

Introduction to the Wiccan Religion

description, history and evolution



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Topics

- What is Wicca?
- What do Wiccans Believe?
- What do Wiccans do?



What is Wicca?

- a reconstruction of the Nature worship of tribal Western Europe, influenced by the living spiritual traditions of other parts of the world, combined with traditional ceremonial practices, and informed by the mythologies of our ancestors.



What is Wicca?

- According to the Institute for the Study of American Religion, **Wicca, or Witchcraft,** is the fastest growing religion in the United States.



Overview

- **Wicca** is a variety of **Paganism**. There is a great deal of variation within Wicca and within Paganism.
- **Pagan** traditions are characterized by earth-centered/nature-centered spirituality.
- **Paganism** is also referred to as **Neo-Paganism** to emphasize its connections to as well as differences from pre-Christian religions.



Vocabulary

- **Witch** – one who worships the Goddess, and sometimes also Her Consort, the God; practices magic; and considers her/himself to be following the spiritual path of Witchcraft
- **Magic (or Magick)** -- a conscious direction of will to accomplish a goal
- **Coven** -- a congregation of Witches, usually limited to 13 members or less.

* From Covenant of the Goddess website www.cog.org



Historical Development: Sources

- Pagan traditions of Nature worship from tribal Western Europe
- Mythologies and images from the ancient world
- Remnants of pre-Christian practices and folk tradition
- Living Nature-worship traditions of extant tribal traditions around the world
- Observing the workings of nature itself
- Practices of ceremonial magic (Hermetic Tradition)
- Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers
 - Charles Leland
 - Margaret Murray
 - Robert Graves



Historical Development

Establishing Tradition

- Gerald Gardner (Gardnerian Tradition)
- Doreen Valiente (Gardnerian)
- Alex Sanders (Alexandrian Tradition)
- Stewart & Janet Farrar (Alexandrian)
- Raymond and Rosemary Buckland



Historical Development

Re-thinking Tradition

- Starhawk

The Spiral Dance

- Scott Cunningham

Wicca for the Solitary Practitioner

- Silver RavenWolfe

To Ride a Silver Broomstick, Teen Witch



Historical Development

Living Tradition

- Wicca exists today in a variety of forms and traditions and continues to grow and evolve.
- Creativity is our greatest resource.



What do Wiccans believe?

- Disclaimer:

Wiccans recognize no central authority.

We have no authoritative scripture or dogma.

We have no common creed.

And we like it this way.

- No one voice speaks for all of us.



Validity of Individual Insight

- Wicca is a mystical tradition recognizing the ability of each individual to experience the Divine.
- Each individual may experience the Divine in a singular, personal way. And each experience is as valid, and as sacred, as any other.



Validity of Multiple Paths

- *“We gaze up at the stars, the sky covers us all, the same universe encompasses us. What does it matter what practical system we adopt in our search for the truth? Not by one avenue only can we arrive at so tremendous a secret.”*

-- Symmacchus the Prefect (384 C.E.)

Council of American Witches



Principles of Belief



Principles of Belief

- 1. We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the phases of the Moon and the seasonal quarters and cross-quarters.



Principles of Belief

- 2. We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with Nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.



Principles of Belief

- 3. We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than is apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary, it is sometimes called 'supernatural,' but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.



Principles of Belief

- 4. We conceive of the Creative Power in the Universe as manifesting through polarity-as masculine and feminine-and that this same creative Power lives in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive of the other. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of Life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magickal practice and religious worship.



Principles of Belief

- 5. We recognize both outer worlds and inner, or psychological worlds-sometimes known as the Spiritual World, the Collective Unconscious, the Inner Planes, etc.-and we see in the interaction of these two dimensions the basis for paranormal phenomena and magickal exercises. We neglect neither dimension for the other, seeing both as necessary for our fulfillment.



Principles of Belief

- 6. We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy, but do honor those who teach, respect those who share their greater knowledge and wisdom, and acknowledge those who have courageously given of themselves in leadership.



Principles of Belief

- 7. We see religion, magick, and wisdom-in-living as being united in the way one views the world and lives within it—a world view and philosophy of life, which we identify as Witchcraft or the Wiccan Way.



Principles of Belief

- 8. Calling oneself 'Witch' does not make a Witch-but neither does heredity itself, or the collecting of titles, degrees, and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within him/herself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with Nature.



