'Tis Evil Luck to Speak of It; Secrecy and the Craft

by Judy Harrow (HPS, Proteus Coven)

So be it ardane, that no one shall tell anyone, not of the Craft, who be of the Wicca, or give any names, or where any abide, or in any way tell anything which can betray any of us to our faces. Nor may he tell where the Covendom be. Or the Covenstead. Or where the meetings be. *Ardanes #31-34*, as given in the *Grimoire of Lady Sheba*.

Maybe you knew it all your life, knew what you were long before you knew that we have a name. Maybe the trees spoke to you from childhood, as they did to me. Very likely you thought you were the only one. You might even have thought you were crazy, and your parents and teachers may have thought so, too. Then, one day, you somehow discovered that hundreds and thousands of us have similar feelings and experiences -- the moment of Homecoming, we call that, the discovery of community. Because we know what alone feels like, community is precious to us.

Even after that, you may have spent a long time looking for the right teacher, the right group, then more time working and studying to prepare for initiation. Finally, they say, you are ready. Whatever was needed, you did it. In a solemn and joyful ritual, now you take your vows -- Witch and Priest/ess at last. Initiation may feel to you like the completion of a long process, but the word actually means "beginning." From now on, you get to figure out what Witchcraft is and what it means to live as a Witch.

Vows of Secrecy

Our many Traditions differ in their demands. The precise content of our initiatory vows is, for most of us, an initiatory secret of its own. Still it is common knowledge that almost all Witches vow ourselves to some form of secrecy. Absolute discretion is our near-universal ideal.

Even the most flatfooted atheist understands that oathbreaking destroys self-esteem. It will also certainly lose us the trust and respect of those who keep their oaths, so oathbreakers exclude themselves from community. And, for those of us who cherish our relationship with the Gods, the consequences go far beyond even that. If we know what's good for us, we keep faith as best we can!

We keep silence even under torture, right? Here's bedrock truth: nobody knows. In the Burning Times, we are told, it was easy to know what one should do, desperately hard to do it. And still, in some places in this world, there are knocks on the door in the dead of the night. All anybody can know is how they **hope** they will conduct themselves at such a time. Nobody knows for sure

how they will act in extremity, and the wise pray never to find out. Realistically, and thankfully, we in the English speaking world are most unlikely to face such stark horror.

Our challenge, instead, is discerning what we should do. Instead of brutal force, many of us will confront ambiguity and confusion, a gray and foggy path with few guiding landmarks. Other needs and values may come into conflict with our traditions of silence. Know it: as you sit reading this essay, some Witch, somewhere, is struggling with a difficult decision about whether, who, and how much to tell. Imagine what that feels like. This is the crisis you'll likely face some day.

So are all these oaths we take just hypocrisy? Should we cop to it and stop the practice - just trust our own best Witchy instincts to guide us through the complexities and let it go at that?

At least one of my students sees it that way. He figures that his own students know right from wrong. During their training, he makes sure they have plenty of chance to think through and talk through the issues they are likely to encounter, so they can be as mentally and emotionally prepared as possible. By the time he's willing to elevate them, he feels he'd better be willing to trust them, without oathing, without binding. The good training he gives them should be sufficient.

I agree that thought experiments and behavioral rehearsals are both necessary and extremely valuable. If not, it would be stupid to write about these issues. But even our best thought alone is not sufficient. Human behavior springs more from the heart and the gut than from the head. As priest/esses, we understand that careful forethought works best when reinforced by ritual, which speaks to the younger and deeper self. An oath is a voluntarily accepted, cooperatively worked, binding spell.

We make some very basic choices about how we want to act -- really about who we want to be. Then, by vowing ourselves to them, we instill these decisions firmly and deeply into ourselves, creating an anchor to our own core values. If this work of binding is well and truly done, we will not casually or carelessly violate our standards, nor compromise our values for convenience or gain. I would expect the oaths I have taken to protect me from panic and to strengthen me in times of critical stress.

