the same way. Being in that mode stimulates others to follow suite. Interestingly, pursued over a period of time it also carries us away from the habits of having negative thought patterns.

Take for instance the use of curse words. In Western culture this used to be the curse of men but woman's liberation has brought many women to use words in ordinary - not angry - conversation that would definitely gain the interested attention of my (1950's) Army basic training Master Sergeants. What, dear women and men, have we gained with this "liberation"? We have gained the ability to casually - thought-lessly - use forms of expression that are totally lacking in love, compassion and understanding. "Fucking" for example, an act which is one of life's premium sources of joy-in-sharing, holding the potential to be a profound expression of love, becomes in words only part of the common currency of dislike and disgust.

How disgusting! If our mind- set is such that our mouths are constantly filled with the sounds and feelings of negativity, how can we entice our beings toward awareness, protection, safety and happiness with the power of positive thinking and speech?

Another example where positive presence of mind can help us is when confronted with Road Rage. It is not uncommon, while driving anywhere in this country, to have some “fool” race past us, try to cut us off and, an amazing part of the experience, to get angry with us, cursing and shaking his fist: he almost kills himself, and us and others along with him! But then, if you are honest with yourself, you can admit that you had some little part in the event: you were not just there. Maybe you were not paying attention. Maybe you did try to slip by or in front of him. Maybe you cut a little too close or followed right on his tail for the last five or ten miles. Maybe, if you had been driving defensively and at Level 8 (out of 10) for your own survival and not at Level 4 or 5, he could have made it home at the end of his bad day without having a negative interaction with anyone. You both would have been far ahead.

The key thought in each of these examples is awareness. By being constantly aware of your particular needs and sensitivities and by being on the lookout for situations which have the potential to harm you, you will be much safer and happier in general and much less prone to the invasion of intrusive energies.

Awareness is well and good but there are those events which sneak up on us anyway: they just happen to us. It is for those that the next three steps in the protective process are necessary.

Grounding

To journey successfully, to spend so much time in the alternative realities, the shaman needs to be a very earthy person, involved in the ordinary events of her family and community and strongly connected with the spirit and power of the land upon which they live. There is a useful lesson here for all of us. Being grounded, strongly connecting with earth energy, gives us a positive foothold on life allowing us to move surely through what ever vicissitudes any day may offer.

An Ongoing Part of Your Life

There are several shamanically inspired ways to get grounded. The awareness practices just discussed are a good place to start. Attitudes and actions of awareness reduce distractions and improve one’s ability to connect with what matters. Next is increasing your level of involvement in the positive pursuits of your community: become involved in the real world of your society. Helping out at a soup kitchen, for instance, will increase your awareness of the needs of others and of how fortunate your own economic situation is (no matter how stressed it might seem at the moment).

Practical survival activities for yourself are also quite grounding. Cooking, eating and gardening (including house plants), especially when they are done with love for yourself and others involved in your household, are wonderful ways to get your

hands in the flour and the vegetables and the dirt and deeply into physical reality. Ceremonies for grounding have always been shamanically significant and are useful for us today. These can be simple or elaborate, depending on your taste and spiritual pursuits. Spiritedly attending the Earth Day service at your church or temple is as powerful as worshipping Mother Earth directly with a circle of friends out in “nature” or calling Her to the altar in your bedroom.

Daily Practices

Most of these grounding suggestions are items to integrate into your lives on an ongoing basis. The shaman would probably also expect to take a little time for a daily grounding exercise of some kind. This could be physical exercise, such as you might perform at the beginning of a martial arts routine. In most martial arts, due to their ancestry in the energy practices of the Eastern temples, there is awareness of the power and efficacy of grounding and centering. Very useful exercises are often taught in that context. Qigong energy exercises, for instance, are excellent for grounding:

Qigong brings about the removal of negativities that lead to worry, sadness, anger, nervousness, fear and a stressful life. As a result, one is free to lead a happy and carefree life. (Li 2000,7)

Qigong can also have an effect beyond the individual, much like what is discussed in the Being Positive section, above:

Those who practice Qigong and other self-healing methods, in addition to healing and empowering themselves, can have a positive effect on others.

