

## CHAPTER 1. WITCHCRAFT AS GODDESS RELIGION

### **Between the Worlds**

The moon is full. We meet on a hilltop that looks out over the bay. Below us, lights spread out like a field of jewels, and faraway skyscrapers pierce the swirling fog like the spires of fairytale towers. The night is enchanted.

Our candles have been blown out, and our makeshift altar cannot stand up under the force of the wind, as it sings through the branches of tall eucalyptus. We hold up our arms and let it hurl against our faces. We are exhilarated, hair and eyes streaming. The tools are unimportant; we have all we need to make magic: our bodies, our breath, our voices, each other.

The circle has been cast. The invocations begin:

*All-dewy, sky-sailing pregnant moon,  
Who shines for all,  
Who shines through all...  
Aradia, Diana, Cybele, Mah...*

*Sailor of the last sea,  
Guardian of the gate,  
Ever-dying, ever-living radiance...  
Dionysus, Osiris, Pan, Arthur, Hu...*

The moon clears the treetops and shines on the circle. We huddle closer for warmth. A woman moves into the center of the circle. We begin to chant her name:

*"Diana. . ."  
"Dee-ah-nah ..."  
"Aaaah...."*

The chant builds, spiraling upward. Voices merge into one endlessly modulated harmony. The circle is enveloped in a cone of light.

Then, in a breath-silence.

"*You are Goddess,*" we say to Diane, and kiss her as she steps back into the outer ring. She is smiling.

She remembers who she is.

One by one, we will step into the center of the circle. We will hear our names chanted, feel the cone rise around us. We will receive the gift, and remember:

*"I am Goddess. You are God, Goddess. All that lives, breathes, loves, sings in the unending harmony of being is divine."*

In the circle, we will take hands and dance under the moon.

*"To disbelieve in witchcraft is the greatest of all heresies."*

Malleus Maleficarum (1486)

On every full moon, rituals such as the one described above take place on hill-tops, on beaches, in open fields, and in ordinary houses. Writers, teachers, nurses, computer programmers, artists, lawyers, poets, plumbers, and auto mechanics-women and men from many backgrounds come together to celebrate the mysteries of the Triple Goddess of birth, love, and death, and of her Consort, the Hunter, who is Lord of the Dance of life. The religion they practice is called Witchcraft.

Witchcraft is a word that frightens many people and confuses many others. In the popular imagination, Witches are ugly, old hags riding broomsticks, or evil Satanists performing obscene rites. Modern Witches are thought to be members of a kooky cult, primarily concerned with cursing enemies by jabbing wax images with pins, and lacking the depth, the dignity, and seriousness of purpose of a true religion.

But Witchcraft is a religion, perhaps the oldest religion extant in the West. Its origins go back before Christianity, Judaism, Islam-before Buddhism and Hinduism, as well, and it is very different from all the so-called great religions.

The Old Religion, as we call it, is closer in spirit to Native American traditions or to the shamanism of the Arctic. It is not based on dogma or a set of beliefs, nor on scriptures or a sacred book revealed by a great man. Witchcraft takes its teachings from nature, and reads inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees, and the cycles of the seasons.

According to our legends, Witchcraft began more than thirty-five thousand years ago, when the temperature of Europe began to drop and the great sheets of ice crept slowly south in their last advance. Across the rich tundra, teeming with animal life, small groups of hunters followed the free-running reindeer and the thundering bison. They were armed with only the most primitive of weapons, but some among the clans were gifted, could "call" the herds to a cliffside or a pit, where a few beasts, in willing sacrifice, would let themselves be trapped. These gifted shamans could attune themselves to the spirits of the herds, and in so doing they became aware of the pulsating rhythm that infuses all life, the dance of the double spiral, of whirling into being, and whirling out again. They did not phrase this insight intellectually, but in images: the Mother Goddess, the birthgiver, who brings into existence all life; and the Horned God, hunter and hunted, who eternally passes through the gates of death that new life may go on.

Male shamans dressed in skins and horns in identification with the God and the herds; but female priestesses presided naked, embodying the fertility of the Goddess. Life and death were a continuous stream; the dead were buried as if sleeping in a womb, surrounded by their tools and ornaments, so that they might awaken to a new life. In the caves of the Alps, skulls of the great bears were mounted in niches, where they pronounced oracles that guided the clans to game. In lowland pools, reindeer does, their bellies filled with stones that embodied the souls of deer, were submerged in the waters of the Mother's womb, so that victims of the hunt would be reborn.

