

## **SAPC MEDIA KIT**

This basic guide has been prepared for journalists and media industry professionals requiring fast and reliable information on Wicca, Witchcraft and other Pagan religions in South Africa.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

When most people are presented with the word religion or spirituality, it is usually an automatic response to think of them within the context of Christianity, or maybe Islam, especially in South Africa. So-called alternative religions and spirituality are, however, actually quite prevalent in this country, and although followers of Paganism number in the tens of thousands, those who hold these beliefs may not be as open because many people misunderstand these religions or simply have never even heard of them.

When discussing or learning about the myriad of spiritual beliefs in our world, the term Pagan or Paganism will often be brought up. But just exactly what is a Pagan? In actuality, the term Pagan can have many different meanings such as a person who doesn't follow an Abrahamic religion, one who follows a nature-based belief, a polytheist belief or one who has no belief in deity. Even many in the Pagan community cannot always agree on the exact meaning of the word Pagan. But it is generally agreed that this is an umbrella term, covering any person who follows a spiritual tradition that doesn't fall within the five major world religions of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam.

The word Pagan is taken from the Latin word *paganus*, the meaning of which is not exactly certain but which is believed to have meant country dweller or rustic. At times the term of Pagan can be used in a derogatory way toward someone who doesn't follow an Abrahamic religion. However, as mentioned earlier, it is a broad term that generally applies to a person who follows a spiritual tradition outside the main world religions; this can include a wide variety of beliefs whose roots go back to ancient times.

One of the common misconceptions by those unfamiliar with Paganism is that all Pagans are Wiccan, perhaps because Wicca is such a well known Pagan religion. But Wicca, which was formed by Gerald Gardner in the 1950's is a distinct Pagan religion. To say that all Pagans are Wiccan would be the same as saying that all Christians are Lutheran. Besides Wicca, some of the other Pagan beliefs include Druidism, Asatru, Celtic Reconstructionism, the indigenous beliefs of many different world cultures and a wide variety of eclectic beliefs that are based on several spiritual traditions.

Wicca and Witchcraft are among the most popular of Pagan religions, but there are others also. There are four main categories within the Pagan community:

- Earth-centered religions (includes most forms of Witchcraft – this is by far the largest category)
- Reconstructionist groups (individuals and groups seeking to re-create the religious practices of the Classical Pagan era, for example worship of Greek or Egyptian gods and goddesses, Druidism etc)
- Ethnic North-European traditions such as Asatru (Traditional Nordic religion)
- Groups that practice Ceremonial Magic.

## **BASIC BACKGROUND FOR WRITERS**

### **The Religion and its Followers**

- Wicca, Witchcraft, Paganism, Heathenry are the name of religions and should always be capitalised. When the words "witch" or "witchcraft" are used sociologically, use a small w. But when you're using Witchcraft either as a synonym for Wicca capitalise it; and when by "Witch" you mean someone who is Wiccan or Pagan, capitalise it too. More and more people claim Witchcraft as their religion.

- Male Witches are called ... Witches; male Wiccans are called ... Wiccans.
- The adjective "Wiccan" is always capitalised. The word does not have a secular form corresponding to small-c catholic, and always refers to the religion of Wicca or its followers. (To call Wiccans "the Wicca" is archaic, and that form should only be used if you are quoting someone who says it.)

### **Deities**

- Capitalise the word "Goddess" as you do "God." One of the Sabbat is named after the goddess Ostara; but Ostara is the Goddess of Spring.
- Wiccans worship a Goddess and a God, not a goddess and a god. But some Wiccans worship many goddesses and gods. The difference is in the first case, "Goddess" and "God" are names, and in the second they're not.

