

Issue 36

May 2023

WITCH

BELTANE





WITCH

Magazine

Dearest Witches,

As we welcome the Beltane fire, the sun warming our skin and the earth blooming towards summer, I hope this issue finds you all well!

Once again I would like to thank the writers worldwide who contribute to the magazine each month, and to you, our readers for sharing and helping keep Witch a free resource!

Additional art by Susi Sanlier
www.susiscauldron.com

All other images belong to the writer/artist, are sourced from UnSplash, Pixabay, or are from the public domain.

Be blessed,

Bekki
Editor

Contact us
editor@witchzine.co.uk
ISSN 2635-2176
www.witchzine.co.uk

Published online by



Crows Feet Press





WITCH
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Poetry and Fiction

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★
**WITCH
MIDSUMMER**

*Submissions due 12th
June*

WITCH is an independently published magazine featuring writers across the globe, from all paths. We feature anything from witchcraft to the occult, pagan and druid practices and anything in between.

Even if you've never written before, we welcome new voices, previously published works and artist features of all kinds.

We'd love to hear from you!

*Send your submissions to:
submissions@witchzine.co.uk*



Beltane
Blessings



WITCH
Magazine

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"This story is gripping and compelling and soon makes us familiar with ritual and witchcraft as normal and essential to awaken and maintain a healthy soulful lifestyle..."

Maureen Walton O'Brien
Visual Artist, Canada

O'LAN RUADH & SARAH BERTI

COCONUT ROSE BATH

Ally Sands

Whether you want to add a little spice between you and your partner or help bring the attraction between you back, this bath is just what you need! Relationships work with an ebb and a flow. Sometimes your partner is more attentive and present for you and sometimes, less available. The original connection can grow dimmer and relight over and over again. Sometimes that flame can even extinguish. This doesn't mean that letting go of the relationship is truly necessary; it can just be a matter of reigniting that energy and connection.

INGREDIENTS

Handful of fresh red rose petals

Handful of fresh pink rose buds

10–12 sliced strawberries

12–15 raspberries

10 fresh hibiscus flowers

Handful of fresh or dried damiana

10–12 fresh catnip sprigs

Pinch of saffron

Handful of fresh honeysuckle

2 tbsp (30 ml) honey

1 pink candle

½ cup (48 g) coconut milk powder

1 garnet

1 red jasper

1 rose quartz



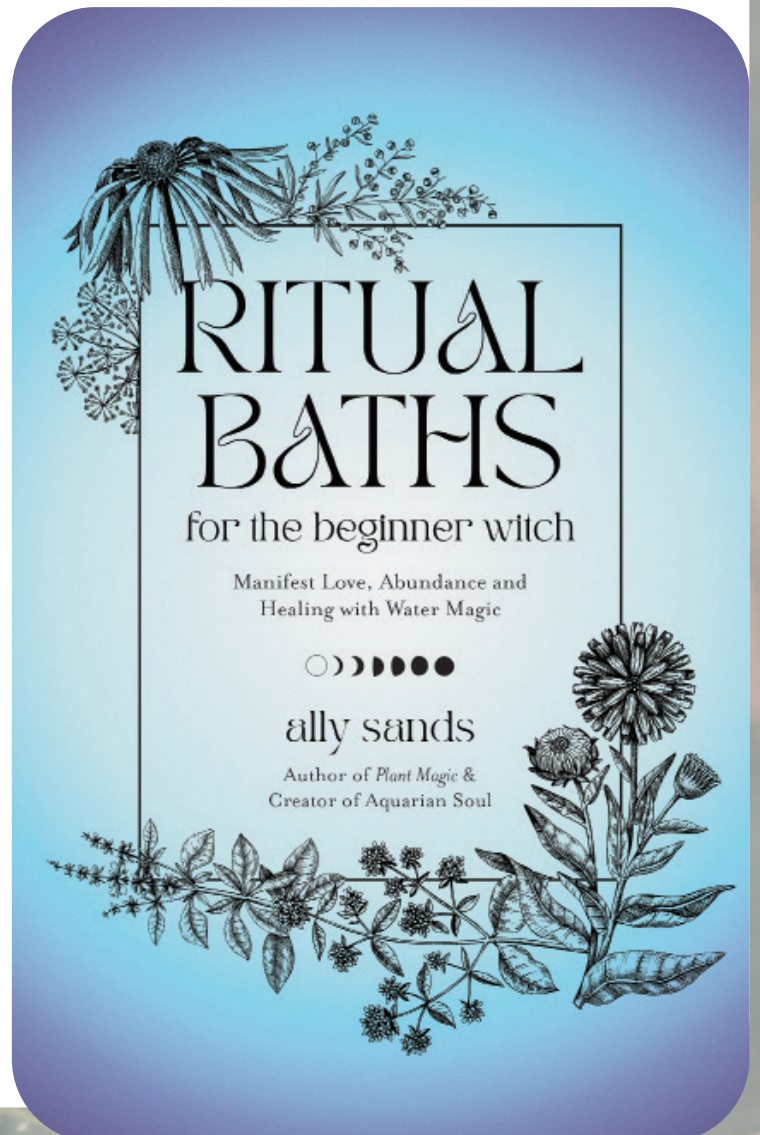
THE RITUAL

Create your bath tea or place the herbs directly in your bathwater. Take the time to enchant each herb and ask it to work for your intention as you set them one by one into the water.

Light your candle and set it on the edge of the tub or in front of you on a tub tray. If you are making the bath tea, place your candle inside of the pot or bowl and let it burn down before adding the tea to the bathwater. Crumble the coconut milk powder between your fingers into the bathwater. Swirl your hand through the water, mixing it in while imagining you and your partner. Place the crystals in the bathwater or set them on the edge of the tub or on a bath tray. You can also hold the crystals as you sit in meditation.

Relax into the bath. Close your eyes and picture in your mind's eye you and your partner together. Imagine walking together, talking, laughing and holding hands and call in that new feeling of excitement you had when you first met. What were all the things that attracted you to them in the first place? Make a mental note and focus on that feeling.

Relax in the bath for 20 to 30 minutes, focusing on your intention. Don't rinse off; just pat yourself dry. You can carry the crystals with you, or place them somewhere you can see them to remind you of this ritual. Let the candle burn-down completely.



Credit:

Reprinted with permission from Ritual Baths for the Beginner Witch by Ally Sands.

Page Street Publishing Co. 2023.

Photo credit: Ally Sands.

Honoring the Wild in the Reclaiming Tradition: The Long Arc of Magickal Activism Bends Toward Hope

Irisanya Moon

"Our tradition honors the wild and calls for service to the earth and the community."

- from Reclaiming Witchcraft's Principles of Unity

One of the first things I learned as a witch was the elements.

I turn to Air to feel the wind, to know change and inspiration. I turn to Fire to feel heat and sun, to know transformation and passion. I turn to Water to know blood and tears, to make contact with emotion and depth. I turn to Earth to know ancestors, plants, and animals, to understand rootedness and composting.

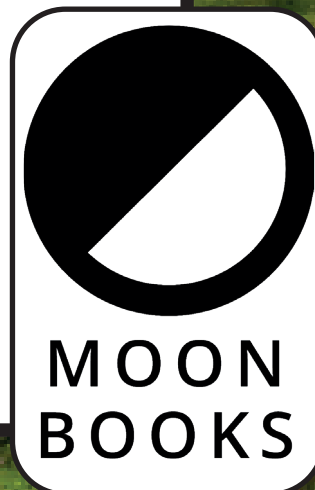
I learned their correspondences and ways to call them for a ritual. I sang songs and moved my body to feel what was all around, to invite them to join sacred spaces. What I didn't understand just yet was how I was still separating myself from the elements, as though I was on the Earth but not of the Earth. I thought I understood the Wild, even as I separated myself from it, calling to it as though it were far away.

But the Earth is not 'over there.' It is here. Right here inside every one of us.

Time & Storytelling

When I was asked to write about my witchcraft tradition, Reclaiming, and environmental activism, I recognized I was not the person to write it. While I am indeed a person who is committed to the environment, I am newer to a tradition that sprung into action and form because of the threats to the Earth. I honor those whose hands have been dirty and whose muscles might still be sore from all those streets, all those actions, and all those consensus meetings.

There are no movements without people, so I turned to the Reclaiming community to help me with "Honoring the Wild: Reclaiming Witchcraft & Environmental Activism." I wanted to collect stories from as many places as possible and then weave them



together to bring a reader into the experience. And if I'm being honest, I was and am still hopeful that the stories will incite actions beyond the places I know.

We begin with a recollection of activism from 1976 to the present day, with the input of those who were there. With the stories of those who were arrested and sometimes hurt, with the stories of those who lost their voices and marched in the streets. Diablo Canyon. Seattle WTO. Nevada test site. G8. G20. Occupy! Anti-nuke. Anti-fracking. Black Lives Matter.

“Many actions and handbooks emphasized ‘environmental racism,’ the disproportionate impact on poor communities and People of Color, who often stand closest to the dangers and impacts of nukes, militarism, and energy production.”

Through stories of being in deep communion with nature, tapping into

the energy and emotions of redwood trees, grassroots organizing before the internet and cell phones, and listening to elders, the idea of the personal becoming political and witchcraft being political emerges. It is in the opening of senses and bypassing the confines of societal expectations that we can find new ways, new directions, and new opportunities to save lands and peoples.

Practice

I can imagine the earliest witches not thinking too much about doing something to protect the lands around them. They acted because it needed to be done. These magickal workings did not need to be profound or complicated; they did not ask the activists to be perfect or have a certain energy. Magick for protecting the land and people was honest and authentic. It worked with what was present, with different people stepping in at different times and in dif-





ferent ways. You had a talent that could help, so that was your role. Not everyone must march in the streets to do it 'right.' There are simple practices. There are quiet ways. And some have worked with Extinction Rebellion and other groups, building connections to tap into what is already happening, growing, and igniting change.

Ritual

There are also rituals dedicated to the Earth and healing, with the idea of internal and external change. The spectrum is wide enough to hold those who might need a structured ritual and those who might travel to the local watershed to remove the trash. Magick also dances in queerness, beyond definitions and structures, sometimes falling into the world because of a need and inspiration. Honoring the wild has never needed pomp and circumstance. Or it could. It depends on what is needed at the moment, much like magick and much like spellwork. What works is what works.

Flexibility is the way of the Witch.

