

Paganism is an umbrella term and applies to many spiritual practices, rather than a religion in and of itself. At its most basic, a Pagan is an adherent of a religion that is not Abrahamic. A tighter definition excludes Eastern and Dharmic religions as well (Shinto and Hinduism). While they are technically Pagan, often they prefer not to be placed under the Pagan umbrella. In general practice, the word Pagan tends to refer to members of a Neo-Pagan religion more than anything else.

What is Neo-Pagan?

Neo-Paganism is a somewhat smaller, umbrella term. It applies to any belief system that is new and not Abrahamic, and primarily to those religions that are inspired by, derived from, or reconstructed forms of pre-Christian polytheisms of Europe and the Near East.

Are all Pagan religions Polytheistic?

No. Polytheism refers to religions that worship three or more deities. Some Pagan religions are ditheistic, some are more henotheistic, some pantheistic, some are monotheistic.

Terms meaning:

- **Animism:** the belief that all things have a spirit.
- **Ditheism:** the worship of two gods.
- **Henotheism:** the belief in many gods, but the worship of only one.
- **Monism:** the belief that all deities share a source.
- **Monotheism:** the belief in and worship of one god.
- **Monolatry:** the belief in many deities, but the belief that only one is worthy of worship.
- **Pantheism:** “all is deity”, the belief that everything/the universe/the world is god.
- **Panentheism:** the belief that deity is both immanent and transcendent.
- **Polytheism:** the belief and worship of many gods.

Polytheism is further divided into:

- **Soft polytheism:** the belief that all deities are aspects or forms of one or two overarching deities.
- **Hard polytheism:** the belief in multiple deities as separate, distinct entities.

Overview of Paganism

Pagan Belief Systems

Wicca

A modern, Earth-centered neo-pagan religion that emphasizes reverence for nature, the cycles of the moon and seasons, and the worship of a Triple Goddess and a Horned God. The term originates from the Old English *wicca* (masculine) and *wicce* (feminine), meaning "wise ones" or "witches," and was adopted in the mid-20th century to describe the religious craft.

- Wicca is a nature-based spiritual practice that honors the cycles of life.
- Fertility is a significant theme in Wiccan rituals, often linked to the Earth and seasonal changes.
- Many Wiccans celebrate festivals like Beltane, which focuses on fertility and reproduction.
- The Goddess aspect in Wicca often embodies fertility, motherhood, and creation.
- Rituals may include spells or ceremonies aimed at enhancing fertility or abundance.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft in itself is not Pagan. It is a craft, and as such can be practiced by individuals of many beliefs, including Abrahamic, and by those who consider themselves non-religious. There are forms of spiritual witchcraft such as Wicca. Some people, usually Pagans, may describe their primary spirituality as a form of spiritual witchcraft and may self-define primarily as, for example, a Green witch or eclectic witch.

Since the 1930s, Neopaganism has redefined witchcraft as a nature-based religion (e.g., Wicca) focused on healing and positive magic, distinct from the historical fear of malevolent sorcery

Witchcraft encompasses a variety of practices and beliefs related to magick and the supernatural.

- It often involves rituals, spells, and the use of herbs or other natural elements.
- Beliefs in witchcraft can vary significantly across cultures and historical contexts.
- Many practitioners identify as Wiccans or follow other neopagan traditions.
- Modern witchcraft often emphasises personal empowerment, spirituality, and connection to nature

Polytheistic Reconstructionism

Reconstructionist beliefs are attempts to reconstruct the Pagan beliefs of pre-Christian cultures. If there's a pre-Christian belief, there can be a Reconstructionist form of it. This is easier or more difficult for the practitioner based on how much lore (the myths and legends of the belief) survive and how much historical and archaeological information they have. Members of Reconstructionist beliefs attempt to practice the belief as it was practiced, but recognise that they live here and now, and as such it's not possible to practice the belief exactly as it was practiced.

Some Reconstructionist beliefs are:

- Celtic Reconstructionism
- Germanic Reconstructionism
- Egyptian Reconstructionism

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Heathenry (and Asatru)

Asatru is a reconstructionist religion. Asatru itself is part of Heathenry. Heathenry includes all Teutonic and Nordic Reconstructionist inspired paths. Asatru is the most popular, but there are other terms like Theodism and Forn Sed that have different views and focuses. Odinism is also a term used but in some areas.

If a practitioner doesn't identify with a specific Heathen culture, they may choose to refer to themselves as Heathens. Heathenry is polytheistic, and focuses on the worship of Aesir and Vanir (two tribes of gods), a handful of Jotnar, ancestors, and land-wights (or spirits). They draw their beliefs and practices from the Eddas and Sagas as well as archaeological and historical evidence. The text Havamal is the basis for ethical guidelines.