### **Traditions (denominations) and Covens**

- Names of Traditions (denominations; and this word is capitalised to indicate that it does not mean "customs") should be capitalised even if they are not named after a founder. It may be obvious to capitalised Gardnerian or Alexandrian, but names like Eclectic and Adventure should be capitalised too.
- The word "coven" should be capitalised when it is part of a name: Coven Luna, or the Coven of the Silver Midnight, but not when it isn't: The coven I work with is small.
- It is not necessary to say "the Campsight Coven" any more than it's necessary to say "the St. Mary's Church."

### **Services and Clergy**

- A Wiccan service is called a "Circle," and the word is capitalised to distinguish it from a non-religious gathering. Our circle of friends worships together in a Circle. ("Circle" may also be part of the name of a Wiccan group, and as such is capitalised: Our coven/study group is called Goddess Circle.
- Religious titles like "priestess" and "priest" should be capitalised when they refer to a specific cleric, but usually not otherwise: She is the Priestess of Campsight Coven; but He has been a priest for 20 years.
- Wicca's formal titles for fully-ordained clergy are "Lady" and "Lord," and are used only with names: This is Lady O'Gaea, but He

is the coven's priest, not He is the coven's Lord. (Lady and Lord, used without names, are titles reserved to the Goddess and God.)

## **Other Neo-Pagan and Heathen Religions**

Wicca is not the only Neo-Pagan religion, so here are some tips for writing about a couple of the others. The first thing you should know is that ... not all modern Pagans call themselves Pagan!

### **Heathens**

- Northern religions and their followers generally prefer to be called Heathen rather than Pagan. The same rules for capitalisation apply: one may hold a heathen attitude, but the one who holds it is a Heathen.
- The word "Heathenry" is comparable to the word "Paganism," and should be capitalised when it refers to one or more Heathen religions.
- The words Asatru and Vanatru (Norse Pagan religions), Asatruar and Vanatruar (one or more followers of Asatru or Vanatru), are also always capitalised.
- Heathens meet in "kindreds" and "troths," and those words should be capitalised when they refer to specific religious groups: The Kindred met on Saturday to pledge a troth.
- Heathen gatherings are called blots (rhymes with "boats" and means "blessings") and sunbels. These too are capitalised when they refer to specific gatherings.

### **Other Pagans**

- The word "Pagan" should always be capitalised when it refers to one or more specific religions or a follower of Wicca or Druidry, with or without the (capitalised) prefix Neo-. Drums may pound out pagan rhythms, but you hear them at a Pagan gathering.
- The words Druid(s), Druidism, and Druidry should always be capitalised. "Druidic" may be used with a small d according to the rules above.
- For Druids, words like "Grove" and "Circle" and "Nemeton" should be capitalised when they refer to actual groups: The Grove meets in the grove.

When you interview a Heathen or Pagan, please check with her or him about the capitalisation and protocols s/he and any group involved observe.

### **INTERESTING QUESTIONS TO ASK A WITCH**

**(Example of questions which may help get an interview started)**

A lot of people are still influenced by Hollywood images of Witches (and now, Wiccans), ranging from B-movies to modern sit-coms. None of them present an accurate picture of Wicca or other Pagan religions. Most of the popular images come from the old idea that Witches are Satanic. We're not, and most of us don't know anything about Devil-worship, so it's inappropriate to even ask us. Instead, ask us about what we do believe.

- Ask us about the Goddess, who in Wicca is all that is eternal and generative.
- Ask us about the God, who in Wicca is all that dies and is reborn.
- Ask us whether we see all goddesses as aspects of one Goddess (and all gods as aspects of one God), or understand each named deity as a distinct entity.
- Ask us about the five sacred Elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Spirit.
- Ask us about our beliefs in life after death, about the Summerland, and about reincarnation.
- Ask us about our Altar Tools -- what they are, what they're for, how they are consecrated.
- Ask us about how our Circles are conducted.
- Ask us about magic and the ethical laws that guide our spell casting.
- Ask us how we feel about the "hag" image of Witches. (Ask Heathens how they feel about the Neo-Nazi image of Odinism, and Druids about the "sacrificing virgins" images they have to cope with.)
- Ask us how we feel about being identified as New Age.
- Divination isn't a tenet of Wicca, but most of us practice it in one or more ways. When you ask us what form of divination we use, remember to ask us what we use it for.

