



Hi all and welcome to the 34th issue of Pagan World!

The PFI is happy to announce that once again, we've branched out into the world. We have 3 new National coordinators: Spain (Aitziber & Werty) Poland (Rawimir) and South Africa (Damon Leff). On behalf of all of us, welcome to the team!!

In this issue, we have a letter that I received from Eric Jett who responded to my article about how I experienced paranormal fairs in Belgium. I was very happy to receive his feedback, so I asked him to write an article for us about how a good paranormal fair should be run. A big thanks to Eric!!

See you next issue!

***Bright blessings,
Diana
July 21 2007***

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Letter to the Editor

Today I recieved issue 33 of Pagan World and I was horrified by an article that I read entitled "A Day at the Paranormal Fair". I have many things to say in response to this article, and from many different views. But I have to say that it appears Diana Aventina had a bad experience at this paranormal fair, and I am sorry that such a thing happens. I have hosted New Age fairs here in the United States for over 6 years now, before that I did read at fairs as a tarot reader. So for me to read that these events "are a forum for the uncrupulous to fill their pockets" was something I took offense, not only to myself and my business, but to the wonderfully spiritual people who attend the fairs. The article I read made it sound like anyone who hosted a fair, or attended one, was out to swindle elderly people out of their money. That is outrageous!



The readers do charge for their readings, the price is not set by me, but each reader sets their own price. I encourage all of our readers to give free readings when they have the chance, but many of these people travel from across the country and I understand the need to make back traveling expenses. I am sorry that this well-known witch of belgium has used her abilities, or her idea of abilities, to cause such a bad name for other tarot readers, but the readers who attend my fairs are as close to accurate as you can be. Each reader that attends one of my fairs is tested numerous times from the first time they attend one of my fairs by people who I send to them. No they do not know who I am sending, and yes I give these individuals the money to pay for the reading so the reader does not know one client from the next. The readers are well aware that I may send someone unknown to them for a reading. I feel this drives the reader to always give the most of their energy to the reading. If those I send are satisfied and what is said comes to pass then the reader is invited back, if not then they are weeded out. Believe it or not there are alot of very true and talented psychics among the frauds. As for myself when I would read at fairs, and even today with my own clients my readings are set on a love offering basis. Interpretation, they pay what they can or what they want, if they do not have the money to pay me, then its not a big deal, the reading is done because it is meant to help. There are many readers who attend my fairs who follow the same belief.

I am not sure if there is an understanding of the Aura Camera or not in this article. I have a very sweet and talented lady who attends the fairs with her aura camera, and no she does not need a book in order to interpret the aura. She does, however, provide the client with a detailed print out of not only the aura photo but also a print out on biofeedback, and how it works and transcribes through the computer the energy fields in order to place on the photo. Biofeedback technology is not something someone cooked up yesterday, and anyone wanting to do research into scientific experiments can see that a persons energy pattern can be transcribed through color onto a photo or printout from a computer. Of course the photo costs money, again this individual has driven over 200 miles to be at this show, and yes it does cost for lodging so I wouldn't expect them to put out all of this money and not get anything in return.

Now after reading the part over the lecture, I'm not exactly sure what the issue was, other than him trying to get those who attended to buy the book. I see nothing different from this than an author who does a book signing wanting you to buy their

book; and if the book wasn't written by him then it is no different then going to a store that wants you to buy the book. You can most usually find things cheaper online than at the actual store. I will say it was not fair for him to promise those who attended a book without saying it had to be purchased. As for him being a representative of scientology, I understand this belief being viewed as a cult. I am not saying that I agree with this religion; however I found it a very sad day that in a pagan publication, an organization that is suppose to promote acceptance of all, there would be a slam against another belief because a government considers it a cult. The last I checked it wasn't too long again that paganism was considered a cult in many areas of the world.

So here is my final factor of why I wanted to respond to this. I host fairs, yes it is a business, but it is also more. New age fairs are a way to get information to areas that may not have a specialty store, and to give others a chance to share their knowledge of spirituality. Our fairs are more than just tarot readers, we have vendors, we have educational tables, which have information on acceptance of other beliefs and even promote the Pagan Federation International as an organization of acceptance. So lets examine how much money can be earned having no scruples. It cost me \$3000 dollars to rent the expo room for our fairs, another \$1000 for advertisement among the free advertisement I do, like going onto the news channels. I usually invest another \$1000 into decorations for the event in order to make the room pleasing to the eye...so it cost me a total of \$5000 to host the fair. Each vender and reader pays a table fee, usually \$80. I usually sell 40 tables, and that is at a good fair so that is \$3200. \$5000-\$3200 still leaves\$1800 out of my pocket. I charge \$5 at the door for people to enter; this number can always change on the amount of people I get through the door. During a slow fair I may get as low as 300 which gives me a profit of \$300, atleast I am not in the hole, on a good fair I can get as many as 800 through the door which gives me \$2200 profit. I will admit not bad for what seems like a weekends work. What many don't understand is it takes me a minimum of 6 months to set up such an event, and considering these events were labled as unscrupulous, our events are nothing but legal going through all of the proper channels with both the state and federal government level. To me this is important so that there are no misunderstandings, and it gives a legitamacy to the readers and healers who attend the fair. So six months of work and I make \$2200 at most I think it is a fair trade for the time and effort I put into such an event. Do I have to host fairs, NO. Then why do I host them? Because it gives me a chance to help bring people of like mind together to enjoy exchanging ideas of spirit, and it has helped increase the knowledge of beliefs systems like paganism in the local community making it more accepted.

Again I am sorry that this individual has had such a horrible experience at this **ONE** fair. However, to classify all fairs of this nature, and those who host them, and attend them, as being unscrupulous is not only unfair it is judgemental. I do not, nor will I lose sleep at night because I own and run a business. I take pride in what my fairs accomplish, and I am extremely protective of those who attend them both as readers and vendors. On a closing note, for the idea that those associated with these fairs are unscrupulous, here in the united states these unscrupulous events have helped bring the heathen ideology of paganism to the for front in order to help the community better understand the stigmatization of such thoughts and what the true belief and spirituality of paganism truly is.

I hope that this helps bring enlightenment about spirit fairs.

Eric Jett

Spirit Fairs
By Eric Jett

So you've seen the advertisement in your local paper about the local New Age or Spirit fair and you think you might be interested in going. New Age fairs can be a great resource to meet new people and gain a wealth of knowledge, but there are always differences between one host and another, and not all fairs can bring you the most positive experiences. So what should you know before you go to a fair? How can you find the right event for you? That's easy, be informed. Like anything, you have to know a little bit about what you are doing, and where you are going, and you should never be afraid to ask questions about the event. I want everyone to get the most out of attending a New Age fair, and to be able to walk out of the event with an enjoyable experience.



My partner and I have hosted New Age/Holistic fairs since 2002, and enjoy every step that it takes to set them up, promote them, and host them. You must know first that the fair you are about to attend is a business. It takes time, money, and a lot of footwork to put on an event like this, so do not be surprised if there is an entrance fee at the door to get in. For instance in our case it takes a minimum of six months to coordinate our events. This time allows us to book the event room, send out paperwork to any psychics and vendors who will attend, map out the table spacing so everyone has enough room, set up the lecture schedules, and follow through with any advertisement, such as news spots or radio specials. Now one of the first things I recommend a person look at is the entrance price, remember that it will cost money when you get into the fair if you want a reading or if you purchase anything from a vendor, so the door fee should not be astronomical. On average a good fair will charge between \$5 to \$7 dollars at the door, and should never exceed \$10. If the door price goes over \$10 ask what that fee covers, sometimes events will give you a couple passes to get free readings, but send an email to the host or hostess of the fair or call them to find out.

While you are communicating with the individual who is putting on the event do not be shy, ask them whatever questions you think are most important. Some questions that I would recommend asking are if there are lectures and if they cost extra? Any reputable fair will usually put an emphasis on education because while this is a business, the main point of the events are usually to promote spiritual growth in the community, and the best way to do that is through lectures or seminars and usually these should be free to attend. Sometimes you will have to pay your door fee first, which is okay but there really should not be an extra cost outside of that to attend any of these lectures. Make sure to ask if they have a business ID. While this does not really affect the atmosphere of the fair, it does tell you if the event is following their state or areas legal rules, which is an important factor in deciding if the event is legitimate.