This influence flows to the sick as healing energy. The same influence may flow as benevolence and virtue to neutralize negative forces, like crime and violence. The effect that one can have on others requires little additional effort. Simply doing your own practice in a state of benevolent intent is all that is required. (Jahnke 2001, 39)

Your grounding might be something of a more meditative nature such as the following.

Grounding Exercise

Sit quietly for a few moments (either cross legged or in an upright chair). As you become relaxed become aware of your breathing: let it be smooth, steady, calm and even. Become especially aware of your in-breaths and your out-breaths; hear your energy as it flows in and out.

Next, on each out-breath let your awareness, your energy, flow downward from your feet and the base of your spine to the Earth. As your energy flows down you may become aware through that descending tendril of all the layers that lie beneath you. Unless you are in wild nature, the first layers will be of a human kind. You may feel the quality of these in passing but your aim and focus lies on the true Earth

beneath.

Soon you will pass the human detritus and come to the layers of Earth Herself. As your out-breaths continue and your awareness goes deeper, feel the differences in the quality of the energy here. As your connection travels down, sensing differences in moisture, density and temperature, you will become increasingly aware of your link with Mother Earth, that steady, supporting Strength which lies beneath you. Go as deeply as you like into that Strength, even to the core of the earth, with its intensity of heat and pressure, if that feels safe to you.

Spend a few moments at your deepest point. Once you have become comfortable and confident in the Strength the Earth has for you, begin to become conscious of your in-breaths.

Following your in-breaths draw your renewed and strengthened energy back up through all the layers. Take your time and bring with you all the strength and reassurance you have gained from the Earth back into your self.

This needs only a few moments and can be pleasantly done morning or evening or both. Instead of sitting it may be done standing in the shower or anywhere, standing or sitting, outside. I have even used it anytime to get grounded after an unsettling event or before meeting a challenge I am especially concerned about.

Centering

When you are well grounded you are very close to being well centered. The well grounded individual, shaman or otherwise, has a collected, solid, unpreferenceable quality about her. He is hard to catch off guard and he rocks back to center, like one of those bottom-heavy dolls, when something surprising does come along. Being centered includes a clear sense of your own strength and ability, which is there without the necessity of being self-absorbed or constantly looking inward for self-assurance. The truly centered person looks outward with ready interest for what each day and each moment may bring. That person is aware of, but does not depend on the opinion of others to discover where they are in the world or in the moment.

That kind of self-assurance comes to the shaman through a lifetime of apprenticeship and work on his or her craft. Being generally knowledgeable and knowing that there is constant support from the allies, teachers and ancestors are key factors as are regular shamanic practices and ceremonies.

Centering Exercise

There is a simple continuation of the Grounding Exercise we have just done which will help you connect with the power at your core. It can follow what you have already done or may be done on its own when you are already feeling quite settled and grounded.

Once more, sit quietly for a few moments (either cross-legged or in an upright chair). As you become relaxed become aware of your breathing: let it be smooth, steady, calm and even. Become especially aware of your in-breaths and your out-breaths; hear your energy as it flows in and out.

Now, on each in-breath, draw energy into your own center. As you breathe in,

feel the energy around you mingling with your own strength and adding to it. Feel especially the strength of the Earth which constantly supports you as it flows and joins with your personal energy. Be aware of the core of calm, centered power which lies within you.

Know that, as you stand on the strength of Mother Earth you can always act from your own calm, powerful center. As you feel this, continue your gentle, relaxed, breathing.

Shielding

Shamanic shielding has been more clearly observed in the field than grounding and centering, perhaps because it is more constant and visible, especially when the shaman performs. Indeed, many of the elements of costume, which makes the shaman stand out in so many of the early drawings and photographs, are there for protection.

As this quotation from contemporary Bolivian Ceremonialist, Miguel Kavlin, makes clear, words and music are also important traditional shielding devices.

