

Lecture #10
the Wicca Movement

in the past ~~20~~⁵⁰ years, alongside the resurgence of the occult, a very decentralized religious movement has sprung up that remains comparatively unnoticed and, when it is, is generally misunderstood.

there are throughout the U.S., thousands of such groups numbering between a few people and several hundred members in each.

these are very individualistic, autonomous, and self made, having no masters or gurus.

they have no temples and meet most often in woods, parks, apartments and homes.

in contrast to most organized cults, money seldom passes hand to hand.

entry into these groups is by choice, not conversion.

These groups differ in regard to tradition, scope, structure, organization, ritual and names for their deities but do regard each other as part of the same religious philosophical movement.

they have a common name, pagan or neo-pagan.

they share a set of values and communicate with each other thru a network of news-letters, regional and national gatherings.

they are poly-theists, share a goal of living in harmony with nature, and see ritual as a tool to end alienation.

Pagan Movement

most look to the old pre-christian nature religions of Europe and the mystery traditions for inspiration.

some even look at the visions of Robert Graves and J.R.R. Tolkien or aboriginal peoples for inspiration.

most of these groups have grown up in cities where the loss of nature has been felt and where the tools to enlarge such a perception exist.

the religious movement called "neo-pagan", including the wicca movement, is only partly an occult phenomena.

it is often interwoven with the artistic and visionary tradition, the ecology movement, the feminist movement and liberation traditions.

Magic

a word about magic since it is associated with the movement, particularly witchcraft.

magic is simply a word for a whole collection of techniques which involve the mind.--

it can be a mobilization of consciousness, will and emotion and uses the imaginative faculties, particularly visualization, in order to begin to understand how other beings function in nature so this knowledge can be used to achieve necessary ends.

for example: to catch fish with ones hands, one has to think like a bear catching fish.

Pagan comes from the latin word paganus which simple meant a country dweller.

heathen originally was one who dwelt in the heath.

these became negative as Christianity grew because these were usually the last people to accept Christianity.

Christianity was basically a religion of the city and urban areas thus the term 'pagan' became an insult meaning 'hick' by the 3rd century in Rome.

Pagan also became associated with hedonism--which in part was true since a certain amount of sexuality was/is incorporated into religious practice.

not all pagan groups practice this attitude

generally, neo-pagans have a healthy attitude about sex.

Wicca or Witchcraft movement

this movement also seeks there inspiration from pre-Christian sources, Eurpean folklore and mythology.

they consider themselves priests and priestesses of the ancient European Shamanistic nature religion that worships a goddess who is related to the ancient mother goddess in her three aspects of maiden, Mother and Crone.

many craft traditions also worship a god, related to the ancient horned lord of animals.

many neo-pagan witches see themselves as modern day heirs to the ancient mystery traditions of Egypt, Crete, Eleusis, etc., as well as more popular peasent traditions of celebratory festivals

and seasonal rites.

most of the craft define witchcraft as "the craft of the wise."

Neo-pagans look at religion differently then most which see the need for a deity (usually male) and contains "beliefs" and "dogmas"

neo-pagans say the root religio means to re-link, re-connect, and therefore refers to any philosophy which makes deep connections between human beings and the universe.

one of the foremost characteristics of the neo-pagan movement is the return to the ancient idea that there is no seperation between secular and sacred, spiritual and material.

one feminist coven says that to them spiritual meant "the power within oneself to create artistically and change ones life."

they see no contradiction between their political and social concern and their concern for "things of the spirit."

most tribal peoples will agree with them.

Women, Feminism and the Craft

feminist covens are springing up all over the US, some showing more creativity, energy and sponteneity than the more "traditional" groups which have existed for years.

many men (and some women) in the mainstream craft groups are upset by the growth offeminist covens, since many feminist witches have purposely rejected some principles, norms, and

structures of the modern wicca movement.

in fact, many feminist witches have stated that women are witches by right.

Z. Budapest (an immigrant from Hungary) has stated that the craft is "wimmins religion", a religion not open to men. she, however, is an extremist.

in addition, feminist witches have stated that witchcraft is no incompatible with politics and that the craft has historically nbeen conceived in rebellion and can only be true to its nature when it continues its ancient fight against oppression.

at various confrences held on questions of spirituality it has become clear that many women regard political struggle and spiritual development as interdependent, and feel both are needed to create a society and culture that will be meaningful to them.

