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# **Wicca & Witchcraft** FOR **DUMMIES®**

**Diane Smith**

**A Reference for the Rest of Us!®**



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# ***Wicca and Witchcraft For Dummies***

**by Diane Smith**



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# About the Author

**Diane Smith** has been a Witch all of her life, but she realized the fact in 1987. She incorporates ideas from many diverse sources (including Shamanism, Bohmian physics, and String Theory) into her eclectic beliefs and practices. She has been a writer and an editor for more than 25 years, working in the fields of medicine, child advocacy, and book publishing.

## Dedication

For my mother, Shirley Anne Smith, and my father, James Smith



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# Introduction

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**T**hank you for picking up this book. I hope it meets your need for reliable information. I didn't write the book in an effort to convert anyone but rather to dispel false stereotypes and to share the facts about the real Wicca and Witchcraft.

First and foremost, Wicca is a spiritual path of personal discovery and experience of the Divine. From Deity, Wiccans receive wisdom, strength, solace, and surprising synchronicities. The way that Wiccans perceive or experience Deity is unique to each individual, but for most, seeking relationship or union with the Divine is the heart of Wicca.

Nature flows from Deity. Wiccan ritual and celebration are timed to the rhythms and the cycles of the natural world, especially the Earth's journey around the Sun and the Moon's passage around the Earth. The Divine energy and the web of life are what real Wicca and Witchcraft are all about.

## About This Book

This book is my attempt to provide a general reference about Wicca and Witchcraft. Unfortunately, such a book is impossible to write. Here's the problem: No author,

including me, can write a book and claim that it definitively represents all of Wicca, because:

- ✓ Wicca is a spiritual path of personal discovery and communication with Deity. Each Wiccan decides what to believe and how to practice.
- ✓ Wicca doesn't have a doctrine or holy book that Wiccans must follow.
- ✓ Wicca doesn't have leaders who require that people worship or live a certain way. No central authority or hierarchy of clergy decides who is and is not a legitimate Wiccan.
- ✓ Wiccans differ wildly in their beliefs and practices. Most Wiccans happily respect each others' opinions and follow their own hearts.

In this book, I try to thoroughly explain the core beliefs, ethics, and practices that nearly all Wiccans accept.

For more controversial issues, I try to offer an inclusive look across Wicca, including many examples of different Wiccan ideas and opinions. Of course, no one really knows what the majority of Wiccans believe and how they practice. No central organization collects such records, but I do my best to describe the predominant beliefs and practices.

Obviously, I can't include every single Wiccan's opinion about every single spiritual issue, and I had to make choices. The book undoubtedly contains some of my personal biases, but I made every effort to be fair and

inclusive, and provide an accurate reflection of Wicca today.

You don't have to read this book from front cover to back. You are free to skip around and read about the subjects that interest you.

One bit of advice: Don't jump in and try to perform ritual or, especially, to work magic without first reading about Wiccan beliefs and ethics. Your practice will be more fulfilling, effective, and ethical if you understand Wiccan principles.

## **Conventions Used in This Book**

Choosing the language to use in this book was a nightmare. Wiccans have no doctrine, and they are free to develop their own beliefs. They also define terms any way they darn well please. Many of the words or phrases commonly used in Wicca don't have clear, standard meanings. Two people may use the same term with totally different ideas in mind.

This section explains the definitions that I finally settled on. However, if you intend to study further, you need to know that the definitions of some terms are inconsistent throughout the Wiccan community.

# Defining the Divine

In this book, I use the words *Deity*, *Divinity*, and *the Divine*. I know that these words are generic and vague, and I use them intentionally, although some Wiccans may find them aggravating.

Nearly all Wiccans believe in some form of a Creative Being, however, they have different ideas about the nature of the Divine. Deity may be the Goddess and the God in perfect duality. She may be the primal Great Goddess that is the source of all life. The Divine may be the Higher Self or a symbol emerging from the unconscious mind. Some Wiccans believe that Deity takes many forms or has many aspects.

I deliberately use vague words because I don't want to be disrespectful and assume that everyone perceives Deity in the same way. One alternative is to use *Goddess(es) and/or God(s)*. That construction is far too unwieldy in the text, and even that awkward phrase discounts people who believe in a primal Source or Creative Being without sex/gender. I apologize to all of those who think that I am dishonoring the Goddess, Goddesses, God, Gods, The All, The One, the Triple Goddess, Earth Mother, Source, Supreme Being, the Ancient Ones . . .

## Defining Paganism, Witchcraft, and Wicca

Every time I thought I had acceptable working definitions for Paganism/Pagan, Witch/Witchcraft, and Wicca/Wiccan, further research made me change my mind. No one agrees on the use of these terms. The following sections describe their definitions for the purpose of this book.

**Pagan** originally meant peasant or country dweller. Pagan was a term of derision, sort of like the word “hick” today. **Heathen** originally meant a person who lived in the heaths (open wasteland covered in heather, low shrubs, and so on). **Paganism**, today, is a collective or umbrella term that encompasses any of the pre-Christian religions and cultures. It usually refers to a nature religion that defines Deity as immanent. *Immanence* means that the Divine energy is manifest in nature. Deity is right here, right now, and is all-present in the world. Pagan also refers to indigenous or tribal religions and cultures. Historically, pagans and heathens were the rural folk who were the last to be converted to Christianity.

A **Pagan** is someone who practices and/or holds the beliefs of Paganism. **Neo-Paganism** is a continuation, revival, or re-creation of an old Pagan religion. A **neo-Pagan** is someone who follows a new version of old Paganism.

