

The birth of religions: Wicca

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Introduction

Paganism is considered to be one of the fastest growing religions groupings in Britain and the USA (ref). What does this growth tell us about the changes in these societies and how spiritual needs are met? A modern form of Witchcraft, "Wicca", is one such Pagan path that is followed in Britain by both solo practitioners, "Hedge-witches", and by groups, "Covens". It is a secretive, initiatory tradition with all members considered part of a wider Priesthood. This paper outlines the development of Wicca in order to demonstrate the following central themes: how spiritual needs are incorporated into a religious practice; how the wider cultures of the societies in which the religion is formed affects what it becomes.

There is a powerful something in the Universe, William James (date) termed it "something more", this "something more" when outside of people it is the province of theology; but where this "something more" is in people, it is called spirituality and the province of Transpersonal psychology. Spirituality is different from religion: spirituality is felt and experienced by the individual, religion is institutionalized and formalized, and it is based on faith- what other people believe or have believed. This distinction is increasingly recognized as people make firm statements that they are spiritual, but not religious.

Religions are the socially constructed containers and conduits for spirituality. They can be, as Marx (date) suggested, the opium of the masses; with the congregation following faithfully the priesthood of whatever denomination as the men who are running the show, and they are usually men. This may indeed be about earthly, material power. But can a materialist account give a full explanation for the foundation of religions? Conversely, can accounts of religions that express the inevitability of the revelation of a deity's message at that time through the exact methods of the deity's choosing provide an account that is satisfying to anyone but the devoted adherent of that religion? We consider that what is required for an adequate account of the birth of a religion is both an appreciation of the socio-political and economic factors of that time together with an appreciation of that "something more" that is spirituality.

The containers and conduits of spirituality, that are religions, are the products of the social and political circumstances of the time and place in which they are created. However, in order to survive and to maintain themselves across time, place and the changing social and political circumstances they need to adapt. Nevertheless, the conceptual patterns formed at their inception remain deeply encoded into them. As society evolves around them they may reformulate in order to adapt to the new context, but still preserves what was essential to their original form. For example, the evolution of Christianity has evolved through many forms all involving the adaptation of the Christian message to the changing social and political context. The response of a religion to the global context can be witnessed at the start of the twenty-first century in the development of radical Islam in response to Western politics and postmodernism. Powerful processes of needing to belong to your pack, tribe or group, are involved; together with fearing what is outside, beyond the group's boundary, out there in the woods, out there in the dark.

Spirituality is hard to suppress. A spiritual component seems to be a feature of being human. For those who state that they have no religion, their spirituality may have taken another pseudo-religious form, such as an adherence to the values of science or a political movement. However, many people need the container and conduit of spirituality that is a religion. If there is not a codified, contained spirituality that is acceptable to part of the population, then a new religion will form. The building of religious containers and conduits may be a social necessity as free floating spirituality may be dangerous. Religions come and go, but spirituality endures. We are interested in the transition point, of how spirituality becomes contained and channelled within a religion through codification and people may become prophets or deities, and written words become sacred.

From the mid twentieth century onwards there developed in Britain a religious movement called Wicca. This was a unification of high magic, as previously practiced by intellectual groupings of academics, theologians and aristocrats, through groups such as The Golden Dawn- an ascending spiritual path, and the ritualized practices of rural people and folk magic- a descending spiritual path (ref). Wicca incorporated the more primitive direct grounded earth spirituality of oral traditions with the reflexivity of written word based religions. In so doing something unique was created, as the historian Ronald Hutton (2001) suggests that 'modern pagan witchcraft' that emerged in the 1950's is the only religion that Britain has given to the world.

A study of Wicca has the advantages for the researcher that they are close in time to it's birth: the documents are fresh; the major characters are not long dead (it is the possible to talk to someone who knew them). In addition, the movement of Wicca between two similar but different cultures, Britain and the USA, permits consideration of the impact of cultural shifts on a religion's development. We suggest that the principles discussed in the examination of the birth of Wicca are comparable to how the world's major religions came into existence.