From ongoing questions and invocations to making art from the brokenness, giving life back to what has fallen to the ground.

Looking Ahead

What is clear in my activist work and the work of those who told stories in the book is that this is a practice that is not for the future anymore. This activism is required for what is happening right now. Climate change is no longer a future event; it is here. It is in the dramatic temperature changes, in the shifting of shorelines, and in new weather patterns in places that never had to prepare. I recognize and admit more readily now that what I do will not save me; it will be to protect the future. Even in the littlest steps, what I offer has to be selfless. And I do things not because they are seen or celebrated. I take action in the way that I can because it matters and because someone is probably watching. Because my descendants are rooting me on while my ancestors whisper in my ears.



We Do Not Do This Alone

I honor the stories of those who have come before me and whose actions helped my current experience. I honor the stories of those who will come after me, those who are building new ways and roads for youth, and those who will live long after them. I honor the ways magick inspires direction and creative action. Perhaps there is more to activism than signs and protests, more than letter writing and shouting at politicians. (It's that too.)

Before and Now

“Honoring the Wild: Reclaiming Witchcraft & Environmental Activism”

comes out on February 1, 2023. While I did not choose this date, it is significant in the Reclaiming tradition. It is the day when the Brigid ritual is often held. While different Reclaiming communities have stories about how they interact with rituals, the Brigid ritual has a story behind it that has kept me focused when I needed it.

After Reagan won the US presidential election in 1980, a group of Reclaiming Witches gathered in despair. They were sad, angry, and scared about what might happen next and how it would cause further damage to the world. They came together in a circle at Winter Solstice and

EARTH  SPIRIT

Honoring the Wild

Reclaiming Witchcraft and
Environmental Activism

IRISANYA MOON

shouted into the center all the things that frightened them, allowing their energy to be released from their bodies. Then, they took candles and lit them and talked about what they could do with the energy, making promises to activate hope and strength for what was to come next.

During the next Brigid ritual in 1981, the magick focused on gathering together to contemplate what has come before and speaking promises before a well and flame (to the goddess Brigid), witnessed by the community. The spell continues because the work continues.

Bending Toward Hope

Because no book will ever give you everything you need, I offer this: environmental activism is the work of hope. It is hard, and it is thankless, and sometimes it is invisible. This devotion to the Earth has many distractions and oppressors. It is work that asks a lot of those who have been accustomed to living in a certain way and for whom sacrifice feels a burdensome ask.

“Honoring the Wild: Reclaiming Witchcraft & Environmental Activism” not only contains stories but also instructions for rituals and exercises. As part of Moon Books’ Earth Spirit series, it brings the conversation into sharper view by centering the voices of those who were there. I was honored to bring these writings together from around the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

For myself, I know that my activism comes out of understanding the potential for loss and hurt. As I have grown in my relationship with the elements, not just as parts of a ritual but also parts of my body, I realize I am an activist for myself as much as I am for a tree or an ocean. When I realize we are not separate, it is not something outside of myself and the people I love.

This is not just about the history of Reclaiming; it is a spell of hope. On each page, you will find voices of care, compassion, and concern. You will find people who want something better for the Earth, so they keep going. So we keep going.

After all, hope is what you have when you believe things could change. And I still believe it.

Irisanya Moon is the author of Earth Spirit - Honoring the Wild published by Moon Books

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Beltane, Spiritual Alchemy, and the Sacred Marriage

Mark NeCamp, Jr.



Arguably, some of modern Paganism descends from ancient fertility cults from an age where ritual, myth, and daily life were all connected in a holistic framework. A great subset of ancient ritual and magick was to benefit the people in practical terms that were significant to the times: making crops grow, having favorable weather, and ensuring the general health and fertility of the tribe. It is in this context that we can talk about the hieros gamos, or sacred marriage.

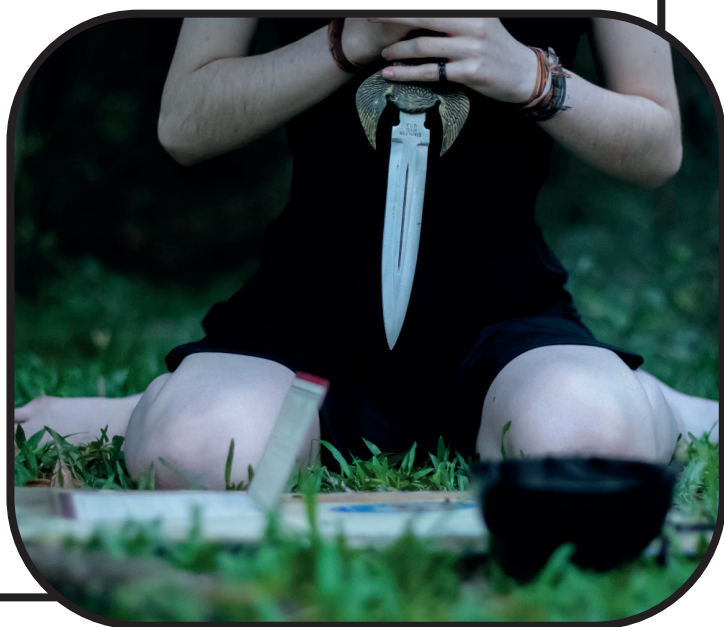
The sacred marriage is the symbolic union of gods or magickal or occult energies. In the ancient world this could be enacted by priests and priestesses representing gods and goddesses. This interplay and union of the gods was supposed to bring fertility to Nature as the act was a generative one. These fertility acts enacted by the gods would bring abundance to the land. For me, this really goes back to the Hermetic axiom of “as above, so below”, where the Heavens/Divine and the Earth mirror each other- what happens in Spirit, affects the world of Matter. The symbolic magick of these acts facilitates this interplay of forces. Some examples of the sacred marriage are:

The Marriage of Zeus and Hera. From the Iliad “As he spoke, the Son of Cronos [Zeus] took his wife in his arms; and the gracious earth sent up fresh grass beneath them, dewy lotus and crocuses, and a soft and crowded bed of hyacinths, to lift them off the ground. In this they lay, covered by a beautiful golden cloud, from which a rain of glistening dewdrops fell...” This speaks to the union of the gods and how it is reflected back from the Earth

The Wachandi of Australia. This tribe performs a fertility dance where their spears penetrate a pit in the ground. The spears and pit symbolize the organs of generation. This is rite that happens in the Spring time and the symbolic act is seen as an initiator of the fertility and abundance of the Earth.

Wicca. In many forms of Wicca there is the Great Rite. This is the symbolic joining of the God and Goddess. This ritual can be done symbolically with the athame representing the God and the chalice signifying the Goddess.

Symbolic unions can be magickal acts, and in modern practice the end result does not





need to be fertility of the land. It can be any result that needs to gestate and be given birth to such as financial prosperity, health, or creativity.

I think what is most important in the sacred marriage is to look at it as the union of opposites, not just anthropomorphic forces. This frees the sacred marriage to be applicable outside of standard gender and sexual “standards” that have been commonly used. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung looked at the sacred marriage as more or the union of psychological aspects of us: the union of anima and animus, or the “female” and “male” aspects of our psyche. In magickal practice, I think identifying opposites within us and finding union with them is an important aspect of spiritual development and magickal practice. You see this in spiritual alchemy a lot, but it is called the “Marriage of the Sun and the Moon”. Below is a an exercise to facilitate your own internal marriage of

opposites. In this union, comes growth, since we are the greater than the sum of our parts.

Exercise: Marriage of Sun and Moon PART 1: Mental Exploration

1. Get a piece of paper, or use a word processing program, to make two columns on a page. Title one column “Moon”, and the other “Sun”.
2. In the “Moon” category, list out anything that speaks to your emotions, creativity, or receptive nature.
3. In the “Sun” category, put down anything about your mental abilities, sense of reason, or ways that you are projective or extroverted.
4. Read the list over and keep for later.

PART 2:

1. Read your list again.
2. Ground and center.
3. While sitting comfortably, hold out your hands palm upwards and away from you.
4. Imagine that the energy of the moon is being held in your left hand. Think of all of the lunar qualities that you possess and feel that lunar energy get more and more intense.
5. In your right hand, imagine and feel the energies of the sun. Think about all of the solar qualities you possess, and feel the solar energy get stronger and

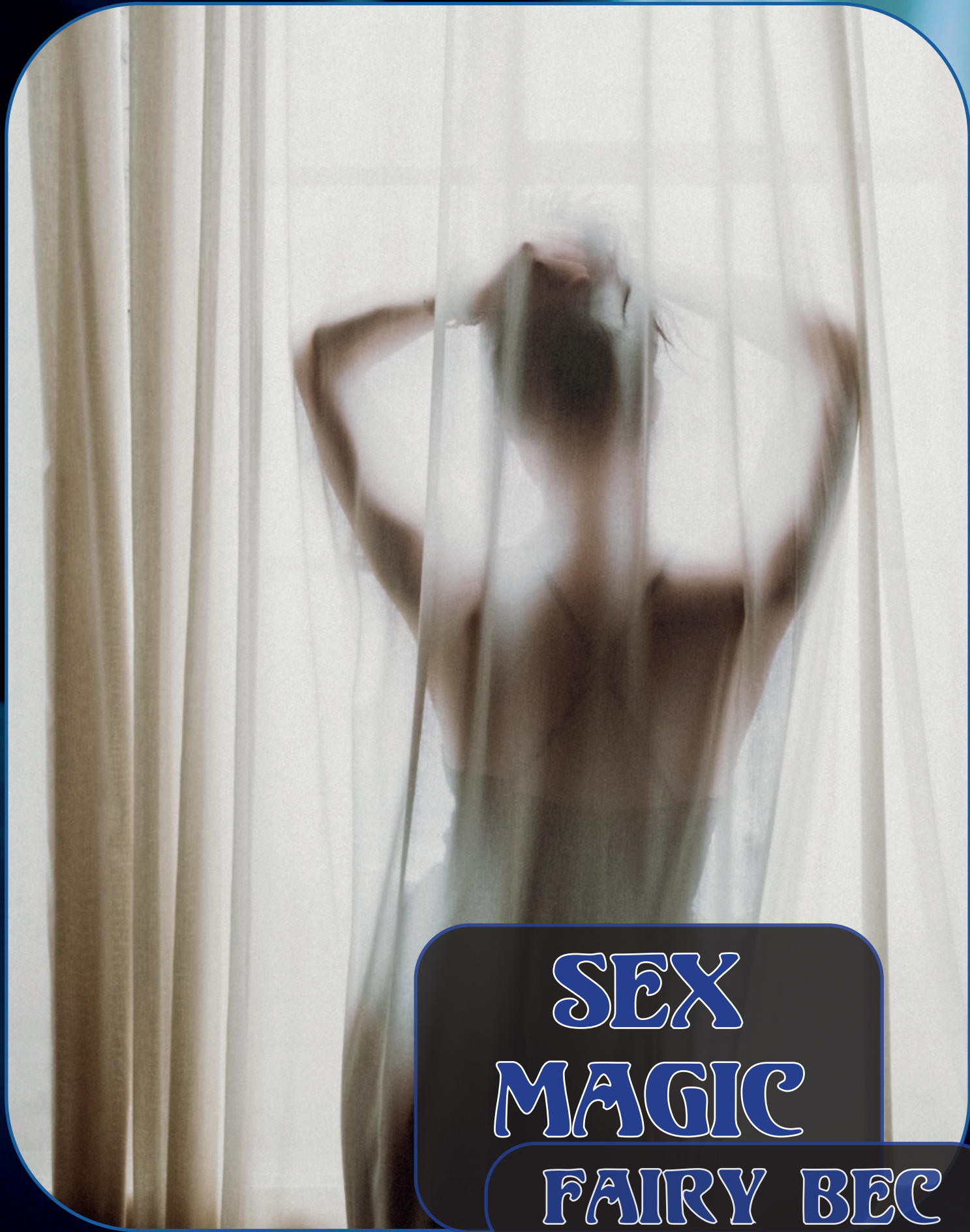
stronger.

