

procreation. Funerals reflect Scientologists' belief that physical life is relatively unimportant, and that the real person – the theta – is immortal. As well, Scientologists may gather at weekly Friday meetings to discuss members' activities during the week and any concerns they may have.

Wicca

History and Teachings of Wicca

"Wicca" is the modern name for witchcraft, in particular the ancient nature-based witchcraft found in the British Isles and France before Christianity arrived. It is sometimes called simply "The Craft" or "The Old Religion." There are a number of strains of modern witchcraft, some referred to as **neopagan** (a modern religious movement that traces its roots to pre-Christian European religion). Because of their newness and lack of institutional development, as well as a tendency toward privacy in order to avoid widespread prejudice, there is relatively little scholarly work available on "The Craft." The best known of the movements that call themselves Wicca are those associated with British Traditional Wicca (BTW) – especially Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca. Both trace themselves to Gerald Gardner (d. 1964). Gardner said that he had been initiated into a traditional **coven** of witches in 1939 in the New Forest region of England, and that they were the inheritors of the ancient traditions of Britain. In 1949 Gardner wrote a novel about medieval witchcraft called *High Magic's Aid*. Then in 1951 he published *Witchcraft Today*, which describes the rituals and traditions of the coven he belonged to.

Covens of witches that have followed Gardner are headed by a High Priestess, and worship the **Lady** and the **Lord**. The Lady, or the Goddess, is also called the Great Mother and the Triple Goddess. She is a fertility deity and is associated with the earth and the moon, and with three phases of women's lives: maidenhood, motherhood, and old age. The Lord is also called the **Horned God**. Represented as a man with a goat's head with huge horns, he is lord of the hunt and death. He is associated with the sun, and rules over the **Summerland**, an after-death paradise. The Lady and the Lord complement each other, much like male and female forms of Shiva in Hinduism. Some Wiccans consider them aspects of a single god, some consider them the only two gods, some consider them one or two among many gods, and some consider them symbolic of the cosmic life force. What scholars call the "ontological" status of gods – whether or not they really exist – is not considered important in Wicca. But Wiccans do believe that the cosmic forces – or the Goddess and the God – become incarnate (take human form) in the priestess and priest during Wiccan rituals.

The Horned God is also the lord of **magick**, which is the ability to cause change at will. The spelling was devised by Aleister Crowley (d. 1947), British occult writer and practitioner, to distinguish this power from the illusions known in popular entertainment as "magic." Magick is not illusory, Wiccans believe. Instead, it is the ability to master the great unseen ("occult") power of the cosmos through sheer force of will, and command it to do one's bidding – a skill achieved by very few practitioners. (Aleister Crowley is not considered a representative of Wicca, but he did influence Gerald Gardner, with whom he worked at the



end of his life, and many people involved in contemporary pop culture, such as comic book writer Alan Moore, horror writer extraordinaire Clive Barker, and musician Ozzy Osbourne.)

There is no rigid doctrine or set of rituals in Wicca. People are free to believe as they like and engage in whatever rituals they find satisfying. Many groups add to the Lady and the Lord divinities from Celtic, Greek, or other traditions. Some worship Diana, goddess of the moon from Greek and Roman religions, or Brigit, the Celtic goddess of fire, poetry, healing, and childbirth. Beyond the Goddess and the God, Gerald Gardner said, there is a Prime Mover, also called “The One,” who is unknowable and so not of concern.

Though there are no doctrines in Wicca, five beliefs are common. First, the divine is imminent in the world, not outside it. Second, humans can interact with the divine easily. Third, the divine is both female and male. Fourth, after death, people are reincarnated. And fifth, the natural world is a system of forces that balance each other, which is similar to the ideas of Taoism (see Chapter 6).

As long as people do not interfere with the happiness of others, they are free to do what they want. Pleasure, especially sex, is good. A central moral principle is called the **Wiccan Rede** (“advice”): “An [as long as] it harm none, do what you will.” This is derived from Aleister Crowley’s motto, “Do what ye will.” Scholars see predecessors to this sentiment all the way back to the Christian thinker Augustine, who interpreted the Gospel of John as a call to “love and do what you will.” In Wiccan teaching, it is meant to empower individuals to trust their inner moral sense.