Ask some of these questions, though, and our responses will be meaningful and informative - and so will your interview.

### **Who to Ask**

Would you ask a pre-teen to tell you about Catholicism or Presbyterianism? Would you ask someone who's just converted to tell you about Judaism? Maybe; but would you take their answers as representative of that faith's theology and practice? Probably not. In fact, you'd be more likely to interview a long-time congregant, who's familiar with the way things work at this church or synagogue. You'd be more likely to interview the pastor or priest or rabbi if you wanted to get the skinny about the tenets of the faith, or its history, or the difference among its denominations.

So it should be when you're writing about Wicca and other Neo-Pagan religions. Ask about your subject's credentials. How experienced are they, and in what ways?

Wicca is one of few religions that accepts solitary practice as legitimate. Wicca is also one of few religions that has no central authority, so literally anyone can call themselves a Wiccan, and excuse their inexperience by saying they're solitary. Such people are certainly qualified to talk about what they do, but can they talk about coven work or a Tradition's perspective or about the local Pagan community? Probably not!

Look for the community's elders. If there is a public group, contact its leaders and ask to speak with someone who is not only experienced in their own Pagan faith, but may know something about other Pagan religions as well. Such elders do exist, and many are willing to share what they know.

If you are interviewing an author, find out what their practical experience is. There are people who write about Wicca without ever having cast a solitary Circle or worked with a coven, much less led one; there are people who write about Wicca without having been initiated or contributing to Pagan community in any way. These people may have something interesting to say, but it's important that you hear it in the context of their experience.

### **Which Witch (or Druid or Heathen) to Ask**

When I'm trying to find someone, my first recourse is to type their name into my search engine. If that doesn't produce helpful results, or to double-check something I've heard about a particular Tradition, or about the use of a Tool or how often one herb or another is actually used, I go to the Witchvox website. Listings there include stores, groups, individuals, and clergy -- and it's all neatly organized by state. Not all legitimate groups are listed there, but they do make an effort to keep the flakes out.

Groups (I use Yahoo, but there are, of course, others) are an auxiliary source of information, but again, anyone can start one, and people on line aren't always who they say they are.

## **DEFINING PAGAN TERMS**

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the terms Wicca, Witchcraft, Wiccan, Witch, Neo-Pagan, Pagan, etc

### **Pagans:**

Paganism is not a single religion, but an umbrella term for all those religions other than the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. A Pagan is a person who follows one of those "other" faiths. Many Witches, Wiccans, Reconstructionists, and other Pagans simply identify themselves as "Pagan" or "Pagans" when talking with others who may not be familiar with the complexity of the different belief systems. This can make it sound like "Paganism" is a religion instead of a collection of religions. Neo-paganism should also not be confused with the "New Age" movement, as Pagans are almost exclusively involved in distinctive religions while New Age spirituality draws from many sources and esoteric spiritual techniques which are generally added as an extra layer on top of whatever religion one normally follows.

### **Witchcraft and Witches:**

A practitioner of a nature-based/revering or folk belief system, art or religion. Not all Witches follow the same belief system. Some practice what is called the "Old Religion" which has its roots in Pagan pre-monotheistic folkways and beliefs and which usually follows the agricultural seasonal cycles. Many Witches believe in a polytheistic deity structure usually based upon the local gods and goddesses of the area of origin. Witches may practice alone as "solitaries" or in covens. There are also family groups or traditions that trace their practices and beliefs within the same close group throughout several generations. Some

Witches consider Witchcraft to be a religion while others simply practice witchcraft as a magical art.

