

The Modern Pagan

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About the Book

MODERN PAGANISM MEANS LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE AND RESPECTING ALL THAT NATURE HAS TO OFFER.

A sustainable way of life, paganism has existed for thousands of years and survived through family tradition among scattered households throughout the British Isles. A pagan lifestyle is attuned to the natural rhythms of the earth and will appeal today to everyone who cares about the environment and the creatures that we share it with, including our fellow human beings.

In this fascinating book, Brian Day explains how to live in a modern pagan style. He offers excellent advice on enjoying an organic life; on celebrating seasonal festivals; cultivating a true pagan garden; creating delicious, healthy food and drink from natural sources; the benefits of herbal medicine; on the importance of pagan parenting and family values; on living without prejudice and discrimination, and much more.

If you have had enough of personal and social pressures in a polluted environment, and are looking for a fulfilling yet simple way to live that is in balance with the natural world, *The Modern Pagan* will show you how.

About the Author

Brian Day was born near Nottingham and brought up in a family whose elder members still had a considerable knowledge of folk lore, folk medicine and folk ways. He acquired an early interest in folk traditions, herbalism, music and linguistics, which led to a lifetime of study of the folk culture of the British Isles.

With awards of degrees in chemistry, biochemistry and computing, Brian has enjoyed a career as an international educational consultant, university lecturer and computer analyst. He has written and lectured extensively on folk culture and is a keen singer of folk, operatic and choral music, having discovered and transcribed several 'lost' English traditional carols. He is the author of *The Celtic Calendar*.

Also by Brian Day:

The Celtic Calendar
A Chronicle of Folk Customs
Chronicle of Celtic Folk Customs

THE MODERN PAGAN

How to Live a Natural Lifestyle in the Twenty-first
Century

Brian Day



RIDER

London . Sydney . Auckland . Johannesburg

Introduction

What is modern paganism?

It is my aim to describe in this book, and also put into modern context, a traditional pagan lifestyle, indigenous to the British Isles. This lifestyle represents the most fundamental level, and therefore the foundation, of British folk culture, and by extension the folk culture of those of British descent throughout the world. Such a lifestyle has survived in families throughout the English and Celtic areas of the United Kingdom, many of whom live on the margins of current, popular British society. The ways in which they interact with one another and with their fellow inhabitants of the natural world are, however, anything but marginal in relevance to the majority who have traditionally excluded them. That majority is currently experiencing serious discord, disruption and imbalance in its families, communities, and natural environments. Many people from all walks of life are now taking a keen practical interest in the ways of those who have preserved the harmonious lifestyle to which the beleaguered majority now desperately aspire. This book offers a window into the world of those whose lifestyle has become of great relevance today to the mainstream society that long ago tried to consign it to oblivion. It is this lifestyle that I describe in this book as traditional paganism at, and evolving from, its roots, and as modern paganism in its evolved current form.

The modern pagan lifestyle represents a synthesis of the ways in which traditional non-spiritual pagans have adapted the traditions they have preserved since ancient times, through the march of social change into the present modern world. The earliest recorded examples of elements of this pagan lifestyle come from descriptions of the ways of the ancient Celts in Western Europe and the British Isles, and in

the latter these appear later amongst the Anglo-Saxon and Norse communities. Today, traditional - or true - British pagans may be of Celtic, Germanic or mixed descent, and because they are a disparate group their surviving lifestyles differ in aspect and application.

Drawing together these cultural threads, I have woven them into what I hope is a tapestry displaying a coherent, integrated picture of the collective ways in which traditional pagans have adapted their philosophies and practices to the demands of modern life. Thereby, this compelling, practical, caring, nature-based way of life is made available to all as a complete package. However, it is a package that lends itself to individual or collective variation and evolution as the occasion demands or the desire decides.

The evolution of traditional paganism into modern paganism has, perhaps remarkably, occurred with little change in fundamental characteristics. So, modern paganism can succinctly be described as a non-spiritual, non-supremacist, nature-based lifestyle, whose principal strengths are high regard for: the quality of personal character; family togetherness; equality of worth and opportunity in the community; environmental awareness and ecological responsibility; development of sensual, imaginal, creative, intellectual and communicative abilities; and for achievement of simplicity in life, especially through ethical and sustainable use of resources and the meeting of demonstrable, practical needs.

