

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN PAGANISM

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MEET THE AUTHOR

I am a practicing Pagan and a Spiritual Director. My God is a woman, a man, a stone, a tree, a child, a lover, a friend, and a mystery. I am a priestess, a ritualist, a devotee, a companion and a swashbuckling spiritual explorer. My path as a Pagan is inspired by joy, honesty, love, peace, respect for all beings and conscious living. As a Spiritual Director I try to step out of the way and attend as fully and completely as possible to the directee before me. I listen to the unfolding story and encourage each directee along his/her spiritual journey. It is my honor and privilege to witness and tend to another person's relationship with his/her personal God.

Throughout this writing, unless specifically noted, my use of the words Spirit, God, Goddess, The Divine, The One, The Sacred, Deity, or God/dess are interchangeable. I do not want to limit myself or you, the reader, to any one name or word for The Unnameable Being. Please take this into consideration and adjust language and pronouns as needed for your own reading pleasure.

In my 18 years of practicing Paganism and 16 years of facilitating Pagan rituals and events, I have participated in Pagan community, witnessed Pagans moving along their evolving spiritual journeys, supported families discovering their faith and raising their Pagan children, and held sacred space for individuals grappling with their relationships with the divine.

As a Pagan, I know full well what a difficult lot Pagans can be. I know the rebellious tendencies, the stubborn and willful rejection of authority, and the independent streak that becomes a veritable tidal wave in a Pagan's spiritual work. I also know the

importance of companionship, the value of community, the longing to be truly seen, understood and held along the way.

As a Spiritual Director working with Pagans, I have seen Pagans feeling isolated, confused, lonely, and struggling with questions of profound spiritual significance. I have experienced directees' determination to blaze new trails, and their adamant refusal to believe anything they haven't experienced, discovered or contrived themselves. I have also seen the sincere desire to integrate, completely and whole-heartedly, the guidance of Spirit into life.

Entering Spiritual Direction is a step requiring great courage, openness, and dedication by a seeker of any faith tradition. For Pagans, the step is made all the more intimidating by the reasonable expectation that a Director won't have the faintest idea where a Pagan is coming from, what he/she is talking about, or looking for.

It is my hope, through this writing, to open some doors of possibility for Pagan Spiritual Direction. I write largely from my own experience as a Pagan and as a Spiritual Director, companion and guide for numerous Pagans. Much of the information I offer here is accumulated over many years and a sharing in my own words of what I have discovered and experienced through my work as a priestess.

I write to Spiritual Directors in an effort to explain some fundamentals of Pagan Spirituality, offer some guidelines for working with Pagan directees, describe some "heads-up" items, and to extend assurance that offering your services to Pagans can be a rewarding, growthful and fruitful opportunity for you in your work.

I write to Pagans in an attempt to outline the aims of Spiritual Direction and hopefully demonstrate Spiritual Direction as a potentially useful, supportive and inspiring component along the spiritual path.

You do not need to be Pagan to offer Spiritual Direction to Pagans, and even if you are, it might not do you any good. Spiritual Direction is a process of accompanying someone on a path uniquely their own. The Director does not need to embody the experience, but he/she does need to be able to witness, hold and encourage the directee to follow his/her own guidance.

And for all you wary Pagans out there, in Spiritual Direction it is the Director's job to learn *your* language, to honor *your* experience and to follow the winding truth of *your* path. Semantics can be sticky, but Spiritual Direction is a practice in the service of any and all spiritual work, not the path of the Director or any specific form of religion.

Perhaps this writing will equate to an introduction of two guests who just may find they have much in common, much to learn from each other and a potentially long, abiding friendship on its way.

CHAPTER ONE: ABOUT PAGANISM

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS PAGANISM?

Just as Christianity is the path following the teachings of Jesus, Judaism is the path following the teachings of the Torah or Talmud, and Buddhism is the path following the teachings of Buddha; Paganism is the path following the teachings of the people, the common folk, and the ways of the Earth. The word Pagan is often interpreted as “not religious” or “not believing in a Judeo-Christian God.” But the word “Pagan” harks back to the Latin “paganus,” which is literally, “peasant” referring to a rural country-dweller (Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary). Neo-Paganism, specifically, is the modern version of Pagan ways, the practices of the common folk, the traditional beliefs of the ancestors, adapted and re-constructed by contemporary people, pieced together from ancient lore, from traditional practices, and from the practitioners’ creative imaginings, speculations and inclinations.

In the interest of clarity, I will be using “Paganism” as a label for the contemporary practices of Earth-honoring spiritual paths. This can include traditions as diverse as: Wicca, Druidism, Shamanism, and many other specific forms. Because so many forms of Paganism are practiced in the United States today, the language used to describe and express Pagan concepts continues to diversify. Much of this writing will be addressing Neo-Paganism in its unfolding manifestations in North American culture.

There is no Bible, Torah, Q'uran or Vedic scripture to inform the Pagan path. There is no unbroken stream of knowledge or teaching. There is no presiding organization or central authority to hold, teach and standardize Pagan beliefs. There is only the specific community or individual practitioner's relationship with Spirit, the Earth, and his/her own sense of being. Each author, teacher, practitioner and community creates and maintains a different, sometimes unique set of rules, practices and traditions.

The modern Pagan path is a newly formed (indeed, still forming) practice of honoring nature, re-creating the old ways, and acknowledging various deities. Many Pagans incorporate practices and beliefs from long-standing traditions including various Native American and Shamanic teachings, but these adoptions are made as contributing elements to a more eclectic, personalized creation. You would be hard pressed to find any two Pagans who define their religion or describe their practices in the same way. Much of contemporary Paganism touches into, springs from, is inspired by, or adheres to ancient lineages; but all told, Paganism as a religion is being re-created, re-claimed, re-envisioned, re-formed, re-birthed, and shaped from the ground up by contemporary practitioners. Most Pagans pride themselves on taking an active hand in creating their own belief system, tapping into ancient traditions of honoring Nature and the Earth's cycles and building customized religious practices that fit their unique desires and needs.

Throughout this material I will refer to some general ideas and core concepts, which apply to many (but not all) Pagan paths. I am careful to use language that acknowledges the exceptions and the wide-ranging possibilities for Pagan beliefs and practices. I invite the reader to explore this text with an open-mind for honoring diversity and to read these descriptions as possibilities, not definitive truths.

ABOUT “GOD” THE CONCEPT

Pagans have various relationships with and opinions about “God.” Many Pagans only relate to “God” as “Goddess.” Some honor a masculine God. Some perceive God and Goddess in balance. Others acknowledge a non-gender-specific presence that cannot be contained within any God-language.

God and Goddess are often thought to exist as entities beyond our human form. They are sometimes considered nebulous, conceptual presences in the world at large, the greater universe, or various elements of the physical Earth. Some Pagans relate to God/dess as mother, father, brother or sister, lover, friend, guiding ancestor spirit, totem animal, intuition, an inner voice, a guardian, or simply an atmosphere of love.

There are many Pagans who believe in one specific form of God/dess and dedicate their lives and practices to honoring, worshiping and serving that one deity, be it Isis (Egyptian), Inanna (Sumerian), IxChel (Mayan), Kuan Yin (Chinese), Pan (Greek), Bacchus (Roman), Elegua (Yoruban), or Krishna (Hindu). These devout Pagans may offer prayers of homage to their God/dess, and ask their specific deity for guidance, protection, etc. They may celebrate holidays that are sacred to their deity, create altars or shrines for that form of the divine and try to shape their lives according to the values and examples set by their chosen God/dess.

It is a common Pagan belief that the Earth, quite literally, is The Divine. Gaia (sometimes spelled Gaea) is a name often associated with the Earth as deity. The name Gaia originally came from Greek mythology, in which Gaia is the Goddess of the planet Earth, but the name has been adopted into modern Western / American Paganism as a label for Earth as the source of life, the all-nurturing Mother Goddess.

Other Pagans relate to God/dess from a mystical perspective, honoring divinity within oneself, acknowledging The Sacred with no specific personifications, no defining or limiting names or descriptions: God simply as unity, oneness, presence or atmosphere, pervading all aspects of reality, omnipresent, interwoven within every living (and even non-living) thing. Living things include trees, fish, birds, insects, and professional wrestlers. Non-living things include stones, air, houses, cars, and kitchen appliances.

There are also Pagans who prefer a polytheistic approach, calling God/dess by many names, relating to many forms and faces of Deity according to the moment's need. One person may call on Eros for help with matters of love, offer gratitude to Osiris for the abundance of Earth's fruits, celebrate Lugh at Midsummer, invoke Cerridwen for insight about death and dying, and try to walk in the footsteps of the peace-bringing White Buffalo Calf Woman. This polytheistic perspective is common enough that it is not difficult to assume that all Pagans are polytheistic because the diversity of Paganism includes so many possible names and faces for God.

Assumptions within Paganism are, across the board, a bad idea. Pagan Deity relations are as varied and unique as each individual Pagan practitioner.

If there could be a bottom line about God or Goddess in contemporary Paganism, it might be "God/dess is whatever the individual practitioner wants him/her/it to be." God can be within or without the individual person. God can be humanistic, animistic, manifest, unmanifest, physical, ethereal, vibration, light, darkness, as descript or non-descript as the specific person wishes. All that being said, some relationship with God and/or Goddess is common. It is important to note that even as Pagans honor deities from diverse pantheons, they do so with their own personal flair and uniquely created forms of

celebration. A Pagan may invoke and honor Kali, from a Hindu pantheon, but utilize an eclectic, uniquely tailored ritual setting for a Pagan (non-Hindu) holiday.

Many Pagans, on the other hand (or just at other times) may relate to God as an unfathomable, inaccessible entity, proof-positive, absolutely real, but beyond our finite human grasp. These Pagans may acknowledge God as an atmosphere, energy, nebulous presence and truth without need or use for specific names or faces. Pagan perceptions of God may land at any point along a diverse continuum. God is:

1. Strictly-personal: I, this limited human form, am God.
2. Personal and inter-personal: I am God, you are God, and we are all God (this may include humans, animals, trees, stones...).
3. Nature/the natural world: God is the Earth, the sky, the stars and space, God is air and water, earth and fire. God, as nature is tangible and touchable, but not limited to one form.
4. God as idea, characteristic: God is love, God is goodness, God is nourishing, God is source of life, and God is the spark motivating all things.
5. God is unfathomable: God is the vast unknown, pure mystery, indescribable in any human language or experience, God just is, and exists beyond our ability to understand or define.

(Rain, 2009)

Here are some possible ways to understand Pagan experiences of The Divine Being...

GODDESS AS FEMININE DEITY

For some, the feminine face of The Divine has proven an accessible, nurturing, loving, soft and gentle form of Deity. Many Pagans re-enter a world of religion and spirituality through the Goddess after breaking from more patriarchal religious backgrounds. The Goddess is often represented as the Earth or Mother Nature. She is also widely associated with the Moon and stars. She is called by names from various myths from many cultures. Neo-Pagans frequently relate to Greco-Roman forms of Goddess. There are also many Pagans that work with the Goddess as She appears in Yoruban, Native American, Mayan, Ancient Sumerian, Hindu, Celtic and Egyptian pantheons. Pagans are equal-opportunity Goddess worshipers.

The Goddess is commonly categorized into three main archetypes: Maiden, Mother and Crone. The Maiden is often represented by the waxing crescent Moon. She possesses qualities of joy, innocence, virginity, vitality, beauty, carefree lightness, and fun-loving playfulness. The Mother is associated more with the full Moon. She includes qualities of nurturance, abundance, maturity, fullness, self-possessed assurance, sexuality, strength and stability. The Crone is represented by the waning crescent and the dark Moon. Her characteristics focus around deep wisdom, mystery, death and rebirth, transition, letting go, darkness, introspection, and honestly seeing what is most true, even if it is ugly.

According to Starhawk, a leading voice in the Pagan community, “The Goddess does not rule the world; She *is* the world. Manifest in each of us, She can be known internally by every individual, in all her magnificent diversity” ([The Spiral Dance](#), 23).

The Goddess is a representation of all things feminine: creation, abundance, sensuality, birth, cycles, emotion, intuition, strength, fertility, mothering, grandmothering, sexuality, beauty, etc. She is the Moon, the Earth, the darkness, the blossoming flowers, the fecund soil, and the living waters of the planet. She is honored as the womb, the source of all life and also the Queen of the Underworld that receives the dead and tends to the departed souls. She is the vibrant maiden, the fiercely protective mother, and the old crone, the keeper of wisdom.

The Goddess is the original Wonder Woman, fighting for truth and justice, possessing super-powered strength, using magic, all-seeing, and infinitely capable. Through the Pagan cycles of the Earth, Sun and Moon, the Goddess participates in a cycle of change, inter-relating with the Pagan perception of the God. She embodies and represents the quintessence of femininity to interact with and complement the masculine form of divinity.

GOD AS MASCULINE DEITY

God, in Paganism, is as diverse as the Goddess. God is the masculine representation of divinity. Each Pagan tradition and culture has a different name, face and relationship with the God. For many, He is the comfortable, fatherly, powerful divine presence. He is represented in the Sun, the growing plants, the harvested fruits of the Earth, and also in the animal kingdom. The Pagan God is frequently depicted as an anthropomorphized creature. Pagan men often relate more easily to a male form of God and may relate to an aspect of God as a role model.

The God is known as: The Lord of the Grain, The Lord of the Dance, The Horned One, Sun Child, the lover, the warrior, Green Man, Oak King and Holly King. He is hunter, healer, power, and vitality. He is that which dies and is reborn. He is wild and passionate. He is Son, Brother, Father and Grandfather. He follows the cycle of the Earth; being born with the Sun, growing, maturing, ripening, fading, dying and being reborn each year.

As the Grain God, He represents all growing things, and the ability and willingness of the planet to sustain life and humanity through the fruits of the land. As the Son, He represents all youthful qualities of boyhood and young men: pure innocence, dependence on others, agility and athleticism, playfulness, virility, charm, and mischief (especially mischief!). As the Father, the God represents qualities of protection, mature love, fertility, guardianship, warrior energies, strength and stability, power, fullness of body and heart, and decisive action. As the Old Grandfather, His characteristics include wisdom, patience, surrender, letting go, grace, experience, death, and sometimes the struggle of life not wanting to release its hold, but eventually having no choice.

Starhawk has this to say about the God, “He is gentle, tender, and comforting, but He is also the Hunter. He is the Dying God – but his death is always in the service of the life force. He is untamed sexuality – but sexuality as a deep, holy, connecting power” (The Spiral Dance, 109).

The God represents all things masculine: fertility, sexuality, dynamic motion, directive energy, radiant light, strength, virility, raw power, fathering, protection, guidance, efficiency and courage. He is the grain, the animals, the Sun, the green plants, the trees, the sky itself, the consort and the sage.

The God interacts with the Goddess, moving through the seasons, embodying energies and behaviors in accordance with the changing Earth, Sun and Moon.

THE PAGAN SUN CYCLE

In Pagan perspectives, the natural rhythms of the Sun, Moon and Earth are worthy of attention, acknowledgement and celebration. Each of the Sun Cycle holidays has a specific focus based on what is apparent in nature. How the God and Goddess are honored changes with the seasons and cycles of the year.

For many, the Pagan year begins at Yule, the Winter Solstice. On the Gregorian calendar, Yule falls between December 20th and 21st. At this time the Goddess is a young mother giving birth to the new light, Her Sun God child. The word “solstice” comes from Latin roots “sol” and “stit” meaning, respectively, “Sun” and “stand” (Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary). The combined idea is that the Sun is “standing still,” a necessary, pivotal moment between the days shrinking and then shifting into growing again. The Pagan season of Yule honors the time of darkness and quiet of winter while nurturing great hope and celebration for the return of the light, the growing days and the coming of a new cycle.

Following Yule is Imbolc, also known as Oimelec, Brigid, or Candlemas. It is a “Cross-Quarter” holiday meaning that it lands directly between a solstice and an equinox. Imbolc falls on February 1st or 2nd. At this time, the days have lengthened considerably, the first crocuses may be starting to show, and there’s an anticipation of the pending spring. The Goddess is honored as a maiden, a young woman full of creativity and light.

The celebrations focus around the life that is beginning to stir underground as the Earth prepares to blossom.

