

# **OUT OF THE BROOM CLOSET?**

**A Guide to Revealing Your  
Practice of Witchcraft to Others**

**by**

**Gary Cantrell**

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## FOREWORD

This material is the result of many months of work, growing from what was initially a single page in my Mirror Book into the volume you are reading today. It was written in an effort to aid practitioners of the Old Religion in dealing with the issues of making our practice of Wicca known to others, or “coming out of the broom closet” to use the vernacular. I believe this book is rather unique in that regard as I am presently unaware of any other publications which have addressed this specific topic in any great detail.

I doubt that I would have been able to complete this work without the support and encouragement of my wife. Her proof-reading and editing comments were invaluable, particularly as they came from a non-Pagan, and offered insights and suggestions that might not have normally been recognized. Additionally, I would like to thank “Photography by Sheri” for contributing the unique artwork for the book jacket.

However, the opinions and comments expressed here-in regarding going public with our practice of the Wiccan religion are, with the exception of the material provided in Chapter 8, my own and represent my personal feelings. There may be others who will disagree, perhaps vehemently, with the thesis of this work and that disagreement is perfectly understandable. We all have our opinions and I

respect your right to differ with me on this very important subject. None the less, I personally feel the time is right to discuss this topic and I strongly feel it is relevant to many of us. All I ask is that you read the material I have presented and at least consider what has been said in light of your own feelings and needs.

This is not meant to be another textbook or a how-to book on witchcraft. *Out Of The Broom Closet* is mostly a chronicle of my own personal experiences as I grew in my skills as a Priest of Wicca and finally acknowledged my practice of the Old Religion to persons outside of the Craft. In writing this book I have attempted to offer some guidelines, thoughts, and suggestions for those of our religion who may be similarly inclined. Hopefully the information presented here will provide the impetus for others to at least evaluate the possibility of openly expressing their beliefs.

It is widely accepted that Wicca is one of the fastest growing religions in the world today, and in the United States alone we probably number in the hundreds of thousands as a conservative estimate. In terms of world wide practitioners we may well be in the millions. We are in the professions, the arts and the sciences. We are peace officers, engineers, office workers, builders, doctors and farmers; and given the opportunity we can educate others by publicly acknowledging and discussing our religion.

In doing so we can provide an informed and intelli-

gent response to ultra-conservative religious groups, and we can counter the anti-witch bias all too frequently portrayed in the news and entertainment media. We have it good today but it can be better, and we can make it truly wonderful for those who will follow us tomorrow. We can help to make a difference if we chose, or are able, to do so.

Los Angeles, 1998.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **Why This Book Was Written**

My purpose in writing this book is quite simply to convey to you my own personal experiences as I decided to step out of the broom closet as a witch and publicly admit my practice of the Old Religion. This was not a decision that was reached lightly. Only after numerous discussions with my wife where we carefully weighed the various pro's and con's of this action did I elect to take this very major step.

Some may question my reasons for doing so, preferring to remain incognito in their practice of the Craft and seeing no valid reason to make public announcements or otherwise show the colors. For those who wish to remain anonymous I believe that I understand your reasoning and I totally support your decision to do so. However, because I firmly believe that only through public education into the true nature of the Craft will we eventually obtain full public acceptance, I have chosen to take this step in the hope that others may be encouraged to do likewise.

Although I must forewarn you that I am fortunate to live in a part of the country which is liberal by virtually any standard. What I am able to do in the open atmosphere of Southern California may well not be possible in a more politically or religiously restrictive environment. Thus, the de-

cision to admit publicly that you are a practitioner of witchcraft must be taken with great care. Jobs and relationships could be at risk and in some parts of the country you may well find yourself the subject of either verbal or even physical abuse by those who's minds still dwell in the Dark Ages.

Unfortunately, equality under the written law is one thing but in actual practice it can sometimes be quite another. For example we are still striving to reach total sexual equality in the workplace and full religious tolerance is apparently equally difficult to obtain in some cases, especially if one practices a religion somewhat out of the perceived mainstream. The bottom line is that this is a decision which each person must make individually given his or her own set of unique circumstances. What has happened to me is by no means a guarantee that everyone else will be lucky enough to be accorded the same degree of acceptance.

If you feel that you can go public without risk or danger to yourself or loved ones, then I do encourage you to do so if at all possible. The more of us that speak up the faster our efforts will crystallize and hopefully the time will come when these words of warning need not have to be written.

