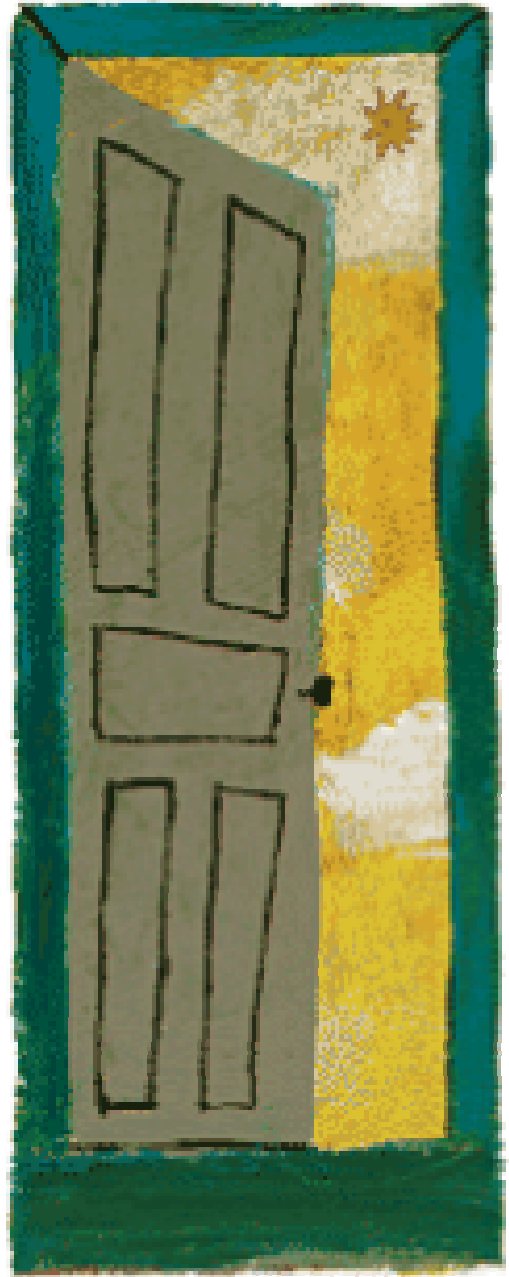


The Front Gate:

Finding, screening,
orienting and
dedicating new
students

A workbook for Pagan
clergy

by Judy Harrow
and Gwyneth Harrow



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Introduction

We are Witches, and experienced coven leaders. These notes are based on our own experience and study. Still, they are only what we have learned up until now -- they are hardly the final word on the subject. We hope they will be helpful to other coven leaders as well as leaders of all other kinds of Pagan groups, people who are intending to start groups soon, and those in advanced training. They are not intended to become the basis for the next Pagan fad, nor do they replace the rituals of your own Pagan tradition or the guidance of your own Elders.

As usual with us, this is a work in progress. We hope to receive advice, corrections, inspirations, great ideas, criticisms and manifestos concerning this book from our colleagues in the Pagan clergy. Please let us know how you think these notes might be improved.

About the authors

Judy Harrow received her Masters Degree in Counseling from City College of New York in 1979. She worked for many years in civil service, and retired in April, 2000. Judy has served as High Priestess of Proteus Coven since 1980. She is currently President of the New Jersey Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling and serves on the National Advisory Board of the Consultation for Multi-faith Education. Judy has written two books, *Wicca Covens* (1999), and *Spiritual Mentoring: a Pagan Guide* (2002). She also edited and contributed to the anthology *Devoted to You* (2003) and coordinated the Fiftieth Anniversary reissue of *Witchcraft Today* by Gerald Gardner (2004). Judy writes the "Mind and Magic" column for PanGaia Magazine, where she explores the many ways that psychology interacts with both Pagan spirituality and magic. Gwyneth Harrow is Judy Harrow's working partner. She lives way up north far away from any modern conveniences, and counts birds for fun. Gwyneth is deeply involved in writing instructional resources for Wiccan clergy.

Judy and Gwyneth have been arguing over nit-picks, collaborating on magical projects, and happily married to each other since the spring of 1994. We have never been able to agree upon the superiority of British or American spelling rules.

These notes were originally created as handouts for an elders' workshop. As traditional elders, we are glad to offer this workshop as a free service to the Pagan community, under the sponsorship of any non-profit Pagan group, asking only that you cover our travel and other expenses.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to our colleagues who shared their wisdom with us: Susan for her comments on psychological issues and contra-indications, Isaac Bonewits for his *Cult Danger Evaluation Frame*, and to the Ladies Morvoren, Theos and Deirdre, who have been unstinting in their aid and counsel to us over the years.

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We would very much appreciate news about how you're using these notes, feedback, suggestions for improvement, etc. Please contact Judy Harrow for this, or to request permission for any commercial use.

Thank you!

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed within these notes are solely those of the authors and are not to be construed as being the opinions or positions of the organizations to which we belong, or any particular Tradition of our Craft.

May these words, and the manner of their sharing, bring good to many, harm to none, and glory to the Ancient Gods!

Chapter 1:

Finding, screening, orienting, and Dedicating new students

Teaching the ways of a religious or spiritual path to a beginning student, or to a new group, is an awesome responsibility. A religious teacher shares information and helps the students develop relevant skills, just like secular teachers of carpentry or surgery or whatever, but for us that is just the beginning. We also facilitate and mentor our students' personal spiritual development. They may come to us for counseling with both the spiritual and ordinary perplexities of their lives. We are unavoidably cloaked with the mantle of religious authority, and so serve as their models of what a person who is well-advanced on this particular Path should be like.

But we are, individually and collectively, beginners. Let's just bracket the ongoing and rancorous debate about whether our Traditions are continuous, reconstructed (and how accurately) or newly created. The fact remains that they are new to most of us. Almost all of us are first generation, raised in other faiths or none. And so, we lack a body of collective experience, knowledge and wisdom about what to teach, how to teach and who to teach. Discovering or creating that deep knowledge base is our job, and the job of those who will follow us. That, too, is part of what makes the teacher's role so demanding and daunting. The beginners we train will shape the future of the Traditions we love.

That third question, who to teach, is what this notebook is about. We have no simple, cookbook directions for you, no pre-built expert system. But we do think that our own years of experience leading covens has at least helped us to identify some of the critical questions. Making these questions explicit may help you immediately, as you work with seekers and beginners. Our great hope is that we will also stimulate discussion among elders, a pooling of thought and experience far richer than what just the two of us can bring.

One important note: we are Witches, so Wiccan terminology comes most naturally to us. We use a lot of it in this workbook. Still, we have a hunch that the same general principles apply to other deeply bonded and committed Pagan groups such as Asatruar or Druids. We warmly and respectfully invite these Pagan cousins to make whatever translations work for them.

Our basic premise is this hard truth: you can't train everybody. You can't even train everybody who deserves such training. Nobody can.

As you read the above paragraph, you may have been thinking of size limits. Size limits are important. Almost none of us are paid for our work; in fact many of our Traditions specifically forbid such payments. Whether you like that or not (another tangent we can avoid for right now), the fact remains that almost all of us need to make our livings by working a secular job. We all have families and friends. Many of us are parents, another

important and demanding role. In short, we have lives, and having lives actually makes us better clergy, more compassionate and responsive to the needs of others who have lives.

But any teaching requires time and attention; lessons must be prepared and students deserve thoughtful feedback on their work. The workshop (at which this book was used as a study tool) itself had a size limit, needed to allow each member adequate chances to participate, share observations and insights, and ask questions - and to allow us to get a sense of how each of you is assimilating and reacting to the day' s work. To facilitate and mentor our students' ongoing spiritual and magical development takes even more time, attention and energy. So we plead with you to be careful not to offer more than you have to give, and only take on as many students as you can truly nurture.

However, those limits, those decisions, are about you and not your students. They are not the limits we will be considering in this book. There is another reading of the statement "you can' t train everybody."

People are not interchangeable parts. A particular student will fit beautifully with some teachers and/or groups, adequately with others, and be a disastrous mismatch with still others. We are not talking about good or bad students, teachers, or groups right now - we are talking about good or bad *matches*. We are talking about who we will train, not about how many.

Don' t try to train people you dislike or disrespect. A better way to say this: train the people you respect and enjoy. This may seem self-indulgent, but it isn' t. If you can only take on just so many students, it makes sense to choose the ones you can do best with.

Chapter 2: Step One – Introspection

In order to effectively assess whether a seeker would do well under your guidance, you must first know yourself, and you must also know your group or your dream. You cannot hope to transmit knowledge to someone else until you yourself have become knowledgeable.

First, know yourself

You may have done extensive self-assessment during your own time of training. If not, now's the time. Even if you did, you may want to check for changes. Here are some of the kinds of things you may want to know about yourself to help make good choices of students:

- What is your personal temperament and style?
- What is your current understanding of / best hope for / your Tradition or Path?
- What are your core spiritual or magical values?
- What kinds of attitudes and behaviors do you consider to be particularly appealing or offensive in another follower of your Path or member of your Tradition?
- What are your specialties? Which of the knowledge or skills related to your Path or Tradition do you feel best qualified to teach?

Exploring your limits

When a seeker contacts us, there are four possible responses. We can accept them. We can refer them to some other teacher or group. We can defer them, tell them "not yet," perhaps giving them some suggestions about what they can work on in the interim. Or we can just plain reject them. Also, sometimes we know nearly immediately what we want to do; while other times we mull over our reactions for quite a while.

To get a sense of where your own limits lie, try to describe the extremes, the people who you would accept or reject with only minimal consideration. Here are some examples:

You might immediately accept someone if:

- The seeker was recommended by someone you respect, perhaps your own elder.
- The seeker is an old and dear friend.
- The seeker was previously deferred. The reason you deferred them no longer applies. You feel obligated.
- The seeker has some particular skill or talent that you miss having in your group.

You might summarily reject someone if:

- The seeker is a legal minor without parental consent. You are concerned about the legal risk

- The seeker is, in your opinion, immature or emotionally unstable.
- The seeker is hostile towards your elders, your life-mate, or an existing group member.
- The seeker seems unable or unwilling to participate fully in your training program.
- The seeker seems to want something you cannot or will not offer.

Note that these are just possibilities. They aren't even necessarily our own turn-ons and turnoffs. Even the two of us don't share identical turn-ons and turnoffs. You may have different ones altogether. We encourage you to identify your own, and also to identify which of them are truly absolute and which are just rebuttable presumptions, probable but tentative outcomes that might be changed as you get to know the seeker better. Judy, for example, would consider a stretched-out (but not watered-down) curriculum for someone balancing other life demands, but would absolutely reject anyone who is hostile to her elders, partner or current coven members.

Booby-traps

Beware of accepting or rejecting a seeker for extrinsic or ulterior reasons. For example:

- The seeker has access to a better meeting-space than you do.
- The seeker has lots of money and is generous.
- You are physically or romantically attracted to the seeker.
- Some other teacher, someone you don't think highly of, mistreated this seeker and you would like to do better by them (or get one-up on someone you dislike).
- Some Big Name Pagan recommended the seeker to you. This gratifies your ego and impresses other coven leaders.
- You think that having a larger number of students will increase your status in the community.

It's always a good idea to seek a second opinion from a respected elder. Whenever you think extrinsic issues like these might cloud your judgment, a second opinion becomes really imperative.

An exercise in sortilege:

Following are twelve descriptions of seekers who might come to you. Each one tells you a little bit about the seeker's life circumstances.

To work this exercise, download and print out the descriptions at the back of this book and cut them into twelve pieces (or, if you prefer, hand-copy the descriptions onto twelve index cards.) Sort the descriptions into three piles: people you would probably accept as students, people you would probably reject as students, and those about whom you are undecided.

Now consider the following questions:

- Were there any indications in common among the people you probably would accept?
- What additional information would you want to have concerning these people before making a final decision?
- Were there any indications in common among the people you probably would reject?
- Would there be any extenuating circumstances that might lead you to accept a seeker who would otherwise appear to be unsuitable?
- Which of these people would you refer to another local group? Which would you reject altogether? What differentiates these two groups?
- What additional information would you need in order to make a decisions concerning the seekers about whom you are undecided?

If you decide to use this exercise with your own advanced students, you can create additional characters out of your own experiences.

Second, know your group (or your dream)

You may be about to start a new group, bringing together a bunch of beginners and strangers who you hope will meld into collaborators and friends. The only thing you have to weigh them against is your dream, your vision or ideal of a good group. Up to a point, the more clear, specific and articulate you can make that vision, the better your screening will be. So here are some more points to ponder:

- What did you like best about the group where you were trained, or any other groups you have been part of?
- Was there anything in any of your former groups that you would have liked to decrease or eliminate?
- Was there anything you would have liked to increase or add?
- Are there any other groups you know that you particularly admire? What makes them special?
- Do you have any qualms or concerns about any groups you know? What are they?
- Beyond simple numeric growth, what contribution do you hope to make to your Tradition or Path by leading a group?

Try brainstorming answers to these and similar questions. We strongly advise you to do this with your partner, if you have one. Then disengage the rational gears and just daydream about your ideal group. Again, if you have a partner, you can try co-visioning.

To do this, talk each other into a relaxed and receptive state, and describe your daydreams to each other. You may want to tape-record this exercise, since note-taking would tend to pull you out of relaxation.