### **Traditional Wicca:**

A modern religion of Witchcraft is called "Wicca." Traditional Wicca is based on the teachings of Gerald Gardner, is coven (group) based and each coven can trace its lineage (line of teaching passed on by initiated Traditional priests and priestesses) back to Gardner himself. There are offshoots of Gardnerian Traditional Wicca such as Alexandrian Wicca, Georgian Wicca and many others. Traditional Wicca is considered a 'mystery' religion, one that requires initiation by the coven and has a "degree system" or different levels of rank based upon coven training and the readiness of the initiate to accept the duties and responsibilities of that degree. Traditional Wiccan covens have a core of inner knowledge-often called the "Book of Shadows"-which is shared only with initiated Wiccans. Most Traditional Wiccans believe in the balance of male-female divinity. Traditional Wiccans are seldom solitary except for those 'Elders'-usually former priests and priestesses-who may have retired from active coven involvement, have taken a voluntary sabbatical or do not have access to a Traditional coven in their area.

### **Other Forms of Wicca:**

A newer form of Wicca has developed since the 1970's that is looser in structure and practice than Traditional Wicca. These practitioners may follow a mixture of various or 'eclectic' Pagan and/or non-Pagan beliefs. Some have formed 'traditions' or covens of their own, with or without a degree system, and have written a "book of shadows" outlining their own belief system and coven structure. Many are 'solitaries' who practice their beliefs and formulate their personal rituals in their own way.

### **Reconstructionist Religions:**

Since modern Wicca is by far the most well known of the Neo-pagan religions or belief systems, many people incorrectly assume that all Pagan or Heathen religions are very much the same as or follow closely the specific tenets and ritual structures of Wicca. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each Pagan or Heathen religion has its own ritual structure, core beliefs and there is often little that can be said to hold 'true' as a universal belief held by either all Pagans or Reconstructionists. In fact, most Reconstructionists take great umbrage when their cultural religious practices and/or Gods are misappropriated and/or misinterpreted by Neo-pagan groups. This has, in recent years, been cause for considerable friction to arise between Pagans and Reconstructionists as they interact with one another.

Reconstructionism is a general term used to describe those religions (sometimes designated as 'Heathen' with many groups preferring the term 'polytheists' or 'pagan') that are the continuation of a cultural spiritual tradition into the modern era. Great emphasis is placed upon scholarship, the use of classic texts (such as 'The Eddas' in *ġsatrœ* and the ancient Egyptian texts in Kemetism) and the revival of traditional modes of worship. Magic(k) plays much less of a role in Reconstructionist religions than it usually does in Wicca or Witchcraft. Cultural relevance is stressed, but this should not be confused with either nationalism or racism, as most Reconstructionists, while protective of their cultural heritage, are neither racists nor bigots. Some of the major Reconstructionist Religions are:

### **Strega:**

(Stregheria, La Vecchia Religione, "The Old Religion") An Italian form of Witchcraft encompassing elements of the pre-Christian European mystery teachings and the ancient Etruscan and Tuscan religions. Many modern Italian Witches today, especially those who still reside in Italy, are Christians who have simply continued to practice their native Old Religion alongside the 'new'.

### **Ásatrú:**

(Norse, Nordic, Reginroth Northern Heathenism) Ásatrú is a Reconstructionist, polytheistic faith based on pre-Christian Northern European beliefs, Gods and Heroes. Most adherents of Ásatrú (Ásatrúar) put much emphasis on historical accuracy and the heroic tales as recorded in texts such as the Icelandic sagas and 'The Eddas'. Ásatrú has a rich and complex ethical system in which personal honor, truth and integrity are considered to be some of the highest virtues.

### **Baltic:**

The Reconstructionist religions of the Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian peoples. Like their neighbours, the Slavs, folklore and custom are important elements in their practices and rituals and the 'Balts' have largely maintained their language, folklore, pagan beliefs and customs throughout the centuries. Nature as a sacred force is emphasized as is harmony both within the individual and in society and the relationship with the gods and ancestors.

