

## The long journey home; a study of the conversion profiles of 35 British Wiccan men

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Study of conversion is as complex and many faceted as the study of religion itself. Heelas asks "How is clear cut conversion, when it occurs, to be explained? It must immediately be noted that the academic community is far from agreed about what could be taking place. Theories abound, ranging from the psychoanalytical to the cognitive. Advocates of different theories are committed to different accounts of human nature, ranging from the behaviouristic to the voluntaristic. Indeed there is so much diversity, with so little advance on the front of finding evidence which conclusively counts either for or against particular claims, that some academics have suggested that the best strategy is to be agnostic for the time being - on the matter of what exactly generates change" (Heelas 1996: 186).

Certainly "conversion" has meant different things historically in different social and religious settings. It also has legal, political and cultural implications that vary in significance depending on the convert's chosen religion and the country in which they practice their faith. All religions have different requirements and criteria for accepting a convert as one of their own, these vary considerably; while the Christian faith has historically been quite happy with the concept of enforced conversion, the Zoroastrians do not traditionally have any mechanism accepting converts, not even a spouse Lamb and Bryant (1999).

This paper discusses conversion and Wicca. Wicca is a branch of Modern Pagan Witchcraft, a subset of the religious faiths that make up Neo-Paganism. Neo-Paganism does not fit easily into any of the typologies yet created to examine religion, it is a faith that has all the ingredients that one would expect of a post modern creation, yet leans heavily on retraditionalization and earnestly cleaves to a pre-Christian heritage. It is a religion that has

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not yet been studied in any depth, but is steadily gaining membership and recognition in Europe, the United States and the Antipodes.

The birth of Witchcraft in its modern form can be dated from 1954, when a retired British gentleman called Gerald Brosseau Gardner, published *Witchcraft Today*. He claimed to have discovered and been initiated into a lost Pagan Priesthood which was the remnants of the ancient Pagan faith first written about thirty years earlier by Dr. Margaret Murray in *The Witch Cult of Western Europe*<sup>1</sup>. The members of this religion, also known as "the Craft" and "Wica" (sic) were apparently very different from the evil Witches of folklore and fairy tale. They were members of a mystery tradition which worshipped ancient Pagan deities, in a nature based faith that celebrated the seasons of the Nature and cycles of the moon; with ceremonial, ritual, festival, feasting and magic. The Old Religion had apparently survived intact over millennia despite the triumph of the Christian Church, the Witch hysteria and Witch hunts of sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and even despite the modern age of secularism and science.

Gardner wrote as an anthropologist and Wiccan initiate. This gave his books a certain credence. There has been much controversy over Gardner's story of his initiation, and the antiquity of the group or "coven" into which he was initiated, as well as the authenticity of the tradition he taught. Arguments about the history of the Craft still fuel bitter debate as hotly as when Aidan Kelley first posited in 1991 that Gardner had created the faith himself. However no concrete facts have yet been uncovered that fully prove the argument for any angle of the debate, and since Gardner's death the Craft has branched into Europe, America and the Antipodes, as well as diverging in several directions. Each divergence or new form of the Craft reflects a slightly different ethos and way of practice. These branches currently include the "Alexandrian" "Traditional" and "Feminist" Craft, with various offshoots stemming from each branch..

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<sup>1</sup> *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* was the eminent archeologist's first book about Witches. Followed by several others it was published in 1921 and her work created a new school of thought on the age old debate of whether Witchcraft had ever existed in any organized form, and what exactly the Witches did at their meetings. Since discredited this theory has nevertheless provided a popular and enduring folklore of Witchcraft which included a very long running entry on the subject by Murray in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*.

There are emergent differences in practice and ideology of Wicca on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States "Wicca" has come to mean any Wiccan based Pagan religious system, whereas in Britain "Wicca" remains the title for a practice of a religious tradition that is passed down any initiatory lineages descended from Gerald Gardner, with Alexandrian Wicca as a subset within this category. In America those who practice initiatory Wicca tend to stick very closely to the original texts and rituals, whereas in Britain the ideologies are generally more fluid and evolve rather than ossify the practice. American Wiccans have adopted the title "Traditional British Wicca", to differentiate themselves from the latterly developed forms of worship. The use of the word "Traditional" does not refer to "Traditional" in the same sense as in Britain. In Britain the word "Traditional" is used to signify those Witches who claim that their traditions predate the one promulgated by Gerald Gardner. For the practitioners themselves these boundaries of nomenclature and practice are easy to distinguish, but for the researcher they can be nightmare, and lead to generalizations or conclusions with which the practitioners themselves disagree (Oakley 1997, Pearson 1998a). This paper introduces Paganism and Witchcraft, but the empirical work in my ongoing study of conversion is focused on Wiccans as defined in Great Britain. Henceforth I will refer to ideas and forms of practice that are followed by British Wiccans.

### **The Major components of the Wiccan belief system**

The Wiccan religion cannot be understood without an appreciation of the magical inheritance which has framed and inspired its development. Wiccan tradition represents a natural development of magical traditions which we can trace with ease to the renaissance period and before this to Gnostic hermetic roots. Both Orion (1995) and Pearson (2000) discuss Witchcraft's renaissance roots and particularly mention such "pagan" heretics as Giordano Bruno, who believed in the divine in Nature, Egyptian magic and religion, and Gnostic mysticism, and was burned at the stake in 1600.

In terms of philosophy, the Wiccan view of life and nature, and the human relation to the divine in nature can be traced in traditions of Gnostic, Hermetic and Alchemical practice. Fundamental to the Wiccan view is the sense that all of life is in some way connected, and that ultimately the living universe is a unity of which we are a part. This core idea of a state

of union being the essence of the divine reality can be traced through hermetic texts such as the corpus Hermeticum dating as a body of texts to the first three centuries and beyond this to Ancient Greek and Egyptian philosophy.

Astrology as a proto-scientific approach to nature attempted to systematically describe and explain the connectedness of all things, and to map the hidden relationship between the human, the divine and nature. The astrological viewpoint became the framework within which the practice of magic evolved. The magic ritual is aimed to influence the web of connections mapped by astrological science; the magician seeks on the one hand to influence material outcomes but on the other to embrace within their consciousness the unity of all nature, to literally to become one in consciousness with the divine Godhead.