Then, even if you have no intention at all of advertising your group, try writing the classified ad ... "new group forming, seeks members ..." The exercise of doing so will help you understand just who you are looking for.

But please remember that we said "up to a point." Leading a group is also the next step in your own growth. (that' s right another learning experience, with all the usual potential for joy and pain.) All wise teachers are open to learning from their students. All who truly walk the Path are open to surprises from the Gods we serve. By surprise, and not always comfortable surprise, They keep our minds young. So beware of too tight a self-definition, which might limit you to stagnant self-replication. You are good, but you are not perfect, and neither is your understanding. Leave room for growth.

Or you may be seeking new members for an existing group. You are weighing potential members against a reality, not a dream. You know how your group works, what it emphasizes and so on. Whether or not you are considering new students, it will be good for your group to make this self-understanding explicit and available to all current members.

Basic functions of a coven

Here is a way to look at this: there are five basic functions that a coven might fulfill.

These are:

- **Worship group** ritually celebrating the Old Gods and the Old Ways.
- **Teaching group** instructing new members in traditional lore and skills.
- **Growth/support group** helping members work through the ordinary problems and perplexities of life and supporting their ongoing spiritual development.
- **Task group** providing a community service, for example publishing a magazine or putting on a gathering.
- **Family of choice** filling the gap left in members' lives by absent or dysfunctional families of origin.

Please notice that different groups might emphasize these functions differently, or even abstain from one or more of them. Knowing what the balance is in your own group will help you determine how likely you are to providing what a particular seeker is hoping to find.

At the risk of sounding pretentious, we encourage you to articulate this understanding by writing a descriptive "mission statement." Ask all current group members (and maybe even your graduates) for input. Collectively creating a mission statement will reinforce your group' s sense of identity and cohesion.

Better yet, giving this statement to seekers will serve as an easy first screen. Some seekers will be able to see that yours is not the group they were looking for, thus saving everybody a lot of time and stress. Others will be attracted by your self-description. But remember that our caveat against too tight a self-definition applies even more strongly to

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existing groups. When an existing group becomes too set in its ways, more than just the leaders' growth is retarded.

As is often the case, the optimal growth path is down the centre, somewhere between chaos and stasis.

Chapter 3:

Step Two - making contact

Teachers cannot teach, and seekers cannot study, unless they meet one another. Sometimes teachers simply do a beacon working and then quietly open themselves to whomever the Gods may choose to send. At other times, we may choose to actively seek students. There are several ways to do this. As usual, each way has advantages and disadvantages.

Word of mouth

Word of mouth is probably the most common method for letting it be known that a group is accepting new students

Advantages

By its very nature, word of mouth communication moves among people who already know each other, so it gets the word out among people whose life circumstances and social connections are similar to yours. When the communication is accurate, it will tend to bring together compatible people who will work easily together.

Disadvantages

The grapevine is also the rumor mill. Information can be inadvertently exaggerated or distorted through transmission errors, as anyone who played "telephone" at childhood parties knows. Worse, completely false rumors can be inserted by malicious gossips.

Also there are pros and cons to spreading the word only within your own social milieu. People who all come from the same background can reinforce each others' comfortable prejudices. Too much similarity puts you at risk of "groupthink," a kind of shared stagnation, at worst a shared and mutually-reinforcing delusional system.

Pagan networking groups and open events

Networking groups and events such as festivals and open circles allow you to make contact with a wide variety of people, including people from outside your own social network.

Advantages

When you attend a networking event, you get to see how people actually behave in a Pagan setting. They probably won't know they are being considered for your group. They may not even know that you are a group leader. So they won't be putting their best foot forward in an effort to impress you. In a workshop, you can evaluate the quality of their questions and contributions. In a ritual, you can feel into their energy and perhaps observe their performance talents. In general, you can see whether they help with scutwork like set-up and clean-up, whether they are pleasant to be around, whether you think they would fit well with your group.

Disadvantages

Sleep-away festivals draw people from a wide area. The wonderful seeker you find may live in a distant city. Local networking groups may become ingrown, dominated by one clique or Tradition. Also, as many hopeful coven leaders skim off the likely candidates, local networking groups may wind up with a high proportion of the "leftovers," creating an atmosphere more welcoming to similar fringe types than to good candidates.

Handouts for Seekers:

First, Isaac Bonewits' **Cult Danger Evaluation Frame** (located at the back of this book) is a service to the entire community. It helps seekers and all others identify groups that are dysfunctional or even actually pathological. It behooves us all to keep this excellent resource in circulation, especially among newcomers to our community.

Second, there are wide differences of belief, emphasis and style among groups that are ethical and functional. Compatibility, in several aspects, is an important consideration. Intelligent and careful seekers screen groups just as thoroughly as thoughtful group leaders screen seekers. To save everybody time and trouble, we prepared some handouts describing our groups. They serve as the first, very rough, screen for compatibility. We offer a few examples of handouts we created (located at back of this book), in hopes that they will give you some ideas for making your own:

- Who Are the Proteans? is a description of the philosophy and spirit of Proteus Coven
- Proteus Coven' Dedication Pledges: what Proteus students promise at the start of training.
- An overview of Proteus Coven' curriculum.
- A FAQ file about Wild Rose Grove

Advertising

A variety of venues, such as Pagan magazines, bulletin-boards in shops, and even leaflets inserted into library books, are available to the teacher who wishes to advertise. Many Pagan journals will run free or low-cost contact ads; New Age newspapers (which are published for free distribution in most large cities) can reach many readers, but tend to charge more for advertisements.

Advantages

Advertising may be the only way to reach out to a seeker who has all the right reasons and yearnings, but has none of the personal contacts.

Drawbacks

Undesirable strangers may be attracted by broad-reach advertising. Be very wary about screening the stranger who comes without prior contact or references. Many Witches are also uncomfortable with public advertising because it feels uncomfortably close to proselytizing.

Some New Age shops and publications are uneasy with explicitly Witchy references, and may require that you couch your advertisement in more subtle terms.

Internet and the Web

These days more and more people have access to the Internet and the Web, and use these to search for both information and contacts. You can list your group with The Witches' Voice, and with many other Pagan web sites, or even set up a web site of your own.

Advantages

Any Internet or Web listing will reach a wide number of people who are fairly sophisticated and demonstrably willing to learn and adapt to new ways. Beyond that, your own web page will give you space for far more detailed self-description than any magazine or physical bulletin board. You can post your self-description or "mission statement" here, along with any other materials you feel comfortable sharing with the general public. Seekers with good self-awareness will get a clear idea of what your group is about. If you don't seem to meet their needs, they can surf along elsewhere. This preliminary self-selection is easiest on all concerned.

Also, both of us have found that email makes it very much easier for a group to stay in touch in between meetings and handle minor logistical decisions.

Drawbacks

Our cautions about open advertising attracting potentially undesirable strangers obviously apply to electronic advertising just the same as to advertising on paper. In addition, consider this: a seeker can be ethical, compassionate, spiritual, magical - whatever you want in a student - and unable to afford a computer or Internet access. A seeker can be all of those things and yet be a technophobe, uncomfortable around machines. Think carefully about whether you want to screen out such people. If you don't, do not limit your recruitment to Internet contacts.

Chapter 4: Step Three - Preliminary screening

Two preliminary steps - asking for and checking references, and asking for a letter of self-introduction - will help you screen out the obviously-inappropriate contacts which you will receive.

Checking references

If the seeker has had any prior contact with the Pagan community, they may be able to supply you with references. While it' s unfair to reject a new person for simply being new, and without prior contacts, when references are available, they can be very helpful. How much weight you should give to a reference will depend on your opinion of the person who provided it. Consider:

Is the reference honest? It pays to have some independent notion of whether or not the person providing a reference is trustworthy. Sometimes people will provide good references for a problem student, simply to shift the burden of dealing with that person on to some other teacher.

Is the reference insightful? Sometimes a person will be quite honest but not particularly insightful -- some people have an ingrained aversion to expressing any sort of criticism of a third party, thinking that it is somehow unfair or not socially acceptable. All of us have our blind spots, which can reduce the accuracy of our references as well as our own screening. Judy, for example, is a notorious sucker for musicians.

Does the reference have similar criteria for a good student as you do? They may have a different notion of good character or relevant talents than your own. No matter how well they know the seeker, they may not know you or your group well enough to judge how well you would fit together.

You can safeguard against this pitfall by asking specific questions. The answer to "would they be a good student" depends on what you mean by "a good student." Instead ask about what you think a good student should be. "Can they keep a confidence?" "What is their sense of humor like?" "Are they self-motivated learners or would they expect spoon-feeding?" If you' re choosing new members for an existing group, it' s good to get experienced members' suggestions for some of these questions.

Some teachers (such as Gwyneth with her Canadian study group) take the references one step further by asking the seeker to provide the name of a sponsor into the group; the sponsor can provide both an initial reference check as well as ongoing support for the student, in the event that the student is accepted into the group.

Remember, simply asking for references is not enough. You must *always* check references and verify that the person is actually aware that his or her name has been used.

Letters of self-introduction

You may want to ask seekers for a letter of self-introduction. This is a good idea because it allows a seeker time to be thoughtful about their responses. Also, it gives you a record of the seeker's early self-presentation and your own first impression. If you begin to notice inconsistencies later, you will be able to check whether or not this is just a trick of memory.

Here are some things you may want to ask the seeker to include in their letter:

Contact information: name of seeker, mailing address and telephone number, e-mail address (if available), along with any cautions about using this information. (e.g. do they share an answering machine or mailbox with people who should not know of their Pagan interests?)

References if they have previous contact with any reputable elders (and if you have not previously asked for, received, and checked the seeker's references.)

- **Practicalities:** the seeker's age, any health concerns (e.g. allergies or mobility restrictions), distance from your meeting place, car or public transit access, work or school schedule, child care concerns. Very important: if the seeker is mated, how does the mate feel about this involvement? If you are interested in astrology, you may also ask for natal data, so that you can construct a birth chart.
- **Religious background:** What is the seeker's religion of origin? How does she or he currently feel about it? What other religious paths (if any) have they explored? What attracts them to a Pagan path? What has been their Pagan exposure up to now? What do they consider to have been the strongest influences on their spiritual development up to this point? Encourage them to go into as much depth as they feel comfortable with in this response. Likes and dislikes, and the reasons for them, are particularly important. Also encourage them to discuss any part of their secular background that they feel is relevant to their spiritual quest.
- **Current desires and hopes:** The most important question of all - what are they looking for now in a group or teacher. What would they like to learn or how would they like to develop during the next stretch of their path? What attracts them to you or your group?

You can put some of this into the form of a questionnaire. If you do so, be sure to ask open-ended questions, and to end each section with something like "is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?" You might also suggest that they use the questionnaire as a basis for a more free-flowing letter of self-introduction. Blank questionnaires can conveniently be posted on the Web or distributed at gatherings.

Letters of self-introduction are particularly important when you'll be making a referral. Sometimes referral is the only possibility, as when somebody far away gets in touch via the Internet. You can only learn just so much about a person through correspondence, without a face-to-face meeting, of course. Still, your correspondence may have given you

a good enough impression that, if the person were local, you would have been willing to meet with them.

If you also know of a reasonable teacher or group in their area, you can forward the seeker' s letter and any references to that local contact. The local group is free to follow up or not. They may not if, for example, your apparently pleasant correspondent has a dubious local reputation. If they decline, their privacy has not been compromised. Similarly, even with a local referral, sending along a letter of self-introduction from the seeker leaves the other teacher or group free to choose whether or not to respond.

Chapter 5: Step Four - Meeting

You' ve had some correspondence with a seeker. Perhaps you' ve seen them in action or even briefly met them at a gathering or a local networking group. So far, they seem okay. It' s time to get to know them better, and this can only be done in a face-to-face meeting. However informal this may seem, it' s actually very similar to an ordinary job interview. Remember that it is only natural, not at all dishonest, for a person to try to make the best possible impression during an interview. So, no matter how much you may like them, proceed carefully and tentatively.

Where to meet

We strongly advise that you have your initial meeting with a seeker in some neutral, public place. This need not be fancy or expensive. A booth in a coffee-shop, at a slow time of the day, is a good, quiet place to talk.

By not bringing total strangers into your home, you protect your privacy and, possibly even your safety. There are dangerous creeps out there: crooks, sexual predators and even bigots who feel they are divinely commanded to murder people of whom they disapprove.

What to ask

What information are you looking for? Nothing very different than what was in the letter of self-introduction, but in more detail and more depth. Where has the person been, what did he or she learn there, and where would he or she like to be going? Just as in a secular job interview, some questions will be the same for all seekers, some will be specific to this person but planned in advance, based on your reading of their paperwork, and still others will come up in response to something they said during the conversation.

Be sure to invite the seeker to ask any questions of her or his own. The seeker has as legitimate a need as you do to check out the situation before committing to it. Besides, you can learn a great deal about someone from what questions he or she chooses to ask. At least as important as what people say is how they say it. You may want to probe or challenge a bit, to see how they will react, since challenge is part of any training process.

Pay attention to all the non-verbal and psychic cues you will certainly be picking up. Pay particular attention to any emotional reactions or hunches that come up in you during the interaction.

Partnership in interviewing

If your partner has come with you to the interview, consider having one partner do most of the dialogue, while the other quietly observes the seeker' s responses on all levels. If you do not have a partner, consider asking a trusted, empathic senior member of your group to assist. Compare your observations as soon after the meeting as possible, while they are still fresh. Two viewpoints are what allow us to see in depth.