I am sure that there are those who may be somewhat at odds with several of the concepts I will discuss in this book, and that is perfectly fine since the path of Wicca is a very personal path and few of us will see everything in



the same perspective. Actually, I think we can all agree that the very definition and history of Wicca is somewhat open to interpretation. Scholars and scientists are continually revising and updating historically significant events as new information is uncovered or identified. It is not uncommon to see previous “facts” suddenly cast into uncertainty as new concepts emerge. And additionally much of each individuals perception of Wiccan history and the very definition of what Wicca is, including some of the ritual content, will usually depend to a great extent on the Path or Tradition of ones personal beliefs.

All I mean to do here is give some scope and depth to my own personal experiences and feelings as I made my religion known. What each of you may or may not take from these words is totally up to you as individuals. This is my personal story and I present it for your education and information, or even for your entertainment, as the case may be.

I began this work as part of my Book Of Shadows, the Mirror Book portion. It was my intent to record my feelings about my own relationship with the Wiccan religion and my spiritual growth in that religion. It was not my original intent to write a dissertation on my personal experiences for others to read, but if these words will help even one other witch in reaching this important decision then maybe this effort will have been worthwhile. Regardless if that decision is a yes or a no.

There is some material included in this text which deals with rituals, the explanation of our holidays, and a brief history of witchcraft. However, that material is presented only in so far as I felt it necessary to provide background information for the reader who may be new to Wicca specifically or to Paganism in general.

I must reiterate that this is not a “How To Be A Witch” book nor is it a detailed step-by-step work on how to practice witchcraft, there are many other books presently available which address that topic quite well. It is only a book detailing my own personal experiences in stepping out of the broom closet and making my Wiccan religion known. This work was undertaken to reflect my experiences and learning, and what is presented here may not necessarily represent the experiences of other Wiccans in similar situations. It is my own personal account and I am by no means suggesting that every other Wiccan follow in these footsteps.

The ultimate decision to go public with your Wiccan religion must always be your very personal choice. One based on your own requirements, your circle of friends, and your responsibilities in your workplace or in your community. While your friends and neighbors may accept your religion without comment or criticism if you are simply an average citizen, it might be impossible for someone under public scrutiny, such as an elected official in a small and generally

conservative town for example, to be just as open and candid.

I can not stress enough that the decision to go public with your practice of Wicca must be considered carefully with a full understanding of the possible ramifications. I should note also that going public can take many forms. Wearing an unobtrusive pentacle ring is one thing, while walking down the streets of your neighborhood in full ritual robe with an athame hanging from your hip is obviously quite another. Aside from the possible legality of the athame itself, of course.

I do feel however, that as more of us come into the open the full scope of the present day Wiccan revival will become known. Those who seek to suppress us will eventually be forced to recognize that Wicca is here to stay and that we are a force to be reckoned with, both economically and politically. The Internet, with its access to uncensored and unlimited information will surely be a driving force to affect that realization.

And since we share with most of the worlds other religions a love of our Earth, it's environment and it's creatures, and of our fellow human beings, I sincerely hope that the road here will eventually and ultimately be one of understanding and co-operation, and not one of confrontation.

## **My Personal Wiccan Beliefs**

Now, having said all that let me explain who I am and what I personally believe. I am a Pagan and a witch in the tradition of Wicca, following an eclectic but basically Anglo-Celtic path of witchcraft. Quite possibly because of my own English-Irish-German heritage I was drawn to Cernunos and Lugh, and to Cerridwen and Brigit, early in my evolution from Pagan to Wiccan. As a point of clarification, the word Pagan as I use it here refers to those who follow any of the typically polytheist or pantheist nature oriented pre-Christian old religions. I am using the more descriptive definition of witch to generally refer to those Pagans who follow the Wiccan tradition. One can be Pagan and not be a witch, and not all witches are Wiccans, but every witch is indeed a Pagan.

In so far as my own background is concerned, I have been a Pagan for over forty years and an initiated witch since early in 1995. I was originally a solitary practitioner of Wicca but have recently formed a small coven in which I am proud to presently function as High Priest.

In so far as my personal understanding of my Pagan and Wiccan beliefs developed, the recognizable beginning did not come for me until the early 1990's. I grew up essentially an agnostic but since my early twenty's I had always felt a closeness and a personal communication with nature. This feeling was coupled with almost a disdain for those

who felt they must house themselves inside an edifice to worship. I never understood why a person could not understand the majesty of creation by simply being part of it. After all, creation and divinity was always present at the beach, mountains and deserts, so why worship inside a structure when the real thing was right there in front of you?