Key concepts within the Wiccan belief system are that the Divine is both male and female, and is immanent in Nature. All are interconnected in an animate Universe, so all life is perceived as sacred. Death is not the end but a time of peace and reunion with loved ones before being reincarnated with them. All are subject to the forces of karma. This is sometimes referred to as the "Law of Three fold Return" where by all actions are returned to the sender. It is rather similar to the Christian concept of "as ye sow, so shall ye reap"

## **The Structure of Wicca**

Wiccans reject centralization and bureaucracy to such an extent that their religion defies definition or categorisation using Church-Sect typologies. However more suitable typologies are being developed to deal with New Religious Movements (NRMs). A useful example is the 1984 invention of Wallis, who like Troeltsch used the principle criteria for the typology as the relationship the sect has with the external world. These definitions classify groups according to their economic, social and cultural conditions and thus are defined as world rejecting, world accommodating and world affirming. Wicca is a world affirming religion.

York (1995) performed a study that describes the structure of the Craft as a SPIN. He sees Hines (1977) SPIN, or the Segmented Polycentric Integrated Network as the sociological construct that is most accurate for Pagan and New Age groups, even though this was originally applied to groups keen on social and personal change such as the new left, or

Black Power rather than a religious community. York focuses on non-bureaucratic segmentation and unbounded reticulation as essential aspects of a SPIN. He elegantly adapts Gerlach and Hines (1968) model of intercell linkages via friendships, study interests, leaders talking at other groups or networks and conferences, travelling, and large gatherings for modern Paganism, and shows how this is relevant to the circular structures of immanence within this milieu that are written about by Starhawk.

York makes many valid points that have not been made clearly before, i.e. that Hill (1973) is wrong to suggest that a religious organisation that seems to lack organisation should be referred to as a cultic milieu, preferring Robbins (1988) and Gerlach and Hine's theory (1973) that a movement might appear leaderless but is in fact "polycephalous", with leadership being situation specific with a leader's position only endorsed by continuous demonstration of worth, and depending on a having a personal following. He agrees with Gerlach and Hine that a movement is strengthened by polycephaly/polycentry by increasing adaptability and innovation; and apart from active recruitment accepts their definition of a movement as one that covers the New Age and Paganism very well.

## **Wicca as a New Religious Movement**

Paganism has been categorized as an NRM (Barker 1989, Berger 1999), and as part of the New Age (Heelas 1996). However, scholars who have done field work within the Pagan community disagree with Heelas. Pearson and York do not see Wicca as part of the New age, and York succinctly explains the similarities and differences between Paganism and truly New Age movements.

Helen Berger performed an eleven year longitudinal study of Pagans in North America. She sees Neo-Pagan Witchcraft as part of "a process of recreating a community of caring, in which nature and all people are treated with dignity. Modernity is viewed as having incorporated a patriarchal ethic in which nature, women and some men are viewed as objects of conquest and domination. Through returning to the old ways of folk medicine, magic, and celebration of the seasons they hope to create a new world" (Berger 1999:25).

She sees Neo-Pagan Witchcraft as a religion of late modernity, a product of religious pluralism and globalism, which technology helps spread. She points out that the magical practices of the Neo-Pagan are different from magical practices of traditional societies, with emphasis on the technology of self as well as results. She argues that the concept of community in Witchcraft is different from the normal sense of community, she says it is a global construct of community which has developed based on shared interest in mysticism, magic and Goddess worship.

"Witches often speak of a sense of coming home when they find Wicca. One element of that sense of belonging is finding a spiritual expression that is consistent with their lifestyle concerns. Being part of a community that celebrates these concerns, in turn, increases each person's awareness of changes that are required in their lifestyle for them to live consistently with their principles" (Berger 1991:79-80).

Berger argues that in Wicca a sign of its modernity is that the self is negotiated and defined, and links to the exploration of self identity, the accessing of the magical self, both typified by the taking and changing of magical names. She points to the re-embedding of moral issues that occurs in Wicca and says:

"Within the context of a liberal acceptance of differences and a recognition of the disintegration of a single moral basis of the creation of a universal ethical system, there is nonetheless the development of a value system - open, based on mutual tolerance, concern for equity among people, and respect for the environment..... It is a moral system in the making - which will never have the ultimate set of rules and regulations that exists in the religious and moral systems that developed in earlier ears. It does however provide a form of political and moral life that helps unify this community" (Berger 1991:81).

It is difficult to say how many Witches there are in the world today. The census of Canada in 1991 listed 5530 people who listed their religion as Pagan, (Reid 1998), Ronald Hutton and Jo Pearson both independently and using different means estimated about 100, 000 self identified Pagans in Britain in 1998 (Hutton 1999, Pearson 1998b). However it is very

difficult to estimate how many Pagans there really are. Pagans cherish autonomy and there is no centralized authority. Many do not answer questionnaires or subscribe to magazines; many do, but may do so on behalf of a couple or even a group of Pagans. Some may identify themselves as Pagan but not be a member of any recognized path. Counting Witches is even more difficult. Many people call themselves Witches in accordance with their spiritual beliefs. Some are initiates, some are not, and others are initiates of several types of Witchcraft.

## **Wicca and Conversion**

Over the years increasing numbers of types of conversion experience have been noted. These include guilty vs. inspirational, intellectual, emotional and sudden, conscious and unconscious. In 1981 Lofland and Skonovd suggested that it was misleading to talk of types of conversion at all but that conversion "motifs" should be examined instead. They developed six conversion motifs, intellectual, mystical, experimental, affective, revivalist and coercive. Lofland and Skonovd stress that these motifs are only major aspects that help to place each experience within an extremely large area of possibility. These motifs seem to successfully expand upon earlier theorists widening of the parameters of definition of "conversion", and have created something of a foundation for other researchers to work from. Later researchers have found similar typologies within very specialised areas of religious research. Lowenthal (1988) within the Jewish religion, Chapman and Lowenthal (1995) in Wicca, and Kose (1999) within Islam.

Chapman and Lowenthal followed a similar path to that of Kose and Lowenthal in 1995 by using the Lofland and Skonovd conversion motifs to explore psychological reasons for conversion to Wicca. An extra motif, "recognition" was added, along with the prediction that this added factor would score highly. This was based on reports by Wiccans of a feeling of "coming home" on initiation into Wicca. This was a process whereby the new initiate joined the religion because they recognised it to be what they had been seeking, and often practised in some form for some time. Recognition was the motif with the highest presence, the mystical and intellectual motifs both showed a high presence, affectional and revivalist motifs showed moderate presences whilst the coercive motif showed the very low presence

that had been predicted. Wicca was found to be a world affirming religion but with a higher occurrence of the mystical, affectional and revivalist motifs than the world-affirming religion as postulated by Rambo.

The 1995 study showed a marked heterogeneity of conversion profiles. The only significant correlation was the negative one of age and experimentation, this is consistent with the historical development of Neo-Pagan spirituality in the latter part of this century. Older Wiccans did not have the opportunity to join such organisations as the Pagan Federation with its Open Festivals and contact networks, access to the vast amount of literature published in the last twenty five years. Nor did they have the plethora of traditions and groups available to them that have flowered since the Witchcraft Act was repealed in 1951.