Watch out for the temptation to play ' good cop / bad cop' roles while interviewing someone. Regardless of how well this works in dramatic settings, you owe a basic duty of care towards the person you are interviewing, and our religion is about life and learning, not interrogation.

Input from group members

If you are bringing some new people into an existing group, at some point your current members should get a chance to meet with the seekers. You can do this by a group interview, where all current members get to ask whatever questions they like, perhaps offer the seeker some advice about the group, and respond to the seeker' s questions. If you' re starting a beginner group or outer court, it may not be practicable to have an individual group interview for each seeker. In that case, you might want to invite all the seekers who have passed your preliminary screens to some sort of workshop that has a component of "show and tell." Proteus often uses a mask-making workshop for this purpose. As each seeker explained the mask they' d made, every present member got a chance to learn a bit about them and feel into their vibes.

Chapter 6: Step Five - screening tasks

You may want to ask all seekers who are under serious consideration to complete one or more substantial screening tasks. We do this with our groups, for the following reasons:

- To let them see that we are serious, demanding teachers who know what we are about.
- To find out whether they are willing to work at learning our ways. (but remember, they know they are being assessed and will probably still be trying to impress us).
- To give students who aren't sure they want to continue with us a graceful way to opt out - all they have to do is nothing.

Characteristics of a good screening task

Well-designed and appropriate screening tasks have several characteristics in common: A good screening task should be something that would benefit anyone, even if they decide not to go any further in their studies. On the other hand, if they do continue in your particular group, what they did for a training class should be clearly related to your regular curriculum. Either way, it is disrespectful to waste people's time or energy with make-work.

The task must not be trivial. It must also not be dangerous or demeaning to the seeker. Completing the task must be feasible with reasonable time and effort and without significant financial outlay.

Successful completion of the task must be readily apparent to the teacher or other assessor.

In our groups, we use an environmental orientation exercise, which we call *Touch the Earth*; (located at the back of this book) . This usually requires significant library or other research. There is no reason to limit this exercise to Pagans. Anybody, of any religion or none, would benefit from knowing more about their local ecology. So we posted *Touch the Earth* on the Web along with our mission statement and other introductory materials. Seekers who found us through the Web might arrive with it already completed. (This means, of course, that we needed to know the answers in order to see whether the seeker got them right. In general, it's a bad idea to ask seekers or students to do work you're unwilling to do yourself.)

If you are located in an area where a variety of groups exist, you may also want to ask seekers to visit one or more other local groups before formally joining yours. This compare and contrast exercise helps them be clearer about what they really want. To help seekers evaluate the groups they encounter, Judy would also recommend distributing copies of Isaac Bonewits' excellent *Cult Danger Evaluation Frame* as widely as possible, and especially to beginning seekers.

Chapter 7:

Know yourself, revisited - developing criteria for weighing seekers

Up to now, we' ve been talking about methods for gathering information about seekers. But knowing a lot about the person is not enough. Each of us will also need some sort of criteria for evaluating all this data we have gathered.

We are not actually proposing any sort of common, community-wide standard. Whether or not we ever should consider developing such a standard is another argument to bracket for later consideration. The fact is that, right now, because we have no such standard, it becomes even more imperative for each of us to be clear about our own criteria for accepting students in our own group. Sharing our experiences and ideas can help each of us sort through the issues involved. The process is collaborative, not coercive, a healthy middle path since each reader or workshop participant can use whatever they find useful and ignore the rest.

As we see it, entering a coven is not the same thing as joining a church or synagogue. It' s much more like entering a monastery or a convent. Witchcraft is an intense, demanding spiritual and magical Path. Before entering upon this Path in any manner, a person should be mature, stable, strong enough to work through the process of becoming a priest/ess and eventually to serve the Gods, the people and the Earth in that capacity. Beyond that, each individual coven has its own local customs, chosen specialties, group atmosphere, etc.

Sometimes we say that a person may be right for the Craft, but not right for a particular coven. If so, we may refer a worthy person to another group for reasons deeper than size constraints. Accordingly, the following discussion will consider "right for the Path" and "right for this group" as two separate sets of things to think about.

Right for the Path?

Clichés can encode a great deal of wisdom. In fact that' s how they become clichés. In deciding whether a person should start something new and major in their life, it' s useful to consider whether that person is - to draw on an old cliché - "ready, willing and able." What does these three attributes mean for us?

Attribute 1 - Ready...

What we do in our small, intense groups is not for everybody. It is not even for everybody who holds Pagan beliefs, who sincerely wishes to worship the Old Gods in the Old Ways.

Advanced spiritual development begins with deep self-confrontation, as we work through our own old "stuff" to provide a clear channel for the wisdom of the Gods. Not everyone is strong enough to face their own demons, the true "guardians at the gateway." Magical

development provides a sorcerer with powerful tools for intervening in the world, tools which should be available only to those who will use them with compassion, wisdom, respect and restraint. High energy workings can destabilize a fragile personality. Navigating altered states of consciousness is a danger to people who are not securely enough anchored in ordinary reality to return and function there most of the time.

In short, a person needs to be a sane, stable, adult with a good sense of their own identity, beliefs and ethics before they explore the esoteric aspects of this or any other religion. "Sane" is the operative word here. So we asked our dear friend and colleague, Susan, to contribute her thoughts. Susan is an experienced coven leader, a community activist, and a licensed and practicing clinical psychologist. We are grateful for her contribution. Psychological issues in assessing a prospective student

Susan says: "I find myself highly ambivalent on this subject, because it' s such an individual and subjective thing. There is no substitute for your own judgment, and my remarks are in no way intended to replace your own instincts and determinations. But I hope that my thoughts will prove useful in conjunction with your own Priest/ess wisdom."

The issue at hand:

We' ve all seen them in our communities, maybe even had them in our covens. These are the people who we get to know, or hear about, and wonder how they ever got into a coven, or why anyone would accept them. Sometimes all it takes is meeting a person once to know that they squick you: their aura is off, or somehow they are just not right. These people are the ones your instincts tell you not to train, usually loud and clear. But they are the very extreme end of the spectrum. More often, a student seems fine in the beginning, but later was hurt, or caused harm, in the group.

Some things to consider:

There are several different questions to ask, when evaluating whether to accept a student (in addition to the obvious ones about their religious beliefs or spiritual practices):

- Will their personality and energy mesh well enough with the coven members?
- Will the coven members be able to tolerate this person, or is there some trait or behavior that makes them undesirable?

Those two questions, probably along with others which I have missed, comprise: can I/we love this person? Having answered this question, you may wish to also consider: Is this person trustworthy in terms of her or his intentional, voluntary behavior?

This is the corollary, can I/we trust this person? But this level of trust, though necessary, is not sufficient, and it is here that we begin to get into clinical questions.

- Is this person trustworthy in terms of having a level of self-control?
- Are they capable of keeping their sacred oaths and more ordinary promises?

In other words, someone might be completely trustworthy, but unable to do what we require. For instance, if I promise to participate in the March of Dimes and then break my leg, I'm not going to be able to keep my word. A more pertinent example might be that of a covener who promises to lead the next ritual, but then has a serious family crisis. That person will not be able to lead the ritual, because she or he is taking care of a more pressing obligation. These sort of situational issues arise for everyone, and each of us probably already has guidelines, stated or not, for handling them.

Breaking promises inconveniences others. An ongoing pattern of unjustified unreliability may result in a person being asked to leave a group, which is distressing to all concerned. But making something a matter of oath means that we consider it essential. Oathbreaking is not just inconvenient; it is a disaster.

What about the seeker, who says she or he dissociates, or is a 'multiple'? *If one part of that person's consciousness gives an oath, will the other fragmented parts keep it?*

What about the disturbed seeker, who is angry and hurting, and does not always seem in control of his or her rage? *Do we bring such a person into Circle and deal with a member who lashes out magically or emotionally without any conscious intention of harming anyone?*

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. For my own part, I would accept a "multiple's" oath, and hold her or him to it after explaining that this was the case and having the student agree. But that's just me, and I've been wrong before.

Sometimes Craft training might be harmful to the seeker

I've been told that in Jewish tradition you were not allowed to study mysticism seriously unless you were 40 years old, married, and well-grounded in the Talmud and other exoteric religious and ethical teachings of that faith. The point is, that a level of maturity and life experience were considered necessary before someone could safely begin to explore Jewish mysticism. I am not suggesting this for the Craft, but we do need to examine the reasons for those restrictions and work out our own answers.

We all have our own crap--pain, fear, anger, desire, jealousy, memory; things we prefer not to dredge up, or try to compensate for in different ways. We build mechanisms, psychological tricks, to manage these demons. The Craft can strengthen the psyche and shore up magical defenses, but it can also weaken psychological ones. I think sometimes that it has to.

What we bring to the Circle is who we are, *in toto*. When we move energy, raise power or cast a spell, it's colored with our feelings and our will. If I'm asked to do magic for someone that I resent, or am angry at, it will be harder for me to do. I'll have to cope somehow with those feelings before I try to do anything else, even if all that happens is my acknowledgement that I am pissed off, but still care about this person. If I'm doing more general magic (casting the Circle, invoking, raising power), I use all of myself to do it. All of me, not just the acceptable stuff on top. I go down through the layers, because

that' s who I am, and where my power is. I can be a possessive, selfish and angry person, I can be insecure, nurturing, lustful, egotistical, loving.

The potential for all those, and more, exists within all of us. The Craft reveals the parts of ourselves we have hidden away. Most of us are empowered by the process. Craft training can heal and strengthen us. But for someone who is already vulnerable, who is very uncentered and whose defenses are fragile and overwhelmed, it can be damaging.

Do you remember your first skyclad ritual? Were you nervous? Imagine that anxiety superimposed on the issues of someone who' s been taught to be rigidly sexually repressed, or someone who' s been molested. It can bring up some pretty uncomfortable feelings. Depending on how the situation is handled, it can be either a good or a bad experience, but it will be a powerful one.

There is no clear way to know who will be hurt, who will cause harm to the group, and who will be a fine Witch. Often there' s no good way to know until after things have gone bad. I have thrown together some warning signs that all is not well. Please don' t take these to mean that a student is inappropriate. They do not. They mean only that there is a problem which must be addressed. Most seekers are honest with us and with themselves, and they will know more clearly than anyone whether they should remain in the Craft or leave.

Warning signs

Here are some of the warning signs to look for:

If the seeker has trouble living in the world of form, or mundane reality, as it is more routinely called. Someone who can't tell her or his own fantasies from reality, and who tells you that he or she is actually an elfen knight/princess trapped here away from another dimension, will have trouble integrating the experiences received during Craft training and may well end up getting lost in his or her own head. After all, it is a lot more comfortable to fight a mysterious demon from the sixth astral level who turns your friends and family against you than it is to realize that the demon is a part of you and you are pushing them away.

If Craft training raises some issues for the seeker that are too painful or difficult to cope with now. My earlier example about working skyclad fits in here. Signs that someone is having difficulty handling what's being raised include: becoming emotionally fragile (easily upset or angered) on an ongoing basis, or missing a lot of circles. Signs that there is a serious problem of some sort include becoming self-abusive (taking physical actions that directly and immediately cause harm to self) or talking about suicide.

If the seeker has a fragmented self, or poor sense of who he or she is. People who are searching desperately for something outside of themselves to make them feel

better, or who have no strong identity, can be carried away by magical experiences, especially divine possession.

On the other hand...

Just to be fair, I' m now going to go over things that do not necessarily indicate a problem:

- disagreeing/arguing with the coven leader/teacher,
- becoming upset, sad or angry from time to time, missing a ritual, or
- having a personal crisis.

Don' forget, too, that the rest of our lives away from the coven or Craft can be hurtful and stressful, and the distress we see in a student may be due to that, or even something as basic as ill health.

We all have things to face, and to cope with, and it is never easy. If Craft training weren' t a powerful thing, it couldn' t hurt, heal, transform and empower us as it does. As Judy says, "it necessarily will raise painful and difficult issues. Part of a teacher' s job is to help people extend their comfort level."

Hopefully the signs I' ve listed above will help identify when a student may be have gone from painful learning to being harmed.

Things to try when someone is troubled

We don' t have to throw someone out of a coven because they are having a hard time, especially if you aren' t sure that their problems are caused by Craft training.

You can begin by asking the person about what you see. Tell him or her what you have noticed, and ask for their opinion. There may be something going on that you don' t know about. Or this could be a chance to bring something to your student' s attention that they need to address.

You can help the person as a friend, by offering assistance and support. You can help the person as a Priest/ess, by including work on issues arising from personal magical work, doing magic for her or him, or providing a magical/religious frame, or explanation, for what' s happening. It is absurdly wonderful how much putting a problem in a different light can help.

If the problems are serious enough to affect the coven, or that you have serious concerns for the student' s safety, then you have the option of confronting the person about the problematic behavior and insisting that the problem stop, or that the person get professional help, or that the person leave the group.

Some questions for discussion

1. What do you do with a member who comes to Circle intoxicated?
2. How do you handle a member who discovers in the course of training that she or he has sexual feelings for coveners of the same sex and is surprised and overwhelmed by this discovery?
3. What do you do with a member who is needy and emotional, takes up a lot of the coven' s time with their crises, and threatens suicide when upset?
4. Would you accept a member who slept his or her way through Lady J' s outer court, with a lot of dissension and the departure of several members resulting?
5. What do you do with an abuse survivor who is afraid of having flashbacks during ritual and is scared of meeting skyklad? What about if she or he actually had flashbacks in Circle?