For those who wish to follow a practical life with no attendant spirituality, modern paganism offers a foundation upon which to shape your lifestyle, whatever your ethnic or cultural background. As a core lifestyle, modern paganism can serve as a template for people who wish to add a spiritual dimension to their life, or a fully fledged religious commitment. There is no conflict between the fundamental personal and natural aims of traditional paganism and the development of a spiritual dimension within that lifestyle.

Put simply, we all have the same basic personal and survival needs.

What are the elements of the pagan lifestyle described here?

Pagans have always guarded their traditions closely, and have tended to be deeply suspicious of anyone seeking to write their history on their behalf. This is not just a consequence of oppression, persecution and marginalisation, and these are not the dominating issues they once were, not that they are yet a thing of the past. Still less than biography written by others do they like to define or categorise themselves and their way of life, for that can be the precursor of a creed, and thus the beginning of a process of codifying traditional paganism in the way of a religion. But in support of the recommendation that traditional pagan folk culture, or significant parts of it, offers a meaningful twenty-first century lifestyle for all, a summary of the principal characteristics of this culture is provided below. This initial summary is not intended to be an exhaustive list of characteristics, beliefs and practices, and it is drawn from across pagan communities. The latter are seldom discrete settlements like villages, but are most likely to be a scattered group of households consisting of extended families and their friends. Other features will emerge as the book unfolds, and by the end you will have the measure of what collectively constitutes the character of modern paganism today.

A non-spiritual way of life

Traditional paganism, even in its modern form, is non-spiritual, and as such can co-exist, as a basic folk culture, with any spiritual dimension.

- *Traditional pagans believe that by rejecting the alleged existence of, or the need for, a superior being at the rudder of the Universe, they can pursue an essentially biological lifestyle without the demands of religious obligation, nor its by-products, side effects, conflicts, historical baggage, or mental or physical constraints.*
- *The belief exists among some true pagans that their culture is historically pre-spiritual.*
- *True paganism is not an evangelising culture, but is welcoming and sharing, and disseminated by example.*

Human and personal characteristics shown by modern pagans

Modern paganism is a simple, harmonious lifestyle in which people demonstrate a strong sense of humility, personal responsibility and consideration for others.

- *There is a pronounced humanist element, and an absence of human supremacist views. For example, personal harmony, interpersonal harmony, and harmony in nature at large are equally valued.*
- *Pagans have human failings like everyone else, and recognise this without shame, so all are welcome amongst them.*
- *Values-based unity of purpose is more important than 'targets' as life objectives.*
- *Responsibility to others is held in higher esteem than upholding one's 'rights'. Total freedom of action is not endorsed, but rather tempered by consideration of the consequences. Such caution stems from a belief in the ancient Law of Returns, which says that all adverse actions rebound in some measure on the perpetrator.*
- *Dishonesty, violence and criminal tendencies are very rare, whereas straightforwardness, gentleness, and senses of obligation and honour are characteristic.*

- *There is a strong current of egalitarianism, with recognition and practical utilisation of the different aptitudes and characters of the sexes.*
- *Diet and health, and therefore intake of food and herbal or chemical preparations, are related as consistently to our place in the natural order as with our metabolic and physiological requirements, and with our responsibility to our dependants.*

Family togetherness

The immediate family is the most fundamental unit of modern pagan life, but the importance of the extended family means that its values are applied in dealings with all relatives, the community, and the natural world.

- *A strong bond of family togetherness generates mutual responsibility, respect and support.*
- *There is a tradition of protection of the structure and sequence of pagan celebratory life, such as living by the pagan calendar, pagan modes of celebration and life-cycle commemoration, but this does not itself imply exclusion of others willing to share and participate.*
- *Upbringing and education are highly valued and distinctive, and reflect the allegiance to the extended family as well as focussing on a child's intellectual, social, physical, artistic and other human developmental needs.*
- *There remains the desire to preserve family and community history and respect for tradition, ancestors and elders.*
- *Checks and balances and generational contributions and viewpoints are respected in family debate.*

Community spirit

The community is regarded in many ways as an extension of the family, in which all contribute, participate, and support

each other.

