



# Craft of the Wild Witch: Green Spirituality & Natural Enchantment

By Poppy Palin



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Evocative and compelling, *Craft of the Wild Witch* reveals how to practice a form of Witchcraft that is both wild and free. Within these pages you will discover the wild Witch's way of seeing and knowing, how to discern one's suitability for the wild Witch's path, and the fundamental themes of green spirituality. Also covered in this guidebook:

- ?Rituals, chants, pathworkings, and seasonal prayers
- ?Tree meditations, spell-weaving, and trance work
- ?The Fey and other-worldly companions
- ?Herbs as helpers
- ?Other-life memories
- ?Sacred intent and safe practice



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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Poppy Palin is a qualified and experienced artist and teacher who uses her trained illustrative skills to enhance her own work and that of others. She has written and illustrated four non-fiction books on her life as a natural psychic, all of which are published by Capall Bann. She combines magical fiction and enchanting artwork in the Wild Spirit Tarot (Llewellyn 2002) and in her "Wild Spirit Trilogy" of novels which begins with The Greening. She is the author of The Craft of the Wild Witch (2004).

She recently illustrated The Hedge Witch's Way written by English author Rae Beth and will be working with her on The Hedge Witch's Oracle in 2002. Poppy's artwork regularly appears in magazines in the 'mind, body and spirit' category.

Poppy is also an experienced tattoo artist who specializes in one-off pieces to commemorate rites of passage. She currently lives in Glastonbury, England.

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#### THE MAGICAL LIFE

#### Chapter One

*Sun-warmed bark under work-rough hand,  
Dry grass swaying on the shifting sand,  
Worn-smooth stone wreathed in dew-clad strands . .*

Is it possible to live a life of natural enchantment and, if so, does that mean we are practising a wild kind of witchcraft? Wildwitchery is all about a weaving of celebration, invocation, visualisation, and our heartfelt intent into our familiar practices.

We weave while respecting and recognising the spirit inherent in each part of creation and the ebb and flow of the seasons.

The wildness gives our practice an unpredictable element, making sure we are ready even in the midst of the most tedious aspects of life, like doing the laundry or cleaning, to interact with our surroundings magically. When we work magic we weave the wild energy of everything from seasonal energy to spirit energy into our everyday deeds. It is this ongoing work that results in our life of natural enchantment. The "witchyness" comes into the equation by means of our starlight vision-our ability and will to perceive these energies-which allows us to understand and connect with all that is considered to be mysterious and hidden.

The word "craft" used in wild witchcraft is about intentionally translating that magical spark into grounded and ordinary tasks, consciously bringing enchantment into our household chores, childcare, handiwork, relationships, and leisure pursuits. Our craft ensures that we have the skill-that we know how magic works and have a familiarity with safe procedures-and the knowledge-particularly of energetic influences, spiritual attributes, and seasonal meanings-we need for the work we will be doing. It is true that spellcraft can be practised under a full moon in robes but it can also be

worked whilst baking bread, shelling peas, watering plants, combing hair, or painting a room. A wildwitch can create formal spells in a controlled way but chooses to do so not as an isolated, occasional act but as a part of an integrated magical life in which every thought or deed can become an act of devotion or enchantment. The key is to see the potential for each moment to be magical and each act to be a sacred experience.

With complete commitment, awareness, and a sense of fulfilling a vital role in our modern world, a wildwitch's whole life can become an unfolding, ongoing spirit song of dedication to healing, harmony, and wholeness. Wild witchcraft is, therefore, not only something that we practice when the occasion calls for it but something that we live from minute to minute. Because of this, there are no ordinary, dull moments, only a seamless flow, a merging of magic into life.

### Maintain Balance

Wild witchcraft is a balance of Earthly (manifest) appreciation and spiritual (ethereal) understanding; an interaction that is both simple and effective. We are all souls that need to develop and grow, but we are also humans that need to find meaning in life. If we are interested in the wild craft we should first consider if our souls are energetically compatible with a path that empowers through a love for the Earth and that works with the waxing and waning tides of life for magical, healing purposes. This is but one of many ways to walk toward truth. The wild way will resonate profoundly with us if we are willing to commit to a process that not only strengthens and nurtures us as spiritual beings but also gives us an opportunity to act for the environment and our fellow creatures in an active, physical sense. It is a way to live well.

It is important that we can feel comfortable with the idea that this balance exists in the outside world and is found within us; we are a balance of the eternal and the corporeal. Even though the corporeal seems more solid at this moment, it is actually the more transient of the two expressions; souls last beyond a lifetime whereas bodies do not! For wildwitches, there can be no separation between ourselves and the rest of creation; likewise, there can be no separation between the inner and outer expression of a wildwitch's own self. One always affects the other. Consequently, we will work from the perspective of the interconnectedness of all creation, with ourselves as valuable (although not superior) parts of it. To acknowledge the life force in ourselves and all fellow beings on a daily basis is known as an Earth-honouring green spirituality.