Some of the ayahuasquero's magical songs, the arcanas, work by invoking protective allies. Protections are found in many cultures: they can take the form of magical shields, swords, necklaces, or garments. In ayahuasca shamanism, shamans use arcanas to weave magical protections. In many old songs, protections were invoked in the form of magical stones or animal spirits. In the Amazon today, one hears of shamans invoking electrical towers, flying motorcycles, and other strange things as protectors. I should add that those shamans aren't joking; they are very serious about their protectors. (White 2000,41)

One of my own most stunning shamanic experiences was witnessing, at Chicago's Field Museum, a recently discovered 18th century shaman's costume from Siberia. It is a long leather cloak, covered with hooks and thorns and masks and mirrors all crafted of metal, and other devices of leather and wood, all to keep away interfering spirits. It must have weighed close to 100 pounds! (Masks: Faces of Culture, Nunley 1999, 278,279) Sarangarel (2000, 108-109) mentions the mirrors of Siberia and also makes the point that helper spirits are essential to the shaman's safety.

There are a few basic ways to keep the spiritual protection around oneself strong, and these same techniques can be applied to other people or even objects that need protection. The basic idea is to specifically ask the helper spirits to grant protection. While shamanizing, a shaman is generally about as safe as possible, since the shaman should call the helper spirits before starting his or her work.

For personal protection it is good to smudge oneself each morning, and pass the smudge of juniper, sage or thyme around the body three times. If you have arshaan [empowered water], pour a little in your right palm, sip a little, then rub the rest

over the crown of the head and third eye (middle of the forehead). This technique should also be used by people for whom you have done a healing or soul retrieval.

When you do this for yourself, ask the spirits to be around you on all sides and to empower you to do your work throughout the day. If you should be fortunate enough to obtain a metal or nephrite mirror, it is good to wear it over the heart when protection is needed, such as when traveling or going to a dangerous place.

Another protection technique is to ask the spirits to keep dangerous people away, to make such people either unaware or afraid of you. This is a good technique to use when going to a dangerous place at night.

Once again, we need to ask what of all this is accessible to us in our daily lives. It might be a little difficult to wear a 5 inch bronze mirror on our chests when we go to the office each day. The grounding and centering we have already learned are easy and they are a good half of what we need to be shielded. Fortunately, many other shielding techniques used by ancient shamans are also popular and easy to use today and those around us will only be aware of our happy confidence, not that we are doing something learned many millennia ago.

Vibrational Shielding

Vibrational shielding, that is, using sound and light energy of certain wave lengths to protect oneself, is common shamanically. The songs of the ayahuasquero are one example; the egg of blue light a Chumash (Northern California Native American) shaman surrounds herself with is another. If you have a favourite color you can use it in your shielding. You can dress in that color to boost your confidence and, if an especially difficult event is looming, just envision yourself surrounded by a sphere of light of that color. You can even paint where you live with protective colors, as we did at the Purple House.

Following your own color preferences works well for shielding. The colors that make you feel happy, strong and effective are protective for you. For guidance, it is interesting to know that some protective colors appear in more than one tradition. Blue, lavender and purple are all powerfully protective and may lend clarity and increase vision. Reds, yellows and oranges are associated with the strength of fire. In some traditions greens are special heart guardians. Both black and white, especially as clothing, are widely used for shielding. Golden light (which many people experience when they enter the tunnel to begin lower world shamanic journeys) is a good protective filter allowing in positive but keeping out negative energy. Clear light (such as you would experience inside a sphere of quartz crystal) and white light are powerfully protective, allowing very little through, and should be used in the most desperate situations. For the highly developed Chinese Feng Shui system of protective color use see, *Living Color*, Master Lin Yun's *Guide to Feng Shui and the Art of Color*, (Rossbach 1994). Feng Shui is derived from shamanic roots via Taoism.

Crystals and Stones

Because of their colors, crystals and stones have long been thought to exhibit vibrational protective and healing energies. (There is a vast literature on this if you wish to delve into contemporary thinking on the subject.) Shamanically, stones of interesting shapes and colors are often carried and may appear on personal and healing altars for the power they hold. Quartz crystals, which are most common in nature and found in many parts of the world, are very widely used by shamans. Reference to their use in extraction work is seen in quotations throughout this book. Many shamans also carry them for their protective effects, and so can you. Once again, they come in all sizes and settings so you can carry a larger plain one in your pocket or purse and the tiniest make totally charming earrings. Large or small they are effective shielding devices.