- *Personal and practical worth in the community is more important than superficial differences. Who, or that which, harms no-one is tolerated.*
- *Standards of personal and social behaviour, especially in public, are expected to be high. Over-indulgence and excess are frowned upon.*
- *Equality of worth and opportunity are very important, as is the absence of all forms of discrimination.*
- *The natural instinct is to care for and rehabilitate rather than condemn and punish, if possible, and only the most irredeemable recidivist would ever be abandoned.*
- *Disrespect for, denigration of, or desecration of other cultures and their adherents and artefacts are unthinkable actions for pagans.*
- *There tends to be a distrust of institution, the media, centralisation and corporation, and anything else that usurps responsibility for the family and its values.*

Environmental awareness

In all aspects of lifestyle, modern pagans never forget that they are just one species in a mutually dependent natural world.

- *Modern pagans have a keen appreciation of humankind's position in local and global dynamic ecosystems as an equal partner with other forms of life, and they acknowledge their responsibility to preserve natural equilibrium by minimising or eliminating the environmental consequences of human actions.*
- *All plots created from nature, such as garden, farm, and park, are treated as extensions of the countryside, with local species and breeds and natural cycles encouraged. Ecological and ethical management are practised by the owner as far as possible.*

- *Fellow organisms and their inanimate associates are considered part of the pagan extended family, to all of which the pagan consciousness feels allegiance.*
- *There is a practical emphasis on equipping oneself for survival as an aspect of personal wellbeing.*
- *Ethical and environmental consumerism are championed.*

Intellectual development

The development of the mind is held to be just as important as a fit, healthy body.

- *There is a high regard for the sensual, imaginal and the creative, and unfettered thought is not found threatening.*
- *There is high appreciation for communicative ability, whether linguistic, artistic, musical, or through other modes of expression.*
- *The rational is not seen as superior to the intuitive.*

Technological

Simplicity, practical need, sustainability, and ethical and considerate use are key elements in modern attitudes to technology.

- *Adaptation by pagans to change, such as through pressure from the march of commerce and technology, varies with individual conscience. Some pagans are technologically progressive within the constraints mentioned in the next paragraph, while others may appear 'old-fashioned', but it is the personal choice of the latter to prefer tradition to conformity with what they regard as forces controlling their lives.*
- *In technological matters there is an emphasis on simplicity, sustainability by low energy and resources consumption, and demonstrable practical need. There is*

thus a tendency to minimal use of technology, maximum use of alternatives, or doing without and reverting to traditional manual and physical methods.

- *The ethical dimension of, and considerate use of, technology is more important than relentless technological change or progress.*
- *Regular personal audits of technological usage are undertaken, as is exercise of choice.*
- *Vocational education is considered no less valuable than academic education. There is considerable interest in the applications of science and technology, especially in practical skills and craftsmanship rather than in relentlessly usurping human skills by automation and mechanisation.*

This is how modern pagans respond to how they find things in the world today. With the exception of the first section of the list, there would seem to be nothing that compromises or denies personal spiritual belief and practice, but a great deal that is of relevance to every citizen of every culture. Pagans, like all people, put their personal gloss on many of the aspects of their lives, and have always done so because of a dislike of prescription. Non-pagans are no different, and there is within this framework the same scope for their individuality to be expressed as pagans have cherished for centuries.

The chapters that follow will expand upon these basic characteristics of modern pagan life, and once you close the last page I believe you will never think of your own life in quite the same way again. To what extent you choose to allow modern paganism to influence your future choices in life is of course a deeply personal decision. This book will also endeavour to show that modern paganism offers the only realistic hope for human survival and social harmony. This is another pressing reason why modern paganism is

presented here as a new folk culture for all in the twenty-first century.

Why is this book structured as it is?

Part One

In the first part of this book, we will consider the events in history that led to the near destruction of the earliest pagan folk culture that traditional pagans claim descent from – that of the ancient Celts. This demise was due to the effects of the Roman invasion of the British Isles and then the subsequent spread of Christianity. The pagan sub-structure was a core folk culture that the invaders and evangelists, as fellow Europeans, shared in large measure. But the desire strongly existed to overlay this with a dominant spiritual dimension, and subsequently to seek to replace the pagan foundation by a remodelled, Christianised version of it, leaving few aspects uncorrupted. This led inexorably to the near extinction of the nature-based way of life that served so dynamically and reciprocatingly the needs of people and the natural world alike.

