

LGBTQ+ (KS3-4)

The relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and large parts of organised religion is complex. Some members of the LGBTQ+ community have been hurt by their experiences of organised religion and this has led to distrust.

I would like to say that Paganism is different. That Paganism is fully accepting toward LGBTQ+ people. But I can't say that.

I can, however, say that the majority of Pagans are accepting toward LGBTQ+ people.

I think it is fair to say, though, that even among the small minority of Pagans who do in some way discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, the number who claim to do it on religious grounds are even fewer. This is because there is very little in Paganism that can be taken as somehow religiously proclaiming that homosexuality, etc. is wrong. So, if you do encounter one of the few Pagans that have issues with such things, my view would be that their discrimination is entirely their own and not something that has been transmitted to them as a 'Pagan teaching'.

In fact, there is a great deal in Paganism that not only signals an acceptance of homosexuality, transsexuality, etc. but actively recognises it as something that can be religiously recognised and celebrated.

A great amount of modern Paganism is constructed from features (both religious and social) of older cultures. It is no secret that the ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, had a rather progressive attitude toward homosexuality, at key points in their history. So it should come as little surprise that there are models within their religious and mythic traditions that can be taken as representative of LGBTQ+ qualities.

The God Dionysus, for example, was depicted as both an old man and as an effeminate youth. The God Pan is unapologetically pansexual. The deity Hermaphroditus (from where we get the word hermaphrodite) was the God of hermaphrodites and the effeminate and possessed both male and female physical features. Even the Goddess of Love herself, Aphrodite, was sometimes depicted with a beard and in Theselay she was celebrated with lesbian rites. And of course, Aphrodite is regularly invoked in the ancient poetry of Sappho, celebrating love between women.

But themes and concepts that can be significant to an LGBTQ+ expression of religion, are definitely not restricted to the Greeks and Romans. In Germanic mythology, we see a number of examples of gender-bending and switching of traditional gender roles and power structures.

In South America, the God Xochipili is the patron of male homosexuality.

Polynesia and the Pacific Islands contain a number of different deities and religious traditions involving gay relationships and bisexuality. Additionally, there are a number of examples of third-gender and gender-variant shamans. In fact, Shamanism generally has numerous examples of people, behaviours and practices worldwide, that fall under the umbrella of gender-variance.

There are actually more examples than I have space to list, but we can see that such themes are common across many ancient cultures, all over the world.

The degree to which LGBTQ+ themes are celebrated and discussed in the broader Pagan community will differ from place to place.

Paganism is a very personalised path and being as the majority of people are not a part of the LGBTQ+ community, it's hardly surprising that those themes may not feature in the practices of a lot of people. Additionally, despite the broad acceptance of LGBTQ+ people, orientations, lifestyles, and love styles, there are large amounts of Paganism that are constructed in a very heteronormative way. They're not exclusionary of LGBTQ+ themes and people, but at their most basic level they revolve around a certain core of celebrating the cycle of life as expressed through the female and male experience, and the union of the male and female to perpetuate life. Much of this has come out of the popularity of Wicca and other modern Witchcraft traditions.

So, while on the one hand Paganism is very inclusive, I could understand if the commonality of heteronormative themes might make an LGBTQ+ person feel excluded.

However, there are Pagan groups and paths that are exclusively LGBTQ+. For example, the Pagan tradition known as Radical Faerie, is exclusively made up of "lesbians, gay men, trans*, bisexuals, queer hetero people and anyone else in between" (quote from Radical Faeries of Albion: <https://albionfaeries.org.uk>).

I think it is a strength of Paganism that it is not just LGBTQ+ inclusive, but that it possesses a wealth of myth, tradition, and iconography of an LGBTQ+ nature. That this creates even more opportunity for members of the LGBTQ+ community to not merely explore their spirituality among accepting people, but to explore a spiritual path that also reflects important aspects of who they are and can be celebrated with others who are also on a similar life journey.

Glossary

LGBTQ+ : Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, +others.

This resource was written by Luthaneal Adams, one of RE:ONLINE's Email a Believer team. If your class would like to ask a Pagan representative any questions about their beliefs, or to see answers to previously asked questions please visit <http://pof.reonline.org.uk/people-of-faith/paganism/>