Amulets

If bronze mirrors are out, it is very easy to wear other kinds of amulets. Amuletic jewelry is fascinating and fun and comes in all sizes, colors and materials. You can select an animal amulet (I saw the cutest pair of bear earrings last night!) to call upon the strength of one of your allies. There are many protective symbols and devices worn by people over the millennia of which the Christian cross is a very popular example - it smells less than garlic and is supposed to keep vampire spirits away. (see *Body Guards, Protective Amulets and Charms*, Morris 1999) You may choose an all purpose protective device - like the cross - or, with a little research, find other symbols connected with your own racial and cultural roots or that are specific against any particular kind of threat from which you are seeking shielding.

Coverings

Shamans are famous for their inventively designed and worn costumes and masks which may call on the energy of the animal and plant allies, depict fierce protective demons, and be covered with protective amulets, dried animal parts, bones and feathers. They may be of leather and metal almost as heavy as the shaman, as light as a cloak of leaves or feathers or, even lighter, painted or tattooed directly on the shaman's skin.

Your personal relationship with tattoos probably depends on your life history and life-style. Suffice to say that more and more people of almost every contemporary background are becoming tattooed. When they do this they enjoy humankind's oldest surviving art form (which grew from shamanic roots). From the beginning, and for most people today, tattoo has served as an expression of faith and of one's relationship to the wider world. As such it is a powerful shield.

Our daily clothing probably seems a little less impressive than the shaman's working costume and tattoos, and it should be so. Even if the most fashion-conscious shaman usually does not hoe the corn in full regalia, you can dress everyday with awareness. Following principals of color, form and symbolism, select garments that protect you from more than the elements. For instance, I always teach in t-shirts that depict one or another of my animal allies: I like to feel that the allies are right there to support me.

Clearing and Cleansing

You are probably familiar with the concept of occasionally clearing crystals of any negative energy they have accumulated. This is an excellent idea for any item you wear as part of your shielding.

Tattoos get cleaned when you do and greatly benefit from the shine of a little oil or lotion before going out into the world (and don't forget the sun-tan lotion!). Clothing should obviously be cleaned in ways that are appropriate for the fabric, etc.

Amulets, stones and crystals can be cleaned or cleared in several ways. Hanging them in the sun for a full day, sunrise to sunset, works well. Moon cleansing is also effective: you can hang the item in moonlight overnight. Some say it takes a 14-day cycle to clean with moonlight, starting at the dark of the moon to eliminate the old energy and reclaiming the item at the full of the moon when it is fully charged with the new light. Passing items over a fire or candle works well as does using the smoke from incense such as sandalwood or a cleansing smudge such as sage. Spring water is excellent for washing, especially if you have gathered the water, with thanks and appreciation, from a real spring and not a plastic "spring water" bottle. Salt water is also used: a little sea salt is dissolved in spring water and the items dipped in it. This may stain some metals, however. You may notice that these are elemental cleansings and we have mentioned air, fire and water but not earth. For some reason, earth cleansings are less common these days although they are often used by tribal shamans for themselves, their clients and their equipment. My earth cleansings can involve burying the item for a ceremonially appropriate length of time or just taking it up to the soft dirt next to the Dragon's Spring and scraping it off.

Spirit Shielding

It is part of the shaman's day-to-day work to invoke the help of Spirit, usually in the form of animal and plant allies, spirits of place, teachers and ancestors. Each of these manifestations of Spirit help shamans in various ways to do their healing work and any of them may be protective against threats in both shamanic and ordinary realities.

As soon as you learn shamanic journeying yourself (and almost everyone finds this easy to do with the guidance of a good teacher) you will connect with one or more allies. Other helpers will come to you as you learn other kinds of journeying and other shamanic techniques. From your first ally journey on, you will have the best possible shielding just for the asking. Sometimes my allies come to take care of me even without my asking for their help.