6. Breathe in and out, and let the energy grow as strong as possible. Slowly bring your hands together to combine the lunar and solar energies, not letting your palms get more than 6 inches/15 centimeters apart.
7. Hold the energy together as long as possible.
8. When you are ready, push the solar energies into your left side. At the same time, push the lunar energies into your right side.
9. While you are doing the above step, push your hands closer and closer. By the time your hands touch, the lunar and solar energies should meet within your body- ideally at your spine.
10. Feel the lunar and solar energies balanced within you. Ground and center to finish the exercise.

The point of the exercise is to balance out your opposites. In alchemy, there is a saying "solve et coagula". This means to separate and recombine. Here, we separated out the lunar and solar energies and recombined them to feel a sense of being whole that is greater than the forces separately. You could replace any other pairs of opposites: Mars and Venus, Heaven and Earth, or many more.

The external sacred marriage has its pair in the internal one. Both are valid, and speak to the ability of the spirit to evolve through a process of two opposites combining to be greater than themselves. I hope that this union of opposites in your life creates fertility and abundance in your life for the mind, body, and spirit. Happy Beltane!

*Mark NeCamp, Jr. is a tarot reader, healer, writer, teacher, spiritual alchemist, devoted family man, and a modern-day student and practitioner of the Art. He teaches classes using magic as a tool for personal growth. He is passionate for how we each can, through the alchemical process, turn our spiritual lead into gold as individuals and as a global community. Currently he sits on the Board of Directors for Wolf Run Wildlife and Spiritual Sanctuary located in Remus, Michigan. He can be found on social media and at his website: www.marknecampjr.com. He is the author of the upcoming work *Energy Magick* by Moon Books Publishing.*



**SEX
MAGIC**

FAIRY BEC

Beltane! The Green man and the Goddess symbolically come together and procreate at Beltane, the most powerful of the sabbats for fertility. Why do you think there are so many Aquarian Pagans? Many Beltane rituals are linked with courting. Maypole dancing is the best example of this.

Beltane is also a time when we really start to feel awakened as the Earth starts to spring forth bursting with greenery and colour. We honour the Earth as we plant our seeds and crops and start to see them germinate and flourish. If the Beltane fire burns brightly then the weather will be excellent, and our crops will be in abundance come harvest time.

So why not tend to your inner fire at Beltane? Your own personal awakening and germination? Beltane is an excellent time to set intentions for the year ahead. The energies are aligned to awakening and the hope that the warmer weather and sunshine brings us is very powerful. This feeling of awakening often starts deep within the body and at our root so why not explore the idea of sex magic to wake yourself up to what 2023 can really bring you?

Before we get into the 'nitty gritty', I need to make it clear that you should not be performing magic on anyone un-

less you have their permission. I always refuse to do love spells for people. I am happy to give a couple in mutual love hints and tips to create a love spell together, but I never intervene. Love and sex can be separate but largely go hand in hand. Sex can be an amazingly healing experience on so many levels. It can also really boost you up. The anticipation fires you up and the satisfaction of good sex leaves you feeling relaxed and often at one with yourself. Think about how we glow after an orgasm.

If it is with someone who resonates on the same soul level as you then it can create a beautiful bond between you. Equally, sex does not need to be with a partner. We all need to show ourselves some love from time to time!

Sex is often seen as a carnal act. However, it is my belief that it can be much more of a spiritual act with the right focus, intent and partner. There are many teachings of tantra and kundalini that can all enhance your sex life as well as your energetic flow. I am going to focus on a combination of both in a very simple way.

We all have energy potential stored in our bodies as well as being able to tap into the sources in the Earth and from the Universe. There is an equal amount of static (Negative electrons) and dy-

namic (Positive protons) energy in the body so when we raise one, the other increases.

Kundalini energy is stored at the base of our spine. Kundalini is more often than not seen as sexual energy - the most powerful energy that we have.

We also have many energy channels called Nadis (Translated as rivers) in our bodies to channel prana/energy. The two that work well together in sex magic are:-

- Ida (Yin/Moon)
- Pingala (Yang/Sun)

These work alongside the Chakra points of which there are seven main ones:-

Position	Western Name	Sanskrit Name	Body areas	Abstract Links	Main Honouring
1 st	Base/Root	<u>Muladhara</u>	Ovaries [F], Gonads [M], Intestines, anus, prostate, spine.	Survival, Family, Life Force, Will to Live	Honours the Earth
2 nd	Sacra/Maral	<u>Svadhishana</u>	Adrenals, reproductive organs, kidney, bladder, pelvic area, legs	Enjoyment of Life, Quality, Self Esteem, Refinement of Feelings	Honours the Creative
3 rd	Solar Plexus/Centre	<u>Manipura</u>	Pancreas, stomach, liver, spleen, gall bladder, digestive system, inner bark, nervous system	Strength, Command, Power	Honours Life Force
4 th	Heart	<u>Anahata</u>	Thymus, heart, upper back, upper lungs, circulation, abdominal cavity	Love, Peace, Trust, Compassion, Spiritual Development, Self-Love	Honours the Heart
5 th	Throat	<u>Vishudha</u>	Thymid, throat, upper lungs, voice, rope of the neck	<u>Communication</u> , Creativity, Self-Expression, Sense of Responsibility	Honours Communication
6 th	Third Eye	<u>Ajna</u>	Pituitary, face, eyes sinus, spine	Meditation, Thought Control, Inspiration, Intuition, Understanding	Honours the Psychic
7 th	Crown	<u>Sahasrara</u>	Pineal gland, brain, skull	Consciousness, Intuition, Wisdom, Connection to Higher Self, Spiritual Awareness, Dreams	Honours Spiritual Connectedness



SETTING UP THE SPACE

It does not have to be a special room, just make the room feel special for your rituals. It could be your living room, but you set up a camp out style space, change the lighting, have a certain incense/oil you burn for these occasions.

Having a sacred space is very important. Uninterrupted time where time feels like it does not exist also helps.

You can hold crystals or have them in the space too. Shiva Lingham work very well with libido and kundalini energy. You can also get Kundalini Citrine and use Serpentine. Afterwards, you might want to sit with some Red Jasper or Hematite for grounding.

You might want to drink something like ceremonial cacao together while sitting

in silence looking into each other's eyes/ looking into a mirror if you are alone. Think about preparing a drink and a snack ready for afterwards or even in the middle if you are able to spare a few hours/a whole day and repeat the exercise several times. Think John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Lighting is also important. Fairy lights make it feel magical, warm low-level lighting is calming as well as flattering.

RITUAL

Meditation style exercises are an excellent start. I recommend that you do this ritual naked. If you can sit cross legged or kneeling at the start, then try it. If not, just sit as comfortably as you can, you may be here for a while.

Begin by breathing. Breathe deeply and purposefully. Try to completely fill your

lungs and then completely empty them on the exhale. If you are with a partner, I suggest that you breathe in time together.

Once you are feeling control of the energy through the breathing, very slowly, connect with the Kundalini energy at the base of the spine/your root chakra and imagine it rising up through the 7 main chakra one at a time and connecting them all together.

When you reach the crown chakra, imagine it opening and allowing energy in. Imagine it like lightning going through the body. The lightning strikes the top of the head, surges through the chakra and grounds itself in the Earth.

The Earth responds by sending that energy right back up to the cloud from which the lightning struck from. You can breathe this energy up and down the chakra as well as up the left-hand side of your body from root to crown and back down the right-hand side to the root chakra. This can be repeated as many times as you like. You can do this with your eyes closed or open. If open and with a partner, connect with them through eye contact alone. If you are alone, you

can look into your own eyes using a mirror.

It is also lovely to place a hand on your heart/on your partner's heart whilst you are breathing.

If you are alone, you can imagine that your aura is growing and swirling and creating a bubble around you. If you are in a partnership, imagine this bubble encompasses you together.

Now you are ready to continue in whichever way you wish. I don't need to go into details here! Let go of your



inhibitions for you have created a safe space to fully explore and indulge in your feelings of pleasure with your rising energies. Let your imagination run wild!

TIPS

* The power is not in the race for orgasm but in the slowing down when things are moving too fast. If you feel you are going too fast, come back to the breath.

* You may also want to take the energy to the point of orgasm then stop and hold this energy within the body.

* You don't even need to touch genitals/erogenous zones to feel the energy rising.

* Close your eyes and visualise what you are doing with your Chakra and Nadi.

* If you are doing this with a partner, talk about it, about what you are feeling, about what you are

seeing in your mind's eye. This could just be afterwards, it does not need to be during. You could also keep a diary of effects and intentions.

Once you have tuned in, you will find it easier and easier each time. You could start the ritual with some Kundalini Yoga too.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE POWER

Anything you like!