### **Celtic Reconstructionism:**

Celtic Reconstructionism is an umbrella term for those who follow the cultural and religious practices of the Gaelic or Brythonic (Celtic) peoples. Beliefs and ritual practices vary from one ethnic or tribal group

to another, but almost all place great store in history, language, the surviving Gaelic literature and cultural relevance/context (with the emphasis being placed upon linguistic and cultural, rather than DNA or religious, ties to those regions). As in most other Reconstructionist religions, personal honesty, integrity, honor in both word and deed and scholarship are very important and highly valued.

### **Druidism:**

A reconstruction and/or a reweaving of the spiritual threads of the wisdom and ritual framework of the ancient Druids. Druids are generally polytheistic and follow a calendar based upon the astronomical yearly stages of the sun, the earth and the moon. Modern or Neo-Druids can be either male or female. Since the ancient order or class of Druids passed along their lore and wisdom through a closely guarded oral tradition, little is known of the actual rites themselves. However, Modern Druidism considers itself as a mainly spiritual path wherein the old knowledge is still accessible through insight and revelation. Like the ancient order, Neo-Druids often denote different levels of learning or expertise. The most commonly known classifications are the Bards (composer of verses; keeper of the lore), The Ovates (guardians and interpreters of the mysteries; diviners) and the Druids (advisors; authorities of worship, law and ceremony). The entire training process for new initiates may last several years.

### **Hellenismos:**

Hellenic or Greek Reconstructionists (Hellenists, Hellenes, Hellenism) are generally polytheists who worship and revere the ancient Greek Olympian gods. It is primarily a 'votive' religion where 'offerings' or gifts to the Gods are an important element of ritual practice. Hellenismos has a highly developed ethical system based upon moderation, hospitality and reciprocity, place great value on scholarship and specifically on the use of classical texts.

### **Kemetism:**

A modern religion based upon the ancient Egyptian family of gods/goddesses and the concepts of Ma'at (all) and Netjer (the divine force). While many gods and goddesses are revered or acknowledged, the Kemetic religion is not polytheistic in the same sense that many other Pagan or Heathen religions are. In many sects of Kemetism, the concept is better described as a 'monolatry' or one god manifesting as many distinct personalities and divinities. Rituals and offerings are often elaborate and great value is placed upon both ancient texts and modern archeological discoveries and research.

### **Religio Romana:**

The Religio Romana is the pre-Christian religion of Rome. The modern religion attempts to reconstruct the ancient faith of Rome and its gods, goddesses and temple rituals as closely as possible. Every attempt is made to rely on actual historical and archaeological evidence and much emphasis is placed upon the original classical texts, writers and language.

### **Slavic:**

The Slavic peoples are not a "race", but are related through culture and area. These regional groups include the Russians, Polish, Czechs, Ukrainians, Byelorussia's, Serbo-Croatians, Macedonians, Slovenians, Bulgarians, Kashubians and Slovaks. In reconstructing Slavic religions, adherents place much store on Slav folk tales and stories. Dualism is an important concept in Slavic religion, but differs from the 'good' and 'evil' dichotomy of post-Christian thought. Here dualism is understood to be a system of complimenting opposites such as darkness and light, winter and summer, female and male, cold and hot. The God-brothers Bialybog "white-god" and Czarnobog "black-god" who rule the light half and dark half of the year respectively, are further illustrations of this polarity. Nature spirits also play an important role in Slavic beliefs.

## **COMMON PAGAN BELIEFS**

Despite the myriad of different Pagan spiritual traditions, there are some beliefs and practices that are common within them all. One of these is beliefs is a reverence for the Earth we live on. Most Pagans have a deep concern for the environment and feel a close connection to the various seasons and cycles of the earth. One reason is that the Earth is often viewed as representative of the Mother Goddess and her resources and beauties should be conserved and preserved out of respect for her and for our own survival. Another reason is because many Pagans believe in the sacredness of all life forms and the fact that all life forms, both on the earth and in the universe are connected, thus they must be treated with respect. Some Pagan beliefs also believe that certain aspects of nature are representative of various deities or spiritual guides.

