

## Voices from Pagan Worldview Traditions

Over the last few years we have collated responses to questions about religion and worldviews from different perspectives. This resource provides personal answers to questions from lived experience and were written directly by believers.

1. What do you believe will happen to you when you die? .....	1
2. What do Pagans believe in? .....	1
3. What would you like children in schools to be taught about your tradition? .....	2
4. How significant is the issue of gender in Paganism? .....	2
5. What are your thoughts on Global Warming as a Pagan? .....	2
6. What are the Pagan Traditions? .....	3
7. How does the religion affect your life? .....	4
8. Is it hard to stick to your beliefs? .....	4
9. What's the relationship between Paganism and Science? Do Pagans believe in evolution? .....	4
10. Do Pagans pray to spirits/Gods? How many times a week do Pagans pray? Where does a Pagan go to worship? .....	5

### 1. What do you believe will happen to you when you die?

This is a very good question! Pagans follow a variety of traditions- Wicca, Druidry, Hellenismos etc, so there are a number of different beliefs about what might happen after we die.

Many believe in reincarnation. Some believe that when we die, we journey in spirit to a place called the 'summerlands'. This might be seen as something very similar to heaven or the Elysian Fields of ancient Greek beliefs.

- Some Pagans may believe there is nothing after death, or more precisely, nothing where our current consciousness is included. In that sense, the belief is that our spiritual/conscious selves end with this life, but our bodies decompose and become another part of the earth.
- Some may believe that we become a more direct part of deity/Gaia/nature in terms of our spirit.
- Some believe we transcend this physical form and are able to be contacted as ancestors in the spirit realms.

One thing that tends to be true across all Pagan traditions, though, is that we are not particularly concerned with what comes after death so much as we are concerned with how we live this life. We will honour the beliefs of individual Pagans when they die and include their concepts of death and any afterlife when we perform their funerary rites, keeping in mind the feelings of those left living and grieving.

### 2. What do Pagans believe in?

That's a pretty massive question, but I'll try to answer as best I can.

There are lots of different types of Paganism. Really, "Paganism" refers to a number of different faith groups. For the most part, Pagan religion tends to be based on ancient pre-Christian religions, such as those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the ancient Germanic peoples, and the ancient Celtic peoples. It can also include those who practice things like Shamanism and magic.

But one of the important things about Paganism is that what people believe is less important than what we do. There are lots of different beliefs held by people, even among those who follow the same faith and honour the same Gods. But what unites each of these Pagan groups, tends to be the way in which they practice their

religion. People get together and do the same things. That is one of the common threads that we share with each other. Even a large group of Pagans from many different traditions and faiths, would probably still be able to share a rite together, even though their individual practices and beliefs might be quite different.

But generally speaking, even though there are many different faiths in Paganism, most of us would be happy honouring the Gods, the spirits, our ancestors, and celebrating the seasonal cycle of the world.

### **3. What would you like children in schools to be taught about your tradition?**

I believe that RE is a very important subject and like all subjects, it should best prepare children to be ready for the world that they will encounter beyond school. As it stands currently, Paganism in the UK is the seventh largest faith group, about on par with Buddhism. So, I would say that classroom time regarding Paganism is probably best allocated based on how likely the students are to encounter Pagans and Paganism in their lives. In some areas of the UK, the number of Pagans is higher and their presence more prominent. As such, some schools in those areas have included Paganism in their curriculum. That makes sense to me.

If the nations religious demographics shift, then it seems to me that our educational institutions should adapt their curriculum to account for that.

### **4. How significant is the issue of gender in Paganism?**

The simple answer is that many Pagan paths focus quite a bit on the divine feminine.... and that follows through to a position that recognises the equality of the sexes.

Whilst that is true, from a spiritual perspective, Pagans are also part of the wider society and personal behaviour doesn't always match spiritual perspectives. Misogyny does crop up from time to time. It is definitely frowned upon and receives robust negative comment. But it would be foolish to pretend that these things DON'T crop up from time to time. There are also some people who take that divine feminine to an extreme that borders on misandry. Again, this is less common and is frowned upon.

For a great many Pagans, there is quite a focus on balance- balance with the natural world, balance between the sexes, and so equality really is important.

In Pagan ritual, women play at least an equal role to men, sometimes a greater role if the rite calls for it. Gender, at least from a spiritual perspective, isn't seen as an issue. Neither is sexual orientation, for that matter.

### **5. What are your thoughts on Global Warming as a Pagan?**

Paganism is an umbrella label that covers a variety of different traditions. Also, within each of those traditions, a great deal of emphasis is placed on personal experience and individuality. So, responses to your question might vary from Pagan to Pagan. But many Pagans consider the Earth as sacred.

