

Glossary: Pagan worldview traditions

This glossary is also available on our website. We also have an accompanying in-depth subject knowledge essay, available both on our website and for download.

[In-depth subject knowledge essay](#)

[Glossary](#)

Athame

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Athamé

DEFINITION: A ritual knife used by some Wiccans to direct energy, such as when casting the circle and cutting a doorway in the circle, to allow admission or exit during ritual, thereby retaining the sacred nature of the space. It also symbolises the masculine energy in relation to the chalice or cup which symbolises the feminine energy. The athame is not meant to cut anything in the physical world.

Beltane

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Beltain, Bealtaine, Bealltainn, Beltaine

DEFINITION: Beltane (30th April/1st May) celebrates the beginning of summer, and fertility. The choosing of May Queens in folk tradition may symbolise the goddess. Some Pagans celebrate it with a maypole dance or lighting fires and leaping over them.

Casting a circle

In some Pagan traditions, a “circle” refers to the people who gather for a ritual. When standing in a circle, all the participants are able to see each other, with no one member elevated over any other. Casting a circle establishes the sacred space and provides protection.

Coven

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: circle

DEFINITION: Some Wiccans gather in groups known as ‘covens’ where they meet together for rituals, festivals and magic.

Druidry

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Druid

DEFINITION: Druids draw upon ancient Celtic traditions, and celebrate nature, especially the local landscape and the sun. Some Druids focus on solar festivals. Most have a broader focus, picking up on the Wheel of the Year.

There are several different Druid groups, the most well-known in the UK being the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), the British Druid Order (BDO) and the Druid Network.

Goddess spirituality

DEFINITION: Goddess spirituality celebrates the divine feminine. Goddesses from ancient traditions, such as the Egyptian Isis, the Babylonian Ishtar, the Sumerian Inanna, the Roman Diana, the Phrygian Cybele/Artemis, or the Welsh Rhiannon and Ceridwen are worshipped, but generally seen as different forms of the one Great Goddess, Mother of all.

Adherents of Goddess spirituality celebrate the Wheel of the Year and rituals very similar to Wiccans and Druids, and there is quite an overlap between feminist Wicca and Goddess spirituality.

Grove

DEFINITION: Druids often gather in groups known as 'groves' where they meet together for rituals and festivals. These gatherings typically take place outdoors.

Handfasting

DEFINITION: A ceremony for couples who want to publicly acknowledge their partnership of love.

Heathenry

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Heathen, Heathenism, Asatru

DEFINITION: The term 'Heathen' applies to groups focused on the Germanic gods and mythology, which are sometimes called 'Northern' traditions, or Asatru. There are several different Heathen groups. Heathenism differs from other forms of Paganism in that there is more evidence for the old tradition, which was still practised in some countries into the second millennium.

Heathenism is sometimes seen as coming under the umbrella of 'Paganism' through its nature-worshipping and polytheistic form, although, as Heathenry has a largely

different origin and content from modern Paganism, around half of modern Heathens do not identify as Pagan.

Imbolc

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Imbolg

DEFINITION: Celebrated on the 1st of February, this festival marks the very beginning of spring, when snowdrops and early lambs appear. Candles are lit to strengthen the lengthening days.

Litha

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Lithá

DEFINITION: The Summer Solstice or Litha (c.21st June) marks the longest day and is celebrated notably at Stonehenge. This festival is celebrated either on the actual longest day (usually 21st or 22nd June) or on 24th June which was the date of midsummer in earlier times and is favoured by the British Druid Order.

Lughnasadh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Lughnasa, Lammas

DEFINITION: Lughnasadh (31st July/1st August), named after the Irish god Lugh, is the beginning of the harvest, with a theme of the death and rebirth of crops. The equivalent Christian festival is Lammas. The Autumn Equinox marks the turn to the darker half of the year.

Mabinogion

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mabinogi

DEFINITION: A Welsh text holding stories important to some Pagans. For example, a popular story for Druids is the tale of Ceridwen's cauldron from the Mabinogion. This explains how the Bard Taliesin gained poetic inspiration and magical powers by ingesting three drops from a potion brewed by Ceridwen meant for her own son.

Mabon

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Alban Elued, Alban Elfed

DEFINITION: The autumn equinox (c.23rd September). Known as Alban Elued or Alban Elfed for Druids. A festival honouring the approach of winter.

Magick

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Magic (ritual)

DEFINITION: Some Pagan rituals are described as magic or magick. It is the use of symbolic action to bring about change or transformation. The k is added to differentiate from stage magic.

Ostara

DEFINITION: The spring equinox or Ostara (c.21st March), when day and night are equal, celebrates the new life of spring, symbolised by spring flowers like daffodils, eggs and rabbits or hares. Some Pagans believe Eostre was the Anglo-Saxon goddess of fertility and dedicate this time to her.

Pagan

DEFINITION: Pagans may be pantheist, polytheist, duotheist, or animist but are rarely monotheist in the sense found in Abrahamic religions. Paganism/Pagan worldviews is an umbrella term for a range of traditions.

Paganism

DEFINITION: Paganism is an umbrella term for a range of traditions, often rooted in ancient European sources. Paganisms are often polytheistic or pantheistic and frequently associated with encountering the sacred in nature, although not in all cases.

One notable side of a Pagan outlook, especially animistic Paganism, is that humans take less of a central role in the universe and are seen as equal partners in an interdependent ecology with other life-forms such as animals and plants.

Paganisms include Druidry, Wicca, Goddess spirituality, as well as those traditions which seek to reconstruct ancient paganisms, such as modern Heathenry and Asatru (Norse traditions), Religio-Romano (Roman), Hellenismos (Greek), Kemeticism (Egyptian) and contemporary forms of animism and shamanism.

Pentagram

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Pentacle

The five-pointed star, or pentagram, is an ancient symbol, identifying the human (four limbs and the head) with the universe (earth, water, fire, air and spirit/ether).

If within a circle, the star is usually called a pentacle. The pentacle is often worn as a pendant or earrings, or on a bracelet by Pagans to express their identity.

Samhain

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Samhuinn

DEFINITION: A pagan festival 'summer's end', (31st Oct/1st November), a time when the veil between the human world and the other world of the spirits is said to be thin. It is a time to remember the dead.

Shamanism

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Shamanism, shaman

Shamanism, in the contemporary 'Western' sense, often refers to those who explore ways to interact with the realm of spirits through one of a variety of indigenous traditions.

The term Shamanism is an anthropologists' term for a wide range of indigenous cultural traditions from around the world, involving trance-like states to interact with spirits, in order to serve the community. The word has its origins with the Evenki in the Tungus region of Northern Asia and Siberia, whose word saman is used to identify their 'shaman'.

Wheel of the Year

DEFINITION: Eight festivals that mark the changing seasons. This is made up of four Celtic festivals (Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh, Samhain) and the two solstices and two equinoxes (these events celebrated in many pagan and other religions worldwide).

Wicca

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Wiccan

Wicca refers primarily to the tradition of witchcraft founded by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s, which focuses on the Goddess and the God, although there are polytheistic practitioners.

'Wicca' is also used in a more generalised way to mean any contemporary practitioners of Pagan witchcraft, who may prefer the term 'wiccan' to that of 'witch' in order to avoid negative associations of that word.

Yule

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Jul

DEFINITION: Yule, or the winter solstice (21st December), marks the rebirth of the sun. It is the longest night of the year. Candles, lights, round sun-shaped decorations and evergreen plants remind people in mid-winter that warmth and life will return.