The context for the early practitioners: how Wicca become a container and conduit for spirituality in the second half of the 20th Century in Britain and the USA

Gerald Gardner, the 'founding father' of Wicca discovered and was initiated into Witchcraft in 1939 shortly after the beginning of World War Two. In 1940, shortly after France had fallen to Germany, Gardner, a staunch patriot and Air Raid Precaution Warden, joined several other Witches to perform a magical operation that aimed to prevent the invasion of German forces, called 'Operation Cone of Power', Gardner recounted its events as follows: *"We were taken at night to a place in the Forest, where the Great Circle was erected; and that was done which may not be done except in great emergency. And the great Cone of Power was raised and slowly directed in the general direction of Hitler. The command was given: 'You cannot cross the Sea. You cannot cross the Sea. YOU CANNOT COME: YOU CANNOT COME'. Just as, we were told, was done to Napoleon, when he had his army ready to invade England and never came. And, as was done to the Spanish Armada, mighty forces were used, of which I may not speak. Now to do this means using one's life-force; and many of us died a few days after we did this. My asthma, which I had never had since I first went out East, came back badly. We repeated the ritual four times; and the Elders said: 'We feel we have stopped him. We must not kill too many of our people. Keep them until we need them'"*. (Bracelin, 1961, page). This event increased Gardner's passion for Witchcraft, and shortly after the end the Second World War he published his first book related to Witchcraft. Though disguised as a work of fiction, 'High Magics Aid' (1949) contained magical passages and instructions. This publication

coincided with a time when the British were adapting to the consequences of the War: many people had lost family and found their faith in the traditional order undermined, including conventional Christianity. Rationing imposed severe restrictions and people experienced their personal control and free choice as limited and restricted. As a consequence, the idea of being able to do 'Magic', to influence your life, and to regain some of that control, was attractive. Wicca from its inception had a philosophical base that encouraged a re-connection to the Earth and to Nature; it emphasised a celebrating the cycles of life whilst also understanding death as a natural part of that process. One book that particularly influenced Gardner, and thereby the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, was Leyland's "Aradia: Gospel of the Witches" (date). Aradia is the name given to the messianic daughter of the Goddess Diana, a champion for the oppressed and underdogs of society; given the social circumstances of that time, it is understandable that this book and the stories of Aradia, influenced Gardner, and was in accordance with post war Britain and the social and political forces that lead to the development of the Welfare State.

The Second World War also led to reappraisal of women's' roles in society (ref). Women, who prior to the Second World War, had generally occupied 'traditional' domestic roles, gained new worth, status and power through land-work and working in munitions factories. This social change maintained momentum during the 1950's and 1960's through the Women's Liberation and Feminism movements. The invention of the contraceptive pill further encouraged sexual liberation which connected to Wicca's intrinsic ideas about sexual expression. The Feminist Movement dovetailed into the Wiccan linked Goddess movement. The male God of Christianity and the central females of Mary Madonna or Mary Magdalene can be difficult religious figures of identification for some people. For men, after the brutalities of war, The Goddess with her innate nurturing and healing qualities offered an alternative, as a deity that could be loved as a mother. The sociologist, Glock (1964) suggests that new religions arise when people feel that they had been deprived of something that they expected from life. At the end of the Second World War the expression of the human spirit and a desire to retain some basic control over ones life and environment encouraged new forms of religions.

A great enabler in the development of Wicca was the repeal in 1951 of the 1736 Witchcraft Act. The repeal permitted people to practice 'Witchcraft' without prosecution. It was an opportunity for Gardner to publish directly about the practice, without the guise of fiction, and he did so in the book "Witchcraft today" (1954). Gardner strongly disliked modernity, particularly industrialisation and urbanisation; he desired a return to a golden age epitomized in folklore, myths and tribal magical practices. He had been a member of the Folklore society for many years; giving talks and writing about the subject. His reactions to modernity can be compared to those of William Morris in the 19th Century when he began the Arts and Crafts Movement (ref) and to Jung (ref). His interest in a return to a past golden age can be compared to the Druidery revival of the late 19th Century that was the re-awakening of Pagan paths.