Chapman and Lowenthal's study was unique in its development and application of empirical science to study the conversion profiles of Wiccans. A handful of other studies have been performed in the same area, but using less empirical methods within a variety of academic fields, such as that by Tania Luhrmann.

Luhrmann (1989) coined the term "interpretive drift" to try to explain why normal people in a rational society might come to believe in magic. She says "I use the term "drift" because the transformation seems accidental, unintended. The once-non-magician certainly intends to become a magician and to practise magic. But that is very different from intending to believe. Rather the once-non-magician begins to do what magicians do, and begins to find magical ideas persuasive because he begins to notice and respond to events in different ways" (Luhrmann 1989:312).

Luhrmann suggests "three loosely interlocked transformations" of interpretation, experience and rationalisation propel the change from one kind of understanding to the next. She sees systematic change in the actual structure of the interpretation and analysis of magic. New experience give ideas flesh and new ideas give sense to other experiences, "Intellectual and experiential changes shift in tandem, a ragged co-evolution of the intellectual habits and phenomenological involvement" (Luhrmann 1989:315). Acceptance of a set of assumptions about the constitution of the magical world then leads to a belief in magic.



Her explanation of this drift could equally apply to Scobie's Christian converts and their acceptance of Christian doctrine, or Lowenthal's Jewish subject population who also reported an unconscious conversion. In a sociological study of Scientologists Wallis (1976) found new converts to adopt a particular language and come to view their lives through scientology's conceptual framework. Scobie's research was in the field of psychology, whereas Luhrmann used anthropological theory and technique, it is likely that they and Wallis are talking about the same process from within three different academic paradigms. Thus the interpretative drift or unconscious conversion would equally apply to a type of conversion to any religion, and is not a process that is specific to magicians or Witches. Whether it is more predominant in a magical religion than any other remains to be discovered. Whether this kind of unconscious acceptance of a form of belief is more common in the Pagan revival would be a fruitful future study, as would a cross disciplinary analysis of these different theories that might in fact be noting the same phenomenon from a different academic view point.

Luhrmann's theory also misses the most common element of the Wiccan conversion process, that the Wiccans themselves do not see themselves as "converts" but as "coming home". Graham Harvey explores this in some depth in his 1999 paper *Coming home and coming out as a Pagan*. He says "Pagans are people who 'come home' in two related senses, neither necessarily taking precedence - chronological or ideological - over the other. First, Pagans come home to themselves, second Pagans come home to a sense of belonging with others or within a tradition. Tanya Luhrmann's 'interpretative drift' and Christel Mannings 'combination models' say less about the experience of Magicians or Pagans and more about the assertions of academic "objectivity" i.e. scepticism and "knowing better" (Harvey 1999:239).

Orion accepted that some level of "interpretative drift" may occur but argued a case for what Chapman and Lowenthal call the "recognition motif" she said: "To a limited extent this is true of the Neopagans. Although for them the predisposing factor is personal experience, such as insights or a deep uneasiness about truths that are self evident to others. In this case, persuasion is of the nature of confirmation, or explanation, rather than conversion to a new belief. In fact, confirmation by those whom they do not respect often has the opposite

effect of causing them to doubt their experiences or to regard them as shameful or pathological" (Orion 1995:53).

One study that was performed by an independent scholar and remains a classic work after more than twenty years is the survey performed by Margot Adler in 1979. Unlike Luhrmann or Orion who were initiated into Witchcraft during the course of their doctoral studies Adler had been involved in Wicca for many years before her book *Drawing Down the Moon* emerged. She discusses Paganism as a "religion without converts." She established six primary reasons why her subjects had become involved in the Neo-Pagan world; these are beauty, vision and imagination; intellectual satisfaction, growth, feminism, environmental response and freedom. She says:

"No one converts to Paganism or Wicca. You will find no one handing you Pagan leaflets on the street or shouting at you from a corner. Many people came across this book, or *The Spiral Dance* (or any of a number of related books), in some isolated corner of America or the world. Often they found it in a small-town library, or in a used bookstore, or stashed away on a friend's bookshelf. Upon opening the pages, perhaps they said "I never knew there was anyone else in the world who felt what I feel or believed what I have always believed. I never knew my religion had a name" (Adler 1979: x).

Chapman and Lowenthal found Wiccan subjects strongly objected to the term conversion, they saw the term "conversion" to be heavily loaded with the baggage of the Christian Crisis/Pauline experience, and felt it was not a term they associated with their spiritual journey and its culmination in Wicca. They said that they had not ever converted to Wicca but had confirmed their already extent faith. To confirm that faith they had undergone the intense experience of initiation to become Wiccan, and continued their journey as members of the Wiccan mystery school.

Whatever faith or religion the respondents had prior to initiation they were not "Wiccan"<sup>2</sup> until they had been consecrated a Priest/ess and Witch; nor did they have access to any of the initiate-only training or oathbound ritual material. They may have been Pagans or

<sup>2</sup> I use "Wiccan" here in the British sense, as described in Chapter Two

Witches, but the initiation itself is what confirmed their status as a member of this occult "mystery tradition". They may have been emotionally and spiritually committed to the Wiccan path, but to become members of the religion they had to confirm this by undergoing this very specific affirmation of their commitment, which includes birth imagery, oaths of allegiance and the taking of a new magical name to symbolise a new spiritual beginning. This is the moment of "coming home".

Studies in this field have often come to discuss New Religions and Paganism, especially Witchcraft and Wicca, in terms of feminine empowerment (Scarboro and Luck 1997:69). This is an important element in the appeal of Modern Witchcraft to women, and discussion of such empowerment has gone hand in hand with the rise of feminist spirituality and Goddess spirituality. There are many books in this area and key authors in this area include Mary Daly, Carol Christ, Judith Plaskow, Starhawk, Zsuzanna Budapest and Naomi Goldenberg. They are engaged in deconstructing patriarchal authority and centring the Goddess in an alternative spirituality that focuses on female images of divinity and power. However, no studies have yet been done specifically on Men and Paganism or Witchcraft, nor do I know of any academic books that cover this. Literature that covers "conversion" tends to be non-gendered, and interpretation of data on Witchcraft is thus usually subject to a feminine bias, due to the numbers of women involved in Craft compared to men.

