



Campus Women



What Is Witchcraft

Witchcraft as seen through traditional myths and stereotypes is something evil. Witches are seen as ugly old women flying around on broomsticks.

These as other stereotypes are far from true. Witches are both female and male, the majority being female. Witchcraft is not evil or devil worship. "All witches adamantly maintained that their beliefs have nothing whatsoever to do with devil worship or black magic. (Witches, Pagans & Magic in the New Age. Kevin Marron).

Witchcraft is actually the belief and worship of nature. Old Pagan religions were centred around nature's birth, death, and rebirth of crops (summer, fall/winter and spring). Witches also worship the Goddess Mother Earth.

Why do people practice witchcraft today? Well there could be a number of reasons for this. One could be the growing concern for the environment. People are also looking for alternative religions other than the already existing ones. Another reason may be that Witchcraft is one of the few equality religions. In traditional covens there were thirteen people usually an equal number of men and women, plus high priest or priestess. Traditionally Witchcraft worshipped both a God and Goddess.

The main Festivals celebrated by witches are Halloween (Samhain) (October 31) this is the festival of death which celebrates the coming of winter. May EVE (Beltane) (April 30), this is the fertility festival this marks the beginning half of the year ruled by the Goddess. Candlemas (Imbolg) the light festival which celebrates the first strings of new life of the earth. (February 2) Lammas (Lughnasadh) which

celebrates the corn harvest (August 1)

Historically Pagans who were considered witches were mostly politically undesirable people. These people were also seen as a threat to the growing Christian religion. Women were among those who "threatened" the men within the church.

"Historians differ as to how many people were burned at the stake in Europe, or hanged under English law, for Witchcraft. They also disagree about whether these people were witches, heretics or simply politically undesirable people. Although both men and women were executed as witches, the vast majority were women. This is partly a reflection of the fact that many of the practitioners of folk magic and leaders of Pagan religious groups were female, but there are also other reasons powerful women, like Joan of Arc, were branded as witches. Midwives and herbal healers were regarded as a threat to the growing body of professional male physicians.

Many of those killed as witches were widows whose husbands had been killed in war. They were seen as surplus women and they were persecuted, either because other people coveted their property or, if they had no property, because they were regarded as a burden on the community." (Witches, Pagans & Magic in the New Age. Kevin Marron) For this reason witches had to take their religion underground (practice in secrecy). The fear of persecution made these people distrust others and become secretive which is likely the reason there is so much confusion surrounding witchcraft today. This also helped to create the stereotype of Devil Worshipers because there was/is so much mystery and secrecy surrounding witchcraft.

Witchcraft is slowly reviving itself as an alternative religion.