



The Circle Within: Creating a Wiccan Spiritual Tradition

By Dianne Sylvan

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The Circle Within is your guide to creating a personal spiritual practice for daily life. The first section is a thoughtful examination of Wiccan ethics and philosophy that explores how to truly live Wicca. The second section includes devotional prayers and rituals that provide inspiration for group or solitary practice.

Topics in this Wicca book include: cultivating an ongoing personal relationship with deity, ethics and standards of behavior, concepts of sacred space, elements of a daily practice, tuning into the Wheel of the Year and the elements, and creating meaningful personal Pagan rituals.

Move beyond the basics of Wicca and enter the sacred space of the circle within.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Dianne Sylvan (Austin, TX) has been a practicing Wiccan since the age of sixteen. She is co-founder and President of Blessedways, a Wiccan educational and spiritual organization based out of Central Texas. Through Blessedways she teaches classes on Wicca, the Runes, spiritual magic, and ecstatic dance.

In addition to her books, Dianne's work has appeared in *Circle Magazine*, *NewWitch* magazine, and the *Llewellyn Wicca Almanac* and *Witches' Calendar*; she has also been interviewed by the *Wiccan Pagan Times*. More of her articles on living Wiccan spirituality can be found on her website, *Dancing Down the Moon*.

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Stepping into the Circle

THE GODDESS IS ALIVE AND well in Texas.

Her sacred grove is a one-bedroom apartment on the East Side, where the traffic noise rattles the windows and rain leaks in through the crack above the door. In the age of computers and stock portfolios, She has traded Her celestial raiment for a business suit. The Hands that spun the web of creation chop vegetables, light incense, type letters. The Voice that called the stars into being answers the hotline at the domestic violence shelter downtown. The Goddess sings Aretha Franklin in the shower at night, and sometimes She forgets who She is.

Then She looks in the mirror and sees the light of the Sacred in Her eyes. She remembers dancing bare-breasted at Beltane and standing with arms upraised in the center of a ring of oaks with chant ringing in Her ears as She weighs dragon's blood resin at the local metaphysical supply store. She thinks of the praise that falls from Her lips on a moonlit night. She remembers Herself.

So can you.

By now you have read books on Wicca, searched the Internet like a big-game hunter on safari, and networked until you couldn't tell one Amber or Raven from another. You've bought specially charged candles and been to festivals; you've memorized lists of correspondences for colors, days of the week, elements, astrological signs, herbs, deities, and animals. Maybe you have been part of a coven or other sort of group, maybe not. You have certainly gathered quite a collection of ritual robes, jewelry, and tubes of henna paste.

The problem, however, is not with whom you have worked or what you have worn. The problem is that you look in the

mirror and you still don't remember who you are. Life feels heavy, and the rituals you attend have started to bore you. There is something fundamental that's missing from your religion, and you hate to admit it. After all, when you found Wicca, it felt so much like coming home. Does your dissatisfaction mean you're in the wrong house after all this time?

Before you start to pack, consider this: humans are a species constantly in search. At the beginning of our history we searched for food, and when we realized that potential food was much bigger than we were, we searched for a big stick to hit it with. We searched for shelter, and then when the basic issues of survival were covered, we searched for community so we wouldn't have to face the dark nights alone. Once we learned to band together and share the labor, we had time to search for something bigger: meaning, purpose, something to explain why we are here and why we share our existence with disagreeable things like murder, flood, politicians, and mosquitoes. We needed something to give us a place in the universe?a vantage point from which things made sense.

Religion of any kind is a way to find that something. It became clear to the human race that the meaning of life?the purpose of it all?would not be the same for every person.

Hence the rise of so many religions and philosophies.

Every faith approaches the search in a different way and finds a different idea to focus on. Christians, most often, seek salvation from our own sinful natures and deliverance from the evils of the world. Put very simply, Buddhists seek enlightenment?a transcendence of the physical realm in order to pursue the spiritual one. Wiccans, along with a number of others, seek union.

Someone once asked me, "What's the point of this Wicca thing? I mean, if you're not trying to get into Heaven or find Nirvana, what are you trying to do?"

That is a tough one, and a question I don't think many of us have given a lot of thought to. It is difficult to step back and look at the bigger picture. I gave the only answer I knew, then or now. The point of Wicca, the real mystery behind it all, is to remember the Divinity within ourselves and all things; to manifest our God and Goddess all the time, every day, every moment; to love as They love, to give as They give; to serve Them in perfect trust, and thus bring Their grace more fully into the world; to understand that we are the embodiment of the Divine love and nurture, and to express that love in the world; to walk as God and Goddess.

Sound impossible? It isn't. We already have all the tools we need; we only have to recognize them and teach ourselves how to use them to return to a view of the world where anything is possible?to see like a child with wide eyes and an

open heart.