Principles of Belief

- 9. We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness, that gives meaning to the Universe we know, and to our personal role within it.



Principles of Belief

- 10. Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy-of-life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be "the one true right and only way" and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practices and belief.



Principles of Belief

- 11. As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft, the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present, and our future.



Principles of Belief

- 12. We do not accept the concept of 'absolute evil,' nor do we worship any entity known as 'Satan' or 'the Devil' as defined by Christian Traditions. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefits can only be derived by denial to another.



Principles of Belief

- 13. We work within Nature for that which is contributory to our health and well-being."



Ethical System: The Witch's Golden Rule

- The Wiccan Rede:

“An ye harm none, do what ye will”

- Personal freedom
- Personal responsibility
- Law of Karmic Return (Rule of Three)



What do Witches Do?

- **Witchcraft** -- the sum total of all a Witch's practices, including but not limited to: **spellcasting, divination, meditation, herbalism, ritual and ritual drama, singing and dancing to raise energy, healing, psychic work, creative mythology, etc.**

* From Covenant of the Goddess website www.cog.org



What do Wiccans do?

- Performing religious ceremonies
- Teaching
- Counseling
- Studying our religion and our craft



What Do Wiccans Do?

- Religious ceremonies may include:
 - **group chanting, singing and/or dancing**
 - **recitation of myth or liturgy / storytelling**
 - **ritual drama / acts of honor**
 - **sharing of food and drink**
 - **meditation**
 - **works of magic**
 - **divination**

What Do Wiccans Do?

■ **Magic (or Magick)**

- a conscious direction of will to accomplish a goal *in accordance with the natural order of the universe*





Wiccan Rituals

- Sabbats
- Esbats
- Wiccanings
- Handfastings (weddings)
- Passing into Summerland (funerals)
- Special rituals for specific events or needs



What do Wiccans do?

- Witches celebrate the eight holidays of the Wheel of the Year to attune ourselves to the cycles of nature and the rhythms of the universe.

