**Comparative Pagan Religions and Practices**

**Qualifiers:** These are Pagan religions, earth-based religions, magickal praxes, magico-religions, or elements of Nature Spirituality that relate to *Common Magick*. Most of them have ties to the British Isles or the United States of America.

**Animism**: The belief that all natural beings, including animals, plants, land forms like mountains and lakes, and natural forces like the wind, have a consciousness and spirit.

**Asatrú**: The reconstructed religion of the ancient Scandinavian, Icelandic, Teutonic and Germanic peoples. Deities and entities are from Norse, Icelandic, and Teutonic pantheons. Holidays based on the cycle of the seasons are celebrated, along with commemorations of heroes. Astatrúr often meet in circles and host a blöt, or toast, to deities and other entities. Some magickal workings are undertaken during these gatherings. An alphabet of Runes is used for both communication and divination. Asatrú is also called Heathenism or Heathenry and sometimes the Troth.

**British Traditional Wicca:** is a magio-religion founded by Gerald Gardner in the late 1940s. Gardner drew upon some of the practices of British Traditional Witchcraft. He also incorporated beliefs, magickal techniques and structures from Ceremonial Magick, Eastern religions, and other sources. Thus, it is sometimes called “Gardnerian Wicca”. British Traditional Wicca is an initiatory religion. Deities and entities come from various pantheons, nearly always including a Great Mother Goddess and Father God. Deities are imminent. Holidays are based on the cycle of the seasons, focusing on the eight “Wheel of the Year” solar events, including Solstices, Equinoxes, and cross-quarters, called Sabbats. The full and new moon phases are often celebrated. Ceremonies occur in a circle, usually led by a Priest and Priestess. Magickal rites are frequently performed at these gatherings.

**British Traditional Witchcraft:** The wordsWitchcraft and Wicca are sometimes used interchangeably, but for our purposes, we will denote “Witchcraft” as (1)the craft and art of using energy for a designated goal, a practice that may be independent of religion. This form of Witchcraft might be non-theistic, meaning not recognizing any God-forms. Other Witches feel it is a spiritual or religious praxis, leading us to (2) Non-Wiccan or non-Gardnerian Traditional Witchcraft, including magickal systems discovered and created by Robert Cochraine, Andrew Chumbley, Cora and Victor Anderson, Sybil Leek, and Paul Huson. Google the names and you’ll learn about the traditions.

In the past, the words “witch” and “witchcraft” were often pejorative terms. One very recognizable practice is combining ingredients in a container while speaking words of power, in order to bring one’s desires into reality. This is often called conjuring, doing a working, or casting a spell. Many Witches work alone, or solitary.

*Ecstatic Witchcraft*: Focuses mainly on celebration and astral projection or journeying for the purpose of gaining knowledge, expanding the consciousness, and interacting with spirit beings.

*Fertility Witchcraft*: Concentrates on the fecundity of animals and plants and the cycles of Nature related to agriculture and herding.

*Initiatory Witchcraft*: Requires learning the Craft from a designated leader, formal training, a dedication or commitment, oaths or vows, levels of ability and knowledge, sometimes called “degrees”, and a series of rituals that mark rites of passage from one level to another.

*Non-initiatory Witchcraft*: Can contain some elements of initiatory forms of Witchcraft, but formal training is often replaced by observation or experience. There may be no declaration of commitment, no formal vows or degrees, and no rituals that mark rites of passage. Organic rites of passage, such as menarche or elderhood may be observed, instead.

**Celtic Reconstruction:** Includes the religious beliefs and praxes of the Celtic people who inhabited Europe from the Iron Age to the present times. “Celts” can be viewed as an ethnic group with specific traditions and folkways. Reconstructionists try to use the religion, arts, customs and literature of only one specific ethnicity, and to ensure that their ceremonies and other activities as historically accurate as possible.

**Ceremonial Magick:** may or may not be practiced in conjunction with religious beliefs. Ceremonial magick often utilizes books of philosophy and esoteric knowledge. In past days, magickal “grimoires”, or spell books, were used chiefly by the literate upper classes, and contained mostly stylized, formal, “high” magick. Ceremonial magick can include divination systems like the Tarot and Astrology, the science of Alchemy, and symbols like the Pentagram and Zodiac. It often utilizes the four elements / directions / humors, along with aether or spirit. There is a belief in spirits and energetic creatures, such as elementals. These concepts came from ancient Greece, as well as the Middle East and Asia. While some ceremonial magicians meet in groups, and some of these groups have initiations, others work alone. Ceremonial magick-users may or may not celebrate seasonal holidays and work with deities.