### **Magic(k)**

Another common part of many Pagan beliefs is the practice of magic. Some Pagans don't accept or believe in the concept of magic and will instead have rituals or ceremonies that are more in tune with their own

personal belief system. Although magic may sound like some kind of special effects show, it's nothing of the kind. Essentially, magic sometimes referred to as magick, is the use of various techniques and rituals to draw on the energies of the earth and the universe in order to bring about a positive result. Some forms of magic may be simple, such as a folk-magic spell of burning a green candle to help bring about prosperity, while other forms of magic may be more elaborate and highly ritualized. In essence, the practice of spells and magic are ways in which to help bring about desired results, mark milestones in life such as birth and marriage, or a way to communicate with deity. In some ways it is similar to prayer or other forms of mainstream religious rituals.

## **Deity**

There are many ways in which Pagans will view or interpret Deity or the Divine, depending upon which tradition they follow. Many, but not all, of the Pagan traditions recognize a balance between feminine and masculine divinity which is seen in the concepts of Mother Earth and Father Sky or the many gods and goddesses that are representative of polytheist beliefs. While many Pagan beliefs are polytheist, some are not and in these traditions a person may refer to deity as Great Mother, Great Father, the Source or the All. One of the things that differentiates Paganism from other mainstream religions is that deity is not typically viewed as a separate patriarch, instead there is a more personal relationship involved in which each individual must figure out what deity means to them, how to work with this Divinity and what lessons they need to learn from it. Put simply, there is more of a partnership involved rather than a separateness.

## **PAGAN HOLIDAYS**

Despite competition from twentieth century "life in the fast lane", the awesome spectacle repeated in the pattern of the changing seasons still touches our lives. In the ages when people worked more closely with nature just to survive, the numinous power of this pattern had supreme recognition. Rituals and festivals evolved to channel these transformations for the good of the community toward a good sowing and harvest and bountiful herds and hunting.

One result of this process is our image of the "Wheel of the Year" with its eight spokes -- the four major agricultural and pastoral festivals and the

four minor solar festivals of the solstices and equinoxes. In common with many ancient people, many Witches consider the day as beginning at sundown and ending at sundown the following day. So, for example, Samhain starts at dusk on the 31st, ending the evening of the 1st.

**Samhain: Southern Hemisphere on April 30 to May 1 (Northern Hemisphere October 31 - November Eve) -**

The night lengthens and we work with the positive aspects of darkness in the increasing star- and moonlight. Many Craft traditions, following the ancient Celts, consider this the eve of the New Year (as day begins with sundown, so the year begins with the first day of winter). It is one night when the barriers between the worlds of life and death are uncertain, allowing the ancestors to walk among the living, welcomed and feasted by their kin, bestowing the Otherworld's blessings. We may focus within ourselves to look "through the glass darkly", developing our divination and psychic skills.

**Yule: Southern Hemisphere on June 21 (Northern Hemisphere on December 21) -** The sun is at its nadir, the year's longest night. We internalise and synthesize the outward-directed activities of the previous summer months. Some covens hold a Festival of Light to commemorate the Goddess as Mother giving birth to the Sun God. Others celebrate the victory of the Lord of Light over the Lord of Darkness as the turning point from which the days will lengthen. The name "Yule" derives from the Norse word for "wheel", and many of our customs (like those of the Christian holiday) derive from Norse and Celtic Pagan practices (the Yule log, the tree, the custom of Wassailing, et al).