In addition, to looking to the past for inspiration, Wicca was also inspired by the scientific advances of the 1950s and 1960s. Through advances in space travel, it was possible to see images of the earth from space, and to witness how beautiful, and yet also delicate it appeared. These images helped to connect people with the reality of the universe within which they lived. And with new understandings of the planet's ecological and meteorological systems, there was an increased understanding of how our actions were damaging it. This awareness influenced alternative intellectuals such as James Lovelock and Rupert Sheldrake. Lovelock started work on Gaia theory in the mid 60s and which culminated in 'Gaia: A new look at life on Earth' (1979). This scientific theory influenced

both academia and the general public, for whom Science had become a source of almost sacred knowledge and a link between people's daily lives and the world and cosmos. With the capacity to make links to the influential epistemologies of Science, nature-based religions, such as Wicca became more acceptable and understandable. In addition, with its links to ecological movements, Wicca contained an appreciation of not only personal but planetary vulnerability with a focus on saving the world in which we live in rather than focusing on salvation in the next.

It was not only Wicca that gained popularity at the end of the Second World War, but Revivalist Druids, that had started to become popular at the turn of the last century, continued to gain advocates in the second half of the twentieth century. Druidry tended to attract a different type of person to Wicca. It was more male-orientated, probably due to the main Druid Revival of the beginning of the 20th century having close link to that 'men-only' brotherhood, the Freemasons. Druidery ceremonies were more theatrical and rehearsed in contrast to the spontaneity of Wicca. Druidery was known publicly through the Stonehenge Summer Solstice Rites which had taken place from the turn of the century. These differences did not prevent close connections to Wicca. Gardner became a member, and in 1946 began to attend druid ceremonies, and thereby became well acquainted with the then head of the Ancient Druid Order (A.D.O.), George Watson MacGregor-Reid. Gardner subsequently become close to A.D.O. member, Ross Nichols, who may have helped him to write *'Witchcraft Today'* (1954). Nichols formed the Order of Bards, Druids and Ovates in 1963, and influenced Gardner's view of nature religions as well as contributed ideas and energy to what became known as 'Gardnerian Witchcraft'. The new, alternative nature religion of Wicca gained sustenance from its earlier forbear of Revivalist Druidery.

Despite the 1950s and 1960s providing the conditions for Wicca to be born, the contrasts to mainstream society should not be underestimated. During the second author's conversations with Charles Clark, who joined Gardner's Witchcraft group around 1954, he made her aware of how alternative the Wica, as he termed it, appeared in the sixties. British society was still quite conservative and the social and moral revolution of the 1960's had yet to make deep inroads into the accepted societal norms. For example, although the final Witchcraft Laws had been repealed in 1954, there were still strong laws controlling nudity (nudity being important for Coven worship). In the early 1960's, Clark supported the photographer Jean Straker, who had fallen foul of British Censorship Laws by publishing images that showed pubic hair. Straker was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act and imprisoned. His subsequent appeal was accepted and his conviction overruled which inspired change in the Censorship Laws in 1965.

Early Wiccans also held many traditional values. A writer who interviewed several Wiccan groups in England in the 1960's note that member's tended towards conservatism (Smyth, date). It has also been noted by Hutton (2001) that Wicca started with Gardner as a form of radical conservatism but developed through Starhawk in the USA into radical socialism. Perhaps, the founders of Wicca had the goal of personal spiritual development, and were inward looking; but through the amalgamation of their ideas with the political movement of feminism, via the Goddess movement, Wicca became outward looking with goals for social reform.

