

My Heretical Wiccan Beliefs

By Merlyn

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One reason I like Wicca is that this eclectic religion has no central creed (e.g., statement of beliefs) that all Wiccans are expected to unquestioningly accept. As soon as some authority figure, be it preacher, pope or high priestess, states that I should accept their beliefs or creed, I immediately challenge their authority to tell me how to think. As a person suspicious of all required beliefs, I applauded Starhawk when she stated in her book *The Spiral Dance* that, when asked about her beliefs, she said she believed in rocks.

Personal beliefs bother me less than the creeds of organized religion. If you and I hold opposing beliefs about the existence of a certain god, it does not matter as long as we do not try to convert each other to our points of view. Beliefs limit our thinking. Natural curiosity shuts down because beliefs explain everything. Once you believe in something, whether it is Jesus, the Great Mother Goddess, or certain winning lottery numbers, you start to feel that you must defend your beliefs against all doubters who question those beliefs. If you have political power, persecuting the doubters is just a step or two down the road. Both Catholic and Protestant countries repressed their respective religious dissenters with an Inquisition for a couple hundred years after the Reformation. Ultimately the repression failed, and we should thank those past religious dissenters whose suffering helped bring us the religious freedom we enjoy today.

Are beliefs unavoidable? In a certain sense they are, because we use our beliefs to make sense of this world. We naturally hope that the same familiar patterns we observe in Nature today will operate tomorrow, next year, and in the next century. Without giving it much thought, we assume (an implicit belief) that gravity always works, the sun rises and sets at certain predictable times, and the seasons always follow each other in a regular yearly cycle. More esoteric beliefs about why we were created, what is our purpose on earth, and where we go after death, satisfy the craving of our human minds for an explanation of these big cosmic questions. Each of us should form our own opinions about these questions without worrying about whose beliefs are correct.

My personal belief system is complicated because I alternate between two opposing viewpoints: left-brain rationality and right-brain mysticism. My rational views reflect the skeptical and analytical attitudes I gained as a Unitarian. Thinking as a rational person, I view all religion as pure human invention and perhaps illusion. Furthermore, I feel I can be a good Wiccan without believing in any particular god/goddess or even in an afterlife. Labels I might apply to my rational beliefs, depending on my mood, are those of atheist (or non-theist), agnostic, deist, or pantheist. Atheist and agnostic are common terms. The atheist does not believe in the existence of a super-natural deity, while the agnostic is not quite sure whether god/goddess does or does not exist. Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, meaning that it does not require reference to a higher being. The Unitarian Church has many atheists and agnostics as members. Deists believe a god or primal creative force is out there somewhere. After the initial creation or "big bang," this primal force stepped back and let the natural forces it created take over. These forces include the winds, the waters, the earth, and sun or fire (the four ancient elements) that endlessly interact to produce the world we know today. In deism, the God (or Goddess) who created the universe does not care if each of us six billion humans has had a good day. Instead, we are left to solve our own problems. Pantheists equate god with nature, but for the rational or scientific pantheist this is more of a metaphoric or symbolic linkage of nature and god rather than a literal belief that nature is Divine.

As a rational person, I believe in imaginary gods as personifications of my subconscious psychological forces. Any visions of gods/goddesses I encounter in my meditative or ritual practices I consider to be projections of my subconscious mind on the external environment.

Individually, and sometimes collectively, we humans have hallucinations that some call religious visions.

If the above rational viewpoints covered all of my beliefs, my life would be simpler. However, I also believe that the Earth and its millions of species are too complex to have arisen by pure chance during the past several billion years. When the scientist says that the laws of physics and chemistry explain everything in our world, he/she is right to a certain degree. But who created those laws? Only some primal conscious force could have done this, I believe. Believing in a primal force requires me to switch viewpoints from that of a rational skeptic to a religious mystic. Using my subjective right brain, I try to identify and connect with this primal creative force through my meditations, rituals and even prayers. I become a Pantheist who literally believes that gods and goddesses inhabit Nature. However, my left brain never completely shuts off, so I always remain skeptical about the existence of my supernatural buddies. A constant internal dialogue goes on in my head between the differing rational and mystical perspectives. Fortunately for me, both of these perspectives have merit.

The concept of immanent deity helps me bridge the conflict between the right and left sides of my brain. If deity is truly immanent, a Divine force exists in my subconscious mind as well as in pine trees, rocks and rivers. I just need to look within me to tap into my own internal Divinity.

Is there ever supernatural intervention in our daily lives? Do alleged miracles, prophecies, and visions represent supernatural communications? I believe the answer is yes, if supernatural is equated with the operation of our subconscious minds. Unseen Deities can use serendipity and coincidence to help direct our lives in certain directions.

At several critical points in my life, apparently random events have operated to favorably propel me forward. One important incident, which was apparently a pure coincidence, happened when I was seventeen. A great aunt died, leaving my parents just the amount of money necessary to pay for my first year's tuition, room and board at the out-of-state university I really wanted to attend; I would not have been able to go otherwise. Another coincidence involved my initial contact with Wicca. Amber K just happened to move from Wisconsin to Los Alamos, rather than to Santa Fe, Albuquerque, or Roswell, at the exact time when I was ready to explore Wicca.

In divination, I have occasionally done a tarot spread that was dead-on. The first time this happened was when I pulled one card from a tarot deck and learned, before being told later that evening, that a young woman who was considering becoming a student with the coven had changed her mind. I don't remember the card, but it must have been the Death card or something similar. I have no explanation for these coincidences or many others that have happened to me. The rational explanation is that these are just coincidences, just unrelated events, and attributing deeper meaning to them is mystical rubbish.

I began this article with an attack on the beliefs required by most organized religions, and wound up trying to explain my own beliefs. While accepting that a primal unknown force created our universe, I think that the gods and goddesses we worship are largely human inventions. However, I acknowledge that unseen forces beyond my control have helped shape my life through interesting coincidences. I know that I make better decisions when I listen to my inner self and let the ongoing coincidences or synchronicities show me which path I should follow. Some call the subconscious mind I try to listen to the higher self or even the Holy Guardian Angel. I don't know its name, I just try to follow its advice. Still I remain skeptical about any supernatural events I have not personally experienced. Balancing my rational and mystical tendencies is one of my goals.