I also never identified with the Christian heaven or hell dogma, nor the male one-God concept that seemed to ignore the very thing that I was beginning to realize was important to me. It seemed that there was a far more realistic theology based on an understanding and appreciation of nature itself as the divinity, and that divinity must surely have both male and female components. However, at this early stage in my religious life I had no real awareness of Paganism or of what a Pagan was.

It was quite by chance that early in 1990, while browsing a rather random selection of on-line bulletin board services from my home computer, that I came across something titled "Pagan Message Boards." My first reaction was one of cautious interest but after several nights of browsing the posted texts the messages began to make a lot of sense. I returned to those bulletin boards many times over the next few months and finally realized that the religious concepts being discussed and explained were exactly what I had been feeling for as long as I could remember.

It was with a mixture of curiosity and some trepida-

tion that I posted a message asking for assistance in identifying some books that one might read to better understand the Pagan religion. Within a matter of days I had received numerous replies, most of which referenced the same several authors and works. My first acquisition was Margot Adler's book *Drawing Down The Moon* which I avidly read cover to cover. I remember finally putting this volume down and saying to myself, with a lump in my throat and even some tears in my eyes, "This is what I am, I am a Pagan." I had found something extremely important, something that would change my life forever.

The culmination of my acceptance of the Pagan religion came to me on a Saturday afternoon early in 1994. I was sitting in my garden meditating, the sun was warm, my eyes were closed and I could hear birds singing in the trees. I was at the point I would describe as deep in the alpha state when I very distinctly and very clearly heard a warm female voice softly say, "Welcome home."

There was no shock, no fear and no concern on hearing those words. Only a profound sense of unconditional love, warmth, acceptance and understanding. I dedicated myself to the Goddess the next evening, beginning my first year-and-a-day in the study of witchcraft and self-initiated as a practicing solitary witch at Imbolc of 1995. I now proudly follow the Wiccan Law and the Old Code of honor and Wiccan chivalry to the best of my ability. I have

dedicated myself to the God and Goddess, and to all those who love them, for now and forever more.

Over the years my collection of Craft and related reference books has grown to over one hundred volumes, with probably an equal number of books dedicated to the various aspects of early Western European history. My computer on-line list of Pagan and Wiccan resources now exceeds at least thirty well-used network addresses with a host of references to various Internet sites and Web pages, and my network of close Pagan friends has grown to over fifty people scattered across the United States and the United Kingdom.

I continue to grow each day in my witchcraft knowledge and skills, to experience the joy and peace of a wonderful and beautiful nature loving religion, to feel the closeness of our God and Goddess, and to relish the warmth and trust of my friends in the Craft.

### **In Conclusion**

So then, you have in this brief introduction the reasons that led me to write this book, as well as a short description of my own personal journey as I explored the realms of first Paganism and finally Wicca. The path I believe our Lord and Lady have set me on is my personal one, as it is or will be for each of you. We who practice the Old Religion will each commit to the God and Goddess in Their

own way and in Their own time. That includes how, and if, you as an individual witch elect to step into the light.

And so, whatever decision you may reach on going public with your practice of the Craft, I wish you joy and bright blessings. May our Lord and Lady always be at your side and may the Wiccan Law ever be your guide:

“Bide the Wiccan Law ye must,  
In perfect love and perfect trust.  
These eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill;  
An ye harm none, do as ye will.  
And ever mind the Rule of Three;  
What ye send out, comes back to thee.  
Follow this with mind and heart,  
And merry ye meet, and merry ye part.”

Blessed be my friends.



## **2. WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED WICCA?**

As I noted in the previous chapter, this is not another book on how to become a witch nor is it meant to be a detailed account of the Wiccan religion or its holidays and rituals. This chapter is provided only because I felt that some background information for the beginner would be helpful in understanding the more germane chapters of the text where-in my growth in the Craft, and my experiences in revealing my religion to others, are described.

I have included a rather detailed bibliography at the end of this book which gives many titles of works that provide a much better insight into the depths of the Old Religion than I wish to undertake in this text. There are many works referenced there which describe the Wiccan Religion in great detail, and I encourage you to become a voracious reader if you feel that Paganism or Wicca has an interest for you.