Wicca does not follow the traditional Western pattern of separating magic and religion. Some religions began with magic and religion linked, but lost those links as they developed. For example, Christianity began as a mystery religion, containing mystical and arcane knowledge. However, a schism between the Gnostic mystics and the orthodox

thinkers created a fluctuating power balance (Pagel, date); with the orthodox thinkers eventually triumphant. Thereby many alternative ideas and interpretations about the life of Jesus, were suppressed or lost. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in 1945 has provided details of this process (ref). This schism was the result of differences in personality, culture and the fundamentals of politics and power. However, Coptic Christianity also inherited spell-craft tradition from Alexandria and older, pharonic magical traditions. Coptic Christianity no longer openly encourages the use of spells although its priests do still carry out magical rites. Judaism is another religion where a path of mysticism can still be followed, particularly through Kabbalah (ref)

The practice of Wicca in Covens relies upon member's unity. It is believed that every group has an Egregore, a concept similar to Jung's (ref) concept of the collective unconscious. There is limited separation between the priesthood and the congregation as whilst Covens do have a High Priestess and High Priest, roles usually held by people who are experienced practitioners of the Craft, and they are generally considered as 'first amongst equals' only. Every Coven has a 'central doctrine' known as a Book of Shadows (BOS) which is an outline for how the Craft is to be practised in that Coven. Some Covens stick rigidly to their original BOS text; others will elaborate and change as the Coven develops. There is an acknowledgement of the differences amongst people who choose Wicca as their spiritual path in how they wish to practice.

According to Hutton (2001, p.370), Margot Adler, a prominent USA Wiccan and the author of the influential text 'Drawing Down the Moon' (date), *'recognised that Wicca had probably been built upon a pseudo-history, and then suggested that this was normal for the development of religious traditions and that Wiccans deserved credit for the fact that they were increasingly conscious of this without losing a sense of the viability of their actual experience of the divine.'*

The spiritual and other needs that Modern Witchcraft met for the early practitioners:

Many people wanted to celebrate that they were happy to be alive following World War Two and Wicca was an opportunity for some to celebrate life through the Mother Goddess. It was a celebration that was not based around hopes of salvation in an after-life but focused on life and the planet in the present. It met people's desire for integration and a re-connection with the Divine, the universe and ones-self. The methods of worship met the needs of the early practitioners. Ritual drama could be creative and fun and had long associations with magical orders who understood the psychological effects of ritual work. It was through 'The First Rosicrucian Theatre in England' that Gardner first encountered members of the New Forest Coven, into which he was later to be initiated. There were, and are, many flamboyant "performers" in Wicca. Self-confidence and the ability to act are good skills for the practitioner to have, especially in relation to ritual and invocation as such skills help to convince the practitioner and group member's of the ritual's intent.

Gardner, a naturalist, and had been since 1930s when, on advice from his doctor, and member of the 'Lotus League' Sun Club (Heselton, date). He was comfortable with the naked body and this attitude contributed to the development of Wicca's 'skyclad' (naked) rituals. Additionally, In his books, Gardner stated that clothes somehow hindered the "power"; as he stated in High MAGics Aid (1949,p150): *' Everything used must have been made with this object in view, so everything used brings to the brain of the magus, the reason of the work. Therefore was Thur clad in the symbolically pure, clean white linen robe, signifying light, strength and purity, also (this is important) bearing no colour or*

pattern that could distract the mind of the wearer or his acolyte. For the same reason the girl was nude, this signified purity unsullied, and the natural magnetism in the human body could flow unhindered to the support of the magus. Here would be no temptation, no distraction for him in this beauty unadorned because a magus must be immune to such conditions ere he may become a magus, for if he cannot at all times prevent his mind from straying, failure in his enterprises would be inevitable; rather was such nudity an added strength to him, for by its presence it signifies the strength of his will and the power of his self-control. For a magus must ever work with a naked woman till nudity is naught to him, lest an evil or mischievous spirit should appear thus, and distract his mind at the critical moment and so ruin an operation.' This is a debatable position, and alternatively many Wiccan's see the absence of clothes as giving rise to psychological nakedness, openness, and trust; something which is very important when you are working with a rich symbolic framework where intent is the key to the magical work's effectiveness. Gardner had a fondness for the naked female form, which encouraged the concept of naked rites. Working naked, or 'skyclad', is liberating to some, whilst others find it frightening. If would-be initiates are uncomfortable with the idea this may be symptomatic of a body-issue that the would-be candidate may have to address before entry would be gained. Being skyclad makes issues of sexuality and of the differences between man and woman prominent.

