

October is the Month of The Witch - So let's talk about Witchcraft!

At Talisman and Cauldron, we do our best to serve as a resource to the Pagan/Witch Community. China is a Celtic Reconstructionist Witch (40+ years) and I am a Hedgewitch (25+ years). Between the two of us, we can usually answer your questions! At least two or three times a week, someone will come into the shop and ask about Witchcraft classes, training programs, and workshops specifically focused on magick. And while China and I have begun to talk about developing a curriculum for a series of classes to be offered at the shop (and please note the more in-depth classes we are offering, for example, next month's 3-part workshop on Animal Communication) even without a teacher there is a lot which can be researched and learned independently. Before you begin a formal course of study, you need to decide upon what path of Witchcraft/Wicca you wish to follow. Here is a partial list:

[Different Types of Witches](#)

I recommend you read through this list and see which one(s) beckon. While yes, you can pick and choose through a variety of paths - if you are seeking a teacher or a coven you will probably have to narrow it down substantially. Covens tend to be somewhat secretive and closed (for good reason) although you may find a listing on Witchvox, getting involved with your local Pagan Pride Day is a great way to meet like-minded people. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagan_Pride)

First, Resources: Let's start with Witchvox aka [The Witches' Voice](#), est. 1997 is a proactive educational network providing news, information services and resources for and about Pagans, Heathens, Witches, and Wiccans. Advertising-free and completely neutral. A wonderful resource, especially helpful if you are traveling and want to locate shops, events, celebrations in a new environment.

Here in Connecticut, we have the [CWPN](#), The CT Wiccan Pagan Network, est. 1994 hosts monthly networking meetings throughout the state, open Sabbat circles, coven and study group referral service, classes/workshops, various social events, and lectures. The CWPN also likes to encourage local people to share their talents and experiences with the community. I am proud to add that it was due to the tireless work of Selena Fox and some longtime members of this group that in 2007 the Department of Veterans Affairs agreed to add the Wiccan pentacle to a list of approved religious symbols that it will engrave on veterans' headstones.

Here are some online classes I will happily recommend:

Christopher Penczak, [Temple of Witchcraft Mystery School](#)

Raven Grimassi, [House Of Grimassi](#), online classes

Laurie Cabot, [The Cabot Tradition](#)

Laurie Cabot created some beautiful videos of her former shop in Salem MA, and these are also instructional (she is a marvelous speaker and teacher). I often recommend young people to "YouTube Search" Ms. Cabot and watch some of these:[Here](#)

Over the years I have written extensively on the topic of Witchcraft and Samhain (Halloween) and all the shop's newsletters are kept archived on the website under "[News](#)".

The Pagan/Wiccan/Witches New Year traditionally starts at Samhain, which was the Celtic New Year. To the Celts, Samhain signaled the end of summer and the beginning of the dark half of the year. This Sabbat dates back roughly to 6,000 BCE – way back to Paleopagan practices of dividing the year into a light half and a dark half, marked by the grazing of domestic animals in open land then bringing the herds/flocks to a safe haven as the days got shorter and darker. It is also when animals were slaughtered and meat prepared for winter storage (along with the last harvest) to provide for the long lean cold months ahead. So Death certainly permeates more than one aspect of Samhain.

But when did this turn ugly and evil? It began when the early Celtic pagans welcomed Christianity into their lands (as they welcomed the beliefs of other people) but the early Church had problems with the Celts as they did not willingly give up their holidays or folk practices. The ensuing patriarchal religion forced down the throats of the people did not go down easily – the Celts practiced equality between the sexes. And while nearly every single ancient world religion honored both men and women and allowed both to hold high station within the respective hierarchy – Christianity absolutely did not. Christianity began as a male-dominated religion taken from the Roman practices of the day. Clearly, Christ did not support male domination (we see this in both His teachings and His actions) but his followers had different ideas and twisted Christ's teachings.

The denigration of women by the Roman Empire was accepted by the early Christians. A Roman father could kill any of his children and had complete rule over his home. Later, during the Dark Ages, the church sought to eradicate Pagans and wise women (who were the midwives, healers - from which the word "Wicce" or Wise One is derived) so it could amass power and property. It taught that women had no souls, helpless to fight their wanton desires, were wholly responsible for man's descent from grace due to their trickery in Eden and were not important. Bear in mind that up until the 1300s healers (wise women) and diviners were used by the church and nobles alike. However, once you have made a group of people inhuman, then you remove the guilt of murder – a theme sadly repeated throughout history, most notably in Nazi Germany's Holocaust. The Celtic women were the stronghold of the family environment and the Celts were free-thinking people – and the church was NOT into "free thinking". Since anything that did not follow church doctrine

was “evil” and Samhain was the primary festival of the Celts – the church determined that Samhain was evil and the association between witches and Halloween was thus born.

During the 15th and 17th Century, the persecution of innocent people through torture and execution was condoned and sanctioned by the church. By the time the religious fanatics were through, the female population had dipped to an alarming rate and almost no wise women or healers survived. While the early church would have been delighted to have destroyed Samhain, they were forced to accept it in a restructured form (All Hallows Eve) sanctioning the long-standing custom of remembering the dead to meet the needs of the social structure of the time.

It wasn't until 1736 that Witchcraft ceased to be a crime punishable by death in England and Scotland. In 1952 England repealed the last of the Witchcraft laws – meaning it was no longer a crime to practice the religion of Witchcraft in that country. Halloween made its debut in the upper crust of American society in the early 1870s. Viewed as a quaint English custom, the Victorian focus was placed on entertaining games, parties and (believe it or not) communicating with the dead. By 1910, the new American holiday of Halloween was focused on children – so divination fell by the wayside. In the mid to late 1990s, certain radical Christian groups declared the holiday Satanic – and the amusing fallout is that these fanatics campaigned to put the “harvest” back in Halloween and urged their followers to practice harvest-like celebrations rather than the American Halloween. So in an ironic twist, fundamentalist Christians managed to bring Samhain full circle as it began as a harvest festival, they thus returned this Sabbat to its proper pagan roots!

For more information, please read Silver Ravenwolf's “Halloween” and Edain McCoy's “Celtic Women's Spirituality” two books I borrowed from while writing the above.

For myself and most of the Pagans/Witches I know, Samhain is a quiet introspective celebration. Certainly, decorating our homes, providing treats to visiting children, carving pumpkins all add a festive nuance to our personal celebrations. In addition, we may spend time preparing an ancestor altar and prayerfully ask for their blessing and support throughout the upcoming year. Later in the night (after visitors and trick-or-treating children have departed) scrying or other forms of divination, offerings left in ritual on outdoor altars, gathering around a roaring bonfire (or smouldering cauldron or fireplace) – I leave it to each of you to follow your hearts in the celebration of our most sacred and mysterious of the holy Sabbats.

Samhain Benediction

It is time to bid farewell

As this Samhain passes slowly

Soon the dawning will embrace us

And the sunset portal close

Until the turning of the year
We must part for just a while
Yet I know there is no ending
And the golden thread spins outward
To that place where you are going
Until I travel there to meet you
Or you return upon the autumn
On that sacred night of Spirits
When we shall meet again
Blessed Be.

David O. Norris

God(dess) Bless Us All!

Laura