In the East-Siberia and the Ukraine the Goddess was Lady of the Mammoths; She was carved from stone in great swelling curves that embodied her gifts of abundance. In the West, in the great cave temples of southern France and Spain, her rites were performed deep in the secret wombs of the earth, where the great polar forces were painted as bison and horses, superimposed, emerging from the cave walls like spirits out of a dream. The spiral dance was seen also in the sky: in the moon, who monthly dies and is reborn; in the sun, whose waxing light brings summer's warmth and whose waning brings the chill of winter. Records of the moon's passing were scratched on bone, and the Goddess was shown holding the bison horn, which is also the crescent moon.

The ice retreated. Some clans followed the bison and the reindeer into the far north. Some passed over the Alaskan land bridge to the Americas. Those who remained in Europe turned to fishing and gathering wild plants and shellfish. Dogs guarded their campsites, and new tools were refined. Those who had the inner power learned that it increased when they worked together. As isolated settlements grew into villages, shamans and priestesses linked forces and shared knowledge. The first covens were formed. Deeply attuned to plant and animal life, they tamed where once they had hunted, and they bred sheep, goats, cows, and pigs from their wild cousins. Seeds were no longer only gathered; they were planted, to grow where they were set. The Hunter became Lord of the Grain, sacrificed when it is cut in autumn, buried in the womb of the Goddess and reborn in the spring. The Lady of the Wild Things became the Barley Mother, and the cycles of moon and sun marked the times for sowing and reaping and letting out to pasture.

Villages grew into the first towns and cities. The Goddess was painted on the plastered walls of shrines, giving birth to the Divine Child - her consort, son, and seed. Far-flung trade brought contact with the mysteries of Africa and West Asia.

In the lands once covered with ice, a new power was discovered, a force that runs like springs of water through the earth Herself. Barefoot priestesses trace out "ley" lines on the new grass. It was found that certain stones increase the flow of power. They were set at the proper points in great marching rows and circles that mark the cycles of time. The year became a great wheel divided into eight parts: the solstices and equinoxes and the cross-quarter days between, when great feasts were held and fires lit. With each

ritual, with each ray of the sun and beam of the moon that struck the stones at the times of power, the force increased. They became great reservoirs of subtle energy, gateways between the worlds of the seen and the unseen. Within the circles, beside the menhirs and dolmens and passage graves, priestesses could probe the secrets of time, and the hidden structure of the cosmos. Mathematics, astronomy, poetry, music, medicine, and the understanding of the workings of the human mind developed side by side with the lore of the deeper mysteries.

But later, cultures developed that devoted themselves to the arts of war. Wave after wave of Indo-European invasions swept over Europe from the Bronze Age on. Warrior Gods drove the Goddess peoples out from the fertile lowlands and fine temples, into the hills and high mountains where they became known as the Sidhe, the Picts or Pixies, the Fair Folk or Faeries.[11] The mythological cycle of Goddess and Consort, Mother and Divine Child, which had held sway for thirty thousand years, was changed to conform to the values of the conquering patriarchies. In Greece, the Goddess, in her many guises, "married" the new gods-the result was the Olympian Pantheon. In the British Isles, the victorious Celts adopted many features of the Old Religion, incorporating them into the Druidic mysteries.

The Faeries, breeding cattle in the stony hills and living in turf-covered, round huts, preserved the Old Religion. Clan mothers, called "Queen of Elphame," which means Elfland, led the covens, together with the priest, the Sacred King, who embodied the dying God, and underwent a ritualized mock death at the end of his term of office. They celebrated the eight feasts of the Wheel with wild processions on horseback, singing, chanting, and the lighting of ritual fires. The invading people often joined in; there were mingling and intermarriage, and many rural families were said to have "Faery blood." The Colleges of the Druids, and the Poetic Colleges of Ireland and Wales, preserved many of the old mysteries.

Christianity, at first, brought little change. Peasants saw in the story of Christ only a new version of their own ancient tales of the Mother Goddess and her Divine Child who is sacrificed and reborn. Country priests often led the dance at the Sabbats, or great festivals. The covens, which preserved the knowledge of the subtle forces, were called Wicca or Wicce, from the Anglo-Saxon root word meaning "to bend or shape." They were those who could shape the unseen to their will. Healers, teachers, poets, and midwives, they were central figures in every community.