Usually everyone who attends an event like this plans on having at least one psychic reading, or at least considers it. This is another area to talk to the event coordinator about. Ask them how they choose their psychics. Do they ask for references? Are the readers required to do a test reading prior to attending the event? Are they tested any during the event? An example of this is that during our events we

will randomly send people to the psychics during our events to see how accurate their readings are. The people we send are usually random people coming through the door to attend our fairs, we give them the money to have a reading done by whichever psychic, and then we ask them to rate their accuracy. Over time the host of the event can get a pretty good feel for which are true psychics and which are not. Ask the coordinator if there is a price limit on readings? At most fairs the a psychic reading will cost extra, but you certainly do not want to pay a fortune for a reading that will only last 15 to 30 minutes. Many fairs, like ours, will put a limit on what the readers can charge. For example our limit is \$35, a reader may choose to charge what they like but cannot charge more than \$35 for the readings. Remember that many of these vendors and readers pay hefty prices at some events and usually that fee you pay for a reading goes to making back their traveling expenses. The last question I would recommend asking the coordinator about the psychics at the event is if they are ordained ministers. Again having your ordination papers does not make you a great psychic, however many areas, at least here in the United States, still have what they call the fortune teller law on the books which makes it illegal to be a fortune teller. By having ordination papers, the psychic is considered a spiritual counselor, and is following their areas state or federal laws. Again this is a way to tell if the event you are going to is legitimate. It is always a good idea to know what your local laws are on New Age practices, such as being a psychic, usually the local courthouse will know, and believe it or not really are not that scary to talk with about the subject.

So you've done your research and you really want to go to the event. Great! But what do you do when you get there? Have fun and ask questions! This is a chance to meet not only the readers and vendors at the fair, but to meet others who are coming to the fair just like you. Most events will have a place where you can sit and visit with others and I highly recommend you take advantage of it. If the fair is done correctly a person can easily spend an entire day and have fun without spending money on a reading or purchasing anything from a vendor, simply by attending lectures and meeting people (By the way the some readers and vendors would not be happy that I said that, but it is true).

There are some things that you still need to be aware of at the fair though. If you decide to have a reading, pick the reader that works best for you, not the reader with the longest line. Remember a reader with a long waiting line doesn't mean they are the best reader at the fair. I have seen this happen time after time, and I consider it very close to mob mentality, if there is a waiting list for a reader people assume it is because they are great so they get in line only to find out that the reading was not that great. Feel out the readers at the event. Ask them what type of reading they do, is it tarot? Rune? Do they speak to animal guides? Angels? Maybe they do automatic writing? Or even spiritual drawings? Find what you are comfortable with and do not be shy. Never be afraid to ask a reader how long they have read professionally. What I mean by professionally is reading for total strangers, not just friends and family. This does not mean they are a great reader but it gives you a chance to get a feel of them, after all we are all intuitive, so now is the chance to put yours to work. And lastly, by no means be afraid to stop a reading if you feel uncomfortable, or if you feel the reading is a cold reading. You have no obligation to follow through with a reading that is not what you expected. Most readers at events like this will not ask you for payment until after the reading, this is so you have the chance to stop the reading if you are uncomfortable without obligation to pay, so do not feel that you have to pay for a reading that was not accurate. If something like this happens make sure to track down the coordinator of the fair and let them know what was going on, that you were uncomfortable, the reader gave a general cold reading, or if the reader over stepped

their boundaries in any way. Many fairs have a psychic code of ethics that they make their readers follow, which involves professionalism and confidentiality.

Outside of readings you will find a variety of vendors at events like this and you should be able to ask them questions about anything they are selling. If you are not sure what book you need or what the right mineral or stone is to work with, then ask the vendor or the coordinator. The coordinator may not know the answer, but will know the right direction to point you in so you can find your answers. Make sure you understand any equipment the vendor or reader is using. If you are not sure how an Aura Camera works, ask the person taking the pictures or giving the reading, they should be able to explain the scientific evidence behind bio-feedback, and how the camera reads and translates that feedback into a picture.

Most importantly, if you plan on going to a New Age fair, have fun and enjoy yourself. Ask questions, share your own knowledge, and put your own intuition to work. Spirit fairs are not meant to make anyone rich, or empty the pocket book. They are meant to be a place for people of like minds to gather and spread the word about their spiritual paths. So take care and enjoy your experiences. If you have any questions about an event that is near you or how to find a New Age fair in your area please feel free to contact me eric@spiritualpathcafe.com and I will do my best to answer any questions.

Rev. Eric D. Jett

www.spiritualpathcafe.com



About Eric:

With his education in psychology, Eric has been able to merge this with his psychic abilities to truly become a spiritual counselor. Currently, he is continuing his education while also continuing his tour of the U.S., reading for both people and their pets.

Starting at the age of 13, Eric began reading at metaphysical fairs, making him the youngest professional psychic in Oklahoma at the time.

Using his love of animals, he began talking with his own animal guides to help bring others to their spiritual centers. He soon found that his abilities were a way to help others open up to their own spiritual capabilities. Over the years, he continued his work with people and the animal spirits while increasing his studies of metaphysics.

In 2002, he hosted his first metaphysical fair in hopes of bringing people together to teach and learn about spiritual beliefs from around the world.

After a brief encounter with a fellow psychic in 2003, Eric began using his abilities to communicate with the animals in a new way. He began helping people connect with their pets on a spiritual level, in order to help people know what their pets really feel.

Eric also began helping people find the issues behind many of their own phobias by guiding them through past life regressions, helping them leave the past in the past and enjoy the present.

The legacy of Paganisms
By Syd, PFI National Coordinator for France

At the heart of the pagan world, our contemporaries are welcome to wonder what 'pagan' means.

The fact to make a choice-so draconian it be- in respect of an ancestral tradition, doesn't imply a rejection of other tendencies if they remain coherent in the essence they claim. A choice is the opportunity to go deeper into a cultural essence, cultural in its whole reality. Thus, paganism can only be paganism if it corresponds to the concrete expressions of its meanings. If not, it is simply something else that a human being is free to choose according to his/her longings and I'm thinking both of New Age and the other major syncretistic practices.

The word 'pagan' comes from the word Pagus (country, territory of a tribe), and like 'countryman', it implies a sacred link both with the Earth and with the natural elements of our human constitution, of our environment. Worships are made in nature, at the frontiers between the different tribes, on the sacred hills, near sources etc. Paganus means « who is from the pagus ». By the fact of being linked to the earth, it is linked to ancestral and primordial legacies whatever be their evolution and their contemporary expression. In paganism there is always a link with the essence of the first principle of belief.

Before 392, paganism was the most common form of religion in the Roman Empire. In 392, the Emperor Théodose 1st forbade it and christianism became the official religion.

Paganism is not a modern invention, not even a syncretism for all, it is the opposite. It is simply an expression of life that runs its way, the moral and spiritual legacy- sacred for our souls- received from the most ancient dreams of the world. So it is obvious that this incarnation can have several faces, several expressions, linked to a culture used as a base of expression, often linked to a characteristics of life, of place, of environment. It is like a multidimension ecosystem. The ancients' beliefs remained in symbiosis with the earth which made them live. If we want to stay true to paganism, we must have it in sight.

Pagan worships come from beliefs based on cycles, transcendence as much as immanence, rhythmic alternations, the world's dance. Modern worships are based on duality and fight (fighting the forces of evil, fighting the beast in us etc). Paganism doesn't oppose good against evil but tends to keep those alternated rhythms that carry life and well-being, between obscurity and light. Suffering is not due to the forces of a demoniac entity but to a lost of harmony, of linking, of respect to natural laws that makes the world turn from night to day in a perpetual renewal, continually re-invented. It is not a simple point of view or a philosophical idea, the very distinction of these concepts of the world is to trigger a fundamentally different attitude towards the world, everyday life and towards everyone's moral values.

Some will tell that paganism hasn't got any texts nor writings and cannot have been transmitted. Books are a recent invention and paganism is some million year-old. Being a full part of the environment, linking the different levels of life, it is part of humans' everyday life. In a pagan world, the Sacred is never somewhere else, locked in a chapel. It is always close to life, just next to the secular world to which it is woven. It is a more subtle and more unreachable transmission that the one managed by

reason, that can cross time and History. Books about it can disappear, paganism is intrinsically linked to Earth and Nature, thus bound to re-birth, like every springtime.

Some will also tell that Wicca, considered as a pagan practice, is a recent creation. It is true, only for the name, but Wicca as long as it is linked to the very essences of paganism is a traditional spirituality. As long as it is not a race for powers and a meaningless collection of methods, Wicca is consciously linked in search of old practices. If the Wiccan danger is to fall into the easy way of taking everything that pleases people with no judgment, it is possible however to practise it with Art and in respect of human traditions of reliance to nature, its cycles and its primary forces. We can thus see how modern paganism is the grand-son of antic paganism as it drinks from it, it eats from it and it is linked to it.

It is never considered to integrate into pagan pantheons egregores and other modern entities – the modern world beginning some 2000 years ago-. Worships to Satan, Lucifer must not be mistaken with those to Bacchus and Pan. Doesn't matter if doesn't suit today's youngsters who like linking in darkness Kernunos' force to Satan's energies. Kernunos is not a god of fight and glory, he is a force of life, a power of regeneration.

Paganism is what is, et that must always be in the sense of Sacredness, in Divine Harmony, not in another life but « here and now ». And that's why I feel I'm a Pagan because in each of my breaths, I will that the air which brings me life be in osmose with the blow brought to me by the wind, the singing of the earth, the singin of the ancestors... ..here and now...