Religious maturity

Mental and emotional stability is the absolute minimum, necessary but not sufficient. Also under the heading of "ready" comes a topic that Judy has been mulling over for some years: religious maturity.

If a Witch is a priest or priestess of the Old Ways, and that is what we claim to be, then a person who undertakes training toward that goal should first be a mature Pagan lay-person. But what does that mean? There are studies that indicate that mature lay members of other faiths have somewhat different characteristics, and that these differences seem closely related to the different values and theologies of those faiths. These people are shaped by their respective religions, and we can reasonably expect the same for ourselves. So, it' s worthwhile asking exactly what kinds of attitudes and behaviors should we expect to observe from a mature Pagan lay person before we accept them into an advanced program of spiritual, magical and priestly development?

Again, we have no right to impose our ideas on one another, but we may find value in taking counsel together. Here are some of Judy' s tentative notions, put out only in the hope of stimulating discussion among a variety of Pagan elders. A religiously mature Pagan lay person might be someone who:

- Loves and cares for Mother Earth
- Knows that Sacred Wisdom is to be found within him or her self, and is willing to work to make that channel increasingly clear. Actively seeks personal development through meditation, ritual and the nurturance of their own creative talents.
- Tries to live in accordance with their best understanding of what Tradition and current inspiration teach. "Walks their talk."
- Respects others, since all of us have equal access to Sacred Wisdom. Recognizes that others may express Sacred Wisdom in different metaphors. Honors diversity. Can recognize those who are also working to clarify this inner access.
- Is open-minded and curious. Recognizes that there is always more room for learning and growth. Is willing to respectfully test and challenge received wisdom.

Attribute 2 - Willing ...

We recognize will as an important component of our magic and of our growth. Understanding something about a seeker' s will both its strength and its nature or direction - is a correspondingly important part of evaluating that seeker' s potential as a student.

Are they motivated enough to really do all the work involved? This will be easy to tell as time goes on. More subtle and far more important: are their motivations appropriate? Do they want to go to the places we feel willing to guide them? What do we consider to be the "right reasons" to seek training anyhow?

Some of these issues are illustrated by the examples in the card sort exercise, given in Chapter 2 of this book. The grossly-inappropriate motivations are easier to see: the person drawn by a crush on the teacher, the person who is looking for magical power to control the behavior of others. If your group meets skyclad, you may sometimes attract a voyeur or an exhibitionist.

From time to time, people will be drawn to our groups by needs and desires with which we can easily sympathize. Perhaps they have some psychic talent, which was ridiculed and ignored in the secular world, and are hoping for acceptance and perhaps a little help in understanding and managing their weird experiences. Perhaps their sexual needs are unconventional, and they' ve heard that our community better tolerates sexual diversity.

Maybe they' re just looking for a secondchance family; many covens function well that way. Particularly if you have a need to be needed, a tendency to co-dependency that so often drives "helpers," it can be very tempting to accept needy seekers out of charity. Some people come because they find a community that espouses and practices values they already hold. This is the classic "homecoming" experience, so often and so movingly described. Some come because they love Nature, feel the need for feminine (or multiple) models of the Sacred, find in ritual a source of nurturance and an outlet for creative self-expression. Those are the motivations that sound good to Judy.

But consider: the motivations that sound best to you are likely to be those that drew you in your own time. Maybe that' s as it should be. Similar motivations go a long way toward establishing the compatibility that allows us to work well together, in a student-teacher relationship or as coven mates.

So, again, we cannot and should not impose some consensus standard of adequate and appropriate willingness. But we can all recognize the critical importance of will and we can take counsel together as we each develop our own notion of will that is both strong and good.

Attribute 3 - Able ...

When we reach the question of abilities, we are asking what gifts this seeker brings to our Path and to our group. People are not interchangeable parts. Each of us comes with a

different combination of inborn talents and temperaments and with the experiences, knowledge and skills developed throughout our lives.

In our view, those inborn talents and temperaments, gifts of the Gods, are also callings, potentials to be developed and placed at the service of the Gods, the people and the Earth.

Again, each Pagan teacher must decide which temperaments and talents are essential, desirable or irrelevant to what goes on in their group. Some temperaments, such as aggression or competitiveness, may even be actively undesirable. (It's hard to imagine an undesirable talent, though some may be irrelevant.) Here are some possibilities of desirable traits, just to start your own thought process. These lists can easily lengthen.

- Temperaments:
- Discretion
- Respect for others
- Honesty
- Reliability
- Generosity
- Talents:
- Imagination and creativity
- Psychic or empathic sensitivity
- Analytic, synthetic and critical thinking
- Verbal or other self-expression
- Ritual performance abilities, e.g. in music

Again, these "desirables" lists are very personal. There is no community consensus. We cannot and should not impose our preferences on each other. Thanks be to the Many Gods, we have no central authority figure or bureaucracy to tell us what is good. But taking counsel together can help each of us to develop our own thinking.

There's another aspect to ability: life circumstances. Is the seeker realistically able to commit to your training program at this point in her or his life? What are the competing demands of school or work? What are the family responsibilities? If s/he is a parent, what are the child care arrangements? If s/he is married or otherwise in a committed relationship, how does the mate feel about the time and energy demands of magical training? Does s/he have a way of getting to group meetings? Does s/he have any health problems that would consistently interfere with full participation? ...

The practical questions can also go on and on. It isn't that we're limiting ourselves to students who have no life problems or impediments. There would be no active Pagan renaissance if we all waited for that. Instead, check that any difficulties are being addressed, managed, resolved, that the seeker is indeed free to become an active and enthusiastic student.

Right for this group?

It's easy to imagine a seeker who is right for the Path. A sane, stable, religiously mature Pagan who is discrete, reliable, caring and co-operative, and also richly gifted with ritual and magical talent. We all know more than one person much like that.

Admirable though they are, the virtues that make a person right for the Path are not rare. They are both widespread and fairly abstract. It's relatively easy to determine whether a seeker is, in general, right for the Path.

In contrast, each individual group is different, even from those in the same Tradition or lineage. Each has its own emphasis, viewpoints, style, local customs, in-jokes and quirks. And seekers also have their personal quirks. So finding a good match between seeker and group can be a lot more complicated - in fact, quirky.

(Judy has written an essay called "On Choosing a Coven." Although it was primarily written for seekers, it may be useful for screeners as well. A copy is at the back of this book.)

At the heart of the matching process lie two big questions:

1. What can or will this seeker bring to our group? (specific talents, skills, knowledge)
2. How will this seeker benefit from studying and working with us?

After that, there are a whole bunch of nitty-gritty issues. A perfect fit is highly improbable. But the more compatible you are on these details, the more comfortably you will work together:

Learning/teaching style: does the seeker prefer a highly structured curriculum, laid out by the teacher, or are they a self-directed learner? Is your teaching style directive or student-centered? If you have a structured curriculum, will it be covering those areas the seeker would like to learn more about?

Ritual style: does your worship tend to be relatively more shamanic or ceremonial? Do you work from an inherited script or create your own? If you use scripts, are people expected to memorize or read? Or do you work extemporaneously? Again, how does this mesh with the seeker's background and preferences? Also, do you tend to stay within a particular ethnic pantheon. If you do, does this seeker also feel drawn to that pantheon?

What is your group's **decision making style:** authoritarian, democratic, or consensus-based? How does this fit with the seeker's preference?

What kinds of **demands** do you make of your students? How often do you meet, and for how long? How much "homework" do you require of your students? In your group, do members typically spend a lot of "extracurricular" time together? Can this seeker participate fully while also maintaining other responsibilities and a well-balanced life?

If your group has a group project or task? If you do, how time-consuming is that? Is this seeker interested in the kinds of projects or tasks your group tends to undertake?

Is your group single-gender or mixed gender? Do you work robed, street-clad, or skyclad?

These are just some examples of the kinds of questions involved in matching seekers with groups. It's good to gather as much information as you can. Maybe you'll want to summarize your findings on a sheet of paper, an outline of the seeker's salient characteristics. Include the results of any structured divination that you do about this seeker.

But then, when you are comfortable that the outline is complete, set it aside. Meditate, daydream and sleep on this seeker. See what comes up. It is these internal responses, which perhaps carry the Sacred Wisdom within them, that should govern your tentative decision to accept, defer, refer or reject any particular seeker.

Obviously, acceptance is what is sometimes called an "and gate." All the time you were checking out this seeker, they were checking you and your group out. They may have also been conducting this exploratory process with several other groups at the same time. Just as you may choose to refer them, they may choose to enter some other group. Just as you may choose to defer them, they may decide to postpone study until they finish graduate school or their baby is older or whatever they feel needs to get resolved first. Just as you may choose to reject them, they may decide they don't want to pursue this Path at all, or that they certainly do, but no way in your group.

If you are tending towards acceptance, some preliminary group meetings will help both you and the seeker come to a firmer decision.

The only way they will enter your group is if the "yes" comes from both sides. Even at that, the yes is still tentative. On some level, it will stay tentative for the next year or more. The situation of a Dedicated student preparing for Initiation more closely resembles betrothal than marriage.

Chapter 8: Getting started as a group

Secular students of group process have identified some developmental stages that seem to manifest in many different kinds of groups. Very briefly, these are

- **Forming** - the initial process of members getting acquainted, checking each other out, and establishing basic trust and rapport. This is the stage that concerns us here.
- **Storming** - establishment of "pecking orders" and internal power relationships
- **Norming** - establishment of group style, procedures, customs
- **Performing** - doing whatever the group came together to do
- **Mourning** - completion, detachment and closure (also called "morning")

This is an oversimplification, as such schemes always are. First, real life never happens in such a neat, sequential manner. Groups sometimes regress and sometimes revisit old issues on the basis of new experiences and understandings. And even if the process were as lineal as it looks on paper, any attempt to define discrete stages is really an attempt to impose discontinuities on a seamless process. Consider the rainbow: just where does green stop and blue start?

This is further complicated in our groups, many of which function like old-fashioned one-room schoolhouses where different people enter, work through the program, and leave at different times, while the group -- with constantly changing membership -- goes on and on.

Still, it makes sense for us to look a bit more closely at the commonly understood "forming stage," which is closest to the experience of a newly-accepted seeker making the transition to student or Dedicant.

The first challenging threshold for a new group member is entering a room full of strangers. Will you like them? Will they like and accept you? Can you trust them? Can you gain their trust and respect? Will you bond well enough to accomplish the purpose that draws you together? The basic goals and operating procedures -- "the bargain" -- of each group may be very different, but in all cases members need to trust one another to "hold up their end" of that bargain.

New group members typically use social small-talk to size each other up. People stick to unimportant or even irrelevant topics -- the weather, sports, fashion, the latest television series -- until they have begun to build as much of a relationship as is necessary for this group to address the task before it. Early group theorists described such topics as the "goblet issues." This is not a reference to a Witch' s ritual goblet- symbol of integration and transformation -- but to a cocktail party, where people will look around over the tops of their glasses to see who they might want to approach.

The members of a class or a task force may only need to trust one another to do their share of the work. Pagan training groups, however, nurture their members' deep magical and spiritual development. This entails a whole lot more risk, and requires a lot more trust. There will almost certainly be moments when our tender old wounds or fragile new hopes are exposed and vulnerable to our coven-mates. So a much deeper level of rapport and trust -- we call it "perfect trust" -- is necessary, and that can't be forced or faked. It takes the time it takes. This may frustrate inexperienced group leaders, who have a carefully thought out plan and are eager to get going with it.

So, in Judy's coven, Proteus, when a new preparatory group is starting, we typically take a few meetings to allow new members to get acquainted with each other and with older members and to understand the commitments our students make, before we formally accept them as Wiccan students through our ritual of Dedication.

Group exercises

Here are a couple of getting-acquainted exercises that have worked well for us:

- **Mask-making:** You will need paper plates, ribbon or string, a stapler, crayons and/or markers, scissors, paste and any other art supplies you like. Ask each participant to make a mask representing something they want to add to their lives, or something they already have but want to increase. They can staple ribbon or string onto the paper plates, so they can wear the masks. When the masks are completed, ask each participant in turn to explain their mask and then put it on. Have the group acknowledge each mask appropriately as it is donned.
- **Lifelines:** You will need a sheet of legal-size (or other long) paper for each student, plus a bunch of crayons, markers or colored pencils. Ask each participant to hold the paper horizontally (in "landscape" orientation) and to draw a plain horizontal line about halfway up the paper. Then, starting with their earliest memories, ask them to draw a lifeline, showing the highs and lows, and drawing symbols or pictures indicating what was going on at those points. These lifelines should emphasize, but not necessarily be limited to, their spiritual quest. When the drawings are completed, go around the group and ask each person to display and explain what they drew. Depending on the size of the group, this may take two meetings.

Explaining the ground rules

Another important function of these preliminary meetings is to let seekers understand clearly what will be expected of them as students before they make any of the relevant commitments. In Proteus Coven, we take at least two sessions before Dedication to discuss the *ethics* and *etiquette* we share. (See Protean Dedicant Pledges and The Proteus Guide to Ritual Etiquette at the back of the book.)

