

Gardnerian Witchcraft

an interview with Deborah Lipp, by Wicked Whimsy

What is the name of your path?

Gardnerian Wicca or Gardnerian Witchcraft.

Is your path pantheistic, polytheistic, nontheistic, or something else entirely?

Gardnerian Wicca, first of all, is orthopraxic, not orthodox. In plain English, that means that the tradition is defined by what you do, not what you believe. There is a wide range of beliefs among those who are Gardnerian, and that's great. By defining ourselves by behavior, we avoid being the Thought Police.

In general, Gardnerians are polytheistic, but that may take any of several shapes. Most Gardnerians are "soft polytheists," meaning we believe in many gods, but that all gods are ultimately One. For myself, I don't believe there is a One god that is distinct and separate from the One that is all life, you, me, my cats, the Atlantic Ocean, and so on. I think some people tend to see "One" as "God," and I don't. I see One as All, the Tao if you will. And within that One, we're all individuals, gods, and people equally.

That said, there's an awful lot I don't understand about metaphysics, despite a lifetime of study.

Gardnerians worship a specific pair of deities, whom we call the God and the Goddess. Some people think that makes us duotheists, but that's not quite true. We don't call Her "the Goddess" because She's the one and only goddess, but because we consider Her name a secret.

The Pagan Paths interview series was designed to help portray paganism not as the monolith it's usually shown as, but as the variety of multifaceted religions & spiritualities that it actually is. Wicked Whimsy is the personal website of Michelle Nickolaisen, dedicated to creating the life you crave, covering topics ranging from style to spirituality to productivity & creativity.



Photo by Luz

What does your daily (or otherwise regular) practice consist of?

Gardnerians in general meet monthly for full moons (Esbats) and for the eight holidays (Sabbats). Some groups also do new moons. Different groups handle the occasional overlap of holidays and moons differently. In addition, we may meet ad hoc, for example, if there's an emergency healing, or a special occasion, or extra training time, or experimental meetings, or whatever.

Whatever private daily (or otherwise) practice an individual may have is their own choice.

Can you please give a brief overview of your holidays, if they exist? Which one is your favorite?

Our holidays are pretty familiar to most Pagans, but let me take a moment to talk about exoteric and esoteric, public and private, and the famous Gardnerian secrecy.

Gardnerians operate under an oath of secrecy, which we take upon initiation. That doesn't mean we can't talk about our tradition, but there are certain areas around which we tiptoe.

Personally, I believe that all religion has an exoteric and an esoteric aspect. There's the part that faces the world and the part that looks inward. I don't think one is superior to the other. I don't think I'd be the Wiccan and Pagan I am today without the enormous positive input of the exoteric Pagan community, by which I mean the public stuff, the festivals, the sharing, the open rituals, the communication. I think that's been an essential part of my growth and exploration and expansion as a Pagan

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and Witch.

For me, that public side is complimented by a private side, by the secret, private, intimate, and mystical experience of Gardnerian Witchcraft.

I actually believe that Gerald Gardner always intended a Wiccan practice to include both. He alluded to it in all of his writing: that a coven was something that functioned within a larger Pagan community. I think that's so important.

So if I talk about the holidays: Beltane, Summer Solstice, Lammass, Fall Equinox, Samhain, Yule, Imbolc, and Spring Equinox, I could talk about the public Pagan stuff, and you'd be totally familiar with that.

Meanwhile, I'm also doing private work on the inner, mystical meaning of those holidays. But I don't think that the inner meaning is the "right" one and the public meaning is somehow fake. Rather, I believe they're two sides of the same coin.

All that is the long way around to saying that the inner, private Gardnerian holidays and how they differ from the public Pagan ones is something I'm not prepared to talk about.

Is there a set view of the afterlife, and if so, what is it?

Gardnerians tend to believe in reincarnation: rest in the Summerland and then rebirth in a new body. Certainly our rituals support that belief. However, I did say we're not orthodox and not the Thought Police, so there are definitely some Gardnerians who don't believe in reincarnation or simply aren't sure.

My personal beliefs have been strongly influenced by studying the Seth material.

Do you have a particularly close relationship with one god or goddess? Would you like to share a bit about them?

In addition to the Gardnerian God and Goddess, my personal patron is Kali. Gardnerians don't necessarily have a patron, it's not part of the tradition. I had a vision of Kali many, many years ago that has had a profound impact on me. She is a difficult Goddess, but She chose me and I accept that and love Her.

Do you interact with any spirits or beings, other than your deities?

Oh sure, all the time. That's such an open-ended question! I mean, how do you take a walk on the beach without interacting with the spirit of Ocean? How do you honor your beloved Dead

without interacting with their spirits? The world is full of spirits and beings and we interact with them all the time.

How do you feel about eclectic vs. traditional Wicca?

I celebrate people's ability to choose a path that is right for them. I would personally never be happy with an eclectic path. It's just not my personality.

I have a section in my book, *The Study of Witchcraft*, that discusses eclectic, traditional, and radical Witchcraft, and how they differ. I go over each path's pluses and minuses, and suggest ways they can learn from each other.

Any resources or recommended reading?

Well, I'm a big fan of my own books. Ha, kidding. I have a recommended reading list on my website.

Check out Deborah Lipp's books on Amazon, or visit www.deborahlipp.com

Pagan Paths is a series dedicated to showing that Paganism is not, as it's often portrayed, a monolith, but an umbrella term for a variety of different, living, breathing religions and paths. Read other interviews in this series at www.wicked-whimsey.com

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