FIGURE 9.10 Calling the elements (earth, air, fire, water, and aether) – part of a Wiccan ritual of handfasting (marriage). Paul Gapper/www.worldreligions.co.uk.

Wicca also teaches the **Rule of Three** (or **Law of Threelfold Return** or Law of Return). Reflecting what Gerald Gardner called “the joke of witchcraft” known only to witches – that “she will get three times what she gave,” this rule has been compared to the Golden Rule of Christianity as well as to the karmic law of reciprocity.

Wiccan Rituals

Unlike most of the traditions we have surveyed, Wicca has no churches or temples. As we have seen, churches and temples are places considered “sacred.” As one enters them, one passes into “sacred space” from space that is not sacred (**profane**). However, in Wicca, all of nature is considered sacred. Not surprisingly, then, Wiccan rituals are held *au natural* – in more ways than one. They are held outdoors, and often the participants are “skyclad” – in the buff, bare-naked – although, again, in keeping with Wiccan respect for individual preference, this is not a requirement.

Wiccan rituals involve the casting of spells or “workings.” In Roman Catholicism, sacraments are ritual actions performed by priests who are believed to effect real changes through those rituals. Thus, the priest can really change bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, and can really confer “absolution” – divine forgiveness for sins, provided everything has been done just right. In Wiccan workings, the priestess can channel the power of the cosmos to effect healing or protection or a number of other physical changes requested by the petitioner. However, spells should be cast for good only, such as for love and wisdom. And no magick, even for good, should be performed on anyone without their consent. Casting love spells, for example, to make someone fall in love without her consent would interfere with her autonomy.

Rituals typically begin with summoning the powers of the four points of the compass and the five basic “elements” – earth, air, fire, water, and “aether,” which is considered the cosmic force that underlies all of nature. Wiccan orientation toward these five points is reflected in the symbol of the tradition, the **pentagram**. Ritual objects include knives



FIGURE 9.11 The Wiccan pentagram.





Three Wiccan Spells

Love Spell

Take three cords or strings of pleasing pastel colors – perhaps pink, red, and green – and braid them tightly together. Firmly tie a knot near one end of the braid, thinking of your need for love.

Next, tie another knot, and another, until you have tied seven knots. Wear or carry the cord with you until you find your love.

After that, keep the cord in a safe place, or give it to one of the elements by burning and scattering the ashes in the ocean or in a stream.

Fertility Spell

During your most fertile time (usually two days before, during and after ovulation), light nine white candles in your bedroom. Place them around your bed. Sit or stand nude with your partner facing the North and repeat the following:

*With one mind, we call to thee.
With one heart, we long for thee
Childe of Earth, Wind, Fire & Sea,
Into our lives, we welcome thee.*

Turn to the East, then South, then West, repeating this incantation each time you do so. Proceed as nature requires. Repeat this spell each of the five nights before intercourse.

Job Spell

Begin on Sunday. Light a gold- or yellow-colored candle and say the following spell:

*A good job awaits me, I know
For thy brilliant light scans and searches a place for me.
A good job awaits me, for thy goodness is great
My faith in thee is complete, a good job waits for me.*

Speak this spell three times. Perform this ritual every day until employment is found. Instead of “good job,” maybe it would help to personalize it and change the words to “record deal,” or something else that appeals to you.

(an “athame” or a “boline,” symbolizing male creativity), a chalice or cup (symbolizing female creativity), a stick (“besome”), the pentacle (symbolizing the five powers), and a wand, a cauldron, candles, and other objects of symbolic value.

The Wiccan calendar – the “Wheel of the Year” – is punctuated with celebrations called **Sabbats**, which are holidays tied to the seasons of the year. British Traditional Wicca celebrates

eight Sabbats. The four “greater Sabbats” correspond to ancient European seasonal festivals. The fall festival is called **Samhain** (the Celtic word for “Summer’s End”), which Christians celebrate as Halloween or “All Hallows Evening.” In ancient Celtic and Wiccan tradition, this is the night when spirits of the departed intermingle with the living. Wiccans mark this Sabbat by inviting the ancestral spirits to join in a celebration in which they express respect for all creatures, living and dead, especially relatives and friends. While Samhain is a dark Sabbat, its opposite is **Beltane**, the celebration of spring, sometimes called May Day or the Fire Festival. At the halfway point between the spring equinox and summer solstice, this Sabbat is celebrated with bonfires and maypole dancing, and may involve symbolic or ritual sex (known as the Great Rite) performed by the priestess and priest. **Imbolc** (or Candlemas) is celebrated at the first signs of spring, and **Lughnasadh** (or **Lammas**) is a harvest festival. The four lesser Sabbats – the summer and winter solstice and the spring and fall equinox – may also be celebrated, as may be each full moon and new moon.