What we know to be physical and what we understand to be spiritual is the basis to spellweaving, green spirituality, and wild witchery. We respect the differences between the physical and the spiritual levels of existence while realising that they cannot be separated and defined in a black and white sense; they are interwoven, interdependent aspects of being. Our lives can glow with the interplay of fixed and mutable energies, the solid and ethereal realities that make up the weft and warp of the wholeness of existence. Our role as wildwitches is to weave the thread back and forth between the levels of being for the purpose of magical transformation and to note the patterns, textures, and hues that reveal themselves to us in this process.

### Earthwalk

We may find that the role of the wildwitch and our own nature are interlinked, entwined and bound by promises made long ago or by understandings gained in the time before time. With this possibility, we are acknowledging our existence as both a

temporal and temporary human being and as an eternal spiritual essence finding human expression. Consequently, it may seem entirely natural to weave magical understanding into the very fabric of our daily existence, to become an enchanter or enchantress, and to see ourselves as actively being enchantment. Indeed, our wild craft requires such commitment. By applying such dedication we will be putting both human heart and eternal soul into our wild craft for the duration of this incarnate life. And, perhaps, beyond.

We shall refer to the duration of our present incarnation as the "Earthwalk." When balancing the manifest and ethereal, it is important to end the separation between human existence on this planet and our generous host, Earth Mother. Our Earthwalk suggests a specific partnership, a relationship between manifest beings and Earth, which is a complex living organism that chooses to support the continued existence of all physical beings. The whole ethos of walking as a wildwitch revolves around this end to apartness; it is vital that we state both verbally and symbolically, as often as we can, without contrivance, how we honour our connection to the planet Earth.

### Seeing and Knowing

In order to truly lead a balanced way we must awaken our starlight vision, which we briefly mentioned in the introduction. To do this, we must combine intuiting and feeling (sensing the ethereal) with education and hands-on doing (practical, manifest application). Once again, to sense the ethereal is "seeing" and to understand the ethereal is "knowing." Therefore we could say that, as wildwitches, we continually exercise the seeing, the knowing, and the physical magical practices we learn by studying the wild craft. The physical magical practices include working with healing herbs, utilising symbolic objects, and practising divination with specific tools. It is important to remember that there should always be an appreciation of both the physical presence and the unseen resonance of all that we do.

One such way wildwitches work in perfect balance with the seen and unseen is by making the divisions between the nebulous and the solid less clear. We can do this by working with pure sound, scent, and colour in our magic, or by using word sounds and patterns in chant. The most common of these methods is daily enchantment. Wild enchantment relies on spoken affirmation and repetitive rhyme, hence the "chant" in enchantment, meaning to use verbal incantation for magical purposes. We may also use simple statements for affirmation of our intent at any given stage during our wild witchcraft. Throughout this book there will be adages in quotations that may help us to focus on and reaffirm our more general and universal intent as wildwitches. The first of these sums up what we have talked about above: "We mend, tend, and blend."

Our desire to blend the realms of existence, both the widely considered "seen" (manifest) and intentionally or inadvertently "unseen" (ethereal/spiritual), ever closer together is for the good of our own magical development, but will ultimately ripple out to benefit the whole of creation, bringing greater balance and harmony into daily life. In other words, as we know ourselves to be living representatives of the natural way-holding within us the same flame of life force that animates the birds and the rivers, the distant star and the grain of sand, the millionaire and the beggar-we understand that whatever we do to ourselves applies to all of creation by direct association. We know that we can no longer see pollution or destruction as "externals" because they may be caused by us. By healing our own ailments through inner work and magical practice, we

can reflect this rebalancing and healing outward and onward. The maxim "As within, so without" is relevant here as it means that what we find to be true and valid within the microcosm of our own lives is inevitably reflected as a universal principle, and vice versa, with beautiful simple symmetry.

Also, what wildwitches acknowledge to be authentic and valid in a spiritual sense becomes reality in the manifest levels, each aspect feeds the other. By having heartfelt faith in the connection between our own self and the universal whole of creation, we draw the two aspects ever closer into balance. This is the basis of wild magic. Our acts of faith, which sparkle with raw elemental energy, are woven into the tides of life and the seasons of the natural world. We blend our seeing with the knowledge of what we must physically do and then all of our spells and prayers are focused with this understanding as a basis. When we have faith in our truth-when we feel it and give it our energy, and use our practical knowledge and skill to enhance it-then it becomes a truth in the world. Just as the preparation and cooking of a soup can be dedicated to our work and infused with intent, so can we act simply and focus powerfully to bring about positive change in a myriad of other creative ways.

#### For the Good of the All

Acknowledging the wildwitch's ability to bring about manifest magical change is a liberating experience but also a responsibility to be taken very seriously as it could easily be misused. "For the good of the All" (the "All" being all encompassing, all that is) must always be our primary motivation. In a spiritual way with no absolutes in terms of tenets, this one heartfelt plea serves as an inspirational principle to work by. To understand what may be for the good of the All, we always need to first consult with our companion spirits in a safe astral place. We will discuss companions and astral place in detail later. For now, it is important to know that our companion spirits can give us "the overview" (the bigger picture or wider perspective of existence). This allows us to look beyond our own human dilemmas and enables us to witness the interconnectedness of all that is seen and unseen. It is a gift bestowed on us by the spirits so that we may see how our actions affect the whole and how the whole affects us. In our own search, we also aim to one day see all of humanity look beyond to the interconnectedness that currently awaits recognition.

