

Reclaiming the Pagan Worldview: The Heart of Mysticism and the Return of the Old Ways

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From "The Witching Way of the Hollow Hill"

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In my way of thinking, what makes a person a "pagan" is not adherence to the surface beliefs of a pagan religion, nor some strongly individualistic way of challenging the status quo, nor even embracing an antique religious model- in the modern day, what pass for "pagan" religious models tend to be created by certain left-wing people to bolster some equally-as-left-wing ideologies. True and honest "paganism" is hard to come by.

In my opinion, being "pagan" is far from any of that- it is a matter of changing your worldview to an older way of seeing and being, giving reconsideration to older wisdoms, and making them relevant to you today. There is a struggle of spirit going on- people are looking for Wisdom and peace, and some look back to the past for hints about how others once found it. This is a good impulse- the past has much to teach us. But it is still a struggle, because mainstream religions strongly disapprove of people looking too far back.

Modern mainstream religions "win" the struggle of the spirit in a new way- they win when people have no awareness of the subtle power of worldview, and when people do not question where the features of their worldviews come from. In the old days, the modus operandi was for the church to convert kings and rulers, get influence over the laws, and kill the heretics and dissenters. But organizations like the church couldn't do what they were trying so hard to do, which was change the basic worldview of the people they converted. That took centuries.

Conversion in name is not enough- to become a true follower of a religion, you have to embrace the worldview associated with the religion completely; and that normally only happens when you are raised from an early age surrounded by a culture that espouses and demonstrates the features of that worldview. Christianity took generations to "set in" properly and fully. In the modern day, pagans have a lot of "unlearning" to do, before they can really say "we are pagan".

A Matter of Worldview

Nowadays, people can believe whatever they want. There is no locked, enforced way of believing. But there IS a worldview that most people in the west accept, people who are pagan and Christian alike, without even realizing they accept it. Many people today feel and want so much to be "pagan" again, and to escape the dominant Judeo-Christian paradigmatic worldview, but it doesn't happen overnight, just like it didn't grow overnight.

Some people don't understand this- they think that being pagan is a matter of reading some books, of making a blanket rejection of their original religious beliefs, and taking part in "pagan" rites or even "doing their own thing"- and nothing could be further from the truth.

The essence of paganism is found in the worldview. Worldview is a matter of how you feel and think about things, on a deep, mostly pre-conscious level. Worldview is normally tied up in culture, and it is a matter of how you were raised, from day one, to think about things and see them. "To be pagan" is to alter or change these deep patterns in your mind, to be more in alignment with a genuine pagan worldview- and a "genuine" pagan worldview should be based on older pagan ideas and ideals.

Hopefully, if any "modern paganism" is worth its salt, it will be inspired by older pagan ideas that still have importance and relevance for us today- and many do. Some features of older worldviews can be interpreted in new ways to make them relevant. We are dealing with organic features that changed to suit the times and needs of long ago, so this is not odd in the least.

Part and parcel of the standard "pagan" worldview, ancient or modern, is a sense of the sacredness of the Land; that the Sacred Land is alive and inhabited by spiritual forces ranging from Godly spirits to the souls of the dead, that All life emerged from the Land or from Nature, and that all will return to it cyclically, on the tides of birth and death.

The relationship between men and women is vital to the modern pagan worldview- the rather destructive imbalances of the past, evidenced in antique (and in some places, persistent) social orders between men and women, fill most modern pagans with a desire to find a healthier way for men and women to relate. Pagan mythologies present men and women as being created simultaneously, not one before the other, or one for the other, as Eve seems to have been a device created from Adam to alleviate Adam's boredom or loneliness; in ancient Germania we have Woden creating a man and a woman at the same time from trees; the same story gets told in a different form in other places- and even the Greeks, before the latebreaking "Pandora" myth, had man and woman springing up simultaneously from the Earth itself, or from the humus and trunks of Ash trees.