But I do not at all expect my oaths, simple statements made for and by the inner child, to help me sort through the complexities, the conflicts, the many shades of gray. This is the task of the inner adult. My oaths help me live by my decisions; they do not help me decide. Instead we can help each other, by thinking together about these issues. Ritual, too, is necessary but not sufficient.

Since none of us has perfect knowledge or perfect wisdom, all we can do when we face complex and ambiguous choices is to act as seems best, take responsibility for whatever we do, and be

willing to learn hard lessons from our own mistakes. Believe me, those mistakes can be public and painful. So I offer, as at least a starting point, what I've learned in the seventeen years since my own initiation.

It helps, I think, to separate some of the issues. Secrecy about people, their concerns, and their involvement with Witchcraft is different from secrecy about our stories, symbols, rituals and magical techniques. Also there is a difference, known since classical times but rarely articulated, between the kinds of secrets which can, but should not, be told, and the mysteries, which are deeply internal, experiential and non-verbal. There are very different issues, very different possible consequences to be considered for each of these.

Beyond even that, the *Wiccan Rede* --"An it harm none, do what ye will"-- is our core ethic, by which whatever else we may do - including our vows - is informed, guided, evaluated and - if need be - set aside. In those few and terrible moments when the Rede and our vows conflict, we truly face the Abyss. May Ancient Wisdom guide us then.

Personal Confidentiality -
the secrecy of who we are.

The violation of a person's privacy has never been and is still not tolerated in our community. While many things have changed since Gardner's time, this is a constant: those who violate others' privacy, or even threaten to do so, will almost certainly find themselves ostracized as oathbreakers.

Every Witch or Pagan has the absolute right to decide for themselves who shall know how much about their religious affiliation. The way to know how public a Witch is willing to be is simply to ask them. In very rare circumstances where you are truly not able to ask them, follow their example. Be careful not to rely on old statements or behaviors. The right to choose implies the right to change one's mind. Perhaps she was open in the freewheeling atmosphere of a college town, but now is struggling to establish a professional career. Perhaps he's in a new relationship, and his new lover has a stronger sense of privacy than the last one. Saying that somebody who had their legal name in the letter column of some obscure publication twenty years ago has yielded all right to privacy is about like saying that only virgins can ever say no.

Each of us is the world's greatest authority on our own life and needs. Each person's situation is different. Some Traditions specifically require that their members maintain personal secrecy. Many other Witches feel that by publicly identifying themselves as Witches, they would risk their jobs, their homes, even the custody of their children. At times, in places, this fear is still accurate. Whether or not it is, each of us chooses our own level of risk. The rest of us don't get to second guess.

People make a wide variety of choices. Some keep their faith entirely to themselves. Others appear on television talk shows for all to see. Some are out to their friends, but not at work. Some people want to reserve their legal name for their professional lives, and use some other chosen name within the Pagan community. Others want their Craft names used only in Circle, preferring to use their legal name in ordinary space. We respect others' choices and expect their respect for our own.

Once out of the broom closet, voluntarily or otherwise, a person can never entirely go back (although that's no excuse for further outing). To out a person against their own will is to deprive them of that choice forever, to do them irreparable harm. Whether or not any secondary harm comes of it, they are subjected to the psychological stress of risks they did not choose and perhaps were not ready to take. It's not "just" the initiatory oath that has been broken, it is the *Rede!*

You may think that a friend is being overly timid. You may think they are exaggerating the dangers of their situation. If this is your opinion, and if they are willing to hear it, then, certainly, you may try to persuade them. Here are some of the arguments for openness:

We aren't nearly as hidden as some of us fondly believe we are. We may actually be making it difficult for sincere seekers to find their way Home, while any determined researcher could dig up telephone and computer email records, perhaps even the subscription lists of magazines or records of who attended gatherings. How about credit card, or even mail order, purchases of Wicca-related books?

Where we really stand is halfway out of the broom closet, and that's the point of greatest danger: subject to trial and condemnation by rumor, not yet fully protected by legal and customary standards of freedom of religion. The only way to win our full freedom is to come out. Not every single one of us, but those who feel they can, and enough of us to make an impact.