**Wicca**, for the purposes of this book, is a continuation, a revival, or a recreation of pre-Christian, primarily European, nature religion or spirituality. Wicca is a type

or sect of Witchcraft. Although Wicca has its roots in ancient spirituality, the modern Wiccan revival began in the 1950s.

Most Wiccans agree with one of the following definitions:

- ✓ Wicca is a continuation of a very old religion that has been passed down through families and groups since ancient times.
- ✓ Wicca is a return to or revival of an old, even ancient, form of religion. Because not a great deal is known about the original beliefs and practices, contemporary Wiccans must add to the old tradition.
- ✓ Wicca is a new form of spirituality that re-creates some very old practices and ideas. The modern form of Wicca began in the 1950s.

Put very simply, Wiccans generally accept two basic principles:

- ✓ A belief in immanent Deity: A Wiccan's main spiritual goal is to grow in his or her relationship with Divinity. Almost all Wiccans believe in a Creative Being. Many, but not all, Wiccans honor Deity in both the male and female aspects, the Goddess and the God. Most Wiccans believe that the Divine is *immanent* in the world, meaning that Deity is right here, right now, and is all-present in the world. People come from and are a part of the Divine energy, and Deity is within everyone.



✓ A belief in interconnection: All of life — everything that exists — comes from and is a part of the Divine energy, so everything is interconnected. All of existence is an unbroken web or circle of energy. Nature is a manifestation of the Deity. Wiccan spiritual practice is based on the cycles of nature.

A **Wiccan**, for the purposes of this book, is someone who practices and/or holds the beliefs of Wicca. Wicca is a type or sect of Witchcraft, and Wiccans are a type of Witch.

**Note:** Not all Wiccans consider themselves to be Witches. Some consider Wicca to be a separate system of beliefs and practices, different from all forms of traditional Witchcraft. Some Wiccans reject the Witch label simply because it has such a negative and evil connotation in the culture. They have abandoned the word, believing that Wiccans can never undo the centuries of propaganda and bad press that Witches have endured.

**Witchcraft**, for the purposes of this book, is an umbrella or collective term for the beliefs and practices of all Witches and Wiccans throughout history, beginning in ancient times, primarily in Europe. Witchcraft is a nature religion or spirituality. The term refers to both the spiritual practice (the honoring or worshipping of Deity) and the magical practice (healing, herbalism, midwifery, spellcasting, divination, and so on). I often use the word Witchcraft in references to history, because that is the

word used in the documentation (for example, during the medieval and Renaissance Witch trials).

The word Witchcraft has many different meanings and contexts. The following are some of the — *sometimes contradictory* — definitions and usages for the word Witchcraft:

- ✓ Wicca refers to the spirituality (the relationship with or worship of Deity). Witchcraft refers to the magical practice (for example, spell casting, healing, divination, and so on). This is a very popular definition, and you may encounter it often.
- ✓ Witchcraft and Wicca are synonyms and are interchangeable.
- ✓ Witchcraft is an umbrella or collective term for the beliefs and practices of all Witches and Wiccans. Wicca is a sect or a specific form of Witchcraft.
- ✓ Witchcraft encompasses *all* the practices of Wicca, including rituals for worship and for magic. Generally, Wiccans create sacred space by casting a circle. Within that circle, they worship or honor Deity and they also work magic. Some Wiccans consider everything that happens in that sacred space to be Witchcraft. For them, Witchcraft is spiritual ritual and magical art.
- ✓ Wicca is the modern-day revival religion, and Witchcraft is the old, pre-Christian nature religion of Europe.

✓ Outside of Wicca and Witchcraft, there are a seemingly endless number of stereotypical and outlandishly inaccurate definitions for Witch and Witchcraft, even within credible sources (such as dictionaries). These definitions often characterize Witches and Witchcraft as evil or wicked and associate them with Satanism.

A **Witch**, for the purposes of this book, is someone who practices and/or holds the beliefs of Witchcraft.

Many Witches follow traditions that were in existence before — or are otherwise separate from — the traditions born during the Wiccan revival of the 1950s. The followers of these traditions commonly are called *traditional Witches* or sometimes *Hedgewitches*. Many traditional Witches focus on the oral teachings, literature, history, and folklore of a specific culture (for example, Celtic), and many traditional Witches have ancestry in their chosen tradition. Some Witches are from family (hereditary) backgrounds in Witchcraft. Some groups of Witches have well-defined spiritual beliefs, and others focus almost solely on practice (folk magic, healing, midwifery, and so on).

**Note:** Not all Witches are Wiccan; most traditional Witches don't consider themselves to be Wiccan at all.

## What You're Not to Read

Wicca encourages independence and self-direction. If you don't want to work practical magic, you don't ever have to explore that topic. If you don't feel comfortable using divination, such as tarot cards, skip that chapter. If you aren't interested in dreams, pass up that information. However, before you engage in any practice (such as magic or trance), make sure that you read about the beliefs, ethics, and warnings that pertain to the practice.

## **Foolish Assumptions**

I don't assume that the readers of this book are now or ever want to be Wiccan. My only assumption is that you want factual, reliable information about Wicca and Witchcraft, free of false stereotypes and sensationalism.

This book is not an effort to bring people into Wicca. Proselytizing, trying to convert others, violates Wiccan ethics. Wiccans assume that those who are meant to follow the Wiccan path will find it on their own.

In some of the more personal portions of the book, and especially in the how-to sections, I use the word "you." I use that word only to simplify the text. The use of the collective "you" doesn't mean that I want to encourage or pressure you to engage in any Wiccan activity.

*If you do intend to pursue a deeper exploration of Wicca or you're moving toward making a commitment, I hope*