Holidays

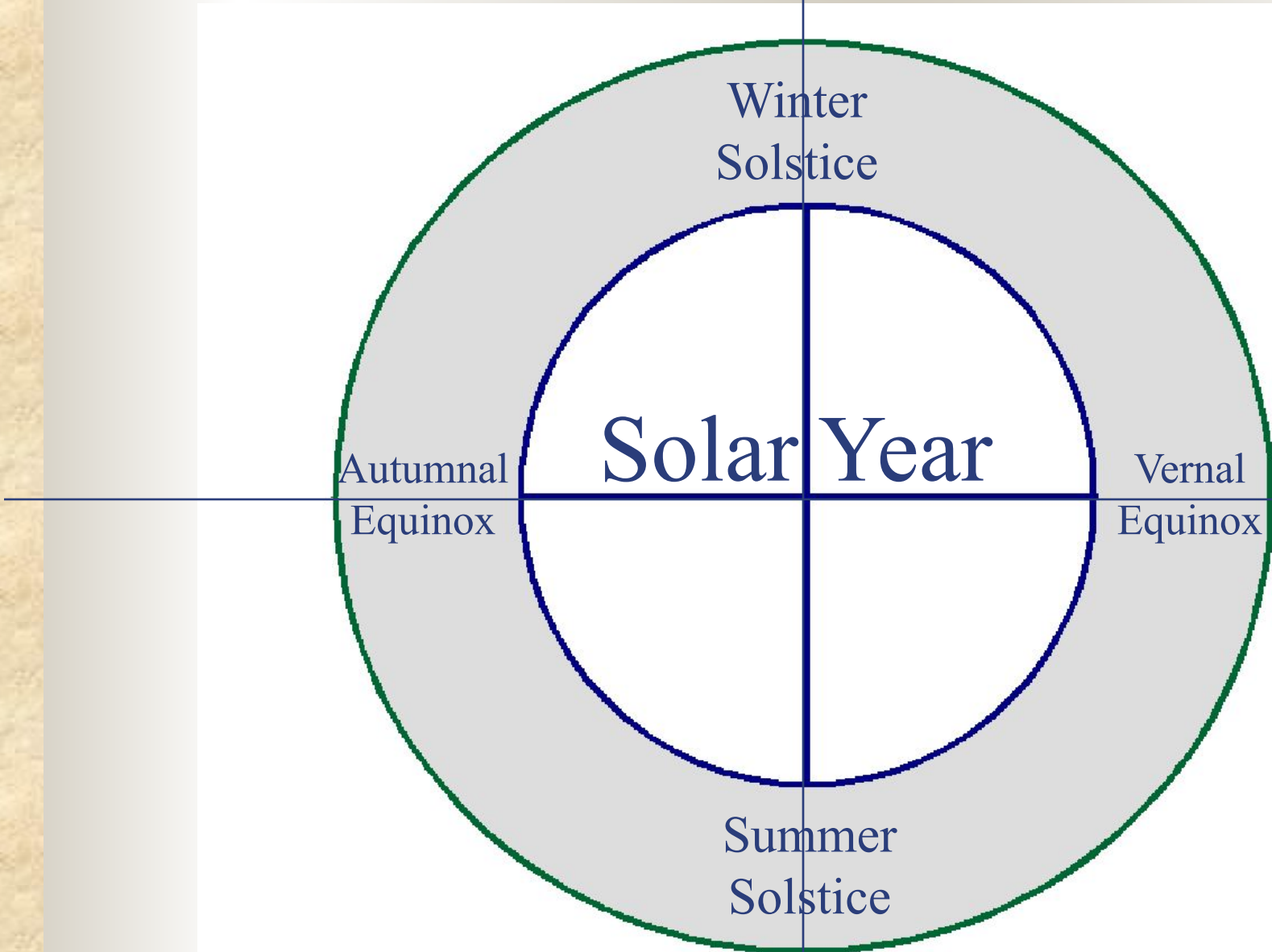


The Wheel of the Year

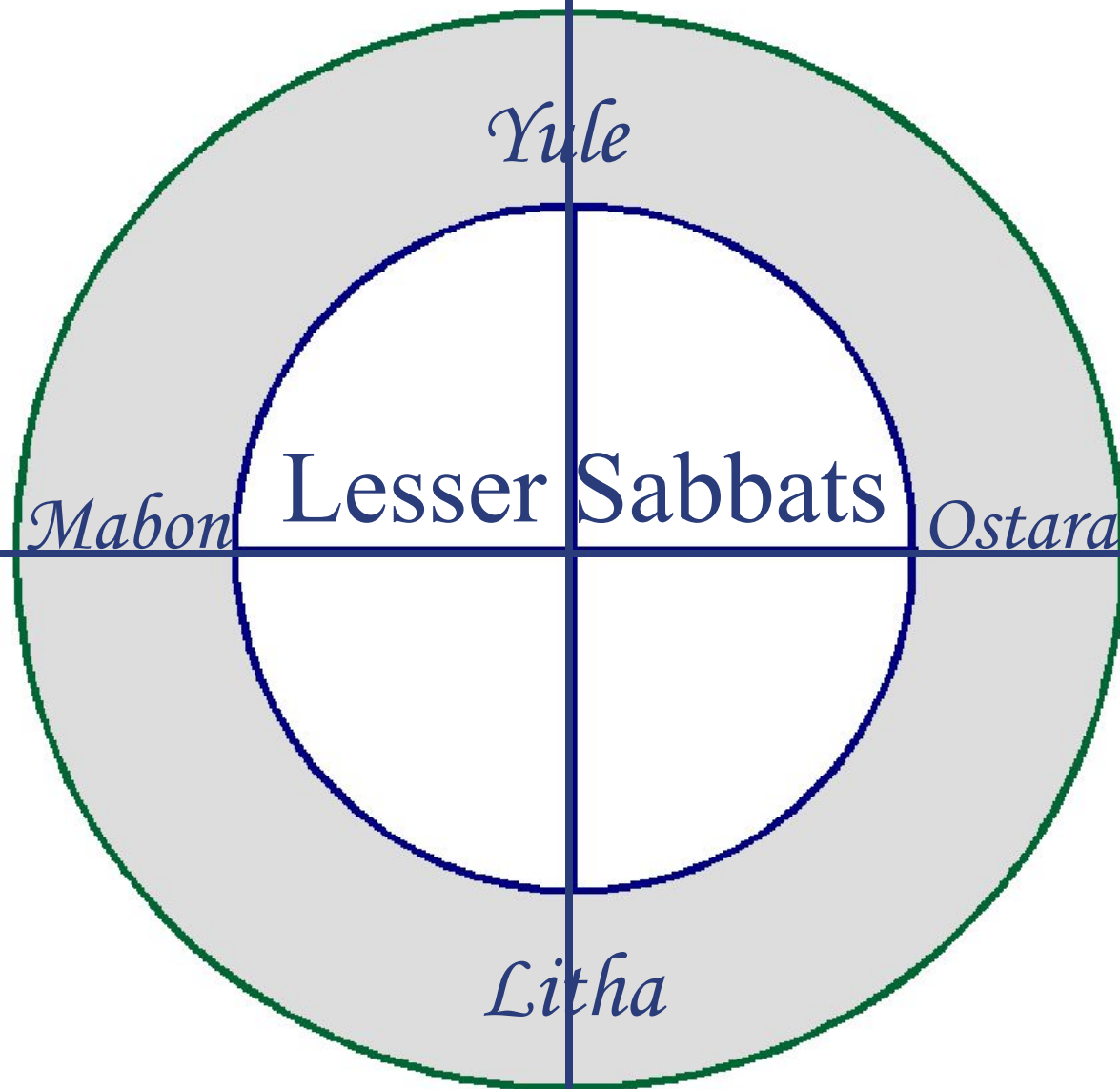