To many witches this honourable aspiration is revealed in a popular maxim: "And it harm none." There is something to be said about this phrase. Although its intentions are perfectly valid, it is sometimes inevitable that someone will consider themselves hurt in the process of change that is for a greater good. The whole ethos is never to deliberately hurt anyone or anything, but it is realistic to acknowledge that to work for the highest benefit of creation we must sometimes put a few noses out of joint. It must be understood that we never would do this with a malicious intent. It is perfectly possible that an oil company could consider itself hard done by if we all switched to using bicycles and woodburning stoves tomorrow, yet our intention would be to help Mother Earth, not to harm the individuals of the company. As we are all connected, some repercussions may be considered inescapable.

Perhaps it is more appropriate to think of an environmental adage: "Think globally, act locally." With this in mind, we can specifically acknowledge how we can effect change in the wider world with our homespun gifts of green magic. It all begins with

us and our small yet potent gestures; the stronger our belief in our connection to the All, the more we are able to influence it. This faith in the interconnectedness of all that is seen and unseen also strengthens us. How can we not be strong? We are directly linked to the same life force of vast and enigmatic planets, cascading waterfalls, and lions bringing down their prey on sun-baked savannahs. We acknowledge elemental power and therefore acknowledge the power within our own wild self.

Because of our deep personal understanding and experience of the interconnectedness of all life, the harder it becomes for us to separate out our witch time-the time we put aside for inner work, spellweaving, or divination-from the rest of daily existence. The holistic viewpoint attained in wild witchcraft makes it nigh on impossible to act as someone who compartmentalises their life into "witchy" and "nonwitchy" activity. Unless we weave our beliefs and creative magic into all that we do, we are not living well, nor are we walking our truth as wildwitches. In other words, wild witchcraft is not just something that we do but something that we are. The wild way gives us the insight and ability to weave spells by wish and will, with love and care.

### The Greening

The wild way also offers an opportunity for us to work as otherworldly emissaries. Our craft prepares us to go out on a limb to bring the beauty and inspiration of the unseen levels long since hidden from the majority of human eyes into manifest existence. If we are prepared to take the first steps on the wild path, then we need to be committed to this idea that the "lost" worlds, the enchanted realms that once were much closer to the human experience, can be brought back into our level of perception. We are speaking here of the lost worlds of Faery. Reweaving the shining magic of the Faery folk (Fey) into our own more basic mode of operation is a life's work. We may see little reward in terms of money or kudos for this work but it will generate untold wealth and satisfaction. Our work will enrich and empower us on far deeper levels than financial gain or social praise. Like all ways of the wild craft, reweaving Fey magic is a daily experience. Even though it is a life's work, it cannot just be referred to on high days and holidays. It gives definition and form to all our days and colours our experience of the world.

On a wildwitch's path this work is the "Greening," meaning to bring magic back to life with the energy of verdant resurgence, which may be found in the Fey or unseen realms. Even though these realms are hidden from the sight of most mortals, the wildwitch can experience them safely as an intermediary between them and the far denser realm that we inhabit from day to day. We may journey in a trance state to these realms and bring to light the enchantments found in our otherworldly interactions, reintroducing the glorious magics of mythic folktales into the modern world. We embark on such a trance journey so that we may again dance with dragons and dally with colourful capering minstrels for the sake of inspiration and pure joy. Through such a trance journey, we may delve into the greenwood of our unfettered imagination and, led by the luminous, wonderfully mischievous sprites of our childhood dreaming, access the living realms that surround us in full colour, shimmer with vibrant energy, and that are hidden from us only because of our own unwillingness to acknowledge anything that isn't immediate, solid, and accepted as the norm.

The Greening is therefore an emotive metaphor for a more wholesome, natural, and infinitely more affecting way of experiencing life. It is important that the concept

moves us as potential wildwitches. When this feeling is coupled with motivation, our trained ability to focus our will, and our understanding of interconnectedness, then we have the basis for a real living way, a way that empowers us while ensuring we are both responsible and respectful.

### Fey Spirits

Through interaction with Fey spirits we are filled by their simple grace and can be representatives of their energies, sparking with their latent power. We may make the veil between the unseen levels and the twenty-first-century world more transparent so that there may once again be peace, harmony, and vibrant creativity on the land. The more we interact with the Fey the more this process will flow into existence. The possibility of a Greening for Mother Earth and all of her denizens-be they otherworldly, Fey, or flesh and blood, the leafy-boughed and mineral-moulded alike-becomes as real as we envision it to be. Our envisioning, be it part of a daydream or a trance journey, is at the root of our power. To envision is to access soul imagery for the purpose of greater knowledge and deeper understanding. When we envision, we enliven our dreams and give birth to bright imaginings. We also see more than meets the human eye, we look into the beyond.