You are charging yourself up. Think about the Ghostbusters guns. The power that forces itself out from them when they

press the trigger is what you are storing up ready to use with this practice. Just remember that you are responsible for the intent and where there is responsibility, there are consequences both positive and negative.

Here are some suggestions to put the energy created by sex magic to good use: -

- Manifesting abundance in an area of your life

- Healing the nervous system - great for anyone, like myself, suffering from Fibromyalgia

- Awakening psychic abilities

- Building stronger bond with yourself

- Building stronger bonds with a partner

- Use bodily fluids in spells

- Sending golden bubbles of love out into the world and imagining they find those in need and burst in a glittery rainbow of love over them

- Above all else, you can use this power to manifest your best self.

Good luck in your quests and don't forget that you can find plenty of videos of Kundalini Yoga, Tantric ideas, Meditation music and more on Youtube. Go fan the flames of your inner Beltane fire!

WORKING WITH PLANTS TO SHARE THEIR MESSAGES

Carrie Anderson

I recently finished the Creative Partnership with Nature program with Pam Montgomery. It had long been a dream of mine to learn from her and I was really excited with the opportunity. Through this course I realized that I really wanted to work on sharing the stories of plants.

I really enjoy reading books written by Heather Sanderson. I saw a post of hers, on Instagram, that she was offering a workshop to help offer ways to write with the plants. She has a fabulous method that really cuts out the chatter and gets to the heart of being with the plants. During her workshop I was visited by the Deva of Raspberry and was given this story that follows. Heather graciously posted the story on her Majestic Wisdom Publishing blog.

My husband read the story and surprised me with a wonderful birthday gift.

He took a portion of this piece and burnt the words into some scrap wood that he had leftover from a previous project. I tried burning words into wood once before and it ended up with my husband buying a first-aid kit and several over the counter treatments for burns. So, I am amazed that he made an entire sign. Then, he bought two new raspberry plants, manure, mulch and stonescaping to create a tiny peaceful corner in our urban garden.

Writing with plants, sharing their voice and also highlighting the nature that is near us, no matter where we live. I'm hoping that I can further the plant's message so everyone can experience our interconnectedness.

Raspberry and Bear

Wild raspberry blooms here, in the spring. A delicate white flower protected by the fuzzy embrace of prickly thorns. A halo of red for Raspberry.



By summer, the berries beckon with a sweet earthy scent and a deep merlot color. In the ripeness of the berries one can taste the woods. There's a distant memory, not quite tangible, just outside our peripheral vision. This berry it's the taste of the wildness that connects us.

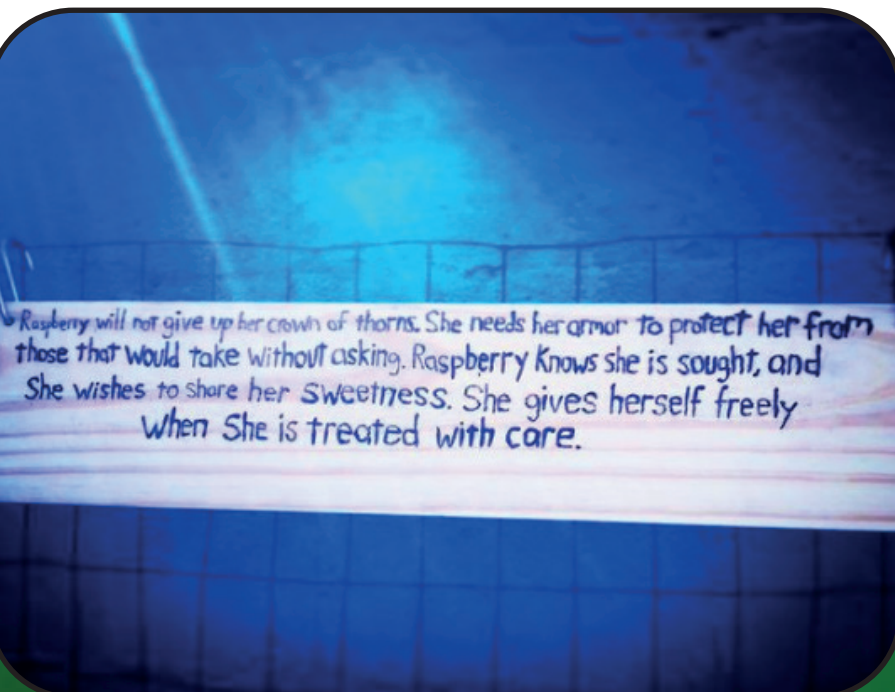
The juice lingers on the tongue and beckons us to sit down with Raspberry. In the shade of a nearby tree we spend time together, Raspberry and I. We share a secluded solitude that nourishes my soul.

Wild Raspberry is a snapshot of hot summer days. As children, we walk along the dusty back roads and pick the berries. Our fingers turn red as the berry juice bursts and we continue down a path that leads nowhere, but anywhere else, as long as it's not home. We walk, getting covered in dirty dust, drunk on berry sugar. We dream of our future with Raspberry trailing along and keeping pace.

At the end of summer, Raspberry lingers on with a headiness that entices with the early scent of decay. In between spring and summer, Raspberry does not wither away and fade with sun. She stands strong in the cold.

Becoming myself, shedding the tight outer idea of self my parents created for me, leads me to move away from the closeness of Raspberry. She doesn't grow here in my city.

She's not shy and she's not reclusive. I can easily find her on any trail, path, or along a meadow.



Raspberry even greets me in the in-between. She calls me, while my eyes are closed. She sings, not a siren song, but a lullaby. I walk towards her and she opens herself up so that we can greet each other like true friends. I glide into her and am greeted by a soft milky white viscous fluid that is her life force. I am carried to her home.

Raspberry awaits. She glows like a luminescent Luna Moth. She's pearlescent, she's like the Grandmother to Mother of Pearl. She has wings, folded upon her back, She wears a cap that covers her head. She is at once, all the colors, but subdued and lit from within. She reminds me of an ethereal Art Deco painting of an ephemeral beauty, almost translucent.

She explains that she wears a crown of thorns to protect herself. Without the thorns, she would not have survived the thirst and hunger of all that await to feast upon her. She would have, long ago, been stripped bare and left to die. The thorns fight for her and battle the greed of others. Raspberry understands there is a delicate balance between self-reliance and thriving alongside others. She extends her delicate fingers, with her offering of berries.

She shares with me a story of how she learned the lesson of needing to give to others and not become hardened and hidden behind her Thorns.

Long ago, one summer, a bear cub approached Raspberry, and grabbed at her. It cried as the thorns pierced its soft paw. The cub bled upon Raspberry and ran off to leave her alone. Winter came and she did not see the cub. Spring arrived with the news that there were no new Raspberry plants. She had hurt the cub and he had told his family. They stopped eating the berries and without them, her seeds were not dispersed.

So she sang her song for the cub, now a young bear. He came with his parents. She wanted the bears to enjoy her offerings, but she had been so worried about her fragile state that she had feared being crushed by the cub. So she attacked. She asked the bears to come to her again, with thickened pads, to taste her fruit and allow her to flourish. She would nourish them with her red color, a reminder for the blood that was spilled when she had only thought of herself and not been aware of her role in the forest.

Raspberry will not give up her crown of thorns. She needs her armor to protect her from those that would take without asking. Raspberry knows she is sought and she wishes to share her sweetness. She gives herself freely when she is treated with care.



BELTANE BLESSINGS

WHO AM I? WHAT AM I? AM I PAGAN OR AM I CHRISTIAN?

WISE WORDS FROM THE OLD CRONE

What are my true beliefs and why do I believe them? Am I just manipulating things to suit myself? This is a debate I have so often had with myself and with other people.

Am I Pagan or am I Christian? Am I a Catholic or am I a Witch? Can I be both? Well the answer, albeit in my opinion, has to be both YES and a little bit NO depending on your own beliefs. With me, whilst it has to be a yes, it is also a little bit Buddhist and a little bit Hindu and quite a bit of Hippy and so on.

What makes us Christian? What makes me a Witch? Well in fact what makes me a Person? Can I be a Mother and not mother my children? Some women give birth but do not become mothers. Some men sire children but do not become Fathers. Many people do not give birth or sire birth but have children. Does that make them any less a parent or does it make them more of a parent? Only you can decide on your own opinions here.



I am known by many names. Nita, Mum, Nanna, The Old Crone, Miss, Mrs S., that volunteer, Neil's wife, The Mother in Law, and some names I can't repeat in polite circles! If I can be known by as many names surely I can also be known by many beliefs. So what am I?

I am a mother, a granny, a daughter, a niece, an aunty, a great aunt, a godmother, a cousin, a sister, a friend, a confidant, a player, a volunteer, a card reader, a grower of herbs, a High Priestess. Gosh so many things and I am still just an ORDINARY PERSON, but I am all these things.

I think the truth of the matter is that we are all an amalgamation of experiences and knowledge often instilled in us as children, then tempered by our experiences as we grow.

I was brought up a very staunch Roman Catholic and regular church goer. Both parents, all my grandparents and as far as I know all my great-grandparents were Roman Catholic. I was sent to a Catholic convent school and my brother to a Jesuit school. I attended a catholic sixth form and then catholic Teachers Training college and even my first teaching post was in a catholic school. I had been almost force fed as a child as to what to believe, told how to behave, told my religion, told my belief, told my way of life. Even as Girl Guide I was told to smile through any adversity, Be Prepared and always, always think of others. Luckily my parents were tolerant people as to how I grew and what I believed.

All these things had a stark affect on my life. Some stay with me and some have gone by the board. I'm not a religious person and I am not sure I ever was but I am a very spiritual person. I

do believe that the Ten Commandments, set out supposedly so many years ago, are a very good blue print for life and encourages each person to try to be the best person they can. Let's just look at these a little more closely.

OK so some are especially written for the Christian/Catholic church but the rest are great rules to try to follow.