If we don't define ourselves, others will define us. By our silence we cede to them the power of naming. Nor are the outsiders who would define us always our friends. They aren't always objective. They aren't even always honest. We have more to worry about these days than stupid cartoon movies, that nobody takes seriously anyhow. Some extremist fundamentalist writers are actively pushing the old lies about devil worship and human sacrifice. The perpetrators of the ritual abuse panic have victims with hypnotically induced pseudo-memories who can and do act as convincing "witnesses." By our robes, candles and pentagrams, we are vulnerable to these lies.

Living in hiding, nurturing a secret, is also psychologically toxic. We can come to believe that we are special, heroic, armchair martyrs. The alienation, and paranoia that this breeds eventually

becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as our furtive behavior draws response in kind from those around us. People who know us personally - family, friends, co-workers - can often sense that we are withholding something from them. If they feel we're hiding something, it's easier for them to believe that we have something unwholesome to hide.

Staying in touch, and being open, with people of other religions and of none provides us with a healthy reality check. Access to a trusted outside perspective can help us avoid some of the flakier theories and practices that sometimes slop over from the fringes of the magical or New Age communities or to recognize when some leader is abusing their role or some group has become dysfunctional. Yes, these things can happen anywhere. The more isolated the community or group, the more intellectually stagnant, the more likely delusion or abuse becomes.

Most important, I think, is the issue of walking our talk. We say we are an Earth religion, finding our ultimate meaning and value in this life on this Earth here and now. Strict separation of secular and religious life seems to me to be inconsistent with geocentric thealogy. And if we are called, as I believe we are, to protect, serve and heal Mother Earth in this time of crisis - well, I just don't see how we can effectively do that from a closet!

For these reasons, I'm very out. I'm writing this under my legal name. I've done media work, using my legal name, for years. And I frequently and publicly encourage everybody to be as out as they possibly can, to actually "push the envelope" on openness. So here's a surprise: in all these years, I have never heard a word of criticism from those Witches who adhere to older traditions of personal secrecy. They respect my choices as long as I am willing to respect and protect theirs. Though our choices differ, we share a commitment to choice itself. The core issue is mutual respect, not secrecy -- the trust that we must have to re-create our community. Those who are most private need to know in their guts that even the media Witches will protect them. Otherwise they can and will protect themselves by avoiding interaction, hiding from the rest of us as they do from the cowan. This is the universal, basic, and absolutely necessary "social contract" among us. Because we know what alone feels like, community is precious to us, and we will protect it. Your continued participation in the Wiccan/Pagan community in large part depends upon your keeping this trust.

Craft Secrecy and Secular Law

Very early one morning in the gray Northeast, a Witch was murdered in her own home. The police, who found no sign of forced entry, concluded that the killer must have been someone she knew well enough to open the door for them in the pre-dawn hours. Since the dead woman had been very active in a local Pagan organization, they requested a copy of the group's membership roster.

Few questions are purely legal. Consider this: the close friends and colleagues of the murdered woman very much **wanted** to cooperate with the investigation in any way they could. They very much did not want the local media to get the impression that the Witches were obstructing a murder investigation. But the legal issue here was stark. The police request could easily have been followed by a subpoena. Refusing such a subpoena would have been followed by jail time for contempt of court. Thankfully, because they had been out in their community for many years, and were well known, the Witches were able to persuade the District Attorney to withdraw the request.

We'd like to think that as priest/esses, as clergy, our communications with coven members are legally protected, "privileged" communication. We'd like to believe that our religious status safeguards us, at least, from the threat of jail. It's not that simple.

This year, members of a Wiccan group were accused of zoning violations - of operating a church in a residential area - because they had a Maypole in their backyard at Beltane. They fought and won their case - yes - but had to take a second mortgage on their house to pay their lawyer. Not all of us are homeowners. What legal rights we have are only made real when we have the resources and the determination to defend them.