**Druidry**: The ancient Druids were the educated class of philosophers, scientists, healers, judges, artists and scholars of the Iron Age Celts. Druidry has been revived as a form of modern spirituality or philosophy that is based on knowledge. Most Druids honor Nature, and meet to celebrate holidays based on the cycles of the seasons. Some practice magick and celebrate Druidry as a religion, while others do not.

**Fairy** or **Faerie Faith:** A belief in spirits of nature, ancestors, or supernatural beings known as “the Fae” or fairies. This tradition draws heavily on folklore, folktales, and fairy tales. There are sets of rules for interaction with (or avoidance of) these esoteric beings. Not to be confused with Feri, a form of initiatory British Traditional Witchcraft.

**Paganism:** Modern Paganism, or neo-Pagan religions, are based on both historical and modern beliefs and practices. Some Pagan traditions and pantheons draw from the religions of ancient societies, such as Egyptian, Roman, Greek, and Eastern European. Many Pagans celebrate holidays that reflect the cycles of the seasons and honor Nature. Most believe in, and use, some form of magick. Paganism can encompass many polytheistic or pantheistic religions, which are those that have many deities.

**Shamanism:** The word “Shaman” comes from the Tungisic language group of Eastern Europe. A shaman seeks to work with the forces and beings found in Nature, for the purposes of spiritual attunement and discovering knowledge. Some Shamans use magick, and /or altered states of consciousness, often for healing or for creating harmony with the natural world.

**Wicca:** Modern Wicca, other than British Traditional Wicca, is not necessarily an initiatory practice, as many Wiccans self-initiate and /or dedicate themselves to specific deities. Wicca is often considered a feminist Earth-based religion, incorporating principles of equality between genders and honoring deities as God and Goddess. It can be a fertility religion or an ecstatic religion (or neither, or both). Wiccans meet in circles or practice as solitaries. Most use magick, and most revere Nature.

**Vodoun, Hoodoo, Conjure:** These magio-religions and magickal traditions come from a syncretization of the traditional religions of African enslaved workers, the beliefs and practices of Indigenous people, European folk magick, and Catholicism. Practitioners work with powerful entities, have an affinity with Nature, and use magick to bring the will into manifestation. Communication with spirits and deities is achieved during altered states of consciousness. Natural objects are used for healing and for creating change in the physical and spiritual worlds.

**Common Magick:** The folkways, folk magick, and magico-religious practices of the common people of the British Isles. This includes Britain, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Wales, and what used to be known as Brittany on the Northern coast of France. It may contain elements of the other traditions listed above. People who practice a magico-religion that originated in the British Isles often choose deities and entities (or are chosen by gods) that derive from this location. They may interact with deities from one or more cultures who dwelled in or occupied Britain throughout history. This includes proto-human races such as Neanderthals; the Fomorians and the Tuatha de Danaan; Indo-Europeans, the Celt-Iberians, our neighbors the Celtic Gauls, the British Isles Celts, the Romans, the Norse and Danes; the Anglo-Saxons and other Teutonic tribes, the Normans and Christians; and the religions of recent immigrants, such as Muslims, Buddhists, African diasporic faiths, Sikhs and Hindus.

When people emigrated to the United States, Australia, and other locations, their folk traditions went with them. They might have adopted the religion or spirituality of the place they’re now living, such as Native American indigenous faiths. They sometimes syncretized their European religions with native folkways, or traditions of other immigrants and enslaved workers. Common magick includes the rituals, spells, workings, celebrations, beliefs, dances, folkplays, songs, chants, folkcrafts, and other practices of the working classes. I wrote a book about it; you should read it!

**Belief in Entities**: Witchcraft and magickal practice can be theistic or non-theistic. Non-theistic means working magick and expanding one’s consciousness without the presence of, or belief in, magickal entities, such as Gods. Theistic practice or religion means that the person believes in god-forms, deities, spirits, elementals, or other unseen beings which are imbued with magickal powers and qualities. They may interact with magickal entities during their practice.

The entities may be viewed as being **omnipotent**, or all-powerful, having every mighty and spiritual quality known to humankind. Deities might be considered to be **omnipresent**, or able to manifest everywhere at once, even within one’s mind. Entities might be **personified**, or have human characteristics, appearance, traits, skills, emotions, and foibles.