Persecution began slowly. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a revival of aspects of the Old Religion by the troubadours, who wrote love poems to the Goddess under the guise of living noble ladies of their times. The magnificent cathedrals were built in honor of Mary, who had taken over many of the aspects of the ancient Goddess. Witchcraft was declared a heretical act, and in 1324 an Irish coven led by Dame Alice Kyteler was tried by the Bishop of Ossory for worshipping a non-Christian god. Dame Kyteler was saved by her rank, but her followers were burned.

Wars, Crusades, plagues, and peasant revolts raged over Europe in the next centuries. Joan of Arc, the "Maid of Orleans," led the armies of France to victory, but was burned as a Witch by the English. "Maiden" is a term of high respect in Witchcraft, and it has been suggested that the French peasantry loved Joan so greatly because she was, in truth, a leader of the Old Religion. The stability of the medieval Church was shaken, and the feudal system began to break down. The Christian world was swept by messianic movements and religious revolts, and the Church could no longer calmly tolerate rivals.

In 1484, the Papal Bull of Innocent VIII unleashed the power of the Inquisition against the Old Religion. With the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "The Hammer of the Witches," by the Dominicans Kramer and Sprenger in 1486, the groundwork was laid for a reign of terror that was to hold all of Europe in its grip until well into the seventeenth century. The persecution was most strongly directed against women: Of an estimated nine million Witches executed, eighty percent were women, including children and young girls, who were believed to inherit the "evil" from their mothers. The asceticism of early Christianity, which turned its back on the world of the flesh, had degenerated, in some quarters of the Church, into hatred of those who brought that

flesh into being. Misogyny, the hatred of women, had become a strong element in medieval Christianity. Women, who menstruate and give birth, were identified with sexuality and therefore with evil. "All witchcraft stems from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable," stated the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The terror was indescribable. Once denounced, by anyone from a spiteful neighbor to a fretful child, a suspected Witch was arrested suddenly, without warning, and not allowed to return home again. She was considered guilty until proven innocent. Common practice was to strip the suspect naked, shave her completely in hopes of finding the Devil's "marks," which might be moles or freckles. Often the accused were pricked all over their bodies with long, sharp needles; spots the Devil had touched were said to feel no pain. In England, "legal torture" was not allowed, but suspects were deprived of sleep and subjected to slow starvation, before hanging. On the Continent, every imaginable atrocity was practiced-the rack, the thumbscrew, "boots" that broke the bones in the legs, vicious beatings-the full roster of the Inquisition's horrors. The accused were tortured until they signed confessions prepared by the Inquisitors, until they admitted to consorting with Satan, to dark and obscene practices that were never part of true Witchcraft. Most cruelly, they were tortured until they named others, until a full coven quota of thirteen were taken. Confession earned a merciful death: strangulation before the stake. Recalcitrant suspects, who maintained their innocence, were burned alive.

Generically, Witches are female-this usage is meant to include males, not to exclude them

Witch hunters and informers were paid for convictions, and many found it a profitable career. The rising male medical establishment welcomed the chance to stamp out midwives and village herbalists, their major economic competitors. For others, the Witch trials offered opportunities to rid themselves of "uppity women" and disliked neighbors. Witches themselves say that few of those tried during the Burning Times actually belonged to covens or were members of the Craft. The victims were the elderly, the senile, the mentally ill, women whose looks weren't pleasing or who suffered from some handicap, village beauties who bruised the wrong egos by rejecting advances, or who had roused lust in a celibate priest or married man. Homosexuals and freethinkers were caught in the same net. At times, hundreds of victims were put to death in a day. In the Bishopric of Trier, in Germany, two villages were left with only a single female inhabitant apiece after the trials of 1585.

The Witches and Faeries who could do so escaped to lands where the Inquisition did not reach. Some may have come to America. It is possible that a genuine coven was meeting in the woods of Salem before the trials, which actually marked the end of active persecution in this country. Some scholars believe that the family of Samuel and John Quincy Adams were members of the megalithic "Dragon" cult, which kept alive the knowledge of the power of the stone circles.[14] Certainly, the independent spirit of Witchcraft is very much akin to many of the ideals of the "Founding Fathers": for example, freedom of speech and worship, decentralized government, and the rights of the individual rather than the divine right of kings.

