

THE CALL OF THE OLD PATHS

All of us come from a history that does not focus on the big cities, the big industries, the big money. For many lifetimes our ancestors have walked the land, lived with the life of our planet, worked with our bodies and lived with the sustenance that was given us.

I think that many hold that heritage in their hearts. I remember that my father and grandfather were raised on the farm. They attended church in their small communities but always kept their perception of the natural world. During the great depression they could always raise the plants and grains that they needed although much of the protein that they received was from the wildlife in the area. Grandad told father that shotgun shells cost three cents apiece, so every one must count. Money was not much available. And they kept their respect and love for the land. I remember Father and Grandfather speaking of how they walked in the forest, felt the life around them and felt in a way that they were in church. Truly there is no existence without the will of Spirit.

As I walked and learned and grew the voice of the living world seemed to call to me. Perhaps our family heritage of music helped; in truth, I think it helped considerably. When we raise our voice in story or song and reach out to our fellow man with the deep feelings that fill our living existence, it raises our perception. When my children were young, we kept this communication with nature and had many bright days.

And as we teach, so shall we learn. My elder daughter Irene, served a hitch in the Marines. In our correspondence and conversation, she spoke of how those who served in war often followed the Pagan belief. When we must load our guns, walk out the door and face imminent death in service to our country, we find in our hearts the desire to be face to face with The Devine. The stories and allegories do not speak so clearly. We are not interested in seeing the collection plate come around six times. I have had these experiences. I felt the call.

And truly, our history in the deep ages before institutionalized religions, early societies in small communities reached out to Spirit in respect and thanks. The great Standing Stones were our first cathedrals. Almost universally, the early Shamans and Wise Women reached out to the spirit of the land, the creatures and all life in our world. They sought healing in the plants and sought messages in the stars.

In these days, many of us have had a very wide and well grounded education. I came through the Catholic machine; grammar school, high school (a very good prep school) and college. From the first catechisms to the logic of St. Thomas Aquinas, we have the heritage of the thought and practice of gifted followers of spirit over many ages. It also gives us the analytical sight to consider and judge that which transpires in the practice of government and religions and how they shape the world.

I think the first thing that raised concern in my teens was the poverty and inequality that burdens the lives of many. I had Latin and Spanish in prep school and the poverty and overpopulation in our South American neighbors spoke to me. Yet the great religions commanded continuation of population growth even though many starved to death. In the great patriarchal writings, there is a message that spoke to a world where many lived their lives and passed within forty years. Health care was almost non-existent. Many children died in birth, illness or accident. That circumstance is no more. We must perceive life as it is today, we have to be very careful about general guidelines in specific situations.

So, I continued my reading in my twenties and early thirties. I read the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, The Egyptian book of the Dead, Shinto. I sought the diverse learnings of many times and cultures. I read Joseph Campbell's thoughts on the meanings and derivation of myth. I read Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner as well as other current authors who study and write in the Pagan belief and others. I have been fortunate enough to meet and speak with many authors.

Another central aspect of the Pagan community is ritual. The great religions of our time have embraced the music and the practices of the early civilizations. There is a lot to draw on in the many previous ways.

The pagan community is a large tent with many occupants. One of the things that spoke to me was the general acceptance of diverse belief and practice. Mankind's perception and response to the Divine is truly amazing and worthy of broad consideration. Face to face there is no discrimination of any belief. On the internet, it may be not so kind. The other acceptance that speaks to me is non discrimination of race. I have walked the path of life in music, war and a forty year career in construction. We are truly one. The full spectrum of the diversity of humankind is reflected in all racial and national peoples.

The other aspect that I honor is the full participation of women in the society. In our history long ago, it was the women, the children and the elderly who held together the society. The men went out to fight the cave bear with spears, or equally violent men. Truly men were expendable. In the pagan community many women came there who had been disenfranchised or suppressed in the fundamentalist patriarchal communities.

In our present circumstance, we face great challenges in climate, energy and the conquest by greed. I walked out of a restaurant not long ago and some men, retired military, were talking outside. I heard one say, "I think the government is in more trouble than we know." I stayed and talked a while with them.

The ethics and responsibility, the heritage of our ancestors rings through to today. We are all here because we hear it and respond to it. I have spent the past months travelling and speaking at summer events hosted by several Pagan groups, from small to large. They had many

interesting comments and ideas. Those that have walked expanding the previous paths of faith are more independent, like this community.

I believe that the path that I have been fortunate enough to experience is a bright one with standards that have brought wonderful relationships with people of all walks of life. I believe that any benevolent reality of God would be accepting; perhaps amused.

I think you may be able to see what has drawn me to the elder path. I think the same things have brought us here, to this congregation which reaches out in the same way to man and God, in the many understandings and visions of men of good will over the ages and in stewardship of our world.