W.I.T.C.H was an organization that came into being on all Hallows eve in 1968. in its first manifesto WITCH stated that the link between women, Witchcraft and politics is very old:

WITCH is an all-woman everything. It's theater, revolution, magic, terror, joy, garlic flowers, spells. It's awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression--particularly the oppression of women--down through the ages. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovey, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. (this possibly explains why 9 million Witches were . . .the first birth-control practitioners and abortionists, the first alchemists (turn dross into gold and you devalue the whole idea of money!) They bowed to no man, being the living remants of the oldest culture of all--one in which men and women were equal sharers in the truly cooperative society, before the death-dealing sexual, economic, and spiritual

repression of the imperialist Phallic Society took over and began to destroy nature and human society.

originally the initials stood for Women's international Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell and it really ruffled the feathers of the conservative members of the Wiccal movement.

however, only the letters remained the same. When demonstrating against Bell Telephone they became Women incensed at telephone company harassment.

this change happened a number of times.

at the time WITCH was founded it was a fringe phenomena, but today its sentiments are accepted by a much larger number of feminists, tho still a minority.

Up to now the neo-pagan movement consists of men and women attempting to live a way of life and uphold values that have been a minority vision in western culture.

in general, neo-pagans embrace the values of spontaneity, nonauthoritarianism, anarchism, pluralism, polytheism, animism, sensuality, passion, a belief in the goodness of pleasure, religious ecstasy and the goodness of this world as well as the possibility of many others.

they may differ in regard to tradition, ritual and concept of Deity but they all view the Earth as the Great Mother who has been raped, pillaged, and plundered and must once again be exalted if we are to survive.

feminists and pagans are both coming from the same source and

heading toward the same goal without realizing it, and the two are now beginning to interlace.

the journey toward spirituality began with Consciousness raising groups which gave women a chance to talk about personal experiences and find them validated by other women. ie, they learned to trust their own feelings.

the stemp from C.R. group to coven was not long.

boty are small groups that meet regularly and are involved in deeply personal questions..

most the original Consciousness raising groups no longer exist as most women are into political action or doing research on women.

this research has turned up legends of the Amazons and myth cycles involving ancient goddesses or heroines.

it has led woment to the Great Mother Goddess in all her aspects and has also led women into magic and psychic work.

this means that as women begin having spiritual experiences they trust them for the first time in thousands of years.

the witch is woman as martyr, she is persecuted by the ignorant, she is the woman who lives outside societies definition of woman.

the witch is one of the few positive images of the strong, potent female power in society, dating from pre-classical Greece.

she was the healer, the wise woman. Many women are trying to get back to their power through ritual and dream work.

the feeling is that if the image of woman has been tainted for about 4000 years they must either go back to the untainted images before or create new images from within themselves.

women are doing both.

as priestess McFarland writes:

We are each Virgin Huntresses, we are each Great Mothers, we are Death Dealers who hold out the promise of rebirth and regeneration. We are no longer afraid to see ourselves as her daughters, nor are we afraid to refuse to be victims of the subtle Burning Time. The Wicce is Revolutionary.

Special issues of such feminist magazines as "Quest", "Country Woman" and "Flextus" have been devoted to spirituality and its relation to the feminist politics.

for example: an editorial in "Country Woman's" special issue noted that women's experiences, both political and spiritual, have never been part of noticed events.

women religious leaders have usually been considered "minor" or "Eccentric," as opposed to the male "gurus" or "messiahs".

the editorial also observed that the division between politics and religion is artificial, a product of the patriarchal misconceptions built into the language. it said:

two streams are developing in women's consciousness--a political and a spiritual stream. since women are noticing different parts of their experiences and categorizing them in terms used by the patriarchal culture, they feel suspicious of each other.

... Woman are revolutionizing their consciousness in both directions and challenging the patriarchal ideas and institutions of religion and government by holding to their own women's experience of life.

the enormous response to the "spirituality" issue of

"Country Woman" gave birth to the quarterly "WomanSpirit"

as one of the editors says: "we feel we are in a time of ferment. Something is happening with women's spirituality. We don't know what it is, but its happening to us and its happening to other people."

