

What is Paganism?

Doesn't "Pagan" mean irreligious?

No. The word "Pagan" comes from the Latin *paganus*, meaning country dweller. This gave rise to the French word *pasan*, meaning "peasant." As a religious term, it is correctly used by anthropologists to designate indigenous folk religions of particular regions and peoples, and by classical scholars to refer to the great ancient pre-Christian civilizations of the Mediterranean area (as in the phrase, "Pagan Splendor," often used in reference to Classical Greece).

To the Romans, "pagan" denoted a "hick," one who was not part of the dominant, privileged, Roman society (just as they used the term "barbarians" to describe foreigners who spoke no Latin). The derogatory quality of the term comes from Roman Christian classism. Thus, from the Christian point of view, all traditional native tribal religions have been considered Pagan, such as those of the Native Americans, Polynesians, Africans, Norse, Celts, Gauls, Australian Aborigines, Hindus, etc.

What is modern Paganism today?

Paganism is, quite simply, Nature worship. It is also called "The Old Religion," "Ancient Ways," "Earth-Centered Spirituality," "Natural Religion," and "Nature-Based Religion."

Today, the word *Pagan*, in its broadest sense, refers to persons following alternative spiritual paths, and who probably do not strictly adhere to the tenets of the world's largest religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Most modern Pagans feel a close connection to Nature and the seasons, and may look to early "Pagan" or indigenous cultures for guidance in strengthening this connection.

Modern Paganism (sometimes referred to as "Neo-Paganism" to distinguish it from original and indigenous pre-Christian folk traditions) is a revival and reconstruction of ancient Nature-based religions, adapted for the modern world. Paganism is an umbrella term denoting a collection of natural religions of the living Earth.

Pagans generally view humanity as a functional organ within the greater organism of all Life, rather than as something special, created separate and "above" the rest of the natural world. Pagans seek not to conquer Nature, but to harmonize and integrate with Her. Paganism should be regarded as "Green Religion," just as we have "Green Politics" and "Green Economics."

Examples of Pagan traditions today include Wicca, Druidism, Church of All Worlds, Norse, indigenous African and Afro-Caribbean, ancient Egyptian, classical Greek, Celtic, Shamanism, Eclecticism, Judeo-Pagans, Hindu-Pagans, Christo-Pagans, and all indigenous Earth-centered paths.

What do Pagans believe?

Just as there is a wide variety of Pagan paths and traditions, so there is considerable variety in Pagan beliefs. Those listed here are commonly held by most modern Pagans:

- ☆ Pagans believe that all life—human and non-human, animate and inanimate—is an expression of the universal/divine mind or energy, a part of which is contained in everything.
- ☆ Pagans believe that all things are interconnected and interdependent, both ecologically and spiritually. Communication and cooperation among all elements of the material and spiritual world is possible.
- ☆ Pagans believe diversity of religious expression is a part of human nature and a positive outlet for our natural urge to connect with the universe. Pagans encourage the questioning and exploration of god-images, worship forms, rituals, celebrations, and ethics; and for the most part hold creeds and dogmas to be unnecessary for spiritual growth.
- ☆ Pagans believe that a variety of views on the nature of Deity is a part of the diversity of religious expression. Pagans may image Deity as it suits their personality, level of growth, and understanding, even to the inclusion of atheism and agnosticism. Some Pagans believe in deities as conscious, self-aware Beings which may be male or female; some view deities as numinous, archetypal, or elemental Energies. Many Pagans personify their images of Deity to make them more easily understood and explored. Most Pagans have strong personal relationships with their concepts of Deity, and strive to work in cooperation with them daily.
- ☆ Pagans believe that all life is inherently good and oriented toward its own greatest growth, potential, and fulfillment. Evil is viewed as destructive behavior, not a state of being.
- ☆ Pagans believe that since the nature of creation is good, salvation is unnecessary. Many Pagans believe in the Wiccan ethic: "If it harms none, do what you will." This ethic may appear simplistic, but it is quite challenging to live. Although Pagan ethics seem to bring a high degree of freedom, they actually bring great responsibilities. In addition, many Pagans believe they will be held personally responsible for their choices in some fashion, either in this life, in an after-life, or in a reincarnation.
- ☆ Pagans are encouraged to explore and test every idea they encounter, and to accept an idea as their own only if validated by personal experience. Pagan religious worship focuses on the experiential and utilizes singing, dance, movement, drumming, energy work, and healing.
- ☆ Paganism is not a "revealed" religion, based on the revelations and teachings of a founding prophet. Paganism is a tribal religion, like those of the Native Americans. In a revealed religion, membership in the religious community is usually defined by believing in the teachings, or scriptures. In a tribal religion, membership is determined by one's participation in the community, and belief is more a matter of personal conviction.

(From the 1999 Papal Apology Project)

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