Pagans have been involved in drawing attention to environmental concerns and campaigning for greater consideration for the environment for a great many years.

Many Pagans would consider that climate change has been made much worse by humans than it might otherwise have been had we been living more in harmony with the planet.

Our spiritual views about the sacredness of nature, nature as sentient seem to be reinforced by scientific discoveries such as how trees communicate with one another.

So, for many Pagans, the effect that humans have had on the rate of climate change could be seen as an attack on the sacred. Some might go as far as to suggest that climate change is nature's way of stopping human beings from doing further damage, although certainly not all Pagans would go as far as to say that.

But in addition to our spiritual beliefs, Pagans tend to be very interested in, as well as concerned about, the scientific evidence around climate change. It has been reassuring that in recent years, most if not all faiths

have recognised the issues around climate change and there are now many faith-based groups campaigning on issues concerning environmental damage and climate change.

## 6. What are the Pagan Traditions?

There are lots of Traditions in Paganism.

The easiest way to break it down is probably to explain the various Traditions in terms of the cultures or practices they are based on. But bear in mind that there can be several different types of each of these. That being said, here's a quick summary:

### Germanic Paganism

Based on the religion of the ancient Germanic people of Northern Europe. Some people might call this “Norse Paganism” or Northern Tradition, though we can better refer to it as Heathenry.

Pagans of this faith honour Gods such as Odin, Thor, Freya, and Frey. They also honour their ancestors and the spirits of the land.

### Celtic Paganism

This form of Paganism focuses on the religious beliefs of the ancient Celtic people of Europe. The Celts were a broad people that stretched all across central Europe and the British Isles, defined by a shared language group and cultural elements. Our best knowledge about their religion comes from what has been recorded by Christian monks, especially in Ireland and Wales.

Their Gods include, Lugh, Cerridwen, the Dagda, the Morrigan, and Brighe/Brighid.

### Hellenic Paganism

This is religion derived from the ancient Greeks. These Gods are pretty well known, including Zeus, Aphrodite, Hermes, and Hera, among others.

### Roman Paganism

As the name suggests, this form of Paganism is based on the religion of ancient Rome. Similar to Hellenic Paganism and often classed as a form of Hellenic Paganism, the Gods of Rome include, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Neptune, and Mars. As you can see, our planets are named after these Gods.

### Pagan Witchcraft

These are religions in which the practice of Witchcraft is a key element. Wicca is one example and probably the most well-known. These witchcraft religions often honour a God and a Goddess, with special importance given to the balance between male and female, and the celebration of both, along with celebrating the cycle of the seasons. Witchcraft is used as a means for communing with the divine and bringing about change in oneself and in the world.

### Druidry

Modern Druids base their religion on the Druids of the ancient Celtic world, though with added elements of the how Druids were depicted in old Victorian romanticism and a little modern flare.

Druidry celebrates nature, knowledge, and wisdom, through a combination of ritual, storytelling, and study.

In many ways, being a Druid is more of a role than anything else. It is accepting a path of self-improvement, balance with nature, and serving one's community.

Some Druids honour Gods, some simply honour the natural world.

### Shamanism

Shamanism is a path that focuses on communing with the spiritual world. The Shaman uses trance in order to journey into the spirit world. She may do this in order to gain knowledge or advise, to heal someone, or for self-development.

In Shamanism, the whole world is seen as having a spiritual dimension, where every tree, animal, river, lake and place (etc.) has a spirit. The Shaman communes with these spirits and acts as an intermediary between the spirit world and the physical world.

## Kemeticism

This is the religion of ancient Egypt. The Kemetic religion draws from information and myths found in papyrus and on the walls of ancient Egyptian buildings.

### **7. How does the religion affect your life?**

Being Pagan is an important part of my life, but it is just one part. I like to think that my Paganism is not the defining feature of who I am, but is instead one of many elements that make me the person I am. Sometimes my Paganism crosses over with different elements of my life, while other elements of my life remain entirely separate.

Of course, my religious views do affect my outlook on the world. But that affect flows in both directions. So, as much as my religions affects my perception of the world, my perception of the world also affects how I understand my religion.

For some Pagans, though, their religion comes with some negative side-effects. Unfortunately, Pagans do experience persecution and victimisation because of their religion. Thankfully though, that doesn't happen quite as much in the UK, as it does in some other countries. However, I do know Pagans who have been victims of violence, crime, and slander as a result of people taking issue with their religion.

I think it's fair to say that most Pagans won't experience major discrimination or violence because of their religion, though some will. But it's quite likely that most Pagans will experience some degree of discrimination during their life.