Around March 21st to 23rd, the Spring Equinox is celebrated. The word “Equinox” also takes its meaning from Latin roots. “Aequi” and “noct” translate to “Equal” and “night” (Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary). This refers to the time when the night and day are the same length. The Spring Equinox, in the Pagan Cycle is called “Ostara.” It is a celebration about the night giving way to the day, the light triumphing over darkness, the fullness of spring and the life that is emerging from the Earth. The God and Goddess are celebrated as youthful symbols of the growing fertility of the land. Traditional Pagan Ostara celebrations were harbingers of Christian Easter practices.

The next Cross-Quarter holiday is called Beltane or May Day. It lands on May 1st and is a lively celebration of fertility. The God and Goddess are honored as young adults, lovers, and the consummated fertility of the Earth. This holiday is named in honor of a Celtic God, Bel, and the fires that represent his virility. Celebrations include dancing around a maypole, a symbolic gesture of the union of divine masculine and feminine energies that lead to fertility, and lighting bonfires for purification, dedications, and sheer joy. Flowers are out in abundance and the fields have been sown and are now filled with blossoming plants that are blessed in hopes of a bountiful harvest.

June 20th or 21st is Litha or Midsummer, the Summer Solstice. Half-way across the year from Yule, this solstice holiday is another point of solar pivoting. Days are at their longest and from this holiday on, the darkness starts making a comeback. Festivities include bonfires and celebrations of the God and Goddess at the peak of their lives, mature, radiant and powerful. But the tradition includes bringing in a perspective of

warning and acceptance that the darkness will return and that this is as good as it gets.

Without a game, comparison or competition between light and darkness, honoring that both are good and right in their time, light is simply easier to celebrate. It's all downhill from here.

Coming down from Summer Solstice, when the days are noticeably shrinking into autumn, August 2nd brings the Lughnasadh, or Lammas, celebrations. It is the first harvest holiday in the Pagan Cycle. The God is honored as the Lord of the Grain and it is through his fading and dying that the grains are cut and reaped. The Goddess at this time represents a motherly figure that is starting to become a crone. The name "Lughnasadh" pays homage to "Lugh" a Celtic God of "light." It is an acknowledgement of the fading light and the need for summer to let go into fall. Lammas, another name for this festival, comes from the Old English roots "hlaf" and "maesse," meaning "loaf" and "mass," the "blessing of the bread" (Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary).

The Autumnal Equinox, occurring between September 21st and 23rd, is the central harvest celebration called "Mabon," which is the name of yet another Celtic God. Mabon is represented as a burning wheel that is sent rolling down a hillside as a symbol of the light disappearing from the Earth. Again, as with the Spring Equinox, this is a celebration of day and night being equal. But this time, darkness begins to triumph and daylight moves to the backseat. For this holiday the Goddess is a crone, the wise one who accepts death and takes it into herself to be transformed. The God is leaving the scene, dying, as the plants of the Earth die, making way for new life to take root in the next cycle.

The final holiday lands on October 31st. It is called Samhain (pronounced "sow-wen"), from the Gaelic roots "sam" meaning "summer" and "fuin" meaning "end"

(Dictionary.com, Unabridged Random House). Samhain is the end of the cycle, the end of the growing season, the time to stop and rest and honor the ancestors. It is the commencement of winter. The Goddess is now honored as the keeper of death, the ancient crone. The God is simply resting, waiting to be reborn at Yule as the Sun Child. The traditional celebrations focus on connecting with one's lineage and family tree, honoring the dead, tending to the unseen spirits, listening to intuitions and dreams, waiting for another cycle to begin.

Through the entire cycle of the year, the Earth, the Sun and stars move in perfect harmony, the God and Goddess reflect the natural world, and the Pagans do their best to pay attention and move in concert with the seasons.

THE PAGAN MOON CYCLE

Just as the Sun and Earth trace a course that begins with new life, grows to fullness, then fades back into darkness, Pagans similarly honor the cycle of light and darkness through the phases of the Moon.

In the course of one solar year, the Moon goes through 13 cycles from new to full and back to new again. Modern Pagans honor the cycles of the Moon and make many decisions based on the corresponding energies. It is generally understood that the natural cycles of the Earth move in harmony with the Moon: the tides of the oceans and the menstrual cycles of women being two common and obvious examples.

The general Pagan perspective is that as the Moon is new and just beginning to become a crescent, it is a good time to begin projects, and start things in motion. The Moon and Sun are at the same place in the sky and the Moon is either not yet visible or is

just becoming a crescent after sunset. There is a sense of joy and celebration as the Moon becomes visible after her temporary disappearance, and the energy of hope and anticipation pervade spiritual focus and explorations at this time.

As the Moon waxes into a gibbous (just past a half-circle in the sky) and then full Moon, it is a time to celebrate fruition, fullness, maturity and culminating energies. The Moon is directly across the sky from the Sun, rising at sunset in her round radiance. The energy is dynamic, active and expressive. At the full Moon, the night sky is its brightest and the Moon beams the Sun's guiding light through the darkness.

Then the Moon starts its waning process of slimming back down to a crescent. The focus shifts to slowing down, wrapping things up and letting things go. The Moon rises later and later into the night and lingers in the sky after sunrise. As the Moon shrinks down into darkness again, Pagan spiritual practices start focusing on the intuitive side, tending to dreams and taking time to reflect and rejuvenate.

Each Moon cycle in a year has its own unique associations relating directly to its synchronicity with the Sun cycle and the seasons of the Earth. Various traditions have different specific names and associations for each Moon of the year, but the essence is the same.

Through the winter, the Moon cycles tend to focus on darkness, the hope for the returning light, the opportunity to rest and wait, preparing for the rebirth of the light. Some traditions call these Moons: Wolf Moon, Snow Moon, Cold Moon, Long Nights Moon and Winter Moon ("Full moon," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

During the spring season, the Moon cycles are associated with growth, planting and nurturing the movement of new life, enjoying the magical renewal of the Earth and

all her creatures. Some traditions call these Moons: Worm Moon, Flower Moon, Storm Moon, Growing Moon, Planter's Moon, Milk Moon, and Moon When Leaves are Green ("Full moon," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

The summer season brings Moon celebrations focusing on abundance, radiance, honoring the physical joys of life and the ineffable, exuberant energy of the planet. Names for these Moons include: Strawberry Moon, Buck Moon, Mead Moon, and Summer Moon ("Full moon," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

With autumn, the Moon celebrations hone in on gratitude for what has been gathered, settling into an energy of surrender and shifting from outward to inward experiences of life. Traditional Moon names include: Barley Moon, Harvest Moon, Hunter's Moon, Blood Moon, and Singing Moon ("Full moon," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

Attuning to the different energies and associations of the Moon, Pagans can notice and honor each season's distinct flavor and follow an observable cycle, with evident, changing daily rhythms.

SUN AND MOON: SEASONS OF CHANGE

The one constant in Pagan practice is change. Everything is always changing, birthing, living, growing, bearing fruit, fading, falling, dying, decomposing, and re-emerging in a new form. This goes for the Sun's light: growing through spring, reaching its zenith in the summer, falling back into darkness during the autumn and beginning another cycle in the winter. It also goes for the Moon in each of its 13 yearly cycles: from

complete darkness to a sliver, to a quarter Moon, to gibbous, to full, back to gibbous, to quarter to crescent and returning to darkness.

A unique quality of Pagan practice is the inherent willingness and ability of Pagans to honor the darkness as having an equal weight, value and purpose in the cycle. There is no judgment about which is better or worse, which is more desirable or more important. The light and the dark are in a constant dance with each other, taking turns in roles of prominence, giving and taking, complementing each other, dominating and surrendering in turn.

The same goes for all energies of duality. Pagans know there is duality: light and dark, day and night, masculine and feminine, positive and negative, joy and sorrow, life and death, sweet and sour, salt and pepper (or is that salt and sugar?). The Pagan goal is not to move from darkness into light or to avoid death and live eternally. Rather, the goal is to be in right-relationship: to accept and honor the light and dark as they come, to flow gracefully with the changes of the natural world.

This is not to say that Pagans *enjoy* darkness, sadness, or thoughts of death and dying. It is also not a suggestion that Pagans seek out the negative aspects of living. The attitude of honoring the natural cycles simply means that Pagans try to accept the truth of duality and to see the blessings in all aspects of existence.

It's easy to celebrate the light, growth, birthing and expansion. The harder task is to apply one's spiritual practice to honoring the darkness, acknowledging the inevitability of loss and accepting that things die and disappear in order to make space for new creation.

Darkness signifies a time to stop, sleep and dream, for things to come to completion and rejuvenate. Nighttime, new Moons, winter and other periods of quiet are times for us to replenish our physical and spiritual resources. Likewise, death is not an ultimate ending, but an inevitable part of the natural cycle. The unseen elements of life are not frightening, only mysterious. There is a need for us to make peace with what we don't know and what we can't see. Why? Because it's all connected.

THE WEB

The intertwined dualistic energies and inextricable dance between diverse components of life and nature point to a fundamental Pagan tenet: inter-relatedness. Pagans perceive that every single thing in the world is connected to every other thing: each leaf, each grain of sand, every human, every thought, each bird, every fish, each particle of light, every insect, every echo, and every movement. Each thing in some way touches and affects, in subtle or profound ways, every other thing. Some of these effects are scientifically observable; some are invisible, indiscernible or seemingly insignificant.

Regardless of the observable effects, the Pagan rule is to move with this basic consciousness of connectedness and therefore hold the greatest sense of personal integrity and responsibility. Ideally, this translates to an increased awareness of cause and effect, a more conscientious decision-making process and a greater feeling of personal accountability, looking for the potential consequences of each action and behaving accordingly. A common reference nowadays to the "Butterfly Effect" is an excellent example of Pagan understandings of inter-relatedness. The metaphor, rooted in Chaos

Theory, is that a butterfly's wing beats could hypothetically stir the winds that move across the surface of the ocean. The disturbance in the water could cause the waves to rise and increase. In the right conditions, these waves can potentially swell to tsunami-sized tidal waves and eventually wreak havoc on the shores. The idea as it relates to Paganism is that every thought and action incalculably affects everything and everyone. Knowing that, it is our responsibility to be as mindful and attentive as we can possibly manage.

Many Pagans refer to a "three-fold law of return." This means that whatever thoughts or actions we put out into the world come back to us in triplicate. This applies to positive actions as well as negative ones. The three-fold concept may be arbitrary, but it is a recurring and common guideline in contemporary Paganism.

The other major rule in modern Paganism is the Wiccan Rede, which states, "Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: and it harm none, do what you will." Some credit Doreen Valiente (an English Wiccan priestess and author, sometimes called the "Mother of Modern Witchcraft") with this tenet because she once spoke it at a gathering of Witches. Others claim the phrase originated in the 1500's or earlier, citing many potential sources (John Coughlin, <http://www.waningmoon.com/ethics/rede3.shtml>). There are many semantic variations on the rule, but the core concept is constant, and the guideline is widely honored in Pagan communities: Pagans are ethically bound to avoid causing suffering. Aside from that, they can do as they wish. This principle is similar to The Golden Rule, recurring in all the world's major religions. If you don't want to be hurt, don't hurt others. Be kind to others, and they will be kind to you.

For children it is enough to be told a rule and to follow along simply because the adults say it is the good way to be in the world. But in shaping grown-up versions of

ethical values, it is important to look for the reason behind the rules. Phyllis Curott, a Pagan author, addresses this explicitly for Pagan practitioners:

The real reason Witches do not and should not harm... is because they experience immanent divinity... once the [Divine] has entered and touched you, filled and transformed you.... it is not within the realm of your experiences or your consciousness to hurt anyone, because you know that the world in which you live is holy, and sacred, and divine. *All of our behavior, our magic, and our ethics flow from this epiphany that the Divine exists within ourselves, in others, and in the world.* (Witch Crafting, 181)

An upside to all this interconnectedness is the potential for joy and delight to return to us when we behave in a positive manner. Unlike many world religions, Paganism encourages and celebrates experiences of pleasure and the satisfying of one's desires. "The Charge of the Goddess" is considered a cornerstone prayer in contemporary Paganism. It is a work with widely debated origins, commonly credited to Doreen Valiente (Ceisiwr Serith, <http://www.ceisiwrserith.com/wicca/charge.htm>). Despite its inconclusive source, many Pagans hold to it as an instructive prayer reflecting Pagan values. It states, "All acts of love and pleasure are [The Goddess's] rituals." Enjoying life and the experience of being human, fully manifest on Earth, are sacraments in the Pagan traditions. Again, referring back to the Wiccan Rede, the hedonistic, pleasure-seeking freedoms of Paganism are held within the ethical framework of "harming none."

HEDONISM WITH INTEGRITY

Paganism isn't purely a self-indulgent path, but it does celebrate all aspects of living. The value system is rooted in exploring, experiencing and honoring the fullest truth of life and living. It does not focus on chastity, asceticism, self-denial, discipline, desire-suppression or obedience. The Pagan tendency toward indulgence includes all facets of mundane life: work, school, eating, sleeping, making love, tending family, caring for the Earth, all forms of inter-relating, noticing and fulfilling the needs and desires of the body, heart, mind and spirit.

Many Pagans believe that the greatest ethic is Love, which includes goodwill and compassion for all living things. The closest Pagans get to a concept of "sin" has to do with knowingly inflicting suffering. Beyond that, each individual gets to create his/her own value system and understanding of morality.

Some Pagans take the rule of harming none and apply it to diet and other daily lifestyle choices. This may include adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet in order not to harm animals; this can include wearing and using materials that are animal safe (no leather or bone products). It can even include recycling and purchasing items that only come from renewable resources in order not to harm the Earth.

Pagans also rely heavily on their intellectual capacities to guide their moral compasses. You might see this simply as employing common sense.

And many Pagans rely on various forms of divination for help in making moral and ethical decisions, preferring to leave the verdict in the hands of the Universe, or the wisdom of Spirit/God/Goddess. Pagans are keen to depend on their own sense of intuition, nature and the innate wisdom of life and all living things. This translates as a

tenet of “If it feels right, it is right. If it feels wrong, it is wrong.” Of course, there is a complexity involved in “harming none” that is impossible to hold in its entirety. How far can we possibly take this value? We must harm plants to eat vegetables, we bring harm to the natural land by building homes, and we inadvertently harm each other in our inter-human relationships. But hopefully our helps exceed our harms.

We can never really know the true extent to which we change our environments, simply by going through the motions of living. Yet, not going through the motions of living would bring harm to us. The trick seems to include moving with the greatest care, consciousness, and the best intentions possible. Do not cause deliberate harm if it can be avoided. Don’t justify bad behavior and don’t be complacent in thinking that our actions are meaningless or insignificant.

Because there is no general consensus in the Pagan community, it falls to each participant to trust his/her inner guidance and personal knowledge about what is right and what is wrong.

HOW DOES PAGANISM WORK?

Most practitioners choose a Pagan path as adults, finding their way independently or with a few companions. Pagan communities tend to be small and close-knit. Many Pagans prefer to practice their religion entirely alone. They are called “Solitary Practitioners.” Some groups of Pagans form covens, which are often (almost always) closed assemblies working, studying, and celebrating together. Others may move in “open” communities, gathering publicly and inviting anyone to attend as they wish with no on-going commitment.

As a religion that is practiced primarily in private, there is no central authority, no supervision and no scripture per se. It is a religion based on lore, personal experience, and the inspirations of nature. Each individual person and each group has the challenge and privilege of finding, establishing, shaping, and maintaining traditions, rituals, and practices. When Pagans do establish working relationships in groups, it is standard to find a circular configuration signifying the lack of hierarchy, the mutual respect and balance of power, all participants being equal, all voices welcome, all wisdom valued. Even the workings of covens are often designed to empower each individual member, to nurture a safe environment for spiritual growth and religious practice. Covens, circles, working groups and spiritual partnerships are all created to lend each seeker the support, perspective, safety, touchstone, and inspiration for the spiritual work.

A core component in Neo-Pagan practice is commonly called “magick,” spelled intentionally with a “k” to distinguish it from illusion, and stage tricks. Magick as part of Pagan spirituality has more to do with prayers, intentions and ritual: practices focused around using the mind, body and energy to create change in the world. This is particularly prevalent in Wicca. The word, “Wicca” comes from the Anglo-Saxon root meaning “to bend” (The Spiral Dance, 19). The path itself is based on the idea that our intentions, our thoughts and our energies are powerful and that we can choose to employ our energetic faculties to shape our own lives, our environments and our world.