I remember an occasion a few years ago when I was a student in an energy-healing workshop and it was my turn to be the guinea pig for other students to try out their new energy skills on. I am not super-comfortable being worked on by strangers anyway and it was my first experience of this sort. I was so nervous that I did not even consciously realize that I was nervous! Then I looked over my left

shoulder - I was lying on my back with 5 or 6 people kneeling around me - and there sat White Cougar with a big smile on her face all ready for protective action. She certainly would have attacked the first person to touch me. Her presence made me aware that I, and she, were over-reacting and I was able to calm us both down in time to receive a very good energy-healing experience.

Can you access the protection of Spirit without knowing how to journey shamanically? Certainly! I believe profoundly in the power of prayer and in the many other ways which humankind has found to make contact with Spirit. Shamanic work simply happens to be the most comfortable and effective framework for my spirituality and I love to teach it to others. You must be aware that you too, following your own path, have a working connection to Spirit. Use it.

How will you prepare yourself today?

I believe that everyone should practice Awareness, Grounding, Centering and Shielding every day of their life. They become good habits that cost you very little of your time and energy and repay your investment every day by helping you to achieve and maintain a calm and peaceful frame of mind for dealing with whatever life may throw you.

I do not believe that any of the practices outlined here is perfect. There is no point in driving yourself to distraction by loading yourself down with too many amulets, crystals, songs, prayers and allies. Irritations, upsets, yes, even intrusions can sneak their distressing way through the protection of the most positively shielded person. Find for yourself a balanced selection from the above exercises and suggestions and I know that you will be healthier and happier because of it.

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Bridget: Pagan Goddess or Christian Saint?

by Theadora Davitt-Cornyn, Jo Gerrard, and Rowan Alexander

This service was originally written for a course titled “Women and Religion” at California Lutheran University. It was performed later that same year by the three authors at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Conejo Valley for Imbolc. It is intended to be performed by three women - a maiden (the Goddess Bridget), mother (Saint Bridget) and crone (Moderator) in a “talk-show” format. Various props can be useful; a map of Ireland, a Bridget’s Cross, a sword and a chalice among others, although these are not necessary.

Moderator: In the distant long ago, when religion was never thought of as a separate entity, but was simply the way people lived their lives, goddess religions were a natural evolution of living close to the earth, in tune with nature’s rhythms, in harmony with the natural environment, in awe of nature’s wrath, and in gratitude for her favors. Fertility and survival seemed to be the two most urgent preoccupations, so the goddess would be invoked and appealed to for these purposes. Women often played a major role in these ancient religions – sadly, now, in contrast to the misogyny found in later faiths.

Christianity was another step along the way, incorporating what we in modern times call pagan religions - sometimes brutally stamping them out as heresies (as was done in the New World), at other times merely absorbing them in painless take-overs such as occurred in Ireland shortly after the arrival of Patrick in 432 CE, as indigenous beliefs were incorporated into Christian theology. The case of Bridget is one of these examples.

(Pope) Gregory (the Great)’s instructions indicate that Christian missionaries were ideally to change beliefs with as little dislocation of popular practice as possible. This policy of adaptation proved to be wise from the point of view of the church because, for the most part, people hold on to cultic practices, that is, to what they feel obliged to do by virtue of their relations to transcendent powers. Cultic practice is inevitably more lasting than belief, the latter being a culture’s speculative or mythological articulation of its relation to the divine. If the missionaries could uproot what they considered to be the essential beliefs of paganism, they were willing to overlook the accidentals of the modes of worship until the practices could be Christianized over time. As long as this kind of policy governed missionary activities, the old worship left many traces in medieval Christianity.¹

Webster's 1962 Unabridged Dictionary defines pagan as: civilian, country-dweller, follower of a polytheistic religion, one who has little or no religion, or who is marked by a frank delight in and uninhibited seeking after sensual pleasures and material goods. It also defines pagan (this is my personal favorite!) as one who prefers a well-ordered dinner to a dissertation on the immortality of the soul.

How many of you might have realized that in its early beginnings, Christianity was considered a cult by its contemporaries?