### **8. Is it hard to stick to your beliefs?**

It is not difficult to stick to my beliefs. But sometimes it can be difficult to get up and do things for them. Life is busy and often a bit messy, so it can be difficult to find the time for religion, among all of life's other demands. Then when you do have some time, you can feel more like sprawling on the sofa and watching Netflix.

There is an old Zen saying that says:

“You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes a day. Unless you're too busy, then you should sit for an hour.”

Sometimes you have to remember that when you're furthest from something, is when you need it the most. We have to make time for what's important. To make time for the things that benefit us. Self-care isn't always taking a break to relax and unwind. Sometimes it's about taking the time to do the things you need, even if it's difficult.

### **9. What's the relationship between Paganism and Science? Do Pagans believe in evolution?**

I'd LIKE to say there is little debate with Paganism and science. But it's not as simple as that. Paganism is actually an umbrella heading that includes a number of spiritual traditions including Wicca, witchcraft, Druidry, Heathenry, Shamanism and quite a long list of traditions that have their origins in particular regions in the ancient world. Pagans are also likely to have their own, very individual perspective on things as Pagan beliefs are also rooted in personal experience. So, it is always difficult to present an absolute 'Pagan' perspective. However, I do think it would be safe to say that Pagans, ancient and modern, tend to work with the scientific understanding of the world of their time. A relatively modern scientific hypothesis that many Pagans embrace, for example, would be Gaia Theory: <http://www.gaiatheory.org/> which loosely suggests that our planet is a living and sentient organism. This theory works well with many Pagan paths as the belief that the divine may be found in nature is quite common.

There are also different ways of approaching science. There are many scientists who are also religious and who do not find any reason for conflict between the two. However, there are also people who believe anything that cannot be proven by the scientific method must be false. My feeling is that the latter is essentially making science and the scientific method a religion instead of a tool to improve our understanding of the mechanics of the universe. But of course, if those who hold that approach to science acknowledge that science is their religion, then that is as acceptable as any other religion as an expression of a world view.

So, the question of whether science and Paganism are compatible or not really depends on whether you are looking at Paganism as a whole, with all its diversity, and also on the perspective of science you choose to use in exploring compatibility. My feeling is that science and Paganism CAN be compatible, but I would be more likely to suggest that they can be complimentary with science indicating the mechanics and Paganism indicating a perspective on what is employing those mechanics. To a certain extent, I think that might work for other faiths and spiritual perspectives with regard to their compatibility with science, too.

Yes, Pagans absolutely believe in evolution. Pagans tend to embrace science whole-heartedly.

We do have many creation myths, from many different cultures, which are important to us in their own way. But we do not see these myths as literal. We understand that our ancestors didn't know as much about the natural world, as we do today, and so many ancient myths are means for explaining the world around them. Even so, these myths can still contain important messages that can help us to understand who we are and how we relate with the world around us.

### **10. Do Pagans pray to spirits/Gods? How many times a week do Pagans pray? Where does a Pagan go to worship?**

Lots of Pagans (including me) do pray to Gods and spirits. Though, the way that Pagans pray can be very different from how Christians pray. Many wouldn't even call it prayer. So, as an example, I'll explain how Heathens might commune with their Gods and ancestors. Some of the most common practices would be to hail the Gods with a toast and a drink, or by pouring a libation out onto the earth.

Pagans pray as often as they want to.

Of course, it depends how you define prayer. There are many Pagans who would say that they don't pray, at all. But they do still commune with their Gods, ask for blessings, and so on. Those Pagans might just do it in a way that doesn't necessarily look like prayer. For example, they might make a toast to the Gods, or pour a libation out onto the ground, or even perform a magical working.

Other Pagans absolutely pray. Though it wouldn't look like Christian praying, with hands together or kneeling. For example, I pray in a way that is based on ancient Greek religion. So, if I am praying to the Olympian Gods, I pray with my hands raised up to the sky. But if I am praying to underworld deities, it is traditional to do so down on the ground, thumping the earth.

Other Pagans might pray in a manner similar to other ancient peoples.

Pagans can worship wherever he or she likes!

Well, more or less. Although there are a handful of Pagan temples scattered around the place, that have been set up for modern Pagan worship, most Paganism takes place in a person's home.

You'll also find that a lot of Pagans like to go out into nature to worship, so you can often find us out in the woods, forests and fields, celebrating our festivals. Or in places with traditional Pagan connections, like the sites of standing stones or long barrows.

In some instances, Pagan organisations will hire a venue, where Pagans can get together to take part in an open ritual. Organisations like The Pagan Federation do this. In London, they hold eight open rituals throughout the year, in a hired hall. This kind of arrangement is particularly good for Pagans who live in big cities and might not be able to get out to the countryside, especially with other Pagans. So, these events provide a way for the Pagan community to come together for rituals.