The Gods are Taking a Riff
by Ian Elliott, January 9, 2007

The Gods are like jazz musicians. They play together so well, they are so "tight," it sounds like they are following a score, but really they are improvising all the time. When we introduce a riff or two, they integrate it immediately into their ongoing jam session. Then, in retrospect, it seems as if our actions were predetermined by fate. Everything that we have done, and everything that has happened to us, seems connected and meaningful in a fluid, ever-evolving design.

But this doesn't apply to the future. When we divine we make out patterns of events taking shape in the present, which may or may not continue unchanged. Our choices are not limited in a forward direction, except by the ground rules of fate governing our bodies and character as it has developed over time. Divination is like tuning in to what the ensemble is playing on the whole instead of just hearing our own parts and the parts of the musicians sitting close to us. We get a sense of where the music is going; but at any moment a new tune may break out and change the direction and mood of the piece; and it may come in response to some improvisation of our own, as happens when our prayers or spells are successful.

So fate is most discernible in what has been, but is only tentative in what will be. This is not Beethoven's "fifth" we are playing, following a written score. It's more like jamming with Bird Parker and the Monk and Dizzy Gillespie.

Bright blessings,
Ian



NEWS FROM PAGAN FEDERATION INTERNATIONAL – May 2007
By Morgana, PF International Coordinator

Spring 2007 saw a new conference season beginning. As I write we have already had our conferences in Germany, France and the Netherlands. Hopefully I can send the reports for the next Pagan Dawn. It has already been interesting to see how different each conference has been. In France the first “Colloque” was held and I was honoured to give a talk about Wicca to a small but attentive audience. In the Netherlands we celebrated our 7th Conference. It has become quite a tradition and people mark down the month of May for the PFI Nederland conference. Next year it will be the weekend of May 10th 2008

However we were already active at the beginning of the year when Saddle & I gave our first Wicca Intensive. It was quite a challenge knowing we were probably one of the first people to give a Wicca Workshop in Turkey. This wasn't my first PFI visit to Turkey of course since we had celebrated “Hekatesia 2005” in South Western Turkey. But now Istanbul was the chosen venue. And what a lovely weekend it was. The weather was beautiful and we were able to enjoy the sights of Istanbul in early spring sunshine. Atheneris once again welcomed us with open arms.

***PFI TURKEY: "First Steps on the Path" Wicca workshop in Istanbul, Turkey –
January 2007 by Saddle LaMort***

There is something about the East you just have to love. It's the wonderful scenery, the exotic places, the inherent magic everywhere - it's also the people, warm-hearted and friendly.

Acting on the request by Atheneris, NC for PFI Turkey, Morgana and I held a two-day Wicca workshop in Istanbul entitled: "First Steps on the Path". Upon arrival, we were filled with anticipation and excitement. Atheneris told us about the people who would attend, and immediately I had a good feeling about the whole thing. All those people, all with different backgrounds, all eager to participate in this undertaking!

Next morning we met the people in person. Initially everyone started off being shy (including me), but soon enough we started chatting, and before we knew it, it was time to start the workshop itself. Morgana started off with a brief introductory round, then eased into the main topic itself.

We covered all topics necessary for a Witch to start on their own path, including, but not limited to the Seasonal Festivals and the Elements. Everyone contributed to the discussions; some with interesting questions, some recounting personal experiences. In no time at all, the initial coldness and formality was gone and it was a group of friends, talking about a topic they are all interested in.

The second day focused on discussing possibilities for the future - the ever present question of "Where and how to go from here?" Eventually all possibilities were accounted for, and by the evening, nothing else was left but to exchange addresses and phone numbers, and say our goodbyes. I feel honoured and privileged that I could take part in this wonderful experience.

Friends, hope to see you again soon! And to Atheneris a huge thank-you!

The Pentacle Quest is over!
A Story of Emotion
By Rev. Paula Morhardt
Church of the Four Winds, Stockton, IL

On Monday, May 28, 2007 a newsworthy event took place at Circle Sanctuary near Barneveld WI. Present were a number of ministers, servicemen, general public, and news media. Others will write of the facts, who was there, what happened at this point or that point. This is not a story of facts. This is a story of emotion. This is one story of what happened that day.

At ten o'clock the news portion of the day was to start, but cameras were still being set up, lights being tested, and microphones being plugged in. By 10:15, however, all was ready and the panel took their places. They all spoke of their husbands, of how proud they were of their husbands and how they had lived. Rev. Fox spoke of the fight for the pentacle that had taken so long, and was now over, of the fight still to come for other symbols. Through all this talking, this emotion, I watched the media people, wondering how they were taking all this. They may or may not have been Pagan, there was no way to tell, but they were there, covering this story as they had covered so many other stories. And then Selena thanked them, telling them it was their fight too, that they had been willing to speak out, to publish and run the stories that explained all the details of the fight for Wiccans' rights. I noticed how two of these news people stood a little straighter, a little prouder, as if they now also realized how important this story was, and I realized that this wasn't just a story about Wiccans getting their rights, it truly was a story of people getting their rights promised them, of heroes being honored for who they were, and not just for what they had done.

Shortly after eleven the press talk was done, and preparations began for the long walk up to the cemetery. Rides were offered for those who needed them, people began to fall into line, flags were unfurled. With the servicemen front and center, flags leading the way, we started the march. Four steps, drum drum drum, four steps, drum drum drum. Through it all the sun shone, the birds sang, and the breeze gently blew. What a contradiction, I thought. It is such a beautiful day, and here we are mourning the loss of these brave men. But as we reached the top of the hill, and Rev. Fox had us stop to catch our breath and look out over the valley, I changed my mind.

I looked out at the prairie, at the sky, at the birds lazily floating and gliding on the thermals, felt the wind and sun, smelled the flowers and earth and yes, the sweat from everyone climbing that hill, it suddenly started to make sense to me. We were not there to mourn. We were there to honor these men, to give them their due.

The widows joined us at this point, and we started to climb the last hill, our drum quieted as the one at the top played cadence. The flag bearers stopped and faced each other at the entrance to the cemetery area, and we walked between them to the chairs set up for the dedication. We all remained standing as everyone found their place, the cameramen found a good spot, the microphones were placed, and the widows were seated. Then the colors were presented and set and Rev. Selena turned towards the flags and we all sang. That sounds so trite, so non-newsworthy, but we didn't sing some Pagan hymn to the God and Goddess, we didn't do some off the wall chant, we sang the National Anthem. That is when it hit me for real. We were not a group of Pagans, Wiccans, Druids, and Heathens celebrating a victory, we were Americans, celebrating the lives of other Americans, lives given in service to their country, and thus to all of us, no matter what path we were on. This battle had been fought so that

American men and women could have their lives celebrated, so that they could be honored in death as they were in life. How appropriate this was, to hear a small group of Americans sing this wonderful song, on top of a tree-covered hill, with the American flag waving proudly at the beginning of a line of flags of each branch of service.

The headstones were blessed by all five elements one by one. At each the widow of that serviceman said a few words about her husband. When all were finished, we lined up to cover each site with flowers, hug the women, and say a few words. How hard this was for them, I thought, yet how wonderful that each can now say with pride, this is what my husband was, what he stood for, how he lived.

As we waited for the lines to finish, I walked over to the small statue of an infant wrapped in angel wings at the base of one tree. I paused to think on all those who were gone, not just those we were honoring this day, but also those who were more quietly remembered here on this quiet hilltop. I walked further down the hill to the Burning Times memorial and said a prayer for those as well, for they too had given up their lives for what they believed in. As I walked back up the hill and found my seat, I reflected on what had happened there that day, but before I could come to a conclusion, the last part of this ceremony began.

We joined together in a circle, holding hands. There was some confusion as we tried to make the circle, but more lighthearted, more in relief at normal sounds again, at no more hushed voices and painful hugs.

Amidst the breeze blowing, the birds singing, people murmuring, came a shot. Sudden and explosive, it echoed down through the valley for what seemed like hours, but was surely only seconds. The breeze stopped blowing, the birds stopped singing, even the air moving in and out of my chest stopped as I caught my breath in shock and surprise. A second shot rang out. The very Earth Herself seemed to stop and hold her breath, waiting. The third shot. And then, the perfect ending to this honoring. As the echoes slowly died away, from another part of the hill came the sound of a trumpet playing taps. All of nature stopped, and listened, and together we waited for that last note to wind its way through the hills, letting those we were there to honor know we did indeed remember them.

As the last note passed into memory, the silence was broken by a single bird, and then by an entire chorus. The breeze started blowing; the Earth once again beat with life. Together we stated what we believed with all our hearts and souls and minds. Through the air rang:

“Though the Circle is open it is never broken. Merry Meet and Merry Part and Merry Meet Again!”



The Umthakathi and the Problem of Evil
by Damon Leff, National Coordinator for South Africa

What is 'evil', and what are the underlying ideologies that motivate a belief in evil?