From Paganism and Christianity 100-425 CE: "The appearance of cults far from their original home...is a prominent feature of life...(for) the first four centuries of the Common Era. But of brand new religions, there are only a very limited number - chief among them is Christianity."²

And from Backgrounds of Early Christianity: Christianity in the Ancient World³: What about pagan views of Christianity in the olden days? The well-known Roman historian Pliny found Christianity to be only a "...perverse and extravagant superstition."

pause

Moderator continues

Today we bring you a story of transition - how one well-loved pagan goddess was transformed into a well-respected Christian saint. This sort of thing happened often in the early days of the church, as the decision was made by early leaders to adapt and adopt much of whatever the local pagan practices were into the Christian way. It was considered a less disruptive method, and was more likely to have a successful outcome than forcing the natives to lose their former allegiances, and to conform.

Curiously, in Ireland, vestiges can still be found of pagan influence: holy wells – which are simply deep pools of fresh water in roundish openings surrounded by the wild grasses of uncultivated fields – (not anything like what we visualize when we think of wishing wells) and clafouties – which are shreds of cloth torn from a hem to make an offering tied onto a branch of a shrub near a holy well – and other rituals often not spoken of openly, such as in October 1994, when I returned to Ireland for a family wedding after all the tourists had gone home. A cousin's daughter was being married. My cousin's wife and I had been having a lively discussion about Unitarianism, which she referred to as a cult!

Now, this woman always had a very large, conspicuous, Roman Catholic statue of the Infant of Prague in their big kitchen window. On this visit the statue was quite noticeable by its absence. When I inquired where it was, the mother ran from the room with her hand clapped over her mouth and one of the daughters explained: "Oh, it's out in the garden under a shrub, for good weather on the wedding day tomorrow." Now, that's an ancient pagan belief, but the mother was too embarrassed to let on, as the Roman Catholic church in Ireland would frown on any display of such heathen behavior!

Since we have no one else today who can speak for the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland in the days of Druids, Firbolgs, and Formorians, perhaps we can ask our guests to introduce themselves.

Moderator: *Turning to Goddess Bridget* Would you like to start us off?

Goddess: Thank you. I have been called Brighid or Bride, or Brig, and I am a triune goddess from pagan Ireland—triune meaning I have three aspects: Maiden, Mother, and Crone. As Maiden I am inspiration and poetry, as Mother I am a midwife and a healer, and as Crone I am responsible for hearth fires, smithies and crafts. I have brought some of my symbols: here you see the lighted brazier representing my fire aspect, a pitcher and chalice for my association with water and healing, some corn and a Brigit's cross for my fertility and earth aspects, a wolf, snake, swan and vulture — though I did not bring my sacred cow—and a shining mirror to the other world, one of my talismans.⁴

Additionally, my association with smithcraft makes me a warrior goddess, and as such I wield a spear and arrow. Imbolc, February second, is my sacred day, and on this day the fires were tended with care and fueled with special woods, including a rowan rod that was placed in the heart of the fire. If such a fire pleased me, in the morning the household might find my mark in the shape of a goose or swan's footprint near the hearth, and such a family would find themselves blessed in the coming year, generally with exceptional fertility in lambs, crops and even human children.⁵

Let me read a brief section from The Goddess Obscured

Saint Brigid shows an incredible likeness to the Celtic Goddess from whom she takes her name, Brigid, the great guardian of fertility and the land. Though by the Middle Ages [I] was primarily associated with poetry, healing, and artisanship, etymology and scraps of mythology establish [me] as having been primarily a matriarchal deity. Like most Celtic goddesses, [I] was intimately connected with topography, particularly with sacred waters and wells. Prayers and sacrifices would have been offered to [me] (and other topographical goddesses), though the druidic liturgy and oral formulas were not set down by the medieval monks who recorded the mythology. Instead, they recast [my] legends and perhaps even some of [my] ritual (such as processions and pilgrimages) in a manner acceptable to the church.⁶

Moderator: *Turning to Saint Brigit* Then you also have an association with Imbolc...

Saint: Yes, I do.