This period was also the time when the African slave trade reached its height and the conquest of the Americas took place. The same charges leveled against the Witches-charges of savagery and devil worship-were used to justify the enslavement of the Africans (who were brought to the New World, supposedly, to Christianize them) and the destruction of cultures and wholesale genocide of Native Americans. African religions took on a protective cloak of Catholic nomenclature, calling their orishas saints, and survived as the traditions of Macumba, Santeria, Lucumi, and Voudoun, religions that have been as unfairly maligned as the Craft.

Oral tradition tells us that some European Pagans, brought over as indentured servants or convict labor, fled to join the Indians whose traditions were similar in spirit to their own. In some areas, such as the American South, black, white Pagan, and Native American elements combined.

In America, as in Europe, the Craft went underground, and became the most secret of religions. Traditions were passed down only to those who could be trusted absolutely,

usually to members of the same family. Communications between covens were severed; no longer could they meet on the Great Festivals to share knowledge and exchange the results of spells or rituals. Parts of the tradition became lost or forgotten. Yet somehow, in secret, in silence, over glowing coals, behind closed shutters, encoded as fairy tales and folk songs, or hidden in subconscious memories, the seed was passed on.

After the persecutions ended, in the eighteenth century, came the age of disbelief. Memory of the true Craft had faded; the hideous stereotypes that remained seemed ludicrous, laughable, or tragic. Only in this century have Witches been able to "come out of the broom closet," so to speak, and counter the imagery of evil with truth. The word Witch carries so many negative connotations that many people wonder why we use it at all. Yet to reclaim the word Witch is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful; as men, to know the feminine within as divine. To be a Witch is to identify with nine million victims of bigotry and hatred and to take responsibility for shaping a world in which prejudice claims no more victims. A Witch is a "shaper," a creator who bends the unseen into form, and so becomes one of the Wise, one whose life is infused with magic.

Witchcraft has always been a religion of poetry, not theology. The myths, legends, and teachings are recognized as metaphors for "That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told," the absolute reality our limited minds can never completely know. The mysteries of the absolute can never be explained-only felt or intuited. Symbols and ritual acts are used to trigger altered states of awareness, in which insights that go beyond words are revealed. When we speak of "the secrets that cannot be told," we do not mean merely that rules prevent us from speaking freely. We mean that the inner knowledge literally cannot be expressed in words. It can only be conveyed by experience, and no one can legislate what insight another person may draw from any given experience. For example, after the ritual described at the opening of this chapter, one woman said, "As we were chanting, I felt that we blended together and became one voice; I sensed the oneness of everybody." Another woman said, "I became aware of how different the chant sounded for each of us, of how unique each person is." A man said simply, "I felt loved." To a Witch, all of these statements are equally true and valid. They are no more contradictory than the statements "Your eyes are as bright as stars" and "Your eyes are as blue as the sea."

The primary symbol for "That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told" is the Goddess. The Goddess has infinite aspects and thousands of names-She is the reality behind many metaphors. She is reality, the manifest deity, omnipresent in all of life, in each of us. The Goddess is not separate from the world-She is the world, and all things in it: moon, sun, earth, star, stone, seed, flowing river, wind, wave, leaf and branch, bud and blossom, fang and claw, woman and man. In Witchcraft, flesh and spirit are one.

As we have seen, Goddess religion is unimaginably old, but contemporary Witchcraft could just as accurately be called the New Religion. The Craft, today, is undergoing more than a revival; it is experiencing a renaissance, a recreation. Women are spurring this renewal, and actively reawakening the Goddess, the image of "the legitimacy and beneficence of female power."

Since the decline of the Goddess religions, women have lacked religious models and spiritual systems that speak to female needs and experience. Male images of divinity characterize both Western and Eastern religions. Regardless of how abstract the underlying concept of God may be, the symbols, avatars, preachers, prophets, gurus, and Buddhas are overwhelmingly male. Women are not encouraged to explore their own strengths and realizations, they are taught to submit to male authority, to identify masculine perceptions as their spiritual ideals, to deny their bodies and sexuality, to fit their insights into a male mold.

Mary Daly, author of *Beyond God the Father*, points out that the model of the universe in which a male God rules the cosmos from outside serves to legitimize male control of social institutions. "The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting." The unconscious model continues to shape the perceptions even of those who have

consciously rejected religious teachings. The details of one dogma are rejected, but the underlying structure of belief is imbibed at so deep a level it is rarely questioned. Instead, a new dogma, a parallel structure, replaces the old. For example, many people have rejected the "revealed truth" of Christianity without ever questioning the underlying concept that truth is a set of beliefs revealed through the agency of a "Great Man," possessed of powers or intelligence beyond the ordinary human scope. Christ, as the "Great Man," may be replaced by Buddha, Freud, Marx, Jung, Werner Erhard, or the Maharaj Ji in their theology, but truth is always seen as coming from someone else, as only knowable secondhand. As feminist scholar Carol Christ points out, "Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected, they must be replaced. Where there is no replacement, the mind will revert to familiar structures at times of crisis, bafflement, or defeat."