Wicca is ripe with sexual symbolism due to its emphasis on fertility. The symbolism can be observed in the Blessing of the cakes and wine, a ceremony that is usually performed at the end of a ritual or Sabbat. This is when the 'male' athame' (a form of dagger) is dipped into the 'female' cup containing 'the wine', for 'conjoined they bring blessedness'. Such sexual openness attracted people who wanted to explore their own sexuality further, and explains why the sexual liberation era of the 1960's increased the growth of Wicca. Wicca provided a home for many on the margins of society, a place, for example, for disenfranchised intellectuals who did not quite fit in elsewhere. The writer Frank Smyth, who interviewed several Wiccan groups in England in the 1960s noted that most of their members were politically right-wing (Smyth, date). However the second author's conversations with Charles Clark indicated that Wicca also attracted people on the 'sexual fringe' such as transsexual and gay people. Perhaps as a result of Wicca's liberal views on nudity and by extension an alternative approaches to sexuality. Gardner himself leaned more towards the non-supportive views about homosexuality of his generation. However, Wicca contained people whose value system was not the mainstream, and this included some who were ahead of their time, some may consider them as fore-runners of moral decline, either-way, the current social world would have been more accepting of their views the 1950's and early 1960's

The development of the Women's Movement in the 1960's linked to Wicca through the Goddess Movement to the reclaim the feminine in the Divine. This contrasts with many other religions which are andocentric. Wicca met the need for people who wanted a more direct access to 'God' where everyone was a Priest or Priestesses and access to divinity is through ones-self. Religions can becoming disconnected with a proportion of their followers if they no longer purport to offer their followers direct contact with the Divine, but only an priest mediated experience. In addition, Wicca offered a grounded expression of spirituality, for example in its use of the four elements.

Wicca incorporated experiences that remain outside of mainstream religion, such as mediumship and the paranormal. Though not unique in doing this, the Spiritualism movement had done so earlier; Wicca was another way to incorporate these experiences into a religious context. As a new and developing religious path it was open to the assimilation of religious and spiritual ideas from world religions. Gardner loved Eastern

mystic traditions from the time he spent in the Far East, especially Sufism, and he was close friends with Idries Shah. Other influences included ancient Greek Bacchanalian ideas (probably via Gardner's friend, Dion Byngam). There was also a strong influence from Freemasonry and hermetic traditions, in addition to the Druidery revival. Wicca the chance of fame. The majority of the High Priests and High Priestesses of Gardner's Witchcraft from the 1950's and early 1960s appeared in newspapers, gave talks, authored books, appeared on television and were consulted on films about Witchcraft and magic.

The development of ritual and its codification: the extent to which artefacts and texts become sacred

Throughout the 1950s Wiccan rituals were subject to revisions. Gardner encouraged everyone to creatively add to their BOS. However, limited codification occurred as the result of "lines" with strong High Priestesses, who adored Gardner and for whom he was perhaps a 'surrogate father', remaining steadfast to his initial approach and BOS. Adler defined a religion as "*any set of symbolic forms and acts that relate human beings to ultimate conditions of existence, cosmic questions and universal concerns*" (Adler, date, p.11). Wicca is a coat rack on to which to hang symbolism. In its early years it was relatively free of dogmatism, with new ideas and approaches readily inserted into its then simple theological framework.

In the USA at the start of the twenty-first century a greater fundamentalism about the practice of Wicca developed with texts taken more literally. This may be due to the USA not having the depth of Britain's cultural history. A comparison can be made to Pagel's account of the differences between Orthodox and Gnostic Christianity. Texts have become 'coveted' in the USA, for example it is necessary to sign a disclaimer to obtain a copy of selected extracts from Gardner's oldest, extant penned work "Ye Bok of the Art Magical" and it remains difficult for initiates to obtain copies of Gardner's early BOS. This can be compared to the difficulty that scholars face in gaining access to the dead sea scrolls. When new material is acquired it often remains in the possession of scholars and academics. The literary value of new material, and the oathbound secretive nature of Wicca means that it is difficult for them to be shared publicly.