And the legal right of any clergy to remain silent varies from state to state, and with the type of case. Many states, for example, mandate the reporting of child abuse. Ten years ago, in Florida, a fundamentalist Christian minister, Rev. John Mellish, counseled a child abuser in his congregation and actually persuaded the man to surrender himself to the authorities. The man confessed, pled guilty, and still the court demanded the pastor's testimony. Pastor Mellish refused on principle, and went to jail for contempt of court, setting an honorable example for all clergy of all religions. Understand, where the law denies the privilege of confidential communication to anybody, a Witch cannot claim religious discrimination.

Each of us needs to research what the law actually is where we live, in order to assess our risks and protect ourselves as best we can. No protection is perfect. And some apparent protections do more harm than good.

At the height of the ritual abuse scare, some members of one major Wiccan group proposed a policy statement dissociating the group from any illegal activities on the part of any of its members. This was called the "cover your anatomy amendment." It was never adopted because the law of the land does not - and should not - control our consciences.

In fact, we do condone some illegal activities. Sometimes a person's spirituality and conscience call them to break the law - trespassing and blockading to defend ancient forests, for example. In some places, activities directly related to our religion, such as reading the Tarot, are illegal. Better to keep quiet than to say we condone some illegal activities, but not others. So we keep

quiet whenever possible. We stay as far away from cowan courts and cowan cops as we possibly can. This is traditional advice, and good advice, but not an absolute. The Rede from which our religion grows tells us that the only absolute is to avoid harm. This is the hard part: sometimes to avoid harm, by the *Rede* itself, we must break silence.

My secular profession, counseling, has its own strong tradition of confidentiality. But professional counselors acknowledge clear limits to that confidentiality, and good reasons for those limits. Witches can learn from this example. In the early '70's, Tatiana Tarasoff was a student at the University of California. Another student, obsessed with thoughts of murdering her, sought help at the University counseling center. His counselor, a licensed psychologist, kept his confidence, and did not warn Tatiana. So she was murdered. Her parents won a wrongful death suit. The California Supreme Court upheld the decision on appeal (*Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California*, 1976) and so established a legal "duty to warn" in situations of serious danger to self or others.

Jail isn't a good enough reason to break silence, but, by the *Rede*, saving a life is.

Sometimes, as with Tarasoff, the danger is individual and specific. Sometimes it is more general. One of the great heroes of my generation is the whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, who saved very many lives by illegally releasing classified material to the press, material which exposed the massive falsehoods that were used to rationalize the American invasion of Vietnam. Ellsberg predictably lost a job that paid very well and carried a great deal of prestige and power. His former colleagues doubtlessly saw him as a traitor. He risked jail. A generation earlier, he might have risked execution.

At a Pagan gathering in upstate New York, we had a case of stupid crudeness. The guy was repeatedly and annoyingly hitting on women. He had wandering hands, and he did not stop when clearly told to. Sexual harassment, no doubt about it, but nowhere near rape. We called together a council of responsible Elders, decided what to do, and informed the man that he was not welcome back next year, nor any other year until we heard from his local community that he'd learned to treat women with respect. A distasteful situation, but one that posed no immediate or serious danger, quietly handled within the community.

Meanwhile, out West, other Witches faced a similar case of stupid crudeness at local open circles. Here, too, the women were annoyed, but they were not injured or endangered. They could have simply declared the guy *persona non grata.* Instead they brought criminal charges. The over-reaction, and its backlash, tore their community apart.

Here's a guide: we can trust the Gods for retributive justice. Our responsibility is prevention and healing only. We should settle problems internally whenever we can. We must never break silence for trivial or ulterior reasons.

But sometimes the Fire Department gets to see the inside of the temple. Some situations carry imminent and serious danger that truly is beyond our ability to handle within the community.

We may break silence only when we must. Only when, as for Daniel Ellsberg, the potential consequences to self or others of keeping silence outweigh the full consequences of breaking it.

Until and unless you are prepared to look the Crone in the eye, tell Her "yes, I broke my oath, and here's why," **and accept Her judgement,** don't do it. Perhaps She'll agree with you, but you have no guarantee. Don't you ever dare try to second guess Her. May we all stay aware of what conscientious whistleblowers put on the line, and may this awareness keep us honest!