My Ph.D. aims to examine the encounter, attraction and conversion patterns of Wiccan men. It explores something of how they perceive the process of becoming Wiccan, and what being Wiccan means to them. I propose, and aim to test, the hypothesis that Wicca appeals because it offers a remystification of religion. By this I mean that converts are drawn to it as a mystical and ecstatic religion which reclaims the ancient myths and embraces a magical universe of meaning as its core plausibility. And vitally, in Weberian terms, there is no routinization of charisma within an organization, but a revitalization of charisma in each and every initiate. Obviously such terms as remystification, re-enchantment and resacrilisation are terms that can be used in various ways, particularly depending on how closely one adheres to Durkheim's original usage of them. I use them in the same way as contemporary sociologists Elias and Dunning (1993), Selfe and Starbuck

(1998) and Bird (1999) who have all argued that the New Age Movement (NAM) and NRM's serve to re-mystify and re-enchant this modern rational world.

## **Work in progress**

This study has the working title "Conversion processes in Wicca, with special reference to Wiccan male initiates." I am currently analyzing the data. So far I have qualitatively interviewed 35 male Wiccan initiates of varying degrees of initiation and length of time in the Craft, along with 10 female initiates as a control group. I have not yet coded or analyzed the data of the female participants in this study. All are members of covens and a large proportion are coven leaders. Gender balance in the covens is averaging to be about one man to three women. Wicca is the main spiritual path for most respondents although the practice of other forms of pagan religion or magic is not uncommon. The average age of initiates is 42. Professions vary widely, no one is on social security and no one is independently wealthy, but there is a lot of variety from scaffolder and nurse through to professor and management consultant. All are of British nationality. Those that have life partners have Wiccan life partners, and with the exception of one couple those that are married are also handfasted.

A remarkable heterogeneity is emerging with regards to life style choices of Wiccan males. It is most common for Wiccan men not to read any particularly newspaper or watch any set kind of TV programme, nor is it common for them to be very involved or interested in politics. Many say that they have little time for TV but would like to see more if they had the time, a varied and busy social life seems to preclude this. Favoured films and TV included action and documentaries and fantasy, while music tastes encompass most music imaginable. Romantic and pre-raphelite art are favoured, followed by modern art. There is a notable lack of relaxing foreign holiday travel, with activity Holidays in Britain and Europe favoured, even if they are "busmen's holidays" to Wiccan events. My findings so far are discussed below.

## Defining Wicca

Male Witches do not feel oppressed in what is often presented as a very female oriented religion, nor do they call themselves Warlocks, many believing the word to derive from ancient Scottish for "oath breaker". All are happy to be known as Witches.

The folkloric image of the Witch is not seen any more terrible than the worst modern media portrayal of Wicca in films like *The Craft*, and *Practical Magic* or television series such as *Charmed*. Such modern media inventions are not criticized too much as they lead to positive images of Witchcraft, although these portrayals are seen as inaccurate descriptions of Wicca perhaps hardly relating to the religion at all.

Wicca has often been called "Goddess Religion", because it venerates the divine feminine. My respondents were happy to see Wicca as a "Goddess Religion" in that it does revere the Goddess, but unhappy to see it defined solely as such, since in practice adherents worship the Goddess on equal terms with the God. A typical comment on scoring my question regarding this was "Well it's also a God religion so in a way I agree with the statement and in a way I don't. So it is either a 10 or it's a 1 because I think it is equally a God/Goddess religion". Overall so far however "Goddess Religion" is scoring 7 on a likert scale of 1 - 10.

Other recent definitions of Wicca have been explored, the trends in my study show that Wiccan men do see Wicca as a "Green Religion" but not necessarily a New Religious Movement and definitely not part of the New Age. They see it as a revived religion which is not ancient, but has ancient elements. None of them see it as the One True Path and none are in favour of evangelization. They favour the term Mystery Religion or Mystery Tradition to describe their spiritual path, a spirituality that is only suitable for the few who choose to follow it, rather than a religion that seeks to convert the masses.

## Becoming Wiccan

There are strong elements of quest religiosity apparent in conversion experiences of the respondents interviewed so far. The first trend is that respondents had been involved in the Church of England (nominally or actively) and tend to have left it due to conscious

dissatisfaction prior to finding Wicca. If respondents had regarded themselves as belonging to any religious movement or organization they usually have left it some time before they came to Wicca. One of the strongest trends I am seeing is that no-one has come to Wicca as a sudden decision, and the decision to get initiated has been a gradual one for all men who have taken part in this study. Some have taken months to decide to take the step, others have taken years.

A second trend that is emerging is that when asked if they had a previous religion a proportion of respondents see themselves as having been Pagan, or Witches if not Wiccans prior to coming to Wicca, and count this as a previous religious faith. None have experienced any difficulty in accepting Wiccan beliefs due to previous religious experience. Adoption of Wiccan beliefs seems to have been a largely unconscious process with the decision to get initiated being a gradual process decision.

Wicca seems to have been popularly encountered through reading and through friendship networks. Wicca's attraction is emerging to be extremely varied, attractions include: its ethos in general, its practice, perception of its lack of hierarchy and the freedom of its practice, magic, connection with the land, resacrilisation of the earth, connection with the seasons, self development, feminist philosophy, working with the God and the Goddess, Nature spirituality, magic, self development, and exploring the mysteries. Common comments are as follows "It seemed to encapsulate a lot of things that I believed in which I had worked out for myself" and "It felt right for me. It felt suddenly... I was presented with a religion which actually believed in the sort of things I believed, which didn't seem to have a home. It felt very comfortable.". All respondents have said that what originally attracted them to Wicca remains an attraction even after more than twenty years of practice.

Experiences and influences (conversion motifs) that were important in men deciding to get initiated include a high score for reading about Wicca and related subjects. Mystical experience, and involvement of friends and/or lovers also score quite highly but involvement of family has scored extremely low. Experimenting with Wicca and Paganism is scoring more highly with newer initiates as does experience at large gatherings to a certain extent, while intense exposure to Wiccan teachings has yet to score.

## Initiation.

Wicca has three levels of initiation. Initiations are regarded as a series of steps into the Wiccan "Mystery". At second degree the initiate becomes a High Priest/ess of the Craft. They are at this stage empowered to initiate others. During the rite a physical laying on of hands "passes the power" of the initiator to the initiate.

Ultimately the initiatory process combined with the long term practice of Wicca is hoped to align the initiate to an understanding and enjoyment of his or her true place within the cosmos, to the achievement of what some esotericists have called "True Will", and others have called the "attainment of the Holy Guardian Angel." It is a condition some Jungian psychologists liken to "individuation" (Crowley 1989). It is hoped that the initiate will have attained this state by the third degree initiation.

A metaphor that is frequently used to describe initiation is that it "opens a door", is "a bridge", or a "gateway". The experience of initiation is often seen as ineffable, adjectives used frequently include "incredible", "fantastic", and "powerful". The phrase "coming home" is also very common. The following descriptions are typical: "Brilliant, I was on cloud nine for ages", "Wonderful", "Very strange, change inducing. Very, very changing", "Being accepted, very special in this sense", "Very moving", "Very powerful", "It was really very, very good", "Very profound, yes a very profound experience for me and I think one that stays with me", "Very different from studying it, a huge shift in understanding and feeling", "At the time I wasn't totally sure what was happening to me, I think. I was overwhelmed by it but it felt very secure. It felt like I was coming home to somewhere I had never been before... if you see what I mean. A very strange sensation".