Magickal beings can also embody the qualities of a natural force, such as Winter or Summer, the Moon and Sun, storms, the sea, a mountain, or the forest. They might possess the qualities of certain traits or conditions, such as strength, wisdom, hunting or agriculture, or a human profession such as healing or smithcraft. Some deities are considered archetypes, or representations of situations that are common to all humans, such as motherhood, childbirth, or death. Some people view deity as Nature, with a capital N. Some practitioners embrace the New Age concept of the “higher self”, which means that each person has a connection to, or embodiment of, a god-force. Some experience deity as pure energy or a power, such as love or amazing wonder.

**Monotheism**: Monotheism means the belief in one single god-form or deity. An example is the Abrahamic religions, who see their God as being an individual, omnipotent father figure. Another example is those who view Gaia, Mother Nature, or a singular Earth entity as being omnipresent. This concept was recognized by Ceremonial Magick practitioners of the fifteenth century in Europe, who believed in the neo-Platonic principle of the *Spiritus Mundi*, or world spirit. Others believe in a universal consciousness or collective intelligence.

**Duotheism**: Duotheism is believing in two deities. Wiccans and some other magio-religions believe in a duality of God and Goddess. The God is often represented as an agricultural or forest deity, often with horns or antlers. The Goddess usually takes the form of the great Mother. These deities may be associated with different ages and take on a triplicate form, such as Maiden, Mother and Crone, represented by phases of the moon, or Youth /Son, Father, and Sage /Grandfather. Sometimes the male triple form includes Warrior or Hunter. Some Wiccans believe that all forms of the Goddess, from all societies, are embodied in the Great Goddess, and that all forms of the God are personified by the Great God. Wiccans sometimes choose a Patron God and Matron Goddess as spiritual parents (or be chosen by the Gods). These deities are called upon during religious rites and magickal workings.

**Polytheism and Pantheism**: Belief in many deities is called polytheism. Pantheism can also be a definition for a belief in many gods, but it usually means belief in all deities, entities, spirits, ancestors and other energetic beings. Some Pagans believe in a pantheon, or family of god-forms, who come from a particular ethnic background or culture.

**Omnitheism** means a belief in all of the above.

Some Common Magick practitioners believe in the duality of God and Goddess. Others are Animists, believing that every single organic being and natural condition has a spirit. Some may believe that all spirits combine to create a deity, sometimes represented by Gaia, or the consciousness of Mother Earth, or an anthropomorphized Mother Nature. Others of us believe in a pantheon of Gods, often deriving from Britain and other locations where our ancestors dwelled. Some old-line Pagans deify their ancestors, meaning to embody them with godlike qualities, such as profound wisdom. Likewise, some Common Magick-users believe that people with psychic abilities have descended from the Gods. Folk magick practitioners might combine god-forms, syncretize two or more pantheons, or choose several deities from several different societies and families of Gods. This is called “eclectic” devotion, and while quite a few purists dislike this approach, other people find that it works wonderfully well.

Of course, some Common Magick practitioners do not believe in any deities at all. Some practice non-theistic Witchcraft, which has to do with energy work and acquiring knowledge without the presence of Gods or other entities.

Some old-line Pagans establish a connection with their deities, an emotional or physical bond. Worshipping means showing devotion and reverence. People may perform acts of veneration, such as burning incense or preparing a special altar dedicated to a particular god. They sometimes use a statue or other point of focus that resembles a particular deity, in order to establish the concentration necessary to interact with them. (This probably did not occur until the Roman incursions into Britain, as the Celts did not originally use representational art.) In turn, the Gods are believed to develop an emotional bond with their devotees. The deities might test our fortitude, and sometimes reward us with blessings. We may call upon them during celebrations, workings and other rituals.

Folktales, myths and legends tell us which deities formed alliances with one another, and with which groups of humans. A listing of Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Brythonnic deities can be found in other literature and reference books, or online. Sometimes, the Gods and Goddesses of Britain were hidden in folktales and nursery rhymes. Mother Goose, the fine lady upon a fine horse, Jack and Jill, Jack the Giant Killer, the old woman in the shoe, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White all might allude to deities.

Folkloric traditionalists usually do not believe our deities are omnipotent. We also may not believe the gods are omnipresent. We mostly believe that one deity has one capability, like controlling storms, or several talents and influences, like Llew / Lugh / Lugas, the God of craftsmanship, physical prowess, contests, sports, and sometimes viewed as embodying the Sun. Even the gods or powers of Nature have limitations. For instance, many deities must obey the laws of physics. While we mostly believe the Gods cannot necessarily prevent bad things from happening to us, we also believe that they can increase the probability of good, positive events occurring, if asked politely.