Eventually, the time comes to make a choice and get on with it or not. Entering formal training for the priesthood, in our opinion, is a very significant life passage, well worthy of being ritually marked and celebrated, particularly if Dedicatory pledges are to be taken

at that point. We urge you to do a ritual for the seekers as they transition into committed students in preparation for their Initiation.

You can create a Dedication ritual that expresses your own ideas about the mutual obligations of student and teacher, the role of other group members, and so on. For us, the main point of Dedication is that it marks entry into a period of exploration. So it's important to make explicit that the result of this exploration might be a decision not to proceed with Initiation. It's also important to us, before teaching any magical skills, to obtain a student's commitment to our group's ethical standards. But, despite all that heavy stuff, the general atmosphere of a Dedication rite should be welcoming and celebratory.

After all, we do not accept a seeker as a student unless we believe that they have the potential to become an Initiate, and eventually an elder and teacher. Each one who comes to learn increases the probability that our cherished ways will survive and thrive. Each Dedication, each Initiation is reason to rejoice!

Chapter 9: If not, then what?

Finally, we need to consider our obligations, if any, to those seekers we decide to defer, refer or reject:

Not right

If someone seems not at all right for the Path, then the teacher would be quite unwise to accept him or her into a pre-initiatory training group. If they seem to be sincere and harmless Pagan laity, you may want to offer them some gentle feedback about why you did not choose to train them for the priesthood. You might feel like offering them some limited support.

Be sure to carefully consider how much of your time and energy you can devote to such support activities: sooner or later you will have a seeker who, although clearly not for the Craft, still claims a great deal of your time and attention. You must be able to say ' no more' , and make it stick, when need be. Your first obligation is to the students you have formally committed to teach.

Unfortunately, some of those you' ll reject will be more serious problems for you and for the community as a whole. They may have had a prior bad experience for which they intend to seek vengeance upon Pagans, or they may be intent upon gathering information that can later be used to attack or embarrass members of our religion. In one classic case, a film company gathered footage of Pagan rituals, saying that the film was intended to showcase our religion to the public. When the film was distributed, it turned out that it was an anti-Pagan propaganda piece, spliced together from rituals and interviews taken out of context, which had been funded by an evangelical organization.

If you find out that a seeker is operating from unfriendly intent, you should warn other group leaders and teachers in your local area. This is always going to be a difficult judgment call, because what is an acceptable question to one person may be regarded as a hostile attack by another person.

Not yet right

Sometimes a seeker appears to be right for the Craft, but is facing life circumstances that make studentship impossible right now. In such cases, teacher and seeker may agree to maintain some sort of supportive relationship until the circumstances change. Support could be as simple as the teacher' s agreement to follow the seeker' s progress through the difficult passage (listening when need be, perhaps advising when so asked), or providing a set of private developmental and devotional activities for the seeker' s own use until circumstances improve.

Not right for your group

As we have alluded to earlier in this notebook, not all groups are operating with the same basic purposes and goals. If your coven is primarily devotional in orientation, someone

who comes to you wishing to be trained in the magical arts may not fit in with the other members of the group. Likewise, a working coven which is deeply involved in ritual performance arts, or internal communications between covens (as is Gwyneth' s group), may value the development of technical skills over personal growth, and would be a bad place for someone who was seeking to a mutual-support and growth group.

So, what can you do to help seekers who are otherwise well-qualified but would not fit in with your group? Provided that yours is not the only game in town, you can refer them to another group which might be better suited to their talents and needs.

Before you can provide a referral, you need to have some idea of where to refer people to. What this means for you, as group leader, is that you should be in contact with the leaders of other teaching groups in your area, and that together you should arrive at a common understanding of what each group can offer to seekers.

A referral can be as simple as a telephone call that you make, privately, to another group leader, or it can involve the writing of a letter of referral that you can send along with the seeker' s letter of selfintroduction. There are no set forms for this sort of communication - do what feels genuine and appropriate in your specific situation, bearing in mind that other group leaders may have different standards of confidentiality and propriety than you do.

Chapter 10: Parting thoughts

We have come a long way in the past fifty years, from a few scattered magical working groups barely in contact with each other, to the delightfully complex network of Pagan and Craft groves, circles, covens and study groups in which we now participate. Back then, you would have had to live in a large city, or in an established college town, to have been able to find books and magazines concerning anything other than established 'mainstream' wisdom. Now, we have many good bookstores, small press publishers and Pagan journals, as well as the burgeoning Internet and Web at our disposal. Yes, we have come a long way.

What this growth in resources means is that sole-sourcing is no longer an issue in our religion. Where there might have been one magical group, or one coven, available to seekers who were lucky and diligent enough to find it, there are now many groups, many covens, and many seekers comparing and considering their options for training and development. This gives rise to the modern phenomenon of 'covenshopping,' where a seeker may visit three or four groups before settling down to serious study and work. In the past decades, we've even seen people taking multiple courses of study, garnering training and initiations from several groups in succession.

By and large, this state of creative ferment is good for us, good for our communities, and in practice, good for the Earth and for our neighbors who have been watching us take our place in the broader society. For the teachers of magical practices, the leaders of Paganism and Craft, the widespread blossoming of alternatives means that we may no longer expect to be able to guide the seeker all the way from beginning explorations through to elderhood - we will have people come to us at all levels of expertise from initial questioning through to established practice, seeking our advice and our guidance - and, if we are fortunate, our lasting friendship.

Our blessings to you, to your students who work with you, and to future Pagan generations!

October 7, 1999

Judy Harrow / Gwyneth Harrow

Appendix

Descriptions of the Twelve Seekers

Feel free to make photocopies of these descriptions, and then cut them into twelve pieces. If you wish, you may copy them by hand on to index cards.

Duncan is a musician who has written some beautiful songs about the Goddess. He tells you these songs came from his own imagination, rather than from some external source. You take this as evidence that She is calling him. Duncan has a clear ethical sense, and gives valuable advice. He is single and about 30 years old, with no children; he has a steady job. He seems to have a drinking problem.

Frank is a young Gay man, a friend of a friend of yours, who is still exploring his career and his relationships. You are aware that he made an angry break with his previous HPS (some years ago), but neither she nor he are willing to talk about it. Since then, he has been primary care-giver to his ageing grandmother, which leads you to perceive him as a loyal and caring person. Your mutual friend believes that Frank has strong psychic talents. Frank lives about two hours away from your covenstead, and has his own car.

Alejandra is a writer in her mid-Thirties who lives out in the suburbs about an hour away from your covenstead. She is an active volunteer for her local community association but hasn't had a paying job since she married about ten years ago. She is very bright and articulate, but is moody and often hears hidden meanings in things that other people have to say about her or to her face. She has no children, but has eight cats and dogs.

Rebekah is an aspiring artist who just moved into your part of town, to attend art school on a full scholarship. She works and plays at night and seldom arises before six in the evening. She came to your Coven's open house meeting, and reported having had a dream of the Goddess which sounds so compelling in its intensity that the hairs rise up on the back of your neck. Rebekah is married to an architect who professes to be an atheist, but who (she says) has no problem with her exploration of Pagan ways.

Ralph is a garage-man in his early fifties, with three adult children. His wife died a few years ago, and he has been looking for someone with whom to share his life. Neighborhood gossips say that Ralph used to beat his wife, and that he collects guns. All you personally know about Ralph is that he is jolly fellow, a good mechanic, and a good neighbor; when your car broke down on the street last Christmas Eve he came out of his house into the snow and helped you get it going again.

Buck is an engineer at the factory where you work, and you have been sharing jokes with him at the coffee-station for several years. You had always thought he was a Buddhist, but now he says he would like to learn more about Paganism, but he isn' t sure how far he would like to go with it. Buck is a single parent. His evenings are given to his children, so it will be difficult for him to come to most meetings -- he has asked whether he could participate in your group via Internet, maybe attending every third meeting in person.

Gwendolyn has been a solitary for many years. During this time, she has studied briefly with a number of good teachers, and done intensive introspective work on her own personal Sacred contacts. At a recent workshop, she received an inspiration that it was time for her to learn to work in a group. The workshop leader, an old trusted friend, referred her to you. But she is very attached to the personal ways of working that she developed during her solitary years.

Surinder attends professional school, in a difficult and demanding program. In addition, she works 30+ hours a week to support herself. A young, attractive single woman, she is also actively seeking a life-mate, with little success this far because of the demands of school and work. She very much wants children, and is upset about still being single. She tells you she can and will fit your training program into her schedule.

Jim is legally blind and believes that people do not make adequate allowances for his handicap. A believer in reincarnation, he feels that he has had various disabilities in different lifetimes because a hostile discorporate entity has pursued him down the ages. He wants to learn magic both so that he can make people treat him better and so that he can, in time, lift the curse. He is more than willing to work hard for these goals.

Erika is your office-mate. She is a widowed mother with a daughter in high school. She is competent, personable and caring, altogether a good friend. Your admiration is mutual. She appears to be romantically attracted to you as well as wanting to learn what you teach.

Alan is a musician. He has a great deal of personal charisma, which can easily draw you in. He also has a genuine devotion to the Goddess. He is very strongly opinionated and talks far, far more than he listens. He reports having had some extraordinary spontaneous mystical experiences.

Robin has a PhD in religious studies, and has written some wonderful rituals and religious poetry. You have long admired her work from afar, and she just moved to your city. When she applies to join your group, you are astonished. You wonder what you might possibly teach her, but you certainly look forward to more contact, so that you can learn from her

The Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame 2.0.1

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Introduction

Events in the last few decades have clearly indicated just how dangerous some religious and secular groups (usually called "cults" by those opposed to them) can be to their own members as well as to anyone else whom they can influence. "Brainwashing," beatings, child abuse, rapes, murders, mass suicides, military drilling and gunrunning, meddling in civil governments, international terrorism, and other crimes have been charged against leaders and members of many groups, and in far too many cases those accusations have been correct. None of this has been very surprising to historians of religion or to other scholars of what are usually labeled "new" religions (no matter how old they may be in their cultures of origin). Minority groups, especially religious ones, are often accused of crimes by members of the current majority. In many ways, for example, the "Mormons" were the "Moonies" of the 19th century -- at least in terms of being an unusual minority belief system that many found "shocking" at the time -- and the members of the Unification Church could be just as "respectable" a hundred years from now as the Latter Day Saints are today.

Nonetheless, despite all the historical and philosophical caveats that could be issued, ordinary people faced with friends or loved ones joining an "unusual" group, or perhaps contemplating joining it themselves, need a relatively simple way to evaluate just how dangerous or harmless a given group is liable to be, without either subjecting themselves to its power or judging it solely on theological or ideological grounds (the usual method used by anti-cult groups).

In 1979 I constructed an evaluation tool which I now call the "Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame," or the "ABCDEF," a copy of which was included in that year's revised edition of my book *Real Magic* (Samuel Weiser Pub., 1989). I realize its shortcomings, but feel that it can be effectively used to separate harmless groups from the merely unusual-to-the-observer ones. Feedback from those attempting to use the system has always been appreciated. Indirect feedback, in terms of the number of places on and off the Net this ABCDEF has shown up, has been mostly favorable. For example, it was chosen by and is now displayed on the website of the Institute for Social Inventions, who paraphrased it for their "**Best Ideas -- A compendium of social innovations**" listing.

The purpose of this evaluation tool is to help both amateur and professional observers, including current or would-be members, of various organizations (including religious, occult, psychological or political groups) to determine just how dangerous a given group is liable to be, in comparison with other groups, to the physical and mental health of its members and of other people subject to its influence. It cannot speak to the spiritual "dangers," if any, that might be involved, for the simple reason that one person's path to

enlightenment or "salvation" is often viewed by another as a path to ignorance or "damnation."

As a general rule, the higher the numerical total scored by a given group (the further to the right of the scale), the more dangerous it is likely to be. Though it is obvious that many of the scales in the frame are subjective, it is still possible to make practical judgments using it, at least of the "is this group more dangerous than that one?" sort. This is *if* all numerical assignments are based on accurate and unbiased observation of *actual behavior* by the groups and their top levels of leadership (as distinct from official pronouncements). This means that you need to pay attention to what the secondary and tertiary leaders are saying and doing, as much (or more so) than the central leadership -- after all, "plausible deniability" is not a recent historical invention.

This tool can be used by parents, reporters, law enforcement agents, social scientists and others interested in evaluating the actual dangers presented by a given group or movement. Obviously, different observers will achieve differing degrees of precision, depending upon the sophistication of their numerical assignments on each scale. However, if the same observers use the same methods of scoring and weighting each scale, their comparisons of relative danger or harmlessness between groups will be reasonably valid, at least for their own purposes. People who cannot, on the other hand, view competing belief systems as ever having possible spiritual value to anyone, will find the ABCDEF annoyingly useless for promoting their theocratic agendas. Worse, these members of the Religious Reich will find that their own organizations (and quite a few large mainstream churches) are far more "cult-like" than the minority belief systems they so bitterly oppose.

It should be pointed out that the ABCDEF is founded upon both modern psychological theories about mental health and personal growth, and my many years of participant observation and historical research into minority belief systems. Those who believe that relativism and anarchy are as dangerous to mental health as absolutism and authoritarianism, could (I suppose) count groups with total scores nearing either extreme (high or low) as being equally hazardous. As far as dangers to physical well-being are concerned, however, both historical records and current events clearly indicate the direction in which the greatest threats lie. This is especially so since the low-scoring groups usually seem to have survival and growth rates so small that they seldom develop the abilities to commit large scale atrocities even had they the philosophical or political inclinations to do so.

The Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame (version 2.0)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Factors:

			Low		High
1	INTERNAL CONTROL: Amount of internal political power exercised by leader(s) over members.	1		_____	
2	WISDOM CLAIMED by leader(s); amount of infallibility declared or implied about decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations.	2		_____	
3	WISDOM CREDITED to leader(s) by members; amount of trust in decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations made by leader(s).	3		_____	
4	DOGMA: Rigidity of reality concepts taught; amount of doctrinal inflexibility or "fundamentalism."	4		_____	
5	RECRUITING: Emphasis put on attracting new members; amount of proselytizing.	5		_____	
6	FRONT GROUPS: Number of subsidiary groups using different names from that of main group.	6		_____	
7	WEALTH: Amount of money and/or property desired or obtained by group; emphasis on members' donations; economic lifestyle of leader(s) compared to ordinary members.	7		_____	
8	POLITICAL POWER: Amount of external political influence desired or obtained; emphasis on directing members' secular votes.	8		_____	
9	SEXUAL MANIPULATION: of members by leader(s); amount of control exercised over sexuality of members; advancement dependent upon sexual favors or specific lifestyle.	9		_____	
10	CENSORSHIP: Amount of control over members' access to outside opinions on group, its doctrines or leader(s).	10		_____	
11	DROPOUT CONTROL: Intensity of efforts directed at preventing or returning dropouts.	11		_____	

VIOLENCE: amount of approval when
12 used by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s). 12

PARANOIA: amount of fear
13 concerning real or imagined enemies; perceived power of opponents; prevalence of conspiracy theories. 13

GRIMNESS: Amount of disapproval
14 concerning jokes about the group, its doctrines or its leader(s). 14

SURRENDER OF WILL: Amount of
15 emphasis on members not having to be responsible for personal decisions; degree of individual disempowerment created by the group, its doctrines or its leader(s). 15

HYPOCRISY: amount of approval for
16 other actions (not included above) which the group officially considers immoral or unethical, when done by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s); willingness to violate group' s declared principles for political, psychological, economic, or other gain. 16

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Low

High

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Who are the Proteans?

Proteans are values-based and service-driven. We share a common ethic. We celebrate diversity and creativity in expression.

Proteans are initiated priest/esses in ongoing and rigorous training .

Our religious activity is a major focus, a primary creative outlet in our lives. As Witches, we dedicate ourselves to the re-creation of Pagan community and culture, to the service of the Gods, the People and the Earth. We work to build the common heritage of Witches, making contributions in ritual arts and technologies or wherever else our talents and our perceptions of the need may lead us. We also seek to share what we discover and create with dedicated, ethical Witches of any Tradition and with our own students. We hope that one of our major gifts to the Gods will be many dedicated, talented, ethical and creative priest/esses.

Proteans are geocentric.

We are practitioners of Earth religion, nature spirituality. We find primary religious meaning and value within this life, in these bodies, on this Earth, here and now. We perceive Deity as immanent and seek to deepen, clarify and extend our conscious contact with the living spirit of Mother Earth. Because She is now wounded and threatened, we dedicate our energies to defending and healing Her.

We also understand that the Sacred may appear to us in many forms, speak to us through many models. We are polytheists, celebrating the diversity of Divinity and the divinity of diversity.

Proteans are skilled technicians of the Sacred.

We study the ritual and state-altering techniques of tribal, shamanic and nature-worshipping people around the world and throughout history, and also do new experimental and developmental work of our own. We adapt and use techniques that are congruent with our values and chosen symbolic models and are also safely within the level of our skills. We work to become increasingly clear channels for Divine wisdom. Because we understand that no human channel can ever be perfectly clear, we weigh any information received in the light of our core values and our best understanding of probable outcomes. Having done so, we sincerely seek to follow the leadings we receive.

Proteans do not have a set liturgy or mythos.

May the Gods forbid that any specific ritual ever become a litmus test of legitimate Protean identity! We are proud to follow Gerald Gardner' s example of lifelong creative development of our liturgical practice. For this reason, there is no problem at all with a Protean Witch being a part of any Wiccan Tradition. Because of our emphasis on

exuberant creativity, Proteans are likely to find themselves at the liberal end of any other Traditions with which they are affiliated.

Almost all Proteans are Gardnerians.

Our roots lie in the Gardnerian Tradition, and the vast majority of us maintain our Gardnerian affiliation. Proteus Coven itself is a Gardnerian coven and the start of a particular Gardnerian lineage. We are, however, "Gardnerian *plus*." Whatever Tradition we may join, as Proteans, we are "that *plus*." We honor our roots, while augmenting our Traditional affiliation with a set of ethical pledges. We recognize our kinship with Witches of any Tradition who will commit themselves to similar ethics, and so we are part of two families.

We live in a time of crisis: great danger for the Earth and all whose lives depend on Hers and great opportunity for those who are co-creating the Pagan Renaissance. May we do well by both.



written by Judy Harrow, HPs, Proteus Coven
updated: March 18, 2002; © 1998, 2002, by Judy Harrow
the address of this page is: www.draknet.com/proteus/mission.htm

Protean Dedication Pledges

These are the commitments that students of Proteus Coven make at the very beginning of their formal Wiccan training.

1. We don' t tell

We protect the confidentiality of all who we meet in Circle and all who ask for our aid. We also respect Traditional secrecy regarding certain lore.

2. We don' t sell

Our work as priest/esses is done for love and need alone. We do not accept any payment for the practice or teaching of our religion, neither in money nor in labor nor in goods.

3. We don' t force

We direct our magic only towards people who have given their prior and explicit consent. We do not practice baneful magic, which is intended to harm others. We do not practice coercive magic, which is intended to control others for our own purposes. We do not practice manipulative magic, which is directed toward others for "their own good," but without regard to their opinions or wishes in the matter.

and

4. We don' t train those who would:

We promise that, if we eventually have students of our own, we will require these same pledges of them at the very beginning of their training.

an it harm none, do what you will!

(More on the Wiccan Rede)

updated: May 15, 2004 by Judy Harrow, HPs, Proteus Coven
the address of this page is: www.draknet.com/proteus/Pledges.htm

The Proteus Curriculum: an overview

When we redesigned our training program in the spring of 1995, we were working from two basic premises.

- First: our Pagan religion is geocentric, Earth-oriented. Although we are polytheists, honoring many different manifestations of the Sacred, our primary devotion is given to our Mother the Earth, Who birthed us, feeds us, and will eventually take us back into Herself.
- Second: In our view, Wicca is not simply a religion, but a dedicated Pagan religious order. Witches are intensely involved with their own magical and spiritual development and dedicate ourselves to rebuilding Pagan religion, culture and community. We create and conduct rituals, counsel, produce religious art and scholarship, do whatever our own talents and temperaments -- and the Goddess' leading- call us to do.

We asked ourselves what sort of training would best prepare our students to serve the Ancient Ones, the community and the Earth as priest/esses should. For now, we have identified six core areas of competency that we feel are important. The next step was to create a series of training tasks or experiences that we think will nurture a student' s learning and growth in each of those six areas. These tasks are likely to change as we gain experience working within this new framework.

The first three areas are about our inner lives, our magical and spiritual development, without which we could not presume to act as priest/esses for others. They are:

1. personal psycho-spiritual growth - general self-development, and especially deepening our conscious contact with the Ancient Ones.
2. geocentricity - this is one of our major innovations. The idea is that, if we are acting as priest/esses of an Earth religion, we should not just sort of vaguely love the Earth, but know and serve Her. So this sequence is about understanding our personal and community values, and about understanding the environment and how we live symbiotically within it.
3. fluency with trance and other altered states of consciousness: hypnosis, pathworking, and Deity assumption. Any priest/ess should know how to relate to it, how to do it, how to guide it, and how to teach it. We believe that Witchcraft is a reconstruction of the lost European manifestation of a worldwide tradition of

ecstatic contact with the Otherworld, sometimes called "Shamanism." Shamans have been referred to as the "Technicians of the Sacred." Trancework, in all its complexity, is our technique, our "craft."

The second three areas are more outward-oriented, more about skill and service:

1. creative service to the community, the culture, the Gods and/or the Earth, exploring what you want to do as a priest/ess and building skills towards whatever that is. This is another major innovation: at the point of taking Second, you will be asked to "choose a major," i.e. state what you anticipate will be your major contribution to the Pagan renaissance. (up to this point, most people have automatically assumed they were preparing to be coven leaders. That' s still a perfectly valid option, but it isn' t the only one and should not be assumed). Between Second and Third, you will be doing whatever you need to develop competence and confidence in your chosen field.
2. basic competence with ritual performance and design. Not just by rote out of the book, but at least the ability to adapt (and hopefully to create) rituals to meet the immediate needs of the participants. We would also hope that our students will become comfortable in ritual to be spontaneous when the occasion warrants it, not always dependent on a script.
3. familiarity with the Gardnerian/Wiccan/Pagan symbolic structure and vocabulary, which informs our theology and enables us to worship and work together and to communicate about our religion, its practices and its core values.

Check-offs are a possibility. If you can demonstrate that you have actually done some work that is equivalent to a particular task, we may exempt you from it. However, you also might want to think about re-visiting the experience, bringing to it all you have learned since the last time you did it. It may have more yet to teach you. We' re always willing to talk this kind of question through with you. The only way to check off on an entire sequence is to check off individually on each included task.

We know that most of our students are not actually beginners. They bring to our group a wide variety of previous experience, reading, sometimes even prior membership in other covens. Still, it does no harm to review the basics. This way each of us can learn what the others know, since we all have different pieces of the puzzle. Also, in our experience, whenever we go over one of the basic topics again, the other things we' ve learned since we last did so only serve to deepen our understanding. Wiccan lore is a densely woven web.

So, we currently anticipate spending the first year looking at the basic building blocks of the Craft: the Gods, the Circle, the elements and tools, the basic skills. During the second year, we will put it all together for a year' s intense study of the Wheel of the Year and the

various life issues it addresses. The third year will be devoted to leadership skills, and largely determined by what our students anticipate their future priestly service to be.

We welcome you to an adventure!

by Judy Harrow

updated: June 8, 2001 © 1998, 2000, 2001 by Judy Harrow

the address of this page is: www.draknet.com/proteus/trainvie.htm

Following is the text of the October, 1999 version of the prospectus, which provides information about the 2000-2001 session of the Wild Rose Outer Grove.

**Welcome to Wild Rose:
an English Traditionalist Pagan Outer Grove
in Calgary, Alberta, Canada
note: Year 2 commences in February, 2000**

Wild Rose is a pre-initiatory religious discussion and working group, with the aim of introducing its participants to English Traditional Pagan folklore, customs and practices. Folklore is distinct from myth: it is the story of our cultural roots rather than a collection of fairy tales or wishful reimagination of some mythical past.

1. How do I join, and where does it lead?

Students may enter the group by formal petition, subject to acceptance. Students may resign from the group at any time within the year, for any desired reason. Upon completion of the year's work, graduates of the Grove will have the opportunity to petition at least one local Coven for membership, and will probably have met representatives of several other Covens, both within and outside the Gardnerian traditional family.

We will **not** be able to do correspondence teaching, whether by mail, phone or e-mail.

2. How much will it cost?

In keeping with our *Laws*, there will be no charge for membership in Wild Rose, other than the participants' own time in attending Grove meetings and in completing homework assignments. The commitment of 40 Thursday nights is in itself a sufficiently high price to pay for knowledge. We may from time to time ask Grove members to contribute consumable items such as candles, incense, fruit, or fruit-juice; these items will be held by the Grove in common and used in its meetings.

Teaching papers will be provided to the members, in weekly installments. The cost of photocopying will be borne equally by all members. Each set of papers will relate in some way to the work of the Grove at that point in the syllabus, as well as to the changing tides and seasons of the natural world. You may view the syllabus if you wish.

3. Who is sponsoring Wild Rose, and why?

Wild Rose is sponsored by Coven of the Stone and Mirror and Coven of the Stone and Cauldron, with non-sponsoring material support from Coven of the Stone and Staff (where the instructional resources were most recently revised.) We are doing this because it provides a philosophical anchor for the Grove, as well as providing standards of accountability for the teaching being done. The sponsoring Covens provide the Grove's teachers and much of its Pagan lore, and will fairly consider membership petitions made by graduates of the Grove, with the caveat that successful completion of the Grove

training is an end in itself, and in no way guarantees initiation into the sponsoring, or any other, Covens.

4. What about the Covens?

Coven of the Stone and Mirror was founded in 1995; it is a Gardnerian coven in the New York lineage of our Tradition. Coven of the Stone and Cauldron was founded in 1998, as a maiden coven of Stone and Mirror.

During the course of the Grove' s work, the Covens will only take in new members from among the graduates of the Grove, thus affording an assurance to the graduates that at least two local Covens will consider their post-graduate petitions for membership, should they so desire.

5. Is there a book I can read beforehand?

The Spiral Dance by Starhawk, and *Drawing Down the Moon* by Margot Adler, are two books which would be worth reading. Grove members may also find Scott Cunningham' s many books on herbalism interesting (if rather technically questionable at times). We will provide further reading lists during the course of the Grove year.