'Evil' [OE. *yfel* OS. *OHG.* *ubil* Gmc. *ubhilaz*] is that which causes or results in harm. Evil is usually defined by referring to its effects; misfortune, bad luck, disaster, and sin as both a cause and an effect of evil, but also as something that motivates and arises as a result of slander and deceit. Evil is also closely associated with something or someone having or exerting a malignant influence on a situation, person or thing, through a simple look – the "evil eye". [1]

For a religious person, evil is any behaviour that is morally objectionable. It is most often the result of an immoral act, vice, or broken taboo in more tradition-bound cultures and societies. Evil is also used as a term describing someone or something that is intrinsically corrupt, wantonly destructive, inhumane and selfish. The online Wikipedia says the word is almost always used to describe "*acts, thoughts, and ideas which are thought to (either directly or causally) bring about withering and death –the opposite of life*". [2]

Different cultures have tended to define the nature and purpose of evil in very different ways, but always affirming in doing so that evil is that which causes or results in harm, both for the individual and for the community.

Amongst the two largest and most dominant subgroups of the Nguni speaking peoples, the isiZulu and isiXhosa, predominantly found living in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, the borders of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, evil is that which destroys the balance between the natural, social and spiritual worlds. The harmony of these worlds is maintained through traditional custom, obligation and taboo. Zulu (approximately 10 million people) and Xhosa (approximately 8 million people) hold that evil (misfortune or illness) may result from four primary sources; the wrath (and calling*) of the ancestors, ritual impurity as the result of breaking cultural taboos, evil spirits, and witchcraft. [3]



1. The Ancestors

It would not be an unfair generalization to say that most if not all urban and rural black South Africans believe in the existence and influence of the ancestors. The ancestors are generally viewed as disembodied but still living spirits who continue to dwell amongst the living. The ancestors (ubuningi – Zulu / *izinyanya* - Xhosa) are believed to have a strong and tangible influence on the lives of the living. They communicate with the living and especially with their nearest descendents through dreams and intuited omens. [4]

The ancestors are intermediaries between the living and the Creator, in isiZulu named *Umvelinqangi* (or *uNkulunkulu* – God of the ancestors), and in isiXhosa named *Qameta*. Traditional religious rituals, initiations and feasts are all employed in honouring the ancestors and in giving recognition to and for their constant guidance, protection and blessing. Whilst the ancestral spirits are generally benevolent, sometimes, when important rituals of propitiation and blessing are not performed or

deliberately ignored, or a taboo or sacred custom is broken, the ancestors are believed to cause illness and misfortune for the person or family concerned.

In 'Rituals and Medicines' David Hammond-Tooke wrote,

"...The usual reason for ancestral interference in the affairs of the living is (a) neglect of the 'customs of the home', the necessary rituals that should be performed, particularly at the pivotal points of the life cycle (birth, initiation, marriage, and death) and (b) failure to accord due respect to seniors." [5]

According to tradition, the spirit of a deceased relative does not become an ancestor until the surviving relatives of the deceased welcome it back through proscribed funerary rites into the family hierarchy. Whilst it is the male head of a household who is usually responsible for the performance of many sacred rituals and customs, it is the function of the traditional diviner (isangomas (Zulu) / amagqirha (Xhosa) to determine if indeed misfortune or illness is the result of ancestral displeasure or not.

2. Evil spirits

Like the Swazi, Sotho, Venda, Tsonga and Ndebele, the Nguni speaking peoples believe the world of the living to not only be inhabited by the spirits of the ancestors, but also by hosts of both good and evil spirits, usually closely associated with Nature. Spirits, both good and bad, inhabit the ocean, lakes and rivers, forests, particular trees and plants, rocks and sacred sites in often remote places, but are also associated with natural phenomena such as rain and lightning, flood and drought. Another entirely different kind is the spirits of dead people for whom no burial rituals were performed. It is the traditional healer's function, in part, to appease those nature spirits defined as good, confine those spirits regarded as troublesome, and drive out those which are evil. Many spirits of nature identified as good are closely associated with assisting traditional healers in their work, whether for divination, healing or the expulsion of evil. Some of those better known spirits of nature associated with evil must be mentioned in relation to the third traditional African explanation for the reason for misfortune, illness and untimely death, witchcraft.

3. Witchcraft

African author Gomang Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani gives the following traditional African definition of witchcraft:

"...witchcraft (boloi) is a system of evil, a result of ill-relationship or disharmony between the living, nature and the Divine." [6]

In isiZulu and isiXhosa a 'witch' is an 'umthakathi'. According to traditional belief, an umthakathi is a person, woman or man, believed to have been born with the ability to harm others. This ability is believed to pass from generation to generation "through the breast", i.e. from mother to child. Umthakathi are reputed to be able to shape-shift, to fly, to work their witchcraft (abathakathi) at night, and to employ the use of both familiar spirits and animals in harming others.

Not only is the umthakathi able to use animals to do his or her bidding, it is believed that the witch also relies on the assistance of 'evil spirits' located in nature. Amongst the Xhosa peoples the most significant of these mythical spirits include the uthikoloshe, impundulu, umamlambo, ichanti and imfene. These are said to be



handed down from parents to children and could be called familial spirits. They are believed to be used by the umthakathi to cause diseases such as small pox, bovine pleuro-pneumonia, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS.

In 2001 Adam Ashforth, in 'AIDS, Witchcraft, and the Problem of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa', explores the still prevalent belief amongst a significant minority of rural and urban South Africans that HIV/AIDS is caused by witchcraft.

Ashforth writes, "As an epidemic of AIDS sweeps through this part of Africa, *isidliso* is the name that springs to mind amongst many in the epidemic's path. To the extent that this occurs, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS becomes also an epidemic of witchcraft." [7]

Ashforth's findings seem to be supported by a 2006 research paper entitled 'Coexisting Discourses: How Older Women in South Africa Make Sense of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic' by Courtney McDonald and Enid Schatz. But McDonald and Schatz also find that HIV/Aids is also sometimes attributed to a number of other causes including a consequence of not observing cultural norms and the loss of traditional customs associated with funerary rites.

The most well-known of these familial spirits of the umthakathi is the *uthikoloshe*. Described as goblin-like, either male or female, it is believed to befriend and favour children. In the hands of an umthakathi however the *uthikoloshe* becomes an instrument of evil and death. They are said to reside in mud huts under dark and stagnant river water. *Oothikoloshe* (plural) are said to carry with them a charmed stone which enables them to become invisible, are reputed to love milk and fear salt. Traditional healers often divine dreams in which the victim feels strangled as the work of an *uthikoloshe*.

In 'The Story of my Mission in Southeastern Africa' missionary W. Shaw wrote:

"...the people [Xhosa] universally believe that, aided by some mysterious and evil influence, the nature of which no one can define or explain, bad persons may enter into league with wolves, baboons, jackals and particularly with an imaginary amphibious creature, mostly abiding in the deep portions of the rivers, and called by the Border [Xhosa] *utikoloshe*. By mysterious intercourse said to be maintained with these and other detested or imaginary creatures, the evil-minded wizards and witches are supposed to obtain their supernatural powers for doing harm to those whom they design to injure in person or property". [8]

The lightning-bird called *impundulu* is described as a rainbow-coloured or white bird with scarlet legs and beak. Believed to feed on human blood, the *impundulu* is said to seduce women and turn them into witches. It is said to be accompanied by owls, eagles and hammerheads, animals traditionally associated to convey messages of evil omen and impending death by lightning strike. Hemorrhaging and miscarriage is said to be the work of *impundulu*.

Umamlambo is a mythical river snake believed to appear to men as a seductress only to cause the death of a senior male relative. The imfene is said to be a baboon that harms cattle. An umthakathi is said to use the imfene as a horse. Another animal closely associated with the umthakathi is the hyena, also allegedly used as a horse. The izithunzela are the spirits of dead people whom an umthakathi has raised from the grave to do manual labour, i.e. zombies.

With few exceptions reported cases of 'witchcraft related violence' show that between 2000 and 2007 incidences of witchcraft accusation and violence against suspected witches occurred primarily within predominantly Nguni speaking provinces, namely within the Limpopo Province, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. I am not however implying that only Zulus, Xhosa and Swazi peoples are prone to making witchcraft accusations, nor that the traditional belief systems of these peoples are solely responsible for witch hunts in 21st century South Africa. Witch hunts are not exclusively restricted to these four provinces or peoples.

The 'problem of evil' is often stated in the question, why does God allow evil to exist? The umthakathi is an essential part of the answer to why, for a Zulu or Xhosa at least, evil occurs in Africa.

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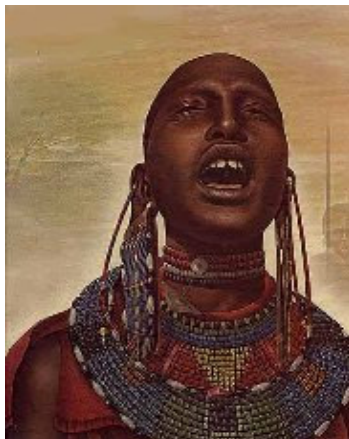
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[8] 'The Story of my Mission in Southeastern Africa' by W. Shaw(1865)





Call for Entries!