Uniting the elemental realms of the Fey with the manifest levels of humanity serves the purpose of healing Mother Earth especially well as the Fey are nature personified, subtle yet influential and radiant beyond measure or reason. However, to say that Fey folk are "nature spirits" is to limit them to only one guise. They actually came to Earth, poetically speaking, on "the backs of the stars" in a time before human domination of the planet. Rich in paradox and glamorous beyond our human knowing, they defy any attempt to label or define them. They are generally happy to guide us if we accept them for the faces that they choose to show to us, and happy to lead us if we are not vigilant. The Fey are pure natural energy and only take form for our human benefit as we need a physical shape to recognise them. They can pluck imagery out of the collective human consciousness and present themselves in the standard pointed cap and boots of our fairytales. It suits their nature to "dress up" in the form of red-capped pixies and willowy, watery sprites. They love to entertain, bemuse, and sometimes cause alarm by the ever-shifting guises they choose to wear for us.

The Fey are both the star-born Shining Ones and the Children of the Earth's Greening. They are incredibly powerful and numinous yet innocent, playful, and full of earthy humour. To help bring back their magic is to help keep Earth alive and thriving.

### Mother Earth

Working with the Fey is but one resource we have to help bring about the Greening. Perhaps first we can acknowledge the living land and all her inhabitants as allies in the work. We share a common aim.

Although we may not always have a spiritual home on this planet and we too may have a soul birthplace in the stars, we have chosen to be present for an Earthwalk now at a time when we are needed here. How are we needed? Well, not only to bring about the Greening, a spiritual resurgence of beauty and enchantment to replace the pall of destructive greed that endeavours to grip the planet, but also to work in a more physical way by recycling, gardening organic food, and campaigning for more ethical treatment of animals, people, and the land. All of these acts, from writing a letter of protest



to investing time and energy in an allotment of land, can be imbued with magical intent. Every positive gesture has the potential to become a spell. When we envision a healed Earth and work toward that outcome, weaving our imagination and our actions together with magical intent, we practice a wild craft.

Mother Earth deserves willing representatives prepared to champion her cause on all levels; all pertinent green issues can be woven into our craft. Therefore, it is central to our wild work to be able to make a sincere and deeply felt pledge to support Mother Earth, in any way we can. Put most simply, we can show our intent by walking gently on her, with affection and respect, and acknowledging her as a beneficent and immensely powerful being in her own right. To clarify, she does not need our healing, she goes through her own cycles of growth and dying and may choose to shrug us off her verdant shoulders, like fleas off the back of a dog, at any time. However, we are her guests at this time. Rather than being fatalistic and selfish, it is far more appropriate to respond to our generous host with kindness and caring.

#### Trance Journey

We just briefly mentioned trance journeys in our discussion on the Greening. We spoke of travelling to meet the Fey and, indeed, our trance journeys are the most valuable way to interact with the unseen levels of being. We achieve this by entering a light meditative state. Soon we will look at our wild journeys more closely.

A trance journey is the most obvious expression of a wildwitches inner work. It is not a physical outward journey but a journey into deeper inner mystery. That deep mystery within leads us to all that is immanent. We can specifically focus inward on the purpose of our Earthly level of existence. We can then journey to bring about desired change in the manifest world, for what we do in the inner realms is reflected in the world and vice versa. "As within, so without."

Generally, we trance journey in order to converse with spirit companions safely, meet with our animal helpers, call up troublesome presences to be banished, and to find inspiration and information pertaining to our craft.

We will learn specific reasons to trance journey soon. For now it is important to understand that when we journey we enter another way of being. The places we journey to are very different than ordinary reality. As with all aspects of wild witchery it is the intent and symbolism we use manifestly that helps us to journey to otherworldly places.

#### Wild and Alive

Wild witchcraft gives life lustre and meaning; it is never an obligation or something that we turn to only when we feel in need of a boost, support, or entertainment. One cannot contain the migration of birds in a box, nor can we grow healthy sunflowers in a cupboard. All things need space to spread their wings and the conditions for growth. Our craft is a living thing in itself, a never-ending ramble through the wildwood of our being, a fascinating exploration, a learning curve. Therefore it cannot be put away, artificially contained, or given sporadic stimulus.

Our craft is alive when it is expressed on a train journey as we create a spontaneous, repetitive, healing chant in our minds for the owners of the passing farmsteads. Our

intent for the chant may be to cease chemical spray use on the crops for the better health of the All. The rhythm of the train forms the measure of the chant. It is also expressed when we buy a paper bag full of wonderfully irregular and muddy parsnips at the local organic market whilst making a heartfelt plea: "As we support the need for wholefood with our purchase, so may all food be uncontaminated again for the sake of the Mother and all her children." Each apparently average moment has magical potential within it; yet, it is also expressed at the dark moon when we sit in deliberate contemplation, weaving a preplanned spell to banish our fears with paper and pen, fire and water. Whether we act spontaneously with sacred intent or whether we plan a more formal rite, the magic exists just the same.

To be a practising wildwitch one must live the life. This cannot be stressed enough. To reduce the way to a handful of random acts, however well our intentions may be, is the equivalent of damming a healthy freshwater stream and working with a trickle rather than a steady musical flow. We can still drink the water, and it will still refresh us for a time, but the energy it contains has been lessened and the life it supports has been restricted.

#### Religion or Spiritual Way?

Wild witchcraft is not a religion. Religious ways hold seekers within preordained human frameworks. Wild witchcraft aims to free, not restrict, individuals and the whole. As with all things in the wild craft, as in nature, there are cycles and spirals linking all in a nonhierarchical, magical continuum. Even the root of the Latin word *religare* (religion) means "to tie" and therefore it is wholly inappropriate for a way that claims to be unrestrictive.

