

Old World Thinking in a Modern Age

Mandy Hager

It seems to me that whether it is greed for wealth, greed for power, or greed for control, the dogged one-upmanship of human behaviour has corrupted many potential forces for good. I put mainstream religions into this category.

While the fundamental teachings of most of these religions are charitable and moral, somehow the competitive race to be 'top God' (and to accumulate great armies of blindly faithful disciples along with the 'baubles of office') sullies the potential for good and ferments into a dangerous brew of jealousy and hate.

Ironically, it was science, always charged as the antithesis of religious thought, which prompted me towards a spiritual worldview that meets my needs for a code by which to live, and for an answer to the big picture question 'Why am I here?'

Science opened my eyes to the facts as they relate to human existence – facts that are devoid of political or racial prejudice, or of megalomaniacal misogynist manipulation – facts that place human beings and our cycle of birth, initiation, love, repose, death and decomposition firmly 'within' a greater system of which we are only one small part.

To understand that every living thing is made of the same elements and particles is to wipe hierarchy and dominance completely away. While still acknowledging Darwin's evolutionary truths about 'survival of the fittest' within our small subset of universal life, the greatest power remains the ebb and flow of all particles and energy in the universe. '*We are all one*' takes on new meaning when we are broken down to our essential chemistry.

For this reason, I place my spiritual 'hat' at the door of one of human beings earliest spiritual models, whose origins go back over 35 thousand years - well before Christianity, Judaism, Islam and even Buddhism and Hinduism. The Old Religion (slandered and persecuted under its inflammatory name of Witchcraft) is closer in spirit to the indigenous spiritual beliefs of Māori, Native Americans and shamanism. This is a model that is One with nature – a spirituality that fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. "*[It] can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive.*"¹

In its modern incarnation as Wicca, this is also a movement that celebrates women – a feminist doctrine that honours women's unique gifts and strengths (something sadly, and blatantly, lacking in the power structures of many mainstream religions.) The primary symbol for this is 'The Goddess', not an entity separate from the world but 'of the world' – one that is *manifest in each of us*.

¹ P25 Starhawk - "*The Spiral Dance - A rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*"
10th Anniversary Edition HarperSanFrancisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1979,1989.

This symbolism of the Goddess bears no parallel to the more accepted mainstream structures of God as Father. *“She does not legitimise the rule of either sex by the other and lends no authority to temporal hierarchies...each of us must reveal our own truth.”*²

I’m not one for clubs or groups, and don’t believe my adherence to the principles of Wicca requires me to partake in any kind of formalised ritual. To me it’s about walking the talk... I don’t see *“justice as administered by some external authority, based on a written code or set of rules imposed from without. Instead, justice is an inner sense that each act brings consequences that must be faced responsibly.”*³ I try to live with the understanding that *‘what you send, returns three times over’* – the Wicca version of *‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’*

Love for life in all its forms is the basic ethic binding me, and sits well with the three core tenets of Wicca – immanence, interconnection and community. *Community includes not only people but also the animals, plants, soil, air and water and energy systems that support our lives. ...in a time of global communications, catastrophes, and potential violence, community must also be seen as reaching out to include all the earth.”*⁴

What this means is that, if spirituality is to be truly life serving, it must stress that *we are all responsible for each other*. It is this very basic principle that I see most lacking in the war of religious fundamentalism and global greed that is taking place around the world today. It frightens me that the so-called ‘leaders’ of the world are so caught up in their own quest for greatness and domination that they are prepared to put us all – the people and the planet – at perilous risk.

Perhaps they need to be reminded of one of the most simple, yet powerful messages from a religion celebrated way back before their own destructive doctrines were written: *If that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without.*

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² P23 as above

³ P26 as above

⁴ P10-11 as above