2008 Annual Pagan Festival: We Are Change

The mission of the Pagan Alliance is to educate our Communities and the general public, to promote acceptance of all faiths and traditions, to connect our Communities, and to celebrate our spiritual diversity. Our main event for the year is the Annual Pagan Festival in Berkeley, CA.

We are looking for creative artwork that speaks to the theme “We Are Change” and will be used as promotional material for the 2008 Annual Pagan Festival. The artwork will be reproduced, with informational text added digitally, as 4 x 6” color fliers, color and b/w ads for print and the web.

Rules for Submission:

- Please submit a digital image of your original artwork on a CD along with a copy of this Entry Form. Name the file firstinitial_lastname.fileformat (example: j_smith.pdf). Only one entry per person.
- Size: 300 ppi, 4.25 x 6.25 inches, vertical (portrait) orientation, CMYK.
- Accepted file formats: .pdf .eps .tiff
- Please include your signature and The Pagan Alliance logo (see logo above) in the artwork.
- Deadline: All Entries must be mailed in (no hand delivery) and postmarked by Sept. 7, 2007.
- Please mail to: The Pagan Alliance: Art Contest Committee
c/o Purple Cow Studios
985 Church St., #4
San Francisco CA 94114

Winner will be announced by September 17, 2007. The winning entry will be on display in The Pagan Alliance Hospitality Suite for the duration of Pantheacon 2008. All entries will be displayed in a digital slide show at Pantheacon 2008.

Artist retains copyright of their original artwork, but exclusively licenses usage to The Pagan Alliance for one year from the date this Entry Form is signed, for print, web, and all other media. After one year, The Pagan Alliance releases exclusive rights, but maintains general licensing rights for print and web use; the artist is free to license the artwork to others at that time. Artwork must be the original work of the artist. If models, photographs, or the like, are used, the artist must obtain the appropriate releases. No copyright infringement! Artist will be given credit for their work in all digital and print media.

Name: _____ File Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: __ Zip: _____

E-mail Address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Please sign the following statement:

“I have read and agree to abide by all terms and conditions stated in the Call for Entries! 2008 Annual Pagan Festival: We Are Change Entry Form.”

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For more information visit: www.thepaganalliance.org



Interview with Ina Custers-van Bergen 'The Road to the Old Mysteries'

In WR Imbolc 2007 Merlin wrote a short review about your new book. I have seen it also – I have not read it entirely, because such a book you read and use as a reference book for years. At least; that is how I think you wrote it – as a workbook. But we will hear later about the 'why'.

Can you introduce yourself to us?

I have been active on the esoteric path since my 16th birthday. I began with Tarot, Astrology, Yoga and Zen Buddhism. After that I have been working on self-development. I have worked i.e. with Gestalt therapy, Bioenergetics, and with the work of John and Eva Pierakos.

I started my social career as an artist. Later I made a change in profession and worked as a psychiatric nurse. For about 15 years I worked on open and closed hospital units. I became interested in Magic and Occultism. Teaching these subjects is my profession right now. The red thread in my career is the fascination for the power of the subconscious mind. Because of this fascination I discovered how to work with it and how to influence these currents of the mind. I discovered how I can work with these energies so that people start to feel better and can develop themselves more fully.

How did you start 'The Road.... yourself'?

In my day job I observed that processes from the subconscious mind were closely connected to what I knew about Magic. I got fascinated, and I looked for ways in which to gain experiences in this area. I quickly found out that this is very difficult to accomplish on your own. The 'undercurrent' is very powerful, and in spite of the fact that I was not a beginner on the esoteric path when I started to practice Magic I was taken by surprise by the strong reaction of my own subconscious mind on the exercises. I started to look for teachers and I found them within the SOL.

I learned how Magic works. High Magic is an immensely ancient path; it is a road full of miracles and unexpected riches. In the old days High Magic was used to develop people and to heal them. Magic is a combination of spirituality and applied psychology and it works with everybody – whether you 'believe' in it or not, because it is based on technique. Magic as 'Science of the Sacred' compares the effectiveness of techniques from different religious and magical systems.

How did you start with the Temple of Starlight?

The Temple of Starlight (Ordo Templi Lucis Asterum – OTLA) has developed as a result of a natural process. While I exercised the basic techniques of spiritual magic, I wanted to share my experiences with other students. I started a group to exercise in temple work. The result was that I created a Magical Lodge.

Lodges need to take in new people, because people also leave because of all kinds of private circumstances. Suddenly I noticed that we had grown beyond the beginner's level, and it was not possible for people to join us without preparation. That is why I developed a basic course.

In the meantime the Lodge developed, because Lodges also have degrees. This process ended in a miniature school with a curriculum of its own. When I got initiated in the Third Degree I was able to initiate the students that I educated myself. In this way the OTLA grew in a natural way in the line of the tradition and developed from the mother school. Nowadays we have developed further and we have a fixed training program towards the first degree, and the first students have started to walk the path towards the second degree. .

How is the training within the OTLA organised?



We are an initiating Order in which students are educated to Priest-Magicians. The training is based on the Grade system of the Golden Dawn. The school has three degrees, which are divided in steps. With each degree you work through a curriculum. You combine theory and practice. The effects of the rituals and the exercises begin to stack up and become stronger and can even bring about hormonal changes in the physical body.. This is why during the training you learn to work with stronger currents of Magical Energy. The three parts of the training are crowned with an initiation. This gives a connection to a higher frequency of magical energy, and that is why you get access to deeper levels.

During the training you work with a broad range of traditions and occult techniques. You work with energy-exercises, with meditations, theory and ritual. You learn i.e. Qabala, Star Magic, Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian Magic. You learn to work with Arthur mythology, Angelic Law, Tarot, and the Mythology from a broad range of cultures.

Students can pass through the training by means of a correspondence course, which is given on an individual basis.. You can learn in practical classes and during intensive weekend workshops. We help people who want to start a magical group. We have developed a special program for them. It starts with the Star Temple Ritual.

Is there a place for a mystery school?

Mystery schools have never been away. The question is; what is the place for a mystery school in our culture. People in our society look for social structures and also for structured spirituality. They start their search and they explore the different areas, and then they develop the wish to connect to a tradition. We have different types of students: we have the interested seeker who is curious about what we are doing and we have the one who has the ambition to do the full training towards becoming a Priest-Magician..

People seek the experience of the Divine in their own lives. That is what a mystery school has to offer. Not a blind faith, but experience. A mystery school teaches the

students to make a connection between personal life and a spiritual core, and with your family and your professional environment. That is what Magic has to offer. By means of magical energies you find a balance in yourself and you learn to experience spirituality in your everyday reality. Magic gives access to sources of energy that give you the possibility to realise your values and your thought-forms in your own life.

In our society we are bombarded on a daily basis with thought-forms made by others; politicians and multinationals, for example. We do not live in a secular society. The most important God is called Money, followed closely by Science. The main temples are banks. Every one of us is bombarded on a daily basis by magical spells in adverts. In a mystery school you learn to create your own thought-forms instead of being led by the strategies of multinationals.

We have access to so much information that we can get from the Internet. Is a teacher necessary?

You can hardly get access to the deeper layers without the contact to a good educated teacher. There is a lot of interesting material to be found on the internet, but also a lot of rubbish.

The most important details can only be transmitted through personal contact. You learn them in practice. Teachers prevent students from losing their way on side roads. A teacher recognises the signs that indicate that a spiritual development is about to come. A teacher observes the development of the personality of students. Pitfalls in this spiritual path are well known within magical schools and students are guided in these areas.



Teachers tell you where and how to come into contact with the Gods and the ancient material. There are libraries of Universities full of specialist material. But if you are not used to experience from a magical worldview, then you can read scholarly books about the Imiut-wand, but you still do not know what kind of object this is, and how you can use it. The problem is to find well-trained teachers. Everyone can nail a sign on his front door, and there are a lot of teachers who do not have an education or who have broken off their education.

Why did you write the book?

When I started with Magic I discovered there was almost no book available in Dutch about this subject. The Western Mystery tradition has a very special energy which is much more accessible for us than the eastern systems. But our very own magical tradition is still taboo. In the Netherlands there are almost no books about Magic. The Mystical Qabala of Dion Fortune burns as a lonely light at a great height. Strange books are translated which give the feeling of a rusty nail, which is nailed, curved in the wood. Almost all the books are old. I myself had but one choice and that was to read everything in English.

It seems that in Holland the fear, which was created consciously in the Middle Ages, never went away. In various foreign countries good magical schools have developed. Here, in Holland, incomprehension dominates about who we are and what the Road of

High Magic is about. It is my mission to give our very own Western Magical tradition its rightful place among the other spiritual systems.

I wrote the book to make a connection between theory and practice. It is a workbook and a book of references. It gives a view behind the scenes of how practical High Magic works, within established religions, and within the ancient pagan religions. These traditions still contain the core of magical systems. This is why people look for an understanding of Magic. The amount of people who need our knowledge grows, because they want to make their own spiritual system complete again.

Has the atmosphere changed since you began?