Initiation is perceived to work on several levels i.e. " I think its a mixture of psychological shifts and a definite element of divine spark, spirituality within." It is seen as: "An important part of the mystery religion and important welcome into the Craft/Recognition as a Witch.", "introduction to the Gods within a formal structure", even "commitment akin to marriage". All respondents have described all their initiations as a very positive experience. Two respondents, both now running their own groups described some disappointment, one

because he didn't have the huge magical experience he was expecting, and another because he didn't feel like coming home, but like leaving it. The latter had been on a 10 week Wicca study group, in which starting to use ritual felt more like coming home than his initiation, at which point he was expected to go and work with a newly founded peer group, rather than in the coven of the people who initiated him. The people who initiated him have since stopped doing "outer Court" initiations like this. Such initiations are not normal Wiccan practice and it is interesting to note that this respondent felt a loss when he was not initiated in the normal way, into coven as a full member of that tight social group.

Second and third degree initiations are felt to be "much deeper" experiences than the first degree, and to hold a much deeper degree of commitment to Wicca and the Gods of Wicca. A few examples of comments noted so far are: "Huge difference. 2nd degree was much deeper, much more deeply moving. And much more intense. Deep, fundamental changes within me and mirrored in the outside world as well. Very, very different. Different things entirely.".... "1st was very much a happy positive thing. The 2nd it had less of a positive impact and I think probably for two reasons. One because I kept expecting there would be another sort of impact like the first, and there wasn't, it was more of a working through rather than a starting point And the 3rd was a total reverse again. That was a very deep, amazing sense of oneness."...."Far more powerful and overwhelming, you are much more a part of it as opposed to being on the edge, it fully encompasses you at 2<sup>nd</sup>." .... "I think the 2<sup>nd</sup> meant taking a lot more responsibility in the coven and it was a recognition of the degree of experience that I had and also lead on to me taking on more responsibility in general. So it was kind of a... You are not just a beginner now, you're somebody who has a certain responsibility within the craft.

I seem to be getting less information as each degree is described as if the ineffability of the moment increases with each level of initiation. Each is emerging as having its own different kind of emotive power, the first being the gate, the second the passing of the power and the third as a moment of integration and harmony, but these are concepts that are current on Wiccan literature. How much the literature affects the experience and the experience the literature is difficult to correlate, but it is fair to say that if the rituals are structured to provide such experiences and conducted properly then it is fair that initiate should experience



those emotions. One respondent talked about the effect initiation had on the perception of others, saying people reacted differently to him at different degrees, and that non-initiated Pagan women seemed to be more interested in him once he became a High Priest!

## Wiccan Ceremonies

The religious rituals are performed within the bounds of a sacred circle. The sacred meeting place of the Witch is not set in stone, but is chosen at any site that may be appropriate and consecrated anew each time formal worship takes place. The area for the ritual (the "work") is cleansed and consecrated, then defined as a circle of sacred space (Farrar and Farrar 1984, Crowley 1989).

Like any religion Wicca has rites of passage Babies are blessed in naming ceremonies called "Wiccanings". They are given God and Goddess parents and their protection is asked of the Gods, but they are not committed to the religion, for it is believed that each should choose their own religious path. Initiation is only considered for candidates who are eighteen or older, an age at which it is believed one can make an informed choice about which religion one wishes to belong to. "Handfastings" are performed in which couples are in the presence of the Wiccan deities, and with the blessings of their friends and families. In Europe at this time handfastings are not legal, and many Witches resent the fact that having joined souls in a religious ceremony one must repeat the mundane vows in the registry office at another time and place. Funerals and requiems are performed in accordance with the beliefs of the departed soul, and tend to mention rebirth. Covens usually perform the last rituals for departed coven members (Crowther 1998:30).

The religious calendar of Wicca centres around eight seasonal celebrations called Sabbats and thirteen gatherings held at or close to the full moon which are called Esbats. The annual cycle of eight seasonal festival celebrations is known as "the wheel of the year". In Sabbat rituals psychodramas are enacted that use various myths to take the coven members through the entire human life cycle each year, in a system of practice and belief that anthropomorphise nature and natural forces. The rituals are also known as festivals as they are a time of celebration and feasting. They are believed to unveil the mysteries in

Nature as the wheel turns, with each Wiccan partaking of their own ever growing understanding of eternal ineffable truths about life and death. The cycle starts at Samhain, or Halloween, the 31 October, other holy days are Yule (21 December), Imbolc or Candlemas (2 February), Spring Equinox (21 March), Beltane (30 April), Midsummer (21 June), Lammas (1 August), and Autumn Equinox (21 September).

A very strong theme of joy, pleasure, happiness and spiritual well being emerges when respondent are asked about what they feel when they celebrate the Sabbats. This runs parallel to the themes of linking to the seasonal cycles of the year, partaking of the mysteries, connecting to the sacred and connection to the land. Unexpected themes are also emerging of a conscious enjoyment of the Wiccan religion, which one respondent described as "a joyous, happy duty only comparable to a Christian celebrating Christmas". Altruism also featured consciously with many respondents wanting to "give something back" or "help people". The strong social element of the Craft was mentioned by most respondents as very attractive.

Esbats feature training and working magic with one's coven. The magic of the Esbat mainly involves "work" for healing, and enlightenment, and also for practical things such as boosting the luck around getting a new job or securing the sale of a property. The Witches also work for others even if those they work for do not necessarily believe in Wicca or magic). Esbats are seen as much more intimate and a cherished space for working the ceremonial aside of Wicca in the intimacy of one's coven; as well as a space for working serious magic as opposed to the social Sabbats. They are also seem to be about, learning or teaching the nuts and bolts of the Craft or simply re-energising.

## **Invoking the Divine**

One unique aspect of the Wiccan religion that has not really been explored by any study so far, is the ritual "possession" of each Witch by their Goddess or God. Part of the central mystery of Wiccan religion is this slow but sure journey from mundane consciousness to magico-religious trance during a Wiccan religion. This is one of the most important parts of any rite, and one of the most important parts of the Wiccan experience, it is very much a

part of art of the Priest/ess path of Wicca, in which the close personal experience of the Divine is facilitated by and for the coven as a whole.