"WomanSpirit" is trying to facilitate this ferment.

most feminist witches feel the spiritual and political can be combined. they are moving toward a position that would, in the words of Z. Budapest, "fight for our sweet womon souls" as well as our bodies.

it was Z who brought the status of Witchcraft as a religion to public attention with her trial in 1975 on the charge of violating a L.A. statute against fortune telling.

since fortune-tellers are numerous in L. A. Z felt she was singled out because of her feminist politicsd and the visibility of her small shop, the Feminist Wicca, which is a center for women and Witchcraft.

much of the neo-pagan movement denounced her but, on the other hand, many came to her defense including one of the esteemed bards who repeated several times his view that the feminist craft has some of the truest representatives of the Goddess.

Z's vision of the future is a socialist matriarchy. like many feminests, she has a vision of a past matriarchal age during which "the Earth was treated as Mother and wimmin were treated

as her Priestesses.

women are looking at the matriarchy from a complex point of view.

they differ as to the existence of past matriarchies and even as to what a matriarchy means in terms of power.

some see childbearing as the source of women's ancient power, the innate difference that created a kind of moral superiority stemming from closeness to nature and life.

other feminists see childbearing as the root of women's oppression

some feminists do not consider the matriarchy as a utopia. there were values but living in any theocracy, whether dominated by a male or female deity, limited freedom.

Ritual

ritual and magical practice aim to end the experience of alienation on the unconscious level of the deep mind.

this is talking about rituals that put one in touch with powerful parts of oneself that have often been scorned and suppressed.

as Alison Harlow, a craft priestess says:

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Ritual "is a consciousness-altering technique, the best there is. Through ritual one can alter one's state of consciousness so that one can become perceptive to nonmaterial life forms, whatever you choose to call them, and through this perception one can practice subjective sciences."

ritual is a way our conscious mind speaks to our unconscious mind.

as one priestess pointed out rituals go beyond words which are conditioned and used to divide but actions have not been limited by men's definitions.

thus there is an attempt to find actions that have a clearness about them that do not have heirarchal connotations.

for ex: a pat on the head says I am bigger and better than you but other things, like washing each others hands, have an equality about them and are a kind of vocabulary that cuts underneath all the divisiveness and unites women.

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Moon Huts are being used by some women for retreats during menstruation.

by doing this they are re-creating an experience common to women in ancient times and in many tribal societies today.

these women are convinced that, contrary to popular scholarly assumptions, such retreats were not forced on women because of "uncleanliness" but were introduced by women themselves to celebrate their mysteries and to have a time of collective interchange.

some women have begun to work with their dreams. in one case 12 women went on a wilderness retreat and dreamed.

one woman's dream showed that women will not find their

culture in the Men's world, but neither will they find it in the ancient women's culture. It is still to be found.

the periodical "WomanSpirit" suggests that only by turning over the biblical tradition and regarding Eve positively, as the bringer of knowledge and consciousness, can we end permanently the split between mind and body and the hatred of both that was foisted upon us by Christianity and much of the classical Judaic traditions from which Christianity sprang.

in one spontaneous ritual a woman produced an apple and "the apple was ceremoniously passed around the circle and each woman took a bite, symbolizing her acceptance of and willingness to claim Eve as her own and recognize our mutual oneness with her."

naturally, rituals involved with the moon are also common since women have traditionally been associated with the moon.

confronting the "Goddess"

it is not surprizing that women involved in these rituals should confront the idea of a feminine deity .

they have found the goddess, or have been led to the goddess, and the idea of "goddess" is fraught with problems and potentialities for feminists.

whatever "deity" is for Neo-pagans, there is no getting around the fact that the popular conception of deity is male.

this is so despite the countless esoteric Christian and Jewish teachings that say otherwise.

Mary Daly has written extensively on the idea that all the major religions today function to legitimate patriarchy and that since "God is male, then the male is God", and that "God the father" legitimates all earthly godfathers including Vito Corleone, Pope Paul and Richard Nixon.

since that image is beyond ourselves it becomes the image of power and authority, even for most of those who profess atheism.

it functions as a powerful oppressive image, whether or not we "believe in him". it can also affect ones self image, and this remains true whether "man" created god in "his" own image, or the other way around.

western women have been excluded from the quest for deity for some 4 thousand years, since the end of the goddess worship in the west.

the small exception is the veneration paid by Catholics to the Virgin Mary, a pale remnant of the Great Goddess.