Criminal law concerns itself with behavior that the whole community considers wrongful and damaging to the collective. On the other side of the courthouse, civil law is about resolving disputes between individuals. Civil disputes almost never involve imminent serious danger.

And so, the *Ardanes* say:

Tis the old Law and the most important of all Laws that no one may do anything which will endanger any of the Craft, or bring them into contact with the law of the land .... In any disputes between the brethren, no one may invoke any laws but those of the Craft or any tribunal but that of the Priestess, Priest, and Elders. And may the Curse of the Goddess be on any who do so. *Ardanes #127-129*, as given in the *Grimoire of Lady Sheba*.

That reads like an absolute prohibition, and it is. But we all know Witches who have sued other Witches in court without being ostracized for it, most commonly if they are getting a legal divorce. In realistic terms, the prohibition is against bringing Witchcraft, not individual Witches, before the bench.

There are two main reasons to discourage lawsuits among Witches. One is that disputes over actual Wiccan issues are not under any circumstance to be taken into secular courts -- the Cowans do not get a vote in our business.

Secondly, even when the issue to be settled is entirely secular, you must not out each other as Witches in court. Revealing that the opponent is a Witch might be "good tactics." It might help you win your case, might even win you a lot of money. But by taking that advantage, you reinforce the notion that there's something weird or wrong about being a Witch, reason enough to decide against one of us.

It's happened. A Witch once sued a Wiccan organization because another Witch had left an inheritance to them and not to her. A Witch threatened both to sue and to publicly name "and not just their Craft names" other Witches who had gotten in the way of some of his political plans. I very recently heard another Witch threaten to sue some Witches because their protests

about his sloppy confidentiality spoiled a business deal of his. It happens, It's ugly. The feedback is usually both swift and dramatic.

So I offer another guideline: you might find yourself suing or being sued by another Witch. It's an unfortunate and a delicate situation. Even as you argue out your differences, in that very adversarial setting, you must somehow cooperate in keeping the silence: whichever side mentions Witchcraft first has broken trust.

The Mysteries: soul secrets

We are nature mystics. We are magic users. Neat phrases, but they mean almost nothing unless you've been there and done that. Magic and mysticism are to be lived, not described. They are, in essence, non-verbal.

Here's some sort of analogy: at one phase of my life I collected and read a lot of cookbooks. Reading cookbooks is not at all the same activity as cooking. Cooking is about smell, texture, taste -- a sensuous experience that cannot be reduced to words. Same with sewing, carpentry, sex, ice skating and what Witches do in Circle.

As nature mystics, we work with altered states of consciousness, with ecstasy. We listen together for the sacred voices on the wind. We look together for the sacred faces in the stones. We chant and dance and dream together. Through all this and more, we seek to deepen our conscious contact with the Immanent Divine, Who we experience as Mother Earth. We feel Her power in us. We feel ourselves part of Her body. Some will hear that as simple truth, some as metaphor, and still others as nonsense. The greater mysteries cannot be told to those unready to hear. People have understood this since ancient times - the details of the Eleusinian rituals were strictly protected by law, but the core meaning never was.

You can tell other people of the mysteries, if you like, without community censure. But you do so at your own risk. Those who are not ready to hear may think you are weird, irrational, unreliable, even delusional. A reputation like that could hurt you on the job. If you persist, they may think you are a fanatic, a bore, maybe even a Satanist. That's why tradition advises us to let ourselves be judged more by our deeds than our words.

But although unwise or premature revelations may hurt you, they will do no damage to the mysteries. Remember, these are mysteries, not secrets. People will screen out whatever they are not ready to hear. So whoever does hear is ready, Witch or not. There is no downside to enlightenment. The Goddess is nobody's private property; She is Mother to all that lives.

We are in conscious contact with Her only imperfectly and intermittently. We are obstructed by old hurts and old habits. We try together to open our own channel to the Sacred, to clear the

blockages. Mysticism shades into magic when we work towards our own psychospiritual healing and growth.