The whole coven assists with the visualizations and ritual intention, concentrating on invoking the God and/or Goddess into the people who will become the vessel for the divine force. The invocation of the Moon Goddess is known as "Drawing down the Moon", and in some traditions the invocation of the God is called "Drawing down the Sun". In keeping with the idea that the central mystery of Wiccan magic is held within the interplay of male and female energy, the Moon is drawn down by a male initiate on to a Priestess and the Sun by a female initiate onto a Priest.

Each meeting builds up to the moment when a female and male member of the coven will stand close to the altar and have a seasonal aspect of Wiccan deity invoked "into" them by a member of the opposite sex, using ritual intention, gesture and words. When entranced the initiate "bearing the God/dess" speaks the words of a "charge". This charge is a poem or piece of prose that is a sort of Wiccan liturgy, or it can be channelled directly. The experience felt by the invokee and all other members of the coven at this point is one of the ineffable mysteries at the heart of Wicca itself. The transformatory experience lingers on, and is believed to be a major part of the spiritual journey of each initiate.

In some ways this ritual action is similar to New Age "channelling" and participants do channel these deities "freeform", but always the Deities, not spirit guides or the dead. When entranced they will very often speak set pieces of Wiccan liturgy such as "*The Charge of The Goddess*"<sup>3</sup>. This works in a manifold way, it gives an aural as well as visual component to the ceremony for other members of the coven, but when learnt by heart and used many times it also occupies the invokee's thinking function like a mantra, allowing the rest of their conscious and unconscious mind to be free and connect in that safe space to their Gods. Ritual actions make sure that the initiate is no longer "holding" the God or Goddess after the circle, but the transformatory experience lingers on, and is believed to be a major part of the process of personal growth that is integral to the Wiccan religion.

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<sup>3</sup> Wicca self consciously has no creed or holy book, but *The Charge* is chosen by many as creed. It is said at initiations and monthly meetings, and is quoted by many as an ideal to strive for.

This practice vividly recalls what Rudolph Otto called the "numinous", that which he saw as the core of all religion, and the essence by which religion itself might be defined. He saw the numinous as purely experiential and ineffable. He said:

"This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other, and therefore like every other absolutely primary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and lead...through ways of his own mind, until he reaches the point at which "the Numinous" in him performe begins to stir, to start to life and consciousness" (Otto 1950:7).

It is when celebrating the Sabbats and Esbats the Wiccan Priest invokes the Goddess or are have the God invoked into them. They describe the duration of experiences as "Awestruck", "Very different", "Enlightened (3)", "Expanded", "Energised", "Animated", "Transformed", "Ecstatic", "Powerful (3)", "Don't consciously remember it (2)" Several respondents remarked that the experience was different depending on which God was being invoked. "It depends very much which particular aspect it is, because I have worked with different aspects and depending on which particular aspect's coming through, it will sit, or he will sit more or less comfortably with me."

Once the experience of directly conveying the Divine is assimilated into the practitioners psyche it is believed to have very positive effects. Comments include "It's made me more coherent internally. It's made me much more in tune with my own masculinity and what maleness is about. It's a really good model for it to hang lots of things on. It's made me feel a lot more settled.", "Made me look at what a male is, and what role the male has in society a lot more deeply.", "I think it has shifted my relationship to my own masculinity. Helped me to be much more aware of that and how I relate to it. And deepened it as well, I think."... "It's made me much more in tune with the kind of cycles of nature."... "It's made me a better person."

"Carrying the God" empowers Wiccan men. The religious experience was described as increasing confidence in four shy men." Its actually increased my confidence When I am out there in the non Wiccan world, if there are sort of weak, vulnerable moments, if I remember

it, I think about it and I think, yea, well I'm just as good and equal and strong and powerful as anybody else, you know, especially when people are trying to treat you in a sort of very unreasonable way. You know the talk down attitude. So even if I... I don't have to be aggressive back to them, just knowing you have that connection. Its a confidence thing". Conversely the same technique was described as changing and calming one respondent who had previously used anger management techniques but no longer needed them.

## **Invoking the Goddess**

The same techniques are used to invoke the Goddess into Wiccan Priestesses as are used to invoke the God into Wiccan Priests. It is seen as the job of the Wiccan Priest to facilitate the Priestess he is working with to channel the divine feminine force, and to closely work with her as she does so. The experience of invoking the Goddess was described as awesome by several respondents and the general feeling was that it brought them very close to the Goddess. It was also described as very enjoyable, and bringing them a much closer connection to women altogether. Descriptions ranged from "misty eyed reverence" - to "very nice" while one comment was "I don't really feel like anything, because I'm concentrating on channeling energy. I'm quite focused on that to be honest. Respondents overwhelmingly described themselves as honoured to be taking part in this mystery. Other descriptions included "extremely lucky", "inspired", "exhilarated" and "close to the sacred. The experience never dimmed for any of the respondents, and one very experienced Wiccan described it as frightening, because each time he had to do his best, and had to make the magic work, and he never took it for granted that it would.

All respondents thought that invoking the Goddess regularly had positively affected them, particularly making them more aware of the feminine, feel closer to women in general, and more aware of their own female sides. One typical comment in summarising this was "It's a direct participation in the mysteries which I think is the great gift of Wicca, and it also really accelerates your own personal growth like nothing else I've experienced."

## Magic

The use of magic is an integral part of Wicca, however the types of magic used by Wiccans are the antitheses of the popular misconception of Wicca as black sorcery. "Black" magic is claimed to be incompatible with Wiccan belief due to the Witch's understanding of Karma and the interconnectedness of all actions. It remains popular to stress the one dogma of Wicca at initiations, the *Wiccan Rede*. "Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill, An it harm none do as ye will, bide the Wiccan law ye must, In perfect love and perfect trust."

I asked respondents what kind of magic they practised. Healing was the main magic used, for some this was the only magic they performed. Most magic practiced was for practical things, such as better relationships at work, successful house moves etc. Particular techniques that were mentioned was chanting, runes, cord magic, visualization and candle magic, which was very popular. "Contacting spirits in the other worlds" and working with the elements were also mentioned. Three practitioners mentioned using shamanic techniques as part of their Wiccan repertoire.

There was a strong correlation between length of time in the Craft and the amount of magic used. One of the leading men in the Craft in Europe today said "I'm not a great believer in doing magic for the sake of it. ...I think the longer you are in the craft the more sparing, the more selective you become... so yes, healing, one feels that one can do... or to lessen the pain or relieve the pain or whatever. So healing is very important, but I don't like interfering with other people's lives."