Mary Daly has proposed an answer with the idea of "God as a verb", but many women find this too abstract and prefer to look to the ancient goddesses.

many women have had powerful experiences with deity as feminine.

"it never occurred to me to create my own religion," wrote one woman, "or more importantly, that god was female. Discovering that femaleness gave me a tremendous sense of relief. I felt her blessing touch me for the first time. I felt a great weight drop

from me. I could actually feel my last prejudices against my own female mind and body falling away."

many women had a long term and easy relationship with the goddess, one reflecting that at age 12 she would call upon Diane while hunting with her father.

others have trouble getting past the programming of a male deity, especially those raised in a Christian or Jewish environment.

still others have problems with the idea of a single goddess, conceived of as transcendent and apart, as it creates as many problems as the male "god". trading "Daddy" for "Mommy" is not liberation as one woman pointed out saying:

I do not believe that changing the sex of that concept does away with its problems. Not at all. to say Goddess instead of God still continues the separation of power, the division between person and the power "out there."

she sees the goddess who is in each of us, the one within. . .she is the inner strength, the light, the conscious woman who knows her own perfection, her own harmony with the cosmos.

as priestesses in the craft, one is taught that within the circle they are the goddess incarnate.

they have been taught to draw that power into themselves thru the ritual of Drawing down the moon.

women who have come to the Goddess outside the channels of Neo-paganism and the craft are beginning to find rituals and concepts that allow for the same idea.

they are finding the goddess within themselves and in all

women.

those feminists who have found joy in ritual, and who have discovered that the concept of "goddess" feels right inside, are often drawn to the Craft.

"Feminist Covens" and "Traditional Covens"

today the Craft has been adopted as "the religion" of a large portion of the feminist spiritual community.

in a few cases feminists have joined with other women (and very occasionally with some men) in the more "traditional" craft.

in other cases, feminists have formed their own covens.

to understand the differences between Traditional and feminist witches let us look at the leaflets put out by WITCH in 1968 as almost all the differences appear there.

one of the assumptions of WITCH was that any group of women can form their own coven and declare themselves Witches by simply making the decision to do so and enforcing it magically.

one could be a witch by saying "I am a witch" three times and thinking about that. They said you are a witch by being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal.

this idea comes easily into conflict with notions of formal training, priesthoods and hierarchical structures.

the Second assumption of WITCH was that Witchcraft is inseparable

from politics

the third was that it was necessary to create new rituals,
"festivals of life, instead of death."

these three assumptions have continued as the wellsprings of
feminist Witchcraft, but they, particularly the first two, have
often been at odds with the assumptions of the mainstream craft.

Neo-paganism in general and the Craft in particular have been
good for women.

Women have strong positions in almost all the Neo-Pagan
religions, not only Witchcraft.

most feminists, however, do not seem to be interested in other
neo-pagan religions other than Witchcraft.

witchcraft is one of the few "new age" religions where women
can participate on an equal footing with men.

outside of Neo-paganism in general, and Witchcraft in particular,
the "Aquarian Age" new religions have not been particularly
comfortable with the idea of women as strong, independent,
powerful, self-identified persons.

one has only to look at the pages of "new age" journals to
conclude that most of the new spiritual organizations are still
in the dark ages when it comes to women.

The religious concepts and historical premises behind

Neo-paganism and Witchcraft give women a role equal or superior to that of men.

while this is true it is qualified and not always true in reality.

Robert Graves book the White Goddess pub. in 1948 has had enormous influence on the witchcraft revival and on women.

however, tho he has often said that the return of goddess worship is the only salvation for Western Civilization he is also seen by many feminists as being as sexist as Freud and Nietzsche.

they accuse Graves of putting women on a pedestal, one of the oldest tricks in the fight against women's rights.

in "Real Women" graves even says that the real woman "is no feminist." and further "Man's biological function is to do; women's is to be," and that "womanhood remains incomplete without a child."

most feminists find these statements objectionable.

a neo-pagan theologian, tho supporting the matriarchy, leaves no place for for the old woman, the hag, the crone, the woman who is "ugly" according to classical standards, the intellectual woman or the woman who desires to be celibate or is not interested in sex.

he condemns women, according to feminists, to be maidens, mothers and creatures of sensual play.

thus, it is no wonder that the pages of most neo-pagan journals

reflect a diverse spectrum on women.