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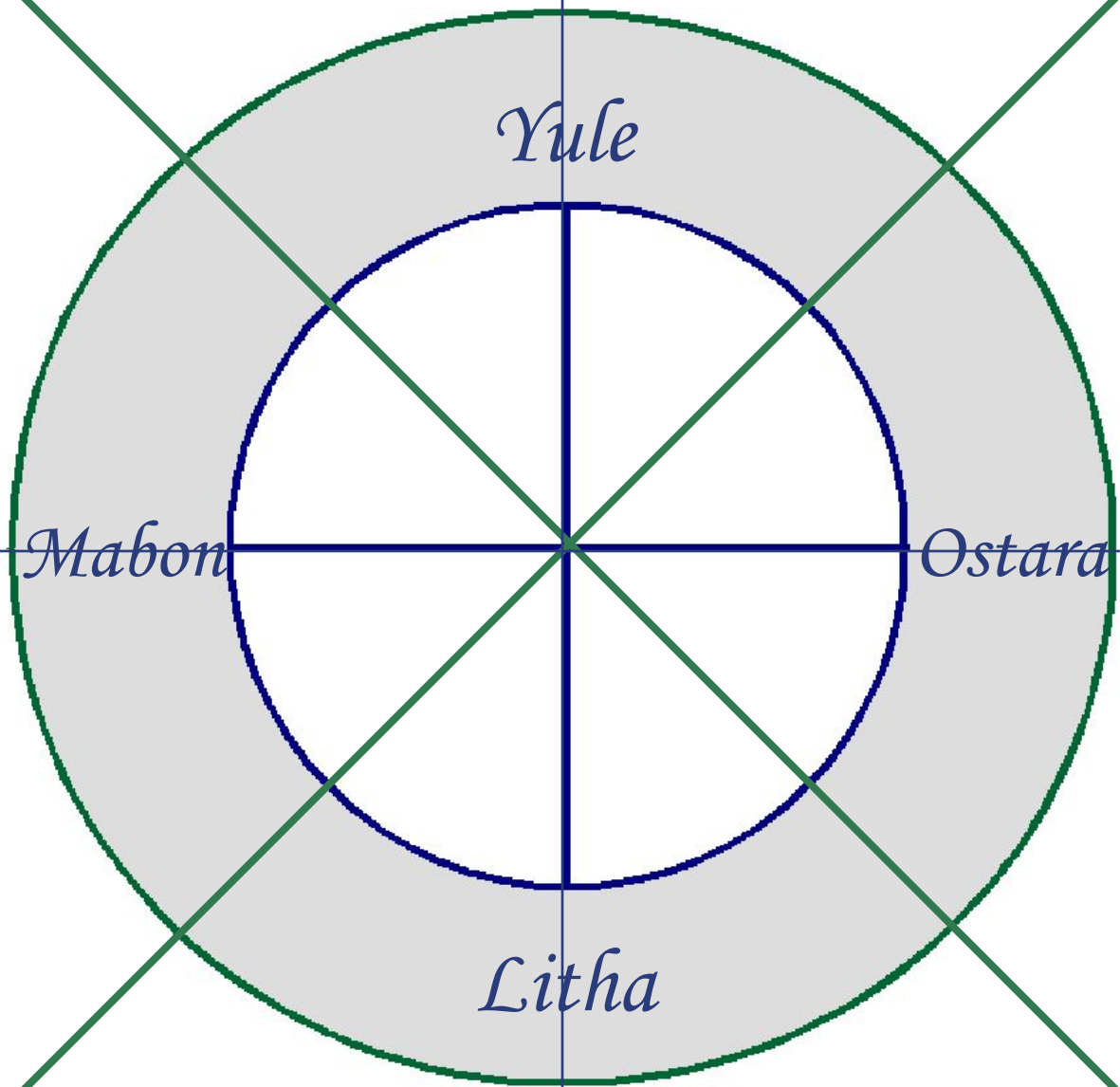
Wheel of the Year