As wildwitches we do not wish to subscribe to a way that makes us feel omnipotent or dominant, nor do we desire to belong to a chosen clique above the rest of society (or above other magical spiritweavers who do not share our qualifications or ideology).

Being a wildwitch is not about "power over" or even solely "power within," but is more like being a part of a "power circuit," where everything involved is equally important and we are acting as receivers and transmitters while engaging in the vital energetic process of interaction and exchange.

As wildwitches it is important that we know ourselves and are honest about our own inclinations. The reason we do this is not to become self-obsessed or to consider ourselves special or exalted, rather to be better able as healed, whole beings to do what needs to be done at this time, for the good of the All. Therefore, we cannot package our craft up and get it out on Sunday evenings, the rest of the week reverting to people who are impervious to subtle energies. We are either open and connected, or resistant and unready to engage. Unlike other practices, it will not satisfy us to perform one act of worship, or attend one ceremony per week.

To some, even having a title such as "wildwitch" may seem separatist and elitist. However, titles are important in our current stage of evolution because as humans we need some sense of who we are and what we do. For example, labels-like plumbers, cakemakers, and dentists-can be useful to identify those we can approach with a problem or need. These terms do not describe who people really are, but only reveal the manner in which they choose to express their skills and make a living in the world.

It would be a little strange to suggest that someone had the soul of a plumber, but by this title we can acknowledge a human skill. To have an awareness of the difference between what we do in the manifest sense and who we are internally and eternally is important. What we do in the world is not the sum total of who we are as it denies a spiritual level to being incarnate. However, what we do in the world may well reflect who we are inside if we have chosen our career or vocation well. Perhaps in time we will feel no need to call ourselves anything, simply being on the path, openly and with grace, will be enough.

#### Soul Nature

It is more appropriate to view ourselves on a personal path than to think of ourselves following an already existing path designed by a pre-existing religion. With this in mind, the title "wildwitch" may actually be more than a temporary Earth title. For some of us, it may be a soul label. If this is the case, the witchcraft we practice will reflect our soul nature. When we practice witchery without applying ourselves, body and soul, we are simply using learned skills.

At the same time, to practice a sincere and natural form of wild witchcraft is no more impressive than practising good dentistry and it is certainly just as useful, even if mainstream society hasn't recognised this yet. It will be a marvellous day when those with the seeing and the knowing are considered as vital to a healthy society as all the healthcare professionals, shoemakers, farmers, and so on. Without actively courting acceptance and craving respectability, we can all do our bit to work toward this day by being as down-to-earth (as befits our practice) and as open as possible. Although we often work alone and in secret, dealing directly with the eternal mysteries, we need not foster drama that can often lead to what we do as being sensationalised as some dark art or trivialised as pantomime. By being ourselves, true to our magical soul nature, we can be revealed as balanced members of a society that desperately needs what we have to offer.

At present, we live in testing times-the spiritual or unseen dimension has been either shunned in favour of immediate material gain or buried under layer upon layer of human fear, need, and greed. Humanity is very adept at couching a spiritual message in dogma, gilding it with a veneer of superiority, and layering on pomp and ceremony, all of which obscures the original meaning. When the material overshadows the spiritual it is easy for all ethereal truth to get lost in the desire to possess, dominate, and control information in a very temporary human sense. Hence, truth becomes religion, yet another monolithic Earthly structure that removes us from experiencing and witnessing the Otherworlds for ourselves at a deep personal level. As wildwitches we stay true to our very personal and independent soul nature despite the clashing fundamentalist approaches to spirituality that the churches and society pressure us with on a regular basis.

#### Spiritual Way

As we have just explained, the wildwitch's soul is driven by instinct and guided by selfknowledge, personal spiritual connection, and hands-on experience, whereas religious people tend to operate within the preordained perimeters of a third party's making. To follow such a religion, one does not need to have direct experience of the central character or theme. In wild witchcraft there are no central characters in terms of figures to

be worshipped, only spirits that are encountered in very personal situations and with whom we have committed and intimate relationships.

It is all too often assumed that by saying we have a spiritual impulse we mean we have a religious allegiance; it is entirely possible for us, as individuals with a strong sense of conscience and a positive internal morality, to self-regulate our own experience of what is holy. It seems ludicrous to suggest that all apple trees should look to one authority for commandments on how they should grow and it is similarly unnecessary for the wildwitch to need such a restrictive code to live by. To have faith in the cycles of nature, in ourselves, in the guiding spirits, and in the universal energies is all we need to walk along our wild spiritual way.

This is not to say that we should revile or undermine other paths that claim religious status, for any road may take us a little closer to truth. The healing and nurturing aspects of all religious disciplines must surely be beneficial and acknowledgement of spirit, in any form, is certainly worthwhile. However, the divisive and dogmatic approaches of religious groups may be seen as entirely unhelpful in a world already burdened with ideas about supremacy and dominance. Further segregation, based in non-negotiable doctrine, is unnecessary in our age. Such beliefs lead to further suspicion, separation, and violent conflict and are entirely in opposition to the wildwitch's firsthand spiritual approach, which favours unity and peace whilst encouraging freedom of expression.

