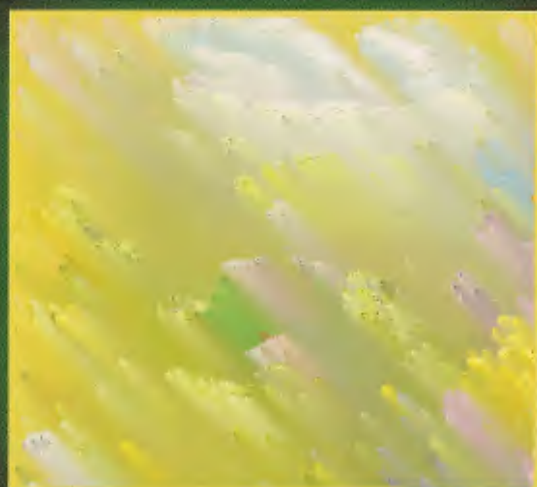


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A GUIDE FOR
THE
SOLITARY
PRACTITIONER

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM

INCLUDES AUTHOR'S BOOK OF SHADOWS

About the Author

Scott Cunningham practiced elemental magic for over twenty years. He authored more than thirty books, both fiction and nonfiction. Scott's books reflect a broad range of interests from the New Age sphere, where he was highly regarded. He passed from this life on March 28, 1993, after a long illness.

WICCA

A GUIDE FOR THE
SOLITARY PRACTITIONER

SCOTT
CUNNINGHAM



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This book is dedicated to the forces that watch over and guide us—
however we may envision or name them.

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Preface

THIS BOOK, THE result of sixteen years of practical experience and research, is a guidebook outlining basic Wiccan theory and practice. It is written with the solitary student or practitioner in mind; there are no coven rituals or magical group dynamics described herein.

The Wicca as described here is “new.” It is not a revelation of ancient rituals handed down for thousands of years. This does not invalidate it, however, for it is based on time-honored practices.

A three-thousand-year-old incantation to manna isn’t necessarily more powerful or effective than one improvised during a private rite. The person practicing the ritual or spell determines its success.

If centuries-old incantations are nothing more to you than senseless gibberish, chances are the ritual won’t work, any more than would a Shinto ceremony in the hands of a Methodist. To be effective, rituals must speak to you.

Rituals are at the heart of Wicca for some, and are pleasant adjuncts to Wicca’s philosophy and way of life for others. In Wicca, as with every religion, ritual is a means of contacting the divine. Effective ritual unites the worshipper with deity. Ineffective ritual kills spirituality.

There are rituals in this book, yes, but they’re guideposts, not holy writ. I wrote them so that others, using them as general guidelines, could create their own.

Some people might say, “But that’s just your stuff. We want the *real* Wicca! *Tell us the secrets!*”

There is not, and can never be, one “pure” or “true” or “genuine” form of Wicca. There are no central governing agencies, no physical

leaders, no universally recognized prophets or messengers. Although specific, structured forms of Wicca certainly exist, they aren't in agreement regarding ritual, symbolism, and theology. Because of this healthy individualism, no one ritual or philosophical system has emerged to consume the others.

Wicca is varied and multi-faceted. As in every religion, the Wiccan spiritual experience is one shared with deity alone. This book is simply one way, based on my experiences and the instruction I have received, to practice Wicca.

Although I wrote it, it didn't hatch out of thin air. The jeweler who facets rough emeralds didn't create the gemstones; nor the potter the clay. I've tried to present a blending of the major themes and ritual structures of Wicca, not to create a new form, but to present one so that others can develop their own Wiccan practices.

When I began learning Wicca there were few books, certainly no published Books of Shadows.* Wiccan rituals and magical texts are secret within many traditions of Wicca, and it wasn't until recently that any systems have "gone public." Due to this fact, few Wiccans wrote books describing the rituals and inner teachings of Wicca. Those outside the Wicca (or the Craft as it is also known) who wrote of it could necessarily report only garbled or incomplete pictures.

Within a few years of my introduction to Wicca, however, many authentic, informative books began to be published. As I continued my studies, both independently and under teachers I had met, I realized that anyone trying to learn and practice Wicca solely from published sources would gain a sadly unbalanced picture.

Most Wiccan authors tout their own form of Wicca. This makes sense: write what you know. Unfortunately, many of the foremost Wiccan authors share similar views, and so most of the published Wiccan material is repetitive.

Also, most of these books are geared toward coven-(group) oriented Wicca. This poses a problem for anyone unable to find a minimum of

* See glossary for unfamiliar terms.

four or five interested, compatible persons to create a coven. It also lays a burden on those who desire private religious practice.