In addition to giving readers an insight into the origins of traditional British paganism, it is an aim of this historical section to provide an analysis that may persuade Christians to look humbly and self-critically at the dire consequences of their centuries-old association with paganism for humankind as a whole. This is done in the hope that they may recognise that what they originally sought to eliminate was their own folk culture too. It serves neither pagans nor Christians to pretend these events never happened, and it is as well to emphasise that the consideration here in the first part of the book is from a pagan perspective. Christians have already taken ample opportunity in literature to express their analysis of, and justification for, these events. But it serves neither group to perpetuate centuries of animosity, mistrust

and misunderstanding by neglecting by absence of dialogue to inform one another of where the two traditions stand today with regard to each other. Christians will, therefore, find towards the end of part one a plea for reconciliation, which I hope they and all pagans will respond to.

Part Two

This plea takes the form of a sincere hope that once again, after so long, Christians will consider the elements of the pagan folk culture described in the second part of the book as their own. They are, expressed in modern form, what they themselves lost when they forced pagans to abandon them on such a large scale during the Christianisation of the British Isles. Please take this culture with the blessing of those who have clung on to it. You can call it what you please, and can overlay it with the spiritual dimension that is so precious to you, as you did in the evangelisation period long ago, but this time please leave it in place, practise it and cherish it, and you may come to believe that there really is no serious conflict with spiritual beliefs in a lifestyle that puts family, community and interaction with the natural world from within at its heart, for these represent the bedrock of human existence.

If you are of a religious persuasion, you do not have to refer to your reclaimed folk culture as 'pagan' if you feel uncomfortable with the term. The re-adoption of all or selected aspects of this lifestyle, or indeed the recognition that you are following some of it now and may wish to add later what you feel fill gaps in your life, is more important to your future wellbeing than the label you use to describe it. But to all readers I would say this. Whatever connotations the word 'pagan' has been given in the long history of its use and abuse, it is time for it to acquire again the respectability that it once had. That respectability is now a deserved one, as witnessed by the growing numbers proud to call themselves pagan. They are proud because of the

personal, family, community and environmental focus, fulfilment and equilibrium that their philosophies and values have enabled them to create. For the simple expedient of adopting this word in a new light, and studying this thesis with an open mind, that fulfilment can be yours too, whatever your station in life, and whether you are of religious persuasion or not.

Traditional, or true, paganism, in the fundamental but modernised form described in the second part of the book, is essentially a practical, survival lifestyle. But it has during the last two hundred years increasingly attracted interest from individuals and groups wishing to overlay their own customised spirituality upon it. In one sense this simply represents the creation of other religions, and mirrors the processes that Christians applied to Celtic paganism centuries earlier. But certain groups, of which wiccans are perhaps the best known, have retained far more in common with traditional pagans than Christians after the Middle Ages were ever prepared to countenance, and as such these groups often refer to themselves today as pagan, or are so styled by others. Traditional pagans would take issue with this on the grounds that the overlaying of a spiritual element on the basic pagan folk culture takes such groups beyond the boundaries of true paganism. Moreover, the persistent use of the word 'pagan' to describe such groups has led to much confusion over who is pagan and who is not. I can but emphasise my own position that true paganism is non-spiritual as described herein, but I recognise the strong bond that the groups referred to feel with the same tradition that I propose as the pagan plinth. Spiritual pagans are, like Christians, cordially invited to embrace or reclaim what is offered in these pages.

How may you wish to use this book?

This book is for all those who want to change, or are considering changing, their lifestyle, to a modern pagan lifestyle, or some chosen aspects of it. This may be because you seek a new direction in life, or you are unhappy with your life as it is, or curious for new experiences. There are no disqualifying factors of any kind that would prevent you from selectively taking up some of the advice offered, or indeed reorienting your life completely. On this matter at least you currently have freedom of choice, but it may not be too long before some of the features of the lifestyle described on these pages will take on a more urgent, even obligatory, imperative. The thesis presented is aimed at all who have the interest or see the need to read it, from whatever cultural background or spiritual persuasion, and with whatever motive, for modern paganism, or new paganism as it is sometimes called, is of international appeal and relevance.