Men and women have different biological functions with respect to reproduction, but no spiritual, mental, or any other ontological inequalities. If men can offer women the gift of physical fertility, women, and the feminine, offer to men the no-less vital gift of emotional and spiritual fertility. Man's strength is not there to hold down and control the feminine, but to protect it and support it, for she is the source of his life and his generations, and the secret heart of his honor and joy- the very form of his deepest spiritual yearnings. There is a great and holy reciprocity between the sexes, they are needful to each other, and modern pagans tend to stand strongly on this issue, as well they should.

The very basic pagan worldview- in common with the ancient beliefs of

all Indo-European pagans- is one of animistic fullness, with a simple, earthy, 'ground level' emphasis on the idea of all things having a spiritual dimension, and on the value of life and of human cooperative well-being.

With the possible exception of the belief in the all important value of Life and the Truth, there is no sense of 'hard absolutes'; there is an ambiguity at the heart of all things, for Nature herself is nowhere clean and clear-cut, on any expressed level. Humans must decide, within the context of every situation, what actions are proper and try to bring their actions into alignment with whatever course brings about a greater harmony. This worldview requires humans to be flexible, brave and responsible.

This worldview has no sense of human moral depravity; no sense of guilt or loathing for the basic organic realities of human life; a basic trust in the dignity and goodness of mankind. Most scandalously, there is no sense of the necessity of salvific revelations or the prophets and saviors of revealed religions; "revelations" for those who live on the Land, and who live as parts of the Land, are ongoing. "Revelations" can be heard by anyone who listens in the wind or to the Land, and can be heard daily in the interior of the heart.

The pagan worldview also has no sense of linear "salvation history"; the world is not going to suddenly "end" one day at the behest of a heavenly judge who will then dole out rewards and punishments. Responsibility for making this world a better place is squarely on humans and the community of life.

"Meaning" in life is not to be found at life's end, or at the end of the world, but every day, in every action and breath. The end of the world-cycle or this era will come naturally, organically, just as it started; it is not a heavenly catastrophe, but a natural reality, and the coming of this "end"- which is itself a pre-cursor to a rebirth for the world- is not the primary concern of humans, as much as living this present moment with wisdom and peace.

Finally, and most importantly, the pagan worldview has a strong emphasis on the surreal, supra-rational presence of the Otherworld, the immense reality that lies beyond the boundaries of our own human perceptions and pre-conceived notions, and which occasionally breaks through into our "world" and perceptions in mysterious, exhilarating, or frightening ways.

This great presence, this extra-sensory reality, is the force behind pagan myths and legends; it is the animating principle of pagan mythology, and the single, pervasive and omnipresent principle by which otherwise inexpressible universal Truths can penetrate the world and mind of man or woman. This reality is the home of the Gods, the source of divine inspiration. Mythology is the presence of the Otherworld in the form of ancient stories; mythology- any mythology can be thought of as its manifestation.

Any mythology can be thought of as a gateway to a truly mystical

experience of timeless truth. Though the mythical stories themselves don't tend to be literally "true", they are nonetheless still "True", all being expressions of great Truth. The ancients had no problems with their myths not being literal. It was the symbolic and metaphorical nature of these holy stories and lore that gave them power; they spoke in the language of the Otherworld.

With the World or Against It

Having made this simple outline of a general "pagan" worldview, it seems pretty straightforward. But modern neo-pagans tend to help preserve a very non-pagan and decidedly non-traditional worldview, even when they are in the grip of what they so fervently think is "paganism".

And the problems of reclaiming a true pagan worldview today are not just consequences of religious oppression, or the history of religion in the west; even our modern materialistic sciences have problems. As much as modern people (and even modern pagans) think that the sciences are positive forces that are "against fundamentalist superstition and ignorance", it is a sad fact that many scientific paradigms aren't any more healthy than fundamentalist Christianity- the sciences too, can be based on firmly non-spiritual and totally "we are automatically right and you are automatically an ignorant, superstitious person for not accepting our math and theories" attitudes. Sadly, science for many becomes a new form of elitism, with its own dogmas and faith in its ability to answer the mysteries of the universe.