A typical comment when asked whether a respondent would perform black magic was "It depends how you define black magic. I would say, I think, the kind of Starhawk's<sup>4</sup> notion of power over, is probably quite a good way of understanding black magic. So if you are working magic in a way that is expressly intending to affect somebody else's will, then you are working black magic. Under certain circumstances I would do. I think if there was an extreme situation where there was a chance of somebody doing violence against me or somebody who I loved.". "No, I don't think I have, " "There are better way of accomplishing

<sup>4</sup> Starhawk is an influential author on Witchcraft. She writes poetically but addresses sociological and psychological issues at the same time.

the same end". "It's not my lot... I don't really feel it's an appropriate use of magic." Younger Witches cited the Three Fold Law as a reason for not cursing at all. Older ones were less black and white in their reasoning but with the same ethos eg "No point, there's always a way round it." "It' s interfering with other people".

Asked if they would curse anyone the overwhelming response was negative, qualified by such comments as "I think it's got to be something of a last resort, something... I think one has to be very careful with the power we've got." "Better ways of dealing with people". Only two respondents said they had performed black magic. One had used a dark seeming ritual, more theatrical than anything else, after neighbours played loud heavy metal music late at night for two years. He deliberately performed it when they were in, so they could hear it. It seemed to work as they turned the music down as soon as he asked for the first time since he had known them, and they moved away soon after. The respondent said that he was not at all sure whether this had anything to do with his ritual, but that leaping round the room chanting his worst sounding chant had helped his own psychological balance greatly! The other story I have included verbatim as an example allow the reader to make their own judgment.

"I did have an experience when I kind of... I was cursing an object and somebody kind of got in the way, so that was a scary one. It was during the building of the M11 link road and there was a chestnut tree on the green there at Leytonstone and they sent in a bulldozer to knock it down. This bulldozer was coming across the grass. It was really muddy, and we'd been up since six o'clock that morning trying to protect this tree and the police had been in and they'd been dragging us about and I was cold, I was muddy, I was tired, I was bruised and I wasn't in a particularly good mood and this bulldozer was coming across the grass to knock this ancient tree down. I was just getting a bit pissed off and I was like you will stop, you will rust, you will not come no further. And I was really like giving it some and then one of the workmen who was walking next to, no one of the security guards who was working next to this truck thing, slipped and I think he actually, he didn't actually fall under the wheel, but he did fall over and he injured himself. He was hospitalised. So I probably stopped that, only for a little while. They dragged him to the hospital then the bulldozer came in again and

the tree was smashed to pieces. But it was a bit of a... I don't know... It's one of those situations, I can't sit here now and say to you I caused it, but I wouldn't do it again"

Respondents were asked how successful their spells were. The majority claimed that magic worked very well. They used expressions such as "a pretty good batting average" or percentages such as "works 80% of the time" or gave high marks out of ten. One said the spells worked "more than should be averagely possible."

## Living as Wiccans

Patterns are also emerging as to who respondents tell they are Wiccan. Most people's friends know they are Wiccan, as do many of their families (except for those whom they thought such news might upset) but fewer work colleagues are told for fear of reprisals at work. There seems to be a very minimal difficulty experienced in joining Wicca from anybody's friends or families. Standard "black magic" stereotypes seem to be responsible for most negative reactions to Wicca so far, but many positive reactions were also recorded regarding Wiccan beliefs. Resolution of any difficulties appears to be through talking about Wicca to concerned family members, and through the families seeing that the religion had had positive rather than negative effects on their loved ones. One respondent from a Hindu background said that his family was impressed with his more mature attitude and particularly with his renewed devotion to devotional practice.

Another element that makes Wicca seem acceptable to families is that Wicca is very much a "world affirming" religion. The social side of Wicca is emerging as a strong cohesive element within it. It is not a reason people join the Craft, but becomes a community "glue" in the Durkheimian sense. Since joining Wicca all respondents have stayed in touch with old friends. All respondents reported making many new friends since joining the Craft. Some do point out that commitment to Wicca can interfere with their chances of getting a new girlfriend. They reported that girls do not appreciate men who are committed to exclusive but sociable engagements regularly on weekend nights, or that their boyfriend worships naked<sup>5</sup> with other women. Several gave examples of a friend who had left Wicca when he

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<sup>5</sup> "skyclad" means naked, celebrating the seasonal cycles naked is part of the "back to nature" ethos of Wicca, Gerald Gardner was keen naturist to the extent that he owned a naturist camp near London.



married a non Wiccan, and one said that he tended to practice far less as he was involved with a non Wiccan girlfriend.

Wicca does affect the lifestyle of its adherents. Jobs have been changed to careers that fit respondents' Wiccan ethics, the Sabbat feasts are noted for increased consumption of food and alcohol, and attitudes are reportedly softened or more widely tolerant by the practice of Wicca. Wicca is seen to benefit its adherents, and not have many disadvantages. However the expense of travelling to meetings, and the amount of time that is committed were spoken of as negative effects, particularly for men with non-Wiccan partners.

### **Wicca in the community**

Many respondents undertook various unpaid voluntary jobs within the Wiccan and Pagan community. Working in the Pagan Federation (PF) was a very popular way to "put something back" into the community, and this sample so far includes two past presidents and four committee members of the Pagan Federation. All are modest, none mentioned these jobs on being asked what jobs they did for the wider Wiccan community. Many people had held a variety of different jobs within the PF over the years, although most of those who had served for longest had now retired from any role within the Pagan community.

My respondents do not think that Wicca should have any centralized authority, or that it should be much more public than it already is. All would attend inter-faith events to explain Wiccan beliefs to people of other faiths; speak at a Pagan gathering about Wicca; run open classes to teach Wicca beliefs and practice; talk about Wicca to people they meet and undertake anti defamation work for Wicca on the invitation of others, but most would not seek to speak at any gatherings or run classes of their own choosing. Those that did choose to run classes tended to be more active within the Pagan community in general. Most would talk about Wicca to people they meet and undertake anti defamation on their own volition, and none would evangelize under any circumstances.

All my respondents would bring up children in accordance with their beliefs but not as Wiccans, those with children already do include them in family Pagan type activities, but Wicca is universally perceived as being a religion of choice to be entered on initiation after

the age of 18. It is clear from the above findings that Wiccans do not seek to convert others to their faith, not even their own children. The following is an excerpt from one of my interviews:

**Respondent:** "I have a stepdaughter and stepson and the stepdaughter is 13, well 14 just, and is very, very interested... I mean obsessively interested and my attitude is that when you're 18, then you can get involved if you so wish. Up until that age we talk about it to her, we don't try and hide it from her, but we try and steer her into doing other things which teenagers of that age can do and enjoy before they get involved in something... any form of religion, not just..."