The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world. Manifest in each of us, She can be known internally by every individual, in all her magnificent diversity. She does not legitimize the rule of either sex by the other and lends no authority to rulers of temporal hierarchies. In Witchcraft, each of us must reveal our own truth. Deity is seen in our own forms, whether female or male, because the Goddess has her male aspect. Sexuality is a sacrament. Religion is a matter of relinking, with the divine within and with her outer manifestations in all of the human and natural world.

The symbol of the Goddess is poemagogic, a term coined by Anton Ehrenzweig to "describe its special function of inducing and symbolizing the ego's creativity." It has a dreamlike, "slippery" quality. One aspect slips into another: She is constantly changing form and changing face. Her images do not define or pin down a set of attributes; they spark inspiration, creation, fertility of mind and spirit: "One thing becomes another,/In the Mother ... In the Mother ..." (ritual chant for the Winter Solstice).

The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be overstressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, our anger as purifying, and our power to nurture and create, but also to limit and destroy when necessary, as the very force that sustains all life. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions. We can move beyond narrow, constricting roles and become whole.

The Goddess is also important for men. The oppression of men in Father God-ruled patriarchy is perhaps less obvious but no less tragic than that of women. Men are encouraged to identify with a model no human being can successfully emulate: to be minirulers of narrow universes. They are internally split, into a "spiritual" self that is supposed to conquer their baser animal and emotional natures. They are at war with themselves: in the West, to "conquer" sin; in the East, to "conquer" desire or ego. Few escape from these wars undamaged. Men lose touch with their feelings and their bodies, becoming the "successful male zombies" described by Herb Goldberg in *The Hazards of Being Male*: "Oppressed by the cultural pressures that have denied him his feelings, by the mythology of the woman and the distorted and self-destructive way he sees and relates to her, by the urgency for him to 'act like a man,' which blocks his ability to respond to his inner promptings both emotionally and physiologically, and by a generalized self-hate that causes him to feel comfortable only when he is functioning well in harness, not when he lives for joy and personal growth."

Because women give birth to males, and nurture them at the breast, and in our culture are primarily responsible for their care as children, "every male brought up in a traditional home develops an intense early identification with his mother and therefore carries within him a strong feminine imprint." The symbol of the Goddess allows men to experience and integrate the feminine side of their nature, which is often felt to be the deepest and most sensitive aspect of self. The Goddess does not exclude the male; She contains him, as a pregnant woman contains a male child. Her own male aspect embodies both the solar light of the intellect and wild, untamed animal energy.

Our relationship to the earth and the other species that share it has also been conditioned by our religious models. The image of God as outside of nature has given us

a rationale for our own destruction of the natural order, and justified our plunder of the earth's resources. We have attempted to "conquer" nature as we have tried to conquer sin. Only as the results of pollution and ecological destruction become severe enough to threaten even urban humanity's adaptability have we come to recognize the importance of ecological balance and the interdependence of all life. The model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive.

The rise of Goddess religion makes some politically oriented feminists uneasy. They fear it will sidetrack energy away from action to bring about social change. But in areas as deeply rooted as the relations between the sexes, true social change can only come about when the myths and symbols of our culture are themselves changed. The symbol of the Goddess conveys the spiritual power both to challenge systems of oppression and to create new, life-oriented cultures.

Modern Witchcraft is a rich kaleidoscope of traditions and orientations. Covens, the small, closely knit groups that form the congregations of Witchcraft, are autonomous; there is no central authority that determines liturgy or rites. Some covens follow practices that have been handed down in an unbroken line since before the Burning Times. Others derive their rituals from leaders of modern revivals of the Craft—the two whose followers are most widespread are Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders, both British. Feminist covens are probably the fastest-growing arm of the Craft. Many are Dianic: a sect of Witchcraft that gives far more prominence to the female principle than the male. Other covens are openly eclectic, creating their own traditions from many sources. My own covens are based on the Faery tradition, which goes back to the Little People of Stone Age Britain, but we believe in creating our own rituals, which reflect our needs and insights of today.