**Imbolc: Southern Hemisphere on August 1-2 (Northern Hemisphere on January 31 - February Eve) -** As the days' lengthening becomes perceptible, many candles are lit to hasten the warming of the earth and emphasize the reviving of life. "Imbolc" is from Old Irish, and may mean "in the belly", and Oimelc, "ewe's milk", as this is the lambing time. It is the holiday of the Celtic Fire Goddess Brigid, whose threefold nature rules smithcraft, poetry/inspiration, and healing. Brigid's fire is a symbolic transformation offering healing, visions, and tempering. Februum is a Latin word

meaning purification -- naming the month of cleansing. The thaw releases waters (Brigid is also a goddess of holy wells) -- all that was hindered is let flow at this season.

**Ostara: Southern Hemisphere on September 21-22  
(Northern Hemisphere on March 21) -**

Day and night are equal as spring begins to enliven the environment with new growth and more newborn animals. Many people feel "reborn" after the long nights and coldness of winter. The Germanic Goddess Ostara (Goddess of the Dawn), after whom Easter is named, is the tutelary deity of this holiday, or for some the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre. It is she, as herald of the sun, who announces the triumphal return of life to the earth. Witches in the Greek tradition celebrate the return from Hades of Demeter's daughter Persephone; Witches in the Celtic tradition see in the blossoms the passing of Olwen, in whose footprints flowers bloom. The enigmatic egg, laid by the regenerating snake or the heavenly bird, is a powerful symbol of the emergence of life out of apparent death or absence of life.

**Beltaine: Southern Hemisphere on November 1  
(Northern Hemisphere on 1 April 30 - May Eve) -** As the weather heats up and the plant world burgeons, an exuberant mood prevails. Folk dance around the Maypole, emblem of fertility (the name "May" comes from a Norse word meaning "to shoot out new growth"). May 1st was the midpoint of a five-day Roman festival to Flora, Goddess of Flowers. The name "Beltaine" means "Bel's Fires"; in Celtic lands, cattle were driven between bonfires to bless them, and people leaped the fires for luck. The association in Germany of May Eve with Witches' gatherings is a memory of pre-Christian tradition. "Wild" water (dew, flowing streams or ocean water) is collected as a basis for healing drinks and potions for the year to come.

**Litha: Southern Hemisphere on December 21 (Northern Hemisphere on June 21) -** On this day, the noon of the year and the longest day, light and life are abundant. We focus outward, experiencing the joys of plenty, tasting the first fruits of the season. In some traditions the sacred marriage of the Goddess and God is celebrated (in others, this is attributed to the springtime holidays). Rhea, the Mountain

Mother of Crete, has breathed out all creation. It is also the festival of the Chinese Goddess of Light, Li.

**Lughnasadh or Lammas: Southern Hemisphere on February 2 (Northern Hemisphere on July 31 - August eve)** - This festival has two aspects. First, it is one of the Celtic fire festivals, honoring the Celtic culture-bringer and Solar God Lugh (Lleu to the Welsh, Lugus to the Gauls). In Ireland, races and games were held in his name and that of his mother, Tailtiu (these may have been funeral games). The second aspect is Lammas, the Saxon Feast of Bread, at which the first of the grain harvest is consumed in ritual loaves. These aspects are not too dissimilar, as the shamanic death and transformation of Lleu can be compared to that of the Barley God, known from the folksong "John Barleycorn". This time is also sacred to the Greek Goddess of the Moon and the Hunt, Artemis.

**Mabon: Southern Hemisphere on March 20 (Northern Hemisphere on September 21)** - This day sees light and dark in balance again, before the descent to the dark times. A harvest festival is held, thanking the Goddess for giving us enough sustenance to feed us through the winter. Harvest festivals of many types still occur today in farming country, and Thanksgiving is an echo of these.

In this way the Wheel turns, bringing us back to Samhain where we began our cycle. Many of the festival days coincide with holidays of the Jewish and Christian calendars. This is no accident; these points in the year were important community celebrations, and were kept largely intact although they were rededicated to the Christian God or a saint. The names may have changed, but the old Pagan practices still show through.