- The solar year is a cycle, a circle.
- The eight Wiccan holidays mark turning points in the course of that cycle.



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Yule

Mabon

Ostara

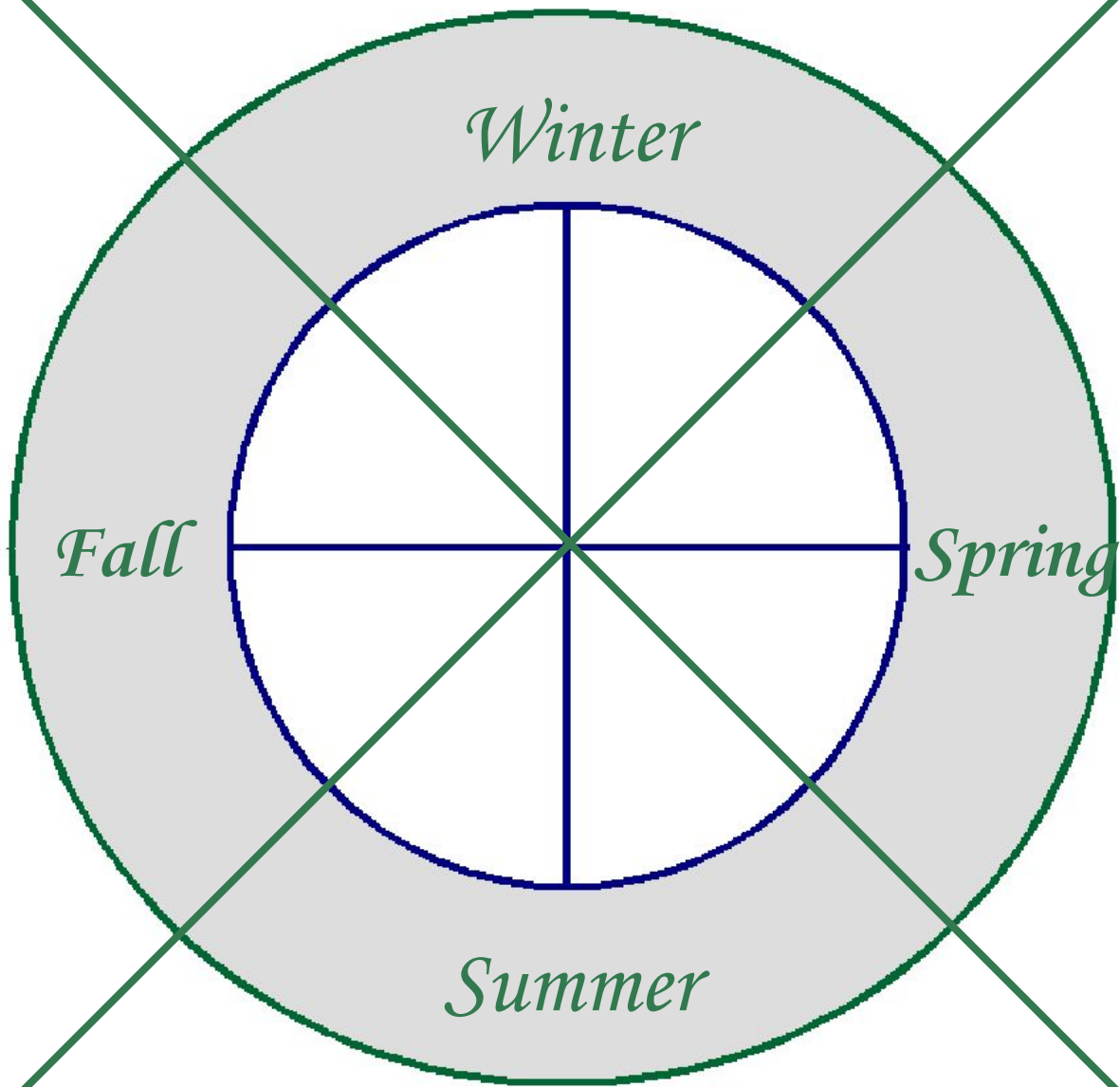
Litha