The rituals and other tools of Wicca serve as a bridge between ourselves and that goal, and as tools they can be used effectively or clumsily. I can't count the number of rituals I have attended where the most spiritual part of the event was the potluck afterward when everyone shook off the boredom of another full moon just like the hundred before it and really got to celebrate. The most moving rituals are the ones with the fewest stage directions and the least fuss, where energy flows along its natural currents and we dance with it. Unfortunately these are in the minority for most groups, and in solo Wicca it can be even harder to create a sense of the sacred when using the same old chants and the same old colored candles. We try not to venture too far from what we've learned from books and covenmeets, since branching out means that eventually our branches will intersect with those of other religions. Wiccans have great pride, I have noticed, in how different we are from the world's biggest sects. Perhaps we think it shows growth on our part, or perhaps we simply want to distance ourselves from the ways of our youth that often left us scarred and wanting. We forget the moments of fellowship, the hymns that were part of our blood, the parts of ourselves that those faiths actually did satisfy even if we grew beyond them and went searching for something more.

The problem is that in our desire to separate ourselves from our childhood faiths and eke out a place of our own in the grand scheme of things, we refuse to learn from our religious heritage. Obviously if the Christians do it, it must be useless. Never mind the millions of people who do find the Christian tradition a fulfilling path. Never mind the people out there who are striving to be *Christlike*?not political, who are not our enemies. We can't learn anything from them, of course. Everything we need as Wiccans is in a book somewhere or in ourselves or in the natural world, right?

The vast majority of our co-religionists nowadays have read all the books on beginning Wicca they can stomach and don't live anywhere near the natural world that our ancestors had to struggle with for daily survival. It's difficult to revere nature with any sense of reality when the nearest natural area is thirty miles away and the closest thing to it is a manufactured park littered with beer cans and stray drug dealers. We spend all day encased in metal and glass, going from house to car to office and back again, and many even work through meals.

Where does that leave us? We are in many ways disconnected from the nature we are supposed to worship. If having a ritual outdoors means schlepping into the country with a ten-pound bag of ritual tools (the mystical Tote Bag of Shadows) and soaking ourselves in bug repellent, what do we do

the other three hundred or so days of the year? In our society we are constantly bombarded with images of violence, hatred, and indifference, and our attempts to change things are often met with hostility. The magic in the world sometimes seems to have a precarious hold on life at best. How can you live as a

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Wiccan every day when your lifestyle is better suited to urban guerilla warfare?

It isn't enough to be a Wiccan on full moons or sabbats.

No one ever became fluent in a new language by using it once a month. The best way is to surround yourself with the lesson; to speak Wiccan from dawn to dusk until it becomes your nature.

One oft-overlooked remedy for our modern dilemma is the ancient tradition of a daily personal practice. In every religion the world over there are people who take the devotional path, giving over large parts of their day to ritual, prayer, and communion with whatever face God wears for them. The dictionary definition of the word *devotion* is to give wholeheartedly to something. Given the Wiccan view of the universe as a place of cause and effect, it would follow that the more you devote to your sense of the Divine, the more the Divine will devote to you. If our goal as Wiccans is to turn our belief in the God and Goddess into reality, immersing ourselves in our relationship with Them is the surest way to turn our belief into knowledge.

How do I know this? My life is every bit as hectic and the city I live in every bit as toxic as most people's. I haven't reached some blissful state of spiritual perfection, but I have seen its nearest neighbor in people I have encountered over the years, and I have begun to learn from their success.

The first group I noticed whose religion and life were as one were Catholic nuns who worked in the hospital where I was a secretary at the age of twenty-two. There were several elderly Sisters who tended to the patients' spiritual needs, and in a building full of trauma and pain they were always calm, gracious, and quick to smile. They moved with quiet surety through the halls, their voices gentle and almost musical. Speaking to any of the Sisters gave my spirits a lift, which was vital given how much I hated the job.

I had to wonder, though, what got them through? They saw the worst of humanity in an endless parade of communicable diseases and gunshot wounds, yet maintained their sense of grace. I had to know if they could still smile when they got home at night, or if it took all their strength just to stay human in such a place.

Finally I asked one of the nuns how she dealt with such a stressful workplace. She smiled at me rather beatifically and told me that when she got up in the morning she prayed.

At breakfast, lunch, and dinner she prayed. At bedtime she prayed, and a dozen other moments in between, keeping in constant, loving dialogue with God. The nuns didn't just believe the tenets of their faith, they lived them from morning till night.