This is yet another reason why it is important to relate to our self-imposed labels with a sense of the poetic rather than with a need to be marked out as part of a regulated body or clan that has a need to be acknowledged as remarkable, absolute, or correct.

To be empowered we do not need to be elevated or set apart. It is an acknowledgement of ourselves as vibrant and worthwhile cells in a functioning whole that is more desirable. Wildwitches see themselves as a part of creation, fulfilling a natural role-one more pure, true note in the symphony of life-no more and no less than this. If we know who we are in soul terms then we can walk our wild way more effectively within this whole.

### Nonconformist of Yesterday

Some feel that it is important to remember that there is an age-old enmity between a certain monotheistic religion and witchcraft in general, in terms of the Western world. This is due to the past subjugation, ill treatment, and murder in the Middle Ages of anyone who did not conform to "the one true way" of medieval Catholicism and post-Reformation puritanical Protestant behaviours. Conforming meant sublimation of the personal will to the men who controlled both church and state, on pain of death. Because of the unpleasant nature of this period of history, it is easy for most people to get carried away with righteous passion and indignation, believing that the desire to eradicate the influence of witchcraft, and all subsequent crimes against those accused as witches, were validated because of the genuine evilness of the craft. On the other hand, when we know witchcraft is not inherently evil, it is easy to be intolerant of the organised religions that once sought to exterminate fellow magical practitioners and to be resentful, if not downright hostile, toward Christianity in general.

For vast swathes of our society today, the medieval woodcut imagery of the menacing hook-nosed harridan with her broomstick and strange familiar spirit is still how witches are perceived. The propaganda of the emotive witch hunts that occurred in the Middle Ages is so influential that witches are still frequently dismissed as ludicrous, hideous figures with no relevance to real modern life. One may also detect a frisson of uneasy fear at their mention. Clearly this image has no correlation to the thousands of people who claim to practice a form of witchery today. And it probably had no real bearing on those who practised a form of nature spirituality in the past. So were those accused of witchery in those terrible times really witches at all?

Usually, those branded as witches were simply nonconformists. To be a nonconformist was a crime punishable by degradation at best, and torture, hanging, or burning at worst. This was legalised via the Papal Bull of 1484, which sanctioned "inquiry" based on the wholly abhorrent *Malleus Maleficarum*. This is a book named "Hammer of the Witches," but aimed to hammer anyone who was not orthodox, not in active support of the church, or any who were considered to be religious heretics or antisocial.

The persecutions of the Middle Ages were just as frequently about money, power, and misogynistic hatred as they were about any green-spirited or folk beliefs among the populace. It was often the widow or lone, elderly woman sitting on some property, which a greedy landowner coveted, who met an untimely demise; it could easily have been the wife that talked back to her husband or failed to bear a healthy child; or the poet, the fool, or the dissident. To keep the people poor, both in terms of knowledge and influence, and to keep the women subservient and without hope, dependent spiritually as well as financially, were the core aims.

As the majority of those practising any form of folk art from midwifery to herbalism were poor, uneducated, and by and large women, there are no real written records of just who was doing what for us to consult. In fact, the majority of what was considered to be "solid documentary evidence" used to label one as a witch was actually derived from the sensationalist, blatantly falsified reports written by those who sought to eliminate witchcraft. These reports were accepted as official despite the obvious prejudices at work. Although we can observe remnants of folk customs and pagan ways in most regions today, witch hunts were widespread, resulting in precious little evidence of the real day-to-day practices and beliefs of the so-called witches of the past whom we associate with nature-based celebrations.

There have always been those who walk between the worlds, the healers and seers going quietly about their gentle arts, living simple, magical lives in close harmony with the land and serving the community in unique and inspiring ways. In the Middle Ages, these people may have been no part of an organised witch cult; perhaps they had never even seen another magical practitioner save their own hereditary teacher. We will never know for sure. What we do know, is that they were picked off, one by one, thousands of them, and all because they failed to fulfil a social, economic, or ethical criteria set by the all-powerful church and state.

And what of those folk who did practice their earthy witchery? Can we claim to have a direct knowledge of their spiritual ethos? Again, the truth is lost to us as written records are not forthcoming. Using guesswork, it is probable that the primary sort of

witchcraft practised was hereditary, the oral tradition serving as a means of recording and transmitting; solitary, due to the isolated nature of many country dwellers; and steeped in the local lore of the area, as most poor folk had little opportunity to travel far beyond the nearest village. Their festivals and celebrations would have been guided by intuition and continual observance of nature's shifting patterns, as there would have been little reliance on calendars and clocks to regulate the annual high and holy days. These hereditary witches would independently work their craft by discovering the qualities of a particular full moon, reading omens, and listening to inner voices in equal measure and with no hard and fast rules, as flexible yet structured as nature herself.

#### Nonconformist of Today

Perhaps as wildwitches we would recognise the lilting and deeply experiential craft of our ancestors as akin to our own. But our frames of reference are so vastly different-we cannot pretend to come from an age without cars, mass market books, the Internet, and specialist shops-that it is stretching the definition of tradition to say that we have a direct lineage from rural practitioners of the Middle Ages and earlier. Therefore, to take up a hereditary crusade on their behalf seems somewhat presumptuous, as who knows what they would make of our ways today.