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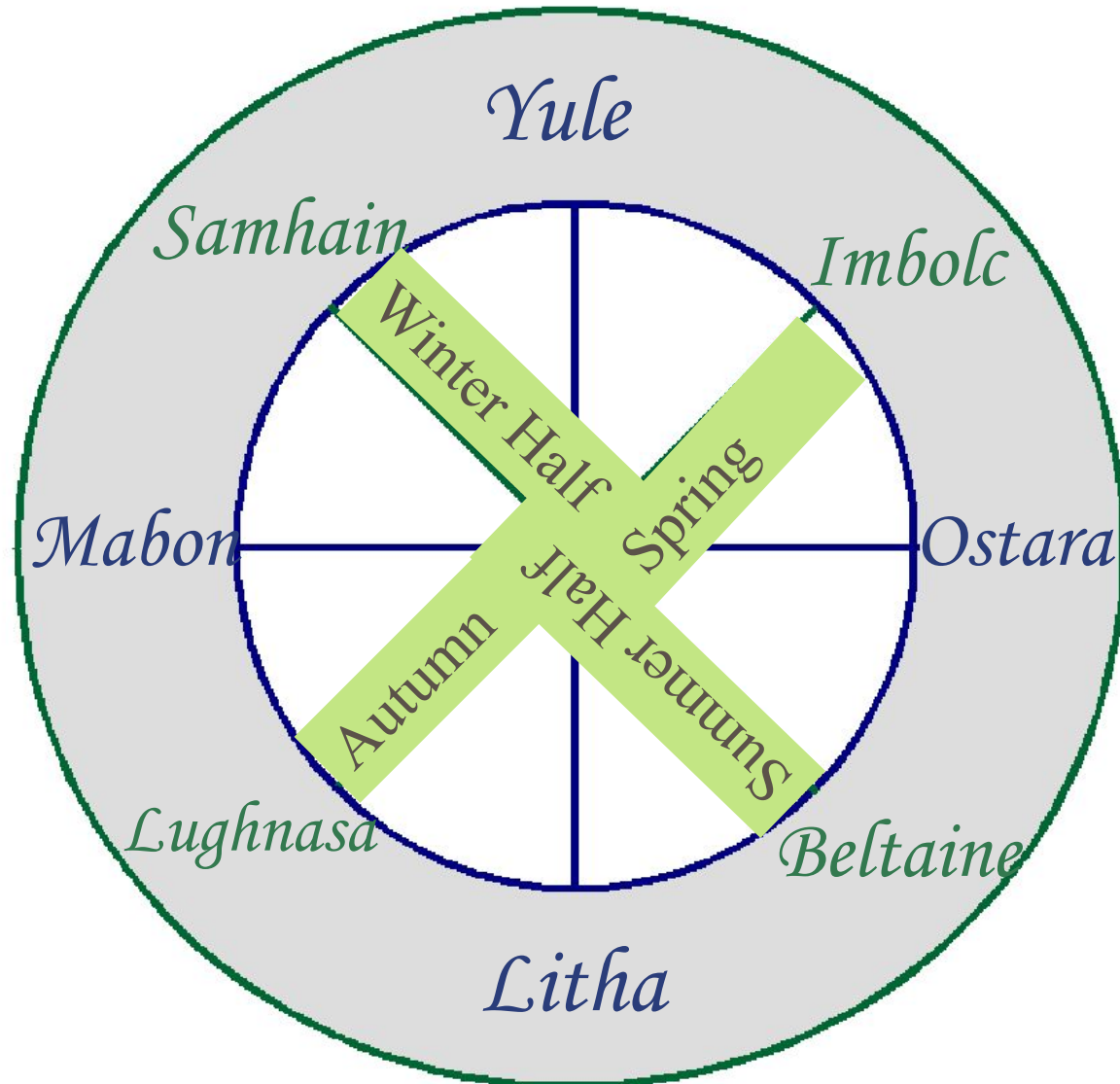
Wheel of the Year

- The **Greater Sabbats** bisect the quarters mentioned above, and are also known as cross-quarter days.
- The **Greater Sabbats** divide the year into quarters marking the change of **seasons**.