I couldn't help but be impressed, as well as feel a little sheepish. I had tried for a long time to tell myself that there was nothing that I could learn from Christians; that their narrow-mindedness was the reason the world was going to their hell in a handbasket. In other words, I'd been as narrow as I thought they were. It was what some of my Pagan contemporaries call a "cosmic two-by-four"—a whop in the head from the gods when you've been an idiot.

The idea of daily practice, however, stuck with me long after I had taken the lesson of tolerance to heart. I started to ask around among my Pagan friends, finding out to my chagrin that, for the most part, they were bereft of any sort of personal daily rituals beyond a few minutes of meditation. Life was simply too busy, they said, to do half the things they wanted to to stay in touch with the God and Goddess. That led me to wonder whether a life too busy for our deepest beliefs is really much of a life at all.

After hunting down a number of books on the monastic life, I discovered that in the arena of personal practice, the humble monks and nuns had us beat. Naturally it's easier to devote your entire life to God if you live in an abbey, where the environment exists to support your religious quest. Yet despite the inherent differences between monastic and lay lives, there are valuable lessons to be found from these little communities, regardless of creed or location.

Buddhist monks—and, indeed, a great number of Buddhists in the larger world—have similar practices to the Catholics. They move in a rhythm of mindfulness and meditation throughout the day, even using housework as an opportunity to meditate on the wonder of the present moment. To a Buddhist, every action is a chance to learn and grow spiritually. As a result, the Buddhist reaches a state of emotional equilibrium where stress and angst have only a fleeting place in the course of the day.

The Sufi dervishes, who practice a form of Islamic mysticism, integrate their prayer and liturgy with dance, music, and the well-known "whirling" that helps the practitioner reach Allah. The poet Rumi, credited with founding Sufism as a sect, frequently referred to God as "the Beloved."

Meanwhile, Westerners run around with cellular phones plastered to their heads shrieking at each other in traffic and having heart attacks on an alarmingly regular basis.
Hmm.

Even among laypeople, Christians and Jews appear to have an easier time integrating their spiritual lives with their daily ones, perhaps because so many people have given it so much thought. Those who *want* to become more spiritually attuned in mainstream religions have dozens of resources at their fingertips.

Take, for example, the recent “What Would Jesus Do?” phenomenon.

It may seem like more of a marketing ploy than a religious precept, but if you look past the merchandise and into a less cynical view, it is an excellent way to integrate faith and the mundane world. Taken at face value it is a profound question. How would a deity act in this situation? What would he say? Are my own actions following my religious ideal? Books abound on Christian and Jewish daily prayer; there are plenty of devotionals, calendars, and classes on living a prayerful life. In this way, Pagans are at a decided disadvantage. Perhaps we simply haven’t given it enough thought. We learn from the outset that we are not separate from Deity, that the whole world is God and Goddess, but what do we do with that belief? How does that belief translate into direct experience in day-to-day life?

I have known a handful of Wiccans who managed to develop an integrated magical/mundane existence, and the effect is amazing. These are the truly powerful Wiccans, the ones whose every word resonates with Divinity. Their lives

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run more smoothly, more peacefully, and when disaster strikes, it seems to flow through them like water. The source? Daily practice, a devotional life.

Why don’t more people live that way? The first cry is, “I don’t have time! I have to get to my meeting and take the kids to soccer practice and answer my e-mail and get that proposal ready for Monday and clean the bathroom and wash the car and figure out what to have for dinner!”

You’d rather be doing all that than a ritual?

As a society, we have given time the power of a god. The clock is our idol and we bow to its whims, always running a little behind like the terrible sinners we are. How many minutes of the day can the average person give up without compromise? Very few, but the truth is, there is no such thing as a spiritual life without sacrifice. In the olden days perhaps it was part of the harvest or an animal (or even a member of the tribe in extreme cases) that went to the gods to show them how much they were loved and respected (and, in some cases, feared). In our time, the sacrifice must be time. We are always called by the gods to give up what we think is precious. In our day, we crave an extra two or three hours even though we waste large amounts of the extant twenty-four trying to climb the corporate ladder. Meanwhile,

our inner lives languish. To find peace in the valley of the shadow, it's worth getting up twenty minutes earlier.

Trust me on this one.

I find it a bit novel, and rather laughable, that a lot of Wiccans (especially the young) want their religion to serve them as quickly and efficiently as possible with a minimum of per-

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marjorie Batchelder:

Do you have favorite book? When you have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each publication has different aim or goal; it means that book has different type. Some people feel enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. They are really reading whatever they consider because their hobby is actually reading a book. Why not the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book whenever they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will need this The Circle Within: Creating a Wiccan Spiritual Tradition.

Phyllis Ramirez:

Exactly why? Because this The Circle Within: Creating a Wiccan Spiritual Tradition is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will jolt you with the secret that inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who write the book in such amazing way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this ever again or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book include such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking technique. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I had been you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

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