### **How I Define Our Religion**

I think it is important at the outset to define what it is I am talking about when using the term “Wicca”. Wicca is a word probably of Celtic, or a mix of Celtic and very old English, origin meaning “wise.” The word “witch” is considered to be derived from Wicca and is generally understood to mean “wise one” or “gifted one.” Although in actuality Wicca

is only one of the many paths of Paganism which can generically speaking be called witchcraft, and I do not mean to imply that only Wiccans can call themselves witches, even though the two words are apparently related.

I wish to emphasize here that I am not trying to claim that Wicca is the only way or the right way to practice witchcraft. In its generic form witchcraft is really any series of rituals, rites or philosophies that lets one get in tune with what ever we choose to call our divinity or our higher power, and to possibly work magick in order to bring about a desired change.

It does not matter if that divinity is male, female, a combination of the two, or something totally different and known only to the practitioner. And it does not matter if the philosophy of your own particular Tradition or Path is one of chaos, dark magick, or white light. All Traditions and Paths of Paganism are equally valid and meaningful to their practitioners. I have close friends who are quite comfortable with a more loose interpretation of the Wiccan Rede than I embrace, and who are into a somewhat more volatile and aggressive form of the Craft. That approach works for them and they are quite happy in their practice of their own Path.

All I am saying here is that at least for me the Wiccan Path with its emphasis on nature veneration, the Wiccan Law and the Old Code, is the one that I choose to follow because it touches something deep within me. It is what I

embrace as my personal Path of the Old Religion. It is the one that works for me.

So then, what I am discussing throughout this text when using the words Old Religion, Wicca, witch, witchcraft, or the Craft; is essentially all the same thing. A loving and peaceful life affirming religion of nature or Earth worship, tied to the seasons of the year through eight festival holidays and the monthly phases of the moon, and recognizing both a female Goddess and a male God as equal deities.

It is important that we never lose sight of the fact that Wicca is first and foremost a religion. It is a veneration of our Lord and Lady, a deep and abiding understanding of life and death in the natural order of things, and an awareness of the religious and cultural significance of our special holidays. Only after all this is Wicca concerned with the deeper arts of spells, magick, and divination.

I suppose that an obvious question to ask today is: Why in this modern age of the home personal computer tied to the global Internet, phenomenal scientific advances in medicine, mechanized farming and ranching, and chemical products to insure crop and livestock production; do you want to practice a religion that was already ancient in the Dark Ages and can have no present day reality or meaning?

I believe at least part of the answer to the growing size of the Wiccan religion today is at least twofold. First, there are many people from all walks of life who are be-

coming disenchanted and disillusioned by what is seen to be the militancy and self-serving hypocrisy of a few of the mainstream patriarchal religions and are searching for a religion that they can better identify with.

Secondly, the growing ecology movement since the early 1970's has brought home to most of us the fact that this Earth is being destroyed at an alarming rate, and we don't have a handy replacement! Wicca with its emphasis on Earth worship and the veneration of nature is a religion admirably fitted to the ecology movement. So, does Wicca have reality and meaning in this day and age at the dawn of the new millennium? A most resounding yes, both from the standpoint of individual spirituality and of planet-wide ecology.

Unfortunately, Wicca has been shrouded in mystery and a great deal of negative press ever since the days of the Inquisition, a subject which will be briefly discussed in the next chapter. The Craft came under heavy attack by the church and essentially went underground during that period in history, and only began to resurface in the middle of this century. Even today, in our supposedly more enlightened society, there are areas of the civilized world and of this country itself where to publicly proclaim a practice of witchcraft could be seriously detrimental to ones health and well being. Which, after all, is the thesis of this book.

Before moving on and defining the Wiccan religion

and discussing in more detail what it IS, let us first take a few minutes to discuss what it is NOT. Once and for all let us be clear on the very important fact that Wicca does not now and never has exhibited any of the following characteristics:

1. Devil worship, Satanism, or “Black Masses” -  
Wicca does not recognize either Hell or the Devil. There is no Devil worship or the worship of Devil figures such as Satan or the anti-Christ, and there is no such thing as a black mass where Christian litanies are pronounced backwards and Christian symbols are defamed. None of these exist nor have they ever existed in Wicca. One of the basic tenets of our Craft is - “Blaspheme no one else’s religion, for what ever their belief may be it comforts them.” There are other Pagan religions devoted to the worship of Satan as God, but this is not now nor has it ever been part of the Wiccan religion in any way shape or form.
2. Bestiality or blood sacrifice -  
There is no sexual contact with animals or any other acts of bestiality in Wiccan ritual, and there is never any type of blood sacrifice at our rituals for any purpose. A Wiccan venerates and celebrates life and our Sabbat rituals are

devoted to the concept of life ever renewing and ever lasting. Other Pagan religions may do ritual sacrifice of animals on occasion but this is not part of Wicca. While we do use various edged tools in our rituals, typically a double edged knife called an athame, this is a tool more than a weapon. It is never used to cut or injure anyone or anything.