The myths underlying philosophy and theology (a word coined by religious scholar Naomi Goldenberg from *thea*, the Greek word for Goddess) in this book are based on the Faery tradition. Other Witches may disagree with details, but the overall values and attitudes expressed are common to all of the Craft. Much of the Faery material is still held secret, so many of the rituals, chants, and invocations come from our creative tradition. In Witchcraft, a chant is not necessarily better because it is older. The Goddess is continually revealing Herself, and each of us is potentially capable of writing our own liturgy.

In spite of diversity, there are ethics and values that are common to all traditions of Witchcraft. They are based on the concept of the Goddess as immanent in the world and in all forms of life, including human beings.

Theologians familiar with Judeo-Christian concepts sometimes have trouble understanding how a religion such as Witchcraft can develop a system of ethics and a concept of justice. If there is no split between spirit and nature, no concept of sin, no covenant or commandments against which one can sin, how can people be ethical? By what standards can they judge their actions, when the external judge is removed from his place as ruler of the cosmos? And if the Goddess is immanent in the world, why work for change or strive toward an ideal? Why not bask in the perfection of divinity?

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

The world is the manifestation of the Goddess, but nothing in that concept need foster passivity. Many Eastern religions encourage quietism not because they believe the divine is truly immanent, but because they believe she/he is not. For them, the world is *Maya*, Illusion, masking the perfection of the Divine Reality. What happens in such a world is not really important; it is only a shadow play obscuring the Infinite Light. In Witchcraft, however, what happens in the world is vitally important. The Goddess is

immanent, but she needs human help to realize her fullest beauty. The harmonious balance of plant/animal/human/divine awareness is not automatic; it must constantly be renewed, and this is the true function of Craft rituals. Inner work, spiritual work, is most effective when it proceeds hand in hand with outer work. Meditation on the balance of nature might be considered a spiritual act in Witchcraft, but not as much as would cleaning up garbage left at a campsite or marching to protest an unsafe nuclear plant.

Witches do not see justice as administered by some external authority, based on a written code or set of rules imposed from without. Instead, justice is an inner sense that each act brings about consequences that must be faced responsibly. The Craft does not foster guilt, the stern, admonishing, self-hating inner voice that cripples action. Instead, it demands responsibility. "What you send, returns three times over" is the saying-an amplified version of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." For example, a Witch does not steal, not because of an admonition in a sacred book, but because the threefold harm far outweighs any small material gain. Stealing diminishes the thief's self-respect and sense of honor; it is an admission that one is incapable of providing honestly for one's own needs and desires. Stealing creates a climate of suspicion and fear, in which even thieves have to live. And, because we are all linked in the same social fabric, those who steal also pay higher prices for groceries, insurance, taxes. Witchcraft strongly imbues the view that all things are interdependent and interrelated and therefore mutually responsible. An act that harms anyone harms us all.

Honor is a guiding principle in the Craft. This is not a need to take offense at imagined slights against one's virility-it is an inner sense of pride and self-respect. The Goddess is honored in oneself, and in others. Women, who embody the Goddess, are respected, not placed on pedestals or etherealized but valued for all their human qualities. The self, one's individuality and unique way of being in the world, is highly valued. The Goddess, like nature, loves diversity. Oneness is attained not through losing the self, but through realizing it fully. "Honor the Goddess in yourself, celebrate your self, and you will see that Self is everywhere," says Faery priest Victor Anderson.

In Witchcraft, "All acts of love and pleasure are My rituals." Sexuality, as a direct expression of the life force, is seen as numinous and sacred. It can be expressed freely, so long as the guiding principle is love. Marriage is a deep commitment, a magical, spiritual, and psychic bond. But it is only one possibility out of many for loving, sexual expression.

Misuse of sexuality, however, is heinous. Rape, for example, is an intolerable crime because it dishonors the life force by turning sexuality to the expression of violence and hostility instead of love. A woman has the sacred right to control her own body, as does a man. No one has the right to force or coerce another.

Life is valued in Witchcraft, and it is approached with an attitude of joy and wonder, as well as a sense of humor. Life is seen as the gift of the Goddess. If suffering exists, it is not our task to reconcile ourselves to it, but to work for change.