Wiccan practices often utilize an array of correspondences including herbs, stones, colors, elemental symbols, candles, fragrances, Gods and Goddesses, and the stars and planets. Any of these correspondences may be woven into focused prayer practice. Engaging as many of the sensory experiences as possible makes the prayer more visceral,

and the more potent it becomes. The more one continues thinking about and feeling a prayer's intention, the more likely the prayer is to become a manifest reality.

Although correspondence tables can change significantly between traditions, the intentions remain the same. Different traditions may associate different colors, characteristics, animals and elements to specific cardinal directions. The bottom line is: if the practitioner can hold, focus, affirm and carry an intention, whatever associations feel right for him/her will be the most powerful for him/her.

Here is one common system of elemental correspondences, created by the author and offered as an example, not a definitive presentation. Since Pagans typically believe that all things are connected, any of these correspondences, tied to any desires can effectively create movement and transformation within and without.

Direction	Element	Color	Creature	Season	Sun	Quality
East	Air	White	Birds	Spring	Dawn	Intellect
South	Fire	Red	Reptiles	Summer	Noon	Energy
West	Water	Blue	Fishes	Autumn	Sunset	Emotion
North	Earth	Green	Mammals	Winter	Midnight	Physicality
Center	Ether	Any/All	Mythical (Phoenix, Dragon, etc.)	Complete Cycle	Any/All	Spirit

(Rain, 2009)

As humans, Pagan practitioners can acknowledge that they are a minutely tiny part of the whole, while simultaneously being a significant factor figuring into the entire

web of life. It is within a single human's scope to look at the natural world with respect, reverence and awe; to see, acknowledge, celebrate and move proactively in the world.

Included in this atmosphere is a Pagan's honoring of the different aspects of his/her own being: physical body, mental intelligence, emotional experience, and spiritual energy. All are valued, and tended to as holy, integral aspects of a complete being. There is no pitting the soul against the body, or assessing the mind as greater, or more powerful than, the heart. Every part of the human experience is sacred. This attitude also pervades Pagan perspectives about the entire life cycle. Birthing, living and dying are all necessary and precious parts of the whole.

Most Pagans believe in some form of reincarnation. Many also believe that ancestors and spirits serve as guides and companions to the living. Without scriptures, rule books, and authoritative teachers, Pagans look for guidance and instruction from the seen and the unseen.

Consciously choosing to honor the unseen translates to the Pagan version of "faith," an inherent or nurtured trust in the unknown, the willingness to believe in and depend on something mysterious, something beyond oneself, or one's tangible perceptions. While Pagans work with an understanding of interconnectedness, there is a large dose of faith mixed in: faith that intentions, thoughts, feelings and prayers find their mark, faith that there are unseen energies and that some form of God/Goddess/Divinity is working in concert with humanity, faith that one season will continue to turn into the next, faith that rebirth follows death.

The movements of the planet are the only long-standing stream of inspiration on which Pagans can all agree. The cycles of change and the laws of nature preside. Gods

and Goddesses take their turns at the helm. Seasons arrive and depart. The Moon waxes and wanes. And Pagans try to pay attention, to align their intentions and behaviors with the rhythms of the world, veraciously following the pleasures of life while accepting and honoring the full spectrum of existence.

CHAPTER TWO: ABOUT SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

This section is an introduction for Pagans to the world of Spiritual Direction, what it is, how it works, why it exists and some core components. It also outlines some issues encountered in Paganism that may benefit Spiritual Directors. I make two assumptions and one aspiration through this writing. My first assumption is that Pagans know what Paganism is. My second assumption is that Spiritual Directors know what Spiritual Direction is. The aspiration is to share information with each group about the other and through this sharing, to build a bridge linking the spiritual path of Paganism with the field of work called Spiritual Direction.

Spiritual Direction is a relationship with Spirit explored through an inter-personal framework. In Group Spiritual Direction, Rose Mary Dougherty says, "...the critical element in spiritual direction, which those involved share, is the intention to rely on God, to seek God actively and wait for God's leading" (2).

A Spiritual Director's job is to be a witness, a support, and a companion for a seeker's spiritual journey. An individual seeking Spiritual Direction has another job: to be on the journey!

The book, Trustworthy Connections states, "[Spiritual Direction] involves great intimacy and requires great trust, with the potential for us (directees) to reveal our aspirations, misgivings, shortcomings, questionable motives and even sins. And we (the

directees) are coming to talk with another person about how we relate to God” (Silver, 95). Through the work of Spiritual Direction, both the Director and the directee are actively tending to the directee’s spiritual path. The Director is not a teacher, a saint, or even an authority. The Director is another human, another seeker, a willing listener, an objective witness, and a comrade on the path.

A Spiritual Director will not teach a directee how to be Pagan, nor will he/she represent the voice of Spirit. A Spiritual Director will help a directee form questions and seek answers to his/her own questions. A Director will encourage a directee to listen for the voice of Spirit as it arises in his/her own life. And a Director will pay attention to the unfolding story, helping the directee be as fully attentive to the movements of Spirit as possible.

BELIEF IN GOD

One of the fundamental beliefs of Spiritual Direction is a simple conviction that there is Spirit. Spirit may be called God, Goddess, Zeus, Isis, The One, Divinity, Deity, Presence, Self, Truth, Life or Love. Any and all specific names and faces are fine, or nothing specific is fine too. Spiritual Direction works from this basic acceptance and acknowledgement that there is Spirit, named or unnamed.

For Pagans looking through a window at Spiritual Direction, there is often a reflexive repulsion about all the “God” talk that is hard to see past. “God” can be translated infinite ways. Pagans may find it easier to say, “I believe in The Earth” or, “I know there is Love” or, “I trust in the Mystery” or even, “I rely on my inner wisdom.” All of these statements can point back to, “There is God.” Spiritual Direction as a practice

does not depend on any particular language, only a sense that Spirit is a true experience, an energetic presence.

A Spiritual Director working with Pagans must be prepared to hear a uniquely personal perspective on “God” from each Pagan. Some Pagans will relate to God as though to another human. In this way, Pagans may hold conversations with God, they may meditate, they may actively enter and commune through a trance-like state, they may invoke and speak with God in dreams, or they may engage in a practice called “drawing down,” in which God is channeled and embodied by a human being, for a time.

Some Pagans ascribe to a belief that God is Love. God as love can be specifically personal, or a neutral, impersonal presence of love that is purely unconditional and indiscriminating. It is not a stretch for Pagans to say “I am God” or “God is me” or “We are all God.” The presence of God as love is omnipresent and omnipotent. In this case, the only thing standing between our human selves and the experience of pure, all-consuming Divine Love is ourselves: egos, thoughts, personal feelings and preferences.

When observed with a scientific mind, it is easy to draw literal, logical connections between all the vegetation of the Earth, which physically nourishes and sustains our physical bodies, the fresh water of the Earth that is necessary for human life, the oxygen in the air produced by the plants of the Earth and which our bodies need, the minerals, and the water and air that comprise our physiological beings. In these ways the Earth is quite literally, solely responsible for our very being. It is the physical source of our embodied forms. From this factual perspective, it is a small leap for Pagans to begin referring to the planet as God, and inferring a “loving” energy along with the physical sustenance the Earth provides. Starhawk speaks about God in The Spiral Dance like this:

People often ask me if I believe in the Goddess. I reply, “Do you believe in rocks?” It is extremely difficult for most Westerners to grasp the concept of a manifest deity. The phrase, “believe in” itself implies that we cannot know the Goddess, that She is somehow intangible, incomprehensible. But we do not believe in rocks – we may see them, touch them, dig them out of our gardens, or stop small children from throwing them at each other. We know them; we connect with them. In the Craft, we do not believe in the Goddess – we connect with her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. (91-92)

Speaking about God is a challenge for many people, not just Pagans. With Pagans there is an added challenge based on the personally unique language of Deity. To begin with, each Pagan has a personal responsibility to identify, label and form a unique relationship with God; therefore, they also tend to have their own personal names and language for God.

It is critical for a Spiritual Director working with Pagans, to listen very carefully and be sure to understand each person’s explanations about his/her God. The individual’s unique, personal names for God may be held as private, sacred information that requires delicate handling and utmost respect.

GOD AS RESOURCE

Following the belief that God exists, there is an opportunity to believe that God is good, loving and available to us. This can manifest as a consistent or recurring desire to be in relationship with Spirit. It might be a feeling that The Divine is a trustworthy, supportive energy in the world. Judy Harrow, in [Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide](#), says:

We are not going somewhere away from normal life in search of the Gods. They are right here, right now. We were already with Them, in Them and They in us, before we took the first step. The connection is already intact; all that changes is our awareness. It's not some exotic and arduous trek, it's an attentive walk around the block. (141)

Spiritual Direction offers a container for seekers to take that walk, and tend to that connection.

For Pagans this connection often starts with a core belief that the Earth is alive and that the living planet supports our individual and collective lives with food, air and materials for shelter. Or it may feel like a deep inner sense of a Goddess energy who loves, nourishes and comforts. Or, as a contrasting possibility, the presence of Spirit may take on the persona of a fierce warrior God who battles for our needs and causes.

Since Pagans can relate to The Divine as specifically personal, unfathomably impersonal, subtle mystery, or wholly tangible; any understanding of Deity is perfectly acceptable for the work of Spiritual Direction.

PRAYER

All this talk of Spirit and God points to the foundation of Spiritual Direction.

Once the groundwork is laid, the real work begins. Spiritual Direction's primary goal is to help individuals deepen their relationship with the Divine. This includes helping people lead their lives according to their greatest sense of Spirit's guidance, noticing the movements of God, hearing the voice of The Goddess and following the wisdom of their highest selves. Margaret Guenther says Spiritual Direction is, "...always a story about relationship with God" (Holy Listening, 32).

The conscious nurturing of a relationship with Spirit is often called "prayer;" however, Pagans tend to have a hard time with the word "prayer" as it may conjure images of kneeling, bowing and scraping, asking for the Almighty God's forgiveness for all the thoughts and behaviors that relegated us to this lowly human existence.

For Pagan Spiritual Direction, it is often necessary to re-define "prayer" and use some other language that doesn't cause the directee to bristle. It is not generally a good idea to ask Pagans about prayer. Vivianne Crowley writes, "We talk very little about prayer.... We simply talk to the Goddess or God and ask for assistance, discuss our problems and offer praise as we see fit" (Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age, 156). Better to ask a Pagan how he/she communicates with The Divine, or relates to the elements or listens to his/her own spirit.

Starting here, one may actually be hard-pressed to find a behavior or mannerism that does NOT fit into a Pagan definition of prayer. Pagan prayer might be defined as: spending time with Spirit, talking to the Goddess, listening to the Earth, honoring the inner Divine, attuning to guiding energies, feeling connected to life, moving consciously,

doing spellwork, singing, or experiencing awe. It also might be as simple as: living in an intentional way, making decisions that seem pleasing to the elements, or sensing what feels most vibrant within one's own body.

Pagans will attune to their perception of God/dess in any way that feels effective, infused with delight, gratifying and palpable in any given moment. A temporary mood or frame of mind will directly affect the ways a Pagan is willing and able to pray. Following the current of one's emotions is equivalent to prayer in a Pagan viewpoint. Feeling heartfully connected with another human through dialogue, gazing, singing, or making love is one of the most powerful forms of Pagan prayer. Because Pagans commonly believe The Divine lives, moves, breathes and experiences the world through them and all living creatures, the sensory experiences of life are synonymous with prayer.

Being able to hear any of these descriptions as a Pagan's experience of prayer opens the door for a Spiritual Director to understand and tend to the directee's prayer life. Adjusting one's paradigm in order to include new language, definition and experience of prayer is the task of the Director.

PRAYERFUL QUESTION AND ANSWER

The importance of structuring a regular, consistent prayer practice is as relevant for Pagans as for adherents to any other spiritual/religious path. The ongoing relationship with Spirit requires a conscious nurturing, establishing and maintaining a communication forum between the individual and The Divine.

This can be particularly challenging for solitary practitioners as there is no community for accountability. But for Pagans that are consciously seeking and wanting to

maintain a daily communion with God/dess, who earnestly want to engage their spiritual beings and structure their lifestyles around the guidance of Spirit, who have a heartfelt desire to consult The Divine and make decisions accordingly, Spiritual Direction can be a tremendous asset to their spiritual aspirations.

By taking on prayer practices, individuals acknowledge that it is their personal responsibility to proactively seek communications with God/dess. They learn to trust that God/dess will respond to them, but they must set the intention to listen. Many spiritual and religious paths have prayerful ways for asking questions, making requests or otherwise sending communications to unseen aspects of soul, Spirit, God, or ancestors; and having those questions and communications answered in some way. Those answers may come through visions, sounds, sensory experience, thoughts or intuitions.

The contemplative practices people employ create an atmosphere for back and forth communications with Spirit. It is widely understood that there is a fuzzy line between self-talk and God-talk or Goddess-talk. If a question is asked and an answer received, it is often hard to say definitively whether it is the questioner answering their own question, or something greater. Quiet, contemplative practice, inviting stillness and patience can help set the stage for the asking and answering of questions, and for the critical discernment process of determining where the answers are truly coming from.

Contemplative practice is an individual engaging sacred scripture, spiritual practice, intentional embodiment, and specific prayer practices as wholly and personally as possible. Where a Christian may practice Centering Prayer as a contemplative practice, a Pagan may engage in a “pathworking” process, a guided meditation exploring mythological teachings. Intentional awareness can turn any activity into a contemplative

practice. It is not a practice of rote memorization, recitation of prayer, or following a prescribed pattern in search of a prescribed outcome. Contemplation is about an individual diving into and discovering the individual response, resonance, repulsion, and reaction to a spiritual adventure. Through contemplative prayer, the praying individual may seek and find personal meaning that is relevant to his/her immediate circumstances. He/she may discover what is fundamentally true about his/her relationship with God/dess.

Allowing silence to be the ground for prayer gives The Divine an opportunity to speak, be felt, recognized and more fully known. The focus can shift away from seeking Deity beyond oneself into acknowledging Deity within. Because much of Spiritual Direction depends on contemplation, quiet, introspective, reflective and interactive prayer; it may be an effective medium for helping Pagans nurture and utilize periods of silence, thereby generating and familiarizing the fruits of contemplative practice.

Margaret Guenther and Gerald May (along with other Spiritual Directors) enthusiastically advocate silence and contemplative practice as the prayerful foundation of Spiritual Direction work expressing the value of setting a tone of prayer, settling into an attentive space and inviting the Divine to be fully present in each moment.

DISCERNMENT

Following one's highest wisdom and hearing the voice of Deity sound good, right? But recognizing that wisdom and learning to hear that voice can take some doing. It's not as easy as referencing an encyclopedia for information or hearing your mother call you to dinner. But it may be as simple as sitting quietly and listening for your own heartbeat.

We all know the inner turmoil that can occur when we are confronted with difficult decisions or life challenges and we all know how hard it can be to weigh our desires with our moral values, and how easily we can be pulled off track when the going gets tough. An individual in Spiritual Direction may take his/her questions and choices to a Spiritual Director for help in sorting through the thoughts, feelings, needs and desires, looking for the greatest true path rooted most firmly in a spiritual foundation.

Every discernment process begins with a question, a desire, a curiosity or a need specific to the seeker. For Spiritual Direction this includes a clear decision that guidance is truly wanted or needed. Then the guidance must be asked for either aloud or silently. After asking, one must then look and listen for messages.

The process of discernment in Spiritual Direction includes considering all aspects of an inquiry: think about all the possibilities, pros, cons, neutrals; feel into the emotional being and see what the heart has to say; notice the reactions of the physical body, feelings, tensions, pleasures, energy, or lack thereof; ask for different perspectives and thoughts from people you know and trust; pray; wait with as much patience and receptivity as possible.

When a question or inquiry is clarified, it is up to the seeker to distinguish the answers. In the Pagan way, the belief is that all the wisdom, all the answers, all the insights are waiting within the seeker; he/she just needs to pay attention to them.