Some readers may find particular chapters or sections of greater initial attraction than others, for modern paganism is treated from many angles, historical, calendrical, environmental, social and ethological (behavioural). Part one explores its ancient beliefs and practices, and part two explores beliefs and practices that sit more comfortably in, and are more relevant to, the modern world. Other readers may wish to go straight to part two and read about how to refashion all or part of their lives in a modern pagan way. You may have already done so but wish to read about philosophies that support your choice or ideas for further enrichment and progress along your chosen path. You can then delay reading until later about the significant events in history that preceded the modern pagan revival. Each chapter in part two is devoted to a specific aspect, or aspects with a common theme, and the extensive use of subsections in the chapters allows the reader to dip in and read about specific matters at any time.

You may well find that some items have instant appeal, and then in the light of your experience you will be drawn to others of kindred affinity. This is how you put together your personal lifestyle. For the independently minded, the modern pagan lifestyle can be looked upon as a resource for your present and future consideration as your life evolves. You may find yourself jotting down some more aspects of your life that would lend themselves to a modern pagan approach, and in this way you will develop consistency of purpose instead of drawing fad ideas randomly from conflicting or miscellaneous sources, or from vested interests. A lifestyle whose elements are drawn from disparate sources is inevitably fragmented by exposure to, and influence from, conflicting cultures and social expectations.

Many aspects have gained widespread popularity as individual pursuits already, such as recycling waste, relaxation therapy, reverting to a natural diet, or the use of folk remedies, but the synthesis of a complete modern pagan approach allows the reader to see these aspects as part of an organic, coherent, evolving whole. By adopting the complete lifestyle, or substantial parts of it, you can truly transform your life in the direction that your previous individual choices suggested to you then that you wanted to move towards. To whatever extent you do this, partial or whole, it is my belief that you will be making an indelible contribution to the greater wellbeing of your good self and of all who are influenced and persuaded by your example.

A minority who feel they cannot, or who refuse to, adapt to modern society seek to escape the rat race by leaving its confines, but for most people their personal, employment and financial circumstances do not allow them to do that. And really they don't actually want to escape in the generally accepted sense of the term, only to understand, adjust to and cope better with or more profoundly to change to a genuinely fulfilling and sustainable lifestyle. These

objectives may be achieved with the guidance contained within this book, by choosing what would fill a particular gap, or solve a particular problem, in your life, or by restructuring your life more radically. Good luck with whatever options you choose, whoever you are!

Part One

Traditional Paganism in its Historical Context

This section of the book is, as far as possible, in historical sequence, starting with the earliest period of settlement in the British Isles that there is evidence for. The greatest emphasis is placed on what is known about the ancient Celts, from whose culture significant aspects of traditional paganism are derived. From there the account moves on to consider the Roman occupation and its devastating consequences for the indigenous Celtic way of life, and then to the spread of Christianity to these shores. From the time of the arrival of the early Christian missionaries to the British Isles the histories of Celtic paganism and Christianity became entwined. This account tells the pagan story of that association.

The word 'pagan' and its many historical connotations

The rural origins of paganism are strongly indicated by the etymological probability that the word 'pagan' is derived from the Latin *paganus*, meaning 'a countryman' or 'rustic', or from the related *pagus*, 'a rural district', or *pagani*, 'followers of the old ways', 'old' often implying 'nature-based'.

In the early years of co-existence between Celts and Christians it would have been reasonable to define a pagan as someone who was 'non-Christian' in the sense of being an adherent of an indigenous, pre-Christian corpus of beliefs, especially one associated with the natural world, but later the Roman Catholic Church assumed the right to define a pagan as one who was 'anti-Christian', and this label

proved to be nearly indelible, for there are many still today who think of a pagan as someone who is anti-religious. The Roman Catholic Church used both meanings to suit its objectives of spiritual domination and social control, and spread the view that paganism is a lower level of human existence than, and an inferior philosophy to, Christianity, and in opposition to it. Whilst the course of history cannot be changed, there is no doubt that the labelling of pagans as anti-Christian has prevented dialogue and mutual understanding between pagans and Christians for centuries, which is extremely unfortunate in view of such a long period of co-existence and the similarities in philosophies and lifestyle that they share.