It is still a challenge to explain to other people our tradition. When we work in New Age Centres we notice that there is a lot of misunderstanding about who we are and what we do. I sometimes call out 'the next time I take a sign with me and during the break and I'll put a plastic frog next to it on the floor:

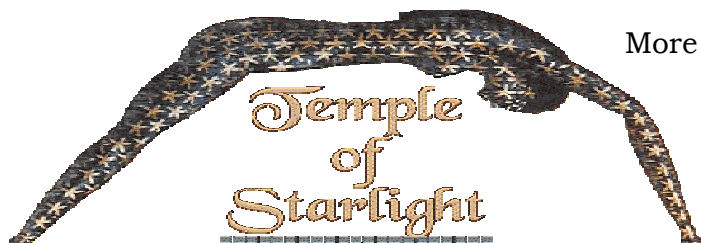
Protected species; Magicians
Take care, dangerous, can work magic!
Love robes, incense and rituals.
Prohibited to feed.'

Slowly things are changing. My experience is that when you just tell people what you do, without mentioning how it is called, then you get a lot of understanding for the beauty of this tradition. Because of the increased interest in pagan belief systems more people are interested in High Magic. The road to a Magical School however is still fraught with difficulty. There is a broad gap between the expectations which people hold of High Magic and the reality. Our knowledge is specialized; you need a high basic level to get a understanding and a connection to the work of the school. My book builds a bridge

Magic is a part of the so called Hermetic and Gnostic tradition. Until the Renaissance it was taught at universities. Popes practiced it, and every Monarch with self respect had a Magician at the court. It will take some time until this job opening at the Dutch court has been fulfilled again (laugh!).

What kind of a future do you see for the Road of the Mysteries?

The most important goal of the school is to offer a place where people learn to realise their full potential. I want to professionalise the training and the school. When I look to the future I hope that there are high quality Magical Temples where you can learn to apply Magical Training in your own life; comparable with the Martial Art schools where a black belt teaches the sport. I want our teachers to become true craftsmen in their trade and to develop as professionals, and that the applications of our techniques find a way into 'normal' professions.



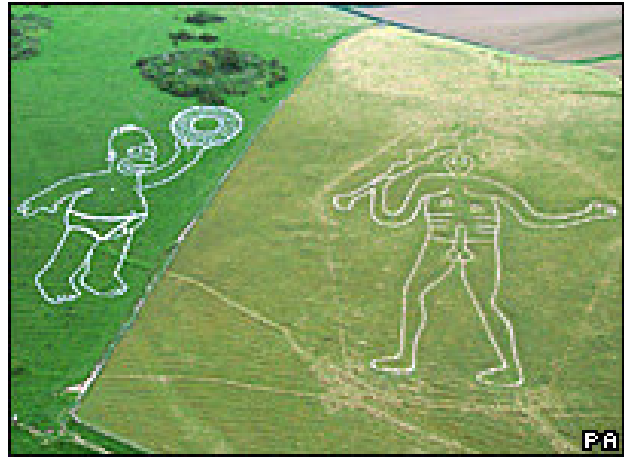
More information www.templeofstarlight.eu

Wish for rain to wash away Homer

There is debate about the age of the Cerne Abbas Giant

Pagans have pledged to perform "rain magic" to wash away a cartoon character painted next to their famous fertility symbol - the Cerne Abbas giant.

A doughnut-brandishing Homer Simpson was painted next to the giant on the hill above Cerne Abbas, Dorset, to promote the new Simpsons film.



Many believe the ancient chalk outline of the naked, sexually aroused giant to be a symbol of ancient spirituality.

Many couples also believe the 180ft carving aids fertility.

"I'm amazed they got permission to do something so ridiculous" (Ann Bryn-Evans Pagan Federation)

The painted Simpsons character has been painted with water-based biodegradable paint which will wash away as soon as it rains.

Ann Bryn-Evans, joint Wessex district manager for The Pagan Federation, said: "We were hoping for some dry weather but I think I have changed my mind.

"We'll be doing some rain magic to bring the rain and wash it away."

She added: "I'm amazed they got permission to do something so ridiculous. It's an area of scientific interest."

'Different and unusual'

It is not the first time the giant has been used to advertise products. He has been used to promote items as diverse as condoms, jeans and bicycles.

Mike Webb, landlord of the New Inn in Cerne Abbas, said his staff were amused by the temporary addition to the village.

"I think it is different and unusual," he said. "We've not heard any complaints here so far, but I'm not sure many of the local people will know who Homer Simpson is."

During World War II, the Cerne giant was disguised to prevent the Germans from using him as an aerial landmark.

Since then he has always been visible, receiving regular grass trimming and a full re-chalking every 25 years.

There is debate among experts about when the giant was created varying from thousands of years ago to as recently as the 17th Century.

Witches define themselves thank you
by Damon Leff, National Coordinator for South Africa

In June this year the Office of the Premier of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, leaked a draft Witchcraft Suppression Bill which threatens to undermine the freedoms and rights already guaranteed to an existing religious minority – Witches - by deliberately criminalizing and prohibiting said religious minority's constitutionally guaranteed right to exist and to practice their religion. The Bill seeks to suppress Witchcraft and will imprison self-defined Witches on the assumption of automatic inference of criminality.

In submitted formal objections to the proposed Suppression Bill the South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA) and the South African Pagan Council (SAPC), supported by Pagans across the country who define themselves as Witches, have criticised the Mpumalanga legislature's decision to base their Bill on a piece of Apartheid legislation – the Witchcraft Suppression Act (Act 3 of 1957 as amended by Act 50 of 1970). The Suppression Bill contradicts 11 clauses enshrined in the Bill of Rights, Chapter Two of the Constitution of South Africa, by denying self-defined Witches the right to dignity, equality, religious freedom, expression, association and the right to choose their trade, occupation or profession freely. The Act would in effect deny equal citizenship to South Africans who define their religion as Witchcraft.

SAPRA has called on the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development to support the enactment of legislation to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination, to protect and advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, and to promote the achievement of equality for a specific historically disadvantaged religious minority – Witches.

SAPRA and the SAPC have presented an alternative Witchcraft Protection Bill to the Mpumalanga legislature for consideration as a replacement to the current Suppression Bill. Chapter 9 (4) of the Constitution of South Africa makes provision for the drafting of legislation to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination. The Protection Bill will provide for the protection of self-defined Witches, protect Witchcraft as a belief system and religion, and prohibit discrimination against persons claiming to be Witches, or alleged to be Witches or practicing Witchcraft.

Who defines Witchcraft?

The Suppression Bill defines Witchcraft as:

...the secret use of muti, zombies, spells, spirits, magic powders, water, mixtures, etc, by any person with the purpose of causing harm, damage, sickness to others or their property.

Self-defined Witches have rejected this definition on the grounds that it stereotypes witchcraft as harmful and portrays Witches as a danger to the communities within which they live and work. The proposed definition will merely serve to justify public fear of witchcraft and promote malice and violence against suspected witches.

SAPRA has called on Provincial and national government authorities to halt the passage of the Suppression Bill and has provided the authorities with the following preferred definition of Witchcraft:

...a religio-magical occupation that employs the use of sympathetic magic, ritual, herbalism and divination.

Urgent need to avert a Witch-Hunt

The national Witchcraft Suppression Act (1957) prohibits not only the knowledge and practice of witchcraft but also the practice of divinations. The Act also makes it illegal to accuse another of either being a Witch or of using witchcraft to cause harm.

Since 1980 thousands of innocent men and women have been accused of being witches or of using witchcraft. Many have been murdered by their communities without trial. Many more have been banished from their villages, their homes destroyed and members of their families murdered or forced to flee in fear of their lives.

For many South Africans a witch is nothing but a source of mischief, quarrel, illness, barrenness and sudden death. In common usage the word 'witch' is virtually synonymous with poisoner, murderer and liar and has become a label of convenience for any archetypal evil that threatens the natural and good societal order. In rural South Africa, the mere suspicion of witchcraft activity may lead to accusation, assault, enforced exile or murder, especially in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

We are not criminals

Despite numerous inter-governmental investigations into the phenomena of 'witch-purging' by individuals and communities within South Africa and in spite of numerous very detailed published reports, including the Thohoyandou Declaration, no attempt has been made to reconcile the two very different world-views at stake when discussing witchcraft from a traditional African and Christian perspective, and Witchcraft from a South African Pagan perspective.

The 1995 Report of the Ralushai Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murder in the Northern Province, defined the term 'witch' to mean a person who,

...through sheer malice, either consciously or subconsciously, employs magical means to inflict all manner of evil on their fellow human beings. They destroy property, bring disease or misfortune and cause death, often entirely without provocation to satisfy their inherent craving for evil doing.

Testifying before a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing in July 1999 Professor Ralushai confirmed his Commission's definition of 'a witch' when he was asked by attorney Patrick Ndou to define what a Witch was. Ralushai stated,

"A witch is supposed to be a person who is endowed with powers of causing illness or ill luck or death to the person that he wants to destroy."

It could be argued that maintaining and reinforcing a definition predisposed to eliciting violence against alleged witches was never in the best interest of tolerance or reconciliation.