Magic has been defined as "the art of changing consciousness in accordance with will." Changes we make inside ourselves often create secondary results in our interactions with others. When consciousness changes, behavior changes, and different behavior calls forth different responses. So to change my consciousness is to change my life in all aspects, not just the religious. Healing, love magic, job magic, all grow from this root.

Although the greater mysteries themselves require no secrecy, this delicate inner work most certainly does. In the quiet intimacy of our small Circles, we minister to each other. All are clergy; all are congregants. Each of us brings to the Circle our deepest needs, our most painful inner wounds and scars, our newest and most fragile inner growth. Together, we create the context for one another's psychospiritual development.

For this, we must have utterly safe space. Few would risk exposing themselves this deeply if their struggles are likely to become common gossip. So, whatever is said and done within a cast Circle is not normally to be discussed with anyone who was not present, not even other Witches.

Human growth takes place both through a gradual and constant process and through a few dramatic moments of radical personal transformation -- initiations. Sometimes we are suddenly changed by something that happens in the normal course of life, such as having a baby. Other initiations are carefully structured rituals, something that our elders do to and for us.

Witchcraft is one such initiatory Path. Initiations and elevations are our greatest acts of magic. They work by separating us from ordinary contexts and mindsets, disorienting us, carrying us to the liminal state, the threshold of change. A candidate for initiation must let go completely, trust himself utterly to the elder or initiator.

Effective initiation requires surprise. If candidates hear verbal descriptions in advance, they will form expectations. Humans are very good at seeing what we expect to see, rather than what is there. If the candidate's perceptual abilities are trammelled by expectations, they will force their experience into that mold. They will miss some part, perhaps the heart, of what is presented to them.

Only the silence of all prior initiates can guarantee initiatory surprise. If you talk to non-initiates about what happens at initiations, you risk spoiling their experience and compromising our future.

"Craft Secrets" - the technology of the Sacred

Remember *Fantasia*, the classic Disney film? Mickey Mouse plays the Sorcerer's Apprentice, assigned by his master to fetch water. Instead, as soon as the old man's back is turned, Mickey peeks into a forbidden grimoire, and finds a spell for turning the broom into a robot that carries the heavy pails up the long staircase. Great, but there's just one problem. Mickey never thought to find a spell to make the robot stop. By the time the Sorcerer returns, the place is flooded and Mickey is in big trouble.

So we say "if that grimoire were available, there'd be a whole lot of wet floors around here." And we say "there's nothing immoral about a bread knife, but I sure wouldn't hand one to my two year old." And we guard our knowledge as if it were a dangerous thing. And, as all power is danger, it is.

No, I don't know how to make brooms carry water, but I do know how to change consciousness in accordance with will, lots of ways. The Witch's Craft is the technology of the Sacred, a set of methods for making ecstasy happen. We learn and practice them as a pianist practices scales, for what they will enable us to do. These techniques and skills, directed toward psychospiritual change, support both mysticism and magic.

Like any powerful technology, our Craft can help or harm. Like any technology, it needs to be handled with caution, wisdom, restraint and care. Our basic sense of responsibility demands that we share what we know wisely. It could be temptingly easy, especially for beginners suddenly finding themselves with such powerful techniques, to use them for self-aggrandizement or to intervene without permission in the lives of others "for their own good."

So, by tradition, we teach our students one-on-one or in very small groups where we can get to know each one well. This allows us to monitor their personal development, making very sure that they understand traditional ethics and cautions. In an organic teaching process, we carefully transfer only those skills that we feel they are ready for, that they can use wisely and well.

Indeed, some Traditions ask their newly elevated elders to wait a while, till what they've learned is tempered by experience, before taking on students of their own. Some real life experience will help them make the judgement calls about pacing instruction. Far from being authoritarian or overly restrictive, this is classic "student centered education."