3. Acts of public sexual conduct -

Wiccan rituals do not include orgies or public displays of overt sexual acts. While some witches do choose to practice skyclad (nude) for initiations or other specific rituals, this is done only with the full knowledge and consent of all members of the coven. There are some rituals or rites in Wicca which, since it contains elements of a fertility religion, do have an overt sexual meaning. However, these rites are generally symbolic only and are typically conducted in private between fully aware and consenting coven members.

4. Idol worship -

Craven or cast images of the God and Goddess in of themselves are symbolic only are not worshipped as deities in Wicca. The God and Goddess are typically represented by a pine

cone and sea shell respectively, and these objects will occasionally adorn our altars. And Wiccans also recognize the symbol of the God as the Sun and that of the Goddess as the Moon, but these items and symbols in of themselves are not worshipped as divine. They are only images used to represent our Lord and Lady during our various rituals.

5. Black magic -

There is no magic aimed at causing damage or harming anyone done at Wiccan rituals. Two basic tenets of Wicca are - “An it harm none, do what thou wilt”, and “What ever action you do, be it good or bane, will be returned to you three fold”.

That is not to say that some of the actions mentioned above are not practiced by other Pagan religions. Indeed they are and they are valid parts of those religions. I only wish to make it clear that these actions are not practiced by Wiccans. Whatever the practitioners of these other rites may call themselves, they are not Wiccan.

What then, is Wicca? The religion of Wicca is a gentle, peaceful and loving one of nature worship. It is a belief in the Goddess and God who are co-equal and exist in each and every thing in and on this Earth and in the sky above, including ourselves. Wicca teaches that there is a

life force which flows through all things, both animate and inanimate, and it is this force that the witch becomes in tune with for the creation of positive personal change.

Wicca is a religion based on harmony with nature and all aspects of the God and Goddess divinity. We believe the Earth is their domain as well as ours, and it is part of our job on this planet to protect and nurture that domain. Anything a Wiccan can do to foster ecology or preservation of natural resources is seen as an honor to the Goddess and God, and to our home that we call Planet Earth. We understand and are in tune with the seasons, the natural order of changes in nature, and in the universe.

Like all religions, Wicca addresses the issue of life after death. However, unlike at least the Christian religion Wicca does not endorse the concepts of heaven or hell with the corresponding one-time reward or punishment scenario. These are strictly parts of the Christian theology.

Wiccan philosophy embraces the concept of multiple reincarnations. We believe the material body you presently inhabit is only a shell for the intellect, the soul, or the spirit; call it what you will. The physical demise of that material entity releases the spirit back to the place we call Summerland for a time of rejuvenation, reflection, and ultimately another incarnation of the physical self. This process of reincarnation is repeated for numerous lifetimes until a development of the spirit is reached where that spirit can truly



merge with the male and female balanced creator/creatrix entity we identify as The One. We return to the God “as sparks rising to the skies” and to the Goddess “as water flowing to the ocean.” This is one of the truths of the Wiccan religion.

How often we may reincarnate, and how much time is spent in Summerland between incarnations, is a matter of conjecture among various authors and Wiccan practitioners. My personal past life experiences seem to indicate a break or space between incarnations of what appears to be at least several hundred years. As to how many incarnations we may experience before unity with The One is achieved probably depends on each individual spirit entity. Since the merging process is one of growth and experience it may depend on each one of us as individuals to determine how many incarnations we experience before final union with our God and Goddess.

And can the reincarnation process be cross-specie or cross-gender? I personally believe that it is not cross-specie, once the cycle is begun as a human entity it must continue in that vain to completion. As to cross-gender, I don't know. One can argue that in order to achieve the complete balance of male/female which is emphasized in Wicca one should experience existence as both sexes. It is possible that if this is the case then we may only be able to recall the gender specifics related to our present incarna-