But many pagans, thinking that science is a firmly non-Christian and totally positive advancement, walk around trying to make our ancestors' lore and ancient spiritual notions "fit in" with scientific-sounding explanations; I have heard such horrid things, ranging from "the trance state is really just an alpha state of consciousness" to "paganism and Wicca are just quantum physics mixed with the ancient mysteries".

I've heard neo-pagans actually trying to explain how their "law of return" was firmly based on physics, and I've even heard neo-pagans trying to "prove" that there is an "afterlife" with the rather tired, pseudoscientific anecdote that goes something like this: "hey man, we're all just energy... electricity- and according to physics, energy can't be destroyed or created, it just changes form...so when we die, our energy just changes form..."

I can't tell you how depressing it looks when someone takes the most precious gift of our ancestors' mythology- and all the lore and power it contains- and tries to explain it all away in these analytical terms, to make it more palatable to the science-dazed masses who think that things can't be "real" unless you can explain them in mathematical terms or demonstrate them in a lab.

What is real and important in life cannot be so explained. A person who thinks they can, will never reach the promise of the spiritual worldview, nor achieve wisdom. They will join the endless mental paper

chase, which only ends in new questions, new debates, and never in peace. They are swept away with the tools of dissection, and can chop things into eternally smaller pieces, but never reach the bottom; they can analyze, over-analyze, discover possible explanations, but never find meaning.

An Older Wisdom

Our ancestors were very wise; they knew secrets to reality and about reality that we can still access today, but only when we understand that we need our ancestors and their legacy more than they need us- because they weren't savages who needed Christianity and rationalistic science to save them from their errors; the "old days" didn't need our ultra-enlightened "modern day" to "fix" its superstitious mistakes. I'm not saying the old days were perfect, but they did have access to a source of wisdom that we have mostly grown unconscious to. And this source of wisdom can spell the difference between life and death.

Let's have a look at our ultra-enlightened modern day! Look at how we Europeans, and to an extent, Africans and Asians, are all suffering from spiritual amnesia, all of us, with lost memories of our ancestors, and of who we are, and where we come from- replacing our wise pagan heritage with foreign cultural beliefs based on guilt and misogynistic, spiritually elitist hallucinations- look at how we have bathed this world in blood; look at how we waste without shame; look at how we degrade the world and environment!

And look at how our new 'champion' science has produced just enough miracle technology to give us guided missiles and monstrous weapons that could destroy the entire planet, and how it has gifted us with just enough technology to keep most of the poor world under the oppression of a small majority of the rich world, and just enough technology to improve the 'quality' and length of life- so that we can each have 90-100 year life spans, all the more time to feel alienated from each other and confused, more years to suffer under the oppression of other countries and corporations (if we happen to be born in the non-technologically advanced world), and more hollow years of doubting the existence of anything that we can't see and hear and feel.

This is the curse of losing who we were and who we are. Wisdom was lost with those things. Science would be a beautiful, wonderful tool, if we had wisdom to temper it. But we don't, and so science is abused and it has become another monster, just like the old church.

I'm not saying we should destroy science; I'm saying we should restore wisdom. Wisdom is to be found in the heart, in the fetch, in the soul, in the feeling self- and the keys and gates to wisdom are encoded in Mythology, and in the actual blood and spirit of each human being. What allows access to this wisdom is trust in the self, trust for the basic goodness and capability of humankind, and honesty to the deepest emotions. Religions or philosophies that tell people not to trust their own hearts are poison, designed to shackle humans in slavery.

It's all there for the taking. It's there for the re-remembering. I can't say where the road lies for each individual, because only each person can discover that; but I can say where it certainly doesn't lie:

1. It doesn't lie in trying to make paganism and old religions "fit in" with the Judeo-Christian worldview or any of the monotheistic religions, who, chiefly by denying the true and full power of the divine feminine, and the ancestrally held truth of the multiplicity of divine beings, were lacking wisdom from day one. Trying to make ourselves "fit in" with them is already death to our cause.