The characterization of a person or group of persons (witches) as 'evil' and so deserving of criminal classification by default makes a mockery of the values of human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms on which the Republic of South Africa is founded.

Witchcraft is a religion

Witchcraft is an ancient magical system that employs the use of divination, sympathetic magic and Pagan ritual practices. Contemporary Witches define their religio-spiritual practices as a craft and modern Witches ply their craft as herbalists, diviners and magic workers.



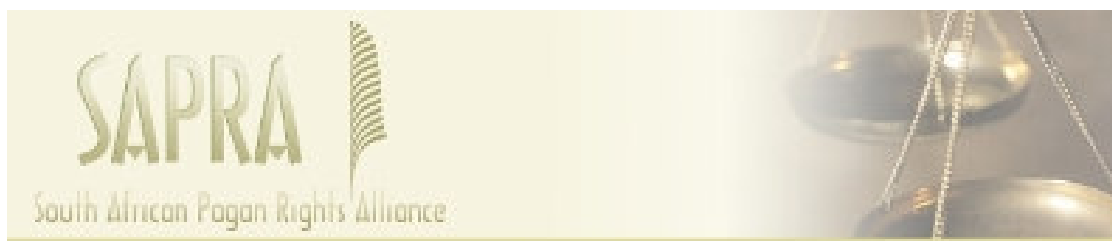
As 'Wicca', Witchcraft has evolved into a modern Pagan mystery religion. Wicca is an initiatory, polytheistic (with exceptions), Pagan mystery religion inspired by various pre- and post-Christian western European beliefs and spiritual practices. Wicca was popularised in England in the 1950's by Gerald Gardner. An initiate of 'the Wicca' is one who traces his or her initiatory lineage back to Gerald Gardner or his initiates.

Not all Witches define themselves as 'Wicca'. Contrived disassociation of the term 'Wicca' from 'Witch' in order to support a cultural and religious world-view of good (the Wicca) versus evil (the Witch) is grossly misleading. The Wicca are (with exception), by self-definition, Witches.

Pagans identify their religion as a modern Earth and Nature venerating spirituality, one that embraces ancient and new forms of spiritual and magical practice, including the veneration of ancient Gods and Goddesses worshiped by pagans of the pre-Christian world.

Although no definite census exists, it is estimated that there are between 3000 and 5000 self-defined Pagan Witches in South Africa.

For more information and supporting documentation please visit the website of the South African Pagan Rights Alliance – Press
<http://www.paganrights.net>



***From the Independent
Witchcraft Casts Spell on Young
By Roger Dobson and Lauren Veevers
Published: 20 May 2007***

Record numbers of young women are dabbling in witchcraft, fuelling a boom in sales of spell books and other pagan paraphernalia, according to new research.

A study of teenagers and their consumption of books, magazines, kits, film and other media found that there are some 700,000 internet sites for teenage witches. The Pagan Federation claims to have several hundred inquiries a week from young people, and has set up a network for those under 18.

"There has been a noticeable rise in the number of young people identifying themselves as witches," said Denise Cush, professor of religious studies at Bath Spa University.

The trend is being boosted by American TV series such as Sabrina the Teenage Witch, Charmed and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.



Yesterday, several hundred witches gathered in south London for Witchfest, held at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon.

According to Professor Cush's report, based on interviews with witches aged 18 to 24, it is the attitude to women that most attracts them: "Paganism and witchcraft appealed because of their clear feminist credentials and absence of homophobia. A main attraction is the positive valuation of women in comparison with other religions." According to the women and girls at Witchfest, their reasons for taking up witchcraft vary. Jayde Harris, 18, became interested because her mother is also a witch. "I don't always tell people about it," she said. Fellow Wiccan Lyn Jones said: "I do spells of good luck for people mainly. I sometimes want to do bad spells but I don't - they come back to you three times as bad."

And Sarah Jayne Thompson, 13, said: "My family is Christian but it never seemed to fit with me so I began reading about Wicca. Lots of the younger kids at school are scared of me, which is cool."

Despite the solidarity at Witchfest, many still keep their beliefs private. Ms Jones said: "I only tell close friends... standing in the queue to come in we were worried someone we know would see us and think we're weird."

The Seto People
Text – Piers Gladstone
Photos – Sveva Costa Sanseverino



In September 2005, the Russian government withdrew its signature from a border treaty with Estonia, setting an international precedent in this on-going border dispute between the two countries. On either side of the disputed part of the border lies the land of the Seto people, Setomaa (meaning ‘Land of Wars’ in the Seto language). A separate ethnic group to the rest of Estonia, the Setos have their own unique traditions of singing runic verse and worshipping pagan deities and are one of the last remaining traditional folk cultures in Europe.

From 862 to 1920, Setomaa was part of Russia, before being ‘incorporated’ into the Soviet Union along with the rest of Estonia in the 1940s. After independence in 1991, Setomaa once again became part of Estonia before being divided when the Estonian government relinquished part of Setomaa to Russia during negotiations in 1996. To this day the border remains unratified and therefore technically not legal. The Setos on both sides of the border continue to face the political uncertainty of this un-ratified border and, like many other Finno-Ugric peoples, also face extinction.

Standing in the yard of her farm in the small village of Helbi, a few hundred metres from the Russian border, 80 year-old Kala Maria is one of the last examples of traditional Seto life. She wears the traditional multicoloured national costume and conical silver breastplate, Suur Solg, traditionally worn by married Seto women. “I don’t know exactly how old my Suur Solg is, but you can see that some of the coins are from the time of the Tzar”, she says inspecting some of the large coins hanging at the end of silver chains. “It was originally from my great-great-grandmother, and has been inherited from mother to mother. Normally when you have a grandchild you give your Suur Solg to your daughter.” Like so many of her generation, Kala Maria’s daughters have left Setomaa, and she lives alone.

Singing is the central thread of the social and cultural fabric of the Setos. “The songs are inherited from generation to generation”, explains Kala Maria. “I learnt my songs from my mother. We want to keep this tradition alive because it is a direct inheritance. Singing is therefore very important for our culture.”

Indeed, song permeates the whole of Seto life: from work to their three-day weddings. “In the old days, life was difficult. All of the work was done by hand. If people got tired, they would sit down for a while and sing, before continuing working. Younger people came along and joined in and learnt the songs. Now there are no young people and there is no work, so people don’t sing as much as they should do.”

“The biggest threat during my lifetime was the beginning of the Soviet occupation in the 1940s,” Kala Maria says as she places a homemade cheese on the kitchen table of her farmhouse with a rattle of her breastplate chains. “We were really afraid and we had to hide all the silver and all of our national costumes. We didn’t dare to sing because people were arrested and deported. We just did not know what would happen

next. It was forbidden even to speak the Seto language, but there was nobody to enforce it”, she adds with a wry smile and a chuckle.

Whilst the early years of being part of the Soviet Union represented danger for the Setos, the collectivisation of their farms helped to preserve and strengthen their culture. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Estonia’s subsequent market reforms resulted in the destruction of the Setos farming tradition, their livelihood and the foundation to their culture. Kala Maria looks out of her window and sighs deeply; “Those of us that are left do not see each other as we did when we worked together on the farms. The villages are getting emptier and emptier and therefore there is no hope. Seto villages used to consist of twenty or thirty farms. It is not a village anymore when there are only five people, and half of them are very old.”

The on-going problems with Russia have taken a greater significance because the border issue is now an external EU border issue. “We were very surprised that Russia withdrew their signature from the treaty”, states Franek Persidski of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow. “Our position is that we have done everything we could in order to get the treaty signed.” This included the relinquishing of some of Setomaa to Russia in 1996, which has lead many Setos to feel that their land is under “occupation”. Although the Setos have been granted special visas to simplify the border crossing, there are also practical issues such as the not uncommon eight-hour wait on the Russian side. Similarly, the problems of international customs regulations when entering the EU have a huge bearing on the Setos ancient practices. “For the Setos who live across the border in Russia, when they come here for celebrations, they cannot bring their silver with them”, Kala Maria explains. “The silver is an essential and significant tradition of our culture and our personality. The silver, like the songs, have been inherited down the generations, and connect us with our ancestors and our tradition.”

The Seto Congress was established to promote the culture and traditions of Setomaa in order to try to preserve and reinvigorate them. Similarly, the Seto Commission has also been active in representing the marginalized interests of its people politically. The re-introduction of Kuniigrii (the annual Seto Kingdom day where a king is chosen), the writing and singing of the Seto national anthem whose lyrics speak of the hardships Setomaa has endured, and most recently the designing and flying of the Setomaa flag, have all helped to rekindle an interest in the Seto culture. It is a measure of their success that Kuniigrii is attended by thousands of Estonian and Russian Setos, and that Setomaa is now promoted by the Estonian tourist board.

At the forefront of the movement to save the Seto traditions is Evar Riitsaar, a tall and charismatic figure who is the current and longest serving King of Setomaa, or Sootska in the Seto language. “It is still a worry whether the culture will remain or not”, Evar says after hanging a large Seto flag above the entrance to an exhibition of his artwork. “If we do not push the ideas of the Seto culture, then it will be lost by the next generation. I feel that this is our last chance to save the Seto culture. Much has already been forgotten and will be forgotten still. For example, there used to be special ways to speak with animals and plants. Things like this have now been lost.”