Honour thy father and thy Mother

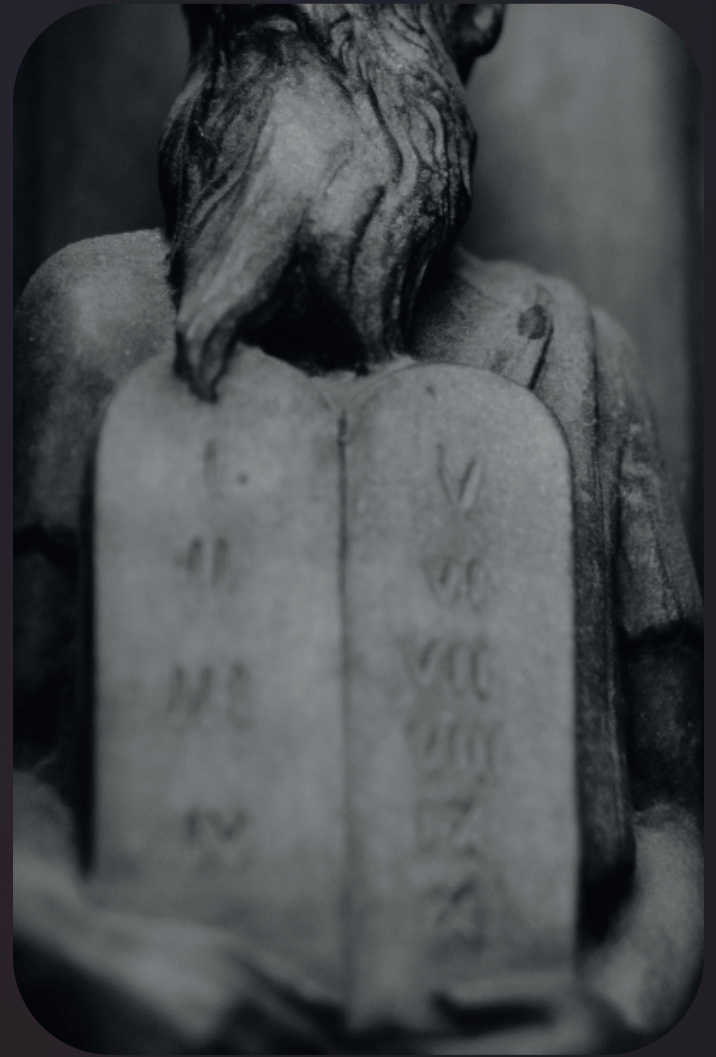
Always a good thing to do even if they have a different set of rules. Still give them credit for being your parents and doing their best for you. Not just thy Father and Mother but all people and rules which there for your guidance and safety and the safety of others.

Thou shalt not kill

What gives any one person the right to remove the life of another person? I dislike killing anything at all no matter how small (except flies).

Thou shalt not commit adultery

Always a good thing so as not to harm or hurt



someone you have given a solemn promise to.

Thou shalt not steal

Absolutely. Not even if you are an entitled person who just wants whatever another person has. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

OK social media trolls. Get over yourselves.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods

No indeed, Be grateful for what you have. You do not know how another person has been able to achieve more than you perceive you have or even less than you. Also don't brag about your own possessions.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife

Or husband in fact.

Interestingly these have changed over the 2,000+ years they were written and the meanings have changed slightly along with the cultures of



the times. Although it was written that Thou shalt not commit adultery, it was accepted at the time they were written that a man could commit adultery with an unmarried woman or with a slave. (Hmmm) Even though this was the case then, I do feel that the sentiments behind the rules and commandments are real and still very viable.

So am I Pagan? Have I changed to the DARK SIDE? Well, no of course not. I am still me and the me that began life so many years ago.

I began my pagan journey, albeit I was not aware of it at the time, reading cards at the age of ten and nobody, really, honestly, nobody, ever stopped me or told me card reading and divination was wrong or I was wrong or evil. I used to read cards as a side show at (catholic) Girl Guide Fetes and also in school. Yes really. I know it was in fun and I only charged a small amount and all monies went to the fete but still, I was actually encouraged to do it.

The first time someone told me that they felt it was wrong it was in my adult life and both people were Church of England and new to religion of any kind. Both people had come to embrace Jesus and God in adulthood. Both people were vehement that what I was doing was the devils seed and I would burn in hell. Well.....at least I'll be warm.

What does that tell me? I know what I think but I will leave you to make up your own mind. I don't like to judge others as nobody really knows the whole story do they?

So yes I am part Christian and also a Witch, a healer a purveyor of herbal remedies. When you hear the word WITCH what image do you get in your mind? A pointed hat and cloak? Bats flying around? A black cat stalking in the background? A bubbling cauldron?

Let's see.....

A pointed hat and cloak? I have worn both when dressing up and anyway a traditional beautiful Welsh Costume utilises a pointed brimmed



hat.

Bats flying around? We regularly had visitors in the shape of pipistrelles in the Lawsonia trees and brown bats too.

A Black Cat stalking around? I did have a beautiful black cat and a ginger one and a white one and a tabby and others and they were all magical.

A bubbling cauldron? I call it a saucepan. I like to cook.

What some people don't see when they hear the word Witch is... healer, herbalist, friend, confident, helper.

I am all of the above. I still uphold my catholic beliefs of being a good person and helping others, donating to charities and assisting the less fortunate where I can. I love to visit churches and graveyards as they are often beautiful sacred places, so are stone circles and holy wells and hills and beaches and forests. I embrace them all.

In all this I am still me. Catholic by birth, Pagan by choice. I must say I have yest to be struck down by lightening but I guess there is still time.

Blessings

The Old Crone

theoldcrone5@gmail.com



MERRY MEET

SCOTT IRVINE RESURRECTION (OF THE GODDESS)

Beltain is my favourite season of the year when the icy grip of winter has pretty much dissipated and the balmy warm days and nights of summer is on the horizon. Its name comes from the Akkadian god of light 'Bel' and 'fire', the fires of Bel.

Bel means Lord and is the title given to the chief Babylonian fertility god Marduk who, after defeating the Great Mother Goddess Tiamat in single combat went on to become the creator God of all Mesopotamia. Tiamat had carried the 'Tablets of Destiny' around her neck giving her the power to govern the fortune of all life on Earth. After she was slain, Marduk took the tablets and used them to create a new world order where God and man ruled over goddess and woman.

He sliced the old goddess in two, imprisoning her top half in the furthest reaches of the universe to create Heaven and her bottom half in the dark depths of the Earth to create Hell (the Upper and Underworld's). The Upperworld was for the abode of the Gods in the care of the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar, the Goddess of Love. The Underworld was for the abode of the disembodied souls after the death of their body vehicle in the care of the Queen of Darkness, Ersehkigal, the Goddess of Death.

May is named after the Roman nature goddess Maia who oversees the growth of plants (much

like the Akkadian nature goddess Ninmah, the aunty of Marduk/Bel. The celebration of Bel on the first day of May symbolises the return of the Lord, the resurrection of the Sun (Son) and the rebirth of nature. It is a time of fertility when fresh spring blooms start to give off scent attracting insects to pollenate the plant to produce its fruit. Without this transaction, nature and many creatures on our planet, including us would cease to exist. If only the big corporations that are content in destroying nature for profit could understand this. A world without nature is a dead world and no amount of money will change that. Both rich and poor, young and old, healthy and infirm will die.

Only with the respect and care for nature will we have any chance to get through the coming tribulations mainly caused by climate change and corporate profits. Nature does not give a flying fig for wealth of power.

Nature is a primordial feminine force that is older than the Earth itself. She was once nurtured by the Great Mother Goddess Tiamat (the Mother of Life) and revered by our hunter-gatherer ancestors who took their guidance from her. When Marduk created the world in his image, he gave dominion of Nature to Kings and men for them to exploit her rich ores of precious metals and stones. The hunter-gatherers of the Mother Goddess were made to live in cities that were built from their labours and work for the benefit of the priests of the Gods who advised the King how to govern his sub-

jects in return for sacrifices, offerings and taxes. It is a world we are subjected to still to this day. Before we can change this dire situation, we need the return of the Great Mother Goddess who has, over the years been dissected into many smaller, lesser goddesses, diluting her power considerably and reducing her many parts to mere consorts and sex objects to the more powerful Gods.

We need to reclaim all the parts of Tiamat to one great superpower of feminine energy, reconnect Heaven and Hell for a fuller picture of the truth of what living on Earth should be, the balance of everything for the benefit of all living creatures and Nature herself. Only then, with the Earth Goddess, the Akkadian Ki, the Greek Gaia or the Roman Terra Mater, Mother Earth returned to the forefront of the human mind can Nature recover to her former glory. Only then, can the planet sustain ALL that live on Her and dwell in peace and harmony as the Goddess intended at the beginning of time.

How do we do that? First, we need to understand that the world is dying being managed as it is now. The system stinks based on divide and rule. If we leave it to the powers that be, Mother Earth will take matters into her own hands, destroy everything and start again. Never underestimate Her power.

A major part of Beltain is the fires, the element of cleansing and renewal. Like the resurrection of the phoenix from the ashes, the Mother will return. The fire, as well as giving light and heat, also destroys the weak, the outdated and the broken. Whoever your Goddess is, she is part of the whole, a piece of the original Mother Goddess Tiamat who cared for and nurtured our early ancestors. We are her children and like children need guidance and discipline

from a caring source. The Stone Age mind was childlike, easily influenced and still open to learning the way of the world.

Their young minds were subjugated to the 'civilised' world of the Gods way too soon. By putting aside the unique differences of the many goddesses we revere and bring them all together, the Mother can regain her strength and begin to stand up to the misogynistic patriarchal Gods that control our lives with fear and worry today.

Draw on the power of the Mother to fulfil Her second coming and a better life for us all.

Blessed be, happy Beltain.



MAKING YOUR MAGIC AND SPELL WORK MORE SUCCESSFUL

RACHAEL TREYMANE



My name is Rachael Treymane and I am an Eclectic Pagan Witch based in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am the Leader of Coven of the Sacred Stars, and I have been tutoring and guiding new comers in the Southern Hemisphere for a couple of decades now.

A common theme that I get asked about is how can people make their magic and spell work more successful, and I think that is an extremely fair question. A lot of people gravitate towards practicing magic because of the power behind it, so we want results at the end of the day!

Ultimately you will do you, I only offer these methods due to how they have helped and amplified my results and those who I have mentored.

The first thing to do is get on the same page as yourself. I feel very strongly about this, because when people set out to do a spell they quite often ask for something other than what they really want or need. Your magic probably works a lot more than you give it credit for, but you aren't measuring it from the right spot. Let me explain; money spells are super popular, and if money is what you want then so be it. How-

ever, the reason behind why you want the money is your real purpose for the spell and therefore will dictate the outcome. If you want more money in your life examine why, get really interested in you and your motives.