6. Do you have any Internet resources or mailing-lists?

Grove members have access to an e-mail discussion group, by means of which can help each other work through the Grove' s syllabus. Email will not be the primary venue of Wild Rose' s work, and we do not anticipate being able to offer correspondence training, whether in e-mail or written form. Personal contact between Grove members and teachers is integral to our work together.

7. Who may join the Grove?

Any person over the age of twenty years, of good character and in sound emotional and mental health and reasonably good physical health may petition to join the Grove, with the exception that membership is not open to people who are concurrently apprenticed into another Wiccan teaching group, or who have already received Wiccan initiation from another person (interested initiates may, however, be invited to help teach in the Grove). We cannot provide child-care at the Grove' s meetingplace. Past experience has been that single parents can make a go of Grove membership if they have reliable child-care arrangements.

Some of the homework assignments may entail spending time in parks, gardens or woodlands, and Wild Rose' s meeting space does have stairs to climb. Persons who have mobility restrictions should bear these requirements in mind. The Grove' s work entails a great deal of reading and a fair bit of writing. People with dyslexia may find this difficult.

8. How do I join the Grove?

As with many things Traditional, you must ask to join the Grove. Write a letter (a real letter on paper, not an e-mail message) of petition for entry into the Grove, describing yourself, including your age, educational experience and career plans, family status (and arrangements for child-care, if appropriate), any allergies, phobias, strong dislikes, physical or sensory restrictions, along with a resume of your past religious experience and training, if any. Please provide a contact telephone number and address, along with any restrictions that apply to it (such as not calling during the day, or asking for you by a specific name). If you have a personal Craft sponsor, please let us know who this person is. All information provided by you will be held as confidential.

We will use your letter as the basis to decide whether to proceed to an interview.

If you apply by mail, and your letter evidences readiness for entry into the Grove, you may be invited to attend an interview in Calgary on the evening of February 1st between 7:00 PM and 10:00 PM (we will let you know what the address of the interview site will be). If you are accepted into the Grove, you must be able to attend the first Grove meeting, and weekly meetings thereafter.

In the event that we have more than 13 applicants for Grove membership, we will draw lots for membership, from among all the qualified applicants. Lots, if need be, will be drawn at 10:00 PM on February 1st. We will notify successful applicants of their acceptance into the Grove, prior to its first meeting.

9. Will I have to swear any vows?

The Grove is not a Wiccan Coven, and so the Traditional Craft vows will not be asked or made. However, Grove members will be asked to oathmake to the following:

- to respect and maintain the confidentiality of their fellow members and of their teachers, including not discussing the Grove' s workings with non-participants;
- to refrain from charging money for teaching or using the lore that they have been taught in the Grove; and
- to refrain from identifying themselves as Wiccan initiates, or claiming the status or prerequisites of Wiccan initiation, during the year' s course of the Grove.

In addition, Grove members will be asked to commit themselves to prompt and regular attendance of the Grove' s meetings, including that if an emergency arises, they will make a fair effort to contact their teacher(s) beforehand, to ask for a boon of absence.

The Grove will operate within a framework of *Laws*, which will be binding upon all members during their period of Grove membership; applicants must copy the *Laws* in their own handwriting during the interview evening on February 1st.

10. Will I have to wear a robe or a special uniform?

Comfortable street clothes will do just fine; in deference to the comfort of your fellow members we will ask you to wear clean clothes (including clean socks!) that are loose enough to allow you to move comfortably and sit or kneel as you please.

11. What about behavioral standards?

We won't dictate your musical preferences, and neither the Grove nor its sponsoring Covens will pass judgment upon your sexual or affectional preferences, so long as they are non-violent, non-abusive, and non-harmful to self or others. People who are philosophically opposed to heterosexual imagery, or who are unwilling to interact with other members of a mixed-gender group, may find the Grove not to their taste. The Grove's teachers will neither demand nor accept sexual or monetary favors from students, nor will we encourage or condone the use of illicit drugs or other intoxicants during Grove meetings. Grove meetings will be in a non-smoking venue.

12. Will I become an initiate?

Working with Wild Rose will not directly lead to Wiccan initiation. From our point of view, that happens in covens, to which you will have the opportunity to petition for membership following completion of the year's sessions.

After your Grove year, you will have several options on how to proceed. You might choose to petition to join Coven of the Stone and Mirror or Coven of the Stone and Cauldron (which would entail certain rites), or to enter another Craft or Pagan group (which may or may not entail additional rites of passage).

The non-initiatory nature of the Grove is intended to let it function as a low-pressure discussion group, within which you may explore the folklore and meaning of traditional English Paganism.

Hopefully, after having completed your Grove year, you will have a rich collection of resources from which to work, and you will have had the opportunity to consider whether you would like to enter formal apprenticeship or dedication to eventually become a Wiccan initiate.

13. What would I need to bring to the first meeting?

Yourself, in a rested and relaxed state of mind; two white candles (which will become collective property of the Grove), a durably-bound, black-covered blank book (lined or unlined as you prefer, at least 6 x 9 inches, 40 to 100 pages), and at least one pen. You will be copying materials into your book during the first meeting, and at frequent occasions thereafter. How much you decide to put in your book will be largely up to you, but past experience indicates that you will have no difficulty in filling it.

You will probably want to obtain a three-ring binder of standard size, so as to keep your teaching papers and notes organized; you may need several binders through the year (about 400 pages of handouts will be provided) but one will do to start.

14. Can the date and time of the meetings be changed to suit my circumstances?

In a word, no. During the 2000 sessions, Wild Rose will meet once a week at a fixed time. If you must work or go to school on the chosen night, do keep in mind that there are other Pagan and Wiccan training groups in Calgary which do meet on other nights of the week.

Blessed be,
Gwyneth
Lady of Stone and Mirror

Yes, we are very well aware that Pagan Groves seldom advertise themselves on the Internet. We are doing this as an experiment, to see whether we can better serve people in south-western Alberta who might be looking for Traditional training but have no idea where to look.

Touch the Earth

Witches worship the Great Mother, the Earth. To make this love and worship real, in Proteus, we work for Her protection and healing, both magically and practically, as our own best talents lead us. This work begins with getting to know Her as She manifests in our own local environment. So, we ask our students to complete this assignment before their formal magical training begins.

1. Trace the water that you drink from precipitation to tap.
2. What sort of soil is predominant in this place? What are its geological and hydrological associations?
3. Name five native edible plants in your region and the season(s) that they are available.
4. How long is the growing season where you live?
5. What was the total precipitation in your area last year (July - June)?
(Slack: one inch or centimeter for every twenty inches or centimeters)
6. Name five birds that live in your area. Which are migratory and which are year-around residents?
7. How did the indigenous people of your area obtain their subsistence from nature? What use have humans made of this land during the past two centuries?
8. Where does your garbage go and how does it get there?
9. From what direction do winter storms generally come in your region?
10. What primary ecological event/process influenced the land form where you live?
Bonus question: what is the evidence?
11. What species have become extinct in your area?
12. When do the deer rut in your region, and when are their young born?
13. What spring wildflower is consistently among the first to bloom where you live?
14. Name five grasses in your area. Are any of them native?
15. What species of plant typically live in close association in your region?
16. How recently was the Moon full?
17. Where is the nearest power plant to your home? How does it generate power? What are the environmental costs and benefits of this method of generation?
18. Where is there "wilderness" in your bioregion?
19. What are the primary sources of pollution in your region?
20. What are the major "natural" sounds you are aware of in any particular (name it) month or season?

This questionnaire was adapted by Chas Clifton (and re-adapted by Iontas and Gwyneth) from "Where You At - A Bioregional Quiz" by Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman and Victoria Stockley, first published in the Winter, 1981 issue of *Coevolution Quarterly* and subsequently reprinted in *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (New Society Publishers, ISBN 0-86571-188-7, 1990). We present this questionnaire in this form for purposes of private religious study. Copyright for "Where You At" is held by *Whole Earth Review*

Choosing a Coven

There are many ways to honor Nature in our lives. Some of us participate in Pagan rites because there we find nurturance, guidance, and community with like-minded others. An artist, a doctor, a teacher, a technician - the work they do is real, and very necessary, but our religion is not its primary focus. Pagan worship helps them stay attuned with Sacred Source, with the rhythms of Earth and Moon, with the life-affirming values of polytheistic, Immanence-based religion. These are the Pagan laity, gathering again as our faith emerges from its long dormancy.

Others of us find in Witchcraft (or Asatru, Druidry, or several other Pagan orders) our authentic life's work, our art form. Although Witches, by Tradition, earn our livings elsewhere, we dedicate much of our free time and energy to our Craft. We are not better, holier, or even necessarily more devoted to the Gods; but here is where our talents, and our delight, seem to lie. This is our way of making a difference in the world: Witches heal.

In our observation, people often spend some time exploring the community, reading, attending public circles or festivals. For some, this exploration fosters a hunger. They wish to study more formally, explore more deeply, prepare for Initiation into the priesthood of the Goddess. You may be one of them.

Perhaps you've followed the Old Ways for some time now, and want to go further along this Path, to deepen your experience of Pagan nature mysticism. You may believe you have the necessary talents and temperaments, and wish to use those endowments to serve the people and the Gods as a Witch and priest/ess. What next? Most of us seek formal coven training, hoping to find guidance from experienced elders and companions along the Path.

What covens can and cannot do for their students

- **Magical and spiritual power comes only from the Gods.**
- **The knowledge and skill you need to use that power effectively come from your own hard work.** Coven training is the easiest and safest way to learn and to practice in a supportive context. Alternatively, you might seek individual training from an elder you respect. Be aware that the best training system accomplishes nothing unless you actually do the work. And there certainly are skilled and empowered Witches who are solitary and completely self-trained.
- **Credentials come from other people.** If community recognition is important to you, you should join a coven that is part of a lineage, one whose elders have traditional religious authority to bring others into that collective. If legal clergy status matters, look for a group that is affiliated with one of the duly incorporated organizations like Covenant of the Goddess. Of course, one coven can convey both types of credential -- as Proteus Coven does.

Be mindful, though, that power, skill, and credentials are three entirely separate things. No one of them can substitute for either of the others, nor prove that either of the others is also present.

Coven Shopping: finding a place to root yourself and grow

If you choose to seek formal training, look for competent training from experienced elders who are authentically spiritual in the context of a functional coven. Remember that you have a choice. Ours is one of the fastest growing religions on this continent. There are many more covens than there were, even ten years ago. Most of these covens make themselves accessible to sincere seekers. As a result, potential students can "shop around," for the best possible coven, the best possible match.

As always, people who have options are responsible for the choices they make. Be thoughtful and careful. Ask for the guidance of the Gods and listen for the still small voice that carries Their response. The quality of your experience depends on the choices you make now.

Here are some things to look for:

- People you can respect, trust and love.
- Good people. How could anyone be spiritual without being at least honest and kind?
- Authentic people - people who seem to live in accordance with the values they espouse. If they claim to be able to teach you Nature spirituality, do they live lightly on the Earth? If they claim to be able to teach you magic, do they seem to be grounded, centered and empowered?
- Competent people - people who seem knowledgeable and skilled, people who are organized, who keep their appointments and are well-prepared for their classes.
- People who listen. People who ask the kinds of questions that encourage you to explore your own spirituality and your own ideas and feelings about traditional lore. People who are genuinely open to learning from their students, as well as teaching them.
- People who will respect your confidences. People who will neither gossip nor use information you share to manipulate or hurt you.

and some things to avoid:

- **Authoritarians** - stay away from anyone who tries to censor your reading or to isolate you from family or friends. Beware of those who get irritated when you ask challenging questions. Be even more wary of anyone who, when you ask a difficult question, either ridicules you or patronizes you ("let your elders worry about that one, dear, your job right now is just to learn what we teach."). If anybody tries to forbid you to express your opinions in the presence of your elders, run screaming out the door. (all these things have happened)

- **Sexual predators** - unfortunately a few of these creeps infest every religion. If somebody tells you that your magical or spiritual advancement depends on your giving them what they want, first spit in their eye, then get away fast.
- **Hypocrites** - those who say they love Mother Earth, and live carelessly and wastefully, those who say they love the Goddess and dominate or abuse human women, those who claim to be Spirit-led while their behavior is ego-driven.
- **Exploiters** - but they' re not instantly identifiable. Any coven might ask students to take a turn bringing consumable supplies like candles or cookies. Teaching covens may have monetary expenses, such as photocopying or rental for a meeting room -- and it' s entirely reasonable for them to charge dues and cover their costs from the common purse thus created. There is some debate in our community about whether a Craft teacher should accept payment for their time and work. This is a matter of opinion, but you can be sure that a teacher who takes payment is not practicing Traditional Witchcraft.
It' s also fair for a teacher or coven to ask you to do your share of setup and clean-up, or of ongoing coven projects. But if some coven leader expects you to work free in their profit- making business, or act as their domestic servant, run screaming out the door.
- **People who order you to go against your values.** Again, this involves some subtle issues. One of the major goals of spiritual development is to learn to hear the still, small inner voice. But some of our inner directives are actually cultural or familial programming. These prescriptions and prescriptions may also be wise, or they may be limiting, or actually evil (consider racial prejudice). They often drown out the voice of authentic Spirit. The best teachers will gently challenge their students to override outworn programming, but never to go against core values. The issue of readiness is also important. If you try to override even the nastiest old programming before you are ready, you might cause a painful backlash. This psychological trauma can actually retard your progress. Beware of insensitive autocrats who try to force all their students into the same Procrustean bed. Don' t ever let anybody pressure into doing anything in or out of Circle - that you believe is wrong. In ritual, we speak to our deepest minds, establishing the moods and motivations that shape our lives. *Don't ever do in token what you would not do in truth.*

Compatibility issues

As polytheists, we celebrate diversity. Sacred diversity also shows itself in a wide range of variation among those covens that are ethical, competent and Spirit-led. You don't just want a good coven, you want one that is a good fit for your own talents, temperaments, inclinations and style. Here are some compatibility issues to consider:

- Mixed gender or all female or male?
- Size - the traditional maximum is thirteen, but quieter people may feel more comfortable in smaller groups. The average size of a coven is more like five or six.