Like other religions, Wicca also celebrates initiation into the group and major life events (rites of passage). Some Wicca traditions recognize graduated levels of initiation, from a simple member to someone who can found an independent coven.

The Wicca marriage ceremony is called a **handfasting**: in it the couple promise to stay together for two years, five years, “as long as love lasts,” or whatever period of time they are comfortable with.

When a child is born, there is a ritual like baptism called **wiccaning**, in which the baby is presented to the Goddess and the God for protection. Respecting children’s autonomy, the parents say that they may later choose not to follow Wicca.

The Traditions of the Seneca

History and Teachings of the Seneca

The five religions we have considered so far in this chapter raise not only the question of what a “world religion” is, but also the question of whether there is some essence shared by all religions. The last “religion” we shall look at – that of the Seneca, a native American tribe – raises even more questions.

The Seneca were the largest tribe in the Iroquois Confederacy. Also called the “Six Nations,” this alliance included the Oneida, Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Tuscarora tribes. They lived in what is now New York State. As the westernmost tribe in the group, the Seneca were the “Keepers of the Western Door.” Today an estimated 25,000–40,000 Seneca live on reservations in New York State, in Canada, and in Oklahoma.

As oral cultures, the Six Nations did not have a written constitution. What united them was The Great Binding Law received by the spiritual leader Deganawida (Great Peacemaker), who was helped by the Mohawk leader Hiawatha. Some ideas from this Law were admired by the founders of the U.S. and incorporated into their Constitution. One version of the Law began with the words “We, the people, to form a union” – the very words used for the U.S. Constitution. In 1988, the U.S. Congress passed Concurrent Resolution 331 to recognize the influence of the Six Nations constitution on the foundational documents of the U.S.





FIGURE 9.12 Dancers from the Allegany and Cattaraugus Reservations of the Seneca Nation of Indians perform at St. Bonaventure University's first Native American Heritage Celebration in 2008. Photo Tom Donahue.

The Seneca lived in **longhouses**, wood-framed structures covered in elm bark, up to 100 feet in length, which housed up to 60 people. They had a matrilineal social structure, that is, membership in the group was passed on through the mothers. Men hunted and served as tribal chiefs, making trade agreements and conducting wars, but women were in charge of farming and property. They owned the land and the homes, and they chose the men who served on tribal councils. While today people live in houses and the longhouse is used mainly for tribal meetings and ceremonies, the position of women in tribal society remains strong and both group identity and property ownership are passed on through mothers.

If we were to travel back in time four centuries to a Seneca village and ask someone there, “What is your religion?” not only could that question not be answered – it could hardly be translated. As we saw in Chapter 5, one feature of oral cultures is that they do not distinguish “religion” from “politics” or “culture.” Seneca beliefs, customs, and rituals that others might call “religious” were continuous with Seneca storytelling, art, music, politics, agriculture, medicine, history, etc. There was no separate part of life called “religion.”

Like other North American native traditions, too, and like oral cultures around the world, the Seneca showed animism and anthropomorphism in the way they described the world around them. That is, they tended to see everything as alive, and they tended to think of living things as like human beings. For example, they called their most important crops – corn, beans, and squash – “The Three Sisters.” The sun was “Elder Brother” and the thunder “Grandfather.” When they visited the huge waterfall called “Nee-ah-gah-rah” (Niagara),



Patriarchy and Matriarchy

Since the early days of modernity, scholars have analyzed the nature and origins of male dominance in human society. It is clearly reflected in historical religions, particularly those that developed in settled societies and have written records. Official interpretations of the biblical and Qur'anic stories of Adam and Eve are often used to explain that women are weaker than men, both physically and morally, and therefore need to be protected and controlled by men. Male dominance is also institutionalized in most religions. It is only in recent years that women have been eligible for positions of authority in most religious groups.