As you can see, the Wheel of the Year for Northern Hemisphere Pagans is directly the opposite of the Southern Hemisphere Pagans.

### **COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PAGANISM**

Perhaps because Pagans are in the minority or because of fears based upon ignorance, there are many common misconceptions concerning Pagan beliefs. One of the most common is that Paganism is the same as Satanism. While Pagans and Satanists do not accept the Christian view of

Satan, the various forms of Paganism do not follow the same belief system as Satanists.

Here are a few other common misconceptions concerning Pagan beliefs.

### **Paganism is the same as a cult**

A cult is defined as a group that is often led by an authoritative figure who controls the group through intimidation, rigid doctrines and isolation. However the wide variety of Pagan beliefs rarely have a central authority figure and do not follow exclusionary beliefs but instead focus upon diversity and community. There are also any Pagans who are solitary practitioners and do not belong to any organized group or coven.

### **Paganism is the same as New Age beliefs**

Pagan beliefs are often referred to today as Neo-Pagan or Neo-Paganism, meaning that the beliefs are a revival or new interpretation of ancient spiritual beliefs. However Neo-Pagan is not the same as New Age. The New Age was a variety of interests that grew in popularity during the 1960's and 70's. New Age spirituality draws on many different sources and esoteric practices, and these practices are often layered on top of whatever religion that a person typically follows. In contrast, Pagans almost exclusively follow a distinct tradition or a combination of two or more traditions, in which case they are referred to as an Eclectic Pagan. As you can see, the term Paganism encompasses a large variety of rich and diverse beliefs whose roots are part of very ancient spiritual beliefs.

## **SOME PAGAN BELIEFS & TEACHINGS**

**Pagan ethics** - Wiccans follow a creed called “the Rede” which states: “An it harm none, do as ye will” or in plain English: “As long as it doesn’t hurt anyone, do what you want.”

**The Law of Three** - Many Pagans also believe in the Law of Three or the Law of Return, an idea that is similar to karma in Buddhism: “For good or for ill, shall be returned to us threefold.” Again, in plain-speaking terms: “Whatever you do will have consequences for you three times over

**Emphasis on feminine deity & feminism** - Witchcraft traditionally and in modern times is made up of mostly females. Wiccans usually

speak of the Goddess rather than God, or sometimes “the Goddess and the God.”

**Pagan worship** - One thing most Pagans have in common is their reverence for nature. They are concerned with the changing seasons and the cycles of the moon. They are looking for harmony with nature rather than dominion over it. For example, Wiccans believe that to the extent that there is a god or goddess above everything, that god(dess) is in everything. (Pantheism.)

**Sexual license** - One of the biggest attractions to Paganism is the misconception of “no rules” sexuality. Sex as the generative force in nature is seen by most Pagans as something utterly sacred and Pagans do feel that the physical act of love is to be approached with great respect and responsibility.

**Sexual preference** – Pagans generally respect a person’s personal choice in the matter of sexual preferences.

**Worship naked?** - Some covens, particularly Traditional ones, perform their rituals in the nude, or what we term skyclad. No group working skyclad should be accepting members under the age of eighteen. Indeed, most covens will not accept minors at all, regardless of dress code.

**Vegetarians** - A significant number of Pagans are vegans and vegetarians, but they are still well in the minority. The cycle of life naturally involves death on a daily basis, and we are biologically designed to eat and digest meat, so doing so is in no way unnatural.

**(If you have questions that are not answered in this guide, please feel free to contact the South African Pagan Council.)**

**SOURCES:** The Witching Well Education and Research Center; The Witches’ League for Public Awareness; Pagan Secrets Revealed; MediaBlvd; Pagan Topics – Expelling the Myths; Spotlight Ministries; Pagan Theologies; The Portrayal of Paganism in the Media; Paganism: A guide for the Media; A Pagan primer for those who are new to Paganism; Common Wiccan Beliefs; The Benton Foundation; Religious Tolerance.