The investment of special significance in Wiccan material objects is small compared to Christian. Wiccan artefacts are not 'sacred' as such, but have monetary value and have become museum pieces. The First coven, Brickett Wood, still uses the sword that Gardner gave to them; it is prized but not in the way of a Christian relic. Wicca has material that is considered 'oathbound', however, what constitutes 'Oathbound' varies from one 'line' to the next, and indeed from person to person. The practice of making something oathbound is an attempt to protect what is perceived as an innate mystery and 'power'. In contrast, Gardner himself printed many of the rituals, and shortly before his death discussed the publication of more material with Charles Clark as agreed that it may better as this would help people to better understand the Craft.

Wicca involves the development of an embodied shared practice, for example through the casting a circle. Attempts to capture the ritual, its process and procedures, by recording them in a written text, represent a way to give guidance of how to recreate the right setting conditions for the desired experiences both for each individual present and the group as a whole. The use of language of a written form brings the possibility for reflections, to revisit what you have written, but language also imposes limitations, words can solidify a meaning as breathy speculations become tablets of stone. A special use of language that

the general public would most associate with Witchcraft is that of the casting of a spell. Spells in Wicca are a way of being active in your own and other's psychological processes. To spell things out and to name things represents the power of language as David Abram elaborates in "The spell of the sensuous" (date).

How Wicca has adapted to the changing socio-political context – with particular reference to the movement in the USA and to the internet. How has it represent itself to itself, to the public and to other religions.

Early diversity occurred when Wicca was exported to the USA. "*Pagan witchcraft left Britain for the United States as a quietist religion, seeking a private but secure place within a wider society, and returned transformed into an evangelical one, seeking to alter the world*" (Hutton, 2001, p306) It posed a challenge to the social and religious views of the USA that it transformed from the radical conservatism of Gardner to the radical socialism of Starhawk and her belief that it is a "religion of poetry not theology" (Starhawk, date, p 22). But where has American Feminist and Wicca left men and the Horned God?

With the advent of the Internet in the 1980's, Wicca in the USA Britain established easier contact with each other. After twenty to thirty years with a degree of isolated development, with the Internet and its rapid exchange of information, it became apparent that the Gardnerian tradition of the USA had adapted and coloured their 'Craft' differently to Britain. The second author's opinion, based upon her personal experience in Internet Webgroups, that the USA Wiccans are often more 'orthodox' than their counterparts in Britain, taking, for example, many things in the BOS more literally. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Gardner and his cultural upbringing are closer to, and easier to relate to by British practitioners. Practitioners in the USA are more likely to believe that Gardner was passing on a tradition that had been kept underground for hundreds of years; in contrast UK practitioners are more likely to believe that Gardner revived and reconstructed something based on historical records and scholarly history books such as "Witchcraft"(date) by Dr. Margaret Murray. The popularity of Wicca in the USA may relate to the relative newness of the culture of the Europeans who settled there. The native spirituality of North America belongs firmly to the Native American Indians. So, it is understandable that people in the USA, who were seeking an alternative to Christianity, should turn to a faith tradition that they attribute as being the indigenous one of their European motherlands. However, there are also indications of USA Wiccans being dogmatic and critical of those in Britain; this may represent the developmental stage of the USA and part of the wider socio-political context of how the USA operates in the world in the first part of the twenty-first century.