It is each person's unique responsibility to actively listen for the guidance of Spirit in his/her life. Although Spiritual Direction, community, family and friends can support the journey, there is only one person who can fully understand the guidance, and it is that person's prerogative to follow or not.

In Spiritual Direction it is the task of the Director to help the directee see clearly, to witness the individual's relationship with the Divine, and through attentive presence, to help the directee find and understand the guidance of Spirit. Silence is often an effective tool for facilitating this work, providing time for true seeing, listening and reflecting. Seekers of all faiths can use silence to look within and listen for the call of Spirit.

In any faith tradition, the work of Spiritual Direction includes a commitment by the directee to seek and tend actively to the guidance of Spirit. Since Paganism leans on the belief that all of nature is sacred and that the Earth is a living, holy entity, there is an infinitely accessible resource for Pagans to consult for guidance. Nature and life itself are wide open for our observance and participation. We can seek and find answers to all questions by looking for the presence and expressions of spirit in any and all things.

There is always more to be said about "discernment" as an exercise. Discernment is, quite literally, the ability to judge, to discriminate between one thing and another, the actual experience of seeing something clearly. Within Spiritual Direction, "discernment" is used to refer to an intentional process of understanding the pure input of God/dess in one's life. It includes simply sitting with what is, considering the emotional terrain, checking in with the physical body's wisdom, employing the intellect, and deliberately consulting God/dess in whatever way is effective for the individual. In Care of Mind / Care of Spirit, Gerald May describes discernment like this:

In spiritual direction situations, one is not only interested in the specific thoughts, images, and perceptions a person might have about God, but also with

the atmosphere in which such phenomena occur. This concern is helpful in considering whether a given experience is *of* God as well as *about* God. (34)

Spiritual Directors are charged to assist their directees through ongoing processes of discernment: asking questions, listening carefully to all thoughts, feelings, desires, and intuitions. The Spiritual Director is a witness, a companion, and a cooperative conversationalist while the directee searches for the guidance and wisdom of God/dess.

Discernment is likened to sifting through the unreal in order to see the Real. The voice of Spirit is often cloaked in and/or surrounded by the voices of ego, one's own emotions or personal motives. Trudging through the personal attachments and general muck to find the gleaming truth of Spirit is no small feat. Spiritual Directors take on this charge through conscious listening and focused inquiry. Margaret Guenther, in Holy Listening, describes the work of a Spiritual Director:

...the spiritual director is simultaneously a learner and a teacher of discernment. What is happening? Where is God in this person's life? What is the story? Where does this person's story fit in our common [religious/spiritual] story? How is the [Divine] at work in this person's life? What is missing? (43)

Some good questions can facilitate the ongoing discernment process. There is a constant question of "Is this MY will or that of Spirit?" And a follow up question of "How do I know this?" The Spiritual Director is at once asking these questions of the directee and also looking and listening for answers through his/her own prayers. Here it is

particularly important for a Director to keep his/her personal spiritual path and religious agendas far away from the discernment process for a Pagan directee. Any questions and insights will need to be put carefully into the Pagan context so the directee can consider the Director's input in a frame that harmonizes with the Pagan perspectives. This requires the Director honestly dedicating him/herself to seeing and participating in the directee's relationship with God/dess. And it requires the directee to allow the Director to witness and participate in that Spirit relationship.

This starts with an understanding that the directee truly wants to live according to the desires of Spirit and that he/she is willing to make decisions based on the fullest understanding of what Spirit desires. Seekers with solid value systems in place are more likely to find their way through discernment questions. Having a clear sense of right and wrong based on moral and ethical considerations helps true seekers release thoughts, desires and messages that don't fit within the established moral code or "meaning system," which is the ground for understanding what is, interpreting the world according to a specific foundation of beliefs. In Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide, Judy Harrow describes faith in this way:

Our understanding of this relationship [with Spirit] is preverbal, so basic and intrinsic to our being that we are often not consciously aware of it at all, but still it guides us through life. We experience faith as a "meaning system," a central organizing paradigm and we express faith through myth and metaphor, and through behavior. To have faith in this sense is to choose to live on the assumption

that our relationship with [Spirit] is composed of love and trust. Faith is not what we believe or say, but how we act. Faith shines through a congruent life. (125)

Choosing to refer to an established “meaning system” and considering those values in decision-making is a crucial element in the work of discernment. If each aspect of being: heart, body, mind, moral standards and prayer are taken into account, the conglomerate result creates a big picture. Interpreting that picture is the crux of the discernment process.

TWEAKING THE PATH

All aspects of the spiritual life need some re-aligning from time to time. Our forms of prayer are adjusted to suit our unique needs and preferences, and the parameters of our faith expand, bend, and/or change with our soul’s growth. As we move from one stage of life to another, or move from one breath to the next, we each have the ability to bring with us the names of God/dess, the prayer practices, and the components of our spiritual paths that still serve us, feel comfortable and effective for us, and by which we feel nourished and supported.

This is where Spiritual Direction can be extremely helpful for members of any faith tradition, including Pagans. Some goals of Spiritual Direction are to help the directee determine effective prayer practices, establish consistent rhythm of practice, then nurture and maintain the practice. The continuum moves from a lifestyle that includes an awareness of Spirit outside of one’s daily attitudes; toward a lifestyle that is rooted in and

moving in harmony with Spirit in each moment, each breath, each thought and action.

Spiritual Direction aims to help directees integrate Spirit awareness as fully as possible, living each aspect of life as prayer, as expression and embodiment of The Divine.

A Spiritual Director can be a powerful motivating, encouraging and validating presence as a seeker lets go of forms that no longer work, and tries on new components of faith that may be more fruitful, comfortable, growthful, and harmonious with the current need. Gerald May writes:

...a person experiencing emptiness in prayer will spontaneously try to change methods, exert more discipline, and seek to overcome any blocks that can be identified. If this is not successful, he or she may then give up and allow matters to take their natural course. (Care of Mind / Care of Spirit, 103)

The work of the Director can move between quiet listening attention to more proactive, co-creative participation in the conversation between the directee and God/dess. A good Director will engage in personal processes of discernment and learn how best to support individual directees in their search. Sometimes encouragement to stay the course is appropriate and fruitful, sometimes it is more productive and important to help a directee discover and explore new forms of prayer.

The humility of the Director, the lack of authoritative power and the attitude of service to the directee and to The Divine keep the focus clear. Spiritual Direction is not about the wisdom, experience or power of the Director. Director and directee are on equal

footing, which helps the directee take and keep responsibility for his/her unfolding journey.

A more pure feeling of honesty and clarity arises when the personal story, attachment, and determination are put aside. Personal yearning is powerful and obvious. Making space for the yearning of Spirit draws one's attention out of the self and into everything else. The Pagan form of inclusivity often incorporates information from the Moon, Sun, Earth and Stars, watching for visions, consulting animal totem wisdom, etc. It gets the individual out of a strict self-reliance and into an expansive Spirit-reliance. The invitation for Pagans in practicing meditation or other contemplative practice is to be open to noticing the movements of spirit, to respond to the experience with gratitude and acceptance, and to keep an inquisitive attitude, asking questions, inviting God/dess to speak, and keeping the personal agenda out of the way as much as possible. You might call this "humility."

DIRECTEES

It is the directee's job to open his/her prayer life to share with another. Rose Mary Dougherty, in Group Spiritual Direction, emphasizes, "The directee assumes responsibility for his or her life with God" (19). The directee needs to find ways to express his/her experience of The Holy in a way that another person can hear and hold. Easier said than done. This level of sharing is unique to Spiritual Direction and it is a profoundly intimate and vulnerable task. Directors of all backgrounds can agree that speaking of one's personal spirituality can be daunting and intimidating. It's about as vulnerable and personal as it gets. Members of more common spiritual communities may

have an easier time speaking of the personal relationship with God because the language and social acceptability is solidly in place. Not so with Pagans.

Pagans are still creating the glossary of spiritual terms, words and phrases. The personal deities are diverse and the personal philosophies are unique enough that a great deal of redefining and explanation tend to accompany the sharing. As a directee, it is important to be able to trust that the Director is truly tending to the wisdom of Spirit on behalf of and in service to the directee's unique relationship with God/dess.

With a Spiritual Director honestly cultivating a space in which the directee can listen for God/dess, the atmosphere deepens and becomes rich soil from which true wisdom can emerge. The Director must be able to trust the directee's relationship with Spirit, and to lean into the language and descriptions the directee offers as explanation of his/her journey with God/dess. The Director is beholden to an atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement of the directee's unique prayer process and personal authority in his/her spirituality.

AUTHORITY

Some may seek Spiritual Direction in hopes of finding intellectual answers and guidance for their religious undertakings. Though some Spiritual Directors are highly knowledgeable, experienced and well-read, it is always on the shoulders of the individual seeker to find the answers that are true for him/her within his/her own heart, mind and spirit. The Director's job is to help the directee understand the guidance of the Divine as clearly and specifically as possible, leaning only on the strength of the directee's personal relationship with Spirit. Gerald May, in Care of Mind / Care of Spirit, confirms, "...the

primary task of spiritual directors is to encourage within themselves this moment-by-moment attention towards God as frequently as possible..." (116).

A fortunate thing for Pagans entering Spiritual Direction is the basic ground that a Spiritual Director is not the actual Director, God/dess is. Trusting the authority of one's own deity is an easy fit for Pagans who tend to be wary of human hierarchy. Spiritual Directors working with Pagans will be especially called to keep an honest humility. The practice of discernment is key, as with any faith tradition experience of Spiritual Direction. The task at hand is to find and understand the true guidance of Spirit, to look and listen attentively to receive the clearest messages of God/dess. God/dess is in charge, God/dess is the source of wisdom and the authority of God/dess is the only one that belongs in the work of Spiritual Direction.

NOT KNOWING

In a culture where there is such pride in having answers, the greatest challenge in the work of Spiritual Direction is to be in a truly humble state of "not knowing." It is hard to admit that we just don't know, but when we do, the doors are left open and the room is spacious enough for God/dess to speak and become known. Remaining curious keeps our minds and hearts open to receive insights, a blank canvas on which God/dess can draw pictures for us to interpret.

Part of not knowing is a willingness to accept a new perspective, someone else's insights, an unexpected bit of wisdom, or a form of guidance we could not anticipate. Margaret Guenther acknowledges, "The person sitting opposite me is always a mystery. When I label, I limit" (Holy Listening, 19). Each spiritual traveler has a unique vision and

a different experience of God/dess. A good Spiritual Director is open-minded and interested in learning a new take on Spirit, meeting a new form of God, speaking a new language. A good directee is dedicated to gleaning new insights while deepening an established rhythm of prayer, practice or communion in whatever form is personally gratifying and effective.

A Director assuming and maintaining an attitude of not knowing includes an admission that it is not the Director's job to impart wisdom or to personally teach or guide the directee. It is critically important to leave the teaching and guiding up to God/dess. Rose Mary Dougherty writes, "There comes a time when we are invited into simple faith as we make decisions, trusting God to transform the ambiguity of our hearts with the fire of love and to be with us in and through the uncertainty" (Group Spiritual Direction, 33). The not knowing allows the directee to be an honored and celebrated traveler, an attuned seeker, a strong and sovereign being with the fullest ability to find the greatest truth God/dess can share.

It is a Director's role to observe the process of the directee, to be attentive as the directee's path unfolds and to help the directee bring gentle awareness back to the ongoing commentary of Spirit. There is a good deal of patience and respect underlying the job of the Director and as long as he/she is maintaining an atmosphere of not knowing, the patience and respect will be rewarded by the subtle, but omnipresent voice of the Divine. There is very rarely a great hullabaloo and fanfare as God/dess makes his/her presence known in the life of the seeker. Though, Pentecostal Spiritual Directors may beg to differ. It is for Director and directee alike to wait and trust that the guidance will come.

All forms of Spiritual Direction have a bedrock of mystery. This is a simultaneously glorious and frustrating truth. There is tremendous liberation in releasing the need to know, in relinquishing control to Spirit. There is also great resistance to simply waiting and depending fully on wisdom, beautifully gentle, subtle, and elusive. And there is great freedom for the Director in fully trusting that the directee is completely in charge of and responsible for his/her own relationship with Spirit. The cooperative relationship between Director and directee is always in service to the directee's truest path with God/dess. It's as if the Director and the directee have agreed to place a conference call to Spirit and once online, all they can do is listen. They may place the call with a specific intention, question or need, but as listeners they must leave the line open for The Divine to speak. And sometimes God takes his/her sweet time about it.

Not knowing may be easier to lean into for Pagans because they tend to view themselves on the same level as every other living thing. In a Pagan perspective, God did not single humans out and instill us, individually or as a species, with the greatest, most superior wisdom, strength or hierarchical power amongst all creatures. Being on the same par as all other people and all other beings, there may be a greater willingness to listen and align our behaviors with the greater plan for the planet. We, as humans, are not expected to understand or guide the direction of the Earth. We are only meant to trust that there is a divine purpose. And we are called to participate in that purpose according to the intentions of God/dess, Life, Love, and the Elemental Beings.

The Spiritual Direction energy of not knowing includes a sense of awe and wonder. Not knowing is steeped in an ability to be child-like, watching the world in wide-eyed wonder, marveling at the unfolding majesty of life and the constant ebbs and flows

of all things. Observing nature in a spiritual way, through ceremony or ritual includes an acknowledgement that humans are no more holy, and just as holy, as every other living thing. All are equally intertwined with the changing seasons. Everything, people included, is participating in the Divine. Every breath is infused with Sacred presence, whether it is consciously acknowledged or not.

The scientific truth of the Sun's presence, and the irrefutable planetary seasons have an obvious impact on all Earth's creatures. Pagans are inclined to spiritualize these truths. Honoring the occurrences of nature is a way of acknowledging that each soul is moving within the greater context and rhythm of the world. Each soul is connected to the greater story that inspires and informs the movements of all things. In that framework, there is no room for personal knowledge, superiority, control, or illusions of such.

VALUES

Many spiritual and religious paths look for rules about "sin" and "virtue" as guiding principles for all behavior. Knowing God's rules makes it easier to make good choices and stay out of trouble. A Pagan rule might focus on personal responsibility. Some paths believe in some form of retribution, karma, or law of return, but the greatest motivating energy for doing well and following a moral guideline is a simple understanding that it is the individual's responsibility to interact with the planet, and all living things in a way that demonstrates respect for life and the individual desire to behave in a good way.

Most of us are raised learning right and wrong from our families. Many of these determinations are influenced by a religious code of conduct. But even beyond the rule book, there are spoken and unspoken values we pick up along the way: qualities that we consider indications of a good life, good behavior, good thoughts, good motivations.

It doesn't hurt matters for there to be a built in system of rewards and punishments. If you tell the truth and don't break things, you'll go to heaven. If you take good care of your family and dedicate yourself to appropriate work, you will proceed to the next level of incarnation. If you don't pray or if you drink, you will proceed directly to hell.

In Paganism, there is no wrathful God taking disciplinary action. There is no fiery pit of hell to avoid. There is no cycle of hierarchical reincarnation. There is only an understanding that all beings have the right to live and the responsibility to live well. There is no rule book defining or outlining "sin." Each participant is responsible for applying his/her own moral compass, feeling and discerning his/her own sense of truth and goodness.

There are certainly some collective opinions about right and wrong that are decided by society and family, even within Pagan communities. Starhawk describes ethical considerations thusly:

Love for life in all its forms is the basic ethic of Witchcraft. Witches are bound to honor and respect all living things, and to serve the life force. While the Craft recognizes that life feeds on life and that we must kill in order to survive, life is never taken needlessly, never squandered or wasted. Serving the life force means

working to preserve the diversity of natural life, to prevent the poisoning of the environment and the destruction of the species. (The Spiral Dance, 26)

As each seeker pursues the truest path of Spirit, it is completely in the hands of that individual to find and interpret matters of ethical and moral consideration. The Director can help facilitate conversations exploring related questions and offer friendly reminders about all the pieces on the table.

Coming back to a fundamental belief that God/dess does exist, the work of the Director is to affirm that truth with the directee. God/dess will reveal his/her wisdom and guidance in exactly the language, form, imagery, experience that the individual seeker requires. It is the job of the Director to help the directee find the guidance he/she desires through the framework of the directee's choosing. If a Pagan arrives for a Spiritual Direction session wishing for a more authentic connection with the Goddess and wanting to make decisions that Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, would celebrate, a Spiritual Director will ask about Inanna's values.