We can only empathise with the plight of those who died for their beliefs, whatever they may have been, remember them as our brave ancestors, hopefully honour them in our own earth-based practices, and strive to ensure that freedom of spiritual expression is the norm for future generations. This includes showing tolerance of those who choose to follow monotheistic religious paths. Harboured any resentments about incomprehensible massacring at this stage in our journey will not serve our need to bring deeper understanding, concord, and equanimity.

The very people making accusations of witchcraft in the Middle Ages were often as ignorant and fearful as those arrested for their real, or more often imagined, crimes against the church. It was a time of great confusion, mistrust, and debilitating panic.

The prevailing air of hysteria probably meant that as long as someone else was being accused, another was safe, and this surely must have led to spurious accusations in order to be left alone. The doctrine of the dominant religion of the time was steeped in images of torment and we can only assume that it was a dreadful climate to exist in, from any perspective. It is easy to revile those who sought to warp the spiritual truths of their religion in order to inflict a reign of terror, yet, hard as it may be to comprehend, some of those involved believed passionately that they were doing the right thing.

Within their frame of reference they were acting out of love and saving the souls of those they murdered by purifying the bodies with fire. It was believed that by burning the bodies of the sinful, the souls of those sinners would be acceptable before God.

One of the most beautiful tenets of true Christian belief, as taught by Jesus, is to have compassion for an adversary. Perhaps it would be beneficial for us to express this by feeling an immense pity, as well as the lingering shock and distaste, for those who acted in a brutal fashion during the witch hunts. If we can be gentle with the mistakes and oversights of others then we are better equipped to know how not to do things in our personal lives as well as how to proceed on our Earthwalk with love and forgiveness. Why is it important to look at this issue? Well, it always crops up in our explorations

of what it means to use the label "witch" and how we feel about the idea of religion and religious allegiance. We are bound to encounter people who wish to bear grudges and have enemies and so it is valid for us, as fledgling wildwitches, to see how we feel about the issue. When our choice to walk the wild way is questioned, it is for us not to rally against such religious structures, rather to explain that we are concerned for the world in terms of spiritual nourishment and that we are simply doing our best to make sure our own lives reflect the relevant principles we hold dear. To reflect on our common goals and similarities and to focus on how we wish to develop and grow does far more to strengthen our connections to the All than to continue dwelling on what is wrong with another's way of seeing the world.

If we are sure of our purpose as spiritweavers and fulfilled by our work as wildwitches, then we have precious little need to focus on thoughts of revenge or hate. Also, if we have a healthy respect for our own abilities, we can recognise that our negative thoughts, if given enough of our energy, can influence the web of life around us and cause harm. Our aim is never to use our abilities for selfish, wanton, greedy, destructive, or intrusive ends. A tall order perhaps but something to aspire to in a realistic way. To spread a positive spiritual regard that fosters joyful renewal for the one we have most respect for, Mother Earth, and all her children is our primary concern. Without her, we could not have an Earthwalk in order to learn, grow, and experience. Her wellbeing must be placed at the heart of all our work. Therefore we may never practice cursing, ill wishing, or harmful "hexing" as to hurt even one of her inhabitants is to act against her and to introduce yet more angry, bitter, and vindictive energy into a world overcrowded with such detritus. It would go against all we hold dear. In the same way we know we are reflections of the All, so do we acknowledge every other living being as such. For example, we may be afraid of spiders but if we accept that they are divine expressions walking in a different way to us, then we cannot simply obliterate them for our own sake. Nor can we curse them for offending us. It is a huge responsibility, a lifechanging realisation, but once we have fully taken on board that in effect whatever we do to any part of the All, we do to ourselves, we begin to live well.

### Wild Solitude

Finally, we will look at our practice compared to other witchcraft. The wild practitioner is a solitary one. This is to say we do not work with other humans but in essence we are never alone in our craft for we work with spirits and the forces of nature. This is not due to any prejudice toward covens-an integral part to most witchcraft-as they are certainly places to gain much in the way of magical support and energetic input, yet the intrinsic nature of those of us drawn to wild witchcraft dictates that we would find it to be restrictive to contain our free-flowing way of relating-which is based in a very individual experience of the sacred-within a structured group situation. Indeed, the whole idea of structure may cause us wildwitches a few problems, being that generally we feel more comfortable with spontaneity and accessibility, and prefer to practice the craft at any time the mood comes upon us.

The structure found within covens may even remind us of the religious ways that we discussed earlier. In fact, within the coven structure there are official roles, most notably the high priestess and priest who have earned the right, through experience and application, to act as spokesmen at any rite. They are taking on the responsibility to channel divine energies on behalf of their group, which consists of people who act

as support for this sacred action. In wild witchcraft this would not be appropriate as personal and direct interaction with energies is essential and to have anyone else, no matter how knowledgeable or capable, acting as a channel on our behalf would seem entirely frustrating and completely unnecessary.