The word 'pagan' is used herein to mean 'not Christian' or 'pre-Christian' in the parts of this book that deal with the conflict between Christians and those who did and do not share their beliefs, and to mean 'non-spiritual', 'not religious', or having a lifestyle where religion has no place, where the context makes no reference to this conflict. The word will never be used to mean 'anti-Christian', for modern paganism is not about perpetuating conflicts between paganism and Christianity but about reorienting personal lifestyle. The Part One discussion from a pagan perspective of the historical association between paganism and Christianity keeps faithfully to what is represented in recorded history, as part of the historical development in preparation for the presentation of modern pagan philosophies in Part Two.

1

The Roots of Traditional Paganism

The Celtic cultural origins of traditional paganism
Traditional pagans have long claimed cultural descent from the ancient Celts, and for centuries, historians and folklorists too have sought detailed knowledge of ancient Celtic paganism (if indeed there ever was a pan-Celtic culture as opposed to local cultures) and information on how it responded and evolved in the face of waves of settlers and missionaries to the British Isles. It would then be possible to reconstruct a modern form of it such as would represent an alternative lifestyle for people who are unhappy about what history has provided for them and its suitability for the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, the difficulty of interpreting the archaeological record and the possession of only a small number of literary and artistic survivals mean that it is not possible through these alone to reconstruct old Celtic lifestyle, customs and beliefs. To achieve any sort of template for a modern pagan lifestyle it is necessary therefore to rely on folk beliefs, customs and traditions of all kinds that can reasonably be held to be of Celtic provenance, or adoption, even if remoulded and repackaged by various immigrant and locally evolving influences throughout the course of history. Myths, legends and folk tales often incorporate details of folk beliefs and ceremonial practices, and although a folk culture may no longer be practised, evidence of its rituals can survive as drama, custom or superstition. In the absence of witness testimony and archaeological evidence these survivals are often all that is available. Moreover, because of the strong oral tradition in the past, they must be scrutinised for natural exaggeration for an audience and the changes that tend to come about as a consequence of being passed on

orally before being written down. Then there is the problem of a writer who wants to be critical, such as a Christian writing about druidism (druidic philosophy) or druidry (druidic practice), or to revamp the facts for a particular audience or as propaganda.

Such a process of reconstruction is not intended to represent the product of a historical sequence of events, but, by assuming that folk tradition is not largely invention, and using what historical sources exist, it is possible to fill in the gaps with a reasonable degree of extrapolation to construct a modern pagan lifestyle which reflects the pagan Celtic heritage. What is being rekindled is not druidic. The fall from power of the druids, who may be thought of as the ancient Celtic priesthood, is often blamed on the Roman invasions of Gaul and Great Britain, but the same happened in Ireland where the Romans never set foot. It was Christianity that was the agent of the destruction or abandonment of both druidry and druidism. The long association of the people of the British Isles with Christianity may have started by their being attracted to what seemed like a complete prescribed lifestyle, whereas the return to Celtic roots by traditional pagans is a quest for elements of the culture that can be pressed back into service in modernised form.

Long ago Celtic beliefs were chased from their sacred sites, which in many cases they had adopted from the pre-Celtic cultures that built them, into remote countryside, where the intellectual and communal strength of the people allowed aspects of old Celtic culture to survive, mostly fragments, not always obviously recognisable, and seldom unchanged with time. It is these that allow reconnection to the past, but retaining modern intellect, practicality and purpose. Add to this the derived aspects of Celtic, and Celtic-influenced Anglo-Saxon and Norse, culture from folk traditions, and the considerable degree to which traditional pagans have evolved and preserved a lifestyle embodying

these aspects, and a basis for the development of modern paganism, is thereby created. The reliance on folk tradition should make the construction acceptable to ordinary folk, in that it embraces only beliefs and customs that are already part of their heritage.

