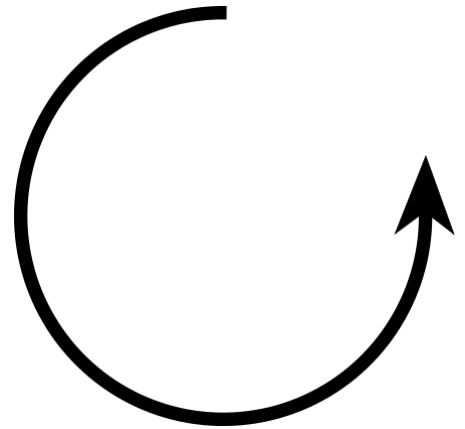


Widdershins

Widdershins (sometimes **withershins**, **widershins** or **widderschynnes**) is a term meaning to go counter-clockwise, to go anti-clockwise, or to go lefthandwise, or to walk around an object by always keeping it on the left. Literally, it means to take a course opposite the apparent motion of the sun viewed from the Northern Hemisphere (the centre of this imaginary clock is the ground the viewer stands upon).^[1] The earliest recorded use of the word, as cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is in a 1513 translation of the *Aeneid*, where it is found in the phrase "Abaisit I wolx, and widdersyns start my hair." In this sense, the "to start widdershins" means "to stand on end".^[2]

The use of the word also means "in a direction opposite to the usual" and "in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun". It is cognate with the German language *widersinnig*, i.e., "against" + "sense". The term "widdershins" was especially common in Lowland Scots.^[2]

The opposite of widdershins is *deisul*, or *sunwise*, meaning "clockwise".



The anticlockwise or counterclockwise direction

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Etymology

Widdershins comes from Middle Low German *weddersinnes*, literally "against the way" (i.e. "in the opposite direction"), from *widersinnen* "to go against", from Old High German elements *widar* "against" and *sinnen* "to travel, go", related to *sind* "journey".^[3]^[4]

Superstition and religion

Because the sun played a highly important role in older religions, to go against it was considered bad luck for sun-worshipping traditions.

It was considered unlucky in Britain to travel in an anticlockwise (not sunwise) direction around a church, and a number of folk myths make reference to this superstition, e.g. Childe Rowland, where the protagonist and his sister are transported to Elfland after his sister runs widdershins round a church. There is also a reference to this in Dorothy Sayers's novels *The Nine Tailors* (chapter entitled The Second Course; "He turned to his right, knowing that it is unlucky to walk about a church widdershins...") and *Clouds of Witness* ("True, O King, and as this isn't a church, there's no harm in going round it widdershins"). In Robert Louis Stevenson's tale "The Song of the Morrow," an old crone on the beach dances "widdershins".^[5]

In contrast, in Judaism circles are sometimes walked anticlockwise. For example, when a bride circles her groom seven times before marriage, when dancing around the bimah during Simchat Torah (or when dancing in a circle at any time), or when the Sefer Torah is brought out of the ark (ark is approached from the right, and departed from the left). This has its origins in the Beis Hamikdash, where in order not to get in each other's way, the priests would walk around the altar anticlockwise while performing their duties. When entering the Beis Hamikdash the people would enter by one gate, and leave by another. The resulting direction of motion was anticlockwise. In Judaism, starting things from the right side is considered to be important, since the right side is the side of Chesed (kindness) while the left side is the side of Gevurah (judgment). For example, it is a law to put on the right shoe first and take off the left shoe first (unless one is left-handed).

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, however, it is normal for processions around a church to go widdershins.

The Bönpo in the Northern Hemisphere traditionally circumambulate (generally) in a counter-clockwise and 'widdershins' direction, that is to say, a direction that runs counter to the apparent movement of the Sun within the sky from the vantage of the ground. This runs counter to the prevalent directionality of Buddhism (in general) and orthodox Hinduism. This is in keeping with the aspect and directionality of the 'Sauvastika' (Tibetan: *yung-drung*), sacred to the Bönpo. In the Southern Hemisphere, the Bonpo practitioner is required to elect whether the directionality of 'counter-clockwise' (deosil in the Southern Hemisphere) or running-counter to the direction of the Sun (widdershins in the Southern Hemisphere) is the key intention of the tradition. The resolution to this conundrum is left open to the practitioner, their 'intuitive insight' (Sanskrit: *prajna*) and their tradition.

See also

- Circumambulation
- Sunwise (Deosil)
- Clockwise

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