Perhaps my true reason for writing this book—besides numerous requests—is strictly personal. I not only wish to present an alternate to staid, structured Wiccan books, I also want to return something for the training I have received in this contemporary religion.

Although I occasionally teach, and Wicca always draws a crowd, I prefer the medium of printed words to point out some of the things I have learned. Although nothing can replace one-on-one teaching, this isn't practical for all those desiring to learn.

And so, several years ago, I began jotting down notes and chapters that eventually became this book. To avoid becoming too narrow-minded (Sybil Leek once said that it was dangerous writing about your own religion—you're too close to it), I've had Wiccan friends read and comment on early drafts to ensure that the picture of Wicca presented here isn't too limited or dogmatic.

Please don't misunderstand me. Though this book's goal is a wider understanding of, and appreciation of Wicca, I'm not proselytizing. Like most Wiccans, I'm not out to change your spiritual and religious beliefs; it's none of my business.

However, with the continuing interest in nontraditional religions, concern over environmental destruction, and a wide interest in the Wiccan religion, I hope this book partially answers one of the questions I'm most commonly asked: "What is Wicca?"

Linguistic Note

Much disagreement concerning the exact (and original) meaning of the word “Wicca” presently exists. It’s not my intention to enter into or add to such discussions, but I don’t feel that I can use this term without defining it. Therefore, “Wicca” will be used within this book to describe both the religion itself (a loosely organized pagan religion centering toward reverence for the creative forces of nature, usually symbolized by a goddess and a god), as well as its practitioners of both sexes. The term “Warlock,” though sometimes used to describe male practitioners, is virtually never used by Wiccans themselves; hence I’ve avoided it here. Though some use “Wicca” and “Witch” almost interchangeably, I prefer the older, less-encumbered word “Wicca,” and so use it almost exclusively.

Introduction

WICCA, THE RELIGION of the "Witches," has long been shrouded in secrecy. Anyone interested in learning "the Craft" had to content themselves with hints from books and articles. The Wiccans wouldn't say much, save that they weren't looking for new members.

Growing numbers of people today are dissatisfied with traditional religious structures. Many are searching for a personally involving religion, one that celebrates both physical and spiritual realities, in which attunement with deity is coupled with the practice of magic.

Wicca is just such a religion, centering around reverence for nature as seen in the Goddess and the God. Its spiritual roots in antiquity, acceptance of magic, and mysterious nature have made it particularly appealing. Until recently, the lack of public information concerning Wicca and its apparent exclusivity has caused much frustration among interested students.

Wicca doesn't seek new members. This has been a major stumbling block to those wishing to learn its rites and ways of magic. Wicca doesn't solicit because, unlike most western religions, it doesn't claim to be the one true way to deity.

With growing numbers interested in practicing Wicca, perhaps it's time to allow the full light of the dawning Aquarian Age to illuminate these ways. To do so is not to trumpet Wicca as the salvation of our planet, but simply to present it to anyone who cares to learn.

There have been many obstacles. In the past the only way to enter Wicca was to a) contact an initiated Wicca, usually a coven member, and b) receive initiation. If you didn't know any Witches you were out of luck, for initiation was an absolute prerequisite.

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Today, times are changing. We are maturing, perhaps too quickly. Our technology outpaces the wisdom to utilize it. Vast unrest spreads over the globe, and the threat of war looms over most of the more than six billion persons alive today.

Wicca as a religion is changing too. This is necessary if it is to be more than a curiosity of an earlier age. The heirs of Wicca must point their religion firmly to the future if it is to have something to offer coming generations.

Since we have arrived at the point where one mishap could end our planet as we know it, there has never been a time when Wicca as a nature-reverencing religion has had more to offer.

This book breaks many Wicca conventions. It has been structured so that anyone, anywhere in the world, can practice Wicca. No initiations are required. It is designed for the solitary practitioner, since finding others with similar interests is difficult, especially in rural areas.

Wicca is a joyous religion springing from our kinship with nature. It is a merging with the goddesses and gods, the universal energies that created all in existence. It is a personal, positive celebration of life.

And now it is available to all.

Section I

Theory



Wicca and Shamanism

SHAMANISM HAS BEEN defined as the first religion. It existed prior to the earliest civilizations, before our ancestors took the first steps down the long journey to the present. Prior to this time, the shamans were the medicine people, the power wielders, male and female. They wrought magic and spoke to the spirits of nature.

The shamans were the first humans with knowledge. They created, discovered, nurtured, and used it. Knowledge is power; women and men who possessed it in those far-flung days were shamans.