So, we guard our techniques for the very best of reasons. Or do we? We need to look to our own motivations. This could all be a rationalization for hanging on to some real or imagined monopoly. You'll see it blatantly stated as the reason for secrecy in some of the older occult books: "power shared is power lost." Maybe, if you seek and wield the abusive power of the dominator. In a partnership model, knowledge shared is knowledge multiplied.

If I know something that my neighbor doesn't know, even if my neighbor is fully capable of learning it, I could get to feeling special, superior to my neighbor. I might even begin to convince myself that I'm entitled to use what I know to push my neighbor around. In short, keeping our techniques to ourselves could tempt us into exactly those misbehaviors that we thought we were preventing.

Wiccan tradition offers us a commonsense resolution:

Let the Craft keep books with the names of all herbs which are good for people, and all cures, so all may learn. But keep another book with all the Bales and Apies (poisons and opiates) and let only the Elders and other trustworthy people have this knowledge.
Ardanes #136-137, as given in the *Grimoire of Lady Sheba*.

A large part of the *Ardanes* is about how to keep a secret under persecution. In contrast with all that, this passage is startling. We are told to share healing knowledge widely, even at the risk of self-exposure. (everybody in the village would know that this old lady is good with herbs) But some life-saving herbs, such as foxglove, are also dangerous. Only people with considerable skill should handle those. So that part of the information is restricted to Elders and "trustworthy people." Notice that nothing is said about whether these trustworthy folk are "of the brethren" or not.

To be honest, we do also have a few "secrets" that are fairly trivial, on the order of "secret club handshakes" that allow us to know our own. Well and good, any healthy community needs some sense of secure boundaries. Nor do we harm anybody by withholding our little in-jokes and passwords.

Whatever will help people to heal and grow, that we should share with anyone of good heart who is curious. The techniques that we know are not really ours. There are no secrets except those of Mother Nature, and She is a blabbermouth. We are under obligation to conserve this knowledge, develop it, and share it with "trustworthy people" of any Path.

Synergistic Knowledge: is now the time to share?

Pagan religious movements, dormant in European and European-derived culture for 1,500 years, are now resurgent. What has changed? What allows this rebirth?

When patriarchal monotheism gained ascendancy, we lost access to the culture's means of communication. In isolated pockets, stagnant, our knowledge atrophied. But, in the twentieth century, communication became faster, easier and, most important, decentralized. We rewove our web by little newsletters, by long drives, by massive phone bills and, most recently, by enthusiastic use of computer nets. Witches, traditional holders of mystical secrets, are also avid communicators.

In this time of neo-Pagan renascence, those of us who are committed to making it happen have a double task before us. One is to recreate the culture, the skills, the knowledge base that was destroyed and lost over the centuries. The other is to teach the young all we know in a way that leaves them free to discover more. Only thus, not by falling back into stagnation, can we honor our predecessors, who created a foundation for us out of almost nothing.

Right now, the need is too great for us to hide what we know from each other. When we share our discoveries, we avoid wasteful duplication of work. Others can help us avoid pitfalls they already found the hard way, or they might spot connections or opportunities we would have missed. Working collaboratively maximizes each person's effectiveness. So, yes, we need to be careful who we teach how to change human consciousness. But we must also weigh the risks and costs of excessive caution. We need to find our balance.

Go back to the old stories. Too many restrictions, followed too scrupulously, can kill the spirit. Cuchulainn, forbidden to eat the flesh of dogs and equally forbidden to refuse hospitality, was undone when he was offered dog meat for dinner, a classic double bind.

More often than not, it's easy to know what to do. Our traditions give us good guidance, and other wisdom, human and Divine, can be available to us. But sometimes it's very hard. Sometimes we are confronted with difficult, or even tragic, choices. The obligations of silence, the needs of communication, these can pull us apart. They can undo us as Cuchulainn's conflicting *geasa* undid him.

But they need not. Remember the stories of the third path, between the straight and narrow road to heaven and the broad, flowery way to hell, lies the almost invisible, winding track to Fairyland.

We draw power from polarity, and this is yet another one. We can hold silence and communication in dynamic tension, making careful choices in each new situation, taking responsibility and always, always learning. We can act as Witches. We can grow.

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