Obviously within the coven there are levels of operation and these restrict individuals from moving beyond a certain grade of responsibility, even when one has proven to be of a sufficiently high standard at the work. When we work alone there has to be a great deal of self-regulation and self-knowledge and direct communion with companion spirits, who will guide our judgements, in order for us to perform at suitable levels. Indeed, wild witchcraft as a solitary experiential pursuit requires a certain amount of falling down on the job, at least at first. But again, the nature of those who deeply wish to practice a solitary, earthy, and wholly unrehearsed craft will be those who enjoy hands-on learning and who are motivated and disciplined enough to carry it out with success, and perhaps even with a certain degree of style.

So it is that the wild craft is largely practised alone or with one or two like-minded people who may come together informally to celebrate particular occasions or to mark the seasonal cycles. Anything other than this complicates what is essentially an informal way of being and not a ritualistic manifestation of spiritual belief. The very simplicity of this unpretentious craft is more akin to embroidery than religious ceremony; one needs to be focused on the act with a certain degree of skill and a developed sense of what makes a beautiful piece of work. It is a calling, an art, and a heartfelt way that can never be explored or expressed adequately in the formal setting that any group requires. Coven witchery is important in its own right but it is not what this work is about.

We may not adhere to a religion or the structure found in covens, preferring a gently unfolding way based in personal experience, but we need not condemn those who do. That is not the intent behind our discussion on religion or religious people. As long as we seek what is holy and enduring, searching for truth and union within the heart of our being, then we will find it in a way that is appropriate for us at this time.

#### Worship or Reverence?

Wild witchcraft is centred in our daily experience of the sacred. It is a continuous honouring of life and the divine life-force energy that animates each aspect of being. Yet with this ongoing sense of interaction, with energy that is eminent and imminent, do we need to worship? Can we praise creation by living magical lives or do we need to use a more formal manner in reference to a deity?

As wildwitches following a spiritual way we have a profound respect for the universal energies, Earth powers, spirit companions, and archetypal beings we encounter, but we do not deify them. Nor do we feel the need to be overly deferential or sycophantic in their presence. To encounter such spirits in an honest, earthy way we only need be awe-inspired and fired with a passion that burns deep in the very root of us. There is a real sense of working with these forces of nature as supportive partners rather than needing to placate, beseech, or overtly adore them as is customary in the devotee-godhead relationship. Respect is the key rather than out and out obedience as there is no need to feel subservient or to petition for favours if we honestly regard ourselves as functioning, valued, and unique parts of an integrated whole. We can feel empowered



by our own sense of connection and by our own understanding of the dance of life rather than relying on a distant and unbalanced relationship that views people as needing to placate and appease a deity in order to get by in life.

### Beyond Worship

We measure our relationship with the divine not in terms of religious rites but in terms of how much praise and acknowledgement we find within us at any given moment. It is a spontaneous and immediate response, an integral part of our craft. And the wild craft we are discussing is not Wicca, which is often taken as the only form of modern witchcraft. In Wicca there are God and Goddess forms to be worshipped. Having a Goddess of equal if not superior power to a God in modern Wiccan belief obviously helps those long conditioned by patriarchy to overcome a limiting, unbalanced world view. Yet, perhaps we can celebrate the male and female principles and energies without deifying them. As wildwitches, balance and egalitarianism is the aim. This said, in wild witchcraft there are no Gods or Goddesses; instead, such great beings are archetypes, representatives of universal principles in human form, beings who once again deserve to be respected and acknowledged. They are unique and powerful spiritual essences who can be called upon to shed light on specific issues for us.

### Reverence for All

As wildwitches, we see each tiny scuttling beetle and each perfect yet vulnerable daisy as beautiful, individual expressions of life-force energy, just as we see ourselves. If we are expressions of this energy then we are a part of it, as is the greatest and the smallest created being. We all share the same essence as the Creator, or the source energy of life. We are all expressions of the divine. It is hard to perceive a separate deity figure when this is your perspective.

A wildwitch would find it difficult to build a hierarchy based on one aspect of creation being better than another. Who may equate the attributes of a wren to those of a mountain and judge one lacking? Are both not successful, succinct ways of revealing the sacred? With this in our hearts, we find no real need to elevate any one spiritual being above ourselves. Nor do we hold our own being in higher importance than any other. It is a truly egalitarian way, one built on the understanding that we are all vital strands in the weaving, serving an express purpose; we are complementing and supporting each other as teachers, guardians, and companions on this life journey.

There is an exchange of ideas and energies that arises from this way of relating. It means that we both give and receive openly and do not use any other being as a "resource," a thing to be tapped into at will to enhance learning. Nor do we surrender our autonomy or deny the responsibility we have as sentient beings. When we engage on this level, we have access to previously inaccessible information; the powerful unseen beings and elemental forces freely offer their spiritual guidance. And what do they receive in return? Not worship but our promise, as fellow beings, that we will express their will, their way, and their wisdom to the world. We are incarnate and they are not. We can make manifest change while they are not able to express themselves in a way considered substantial. We have the means of making a difference while on Earth whilst they may be given little credence in the modern frame of reference. Yet for all the disregard they are accustomed to experiencing in human realms, they have that which is most valuable to us: greater access to truths, to that which is hidden from our

mortal eyes at present. They are once removed from this dense level of being and consequently become our link to the mysteries beyond the mist of human vision. They have the overview.

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