However, some scholars have wondered if patriarchy is indeed dictated by nature or a function of specific socioeconomic developments in history. Among the earliest to question male control of females was Friedrich Engels (d. 1895), Karl Marx's collaborator. Engels saw patriarchy as a result of the dominant position gained by warriors when human beings made the transition from the nomadic life of hunters and shepherds to the settled life of farmers whose land and crops were the source of survival and therefore widely coveted.

Many contemporary scholars believe that patriarchy is not an essential part of life but something that simply developed and has been kept in place by institutions. Gerda Lerner (b. 1920) describes organized religions as the institutionalization of patriarchy in her landmark *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987). Some scholars see male dominance as having outlived its usefulness. Correlated with the prevalence of military approaches to conflict, patriarchy should be replaced with more reasonable and balanced approaches to social organization, before the human race eradicates itself in a militarist frenzy. Andrew Bard Schmookler expresses this view in his groundbreaking *Parable of the Tribes* (1984/1995).

Other scholars have recommended the replacement of male dominance with female dominance – **matriarchy**. Some have even imagined an ancient time when women ruled the world and life was full of peace and harmony. However, anthropologist Cynthia Eller disputes this notion in her *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (2001). There is general agreement among scholars that non-patriarchal societies are not dominated by women (and therefore are not matriarchal); rather, they are matrilineal (meaning that lineage or property are passed on through mothers) or matrilocal (meaning that upon marriage a couple becomes part of the bride's extended family rather than the groom's).

meaning Thundering Waters, they heard its roar as the voice of the Spirit of the Waters. In addition to the spirits in such natural forces, animals, and plants, the Seneca also believed in a personal god, sometimes called the Great Spirit or Great Mystery, who created the world, taught people how to live, and watches over all creation.





Chief Red Jacket's Response to Christian Missionaries



FIGURE 9.13 Portrait of Red Jacket by John Lee Mathies, oil on canvas, 1828. Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, lent by the estate of John W. Brown.

In 1822, Red Jacket, Chief of the Seneca, called a council in Batavia, New York. Here are some of his comments there about the attempts of Christian missionaries to convert the native tribes:

When the Great Good Spirit made the world, he put in it the trees of the forests, the birds of the air, all kinds of animals, and fishes that live in the waters. To all these he gave their respective shapes, colors, natures, actions, etc.... Those are all fixed, you see, and are immovable. They cannot change colour, nature or their actions or customs. He also at the same time made the White Man, the Red Man, and the Black Man. To the White Man he gave one way to worship him and certain customs; to the Red Man another, and his customs and way to live; and to the Black Man others still. Now I say we can't change our religion or custom, because they are fixed by the Great Good Spirit, and if we attempt to do it, we shall offend our Great Spirit and he will punish us for it.

From the rising to the setting sun examine all the different tribes of Indians, and see in what a condition you find them. I have travelled far. I have been from the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific, and I know the habits, customs and situation of almost every tribe and nation of Indians. And I say that it is a fact, that whenever you find a tribe of Indians that have been Christianized and have changed their custom or habit, which the Great Good Spirit gave them, you will see that they are a poor, worthless, lying, ragged, miserable and degraded set of beings.... I say, therefore, that the Great Spirit will not suffer his Red Children to change their religion or custom.... It is not because the White Men love the Indians that they want to make them Christians, it is because they want to cheat them out of their property. The Black Coats [missionaries] that they send among us with honey on their tongue, have always proved themselves to be dishonest; they are an ignorant, idle set of creatures, incapable of getting a living amongst their White brethren, and are therefore sent amongst us to get a living. They bring along with them a worthless set of White Men who steal our horses and seduce our Squaws.

Although the Great Spirit of the Seneca is similar to the God of the Bible, the Europeans who came to North America often treated the indigenous peoples (Native Americans or “Indians”) as “heathens” (people from the “heath”—lands covered with shrubs that were uncultivated, in the literal sense of not being farmed) and their beliefs and rituals as “paganism” (see p. 277). The Iroquois tribes had a ritual of sacrificing a maiden to Nee-ah-gah-rah, for example. They put her in a white canoe decorated with flowers and fruit and pushed it over the falls. European missionaries condemned this sacrifice as barbaric and tried to replace such traditions with Christian beliefs and rituals. However, some of the native people asked the missionaries about the death of Jesus on the cross, which Catholics reenact – indeed “celebrate” – in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Wasn’t that killing meant to please God, they asked. And if that sacrifice of a young man was good, then why is our sacrifice of a young woman bad?