Many people want more money because it brings about feelings of security and success, but the universe understands (and at a certain level you do too) that money will only bring about these feelings temporarily - if at all. The universe instead will provide you with opportunities to feel security and success without money because it is more sustainable, however, you might not notice this because your spell was for money instead. If you need a new fridge, then make your spell about that instead of money.

It's a clearer pathway and you will probably be more successful. If you have a low income and want to make it more abundant then consider doing magic that will enable society to value people's time and labour more, or a spell that supports a new legislation change which will bring about much needed economic change - we are more than an individual at the end of the day!!

If you have a hard time trying to decipher what you actually truly want then get a reading from someone neutral, as this can trigger your thought processes

and inner self. Getting on the same page with yourself when it comes to your spell work is essential.

I believe that while you are better off formulating your own spells, please ask for advice if you get stuck! It is normal to ask for guidance, as we are a social species, and learn from each other all



of the time. It might not be the best idea to jump online because there are numerous sources and you can easily become overwhelmed. But if you can scroll through and can objectively decide what is right for you and what isn't, then go for gold!

While some people would argue that intention is the only thing you need for spell work I am going to challenge this just a smidge - especially for those just starting out. Here is why; ingredients/ tools/ associations help bring focus and much needed energy to your magic. As a beginner you might not have the energy needed to pull most things off on your own - and sometimes we just don't have the energy anyways no matter how experienced we are.



Learn to use the energies around you, that of your tools/ ingredients/ associations but also the world around you, your ancestors, and your deities. If you are new to ancestor or deity work please be respectful, and understand that if you call on an entity, they still have the choice to engage with you and your magic - they are under no obligation to do your bidding. You cannot force your ancestors or deity to do anything that they are not willing to do; they are not Pokémon characters at the end of the day! You can expect that over time and with practice that your energies will build up, just like working out your body at the gym. Over time your relationship with deity and your ancestors will grow stronger too.

Also, let's be real for twenty seven seconds, your intentions will not indicate the entire outcome of your magic or spell work. For example, if you do a spell to get a job and it is successful that's great! But let's not pretend that someone else might have needed that job more than you and as a result of your spell they are still struggling to feed their family for another month. This is the harsh reality of magic and unless you understand this fundamental concept you will never tap into your true magical potential.

How much preparation you pour into your magic and spell work is also important in my experience. A lot of our spell work is actually spicy psychology and the

more effort you put into your magic the better chance you have of changing your behaviour or circumstance in order to achieve what you want to achieve. When it comes to the words that you use be extremely specific, the more to the point you are the better! Whatever words you use do not need to rhyme and they do not need to be perfect, they just have to have meaning behind them - emotion. Yes, bring your emotion to your magical workings, because they are in fact another extremely positive tool to help elevate your end result.

In my opinion, any correspondences you use for a spell are best left exclusive for that spell. For example; if you use a candle then only reuse it to charge your spell up again, or use it to mediate on the spell - you get the picture. Get crafty and make your own stuff and use the things you have in or around your home already. Consider what magical correspondences are associated with what you have in your garden and in your cupboards before you go out and buy new items. If you need something a little more specific then by all means purchase it, but it is important to know that you don't need all the expensive and elaborate things out there. If you do end up making a purchase please consider supporting another Pagan or Witch in the community before a generic shop - usually their love and intentions are bound in their creations and you can also harness that in your spell work.

Lastly, using substitutes in your spell work is normal. It is a pretty typical aspect to switch things out for elements that are more readily available to us. Just be mindful of your substitutes though!!! For example; if you are making a fruit salad and don't have pineapple but have plenty of strawberries, then using them would be a good move. But if you are making a fruit salad and don't have pineapple, substituting it with chocolate just won't do! You won't have a fruit salad in the end, if you get my meaning. You will have something different, and perhaps that is ok or better, but it still won't be a fruit salad.

If you are interested in building on your magical success, you might want to consider recording your processes and methods. You can go back to your recordings and reflect on what went well, but also, what could go better next time. Like most things in life, we get better with reflective practice, so dive deep and have fun out there!

Go well beautiful souls, Rachael x

COVEN OF THE SACRED STARS

Coven of the Sacred Stars is a magical community based in Christchurch/ tautahi, Aotearoa New Zealand in the Southern Hemisphere. The coven is made up of up to twenty two people at any given moment and they hail from all walks of life and different cultures. Membership includes, (but it is not limited to), Wiccans, Atheists, and Druids, but is predominantly made up of Pagan Witches.

The coven prides itself on their original rituals, Wheel of the Year celebrations (specific to the land and cycles in Aotearoa New Zealand), moon moots, magic, and its ability to provide a safe and nurturing space to fully explore the true eclectic nature of the coven. Social justice is a main theme in the coven and they are passionate about being good Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners (New Zealand's countries founding document), prochoice, the environment and the rainbow community, among other things.

The coven are committed to having a positive influence on the general public about witchcraft by challenging stereotypes and providing education, while advocating for individual and community connection and change. Pagan Pub Night, the Samhain Photo Shoot, and the (2023) Beltaine Ball, are some of the public events that the coven uses to engage the witchcraft and Pagan community in Aotearoa New Zealand. These events also enable people in the general public to get a sense of who Witches and Pagans really are, guided by actual Witches and Pagans, rather than what Hollywood or dominant religions stipulate.

Coven of the Sacred Stars was created by Rachael Treymane in 2019, but did not come into full fruition until Rachael had found its original and founding members in 2020. "I was looking for very specific people who could equally carry magical practice alongside community responsibility, practical work and the specific coven culture that I was creating". The founding people include



Sophia Lee, Jono Huntley, Jess Jean, and Kat Fitzell. "Some found me, but others I deliberately head hunted. It is important to find the right people for such a big project".

Rachael had always been in and out of spiritual groups from the age of sixteen, but had never found the magical coven that she truly craved. On investigation Rachael discovered that there were many people in the community that felt the same way so this became the driving force. "Sometimes when something is not available you have to pull up your big girl pants and create it yourself!"

Originally Rachael had attempted to create another group called Canterbury Coven, however due to uncommitted membership and an imbalance of rights and responsibilities, the group was extremely short lived. "At first I was heart-broken, but this was short lived as the universe gave me a tap on my shoulder and told me to keep going, letting me know that the right people would turn up. I'm so glad that I kept going!"



Rachael set off on a new path, taking her original ideas with her, and remained dedicated to her initial vision. With strong leadership and a firm foundation of members who valued integrity and interdependence, Coven of the Sa-

cred Stars was born and remains thriving to this day. “It is just phenomenal what we have achieved in such a short amount of time. Something I am most proud of is how our member’s transition from being worried about coming out of the broom closet to freely telling people how they identify spiritually. This enables the people watching us to do the same, bringing more safety and equality to our spiritual communities. It also normalises us, and that is important”.

Coven of the Sacred Stars has inspired, and continues to inspire, other nature based spiritual groups and covens to form, which was an original goal of Rachael’s. “It was so difficult to find magical peers, and most covens were well out of the public eye. Even the small few who were searchable were not taking in new members. Coven of the Sacred Stars has flipped this part of our culture on its head”.

Rachael wanted her Witch and Pagan peers to have a wide menu of magical organisations to choose from to join, as this was seriously lacking in Aotearoa New Zealand. “Since we have gone public I count four other covens that have



just popped up that we have inspired, and they are just the ones we know about! It is humbling to think about this being possible in little ole Aotearoa New Zealand, but it is the current reality and I can't wait to see what this looks like in the future".

Coven of the Sacred Stars offer guidance and mentorship to anyone who is looking to start their own coven in their own area, however in the future the coven intends on branching out and having membership countrywide - it is possible that even international membership will evolve.

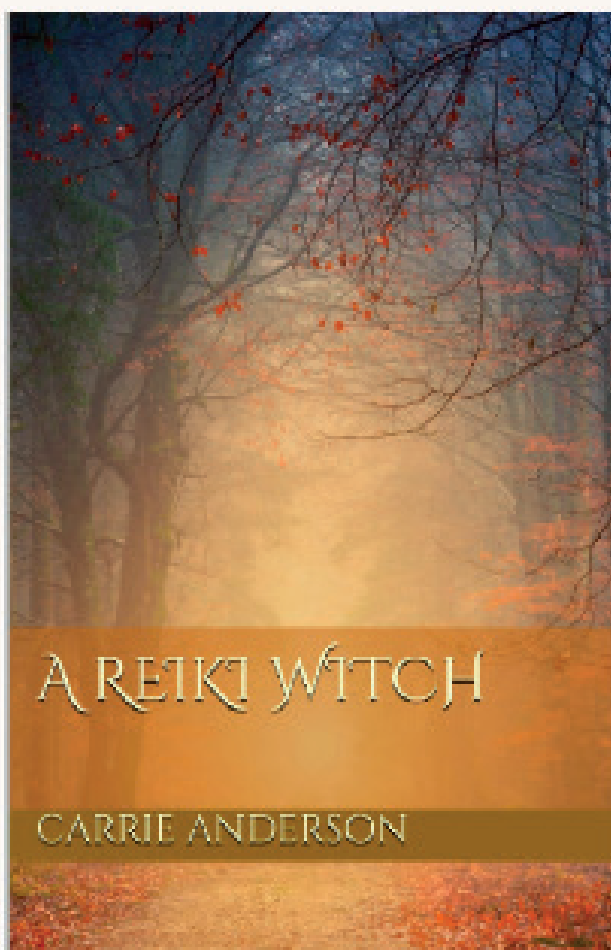
Anyone who has a genuine interest in joining Coven of the Sacred Stars has a chance and there is a thorough screening process to help ensure that the coven is the right fit for the potential member. The coven acknowledges that there is still a shortage of covens in Aotearoa New Zealand and people are excited when they stumble across their group.

However, the coven also acknowledges that due to their public facing element and their social justice endeavours that the coven will not be the right fit for everyone.

Coven of the Sacred Stars require their members to be strong communicators, exclusive to their coven, be formally initiated (in due time), be committed to their obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, completely avoid cultural appropriation, and engage in their active democratic and consensus based processes.

There are two types of membership in the coven - the "coven core", who act like the engine of the coven, and the "regular membership" who attend social functions, rather than formal moon moots. The coven core is made up of roles such as Leader, Co-Leader, Secretary, Treasurer, Master of Tools, Social Media Officer, Events Manager, Coven Membership Rep and Alternate Officer. In the future the coven intend on having a third type of membership that is a lot more casual, intended for people they network with, their friends and family, and practitioners who want to participate in the occasional larger ritual or Wheel of the Year celebration.