Most Pagans believe that the truest wisdom to be found is discovered within oneself. It is the earnest seeker's challenge to open to, learn and walk the inner pathways of spirit wisdom with greater and greater clarity, insight and discernment. In partnership, Director and directee work in tandem, sharing an atmosphere of prayer. They ask questions, receive answers and endeavor to decipher the language of Spirit. Resting in not knowing, Director and directee listen and attempt to heed the voice of the Divine.

CHAPTER THREE: PUTTING IT TOGETHER

AN EASY FIT

At first glance Spiritual Direction and Paganism don't seem to go together. Pagans, with their independent mindedness, personalized spirituality, and rebellious natures, may find the very idea of Spiritual Direction distasteful. Spiritual Directors, with their focus on "God" and "prayer" and religious grounding might find Pagan attitudes unmanageable. There is a lot of re-negotiating, defining and bridge-building to be done to bring Pagan spirituality into the realm of Spiritual Direction and vice-versa.

Since Spiritual Direction tends to appeal to more inner focused spiritual seekers, and since so many Pagans have solitary forms of practice, Spiritual Direction for Pagans can make a lot of sense. Spiritual people who are not accustomed to being witnessed and supported on their souls' journeys tend to have a harder time opening up to the work of Spiritual Direction, but they are often moved by the fresh and fruitful experience it offers. Being validated and encouraged on one's path is a powerful experience that often stimulates a greater motivation to continue the journey and a strengthened sense of direction.

PATIENCE

The blessings of Spiritual Direction blossom where a safe space is created. The Spiritual Direction relationship always requires a great deal of trust, which takes time to develop. Space and patience in abundance allow for a basis of comfort and safety. Directees need to feel accepted, fully and completely welcomed, to be, share and experience openly with the Director. If a directee comes in and says that he/she has dedicated his/her spiritual path to following the guidance of a dragon spirit, the Director needs to be able and willing to hear, accept and support that. If a directee comes and says he/she is waiting for a vision from the ancestors, the Director needs to be able to wait with the directee and listen for that form of guidance.

Note: although dragon guides are not the norm (even in Paganism), it does happen.

Directors of any ilk are called to be in a constant atmosphere of acceptance, a willingness to hear and hold anything that may come in, and a receptive ability to express that acceptance to the directee. Gerald May emphasizes:

...legitimate spiritual guidance involves a full acceptance of the physical and psychological nature of human beings and an informed, caring response to the manifestations of that nature. But it is also continually and consciously rooted in mystery and in an awareness of graced furtherance of the person's life in and towards God. (Care of Mind/Care of Spirit, 31)

As a directee gradually develops a comfort with the Director and practices sharing, the apparent acceptance of the Director will either encourage further deepening

confidence for the directee, or contribute to wariness and uncertainty. With a Pagan directee, the Director may need to monitor his/her responses carefully and prepare to expect the unexpected.

THE UNIQUELY CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD/DESS

God/dess is commonly acknowledged as an etheric nebulous concept, which exists through the individual person's deliberate relationship with it. Through personal desire and outreach, the conceptual presence of deity can become more palpable. It is difficult, at best, for most people to relate to a purely abstract entity. Prayerful communion with the abstract notion of God/dess can shift one's perception of God/dess from the strictly theoretical into the personal. The relationship with and perception of God/dess changes: ebbing, flowing and shapeshifting continuously.

The Pagan's changing relationship with God/dess can alternate between feelings of connectedness and disconnectedness. Perceptions of God/dess can include visible and invisible aspects of nature, a personified entity, an echoing sound in one's own mind or heart, an experience of interfacing as another human being, or a gentle twinkling of starlight. God is the epitome of diversity. The Divine can be form, thought, human, animal, plant, emotion, power, wind, water, within and without. God/dess can be mature, childish, vindictive, silly, vengeful, playful, formal, entirely concretely manifest, or deceptively elusive, singular and infinitely pluralized, masculine, feminine and non-gender-specific, creator and destroyer. A Spiritual Director working with Pagans may

hear all these things and more from one person at different times, or even at the same time. God is tricky like that and Pagans are willing to play along with the tricks.

Starhawk describes the Divine as, “psychological symbol and also as manifest reality... [It] exists, and we create [It]” (The Spiral Dance, 95). This inclusive mentality allows Pagans to stay rooted in a scientifically grounded reality, acknowledging factual information about the world, while simultaneously marveling at the wonders of the world as Divine creation. The invitation is for the Pagan practitioner to engage with, relate to, and celebrate divinity in any and all possible contexts.

The desire to know and relate with God/dess is ambiguous, amorphous, elusive and/or deceptive. Often, the practitioner believes God is already present, but must be invited anyway. God is within, and yet we must look for Her. Vivianne Crowley, in Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age, says:

The archetypes of the Gods serve a dual role as archetypes of the divine forces which move in the outer universe, but at the same time they are archetypes of our own inner divinity, the Self. When we invoke the God or Goddess we attune ourselves to that divine spark within us. (151)

This is a relationship of remembering what is true, uncovering what is obvious, and knowing what is already known. The trickle-down effect spans from God/dess as purely nebulous, to God/dess as an abstract form, to God/dess as a specific form, to God/dess as a personal image.

God/dess can be discovered and celebrated through the light of the Sun, the ripening fruits of the Earth, the human relations, the movement of the ocean, or one's own thoughts. The forms of the Divine are infinitely varied and include masculine and feminine characteristics. Non-Pagans often assume that Paganism is a religion about and for women only. Not so. Paganism is comprised of men and women alike. Pagan men can honor masculine or feminine gods and Pagan women can do the same.

The balance of masculine and feminine power within Paganism is important. Many women find their way to Paganism in order to pay homage to gods they can personally relate to as women. Often, women will begin a Pagan path that is exclusively feminine and they will gradually begin integrating masculine forms of the divine in order to bring things into balance.

Likewise, men will often begin a Pagan path honoring the Goddess, because they feel the absence of a feminine form of divinity in their previous religious experiences. Men often integrate more masculine forms of God when they feel the need to worship a deity that looks and thinks like them.

It is common for men and women on a Pagan path to swing back and forth between honoring Gods and Goddesses as their life circumstances change. Masculine and feminine forms of deity represent different energies, but they are essentially the same. It is a constantly changing dance of intermingling, taking turns. All the names, faces, qualities of deity can overlap and/or shapeshift according to the needs of the individual practitioner. All qualities truly exist simultaneously, but each specific Pagan will choose to see, hear, feel and call forth whatever qualities he/she most needs, wants or can access most easily.

The Spiritual Director working with Pagans should be prepared for sometimes dramatic changes in the forms of deity a directee chooses moment to moment. Helping a directee in clarifying and nurturing a relationship with his/her deity, who can be amorphous, may require a lot of flexibility, adaptability and greater efforts toward understanding the correct language and adjusting it as needed.

The Director is called to seek God in whatever way the directee needs. If the directee is looking for the wisdom of an owl, the Director should also look for the owl. If the directee is asking Brigid for guidance, the Director should also seek Brigid. If the directee wishes for the assurance of Odin, the Director should also turn to Odin. Through this cooperative effort and harmonious seeking, Spirit is more likely to share in a way that the directee can receive. However a seeker is relating to the Divine in any one moment, it is a relationship specific to that moment alone. Each moment is an opportunity to discover that moment's spiritual need, the effective practice for that instant, the fruitful relationship for that time.

MYTHOLOGY AS GUIDE

Folklore, mythology and legends provide Pagans with perspectives, lessons, and prompting messages along the way. Each practitioner or group has their own set of stories they can turn to when needed. Commonalities in stories amongst groups or individuals can result in a more significant energy of support, solidarity and understanding. Such authors as Starhawk, Zsuzsanna Budapest, and Clarissa Pinkola Estés use folklore, myth, fairytale and legendary stories as the groundwork for spiritual teachings and practices.

Myths give information about various forms of deities that can help practitioners relate to, understand and utilize the wisdom and blessings of those gods or goddesses. Stories can offer valuable insights about the seasonal changes of the world and the inter-human experiences of living. Mythology about specific pantheons of gods and goddesses can lead seekers into greater acceptance and patience for their own experiences. If Gods and Goddesses can experience pain, confusion, joy, sorrow, love and loss, it must be okay for humans to share those emotional experiences as well.

If these aspects of the Divine are fooled by life's tricks, falling into traps, being carried away in foolishness, it must be okay for us humans, too. If even the immortal ones need to seek guidance, insights, wisdom beyond themselves, maybe humans can be expected to do the same.

EXTROVERTED PAGAN PRACTICE

Paganism does not tend to focus on contemplative practice, rather choosing to focus energy on celebrations of external occurrences, expressive rituals, and outwardly dynamic forms of prayer. These extroverted practices of Paganism encourage community connections, personal expression, and enjoyable ways to give voice to life's changes.

The downside is that the external trappings of dramatic ritual, and demonstrative practices can take all the focus away from the heart's experience of the spiritual journey. From an outside perspective, it is easy to see Paganism as all expression and no introspection. Just as there are Christmas and Easter Christians that attend church only twice a year, there are Yule and Beltane Pagans that celebrate two holidays each year. This sort of secular Pagan would not be a good candidate for Spiritual Direction.

Pagans do well to seek meaning and incorporate contemplative focuses into their spiritual work, to moderate the extroverted tendencies of Paganism with reflection and inner work. Spiritual Directors may need to stretch to help Pagan directees in recognizing ways that Pagan practices are, in fact, contemplative opportunities to access the guidance of God/dess.

CONTEMPLATIVE PAGANISM

Contemplation is truly, at its core, a practice of self-exploration, introspection and intentional honest objectivity about one's own truth. Contemplative practice is a personal exploration of spiritual terrain.

Contemplation is most easily done in private. It is a personal experience and an independent reflection. Solitary Pagan practitioners tend to lean more into contemplative practices and will often look to other spiritual paths and teachings for inspiration and guidance. Even within groups, Pagans will often incorporate adopted contemplative practices into the more traditional Pagan celebrations, structuring a ritual experience with a period of silent, seated meditation, moving into community drumming with expressive dance. Pagans may practice mindfulness meditation while walking in the woods, or incorporate Zen breath awareness while working in the garden.

In The Earth Path, Starhawk writes about the importance of contemplative practice with specific references to Buddhism:

Buddhists spend years in practice in order to achieve a quiet mind.... observing the outer world around us requires a great deal of inner work and discipline. It becomes a deep spiritual practice that incorporates some of the aspects of Buddhist detachment and may lead us on a journey of personal healing. (52)

It is not unusual to encounter Pagans who practice some sort of Buddhist meditation, Tai Chi, zazen, walking a labyrinth, using Reiki, or doing Yoga. None of these are specifically Pagan in origin, but they are all easily adopted into a Pagan framework. For Pagans, contemplative practice often includes walking in nature, sitting by a river, marveling at the movement of Earth's creatures, bird watching or planting trees. Certainly practitioners of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam garden and go for hikes; but for Pagans it is akin to going to the church, synagogue or mosque.

Pagans who celebrate the phases of the Moon are more likely to bring contemplative practices and awareness to new Moon times. New Moons are understood to be a quiet time of resting, reflecting, dreaming and waiting for the next cycle to begin. The opportunity to consciously close one phase and transition gradually and attentively into another is often a contemplative time.

During a new Moon, as well as other times, Pagans may use such practices as scrying, dreaming, chanting, drumming, or any form of divining. Scrying is a trance-like form of gazing, looking into some kind of medium for imagery that may answer spiritual inquiries or inspire the soul. Scrying can be done with water, smoke, fire, embers, etc. Dreaming can be ritualized and entered with great intentionality. Dreams can be specifically invited; lucid dreaming is sometimes engaged as a way of consciously

interacting with the dreams. Dream interpretation and journaling may follow the dreaming itself as a means for unpacking the dreams' meanings and messages. Chanting and drumming can both be used as ways of releasing the intellectual grasp on spirituality and falling into a purely experiential and heartfully expressive prayer form. Divining, in this context, means to seek answers or insights through some metaphysical means. There are countless ways of looking for answers, to name a few: reading tarot cards, using dousing rods, consulting a pendulum, applied kinesiology (muscle testing), or reading runes. All of these are methods for seeking and receiving guidance through something sacred, or at least not entirely ruled by the intellectual conscious capacity of our humanness. It's a way of resting in a state of not knowing and choosing to be open to the communications of the Divine.

Some more involved contemplative practices may include extensive fasting periods and/or vision-quests. Some Pagans have personal associations with totem animals or elemental beings that they may consult consistently for guidance. Some Pagans have strong connections with their ancestors or other unseen spirit beings. These are not unique experiences to Paganism, but Pagans may be more inclined to include these alliances as part of their spiritual framework.

PAGANS AND THE UNSEEN BEINGS

People in many traditions honor the ancestors, and the experience of communicating with unseen beings is not unique to Paganism. But Pagans are likely to heed communications with the unseen and actively engage those relationships. Many Pagans believe that people and animals who die can stick around for awhile to help the

living. They may communicate through dreams, visions, divination tools or anything in nature.

Some Pagans intentionally include “channeling” as part of their spiritual work, which requires a tremendous level of discernment and attention. David Spangler writes about individuals who channel unseen beings, expressing concern over the tendency of these people to be “driven by their egos, interested in adulation, control, and power...” (The Call, 30). If a Pagan in Spiritual Direction chooses to channel or consult with channels as a means for garnering spiritual guidance, Directors will likely need to help the directee sift through complex personal factors, making space for the Pagan’s interactions with the unseen, while finding ways to help the individual decipher messages received and put the guidance to good use. Including the input of, and interactions with, unseen beings can be a valuable component in Spiritual Direction with Pagans, a challenging but rich contribution to the discernment process.

EBB AND FLOW

In Spiritual Direction it is common for directees to spend a good deal of time inquiring as to how God/dess wants him/her to be moving in the world. Since Spiritual Direction helps people follow the will of the Divine in their lives, and since Pagan understanding of Divine will includes all aspects of expansion and contraction, the Direction work with Pagans can include a wide range of drawing in, reaching out, resting, acting, waiting, moving, following the push and pull energies of life.

Within a Pagan perspective, there is plenty of space for mystery. The periods of darkness, quiet, and introspection within the wheel of the year, during the new Moon,

and through each and every night; all these dark times are opportunities for the Pagan seeker to rest, listen and wait for guidance, to relinquish the need to DO, and to relax into stillness. In stillness, there is a great opportunity for not knowing, for being completely open to receiving guidance. If Pagans use the times of quiet well, the guiding visions they receive can lead to sweetly inspired activity as the light returns and the time for movement resumes. The natural rhythm of all living things is to push then pull, act and rest, give and receive, flow in and out alternately. The same rhythm applies to matters of Spirit.

It is generally understood that the Earth is in a constant state of change, unfolding, emergence and growth. The presence of Spirit is likewise evolving and it is the spiritual work of Pagans to witness, understand and participate in this cycle of change as consciously and harmoniously as possible.

Our cultural focus on duality is a disservice to the spiritual process of ebbing and flowing. The inclusive Pagan perspective can allow a wider spectrum of “right-ness” along the spiritual path and in Spiritual Direction. In creating religious systems, we humans have focused a great deal of energy on defining good and bad, right and wrong, holy and evil. Our perceptions of duality have given us a ground for defining our values and guiding our footsteps. Religions have, in large part, served to alleviate, or at least explain, our discomfort with darkness and every aspect of life that we deem unattractive or undesirable. These definitions of good and bad, right and wrong, provides the ground for Spiritual Direction. A lot of the work in Spiritual Direction hinges on questions about how, as spiritual beings, we can understand goodness, find our true path, and hold fast to it through our mundane and spiritual explorations. In lieu of concrete definitions and

dogma, this work becomes more complicated, or perhaps just more fluid, in Spiritual Direction with Pagans.

Hard boundaries of good and bad don't have a place in Paganism. Pagans don't tend to think of God/dess as a being of goodness or light; at least not exclusively. Pagans also don't categorize light as good or dark as bad. Pagans don't look at life as good, and death as bad. Nor do Pagans associate Earth as darkness and heaven as light. Growing and fading, living and dying, all the phases in-between are considered holy, right, good and appropriate in their time.