Seneca Rituals

Unlike traditions with writing, Seneca traditions were passed down orally. They are expressed mostly in stories and rituals, not in doctrines or “teachings.” If we assume the categories used in Christianity, we can talk about “Seneca beliefs,” but this is not the way the Seneca traditionally talked about what they thought and did. They understand the world to be controlled by many spirits, the greatest being the Creator that Chief Red Jacket called the “Great Good Spirit.” However, this understanding of the world is not called “belief” as distinguished from “knowledge” – something that can be proven. Instead, as in many traditions, Seneca understandings of the world are better thought of as a worldview.

The lives of the Seneca historically depended on the crops they grew and the animals they hunted, and so they were attuned to the four seasons. Each year they had six major festivals in which they thanked the Great Spirit for the plants and animals they ate, and asked the Great Spirit for continued blessings:

- Midwinter or New Year’s Festival, lasting nine days, in January or February.
- Thanks-to-the-Maple Festival, late February or March. As the sap began to rise in maple trees, they gave thanks to the Great Spirit for the gift of the maple, and to the maple itself for yielding its sweet sap.
- Corn Planting Festival, in early May or June. As the seeds of the vegetables were planted, they invited the Great Spirit to bless them. They also asked “Our Grandfathers the Thunders” to bring rain on the crops, and “Our Elder Brother the Sun” to not burn the young plants as they emerge from the ground.
- Strawberry Festival in June. This was a “first-fruits” ritual thanking the Great Spirit for the earliest crop of the season.
- Green Corn Festival, lasting four days, in late August or September. The Seneca thanked the Great Spirit that the crops had ripened.
- Harvest Festival in October. As the corn was picked, dried, and stored for winter, the Seneca thanked the Great Spirit for another year’s harvest.



The Midwinter Festival is still very popular. Its format varies from tribe to tribe, but all have the same essential components. The general theme of the festival is to honor the Great Spirit, thank him for the blessings of the past year, and ask him to bless the people with another fruitful year. On the first day, there is a public naming of the babies that have been born since the last Green Corn Festival. The second day begins with the Big Heads, two men dressed in bearskin coats and masks made of cornhusks, waking people up and announcing that the new year has begun. The Big Heads call the people to the council house (the building where special tribal meetings are held) or the longhouse to reveal their dreams, and warn that if they do not come they will be obsessed by the desires that caused the dream. On the third day, called Ashes Stirring, small groups of people visit the houses in the village to stir the ashes in the hearth as a symbol of thanks for the blessings of the previous year. Then they return to the council house or longhouse to sing songs of thanksgiving.

The fourth day is for rituals of the special medicine societies, such as the **False Face Society**, the Buffalo Society, and the Otter Society. They perform healing rituals for sick people. On the fifth day, the main ritual used to be the burning of a spotless white dog as a sacrifice to the Creator. Earlier it had been strangled (no blood could be shed) and its body, decorated with beads and ribbons, had been hung on a wooden statue of the Creator. Today a white basket is substituted for the dog. After the sacrifice, a Thanksgiving Dance is performed.



The Origin of the False Face Society

There are many tellings of the origin of the healing powers of the medicine men of the False Face Society. According to one short version:

The Spirit Medicine Man, a man blessed with healing powers in response to his love of living things, met a stranger and they had a contest... [to see] who could move a mountain. The stranger made the mountain quake. The Medicine Man said that the stranger did indeed have skills, but not enough to move a mountain. The Spirit Medicine Man moved the mountain, but so suddenly, it hit the stranger and left him disfigured. The Spirit Medicine Man healed him and taught him the ways of medicine. The stranger became a very famous healer known as "Old Broken Nose."

(<http://www.support-native-american-art.com/iroquois-masks.html>)

Six Nation traditions explain that the stranger then went to live in the forest. Masks made in his image summon his power when needed. Those initiated into the Society go to the forest to be inspired by Old Broken Nose's spirit, whereupon they carve a mask from a nearby tree. The masks, representing Old Broken Nose, are considered sacred and are not supposed to be photographed or sold for profit.