At the start of the twenty-first century Wicca has become a business. There are DIY courses, and personalised robes and equipment, with the 'seeker' offered a diverse array of Witchcraft types and traditions, especially in the USA. In an attempt to avoid confusion, many practitioners in the USA have adopted the label 'British Traditional Witchcraft' (BTW) for traditions that stem from the New Forest Covens, these included: Gardnerians, Alexandrians, lines descending from Sybil Leeks Horsa Coven as well Central Valley Wicca, which displays some striking similarities to Gardner's Wicca (although their lineage, and exactly how and when arrived in the USA is still a matter for research). The term 'BTW' is generally not used in Britain. The various 'lineages' and traditions are still fairly separate, but as the Pagan paths gain increased popularity, traditions are merging with the view that a stronger and more comprehensive framework will be formed. It is understandable that people want to integrate their favourite parts of different traditions into their own path. As

there is no central governing body the Pagan paths readily lend themselves to adaptation and personalisation.

In representing itself to itself, the public and to other religions Wicca has increasingly been able to represent itself in a non-scandalised way via the mainstream media. "Guest witches" appear on television, for example in 2005 Kevin Caryl, appeared on "Spirituality shopper" representing the Paganism. In the late 1960s in the USA, Tim Zell established the Church of All the Worlds; a collection of mystics influenced by the sci-fi genre and images of Utopia. From this collective arose Green Egg a classic Pagan magazine which was response to a planet in crisis. 'Green Egg' was a pioneering USA Pagan comparable to 'The Pentagram', 'The Wiccan' and 'The Cauldron' in Britain. Many publications, unlike the online forums, embrace more than one Pagan path. As there are now many pagan paths and if separated, many would not have a sufficient readership, but together they create a significant audience. Wiccan practitioners have been involved with interfaith movements, including Don Frew in USA and John Macintyre of the Scottish PF. Interfaith moots have been started by pagans in Nottingham in an attempt attract other religions to attend. Paganism is a broad-spectrum pluralistic faith that embraces of other paths, and has a stated aim of love for all and a recognition of the interconnectedness of all.

The needs it meets for more recent practitioners, spiritual and otherwise. The people it attracts today compared to 50 years ago. Would it be recognizable to the founders? Can it be a container and conduit for part of a person's spirituality whilst other religions also contain and carry part?

The spiritual practices of Wicca unite people through ritual and the group egregore or 'mind'. For example, when casting a spell, participants of a particular group tend to work with the same symbolism. This may be a particular pantheon or a particular table of correspondence, such as those given by Crowley in '777' (1909). All magical orders are based on a particular set of rituals and a symbolic framework. People are attracted to those that fit most closely to their other beliefs. Some are more anarchic than others, but by definition they will all have a basic psychological framework in place. The purpose of these frameworks is to provide the subconscious with a 'language' to use. A long established definition of 'magic' states that 'it is the ability to effect change in conformity with Will'- with "Will" referring to the person's true desires and needs as opposed to the more superficial ones we find ourselves pursuing through fundamental biological and hormonal influences. Magic, or "Magick" has been defined in the following ways. Joyce & River Higinbotham define Magick as the actions of many consciousnesses voluntarily working together within an aware and interconnected universe to bring about one or more desired results (is this a quote?). Tyson (date) considers Magic to be the art of affecting the manifest through the Unmanifest. The manifest is all that can be seen, touched, perceived, manipulated, imagined, or understood. The Unmanifest is none of these things. It is the place, or rather the non-place, from which everything issues. All that comes into being comes from the Unmanifest. All that passes away goes back to the Unmanifest. And according to the famous occultist Aleister Crowley, magick is "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will." ... In fact, Crowley... says that "every intentional act is a Magickal Act." If you follow his line of reasoning, there is a great deal of validity in what he says, although it is not what we are seeking at this time. We need to make the definition of magick a bit longer: *Magick is the science and art of causing change (in consciousness) to occur in conformity with will, using means not currently understood by traditional Western science.* (Kraig, date- not sure of where this was a quote).