How did shamans capture or discover this power? Through ecstasy—alternate states of consciousness in which they communed with the forces of the universe. Early shamans first attained this state through the use of such “tools” as fasts, thirsts, self-infliction of pain, ingestion of hallucinogenic substances, concentration, and so on. Once mastered, these techniques allowed them to gain awareness of other, nonphysical worlds.

Through such “awareness shifts,” all magical knowledge was obtained. Conference with spirits and deities, plants and animals opened up new vistas of learning. Among their own people, the shamans often shared some of this knowledge but reserved the rest for personal use. Shamanic lore wasn’t for public consumption.

Later, shamans advanced in the use of tools to facilitate these awareness shifts, marking the advent of magical ritual. Shamans around the world still use tools such as drums, rattles, reflective objects, music, chants, and dance. Indeed, the most effective shamanic rites are those that utilize both natural and artificial tools—a sighing wind, roaring ocean, flickering firelight, steady drumbeat, hiss of rattle. These, combined with darkness

and chants, eventually overwhelm the senses, forcing a shifting from awareness of the physical world to the vaster realm of energies. Such are shamanic rites that exist to this day.

From these primitive beginnings arose all magic and religion, including Wicca. Despite current controversy as to the "antiquity" of Wicca, it is spiritually descended from such rites. Though refined and changed for our world, Wicca still touches our souls and causes ecstasy—awareness shifts—uniting us with deity. Many of the techniques of Wicca are shamanic in origin.

Wicca, therefore, can be described as a shamanic religion. As with shamanism, only a select few feel compelled to enter its circle of light.

Today, Wicca has dropped the ordeals of pain and the use of hallucinogens in favor of chanting, meditation, concentration, visualization, music, dance, invocation, and ritual drama. With these spiritual tools, the Wicca achieve a state of ritual consciousness similar to those attained by the most brutal shamanic ordeals.

I deliberately used the term "alternate states of consciousness." Such changed consciousness states aren't unnatural, but are a deviation from the "normal" waking consciousness. Wicca teaches that nature includes a broad spectrum of mental and spiritual states of which most of us are ignorant. Effective Wiccan ritual enables us to slip into such states, allowing communication and communion with the Goddess and God.

Unlike some religions, Wicca doesn't view deity as distant. The Goddess and God are both within ourselves and manifest in all nature. This is the universality: there is nothing that isn't of the gods.

A study of shamanism reveals much of the heart of magical and religious experience in general, and Wicca in particular (see bibliography for recommended books). With ritual as a means to enter ritual consciousness, the shaman or Wicca constantly expands his or her knowledge, and knowledge is power. Wicca helps its practitioners to understand the universe and our place within it.

At present, Wicca is a religion with many variations. Because it is such a personally structured system, I can only state generalities about its creed and form here, filtered through my experience and knowledge, to create a picture of the nature of Wicca.

Wicca, in common with many other religions, recognizes deity as dual. It reveres both the Goddess and the God. They are equal, warm, and loving, not distant or resident in "heaven," but omnipresent throughout the universe.

Wicca also teaches that the physical world is one of many realities. The physical is not the absolute highest expression, nor is the spiritual "purer" than the base. The only difference between the physical and the spiritual is that the former is denser.

As in eastern religions, Wicca also embraces the doctrine of reincarnation, that much-misunderstood subject. Unlike some eastern philosophies, however, Wicca doesn't teach that upon physical death our souls will reincarnate in anything other than a human body. Also, few of the Wicca believes we began our existence as rocks, trees, snails, or birds before we evolved to the point where we could incarnate as human beings. Though these creatures and substances do possess a type of soul, it's not the sort we humans have.

Reincarnation is accepted as fact by many millions in the east and west. It answers many questions: what happens after death? Why do we seem to remember things we've never done in this life? Why are we sometimes strangely attracted to places or people who we've never before seen?

Surely, reincarnation can't answer all these questions, but it is there for those who wish to study it. This isn't something that should be believed. Through contemplation, meditation, and self-analysis, many come to the point where they accept reincarnation as fact. For more information on this subject see chapter 10, "The Spiral of Rebirth."

The Wiccan ideal of morality is simple: do what you want, as long as you harm none. This rule contains another unwritten condition: do nothing that will harm yourself. Thus, if you as a Wicca abuse your body, deny it the necessities of life, or otherwise harm yourself, you're in violation of this principle.

This is more than survival. It also ensures that you'll be in good condition to take on the tasks of preserving and bettering our world, for concern and love for our planet play major roles in Wicca.