Through his art though, much of the Setos cultural identity, derived from their pagan past and epic, important cultural figures such as the singer and songwriter Tarka, and their gods such as the god of fertility, Peko, is being preserved and given a new lease of life. Evar also teaches painting and sculpture in the local school as well as performing with his band Loqoriq (meaning ‘joyful laughter’). The male members of this band

performed old Seto songs in London as cultural representatives when Estonia was incorporated into the European Union. One of the band members also wrote Estonia's entry to the Eurovision Song Contest in 2004, which was sung in Seto. Such examples are tangible successes in the Setos struggle to exist in the 21st Century.



“As Sootska, I do what I know best; singing, dancing and painting. This is the only way for me to serve Peko's will”, explains Evar. “The tradition of Sootska nearly died out; when the Russians were here, it was not allowed, but it was revived about eleven years ago. There are no formal duties, but a lot of spiritual ones. We have a strong shamanic background in Setomaa. Nature gives its signs. Sometimes you receive a sign during dreams, sometimes during singing. Last night, we went to Tarka's grave at

midnight and I received a vision.”

The festival of Paasabar is the most important of the Seto religious festivals – the older generations count the time of year by it. Paasabar takes place annually in Obinitisa, Evar's native village 3km from the border. Before independence, Obinitisa had more than a thousand inhabitants. Now there are just 245, but the village starts to swell with Setos returning to their families from other parts of Estonia and Russia for Paasabar. The day before the main festival, the cemetery in the forest at the edge of the village is a hive of activity as people tidy their family's graves. After a sparsely attended church service, a procession slowly makes its way through the village to Obinitisa lake for a blessing. After the evening meal, families go to the cemetery and place candles on their ancestors' graves, turning this forested cemetery into a magical scene.

The Setos were pagans until the 14th Century, when the monastery at Petseri (now 500 metres across the border in Russia) was built. Although they became Christian, they retained their pagan traditions and beliefs. The burying of their ancestors in the forest, the worshipping of the souls of their ancestors and the eating and leaving of food on their ancestors' graves is perhaps the most obvious form of this cultural retention. For Paasabar, every family grave has tables erected on them – some overloaded with food and crowded with people, while others have just two old people and one plate.



“This place is where I get my strength from my ancestors”, Evar explains as he stands in the dappled sunlight by his mother's family graves. “We come here to remember them with kind words and happy thoughts, and it is therefore a happy and reflective day.” People also visit the graves of friends, each time being given a shot of the powerful Seto moonshine, Hanza, and being offered food, before talking of those who are no longer with them. Even strangers are welcomed in the same way. The priests also visit the graves, blessing them before eating and drinking, and receiving some money from the family. The cemetery is literally alive, and as the day progresses and the Hanza consumption continues, so things become more animated. By late afternoon, people start to leave while others collect the flowers and leftovers and take them to the ancient Seto burial mounds deep in the forest.

In the last few years a younger generation of non-Setos have started to arrive, buying and restoring old farms, in search of a more natural way of life. Ain and Segre Raal first came to Setomaa ten years ago and bought their farm in the village of Kullatuva three years ago. Both Ain and Segre have been accepted by the community and are involved in its daily life — Ain plays the Karmoska (a type of accordion) at parties and festivals and Segre runs the Seto Museum in Obinitsa. “I want and hope to be a Seto”, Segre says. “Now, I see myself as a very close friend of the Setos. It’s not so easy to become a Seto after just two years.” With the Russian border less than two kilometres away however, Segre fears for the future of her family, and both fear for the future of the Setos. Segre looks out across their land; “I hope that the Seto people will remain Setos, that they understand how rich they are, with their culture”. “Yes”, agrees Ain. “So that they love their culture and they keep it alive and give it to their children.”

The Setos, like so many other cultures who have suffered, continue to exist because of their need to fight for their survival. To simply preserve this culture is in effect a cultural death that would equate to the Setos becoming a museum piece: something from the past. With people such as Evar Riitsaar leading them, the Setos have a real chance of a future. “What is important is to bring new things to our culture”, he explains. “It will depend on the young generation; if they learn our traditions, our language, our old songs and write new songs. I hope that in the future, young designers and architects will bring Seto ideas and traditions to their work.” Herein lies the problem for the Setos, because all the young leave Setomaa to study or find work in the cities. As seventeen year-old Maria said; “I want to study interior design in Finland. I won’t return to Setomaa. I don’t like this place. It is very small and very boring here. I don’t like Seto culture. Setos are very strange people.”



With Estonia’s inclusion in the European Union, the Setos perhaps have been thrown a lifeline. The growth in tourism has brought much-needed jobs and money to the region, as have EU grants. Setomaa ironically voted unanimously “No” in the referendum, mainly because of their experience of being part of a previous union, the Soviet Union. Others, such as an Estonian diplomat based in Bruxelles, see the inclusion into the EU as part of the problem with Russia; “The Russian’s refusal to sign the border treaty is so that they can influence Estonian and EU policies.” As for the Russian Setos, they have no tourism, no EU grants and live in one of Russia’s poorest oblasts, Pskov.



Evar Riitsaar’s partner, Kauksi Ulle, Setomaa’s foremost and prolific writer, looks at their baby in her arms and says with conviction; “I hope that the richness of our culture will not be diluted into the Estonian culture; that our weddings, singing, family life and language will remain.” As the late linguistics professor Kenneth Hale once said; “When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It’s like dropping a bomb on a museum.”

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Contact us !

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International Coordinator: Morgana
PO Box 473, 3700 AL Zeist, THE NETHERLANDS
Morgana@paganfederation.org

Magazine Pagan World
Diana Aventina, Begijnenstraat 44, bus 1, 3290 Diest, BELGIUM
diana@paganfederation.org

PF International (Australia): Andrew
PO Box 477, Keyneton, VIC 3444, AUSTRALIA
andrew@paganfederation.org

PF International (Austria): Karen & Werner
Schusswallgasse 3-11, 1050 Vienna, AUSTRIA
Karenandwerner@paganfederation.org

PF International (Belgium): Maya
Tuyaertsstraat 61, 2850 BOOM, BELGIUM

maya@paganfederation.org

PF International (Canada): Tiamat Shadows
252 Rundlehorn Cres NE, Calgary, Alberta T1Y 1C6E, CANADA
tiamat@paganfederation.org

PF International (Czech Republic): Jakub Achrer
Oravská 15, 100 00 Praha 10, CZECH REPUBLIC
zahrada@paganfederation.org

PF International (France): Syd
c/o Les Ateliers du Sydhe, 46 ter rue Ste Catherine
45000 Orleans, FRANCE
Syd@paganfederation.org

PF International (Germany): Caesaja
Adreystasse 137a, 58453 WITTEN, GERMANY
caesaja@paganfederation.org

PF International (Hungary): Shade
Budapest 1385, P.F. 858, Hungary
shade@paganfederation.org

PF International (Italy): Elaphe
Via Oxilia 13, MILANO 20127, ITALY
cronos@paganfederation.org
elaphe@paganfederation.org

PF International (The Netherlands): Morgana & Lady Bara
PO Box 473, 3700 AL Zeist, THE NETHERLANDS
Morgana@paganfederation.org
ladybara@paganfederation.org

PF International (Poland): Rawimir
rawimir@paganfederation.org

PF International Portugal: Isobel Andrade & Jose Ferreira
Apartado 24170, 1250 - 997 Lisboa, PORTUGAL
Isobel@paganfederation.org

PF International (Scandinavia and Finland): Winterwillow
Idaborgsvagen 10, 117 62 Stockholm, SWEDEN
winterwillow@paganfederation.org

PF International (South Africa): Damon Leff
damon@paganfederation.org

PF International (South America): Nero
Caixa Postal 448, Porto Alegre RS, 90001-970, BRAZIL
Nero@paganfederation.org

PF International (Spain) : Aitziber & Werty
C/Ventura Rodriguez n° 9 10° 3ª, 08035 Barcelona, SPAIN
werty@paganfederation.org

PF International (Turkey): Atheneris & Birkan
PO Box 473, 3700 AL Zeist, THE NETHERLANDS
Atheneris@paganfederation.org (Turkey)
Birkan@paganfederation.org (Netherlands)

PF International (USA): Link
6538 Collins Avenue, #255, Miami Beach, FL 33141 USA
link@paganfederation.org

PFI UK representative: Anders
anders@paganfederation.org

PFI Asia representative: Ikari
ikari@paganfederation.org

PF International (All other Countries): Branwen
Postbus 473, 3700 AL Zeist, THE NETHERLANDS
branwen@paganfederation.org

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**Please send your articles by email
to Diana Aventina:**

paganworld@paganfederation.org

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floppy disk or TYPED to**

**Diana Aventina
Begijnenstraat 44, bus 1, 3290 Diest, Belgium**

The reason this issue was late.....