until recently, neo-pagan journals were filled with the self-congratulatory articles by men on how women in the craft have no need of "women's lib."

for a period of time many letters and articles appeared in the Neo-Pagan press denouncing feminist witches as "sexists" and "bigots" and expressing fear of any alliance between feminism and the craft.

a subtle emphasis on the goddess began arguing for more male gods and more balance between male/female.

some of these were written by women.

however, it must be pointed out that several neo-pagan men took a strong public stand supporting the liberation of women

there is a serious question whether separatism is the ultimate answer for these feminist women or whether there should be a healing and renewal

one thing the Craft does have to offer feminists, outside of its knowledge of ritual and lore, is the polytheistic perspective and its view toward diversity and flexibility

perhaps the most important thing that the feminist craft can give the "mainstream" Craft is the understanding that Witchcraft is a religion and a practice rooted firmly in rebellion.

many feminist witches see the craft as a kind of village woman's

wisdom, the knowledge of village midwives and healers.

this notion of folk wisdom is often denied by the more "traditional" groups, who still tend at times to be impressed by ideas of royalty and by titles, bloodlines and lineages.

mainstream craft members often split their lives in two; with two sets of friends, two sets of interests.

this leads to dualistic thinking which feminist craft groups reject.

The "mainstream" craft can offer the feminist craft the openmindedness characteristic of polythists.

feminist groups often have a tendency toward dogmatism, substituting "big Mama" for Big Daddy.

the problem of Goddess monotheism will have to be resolved if the feminist Craft is not to become just another One True Right and Only Way.

it can be said that, generally, most members of the "mainstream" craft function outwardly as "ordinary" members of society, while at least some members of feminist craft live on the edge of society; that the feminist craft serves, at least in part, as a source of renewal for women who are among the dispossessed and the oppressed.

Recent developments

the women's spirituality movement is now so large and

undefinable that it is like an ocean whose waves push against all shores.

it is estimated that Starhawk's book The Spiral Dance alone created a thousand women's covens and spiritual groups.

it is impossible to estimate how she and other writers, have influenced women to form groups. Workshops, classes, and lectures on women's spirituality and the power of the ancient goddesses are everywhere, at adult education centers, feminist bookstores, and new age institutes.

Jewish and Christian women are examining the feminine.

Unitarian women are creating women's rituals.

today the tensions between the feminist and traditional craft are much less evident.

women's circles and men's circles happen routinely at Pagan festivals and even in the traditional craft.

English traditional covens are creating rites of passage for boys and girls.

In the feminist craft separatism has diminished--at least in the U.S.

More lesbian women are seen at mixed Pagan festivals and more women from the mixed traditions have gone to women-only gatherings.

there are still many men within the English traditions who are deeply angered and threatened by feminism.

separtism is still very strong in England

in the U. S. there is increased contact between feminist women and men in the larger pagan community

Starhawk, by focusing on feminist Witchcraft but including men, has had a great impact.

at present, she is working for the Creation Spirituality institute run by Dominican Matthew Fox in California, for which is now in trouble with the Vatican.

the idea of the Goddess has entered mainstream literature and ideas.

it is absolutely common for women to mention the Goddess in public and have people know what she is talking about.

feminist spirituality has led to the publishing of non-sexist reinterpretations of tarot, astrology, Kabbalah and the I Ching.

feminists involved with goddess spirituality have been entering theological seminaries in large numbers, and they are writing new history and new theology.

as the women's spirituality movement continues to grow one of the greatest struggles and debates is over the question of whether it is to be a fundamentally monotheistic or polytheistic movement.

all agree it is essential to reclaim and restore the power of the thousands of ancient goddesses but to invoke, to evoke, to become, to actualize these ancient goddesses is very different than to reduce them to one universal Mother Goddess, or even a triple goddess.

The claim that a universal Mother Goddess was worshipped widely thruout the ancient world may be a kind of monotheism that only differs in gender from the religions modern Pagans have rejected.

it also may be a kind of universalism at odds with Pagan concepts of diversity.

mainstream scholarship--some of it by women--is continuing to deal strong blows to the idea of such a universal religion.

there is little evedince, other than intuitive, to support it

on the other hand there is no denying the power and strength of ancient and modern goddesses from a thousand cultures and no denying the many ancient cultures where women wielded power.

there is also no denying that the world will change as women take up their roles as priestesses once