Folk culture... preserved the links between [me] and [my] pagan forerunner. The folk traditions surrounding Imbolc highlight these affinities. Straw and grain from the previous harvest are central to Saint Brigid's Day celebrations. Until modern times, on Imbolc/Saint Brigid's Day, a small quantity of specially preserved seed grain was mingled with the first crop to be sown. The straw or stalks of the grain seed were blessed with holy water, hung up in houses, or set in the thatch of cottages. A sheaf of oats, a cake of bread, or a dish of porridge was placed on the doorstep the night of Saint Brigid's Day as a grain offering to [me], [as I] was believed to be abroad. Other cakes were placed outside the win-

dow to provision a hungry traveler.⁷

Additionally, when I was a saint, official Christian—later Catholic—doctrine limited me to the patroness of Ireland in conjunction with Saint Patrick, and the patroness of Dairy Workers.⁸ One of the many legends about my tenure at the convent I founded in Cil-Dara is that my cattle could produce enough milk to fill a lake; one churning could fill several baskets with butter. The Christians did keep my festival very close to Imbolc; they moved it back one day to the first of February, but *shrugs* that may have been because the old festivals were often celebrated starting the night before, as the Goddess has mentioned.⁹

Here, let me read my entry from *The Lives of the Saints*, which is official Catholic Doctrine as published in the mid-1950s *gets up to point out significant locations on the map as speaking*

[I am] known as the second Patron of Ireland and “the Mary of the Gael.” Born in County Louth near Dundalk about 450 CE, [I] showed signs of sanctity from [my] youth. According to a legend, [I] asked God to take away [my] beauty in order to escape marriage and pursue [my] religious vocation. And when [I] received the veil from St. Mel, [my] beauty which had given way to deformity returned.

[I] founded the first convent in Ireland at “Cil-Dara” (The Church of the Oak), now Kildaire, over which [I] presided many years. [I] also established communities in other parts of Ireland, and by [my] prayers and miracles exercised a potent influence on the growth of the early Irish Church.

[I] was generous and joyful, vehement and energetic. [My] one desire was to aid the poor and needy and relieve those in distress. One of [my] friends once brought [me] a basket of choice apples and saw [me] distribute them to the crowd of sick people thronging about [me]. The friend could not refrain from exclaiming: “They were for you, not for them.” [I] simply said, “What is mine is theirs.” [I] died in 523 and was buried in Downpatrick in the same grave as Sts. Patrick and Columba.⁵

Moderator: I see. You said when you were a saint?

Goddess and Saint both nod

Saint: Yes, that’s right. Since I had fulfilled my purpose in helping Saint Patrick to convert Ireland over to Christianity it was determined that I was no longer necessary, and since there was “no proof that I had even existed” I was decanonized in the 1960s in the wake of Vatican II.¹¹

Goddess: Not that it was very surprising that the Vatican would make that decision: after all, when they took over my stories it was only because I was a popular and well-loved Goddess among the people, and many Irish Catholics still venerate *gesturing to the saint* her - us - me - as a Saint. They even re-lighted my sacred flame in Cil-Dara not once but twice. Once in the 1500’s, and once again in 1993.¹²

Moderator: *to the Saint* So you don’t claim any existence of your own?

Saint: Good heavens, no!

[My] associations with the grain plant and the seed must predate the Celts' conversion to Christianity. ...customs connecting [me] with tillage and sowing at Imbolc surely reflect the linkage between [me] and the Celtic goddess from whom [I] got [my] name. The etymology of the word Imbolc, the agrarian customs and activities associated with it, and its date in the agricultural year all suggest that a pagan tilling and sowing ceremonial was transformed into the Feast of Saint Brigid, and that the pagan mother goddess, whose symbolic "belly" or "womb" was envisioned as producing the season's crop, was superseded by the Christian saint who, until modern times, was honored at Imbolc/Saint Brigid's Day with baked grain cakes and stalks of grain.¹³

Not only that, but look at the similarities of the stories that are told about the two of us, considering that the Goddess' stories came long before mine.

Goddess: For example, it is said that I was born at sunrise, and that when I was born a tower of flame that reached from the earth to heaven burst from my forehead.

Saint: And, for my part, when I traveled to the nunnery at Telcha Mide to take the veil with a group of virgins I held back from Bishop Mel, at which time a pillar of fire rose from my head to the roof of the church, prompting him to call me forward to be the first to take the veil. Not only that, but he read over me the form of ordaining a bishop - which did get him in trouble, though he claimed it was given to me not by himself but by God. Since I had been ordained as a Bishop, I could appoint other bishops, and all those bishops I appointed were goldsmiths.¹⁴

Goddess: Which leads back to me - as goddess of smithies and crafts goldsmiths were certainly under my care. And then there is the matter of the sacred flame, as well.