This does not mean there is no experience or acknowledgement of pain or suffering. Pagans are no more comfortable with challenge than anyone else. There will always be aspects of life that generate hurt and it is easy to see hurt as "bad." A Pagan viewpoint might focus on the hurt as a motivating force that helps us see that something is misaligned and needs to be changed. But Pagans are generally willing to accept mystery. Part of the mystery of life and all existence is that suffering is part of the package deal. Pagans can acknowledge that pain happens, and that it must be part of the mysterious plan of the Universe. Humans can strive to alleviate suffering, make choices that steer toward happiness and harmony, but must inevitably accept that suffering is a part of life.

There is an equal value placed on times of waxing and waning, fullness and emptiness, action and stillness. Phyllis Curott writes, "Nature teaches us that not only is it the nature of energy to flow, it must do so in balance. Energy cannot always move in one direction – in fact, its movement is cyclical, and in this way it is constantly replenished" (Witch Crafting, 258). The Pagan goal is to embrace all energies, all phases, and all facets

of the world in the right time. Change is the epitome of the journey. There are undeniable polarities in the world and Pagans can acknowledge differences without assigning an arbitrary judgment of one side being correct and the other being incorrect. Both sides of any extreme are necessary to bring balance and wholeness. Without darkness, we can't recognize light. Without nighttime, day means nothing. Without death, what does life matter?

The role of duality in Paganism is one of creating a basis from which we can recognize change and honor the contrasting energies of the life process. Pagans understand things more fully through dualistic feelings and thoughts. God/dess is always both/and; Spirit is always both/and; inclusive, diverse, multi-faceted, unlimited. All pieces are necessary and in existence through Divine design. Anything that exists on the planet must be here for a reason, and who are we to deny the value of any one thing? Yes, even mosquitoes.

Pagans value balance: the balance of masculine and feminine, light and dark, summer and winter, growth and decay, pleasure and sorrow. Generally speaking, Pagans don't believe in "evil." Neither do Pagans believe in "sin." Pagans do believe in alignment, and place a great value on being in harmony with the world. Pagans recognize the existence of duality without assignments of good or bad; Pagans are more inclined to accept and seek harmony with the variant stages of life as a spiritual view and opus.

More mystically minded Pagans may ascribe to a philosophy that evolves around a duality of love and fear. If a life purpose centers on experiencing and living fully into love, the antithesis would be about focusing on and moving from a place of fear. Duality is a human construct. Nature does not have a dualistic mindset. The creatures of the world

awake when the Earth, Sun and seasons tell them to awaken. They hunt, forage, eat, rest, drink, hide, and relax as nature dictates. They live, procreate, struggle, delight and die according to their interactions with their environments and in accordance with the natural cycles that The Universe has mandated.

Whether practical or mystical, a Pagan perspective accepts that God/dess is apparently a great lover of diversity in form and energy. God/dess creates and embraces all phases of life, all colors, all shapes and sizes of existence. A more artistic view might describe life as a greatly varied palette. Life displays a study in contrasts and complements, which create awe. Multiplicity generates intrigue, and the ability to see and celebrate diversity is Godly.

DIVINATION

Pagans have their own ways of listening for Spirit. Pagans may be more adept at trusting their inner guidance since they are so often accustomed to only trusting their own intuitive wisdom. Pagans are likely to go for a walk in the woods and try to garner meaning from the leaning of the aspen, the rising and falling cadence of the wind. There is also a wide array of esoteric forms of listening that many Pagans ascribe to: reading tarot cards, dreamworking, using dousing rods, consulting pendulums, channeling, reading tea leaves, or drawing runes. A Pagan may confirm he/she is on a good path and moving in the footsteps of Spirit according to the interpretation of any of these media.

Starhawk gives a brief mention to “divination” in The Spiral Dance saying it is, “another method of awakening the deep mind... divinatory techniques work essentially to focus awareness and engage the heightened intuition and perception... as methods of

spiritual and psychological counseling” (169). Many Pagans have specific tools that they lean on for this guidance and counsel. Likewise, some Pagans will always seek messages from one specific deity or totem animal. A common component in Pagan spirituality is steadfast personal dependence on one’s inner experience.

PAGAN PURPOSE AND ALIGNMENT

Faith traditions around the world focus their unique varieties of “life purpose.” Many faiths have some common values and also some wide ranging differences. Some faiths value service above all else. Some value devout piety. Some value asceticism. Some value devotion to family. Some value worldly success. Ask a hundred Pagans what the purpose of life is and you’ll get (at least) a hundred answers.

As a broad generalization, Pagans value life and celebrate the fact that in any given moment, life is happening, we are all participating in life and we should do so as fully and consciously as possible.

Pagans tend to believe that we are both physical and spiritual beings, simultaneously and it is a harmonious dual existence. For many Pagans, a life purpose focuses around honoring both the physical and the spiritual aspects of oneself and of all beings. This includes being in harmony with the Earth, animals and other humans. As physically manifest beings, it is our job to be fully who we are, to expand, learn, grow, be conscientious, and embody love. Some may say that the purpose of life is to explore the depths of love, the height of joy and the fullness of humanity.

Pagans love pleasure. One might ask “who doesn’t?” but some cultures and faith traditions view pleasure as a quality to be managed, suppressed, denied, and conquered.

Pagans really celebrate pleasure: emotional pleasure, physical pleasure, energetic pleasure, the pleasure of self, the pleasure of others, and the pleasure of the planet. Some Pagans ascribe to a life purpose of finding, promoting and experiencing the greatest possible pleasures of life without creating suffering. Vivianne Crowley says:

The way of the Goddess is portrayed as a way which is followed not as a duty, but because it gives us joy in the here and now. This is not the joy of hedonism, although earthly pleasures are considered gifts of the Goddess which should be enjoyed, but 'ecstasy of the spirit,' spiritual growth and the expansion of consciousness. (Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age, 160)

Focusing on, nurturing and working to increase positive energies is another common Pagan value. Notice what creates the greatest harmony and joy in the world and work to manifest it in all possible ways. Gratitude follows this growth of positivity. Many Pagans dedicate themselves to gratitude as a life purpose.

Some Pagans believe that life itself is the goal. They are not trying to get to heaven, they are not trying to escape the Earth, they are not trying to transcend a cycle of reincarnation, they are not trying to overcome previous mistakes or past life karma, they are not seeking anything beyond what is in their immediate grasp. They are on the path of Divinity already, through their human-ness, through their human existence, through their connection and harmonious relationship with the Earth.

Pagans are, however, seeking more consistent awareness of the omnipresent Spirit and elements. The understanding is that all energies that be are already connected,

available, and accessible, we just need to notice them. It is the task of a Spiritual Director to help a Pagan directee become more conscious of what is already there.

Within the context of Spiritual Direction, the Pagan sense of purpose can be clarified, supported and explored more fully. It is important for the Director to be open to hearing, accepting and encouraging the Pagan Directee in pursuing and fulfilling whatever he/she determines his/her life purpose to be.

“Fate” and “destiny” are common words in Pagans’ vocabulary, referring to a belief that all things are as they are meant to be. The state of the world and our role as humans has been pre-determined by Divine will and that we can honor the rightness of all things by working to align ourselves as harmoniously as possible with what is. This does not mean that human behaviors and choices have no impact. It means that any impact the individual may have cannot be out of alignment with the Divine plan. Life and the world are unfolding according to design, within the framework of God/dess’s vision; it is our human task to play along in a harmonious way and we can’t help but be part of the vision. Sometimes the playing along can look like trial and error. Pagan practitioners may set a course and then wait for feedback, listen to their own hearts and watch their surroundings for some indication that the direction is a good one. This kind of seeking requires a willingness to adjust the route and re-align as needed.

HUMILITY? WHAT’S THAT?

Pagans are no good at humility. So much of traditional Spiritual Direction hinges on an attitude of humility, a belief that the individual seeker has something to seek, the individual wisdom could use the wisdom of God, the personal guidance is not a complete

roadmap, and the compass of Spirit is needed. Humility suggests a bowing down to something greater, more authoritative, more wise, strong or correct. It is a simple matter of admitting that one doesn't have all the answers already, that he/she needs help, input, guidance and strength. That he/she alone is not enough. God/dess is needed.

As Pagans often land upon the Pagan path after escaping a subservient role in another faith tradition, they are not wont to take on a subservient role in Paganism without a fight. Along the path of rebellion from the family faith, many Pagans find themselves looking to Paganism because it is solidly grounded in the undeniable rhythms of the Earth, Sun and Moon: all scientifically verifiable and intellectually sound. The need for a proof positive spirituality does not lend itself easily to trusting, depending on or looking to hierarchical, external sources of information.

Pagan rituals are held in circles so that all members can see one another and express themselves as equals. The web of life is honored as a symbol of balance amongst all beings, all inter-connected, none more or less important than any other. In most Pagan traditions there is no structure for any person bowing to the authority of any other person. And many Pagans interact with Deity as a comrade, a friend, or an aspect of oneself.

The greatest extent to which most Pagans will submit to God/dess is through gratitude. As God/dess makes something happen, we humans participate in that creation, working with Spirit through our manifest beings to continue the cycle of changes.

From another perspective, because Pagans are intent on seeing all forms of life as equal, there is unique opportunity for more humility than in some other faith traditions. Pagans are likely to honor the spirit of trees, the plants in the garden, or the migrating geese, saying, "I am no greater than you." Rituals often include offering gratitude to the

ancestors, the animals, the Sun and Moon, the darkness, the rain, and the Divine, all as gesture of recognition that all things are sacred and true spiritual awareness includes remembering the gifts all things offer each other. Phyllis Curott summarizes, “Nature reveals the wise perfection of divine order. And by living in harmony with Nature, you are living in harmony with the Divine” (Witch Crafting, 91-92).

Pagans in Spiritual Direction can be greatly challenged to maintain an attitude of humility and receptivity. A common Pagan belief is that we are each in a position to affect change in our environments. It is within our power to create the things we want and to use prayer as a means of manifesting our desires. In the world of Spiritual Direction, it is okay to want things and to ask Spirit for change, but it is a greater intention to ask what Spirit wants and to offer our energies into the service of Divine will. Personal gratification, while remaining a powerful energy in Pagan spirituality, has to learn to play second fiddle to God/dess gratification.

To “worship” is to be in awe of something. Pagans aren’t only in awe of the mysterious unknown God; they are in awe of all life forms, the interactions of the elements, the beauty in nature or in art, the movements of the sea and sky. Pagans can easily acknowledge that they are a small piece of all that is, and yet, like a holographic imprint, all that is in some way connects to and infuses each small piece.

CREATING A GROUND

As Pagans find their way into a Pagan lifestyle, it is common to hear individuals describing their discovery of this path as a “homecoming.” Many Pagans reject their family/root religion after a lifetime of feeling disconnected. Upon discovering Paganism,

many feel an immediate comfort and familiarity with the rhythms, practices, stories, and celebrations. As contemporary Paganism continues to grow and establish itself as a viable religious presence, the practitioners are able to access more resources, guidebooks, and companions for the journey.

Pagans are well-known for being independent thinkers, self-reliant and determined to seek their personal sense of truth and wisdom. You could call it “hard-headed” or “distrusting.” But, Pagans are just the classic Missourians of Religiosity: they have to see it to believe it.

For many non-pagans, the spiritual path is outlined by a set of religious beliefs, scriptures, the teachings of a specific church, pastor, and a family system that introduces and maintains a prescribed dogma easily referred to for answers, guidance and clarity. Having a spiritual guidebook can be handy.

Although there are many books offering authoritative answers about Pagan beliefs and practices, there are, to date, no canonized publications on Pagan spirituality. And if there ever were such a work published, I have no doubt that Pagans across the country would be burning it as sacrilegious.

Spiritual Directors do well to have some reference point for their directees, some resource for concrete guidance. Sadly for the Pagan Director, and joyfully for the Pagan directee, the free-thinking and individualistic nature of a Pagan path duly erases all hope for definitive instruction manuals.

But even without established structures and canonic manuals, the increasing presence of Paganism in American culture is creating greater opportunity for practitioners

to share their experiences with each other, nurture community experiences of spirituality, and therefore find a greater sense of belonging, acceptance and support for the journey.

DESIRE AND DENIAL

Buddhists put a lot of focus on non-attachment, Christian teachings often glorify asceticism, and Jewish covenants tend to eschew the indulgence of human pleasure. One delightful aspect of Pagan spirituality is an understanding that “desire” is a central value and an indelible virtue. Noticing and fulfilling personal desires is considered a sacrament, as long as it is undertaken with respect for life and with the aim of “harming none” as the Wiccan Rede dictates. In *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk writes, “In Witchcraft, desire is itself seen as a manifestation of the Goddess” (99). In *Spiritual Direction with Pagans*, personal desire can be brought in and honored as a cherished value, while seeking to balance it with the desire of the God/dess.

In order to let go of the self-focused energy of desire and the satisfaction thereof, Pagans must recognize a greater desire, a superseding yearning to please God/dess or put oneself in service of a broader cause than one’s own preferences. Letting go of one’s preferences, or at least moderating them by opening to include a wider perspective, creates a space for God/dess to contribute to one’s thoughts, feelings and decisions.

As *Spiritual Direction* has its roots in Christianity, the traditional work of *Spiritual Direction* has focused on helping individuals deepen their commitments to scripture, and to the values of the church. When working with Pagans, the *Spiritual Director* is challenged to expand the structure of a moral value system to include Pagan sensibilities. This includes considering personal preferences and desires as valid components.

EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual Direction is a forum in which a seeker of any faith tradition can practice inviting God/dess to be as fully present as possible throughout his/her life. It offers an opportunity to stay more consciously in remembrance of God/dess. It invites the seeker to include the vision, wisdom and intentions of God/dess in every aspect of life. Spiritual Direction is for anyone who wants to listen for the guidance of The Divine and to trust in that guidance when it is heard. Spiritual Direction is a resource for those who earnestly want to include God/dess in their daily thoughts, decisions and movements.

Making this decision, asking for help from God/dess, is not easy. Inviting another human into that conversation is likewise challenging. Margaret Guenther says, “in this covenanted relationship the director has agreed to put himself aside so that his total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair” (Holy Listening, 3). A blessing of Spiritual Direction is that it offers the directee a wider perspective. It amounts to two sets of eyes, ears, hands, and hearts seeking guidance from the same source for the same purpose.

The discernment process is an ambitious attempt to sift through all possible forms of input in order to arrive at an essence of spiritual truth and clarity. With a companion participating in and assisting with the process, the work can stay more focused and the scope can be broadened. It is a relationship in which the Spiritual Director is in service to another. A Spiritual Director can bring a level of objectivity that the directee may not have. Sometimes that outside perspective can be challenging, but it can also bring a welcome authenticity for the earnest seeker.

Spiritual Direction can help a directee stay more consistent in his/her practice and it can give the directee an oft needed sense of accountability. Consistency in prayer and being patient in each moment can create strengthened trust in the unfolding Divine plan. A feeling of community and companionship can be validating, comforting and motivating. A Director can encourage the directee into more engaged forms of relating to The Divine.

Spiritual Direction can be a resource for information, new tools for spiritual practice, and a support system when one's energy for the path follows a natural ebbing and flowing pattern. Spiritual Direction offers an ongoing invitation for the seeker to consistently maintain a focus on his/her values for his/her spiritual existence.

CHAPTER FOUR: PAGAN DIRECTION IN ACTION

GROUNDED IN GOD/DESS

The spiritual life is rooted in a desire and dedication to keeping the presence of Spirit, God, Goddess, Divinity, and one's own sense of Soul as a central, focalizing awareness. Starting with an acknowledgement that the individual human has a soul to tend to, that awareness then expands and begins to seek the information and guidance needed to nourish the soul well. In Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide, Judy Harrow defines Spirituality as "The quest for conscious connection with Deity" (40).

In Paganism, this sought connection with Deity is so widely varied; practitioners keep adjusting, including, expanding and diversifying the definition and understanding of what Deity is. Nature is deity and/or nature is a container for deity. Nature is personified as deities, names and faces are created to describe what happens in the natural world. Worship is the awe and oneness we can experience in nature. Plants, animals and events in the natural world serve as symbols, tools, and bridges linking us to the greater, unmanifest, unfathomable presence of Deity.