A REIKI WITCH



Carrie Anderson

Learn ways to
incorporate your
witchcraft with your
Reiki

A new book on Kindle
Unlimited and also
available as a
paperbook.

AURORA

She slips fingers
stained with stardust
into slick folds and
paints the first dawn
in flames and desire

She rises on the light
crescending like the sun
and crashing into embers
birthing her own spirit
from the fire of creation

In her doseheld center
lies a multitude of self
each a world perfectly apart
in a dark universe
fertile with beginnings

STEFFIE DE VAAN



CURSED

Emma Wells

“More sinned against than sinning” – King Lear

*Blame spins hotly on men’s tongues,
lashing out at framed culprits
tagging them as scapegoats,
maiming reputations to tatters.*

*Blame a woman.
Simple.
Easy.
Child’s play.*

*Even better:
brandish her a witch.*

*An irreversible curse
upon supposed devil women
in league with Lucifer himself;
natural healers, green witches
scorched fast with hate,
baked hard by misplaced misogyny.*

Witches. Sufferers all.

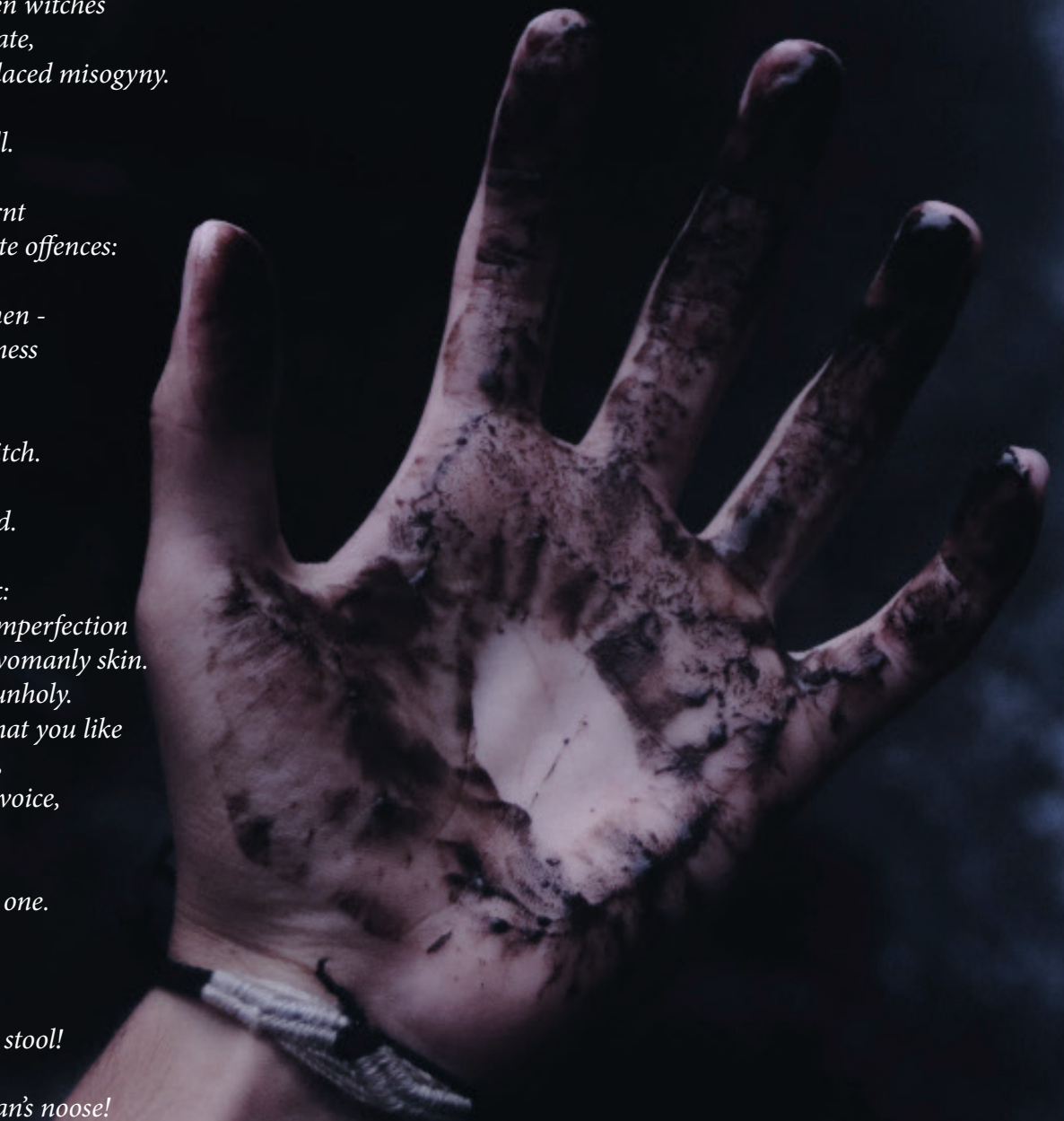
*Hung, drowned, burnt
for mostly illegitimate offences:
shamelessly abused
by finger-pointing men -
too afeared of otherness
to seek truth .*


*Better to blame a witch.
Mud sticks.
Fling it fast and hard.*

*Find the witch mark:
a blemish, mole or imperfection
upon godforsaken, womanly skin.
Call it guilt. Call it unholy.
Call it sin. Call it what you like
for if you are a man,
with a loud enough voice,
all will believe you.*

*The masses move as one.
Unthinking.
Truth matters not.*

*Prepare the ducking stool!
Fire the timbers!
Tie tight the hangman’s noose!*





*No court. No hearing.
No judgement. No fellow women
to protest. All too cowered. Afeared.
Crushed by patriarchal pressures.*

*So sisters burn, drown, choke
upon societal cords of distaste
with no kind eyes onlooking;
no true confidante with bending ear
or redeemer of the peace.
Was God asleep? Aged too long.*

*For these women were cursed
blighted as failed crops;
ominous as a raven's shadow;
duplicitous as jezebels;
unknown as voodoo dolls.
Damned and doomed.*

*Blame a witch.
Easy as pie.
A simple sum:
 $1+1 = 2$.*

*Mankind stands back,
statically witnessing fires ablaze;
spiked hate flickering
in dubious, peaked whispers.*

*Women of science
culled from society:
midwives, nurses, doctors,
apothecaries, herbalists -
all alternative therapists purged
by man's ignorance.*

*All women cursed (all too unfairly)
by trade or knowledge.*

Blame a witch.

*Shame is etched deeply
in historical tapestries of time;
study closely, pinpointing
threads of blackened woe:
each loop and whorl
is a cursed witch,
flailing to be freed.*

Emma is a mother and English teacher. She has poetry published with various literary journals and magazines. She enjoys writing flash fiction and short stories also. Her debut novel, *Shelley's Sisterhood*, is due to be published in 2023.

CORINNA'S GOING A MAYING.

P. J. Richards.

She loved her husband, in her own way. He was young and handsome and faithful – all she required. The only cruel thing he'd ever done was to tell her how he hated her favourite dress, but upon seeing her expression, he immediately rued his harsh words and bought her a new one. It was green silk brocade with leaves of silver thread stitched over the bodice; a flouncy thing, trimmed with ribbons and fine French lace – she never wore it. Her favourite dress was of simple black linen. Too plain, everyone said, for a woman as comely as Corinna.

Life was peaceful in their household, quiet with no children; and though the servants were discrete, she was aware that the village gossips had their own opinions on the subject. Her husband never mentioned it, not because he didn't want a child, she knew, but that he didn't want her to feel responsible.

She was of course.

Sometimes when they sat together in the long evenings; she with her embroidery, he with his books, and the flames in the fireplace cast their fleeting jagged shadows around the walls, she would notice him glance up as if catching sight of something, whereupon she would lean across and stroke his cheek, whispering his name in a voice as honey sweet as the scent of the beeswax candles, to bring him back to her.

Her modest manner of dress and pious ways earned her a Puritan reputation despite her husband's loyalty to the throne. She kept her own council, as always, content that her influence reached far deeper than his politics. And when mutterings amongst his friends about the potential source of betrayal she posed, caused him anxiety – unspoken as always but she could tell – she charmed his misgivings away with pledges of steadfast devotion, soothing his furrowed brow with her cool fingers, easing him in the velvet warmth of their bedroom, until he forgot all words except hers.

She wore black to counter the fairness of her hair, to cast a sombre and chaste shadow over her conspicuous beauty. Whispers behind hands claimed it was an affectation, but she wore the widow's weeds in honour of her late husband and would not allow herself to be coaxed out of mourning, even though it was now almost seven years since her loss - and the same seven years since her subsequent

wedding, for a young widowed heiress with a fine house and estate would always be an irresistible temptation.

On the few occasions when she wasn't at her husband's side she could be found in the church, her bowed head covered with a plain linen coif, hands clasped together so tightly in prayer that the knuckles stood out pale as the pearls around her slender neck. Sometimes she would shake, lost in a holy fervour, her beautiful face upraised, eyes showing only the whites, rosy lips soundlessly speaking words of no recognisable tongue. At these times the other parishioners, in respect of her obvious piety - and out of a tacit fear - left the surrounding carved pews empty. The priest tolerated her shivering form, alone in the seat belonging to her family name, but whenever the sun shone through the stained glass windows, and St Michael appeared to wield a lance of light to pin her down, there would be a strange shimmering over the unused places, and the dust motes in the air would part around shapes like small stooped shoulders and heads. Then the priest would cross himself and lean upon the great and reassuring Bible, and would not meet her eyes.

Respected but never liked, she held her position in that small domain, as a seed protected in her delicate hands, nurtured for her own benefit. Beyond, in her husband's turbulent kingdom, England was staggering towards civil war in a gathering storm of debts and obligations. Here in her realm, she prepared to pay what she owed.

*

When at last the seventh Winter died and the year turned, she felt a pang of regret. The price of love. Corinna caressed the thought with awe.

The tide of Spring was surging over every patch of earth, heralded from countless throats; the birds seeming to sing out the blossom that garlanded the orchards and hedgerows. Even the most humble cottage gardens proffered their abundance like brimming treasure chests, and the rutted lanes were spiced with fragrant herbs.