**Me:** "Do you think she's influenced by her mother's beliefs? "

**Respondent:** "I think she is, yes. Yes. I don't necessarily think that's good, but yes, I don't think she can help being influenced when she sees people coming and going all the time and most of the friends, the people who come to see us are Wiccan"

**Me:** "She's not rebelling...?"

**Respondent:** "No, she's not. No. No. She wants her own little altar and so on and so forth and it's very difficult to steer her in a gentle way. I will go along with the fluffy bunny in that instance and say, fine, you have your little altar, but don't get too involved because there are too many things that a child of 14 can do, like learning to ride a horse and getting involved in clubs and things for young people that I think she should pursue."

On the basis of Berger's 1999 census which she found 41.3 percent of respondents had children. Berger conservatively estimates that 82, 600 children are being brought up in Neo-Pagan families across North America. She notes a contradiction between the concept of a spiritual path that is sought and attained and a religion that one is born with. She raises the interesting question as to whether Paganism will remain a religion of converts, or whether it will develop an organic form of Paganism that can include new generations. She see the next generation of Pagan children as being direct causes for a routinization of the religion.

Her conclusions are that Witchcraft is a religion set firmly in late modernity that should be viewed as a community of interest. She points out that it is in a process of change, with ongoing discussion about the disadvantages and benefits of routinization. She sees the religion at a crossroads in which it may become a viable model of the "rudimentary transformation" of a late modern religion if it fulfills Robbins (1988) criteria for long term viability. These are the successful socialization of its children, the development of an organized structure, and the achievement some sort of accommodation between itself and the wider community.

## Conclusion

A paper of this length cannot allow space to compare my thesis with others, but I am glad to have been able to present a short summary of their ideas and of my findings that will allow the interested reader to make their own comparisons, or follow their own investigations further.

Whether the original hypothesis that forms the foundation of this study will prove true remains to be seen. So far it does seem that in Wicca religion is retraditionalized by ceremonial, myth, and magic. A mystery of Gnostic contact with the Divine is unveiled, offering its Priests and Priestesses a resacrilised, remystified and re-enchanted world. Whether initiates come to Wicca seeking mystery in any post-Weberian sense is not yet clear, but they certainly see Wicca as a "mystery Tradition", perhaps not in the classical sense, but certainly as a means to engender a sense of continued revelation of the mysteries of life and Nature. Other themes are also being uncovered as this study explores what the adherents of Wicca see in their enchanted universe, how the enchantment affects them and just what it is that draws them to join this little known and little studied branch of the Neo-Pagan movement.

The overwhelming themes of the attraction of Wicca seem to be that it is a religion of personal choice, of deep connection and of joy. It is a personal choice that people are taking as it fits the zeitgeist of late modern society. It offers connection to the past, to the earth, to other Witches in the coven and to the wider community. Ecology, feminism,

pluralism, individualism and tolerance are all part of the rich tapestry of Wiccan belief. It is fun, and delights its followers after years of practice. It seems to be very socially orientated and geared to personal development, but with a very strong religious sense and a core devotion to the Divine. It's adherents feel it offers joy in the present and hope for the future.

The Divine in Wicca is both male and female, yet conjoined to become one. It is this part of the mystery of Wicca that is symbolised by the penultimate point of each and every meeting when cakes and wine are blessed by a Priest and Priestess. The Priestess holds a ritual dagger while the Priest kneels before her, holding a chalice, they join them in a revered act of symbolic sex whilst consecrating the communion feast that is then passed around the other initiates. This ritual act is part of the central magic of Wicca, the interplay of masculine and feminine polarity, which is emphasised in the ritual *the Legend of the Goddess* when the God lays down his sword and crown at the Goddess feet, and she takes his power, wielding it as something loaned in love and mutual respect. To the God she gives her chalice, the symbol of the feminine principle, and teaches him the mysteries of her love. The women are thus girded with a sword, and crowned in strength, whilst the men celebrate their masculinity yet are encouraged to explore and nurture gentleness.

So far I have found that Wiccan men are happy with their role in Wicca. They do not see their religion as overtly feminine even though the predominance of practitioners are female. They are very comfortable to be so underrepresented and to have the role they have within the Craft. They actively play a supportive role to the Priestesses of the Coven but feel that the role of the male in Wicca is underestimated by the outside world. Wiccan men rediscover and reclaim their masculinity by embodying a very masculine God, at the same time as cherishing the feminine principle. In their rites they act out psychodramas of traditionally the masculine roles of young God, Young King, Old God, Old King, Warrior, and Protector whilst celebrating the life journey from boy to old age, death and beyond; yet the archetypes they act out always maintain an adoration of, and dedication to the Goddess.

The respondents in this study seem to understand Pagan masculine spirituality in a manner that is most closely resembled by Moore and Gillette's idea of a "deep and rooted

masculinity" (Moore and Gillette 1991). This describes a crisis in masculinity due to the break down of the traditional family, and the loss of true ritual processes for initiating boys into men, which has led to a dominance of "boy psychology" that oscillates between weakness and abuse. They also argue that patriarchy is abusive to men as well as women, and is not a "deep and rooted masculinity". They argue that "deep rooted masculinity" has capacity for love, gentleness and relatedness equal with the feminine. The crux of their argument is that what men are missing is not the feminine but the true masculine; "an adequate connection to the deep and instinctual masculine energies, the potentials of mature masculinity. They were being blocked from connection to these potentials by patriarchy itself, and by the feminist critique upon what little masculinity they could still hold onto for themselves. And they were being blocked by the lack in their lives of many meaningful and transformatory initiatory processes by which they could have achieved a sense of manhood" (Moore and Gillette 1990: xviii).

The core of the empowerment is not in the structure of Wicca or the fact that Wicca is mainly peopled by women, it is in the mystery of the invocation of the Divine. It is when men are invoked as the God, and embody the divine masculine; and when they invoke the Goddess, the essence of the divine female, in a sustained and deep personal moment of adoration and veneration, that they feel most deeply empowered and take that empowerment with them into their every day lives. Embodying the Divine is a core part of Wicca's inner magic, and clearly seen as one of its "mysteries."

Wiccan initiates do not convert but come home. But come home to what? This study seems to imply that Wiccan converts come home to enlightenment, empowerment, empathy, equality, and joy. A homecoming does not stop in the doorway of a house, just as commitment to Wicca does not stop at initiation. Far from it, initiation is the door that opens onto a long personal process, an individual odyssey into the mysteries of Wicca. This long journey is what is believed to bring initiates to be at one with themselves, with the universe, and with Nature. The promise of esoteric philosophy throughout the ages has been an experience of wonder in realisation of the connectedness of all things, and the realization of one's own divine place in the cosmos. This has been spoken of throughout millennia as a journey home to our place at the side of the Gods in whose image we are made, to be

upraised at last from the fall of Man. This is a journey that the Wiccan religion facilitates for its initiates; to come home to their true self, to rediscover the divinity within the heart of all mankind, and to be at peace and at one with the Gods.

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