Modern neo-pagans who walk around with their well-meaning "all Gods are one God" idea are doing nothing but sealing up the victory of the monotheistic machine over our wise ancestors, who believed in many Gods. Gods are individuals, not "aspects" of "one god".

2. It doesn't lie in trying to make our ancestors' mythologies and wisdoms "fit in" with a modern scientific worldview. Our ancestors were deeper than the modern world tends to give them credit for; they had mystical contacts with states of awareness that were and are above and beyond any limited left-brained equation or logic pattern; the Gods dwell in states that even the most brilliant human mind cannot perfectly explain or express, and which does not need to be "expressed scientifically" to make the presence of the Gods a Transformative, real presence in our lives.

We can all experience what we need to experience, if we let go of our "need to know", realize that some things defy the "knowing" of mortals and their brains, and cast ourselves into the Infinite, leap without fear into the fearsome-seeming "unknown" and go with bravery towards the Unknowable.

There, in the strange shower and whirlpool of mythological images, of strange symbols, and of ancestral stories, a miracle happens- the Symbols and images and words all start to make a deeper sense; the mind goes into some "new mode", (it's rather impossible to explain) but you reach a "new place", which is actually a very old place, wherein you commune wordlessly with what is real, with the reality under and within the words and symbols.

You experience yourself again, but not a self you ever guessed or knew was "you". You meet the Gods. You suddenly understand, in a way that you cannot easily explain, HOW they exist and work in the world, and how your existence ties in to the World-Fate.

You learn how to sense your actions, what your actions "mean", what they will accomplish, from whence they spring, and how much power you have to tremble the threads of fate to seemingly create your own destiny, which is (and always was) a greater destiny. And the whole time, you will be mystified at the whole process, unable to really explain it, and beyond that, not feeling the overpowering need to explain it.

A person who has gone through this experience is changed forever; they have become (as our northern ancestors said) a wyrd-worker. They become a Witch; a pagan mystic whose awakening was not possible without the older worldview of wonder and mystery, where wisdom is supreme.

The Sleeper Has Awakened

That awakened person understands the role of Wisdom in everyday life. That person can then be a scientist, without his creations turning on him, and on others. That person can then be religious, without his words and deeds tarnishing what our ancestors' "religions" were intended to communicate to mankind. That person can then be human, and be completely and totally satisfied with that. That person can be himself or herself, and that is enough. We have all experienced upbringing in a Judeo-Christian world, even if we weren't brought up as a monotheist; the unspoken yet real influence of this worldview permeates all aspects of our lives.

Even people far from the west have elements of monotheistic culture that permeate their existence. Christian and Muslim missionaries pick away at the bowels of eastern nations, trying their hardest to turn those people away from their traditional religions and spiritual paths, and for the largest eastern land- China- the scourge of atheistic communism has plundered its majestic spiritual heritage.

India, the last home of true Polytheism, has begun to succumb to the monotheistic battering of Islam and Christianity, and to this day, when Hindu religion is taught to westerners, the "acceptable" form is to tell everyone that the Hindus ALWAYS believed in "one god"- Brahman- and how all the other Gods were mere aspects of "him". The obvious polytheism of the Vedas is ignored, in favor of monotheistic re-interpretation, and many Hindus themselves see monism and monotheism as acceptable paths to finding acceptance in the "new" world.

This monotheistic homogenization, this sadly narrow way of seeing the world, and the rationalistic curse of the brilliant yet unwise sciences, have an affect on people from all over, consciously and subconsciously. Changing the deepest programming, the deep and essential assumptions that were put there by the simple fact of how and where we were raised, is the first and greatest task of liberation, and of the modern pagan, of any stripe or predilection, and it makes no difference where that pagan might be from. I speak mostly to an audience of western pagans, descendants of European peoples- but I also mean these words for all pagans.