The traceable roots of traditional paganism in the British Isles, then, lie in Old Celtic society and whatever components of pre-Celtic society it had absorbed. The practice of magic was an important part of this society, and persisted, with inevitable borrowings and changes, through Anglo-Saxon and Norse settlement. The way in which basic folk beliefs remained reasonably consistent throughout the British Isles during the Germanic invasions shows how much they were a part of common European folk culture, and how much devolving folk customs remained true to their roots. An analysis of folk beliefs, customs and ceremonies enables us to discern certain attitudes which recur and which one can reasonably assume were manifest in everyday life. Indeed it is still possible to interview elderly people in certain rural areas who remember the old ways, the skills, knowledge, social interactions and communal living. Further insights into ancient paganism come from our knowledge of: surviving ritual magic; spells, charms, amulets and talismans; depictions in art of, or references in oral lore and literature to, pagan images and ways; and life-cycle practices associated with birth, puberty, partnership and death. All these aspects of popular culture are the legacy of paganism past which, when expressed in modern form, are the basis of new paganism.

Whenever a group of people, like traditional pagans, with common cultural aspirations hark back to a past age for any part of their inspiration for living, they are sure these days to be labelled 'old-fashioned', or said to have been left behind by the march of 'progress'. Cartoonists will picture them in animal skins and carrying clubs! But pagans living in the modern world know perfectly well that any return to

traditional ways must be selective and appropriate for today's conditions. They believe that their descendant philosophies, attitudes, family values, social interactions, communal practices, and the harmonising of life with the natural environment, are still relevant and adaptable to the modern world. Modern paganism is not a 'back to nature' movement, which is wholly idealistic in a technological age, nor does it seek to 'put the clock back' in various ways that would retard its own progress as an evolving culture. The spartanism characteristic of some extreme sects is not typical of modern pagan life, for modern pagans believe life is to be enjoyed, just not at the expense of adverse personal, communal or environmental consequences elsewhere.

Paganism grew out of people's needs, primarily to understand their environment and survive in it, and we could do well to re-examine it now for our continued survival and wellbeing in the face of the collapsing of social and environmental equilibrium under human pressure. As the disrespectful and unprepared traveller will witness, nature always gets her revenge, but pagans believe also that all negative actions rebound, and harm the perpetrator. Many of the old pagan practices may not now be relevant or acceptable, but the philosophies and attitudes that governed them are largely applicable today, and these, when applied to today's problems rather than past rituals and practices, form the basis of modern paganism. There are times in all our lives when we need the courage to admit that we may benefit from wiser counsel, and in this thesis the counsel is that of traditional paganism.

Paganism and the natural world

Once our early human ancestors developed the self-critical faculties to appreciate the range of skills and accomplishments that they themselves possessed, it is

understandable that they might regard the vast complexities of the natural world as the handiwork of a humanoid too, but of an enormously more powerful and talented one than any they knew. Religion, to peoples of the ancient world, was the belief that powers superior to their own created, controlled and directed the forces of nature and the behaviour of living things, and the apparent reality of this belief necessitated the practice of propitiating and conciliating these forces in order to survive. It was assumed that the origin of these powers was in superhuman form. This essentially practical and logical view is perfectly understandable, but, regardless of who or what initiated the formation of the natural world and controlled events within it, people still had a basic need to understand it, thrive in it and try to bend it to their advantage. In this sense, pagans and those who developed religious beliefs were alike.

Pagan personification of nature and natural forces

The notion of personification is different from that of a religious belief in a superhuman creator and controller. For the early pagans, humans were part of the ecosystem, and some of their fellow inhabitants appeared to have attributes like theirs, especially animals. It must have been a source of humility to realise that some animals were stronger, faster, more alert and possessed of more acute senses than they, and this humility must have made it easier to accept the idea of a superhuman creator. But inanimate phenomena appeared to have some of their powers too; the wind could blow like they could, so perhaps it too has some human characteristics. In such ways, those who are now called pagans personified these familiar components of their environment, but misleadingly, these personifications are sometimes known as 'deities'. However, they were not thought of in the same way as the gods of religions, for these 'deities' were looked upon as fellow inhabitants, for

whom the population had respect and with whom they felt oneness. Pagans undoubtedly sought ways to influence these personifications and were in awe of the more powerful, but their attitude towards them was not like the worship of a single omniscient creator or of a pantheon of ethereal, versatile, powerful gods and goddesses living in a supraterrrestrial realm, and it is not helpful, therefore, where pagans are concerned, to regard these personifications as gods and goddesses. Instead of using phrases like 'worship of the sun god' it is better to say 'veneration of the personification of the sun' or simply 'veneration of the sun'. Whether the personifications were male or female may have rested on whether their observed characteristics were more in keeping with pagan notions of masculinity and femininity at the time, but they were all specific, natural and local.