Wicca aims to unite people: if the rituals work well, attendees feel that they have had a

shared experience which links with what could be considered one of the philosophies of Wicca -that everything is connected. This philosophy is not unique to Wicca, as Nagarjuna the Buddhist Monk stated: "Things derive their being and nature by mutual dependence and nothing in themselves." (ref) In fact, this philosophy of Wicca may have been adopted from Buddhism. The 'group mind' the egregore, is of paramount importance when working with others, although it is possible for people to practice solo; solo and group practice are considered to offer different forms of rewards and understanding. Wicca has limited dogma; though levels may have increased with its increasing popularity. However, within a Coven, although all members will be using a similar psychological toolbox and framework, the personal experience and what is perceived is individual. For example, members of a Coven may have varying interpretations of what the God and the Goddess are: one person may believe them to be actual 'beings' another person may consider them as aspects of their own self, and yet another may see them as personifications of natural forces in the world around us. These differing perceptions are not considered to be a hindrance to magical work. The Pagan paths, especially Wicca, where working 'skyclad' (naked) is common, offers a liberating 'acceptance' of the body that contrasts to religions where guilt is a more significant component. This is healthy for the fragile human ego and is a way of reclaiming the body, and experiencing the body as magical regardless of how it conforms, or not, to cultural stereotypes of the perfect body. As Greenwood states: "The body is the focal point of all Western magical work" (date).

Wicca at the start of the twenty-first century attracts people who are different, yet similar to those in the 1950's and 1960's. It attracts people who are from the following subcultures: Goths, Hippies, Vegetarians, Dungeon and Dragon game players, Information Technology professionals, would be mediums, abuse victims,- those who are more on the 'fringe' of society. What remains consistent is that the attraction is to those who are marginalised and on the edges of society, people who therefore perhaps identify with the traditional image of the witch in the Middle Ages of someone on the edge of the village. It still meets similar needs: a rejection of modernity, a desire for green living, a simple life, to be in the countryside, away from the chaos of modern life, yet an interest in scientific principles. It provides a supportive network for people who are marginalized- offering social support, meaning making, solidarity and helping to avoid alienation.

It provides a place for those who have had transliminal/ psychosis experiences. Survivors of abuse and trauma- these bad experiences may lead to anomalous experiences and new spiritual understandings. Practitioners of Wicca are most likely not born into witch families, but may find a new family in a Coven where they are able to talk about their experiences and developing spiritual awareness. Closely linked to Wicca, especially in USA, is Goddess Spirituality, whose advocates, such as Starhawk and Suzsanna Budapest, tends to attract more middle-class white woman, who are often middle-aged and needing to 'reclaim' something for themselves, perhaps after devoting much of their life to children, partner, home and jobs. Life-stage issues and the appeal of Wicca may also be apparent in its attraction to teenagers, with the additional; influence of popular culture via figures such as Harry Potter and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

If one considers the question: Would the founders still want to join? The answer is: Yes, probably. Although they would notice differences. The sexuality component in the early 1950's and 1960's lead more often to sexual activity. In that period Wicca was a justification to have more sexual partners, a justification no longer required. They would find the practitioners more left-wing. They would find the current forms less egalitarian. Gardnerian and Alexandrian Covens are known for being somewhat elitist, and the preserve of closed covens and hard to find. They would find that the practices have

become more fixed now. However, because of the diversity, they would be able to find a coven somewhere that suited them.

Wicca can be a container and conduit for part of a person's spirituality in combination with other religions. For example Christian Wicca is emerging in the USA. They have a Trinity deity: God the father, God the mother and God the son. Links with Christianity are not as surprising as they might at first appear. Hutton (2001) draws parallels with the "House church" of British Christianity who meet in homes and have a diversity of practice within a common framework- faith healing and "invocation" (possession by the Holy Spirit). In addition, there are already underlying links as Christianity adopted Pagan festivals, for example Yule- rebirth of the sun, becoming Christmas and the birth of the "son" of God. Another relatively new path involves the amalgamation of Druidry and Wicca to create Druidcraft. People can use Wicca to follow specific pantheons: Celts Wicca , Seax Wicca. Wicca's flexibility results in its appropriation by others: it has the ability to assimilate, accommodate and to be assimilated and accommodated.

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