Pagans commune with God/dess through the use of herbs, stones, and experience of the elements. The more connected a Pagan feels with nature, the more spiritually aligned he/she is likely to feel. Learning about the natural world is synonymous with learning about God/dess and the mystery of life. By learning magical, energetic associations of various plant and mineral essences, Pagans can feel more directly

connected and associated with the energy of all creation. Connecting and communicating with animals and plants is a common point of access for Pagans.

The connection with Deity is not always an expansive, growing and diversifying experience. Many Pagans dedicate themselves to one form of Divinity and focus the spiritual journey around honoring, following and serving that one God/dess. This can include an acknowledgement that there are many other Gods or Goddesses, but that a person can be dedicated to only one. Through serving a single form of the Divine, the connection and stream of communication can be more powerful, clear and accessible. Some Pagan practitioners have a specific pantheon or family of deities at the center of their faith. Many Pagans believe that certain Gods or Goddesses choose the people they want, and that when the choice of the Deity is clear, the chosen is dedicated to follow that guidance. Still, the basic Pagan belief is that the Sacred is present throughout all of creation. All things are infused with Spirit. Each being is a part of creation and therefore a part of God/dess.

In our finite human ways, we will continue our attempts to define and therefore understand Divinity. We will continue our creation of concepts and explanations that may point us in the right direction, but will never be complete. Our perceptions and ideas may be accurate and good, but they will never entirely encompass The Great Mystery that is God, which is why we will always have a sense of awe and wonder when we contemplate Divinity.

God/dess is the “YES” of the universe. The Divine is creation and destruction, action and inaction. God/dess is beauty, power and mystery. Whatever the form of Divine, whatever the philosophy of the individual, the spiritual task remains: create and

nurture the relationship between individual soul and Divine presence. When individuals commit themselves to nurturing this relationship with the Divine, the spiritual path deepens, focuses and the individual becomes a co-creator with God/dess. The dedication to moving with God/dess, and engaging in an ongoing discernment process with Deity, provides the solid foundation for true Spiritual Direction.

RUNAWAY SPIRITUALITY

A plus side to the Pagan personalizing of practice is that a Pagan is not likely to emulate a spiritual prayer life that doesn't suit him/her. Pagans are much more likely to piece together a custom made prayer regimen and experience for themselves. Margaret Guenther, in Holy Listening, warns, "...immersing oneself in other people's recipes for the spiritual life is an effective delaying tactic" (71).

Paganism is almost entirely a first generation path, whose practitioners come to it as adults and who are responsible for building a set of beliefs, rituals and traditions along the way. Pagans often refer to their faith as an age-old religion spanning back many centuries, some say several millennia. A more accurate portrayal is that Paganism is a modern attempt to celebrate age-old occurrences in contemporary ways. Pagan traditions are being written now. Forms of prayer are being created now. Guidebooks are being authored now. And the personal processes of discovery and discernment are happening now. Modern day Pagans are inspired by the past, by the ancestors and by the ancient celebrations of the planet. Today's Pagans are taking responsibility for honoring their inspiration and weaving a new form of Pagan spirituality according to the current need.

This quality of ancient inspiration mixed with modern need applies to the relationships with God/dess as well. The Pagan perspectives of Deity include reverence and respect for the names and faces of Goddess that have been celebrated in every culture around the world since the dawn of humanity. At the same time, Pagans are creating prayer, ritual and expressions of homage that fit in today's cultural structure. Pagans, by and large, acknowledge that their prayers and rituals honoring various deities are symbolic and based more on intentionality than on literal, actuality. Modern Pagans can worship Isis and Osiris but are not likely to have their bodies mummified when they die. Some Pagans honor ancient Aztec Gods but do not sacrifice prisoners of war for their Gods' appeasement. Modern practitioners are more likely to light a candle and speak the names of God aloud as invocation. They are more likely to offer a sacrifice by pouring water into the household plants and burning incense.

STAYING ON TRACK

Judy Harrow, in Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide, says, "Effective religious activity helps us to restore our awareness of our bond with the Ancient Gods and to reclaim our functional access to Spirit" (156). This translates to an indication that "prayer," by whatever label, brings us to a conscious relationship with the Divine and opens the channels for our ongoing communications with that wisdom. That is, essentially, the purpose of Spiritual Direction stated in Pagan language.

Along the spiritual journey, seekers keep trying to let God/dess be the foundation for their desires and decisions, their lens through which they see the world and the compass guiding their hand. Pagans take into account the values of their cultures, their

families, and their own deepest hearts; looking for the subtle or obvious signs of the natural world; listening to the echoes of their own souls' longings; and then acting accordingly. At each step, harmony is sought, alignment with fate, nature, Spirit, self, and others. At each crossroads the spiritual seeker assesses options and tries to determine which choice most profoundly pulses with the energy of goodness, rightness, desire, integrity, and the blessing of all the energies that be.

With each decision, Pagans have the option of inviting God/dess to express his/her/its preference. With each invitation, there is an opportunity to receive guidance. With each piece of guidance taken, an understanding of Divine will is fortified and a familiarity with the language of Spirit grows. These communications nurture the individual soul's relationship with Deity and strengthen the collaborative energy of personal power and Divine will moving in concert through life.

In the Pagan faith, there is no understanding, belief or pretense that the domain of God/dess is in any way detached, separate from or moving independent of the physical world we live in. It is Pagan duty to include the honoring of the Sacred through, alongside, or in union with honoring of the mundane. Acknowledging the inextricably intertwined relationship of Spirit and matter is a natural foundation for a full, attuned life.

ESTABLISHING "PRAYER" PRACTICE

The lack of public community can make it difficult for Pagans to identify forms of prayer and to establish resources and supportive environments for nurturing prayer practices. Pagans, being seditious sorts, may find it easier to describe what is *not* prayer and what does *not* work, rather than what *is* prayer and what *does* work. Pagans don't

have set, formal religious structures, common definitions for prayer, or consistency amongst practitioners, groups or traditions. Many prayer practices and spiritual exercises are kept secret or exist exclusively within closed circles. Many practices are only passed along via oral tradition. As Pagans attempt to structure their belief systems and strengthen their practices, the Director will most often be working with a blank slate wide open for inquiry, exploration and interpretation. If a Pagan comes to a Director asking for assistance in developing a prayer practice, the Director can only refer the directee back to “what is in your heart?”

Many Pagans have a regular prayer practice that revolves around the cycles of the Moon. Some create regular prayer practices around more secular dates: meeting with a group for ritual, study or social time every Friday or twice monthly on Sundays. Some Pagans have daily practices of setting intentions, asking for guidance and offering gratitude. And many more Pagans will dive into spiritual work when life presents challenging circumstances for which mundane consciousness isn't quite cutting it.

Often, setting up a prayer practice needs some physical surround: establishing a certain, consistent location for prayer, finding a consistent time of day/night, creating a ritualistic way of demarking the beginning and end of prayer time (ringing a bell, lighting a candle, singing or listening to a song, speaking a specific phrase, verse, or mantra). Creating rhythm for regular prayer is often a tremendous challenge for Pagans who, by nature, seem pre-disposed to rebel against expectations and discipline. The late Sufi teacher Murshid Samuel L. Lewis used to say that if eating ice cream were considered a prayer, we would all be punctual and unfailingly devout in our practice. Pagan prayer has

to be enjoyable, gratifying and consistently enticing in order to maintain the interest and ongoing attention of the practitioner.

Movement is a good medium for Pagan prayer. This includes walking, hiking, dancing, yoga and/or stretching, gardening, tai chi, etc. Pagans, in general, include the physical body as a part of the spiritual experience and, therefore, are more likely to include physical engagement and expression as part of a prayer practice. With practice and dedication, Pagans can integrate communications with God/dess into doing the dishes, driving to work, taking a bath, reading a book, laughing, crying, talking to children, walking the dog, brushing teeth, watching a movie, spending time with the in-laws, falling asleep, or looking online for cheesecake recipes (or maybe that's just me).

Prayer is often an attempt to change consciousness in some way. For Pagans, ritual is commonly employed along with various forms of trance work, dreams, meditation, guided visualizations and/or pathworking. Participating in rituals, either solitary or in a group, prepares the mind and body to recognize and engage consciously with the Divine. Consciously offering gratitude opens the door for greater awareness and ever more gratitude. Experiencing awe and wonder at nature entices the wonderer back for more appreciation in experiencing nature. In this respect, prayer is fruitful and therefore potentially addictive. There are worse things.

RECOGNIZING PRAYER

So how do you know when you're praying or when whatever you're doing counts as prayer? After asking questions in prayer, and receiving answers, there are infinite ways to determine the effectiveness of prayers.

Pagans may recognize the communications of God/dess by deliberately tuning into the messages and wisdom of their own physical bodies, paying attention to how energy flows or stagnates in their muscles and bones. They may invite and try to pay attention to ways God/dess may use the world's natural sounds to communicate meaning: bird's chirping, rustling of wind, crackling of fire, even traffic sounds, or simple quietude. Some Pagans believe in "omens," signs that Spirit may be sending that we have the option of noticing and interpreting and heeding if we pay attention.

Some Pagans use their prayerful intentions to ask for things to happen in their lives or in the world. If those things occur, there can be an associated sense of personal satisfaction that the prayer was answered. There can also be a sense of wonder and amazement, gratitude and celebration.

Pagans may feel this validation as an experience of peace, unity, a feeling of rising energy (physical or ethereal), feeling joyful or exuberant, noticing an overall atmosphere of comfort and calm, seeing or perceiving light, being aware of intellectual stimulation and engagement, an overall sense of wholeness, witnessing some obvious indication of manifested intention, or perceiving an experience as a direct communication or conversation between oneself and God/dess.

Many of these experiences are universal descriptions people of any faith tradition may associate with being aligned with Spirit. Regardless of the definition or description, it is widely understood that prayer must be experienced. It cannot be taught or learned purely on an intellectual, conceptual level. When someone experiences prayer, in whatever form, by whatever name, in whatever context, the truth and validity of that prayer experience is in the experience itself.

HAZARDS OF PRAYER

Mostly, people think of prayer as a safe, benign, peaceful activity (or inactivity). The process of communing with Spirit is not, in and of itself, a treacherous undertaking. However, there are certainly some forms of prayer that lend themselves to soul-trouble. Paganism may have more members apt to experiment, and utilize more dangerous forms of prayer including the use of drugs, shamanic journeying, working with trance states, channeling unseen beings, etc. Perhaps these practices are made more risky due to Pagans' independent tendencies toward solitary practice.

Pagan prayer seeks to notice, access and move energy; so many Pagans are sensitive to changes in energy. Some Pagans intentionally open themselves to be mediums for unseen beings. Pagans who incorporate channeling as part of their spiritual and/or ritual work can experience lingering energy/presence of the entities they channel. Pagans sometimes describe experiences of being energetically/psychically attacked, or simply being contacted for communication by unseen beings unbidden.

Some ritual work and practices require extra attention to prepare and tend to the practitioner along the way. When not handled carefully, mismanaged energy can result in the practitioner feeling unfocused, physically jittery, headaches, blurred vision, sleepy or giddily energetic.

There are simple, practical ways to handle energy imbalances, and Spiritual Directors working with Pagans may need to offer specific instruction to get a Pagan back on track, energetically speaking. Most Pagans who have been practicing for awhile have a sense of what methods work well for them.

Food is always a good place to start. Especially good, healthy food, whole grains, fresh vegetables, etc. Sugar, caffeine or other junk foods won't help. Sleep is often a good re-set for energetic discomfort. Connecting with the Earth in a physical, real-life way helps; go for a walk, hug a tree, lie on the ground.

Spiritual emergencies happen in many traditions. It helps to have a sense of anticipation, a supportive ground, community connections and a plan of action when difficulties arise. Judy Harrow writes about "Shamanic threshold illness" with an explanation that in a culture that supports that specific form of spiritual work, the resultant "spiritual emergency" is anticipated and therefore managed responsibly (Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide, 165).

Even with the forms of prayer mentioned here, most practitioners undertake their practices with established support systems, and engage the work carefully. These words of warning reference the exceptions, the careless, ill-prepared, reckless, or too-courageous-for-their-own-good practitioners.

Note: as a Pagan and as a Spiritual Director, I do not advocate the use of drugs in any spiritual work.

PAGAN PRAYER RESOURCES

Even with the social stigma around Paganism and our culture's long history of Pagan persecution, the Pagans are finding their way back out of the broom closet, so to speak. Many Pagans are discovering and nurturing community connections through either open or closed practicing Pagan groups. Groups often gather for Moon and Sabbat

celebrations, ritual and social time. Pagan families establish and maintain their own unique traditions and ways of celebrating the seasonal holidays. Through group celebrations, Pagan families often make connections with each other and can then establish a greater support system for their own practices.

Some Pagans find their way into partnerships in order to pray, commune and accompany one other person at a time in spiritual explorations. More and more books are being published with information, instructions, guidance, suggestions for ritual work, community building, Pagan sensibilities, history and folklore. Some of the more outspoken Pagan leaders, ritualists, priests and priestesses offer public services for seekers: workshops, public rituals, facilitated conversations, crafting classes, etc. Pagan festivals around the country are magnetically pulling large gatherings of Pagans for celebration, networking and sharing information. Although it's cliché by now, the internet has been opening up channels for all sorts of Pagan connections. Centers for Pagan study are emerging across the country and Pagans' public presence is increasing by the day.

Pagans will also study with spiritual teachers from other non-Pagan traditions including: Reiki masters, yoga instructors, or meditation teachers. Spiritual Direction falls in this category as well. Hopefully it's clear by now that a Spiritual Director need not be Pagan in order to work with Pagans.

PETITIONARY PRAYER (KNOWN TO PAGANS AS, "SPELLS")

Making requests of God/dess or the Universe is a common form of prayer, and certainly not a uniquely Pagan tendency. In Pagan prayers, requests are frequently accompanied by some form of spell. A spell is really just a prayer, but it usually includes

the use of symbols, physical tools, instruments that carry the intention and are meant to hold the energy of the prayer. This often includes incense, candles, dried herbs, essential oils, semi-precious stones, etc.

The idea behind spellwork is that thoughts, requests, desires and intentions are powerful, made more powerful by the practitioner's experience of them and by the energy offered to them both ceremonially and effectually in the mundane, physical world. One can spend five minutes sitting silently in prayer, asking for God to heal an ailing auntie, and then stand up and get on with the day.

Or, one can sit down, ask God to heal the ailing auntie, light a white candle with the understanding that white is a healing color, burn some lavender and ask for the scent of the smoke to carry the prayers, put a piece of rose quartz and a hematite stone into a small muslin bag and bury it under an oak tree in the back yard, take a picture of said auntie, put it on an altar surrounded in rose petals, then sing a chant about comfort and wholeness while getting on with the day.

David Spangler, in The Call, writes:

...energy follows action. This is one of the principles behind magic and ritual. You form circles, beat drums, light candles, chant chants, dance about, or do whatever you do in a ritualistic way in order to invoke or raise a quality of energy. Why go through the fuss? You do so in the expectation that by ritualistically acting out, you will create a vessel of imagination that will invoke and hold whatever essence or quality that you wish. You act first, and the inner reality follows. (53, 54)

The Pagan attitude is that the more senses, thought, tools, and energy one can put into an intention, the more likely it is to come about. The more one can keep a prayer in one's consciousness throughout the day, the greater the momentum that is lent to the intention.

PAGAN EMPOWERMENT

So, there is no central authority in Paganism, which most Pagans will enthusiastically celebrate. Most Pagans are fiercely independent and don't want to be told what to do in any circumstances, certainly not in the context of religion or spirituality, and definitely not by a Spiritual Director. It is a great thing to be able to make one's own decisions, follow one's own guidance and tend to one's personal inspirations as a chosen spiritual path. This is the height of independence, self-sufficiency and freedom. But all this independence comes at a price, or rather, with an obligation. It is for each individual Pagan to be his/her own clergy, his/her own authority, and his /her own resource for guidance. It is important for Pagans to recognize and trust their own intuition.

Staunch independence in all Pagan spiritual matters can soften into community connections and relationships of mutual support along the way; this can potentially include a Spiritual Direction relationship. The purpose of Pagans working in "circles" is to emphasize a focus on mutual respect, a balance of power and a true acknowledgement of equality amongst all participants.