Ásatrú

- Ásatrú is a modern revival of ancient Norse paganism, focusing on the worship of the Norse gods.
- It emphasizes a connection to nature, ancestors, and the cultural heritage of the Norse people.
- Followers often honor deities such as Odin, Thor, and Freyja through rituals and offerings.
- Community and fellowship are important, often celebrated through gatherings known as blóts and sumbels.
- Ásatrú promotes personal responsibility, honor, and the concept of fate (wyrd).
- Many practitioners incorporate elements of Norse mythology and runes into their spiritual practices.

Heathenry

- Heathenry is a modern pagan spiritual practice rooted in ancient Germanic traditions.
- It emphasises a connection to nature and the reverence of ancestral spirits.
- Followers often honor a pantheon of gods and goddesses, such as Odin and Freyja.
- Rituals may include blóts (sacrifices) and sumbels (toasting ceremonies) to foster community.
- Heathenry values personal experience and interpretation of spiritual practices.
- Many practitioners focus on ethics derived from their cultural heritage, such as honour and hospitality.

Slavic Reconstructionism

Slavic Reconstructionism is a polytheistic religion seeking to reconstruct the ancient ethnic religion of the Slavic peoples, a diverse group of people including Russians, Ukrainians, Bielorrussians, Poles, Slovaks, Rusyns, Kashubs, Sorbs, Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Bulgarians among others that are united by their shared language, culture, and customs. Traditional folklore and customs are highly regarded and form the basis of material. Dualism is an important and permeating concept, though not necessarily in the Western sense of it, as are nature spirits and gods.

There is Double Faith (Dvoje Vierie, or Dve Viere), a syncretic Slavic religion that arose as a result of forceful conversions that survives in traditional culture in the villages. It combines Orthodox and Catholic practices with heathen ones, syncretising old gods with Christian saints and blending heathen stories into Christian folklore.

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- Emphasis on pre-Christian Slavic traditions and practices.
- Focus on the worship of ancient Slavic deities and nature spirits.
- Revival of folk customs, rituals, and seasonal celebrations.
- Importance of community and family in spiritual practices.
- Integration of historical texts and archaeological findings into beliefs.
- Advocacy for a connection to the land and ancestral heritage.

Hellenism

Hellenism is a form of reconstructionism focused on Greek pre-Christian religion. Hellenics have the largest bulk of myth and lore to draw from, but it tends to be Athens-focused; different city-states in Greece did things in different ways and so did people in the countryside. Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric and Orphic hymns are notable. Hellenics value piety among other things, and some may eschew the practice of magick as impious.

- Polytheism: Belief in multiple gods and goddesses, each governing different aspects of life and nature.
- Mythology: Emphasis on myths that explain the origins of the world, human existence, and the divine.
- Rituals and Worship: Importance of rituals, sacrifices, and festivals to honor the gods and seek their favor.
- Philosophy: Value placed on philosophical inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge, with figures like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
- Humanism: Focus on human potential and achievements, celebrating the individual and the human experience.
- Nature and Cosmos: Reverence for nature and the cosmos, viewing them as manifestations of the divine order.

Kemeticism

Kemetic spirituality is premised on the thought that the goddesses and deities of the ancient Egyptian civilisation are still operative currently. Kemetic spirituality cannot be described in one term; that is it is not just a religion it is a set of beliefs and practices which differ among its adherents. Some practitioners remain orthodox about the ancient Egyptian religion whereas others deviate and apply those teachings in a way that guides their spiritual path.

- Reverence for the Neteru: Worship of the ancient Egyptian deities, known as the Neteru, who represent various aspects of nature and life.
- Ma'at: Emphasis on the principles of truth, balance, order, and justice, which are central to living a harmonious life.
- Ancestral Veneration: Honoring ancestors and seeking guidance from them as a vital part of spiritual practice.
- The Cycle of Life: Belief in the cyclical nature of existence, including concepts of death and rebirth.
- Personal Spiritual Development: Focus on individual growth and self-discovery through rituals, meditation, and study of sacred texts.
- Connection to Nature: Recognition of the divine in nature and the importance of living in harmony with the environment.

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Shamanism

Shamanism is an ancient spiritual practice that has been part of diverse cultures around the world for thousands of years. Shamans, often regarded as healers or mediators between the physical and spiritual worlds, play a crucial role in their communities. They utilize various techniques, such as drumming, chanting, and herbal medicine, to connect with spiritual realms and provide guidance to individuals seeking healing or insight. Not all shamans are alike.

- **Connection to Nature:** Shamans believe in a deep spiritual connection with nature and the environment.
- **Spirit World Interaction:** They communicate with spirits and ancestors to gain guidance and healing.
- **Healing Practices:** Shamanism often involves rituals and ceremonies for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.
- **Altered States of Consciousness:** Shamans enter trance states through drumming, dancing, or meditation to access spiritual realms.
- **Animal Guides:** Many shamans work with animal spirits or totems that provide wisdom and protection.
- **Community Role:** Shamans often serve as healers, leaders, and mediators within their communities.