Magic, the art of sensing and shaping the subtle, unseen forces that flow through the world, of awakening deeper levels of consciousness beyond the rational, is an element common to all traditions of Witchcraft. Craft rituals are magical rites: they stimulate an awareness of the hidden side of reality, and awaken long-forgotten powers of the human mind.

The magical element in Witchcraft is disconcerting to many people. Much of this book is devoted to a deep exploration of the real meaning of magic, but here I would like to speak to the fear I have heard expressed that Witchcraft and occultism harbor fascist tendencies or are linked to Nazism. There does seem to be evidence that Hitler and other Nazis were occultists-that is, they may have practiced some of the same techniques as others who seek to expand the horizons of the minds. Magic, like chemistry, is a set of techniques that can be put to the service of any philosophy. The rise of the Third Reich played on the civilized Germans' disillusionment with rationalism and tapped a deep longing to recover modes of experience Western culture had too long ignored. It is as if we had been trained, since infancy, never to use our left arms: The muscles have partly atrophied, but they cry out to be used. But Hitler perverted this



longing and twisted it into cruelty and horror. The Nazis were not Goddess worshippers; they denigrated women, relegating them to the position of breeding animals whose role was to produce more Aryan warriors. They were the perfect patriarchy, the ultimate warrior cult-not servants of the life force. Witchcraft has no ideal of a "superman" to be created at the expense of inferior races. In the Craft, all people are already seen as manifest gods, and differences in color, race, and customs are welcomed as signs of the myriad beauty of the Goddess. To equate Witches with Nazis because neither are Judeo-Christians and both share magical elements is like saying that swans are really scorpions because neither are horses and both have tails.

Witchcraft is not a religion of masses-of any sort. Its structure is cellular, based on covens, small groups of up to thirteen members that allow for both communal sharing and individual independence. "Solitaries," Witches who prefer to worship alone, are the exception. Covens are autonomous, free to use whatever rituals, chants and invocations they prefer. There is no set prayer book or liturgy.

Elements may change, but Craft rituals inevitably follow the same underlying patterns. The techniques of magic, which has been termed by occultist Dion Fortune "the art of changing consciousness at will," are used to create states of ecstasy, of union with the divine. They may also be used to achieve material results, such as healings, since in the Craft there is no split between spirit and matter.

Each ritual begins with the creation of a sacred space, the "casting of a circle," which establishes a temple in the heart of the forest or the center of a covener's living room. Goddess and God are then invoked or awakened within each participant and are considered to be physically present within the circle and the bodies of the worshippers. Power, the subtle force that shapes reality, is raised through chanting or dancing and may be directed through a symbol or visualization. With the raising of the cone of power comes ecstasy, which may then lead to a trance state in which visions are seen and insights gained. Food and drink are shared, and coveners "earth the power" and relax, enjoying a time of socializing. At the end, the powers invoked are dismissed, the circle is opened, and a formal return to ordinary consciousness is made.

Entrance to a coven is through an initiation, a ritual experience in which teachings are transmitted and personal growth takes place. Every initiate is considered a priestess or priest; Witchcraft is a religion of clergy.

This book is structured around those elements that I feel are constants among all the varied traditions of the Craft. Interest in Witchcraft is growing rapidly. Colleges and universities are beginning to feature courses in the Craft in their religious studies departments. Women in ever greater numbers are turning to the Goddess. There is a desperate need for material that will intelligently explain Witchcraft to non-Witches in enough depth so that both the practices and the philosophy can be understood. Because entrance to a coven is a slow and delicate process, there are many more people who want to practice Craft than there are covens to accommodate them. So this book also contains exercises and practical suggestions that can lead to a personal Craft practice. A person blessed with imagination and a moderate amount of daring would also use it as a manual to start her or his own coven. It is not, however meant to be followed slavishly; it is more like a basic musical score, on which you can improvise.

Mother Goddess is reawakening, and we can begin to recover our primal birthright, the sheer, intoxicating joy of being alive. We can open new eyes and see that there is nothing to be saved from, no struggle of life against the universe, no God outside the world to be feared and obeyed; only the Goddess, the Mother, the turning spiral that whirls us in and out of existence, whose winking eye is the pulse of being-birth, death, rebirth-whose laughter bubbles and courses through all things and who is found only through love: love of trees, of stones, of sky and clouds, of scented blossoms and thundering waves; of all that runs and flies and swims and crawls on her face; through love of ourselves; life-dissolving world-creating orgasmic love of each other; each of us unique and natural as a snowflake, each of us our own star, her Child, her lover, her beloved, her Self.