We can be free to revive the wisdom of the past, and the key is in having the bravery to part ways with the "Modern assumptions"- the many modern myths that we are all exposed to from an early age.

These myths include the myth of religious and cultural homogenization, the killing need to mutilate the Truth by forcing it into a simple, unitary mold, and the myth of "rationality"- the myth that tells us that

all of reality can be explained and understood by the human mind coupled with enough education and scientific endeavor. These myths serve the human ego, serve our need to think that life is at heart simple, predictable, and explainable. Life, as the wise of all eras have known, is anything but.

Forget about explaining everything. What we have to do is learn to FEEL again, without having to rationalize every feeling; we must learn to DIVE INTO the symbols and images of ancestral mythology, without trying to 'explain it all', and letting these symbols and myths reveal their hidden meanings to you- you must submerge yourself, and let the feelings and insights rise.

This is intuitive work; modern people's difficulty in learning how to do this is a direct consequence of the loss of pagan mysteries; a direct consequence of the demonizing of the divine feminine, Dame Wisdom herself, a programmed mistrust of the feeling, intuitive aspect of our natures. Dominant religions are oriented around a basic mistrust of the human heart and feelings- the heart is corrupt with sin, even according to the Bible. At this point, we must make a stand, and part ways with the human-hating religions that turn people against themselves, all to better force them into reliance on dogma, and into reliance on religious leaders and institutions.

A person, at some point, has to stop fighting to make every aspect of their experience "conform" with some notion of how things "have to be", and let the great web of Fate be what it is, because nothing can change how Fate is, or how things "are" on the deepest levels. Luckily, it's not Fate we have to change, but how we experience it.

You 'Let it all be' and go still and totally open- you let yourself feel love, real love for the Grandmothers and Grandfathers who passed their wisdom down, and for the Gods and spirits that they loved- and what is real, what is immortal and precious, what does not come nor go- will rise into your awareness, because it is the basic reality of you.

This is the promise of the Old Ways, and it shall be, for what is immortal and real is an inseparable part of us, and we can allow it back into our conscious reality, at any time, so long as our hearts are given over with consent, trust, and total honesty.

What is precious- the very heart of the old worldview, that mystery which filled our ancestors with peace as they sat around hearths or fires listening to old stories, or when they gazed upon the natural world at certain striking times- that precious "way of engaging" the world will certainly rise in you, once your awareness is not clouded with modern mythology, nor with constant mental grasping.

With love, devour the images and symbols of true and holy ancestral Mythology- go into them, and take them into you; be an idolater! Love the idols, the symbols, the non-linear and mad-seeming stories! Surely they seem strange, for the path to the Otherworld is strange- realize that each one is a door into you, and through you, through your soul, for they are things of the Gods.

Mythology was born in the experience of ancient people, experiences they had of nature and Divinity. These stories are not merely "made up" or foolish; they encapsulate mysteries and their symbols are an otherworldly language, waiting to reveal a special Truth to you. They will forever flow with Truth, if you will forever go deeper into them.

The true myths are the footprints of the Ancients, the marks of divinity on the world, and on the human mind and heart. Welcome to our Faery Tale! As it turns out, there is no such thing as "just a made up story" after all. If you want peace, and insight, then be what these sacred stories and images call you to be, and be it with all your heart.

When you have done this, you will find that the rites, beliefs, and ideas of whatever pagan religious expression or tradition you feel drawn to come naturally and with total, elegant ease, in a way that they didn't come before this deep change. They come with a satisfaction they didn't bring before, even if they did feel satisfying before.

The human spirit is a deep layer of Fate, an ever-moving and yet ever-still thread of Fate. This is its identity. It touches the Spirits and Gods, who are also a part of the web of Fate or Wyrð, in a very profound way. Let your soul be what it already is- a sorcerer's soul, one that touches and communes with the divine forces that rule over this world and every other. This is the work of the True Pagan mystic.