Druidry

Druidry is an ancient spiritual path. Druidry traces its origins to the ancient Celtic people, particularly in regions that now include Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, and parts of France. Druids were a powerful force. They acted as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds, overseeing religious rituals, including sacrifices and divination.

Modern Druidry is a flexible, nature-based spiritual path characterized by a lack of dogma, meaning there is no single sacred text or universally agreed-upon set of beliefs. While theological views vary significantly among practitioners, nature is revered as sacred, and most Druids emphasize a holistic, systemic view of life where humanity is one part of the wider web of existence rather than its center.

- **Diverse Theology:** Adherents may identify as polytheists (worshipping Celtic deities), animists (seeing spirit in all things), pantheists (believing the divine is everything), or even monotheists, agnostics, or atheists.
- **The Otherworld and Reincarnation:** Many Druids believe in an Otherworld beyond physical senses and hold that the soul undergoes reincarnation or successive rebirths to cultivate wisdom.
- **The Three Goals:** The tradition focuses on cultivating wisdom, creativity, and love through connection with nature, community service, and artistic expression.
- **Ritual and Awen:** Practices involve meditation, seasonal festivals (the Wheel of the Year), and invoking Awen (spiritual inspiration) to connect with the divine forces of nature.

Vodou and Santeria

Vodou teaches the existence of a single, transcendent creator god known as Bondye (from the French Bon Dieu), who is considered remote and uninvolved in daily human affairs. To communicate with Bondye, practitioners rely on a vast pantheon of intermediate spirits called lwa (or loa), who act as links between the visible and invisible worlds and are often equated with Catholic saints.

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The primary aim of Vodou is to *sevi lwa* (serve the spirits) through rituals involving drumming, dancing, prayer, and spirit possession to gain health, protection, and good fortune.

- **Ancestor Veneration:** Ancestors (*zanset*) serve as spiritual guides who dwell in *Ginen* (the African homeland) and interact with the living through signs and dreams.
- **Soul Composition:** Humans possess a soul divided into the *ti bonnanj* (conscience) and the *gwo bonnanj* (psyche/personality).
- **Moral Framework:** Vodou rejects the concept of an external Satan or eternal hell; instead, it focuses on maintaining spiritual balance, observing taboos, and understanding that actions have karmic ripples.
- **Oral Tradition:** The religion has no central authority, holy book, or formal creed, with customs passed down orally through *houngans* (priests) and *mambos* (priestesses).

Santería

Santería is a syncretic Afro-Cuban religion that blends traditional Yoruba beliefs with Roman Catholicism and Spiritism. It centers on the worship of *Orishas* (spirits or deities) who are viewed as manifestations of the supreme creator god, *Olodumare*. Practitioners, known as *creyentes*, engage in rituals to cultivate a reciprocal relationship with these *Orishas*, seeking guidance, protection, and healing.

- **Life Force and Character:** The concepts of *Ase* (generative life force) and *Iwa Pele* (good or gentle character) are vital, encouraging followers to improve their faults and live in good grace.
- **Destiny and Ancestors:** Each person has a pre-ordained destiny linked to a specific *Orisha* who "rules their head." Ancestor veneration is also central, with offerings made to *egun* (spirits of the dead) for protection.
- **Ritual and Divination:** The religion is practice-oriented, using divination systems like *Ifá* and *Dilogun* to interpret messages from the *Orishas*. Rituals often involve animal sacrifice, drumming, dancing, and trance states to communicate with the divine.
- **Community and Initiation:** Santería is hierarchical and community-based, centered in *ilé* (house-temples). While non-initiates participate in some practices, deep knowledge and certain rituals are reserved for initiated priests (*santeros* and *santeras*) who undergo years of training.

Eclectic Neo-Paganism

A contemporary religious movement characterized by the conscious blending of diverse spiritual ideas, symbols, and practices from various ancient and modern sources to create personalized, earth-centered paths. Unlike reconstructionist traditions that seek historical accuracy, eclectics act as *bricoleurs*, prioritizing what works for individual spiritual growth over traditional authenticity.

- **Majority Status:** Eclectic Paganism is the most common self-identifier within the community, with 53% of Pagans in sociologist Helen Berger's census describing themselves this way, compared to only 38% identifying as Wiccan.
- **Philosophical Approach:** It is non-traditional and pluralistic, rejecting absolute truth claims and instead honoring the diversity of nature and life while eschewing intolerance.