Moderator: How so?

Goddess: Well, my sacred flame at Cil-Dara was tended by nineteen virgin priestesses, who were called Daughters of the Flame - meaning me, of course. Each girl represented one year of the Celtic "Great Year," and for the twentieth year, no one tended the fire and yet it continued to burn. No male was ever allowed near my flame, nor my priestesses. And when Christianity took over...¹⁵

Saint: ...It was said that I began a convent at Cil-Dara - the first in Ireland - and that the fire was tended by myself and nineteen other girls. And, no male was ever allowed to enter the convent, which led one bishop to supposedly issue an ultimatum - that we would accept a male protector and overseer, but I refused. *grins at Goddess, who grins back* Sounding familiar? Not only that, but when I died, each surviving nun took care of the fire - one each for nineteen days - and on the twentieth day the fire was left alone and miraculously continued to burn, and it was said that I tended it.¹⁶ There's also the matter of the Goddess Brigit's two-faced Nature.

Goddess: *Shrugging* I only think that's significant because of the number of myths that are told about you and how God removed your beauty until you took the veil - either because you had asked Him to or because of some accident that occurred. I rather think that it's a flimsy association, though, since half my face being dark and ugly and the other half being white and beautiful probably had more

to do with the traditional association of women with the moon.

Saint: *nodding* Probably.

Goddess: Let us not forget, though, that we are both associated with childbirth. I was said to attend every birth, and there are some legends that associate you with the birth of Christ.¹⁷

Saint: *frowning* That's one of the stranger myths about me, though, since I supposedly was a contemporary of Saint Patrick - he's supposed to have baptized my father and mother - and I'm also supposed to have founded the convent at Cil-Dara, which happened in the third century CE - and my birthdate according to official Catholic doctrine, I remind you, wasn't until 490!

Moderator: *To the two women* Curious. Well, ladies, thank you very much for your insights today.

turning to class

It has been said that religion is the universal human response to the twin conditions of the awareness of being alive, and having to die. Those are but two stories of human understanding and grappling with these essential elements of human existential pain.

Where we find ourselves today is on the threshold of another advancement, into what could be called a post-Christian era... reuniting us with our original pagan roots, so that we might incorporate them into our understanding of human progress from those times of superstition, due to lack of scientific awareness, to today, while bringing back the valuable essences of primal earth-centered connectedness, and interdependence, hopefully in time for religion to have a more positive impact on our planetary health.

1 The Goddess Obscured, p 50

2 Paganism and Christianity : 100-425 CE, p 119

3 Backgrounds of Early Christianity: Christianity in the Ancient World, pp. 558-9

4 <http://www.sxws.com/charis/brigit.htm>

5 <http://gaia.faithweb.com/brigit.html>

6 The Goddess Obscured, p 71

7 *ibid.*

8 The Lives of the Saints, pp. 56-7, also A Visual Almanac of the Virtuous, Pure, Praiseworthy and Good Saints, pp. 28-29

9 <http://www.millersv.edu/~english/homepage/duncan/medfem/bride.html>

10 The Lives of the Saints, pp. 56-7

11 <http://www.sxws.com/charis/brigit.htm>

12 <http://gaia.faithweb.com/brigit.html>

13 The Goddess Obscured, pp. 71-2

14 <http://www.sxws.com/charis/brigit.htm>

15 *ibid.*

16 *ibid.*

17 <http://members.aol.com/gmkkh/brigid/about.htm>

Author Bios

Theadora Davitt-Cornyn is a long-time member of the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and their ACE of CUUPS chapter (Thousand Oaks, California) and is a recent California Lutheran University graduate with a BA in an Interdisciplinary Major: Women's Studies from the Perspective of Religion and Social Science. She is now studying for an MDiv in Community Ministry (special focus: Migrant Ministry) at Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California

Jo Gerrard stumbled into both UUism and Paganism at about the same time. She is happily exploring the ins and outs of both.

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