- Ritual style - ranges from highly formal and ceremonial to spontaneous and "shamanic."
- Teaching style - they may have a highly structured curriculum or they may let their teaching be directed by student interest. If there is a prescribed curriculum, does it cover your particular interests?
- Decision-making style - this can range from full consensus process through majority vote to parent-like benevolent dictatorship.
- Time demands - good training requires the student' s time and work. As the Craft matures, our notion of what a priest/ess needs to know has grown accordingly. Pacing makes a big difference -- we can either pack it in or stretch it out. Find out what a coven' s typical time demands are, both for attendance and for homework. Figure out whether you can meet those demands while continuing to have a job, a family and a life.
- Theological emphasis or focus: Goddess only, Goddess and God in balance, or full-blown polytheism? Any particular pantheon or historical or cultural emphasis?
- Social contact - do you want your coven to also be a large part of your social life, or would you rather keep social and coven life mostly separate? (If your mate is not involved with the coven, you' ll almost certainly prefer the latter.)

Summary

Coven-shopping is healthy for both covens and coveners. Meet as many covens and coven leaders as possible. Visit as many covens as you can before you commit to one. Remember as you weigh your choice that they are asking themselves remarkably similar questions about you -- and this is exactly as it should be. We all benefit when the best possible matches are made, for the coven process forms the leaders of the future -- and our Craft must ever survive.

Get to know the coven. Get to know the leaders. Coven participation is not just a simple transfer of knowledge or skill -- it is socialization into a small, closely-bonded community of priest/esses. So one final question sums up all the issues we' ve looked at so far. Do you want to become more like these people? If so, ask them if they will have you as their student. And may the Gods guide your Path to Their service.

by [Judy Harrow](#)

updated: February 16, 2000; © 2000, by Judy Harrow

the address of this page is: www.draknet.com/proteus/Findcovn.htm

The Proteus Guide to Ritual Etiquette

Most of Circle etiquette is the same as what your mother always told you about shul or church: "sit up, follow the service, have respect, don' t fidget or mumble". A possible Pagan adaptation would be "don' t fidget or mumble unless, of course, everyone present is doing the same. This may be their way of raising power!"

Attendance:

1. For anything on the regular coven schedule, we will expect you unless we hear otherwise from you. If you can' t make it, please notify us before the established arrival time. Without such notice, we would assume you were delayed enroute and hold for you, thus inconveniencing everyone present.
2. Missing two regularly-scheduled meetings in a row without good reason or without timely notice will result in your being placed on sabbatical.
3. If an invitation to a Circle or other Pagan event, here or elsewhere, includes a request for response, of course you should let the hosts know whether or not you plan to attend. If you are expected somewhere and find you can' t attend, notify your hosts as soon as possible.
4. Be punctual. If you are unavoidably delayed, and you find a closed door, knock very quietly or ring the bell *once*, briefly. If there is no answer, quietly go away. Apologize later.
5. Be sure to take care of any predictable physical needs (restroom, medication, etc.) before Circle, to minimize disruption of the energy. If you have any other special needs (i.e. to sit on a chair instead of the floor, a shawl for warmth if you have the sniffles), let the officiant know in advance.
6. Barring life-critical emergencies, do not leave a cast Circle without first getting permission from whoever cast it. Always ritually cut yourself out and back in. If people are holding hands, take one step back, then join the hands of those on either side before leaving.
 - *If you know you may need to leave briefly during Circle - (e.g. pregnant women need the restroom far more often) - let the officiant know in advance and sit nearest the door. Leave and re-enter quietly, and try not to leave during particularly intense moments.*
 - *If possible, avoid time-bound plans immediately after coven meetings. That means it's OK to plan to go on to a party afterward, but concert or theatre tickets are inadvisable.*
 - *If you have an unavoidable time limit, please be sure to let the officiant know about it in advance, so there are no unanticipated mid-Circle departures. Most often, the best way to handle such a time limit is simply to skip that meeting.*
 - *Circle does not belong to the Clockworld, and it takes what time it takes. The duration of a Circle neither can nor should be precisely predicted. In token of this, we do not normally wear watches in Circle.*

7. When you come to Circle, you present yourself before your kindred and the Gods. Try to come in a suitable condition.

- *If you are drunk or stoned, stay away, period.*
- *If you are contagiously ill, stay away. We can send healing energy.*
- *If you are injured or ill with something non-contagious, consider whether in-person healing or more rest will be best for you. Only you can choose.*
- *Ideally, we come to Circle calm and centered. However, if you are troubled, you may want the support and healing of Circle. Figure out what will most help you. If possible, call the officiant in advance, so your need can be considered in planning the ritual.*
- *Have a light meal or snack before. Don't come so hungry that you will be distracted or so overstuffed that you will be sluggish. If possible, come relatively well-rested and physically clean (if you're coming straight from work, you can clean up or grab a snack here.)*

Contributions:

1. There is never any kind of fee or dues for participation in Proteus. If you are feeling flush, you are always welcome to bring food and beverages for sharing, or supplies such as candles, charcoal, or printer paper. These are welcome, but in no way needed.
2. The really needed contribution is the one that anybody can make: work. Please help as you can with set-up, cleanup, and the other occasional chores of coven life. This includes mucking out the bathtub and even occasionally doing a laundry load of towels.
3. If there's going to be a feast, and you have allergies or other special food needs, bring what you can eat. If this is something others can also share and enjoy, so much the better. But your restrictions should not limit what others can bring or enjoy.

Process and focus:

The Circle is a collective thought form. We all work together to enter "Circle state of consciousness," to maintain and reinforce our shared sense of being in a different and sacred space. It might be helpful to think of it as a special kind of mood. Like any mood, it can be dissipated, even by something as simple as using each others' ordinary names. Always be sensitive to the mood and the flow. Remember that long conversational side-tracks into unrelated topics will disperse the mood. Rudeness and vulgarity will destroy it more harshly. Maintaining focus, nurturing the mood, is everybody's job.

1. During the more "ritual" part of the ritual, only speak if your speaking is part of the rite, as in offering a libation. Do not interrupt working or worship in process unless you perceive imminent, serious danger or imminent, serious breach of ethics.

2. Discussion is appropriate in Circle during teaching sessions or when we take counsel together about workings or group business. At those times, only one person should speak at a time and remarks should be audible to the entire group. No side chat. Side chat is at best rude and at worst corrosive to mutual trust and respect.
3. *Questions are expected, desired and anticipated. Don' t worry about seeming foolish. Asking a question may make you seem like a fool for a moment; but if you don' t ask your "silly beginner' s" questions, you will be a fool for life. Remember, Gwyneth and Judy had to ask these questions at least once, too*
4. *Comment and feedback on ritual process are valuable.*
5. *Within our own coven, challenge, disagreement and argument within the bounds of mutual respect are also appropriate and welcome. They are usually not appropriate when guesting.*
6. Humor, too, is an important asset of the Pagan community. Getting carried away with jokes at an inappropriate time and disrupting a ritual, however, is bad practice. One person' s suggestion: "Stop and think before making a joke. Is it in keeping with what' s happening, or is it going to blow the energy? Is it worth defusing a Circle?"
7. Once the Circle is closed, please hold all comments, questions or analysis until after you' ve had at least one good night' s sleep, lest we disrupt fragile beginnings with premature analysis before they have had a chance to take root.

Touch:

Always remember that touch is entry into intimate space. Never touch without permission.

1. Some of us are starved for caring touch. Warm hugs and massages can be wonderful things. Our religion values and celebrates sex between consenting people of whatever number or gender.

However, don' t assume. Always remember that touchie-feelie does not inevitably lead to sex. Not all Pagans are polyamorous. Neither Pagan nor polyamorous means universally sexually available. Skyclad is a ritual, theological statement, not a sexual suggestion. Innuendo, coercion, and manipulation regarding sexual favors are not at all acceptable. NO means NO.

2. Furthermore, please be aware that some others have had their space invaded in traumatic ways, and these people need clear boundaries and full control of their personal space. Or they may just not be in the mood for a backrub or a full-body hug. So, even in the case of non-sexual touching, always check first, even if just with eye contact, and be sensitive and respectful towards any resistance.
3. If someone is touching you in a way that you find uncomfortable, sexually or otherwise, please don' t hesitate to make the person aware of your feelings. If the person doesn' t stop, don' t be afraid to ask an elder for help. You don' t have to put up with it.

4. Magical people put a part of themselves into their ritual objects. DON' T TOUCH ritual objects, on or off the altar, without getting specific permission. This applies to people' s personal tools, Tarot decks or other divinatory media, ritual jewellery (especially while they are wearing it!), or any other ritual paraphernalia. Do not touch any such thing without permission.
5. On the other hand, we regard our own ritual tools as teaching paraphernalia, and so any member of Proteus is welcome to work with them.

Guesting:

1. Coven raiding is not something we practice or tolerate.
 - o *If someone attempts to recruit you, let us know at once. Do not ever invite a member of any other coven to one of our coven meetings unless they have checked in with their HP/s. Expect us to verify this with the other coven' s leader.*
 - o *As long as you are a member of Proteus, clear it with us before starting to work with any other group or teacher. Please also check in with us before guesting at other covens. We won' t arbitrarily refuse permission, but we would like to know.*
2. Do not bring guests anywhere without clearing them first. Your hosts may need to know how many are coming so they can prepare the proper amount of materials or refreshments. They may also have some problem or incompatibility with the person you would like to bring. No arguments about this. Anyone has the right to choose who will or will not be invited to a private ritual, especially to a ritual in their own home.
3. If you would like to bring a guest to a Proteus event, check with the officiant, the person whose home we' re meeting in and the coven leader at minimum. (Yes, we know that may be all the same person.) If practicable, it' s a good idea to check with all other coven members.
4. Should you invite a person to an event, you remain responsible for that person. Educate that person as to what they can expect, how to behave, and what is and is not expected of them. Ritual is not a spectator sport. Do not invite people who just want to have their curiosity satisfied. If you are not prepared to take responsibility for someone and their behavior for at least a year and a day, don' t invite them.
5. In general, when visiting other groups, if you see something different from what you' re used to, make sure you know what this practice or object means to them before you judge. Different does not necessarily mean unethical, and there are some actual differences of ethics between Traditions and covens.
If your question is about symbolism or technique, ask the officiant quietly later. It' s almost never appropriate to break the flow of their ritual with such questions. However, if they are completely unwilling to respond to honest and respectful curiosity, they should not be inviting guests.
Even if your concern is about safety or ethics, barring imminent and serious physical danger, it' s better to just quietly withdraw. If you see something disturbing while guesting elsewhere, please discuss it with us as soon as possible.

Miscellaneous:

1. Confidentiality: this is more of an ethics issue than one of etiquette, and you' ll find a more detailed discussion in *the Basics for Beginners essay*. There are two points to be mentioned here:
 - o *Coven business normally remains within the coven. If you perceive a serious ethical breach, please discuss this with us first. If you are still unsatisfied following such a discussion, Lady Morvoren, Judy' s Queen, is your next proper appeal. Unless there is imminent, serious, physical danger, all Craft disputes are to be kept within the Craft.*
 - o *Gwyneth and Judy discuss all matters of coven business with each other, definitely including students' progress and problems, and decisions concerning initiations and elevations. All coven-related information is shared between us. The only kinds of secrets you can expect us to keep from one another are those concerning surprise birthday parties. Don' t even think about invoking confidentiality to play us off against each other.*
2. Get your assigned work in on time. If you can' t, be prepared to explain why not. There are sometimes valid reasons, but an honest admission of failure to organize your time is preferable to lame excuses.
3. We have a regular covenstead, although we might meet anywhere if there' s a reason to do so.
Passaic House is smoke-free and clothing optional. We may meet outdoors in some place that is sacred for us, but obviously not for everyone. When we go there, bring empty trash bags, and carry them out afterwards, full.
4. When in a Circle, always go deosil (sunwise), NEVER widdershins (counter-sunwise).
Deosil is the direction of the sun' s movement, so most Witches use deosil movement as a way of reminding ourselves to always go with, never against, the natural flow of Nature. Unless you are specifically directed otherwise, whenever you move, or pass anything, within a ritual Circle, the proper direction is deosil. Certainly, this is the custom in Proteus.
If you are confused what that direction is, put your right hand in. When your right hand is toward the Centre of the Circle, you are facing deosil. This is also the origin of the phrase "right hand path," which simply means work in accordance with Nature' s own flow, and does not imply anything at all about handedness.
5. **Important: These rules apply to Proteus Coven.** Descendant covens may - and should - modify them to suit local needs.

Judy and Gwyneth

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