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- Distinction from Other Forms: It differs from Reconstructionism (which aims to revive specific historical religions) and Devotional Polytheism (which views deities as literal beings); eclectics often view gods as metaphors or aspects of a greater divine unity.
- Historical Roots: The movement grew significantly in the 1960s and 1970s due to the counterculture, the scarcity of traditional resources, and the rise of solitary practice, heavily influenced by figures like Robert Graves and the feminist spirituality movement.
- Internal Tensions: There is ongoing tension between eclectics and traditionalists (such as Gardnerian Wiccans) or reconstructionists, who often view eclectic practices as diluting mystery traditions or trivializing cultural contexts through appropriation.

Feri

(also spelled Faery or Faerie) is an American Neo-Pagan witchcraft tradition founded in the 1950s and 1960s on the West Coast of the United States by Victor Henry Anderson and his wife Cora Anderson. It is characterized as an ecstatic tradition that emphasizes sensual experience, sexual mysticism, and shamanic trance states rather than fertility rites or strict moral codes like the Wiccan Rede.

The tradition is initiatory and polytheistic, drawing heavily from Huna, Vodou, and Southern folk magic. Key teachings include the concept of the tripartite soul (talker, fetch, and holy daemon) and the use of the Iron and Pearl Pentacles as tools for grounding and balancing personal and transpersonal energies. Notable initiates include Starhawk, who incorporated Feri concepts into the Reclaiming tradition, and Gwydion Pendderwen, who helped expand the tradition's lore and rituals.

Reclaiming

Reclaiming is a tradition of neopagan witchcraft founded in 1979 in the San Francisco Bay Area by Starhawk and Diane Baker. It uniquely blends Goddess spirituality with feminism and political activism, aiming to combine personal spiritual growth with radical social, environmental, and economic justice.

The tradition is guided by the Principles of Unity, a document outlining core values such as personal authority, inclusivity, social and environmental justice, and intersectionality.

- Ecstatic Rituals: Described as EIEIO (Ecstatic, Improvisational, Ensemble, Inspired, and Organic), focusing on healing and empowerment.
- Decentralised Structure: Composed of autonomous "cells" or communities that make decisions by consensus.
- Activism: A core tenet linking magic with direct action for social change and ecological protection.
- Diverse Theology: Embracing a wide range of beliefs, from polytheism to nontheism, while centering the immanence of the divine in the material world.

Standing Stone Worship

Standing stone worship was a widespread ancient practice where monoliths (menhirs) or stone circles served as focal points for pagan religious rituals, ancestor veneration, and nature worship. Archaeological evidence suggests these stones were used to honor deities, mark covenants, commemorate significant events, or house the spirits of the dead, with sites like Stonehenge and Gezer.

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- Emphasis on nature worship, viewing the natural world as sacred.
- Belief in multiple deities, often associated with natural elements and forces.
- Rituals and ceremonies are performed at sacred sites, including standing stones.
- Ancestor veneration is important, honoring those who came before.
- Seasonal festivals celebrate the cycles of nature, such as solstices and equinoxes.
- Community and connection with others who share similar beliefs are valued.

Dianic Witchcraft

a feminist Neopagan tradition focused on female experience and empowerment, founded by Zsuzsanna Budapest in the United States during the 1970s. It is distinct from most Wiccan traditions because it honors only the Goddess, viewing her as the sole divine source containing all goddesses from various cultures.

- **Female-Only Leadership:** Traditional covens, particularly those in the Budapest lineage, are composed exclusively of women and led by ordained priestesses, rejecting patriarchal religious structures.
- **Goddess-Centered Theology:** It emphasizes a monotheistic or henotheistic worship of the Great Goddess, with figures like Diana and Artemis seen as aspects of this single divine force rather than separate deities.
- **Feminist Roots:** Developed alongside the Women's Liberation Movement, it incorporates radical feminism and focuses on healing from patriarchal trauma, celebrating women's biology, and affirming female sovereignty.
- **Eclectic Practices:** Rituals blend elements of British Traditional Wicca, Italian folk-magic (from Charles Leland's *Aradia*), and New Age beliefs, often including spell work, meditation, and the celebration of the Triple Goddess (Maiden, Mother, Crone).

Seax-Wica

A tradition of modern Pagan Witchcraft founded in 1973 by Raymond Buckland that blends aspects of Wicca with the iconography of Anglo-Saxon paganism. The term literally translates to "Saxon Witchcraft" or "Saxon Wisdom," with "Seax" referring to the traditional Saxon knife (a primary ritual tool) and "Wica" (with one C) meaning "wise" or "wisdom."

- **Non-Reconstructionist:** It is a modern religious system rather than a historical reconstruction of early medieval Saxon religion.
- **Deities:** It primarily honors the Germanic deities Woden (representing the Horned God) and Freya/Frig (representing the Mother Goddess).
- **Openness:** Unlike many other Wiccan paths, Seax-Wica employs no secrecy oaths, allowing for public practice and self-initiation.
- **Structure:** It supports both solitary and coven practice, with covens operating democratically and electing leaders for fixed terms.