Under her black dress she wore a shift of emerald green, vivid as the church windows, soft as the new leaves, hidden carefully beneath her skirts so no edge would be glimpsed as she walked along, singing softly.

'Rise, and put on your foliage, and be seen,
To come forth, like the Springtime, fresh and green...'

Her head was uncovered, the coif pushed back to lie across her shoulders, she plucked flowers from the hedges as she passed and twined them into her loose hair.

‘And sweet as Flora take no care, for jewels for your gown or hair.
Fear not, the leaves will strew, gems in abundance upon you..’

The sunrise had transformed the dewdrops to glass, as if the sky had been crafted from a vaulted church window and then shattered into myriad tiny splinters. She smiled and closed her eyes, delighting in the warmth and the ruby light glowing through the blood within her eyelids. She unbuckled her shoes and cast them aside. Feathery grass closed over her feet, cool and damp, she clenched her toes until the mud soaked through the turf and her slim feet were stained brown, only her nails showing clean as small pink shells.

She could feel May rising through the ground, swelling like an oncoming wave. Then a man’s clear voice sang out over the birdsong:

‘Come, we’ll abroad, and let’s obey
The proclamation made for May,
And sin no more, as we have done, by staying,
But my Corinna, come, let’s go a Maying.’

Her husband.

Every Mayday he found her, out in the fields and woods by the dawn light, her black dress hitched up for running, legs bare and wet with dew, hair wild and wound with petals, chanting the song for which she was named. She reached out her hand and he took it, and they ran, leaping, laughing, singing together as best they could in breathless gasps.

‘Some have wept, and wooed, and plighted troth,
Many a green-gown has been given..’

‘Corinna!’ He laughed with wonder, ‘your shift – are you finally out of mourning?’
‘For now.’

They trampled a wide dark trail through the silvered meadow, towards the hawthorn wood; first one leading then the other until they were spinning, arms linked, in a mad dance. When they reached the trees they fell, tangled together and giddy with delight. He made to kiss her, but she put a finger to his lips.

‘Not yet, my love.’ And she drew him further in.

Behind them in the meadow a line of thin trails followed, moving swift and straight as arrows.

The trees closed around them as they walked deeper in, growing thicker and darker, the warm air perfumed by their blossom. At last she found a place that pleased her: a sunlit glade, draped with spangled silken webs, and at its centre a ring of boulders adorned with moss as deep and soft as featherdown. She led him into its heart.

He smiled and drew her into an embrace. "Listen! You have silenced the birds with your beauty."

'Then we shall sing for them.' She kissed him, and then they both took up the refrain in hushed, passionate tones.

'Come, let us go, while we are in our prime.
And take the harmless folly of the time...'

With his lips still on hers he caught a reflection in her eyes, a shape darting behind him, but she cupped his face and kept him from turning.

The glade darkened as if a cloud had veiled the sun, he shivered and looked up - the sky was clear. His voice faltered to silence while she sang on.

'Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun...'
Other voices joined hers, light and pure as birds'.
'And as a vapour, or a drop of rain
Once lost, can ne'r be found again...'

'Sing with your children, my love, they have waited so patiently these seven years.'
Now he dared not look behind him.

He felt small hands, cold and slimed with mud, catch hold of his, and tug insistently on the hem of his coat. He kept his fearful staring eyes on Corinna's face.

'So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade...'

High voices, his hands pulled and clutched tight, he dared not, dared not look down.

‘All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night..’

Corinna smiled. ‘Seven beautiful babes, my love, all of them yours, each birthed here in these woods and swaddled in the snows of February.’

Corinna stooped, stroked her cupped hands through the moss growing on the stones, raised them and washed her face in the dew. Her skin shone, lustrous and perfect against the darkling glade. She closed her eyes and breathed in deeply as if pulling all the life of Spring deep inside her.

She unlaced her black linen bodice and tore away the skirts, shedding them to reveal the green gown beneath. It was the dress he had bought her, stripped of its ribbons and lace, the silver embroidery unpicked.

She was all he could see - all he would ever see.

His May Queen.

She exulted in his enduring passion. Laughed with pure joy when the name she had chosen for herself was cried out on her husband’s final breath, as he was pulled down into the yielding, devoted earth. For upon this day her love for him was as deep and true as his roots, as bountiful as the leaves he would grow for her, as sweet as the blossom he would bear.

And when the Maying was over and done; when the noonday sun had dried the dew and her tears, after her children were settled down safe in their earthen cots, and the last notes of her song were held; Corinna would lay one more stone within her circle, then wander homeward singing, to mend her beloved black gown.

And mourn her King.

* * *

WHAT WE'RE READING

THE MAGIC OF

SERPANTS

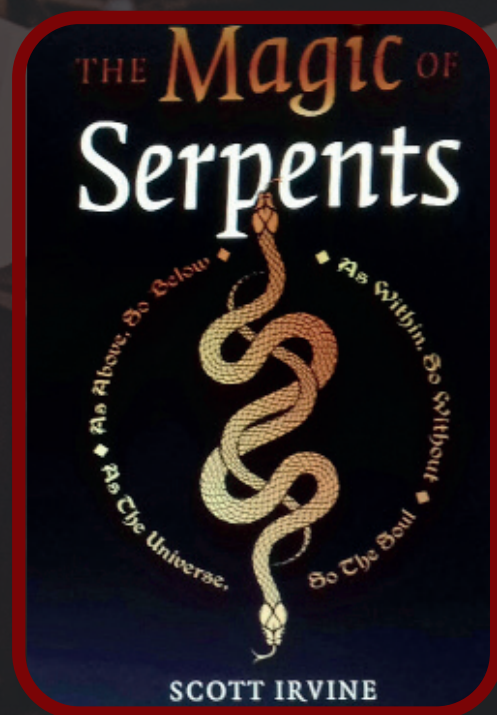
BY SCOTT IRVINE

When you call on the power of an animal, you are asking to be drawn into complete harmony with the strength of that creature's nature. Your spiritual animal becomes your teacher, allowing you to grow and connect with Mother Earth. Learn to honour every living thing as a teacher, see the spirit in everything and Mother Earth will begin to reveal her secrets.

The snake evokes strong feelings of both fascination and fear; fascination because of its sleek wavy body that glides across the ground with ease and fear because of its vicious bite and the speed it can crawl across the ground. The spirit of the snake as a universal creative force can bring the beauty of nature and the connection with Mother Earth to life. The power of the snake spirit is the magic of creation as it embodies sexuality, psychic energy, alchemy, fertility and promotes ascension into the higher realms. It is the energy of wholeness, cosmic consciousness and promotes the ability to experience anything without fear. It is the knowledge that all things are equal in creation. The serpent represents complete understanding and acceptance of the opposing male and female forces within each organism, creating a union of two into one, producing raw divine energy.

On a personal level, the serpent teaches that we are all universal beings. By accepting all aspects of your life at any given moment, you can bring about transformation of the creative fire from within. This fire energy, when working on the material plane creates passion and desire, procreation and physical vitality. On the emotional plane, it becomes drive and ambition, creation and resolution. On the mental plane, the fire becomes intellect and charisma, power and leadership. When the snake energy reaches the spiritual plane, it becomes wisdom and understanding, wholeness (holiness) and complete connection to the spirit of the entire universe.

The Magic of Serpents by Scott Irvine will be available from June 2023 and available from the publishers Moon Books (John Hunt Publishing) and major outlets including Amazon and Waterstones.



SCRYING: DIVINATION USING CRYSTALS, MIRRORS, WATER AND FIRE BY LUCYA STARZA

REVIEW BY CARRIE ANDERSON

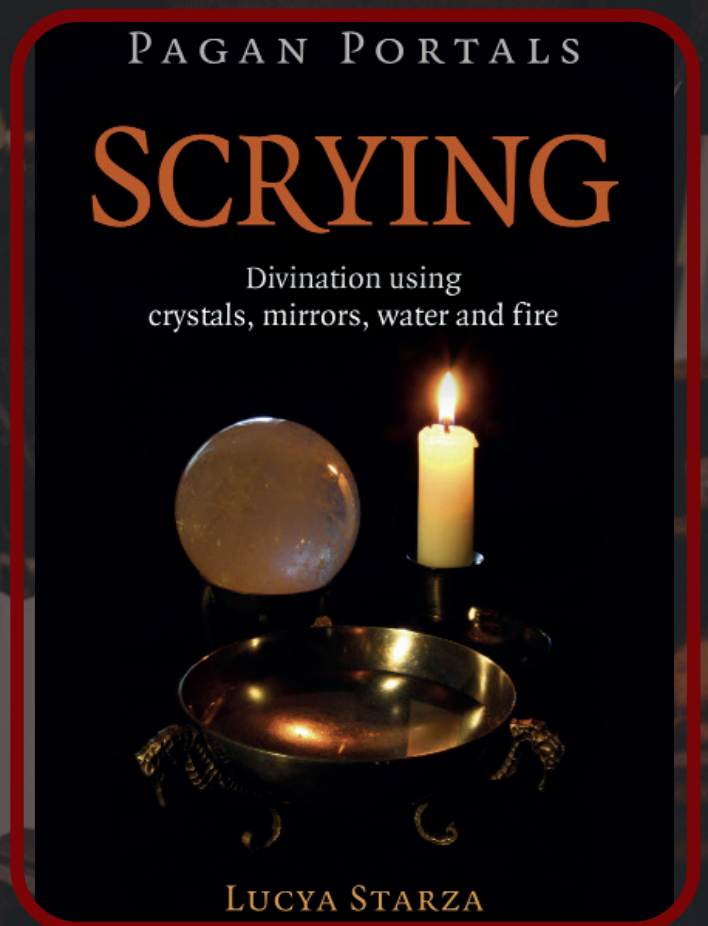
Scrying is my preferred method when offering divination services. I specifically love wax scrying, black mirror, and crystal ball scrying. I am reviewing this book with the lens of someone that does offer professional scrying services.

I found Starza's book on scrying to be an excellent overview and introduction to the subject. She not only focuses on the more common methods of scrying but she touches upon lesser known ones too.

I particularly liked that the author offered ways to scry that do not require you to purchase any items. Her chapter on scrying in the outdoors shows that this form of divination is accessible and can be combined with being in nature.

Lucya Starza offers some tips, ideas and guided meditations to help the reader practice the art of scrying.

If you are interested in learning how to scry then I would say this book is a great starting place.



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by LUCYA STARZA

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