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Wheel of the Year





Yule/Winter Solstice – Dec. 21st

- At this time we celebrate the birth of light, as the Great Mother brings forth the newborn Sun God.



Imbolc - Feb. 2nd

- Traditionally this time marks both the first stirrings of Spring in Mother Earth's womb and the coming into milk of the ewes in lambing season.
- This day is sacred to the beloved Irish Goddess Brigit, triple solar goddess of smithcraft, inspiration, and healing.
- This time is associated with beginning growth and **initiation**.



Ostara – March 21

- The traditional name associated with the festival celebrated on the vernal equinox full moon derives from the Teutonic Moon-Maiden Goddess **Eostre**, whose symbols were the **bunny** and the **egg**.
- This is the seed time.



Beltaine - May 1st

- On this day, we recognize the ripening of Nature and celebrate the fires of passion.
- Like the maypole, this time marks an unabashed celebration of sexuality and fertility.



Midsummers Eve/Litha/ Summer Solstice - June 21st -

- On the longest day of the year, the Sun God reaches the peak of his power and the Bright Lady's abundance overflows.
- Herbs are gathered now, at their peak of strength.
- No other day is so strongly associated with the Faerie in folk tradition as Midsummer's Eve (as Shakespeare well knew).



Lughnasa - August 1st

- This is the first of the Harvest festivals, celebrating the first fruits of the harvest. The power of the waning sun flows into the grain.
- This Sabbat derives its name from the great Celtic Sun God Lugh, who also is called King of the Faerie.
- We bake loaves from the first harvests in honor of the Lord of the Grain and the Corn Mother.



Mabon/Harvest Home/Autumn Equinox

- September 21st -

- This is the time of the last harvest, when we celebrate the Divine Sacrifice of the grain to sustain us through the cold winter.
- This is the second of the Harvest festivals.



Samhain/Halloween – Oct. 31st

- The **Great Sabbat**, Samhain means “**Summer's End.**”
- The age-old traditions of honoring the dead and divining the future still run true in the lore of Halloween.
- Poised between the death of the old year and the birth of the new, Samhain touches all at once on past and future, summer and winter, creation and chaos. The walls between the worlds fade, and the dead walk with us.



Patterns of Practice

- Solitary
- Circle of Solitaries
- Coven
- Church
- Networking Organizations



Summary: What Wicca is NOT

- Wicca is NOT Devil Worship.
 - Wiccans don't believe in the Devil. This is a Christian concept not shared by Wiccans.
- Wicca is NOT harmful.
- Wicca is NOT evangelical.
- Wicca is NOT for everybody.



Summary: What is Wicca?

- **Five features of modern pagan witchcraft***
 1. It aims to draw out and enhance the divinity within human beings.
 2. It abolishes the traditional Western distinction between religion and magic.
 3. It is a mystery religion (or set of mystery religions).
 4. Its essence lies in the creative performance of ritual.
 5. It is eclectic and protean.

*Ronald Hutton. *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford University Press, 1999.)



Summary: What is Wicca?

- Wicca is the worship of the Divine as imminent in Nature, manifesting as Goddess and God, Mother Earth and Father Sky.
- Wicca is a philosophy of active participation in the workings of the universe.
- Wicca is ceremonial tree-hugging.
- Wicca is viewing cooking as a sacred act, sex as a sacrament, and littering as sacrilege.
- Wicca is recognizing the Sacred in each of us and in the world around us.



How do I find out more?

- Recommended Reading List
 - ***The Spiral Dance*** by Starhawk
 - ***Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*** by Scott Cunningham
 - ***Drawing Down the Moon*** by Margot Adler
 - ***The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*** by Ronald Hutton
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