Pagans will typically only look for help through Spiritual Direction if all their own resources prove inadequate around a specific inquiry. They are a skeptical bunch, likely to question anything, and challenge any hint of authority. The lack of

standardization in Pagan spirituality is at once highly appealing, and profoundly challenging. With no dogma, and no community consensus, there is a constant process of exploring, testing, and actively seeking to discern right from wrong. There is also a severely limited possibility of stagnation. Everything is always up for discussion, readjustment and adaptation. By living a constantly evolving spiritual existence, Pagans can constantly seek clarity, depth and conscious connection with God/dess as each moment dictates. Spiritual Direction can be a tremendous resource in this work.

It is the focus of the conscious seeker to continually look for, find and follow the guidance of Spirit and to deliberately shape one's world to align with the Divine will. Without this conscious alignment of intentions, the spiritual journey is empty and meaningless. There is no power in a spiritual path if it does not include the dedicated shaping of one's behaviors and presence in the world. Spiritual Directors endeavor to help directees understand the spiritual terrain and determine the most aligned movements.

SOCIAL ISSUES

SECRECY

Most Pagan communities are somewhat secretive, private, closed and subtle in order to avoid public scrutiny. Fear of judgment and ridicule is widespread and Pagans are commonly poised on the defensive against the non-Pagan world and even against other Pagans.

Paganism is gradually becoming more acceptable in today's culture, but there is still a great deal of fear and secrecy. Many Pagans do not share their beliefs with their

families for fear of ostracism. Others will not or cannot publicize their beliefs in the work place for fear of discrimination and/or termination. Some choose to keep their Pagan spirituality secret for the comfort of their neighbors and communities.

Even with the growing number of Pagans and the increasing acceptability of Paganism, Directors can expect to work with Pagans who continue to feel isolated, who are seeking companionship, validation, encouragement and support on a solitary path.

And as the Pagan movement ages, more practitioners find themselves raising the next, younger generation of Pagans. There is a newly emerging generation of Pagan families seeking community and resources for teaching their children the Pagan ways.

Although the burning times are behind us, there is still a lingering social fear associated with Paganism. Fear of persecution persists even after the reality of prosecution has abated. All this contributes to the Pagan inclination and/or necessity to explore various forms of prayer in an isolated setting with limited resources and very little, if any, guidance.

Spiritual Directors will do well to keep these things in mind as sensitive, contributing factors to a Pagan director's hesitancy or resistance to sharing openly of his/her spiritual life.

STRUCTURE... OR LACK THEREOF

On the other side of the same issue, some Pagan circles hold a concern that as Paganism enters the mainstream and becomes a more socially acceptable religious path, a centralizing authority will emerge and strip Pagans of their autonomous freedom. Pagans pride themselves on being an in-cohesive bunch of insubordinates.

Many Pagans resent their social invisibility, yet simultaneously guard their privacy and underground, secret status. Pagans do not want to be dismissed by society, but neither do they want to be inducted into the acceptable, everyday, run-of-the-mill social normalcy. Pagans tend to resent the lack of cultural legitimacy, while scoffing at social conformity. Pagans delight in being eccentric and disorganized as a religious statement. Pagans love being unstructured, yet they enjoy feeling connected, understood and supported, just like everyone. Pagans cherish their independence and self-directed practices and the flexibility inherent in creating one's own belief system. There is also a degree of pride and ownership associated with designing one's personal faith structure.

Starhawk describes Pagan community like this, "Witchcraft tends to attract people who, by nature, do not like to join groups. The coven structure makes it possible for rabid individualists to experience a deep sense of community without losing their independence of spirit" (The Spiral Dance, 49).

Group practice is often a loosely knitted together collection of various paths. In the gathering there is a good deal of flexibility built in so each participant can feel free to believe (or not) whatever they wish, to say (or not) whatever they wish, to contribute as much (or little) as they wish, to generally respect and acknowledge the beliefs of each other without signing on for the same spiritual job description.

SOCIAL MISCONCEPTIONS

There is still a wide-spread misunderstanding of Paganism in American culture. Some people still believe that Pagans worship the devil. In truth, Pagans don't believe there is a devil. Some folks think if Pagans don't believe in a Judeo-Christian God, they

must be atheists. Actually, some Pagans even believe in a Judeo-Christian God, they just include this God in the myriad of other Gods and Goddesses worthy of invocation and praise. Then there are the more benign social beliefs including a thought that Pagans are all women who worship a Goddess only. The word “Paganism” still often conjures images of dark arts, sorcery and sacrifice. These associations seem to be fading into more realistic, friendly and benevolent depictions such as new-age crystals, psychic hotlines and Harry Potter, none of which are specific examples of Paganism, but all of which represent a gradual willingness to accept and acknowledge associations of Paganism as safe enough to be allowed.

Pagans often define themselves by “not-ness.” They are not-Christian, not-Jewish, not-Muslim, not-Buddhist, not-Atheist, not-normal, not-abnormal, not-evil, not-dismissible, not-homogenous, not-elitist, not-conformist, not-blatant, not-subtle, not...

Pagans tend to be tremendously wary of proselytizing; this applies in both directions: Pagans don't want to be converted, and they don't seek to convert others. This sometimes manifests as a hush about religion in general, which enables society to maintain the misconceptions about Pagan spirituality.

Social stigmas about Paganism are often more about language than components of actual beliefs. It is now commonplace for the public to care about the Earth, to want to treat the planet with respect and to be conscientious about other species. It is secularly acceptable to be aware of the celestial occurrences of solstices, equinoxes and the phases of the Moon. It is increasingly acceptable to refer to God as a non-gender-specific entity or to include masculine and feminine pronouns in reference to God. As long as words like “Goddess,” “Pagan,” “Witch,” “magic,” or “spells” are not spoken, everyone seems to be

all right. Well-informed Pagans can articulately share their wisdom with their communities and help re-set the social perceptions of the tradition.

PAGAN FAMILY

Pagan families find it challenging to raise Pagan children in a primarily Judeo-Christian society. Instilling Pagan family values, celebrating Pagan holidays, teaching Pagan mythology and guiding children along a Pagan spiritual path can be overwhelming with American culture's dependence on mass-media information, public school lessons, and the general commercial messages that pervade our daily rhythms. Spiritual Directors need to be aware of these actualities and work with Pagan directees in this light.

Many Pagans struggle to support their children who are often subject to judgment and ridicule by classmates and social peers. Pagan children are often confused by holidays they learn about in school that are not celebrated in the home and Pagan children are frequently misunderstood by their teachers and peers. For example, when my daughter was in second grade, she was learning about Easter in school. She told her teacher that Easter came from a Pagan holiday called "Ostara" and her teacher was shocked, curious, but skeptically taken aback. Supporting Pagans with Spiritual Direction often requires supporting parents through these social circumstances.

Pagan families are inundated with general demonization of "witches" and the use of Pagan symbols in movies and books, all of which are based on distorted misrepresentations or outright lies. Regardless of the faultiness of these perspectives, Spiritual Direction with Pagans often includes accompanying Pagan directees through

healing journeys and a re-stabilizing process after the effects of their participation in society as a widely misunderstood minority.

Pagan children with exceptional self-confidence and a solid grounding in their family's Pagan traditions can help their compatriots understand another set of holidays, a different set of religious values, and a wide-array of traditions, stories and interests. Similarly, Pagan adults with enough confidence and comfort, which can be supported through Spiritual Direction, can move more gracefully and harmoniously in their communities.

WORDS OF WARNING

LEGALITIES

Religious questions and spiritual explorations are not uncommon for teenagers. They are expected to go through individuation processes including critical assessment of religious beliefs. Neo-Paganism is attractive to teens, largely due to its encouragement and positive evaluation of personal freedom and sovereignty.

When first discovering Paganism, most spiritual seekers are not well-versed, articulate or able to explain proficiently what it is they are seeking and finding. Given the bad social reputation Paganism has received, parents of teens are often, understandably, wary of their children's dabbling in Pagan practices.

Spiritual Directors should be cautious when considering working with teens in the context of Paganism. While not illegal, it is likely to prompt concern on the part of parents and guardians of teenaged Pagans. Judy Harrow, as a Pagan priestess, author and

Spiritual Mentor writes: “Some of us advocate turning young people away from even open, public Sabbat celebrations unless they have parental consent” (Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide, 48).

With directees of any tradition, it is a good idea to get parental approval before working with minors, but the importance is heightened with a controversial spiritual path such as Paganism. While it is honorable to support seekers of all ages, it is also honorable to acknowledge family ties and to respect the authority of parents.

DIRECTORS, PLEASE DON'T...

Do not try to intermedicate between a Pagan and his/her concept of God/dess. Pagans are usually fiercely attached to being in direct communication with their own Gods.

Do not use language in reference to a Pagan's spiritual path that he/she has not explicitly used and/or approved. I can't emphasize this enough. Pagans are likely to be extremely sensitive about language. Using the wrong words can destroy rapport.

Do not take anything for granted. Inquire openly and honestly. Better to ask questions, get the story directly and stick with what the directee unequivocally shares. Keep the conversation forum welcoming. Do not assume anything about religious tenets with a Pagan directee. Actually, just don't assume anything at all.

Do not use language suggesting “humility,” “hierarchy,” or “authority” with a Pagan directee. Do not presume authority over a Pagan in any spiritual matter. This may seem like a no-brainer, but it is possible to inadvertently express a subtle nuance that a Pagan may interpret as authority. Be careful.

Do not suggest to a Pagan that he/she give his/her power over to anything, or anyone, including God/dess. Vivianne Crowley writes, “In Wicca we believe that each of us has a free will. We cannot have other than free will because each of us in our innermost centre is divine” (Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age, 112).

Do not expect Pagans to indulge language or concepts of pleading with the Divine, or “bowing” to anything. For Pagans, “bowing” is typically unthinkable, let alone doable!

Do not try to talk about “sin” with a Pagan. “Sin” is likely to be a trigger word and even the concept of transgression in the context of Pagan spirituality may not fit.

Do not use judgmental language in an attempt to quantify or define things as good or bad, right or wrong. Remember that all things in Pagan spirituality are personally determined and variable.

Do not push an emphasis on community with Pagan practitioners. It is often a sore spot. And many Pagans truly are perfectly happy and fulfilled working entirely independently.

Do not focus on masculine language for Divinity unless the directee does. Words like “Lord,” “God,” and “Savior” are likely to send a Pagan directee looking for a stiff drink followed by a new Spiritual Director.

Do not use absolute language. Everything in Pagan spirituality is quantifiable. Absolutely.

Do not expect Pagans to go for moderation, restraint, or discipline in matters of spirit or the mundane. Pagans are no good at moderation, and generally like to keep it that way.

DIRECTORS, PLEASE DO...

Since Pagans often use unusual language in describing their spiritual experience, it is important for a Spiritual Director to make sure he/she understands the directee's language and meanings. As with any directee, it is necessary for a Director to use the same words that the directee uses and be careful to use them correctly. Ask for clarification or more information, as needed, to be as accurate as possible when referring to a Pagan's spiritual experience.

Because a Pagan's religious path is personally created and nurtured, it is a sensitive matter and often the names or specific language an individual Pagan uses are private and personal. Pagans are moving in a unique framework. Think about a Pagan's spirituality as his/her child, his/her creation, the container for his/her soul.

Remember "The Wiccan Rede." It will be the most useful reference point for understanding, underlining and clarifying values and moral priorities in Pagan Spiritual Direction:

"And it harm none, do what you will."

This "golden rule" of Paganism is as close as practitioners get to having a standardized ethical law. The Director's job, leaning on the Wiccan Rede, is to help the directee sift through interpretations of "harming none." Support Pagans in exploring and living with open-hearted, fully embodied presence and the Rede will keep everything on track in the broad scope.

HOW PAGANS MAY USE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Although Pagans don't tend to refer to The Divine as "God," the guiding focus of any spiritual path revolves around the desire to stay connected to one's personal understanding of that presence, by any name. Spiritual Direction for Pagans may provide a much needed structure for the search: a consistent and fully intentional environment for nurturing the relationship with God/dess and heeding the invitations of Spirit.

Spiritual Direction is a long-term relationship between a Director, a directee, and God. Obviously, the spiritual path is life-long and each person has a life-long task of tending to that path in whatever way suits him/her. Pagans, however, are more likely to enter Spiritual Direction for a specific, short-term need and then get back to the independent, self-directed, solitary practice. Pagans may use Spiritual Direction as an opportunity to establish an anchor in spiritual practice, to explore and set up a prayerful rhythm, or to resolve a temporary spiritual "stuck-ness."

Pagans may be keen on the non-hierarchical basis of Spiritual Direction; the understanding that the Director is not more holy, more knowledgeable, more evolved or more spiritual than the directee, may be particularly appealing to authority-wary Pagans. Starhawk states clearly, "Our ultimate spiritual authority is within, and we need no other person to interpret the sacred to us. We foster the questioning attitude and honor intellectual, spiritual, and creative freedom" (The Twelve Wild Swans, xviii). The sense of partnership in Spiritual Direction – both the Director and the directee looking, listening and seeking the same things at the same time – may offer Pagan directees more comfort and safety, a greater feeling of trust and camaraderie in the relationship and the work at hand.

In lieu of a religious organization, Pagans are often seeking validation for their own inner wisdom and spiritual guidance and (Pagans, cover your eyes here) may be eager for the approval and encouragement of a Director. (Okay, you can open your eyes). The validation and witnessing a Pagan can receive in Spiritual Direction is often a rare experience for which he/she can feel grateful and blessed.

Since contemplative practices are primarily solitary forms of prayer, privately practicing Pagans may benefit greatly by having more contemplative options for their prayer time. The focus on contemplative practice, nurturing silence and prayerful listening may be novel in some Pagans' experience. The invitation to get quiet and wait for clarity in Spiritual Direction is an opportunity for Pagans to expand their perspectives and faith in the guiding presence of God/dess in everyday experiences and relationships. Spiritual Direction can usher Pagans through fears and judgments, into greater realizations of love and trust.

Discovering spiritual common ground in Spiritual Direction can be liberating and powerfully encouraging for Pagans. As long as a Pagan can enter Spiritual Direction without fear that the Director will be attempting to change or correct something about his/her belief system, trust and rapport can be established and blossom into fruitful corroborative work.

The personal Pagan experience is always rooted in choice: the choice to practice alone or in groups, the choice to listen for God/dess or not, the choice to harmonize one's behaviors or to move individualistically, the choice to gracefully follow the seasons or struggle against the flow. Within Spiritual Direction those choices can be acknowledged, supported, and held in a greater context: Director and directee are working together to

ground the personal decisions in the atmosphere of Spirit. With sensitivity to specifically Pagan concerns, Spiritual Directors may assist the journey of Spirit and help the Pagan seeker in exploring the depths of his/her faith.

CONCLUSION

With the understanding that Paganism is a religion populated by renegades and fraught with inherent challenges, it is important for Spiritual Directors who are open to working with Pagans to have some insight as to what their spiritual foundation is. There is tremendous opportunity in the world of Spiritual Direction for Pagans to find support, encouragement and validation for their soul-work.

Through my work with Pagans in Spiritual Direction, I have witnessed beautiful unfoldings in the world of Spirit. I have heard stories of struggle and reward. I have sought to bring the gifts of Spiritual Direction to Pagan seekers and have found rich ground for spiritual growth. Adapting the language of Spiritual Direction into Pagan terms has proven tricky, but perfectly possible and effective.

As a Pagan in Spiritual Direction, I have needed to translate terms and concepts into my own framework. I watch my own engrained reactions and spiritual routines, expand my horizons, work on breaking my habitual ruts and living more fully attuned to my own perception of God.

Beginning the Spiritual Direction work is always a steep learning curve for both Director and directee. The Director learns a new language and the directee learns trust. If both participants are rooted in their steadfast dedication to Spirit, and if both exercise patience, the relationship can flower into an out-and-out garden of Spirit fruits.

Through sharing what I've learned and offering the insights I've glimpsed, I hope that Directors and Pagans alike will feel more informed, courageous, confident and willing to step into conscious relating. For the benefit of the seeker, for the honoring of The Divine, and for the greater love and harmony of the Earth we share.

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