Veneration starts with sensory recognition of presence, which in turn leads to aesthetic appreciation, admiration and assessment of attributes. These attributes may be seen as having utilitarian value, or as appealing to survival sensibilities and thus worthy of emulation. Upon the realisation that appreciation and utility have become dependency, admiration turns to veneration. Veneration may then result in the assignation of personification, in recognition of exceptional qualities that an ordinary human is unable to match.

However sophisticated humans think they are they are limited. Therefore they are not above veneration of the superior attributes of other animals, of the beauty of landscapes, of the permanence, solidity, multi-texture and sheer grandeur of geological formations. The stable, reassuring presence of the tree is a storehouse of resources, as is the stream, whose abundance includes food, drink, silt, gravel, driftwood and other natural materials. The wind too is a cornucopia, bringing rain, coolness, warmth, identifying sounds and odours, birds for food, and above all change. Fertilise and water the earth, and growth and regeneration

ensue, as also happens after fire. Illustrations of the power of transformation of the elemental forces are all around to be marvelled at.

Some basis for the belief that personifications were not like deities to be worshipped comes from traditional feelings of oneness with natural phenomena and inhabitants as fellow travellers with whom one shared the environment, boxing and coxing for survival. Relationships in folk tales between Celts and personifications do not have the obeisant character to be expected of people in awe of, and subservient to, deities, for Celtic heroes took on natural forces; they were not bowed by their irresistible power.

Natural law

The belief that the Universe is not arbitrary but governed in some way is known as the concept of natural law. Examples of natural cycles are seasonal, meteorological and astronomical cycles, the latter including the diurnal movement of the sun, the phases of the moon, the returning patterns of the constellations, and solstices and equinoxes. Also, pagans came to admire the symmetry of anatomical and morphological form, as exemplified by the hexagon of the honeycomb, the pentagon of the starfish, the logarithmic spiral of the chambered nautilus, and the bilateral symmetry of their own bodies. No one who has gazed in awe and wonder at the beauty of snowflakes and mineral crystals can doubt that nature is the supreme geometrician. But faith in the orderliness of natural events was tempered by the realisation that there were chaotic aspects to the natural world. The sun rose in the east and set in the west, but the wind blew where it would, as did the lightning strike and the clouds drift. The concept of fate becomes inextricably bound up with order and disorder when it is realised that the future of a world showing both order and disorder is inexorable. But what pattern will

develop, or will there be no discernible pattern? Death must come to us all, but how, where and when? When symmetrical leaves fall in autumn, why do they make disorderly piles on the forest floor? It was against these apparently formless and aimless aspects of nature that early humans strove for meaning, and signs of order and regularity.

Paganism and magic

Actions designed to manipulate the natural world are collectively referred to as magic. Magic assumes that nature works in specific, predetermined ways, and an understanding of these ways leads to methods of altering them to advantage, normally by imitation or contagion. Making a noise like thunder to induce rainfall is imitative, sympathetic or homœopathic magic, and inserting pins into clay images of an intended victim so that he or she feels pain is contagious magic. The latter also worked on the assumption that possession of something belonging to the intended victim enabled the magician to exert control over that individual. Magic is essentially an immediate form of action, whose success depends on human ritual skill and not on the extraordinary powers of a deity, but *Homo sapiens* the philosopher would eventually want more than just sufficient grasp of natural events to aid daily survival. His curiosity sought deeper understanding of and, ultimately, explanations for events. Gradually, for the more curious and experimentally minded, the quest for order and regularity turned magic into science.

The rise of science and mathematics

Science probably began in much the same way as magic, when people's natural curiosity led them to recognise, describe and seek explanations for patterns in nature.