



According to Dee, Anubis is the god of the dead. She explains what the Egyptians saw as Anubis' role.

"Anubis took the soul into a place called the balance, where the heart was weighed against the feather of truth, and if the soul was worthy, it would go up into the Egyptian idea of Heaven, or it would be eaten by ... I can't remember the god's name, but he had a crocodile's head."

Bast is the Egyptian goddess of the home and the family, and according to Dee, some sources also say that Bast has a warrior side.

"She's a very nurturing goddess, they consider her to be very much like the sun, the sun being warm and essential for things to grow," Dee explains.

Volkova further offers her perspective on divinity and worship.

"I believe that divinity is imminent, and that you can walk out, and no matter where you are, divinity will always be with you, no matter if you're in a church, it doesn't matter, you're not constrained by geography and such, you don't have to go to a holy place to worship. It's always there around you no matter where you go," she states.

Mapstone, meanwhile, is new to Paganism. Calling herself "a cross between a Christian and a Pagan," she mentions that the presence of both a male and female force in Paganism is appealing to her.

"I'm finding that I'm more spiritual than religious. By 'spiritual' I mean ... believing in the elements and that there is, yes, a being, but it's more man and woman and more just a force, than just a man-figure or that type of thing."

Mapstone emphasizes the individuality of everyone's beliefs in witchcraft and Paganism.

"I've been reading in a lot of books, and there's no one real explanation of a witch or a Pagan, everyone has their own definition and their own belief system, and that's what I've gathered Paganism is—an individual thing. You find your own path, you find out what's right for you, and you do what you feel is best," Mapstone explains.

Though many witches are solitary practitioners, when then practice in a group, they do so a circle, explains Green.

"There's a high priest and priestess that keep things focused, but they're not there to direct us or tell us what to do, as in most of the other religions. They're just there to keep things on an even flow."

The circle, according to Green, exists because of the view that everyone who is participating is equal.

"The idea is that no one ... is better than anybody else. Everyone when they accept their religion

become their own priest, follow their guidelines," he says. "You set your own dogma, you set your own morals and values based on our one rule, for lack of a better word, which is you can do what you want, as long as you harm no one, and that includes yourself."

Green explains the difference between monotheism, the belief that there is one God, and polytheism, the belief in multiple gods.

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"In monotheism, it's like you have one bucket with all the water you're ever going to need for anything, for whatever you need: wash the car, drink, cook, whatever, and in polytheism, you have many small vessels of water you use individually for whatever, and each one of these have a distinct personality, and depending on what you want from them. You can kinda wander once you've learned a bit," Green explains.

Many witches are polytheistic, but this is not always the case.

Let's get academic: Samhain and Halloween

Back in the secular world, the University of Alberta's Department of Religious Studies offers a course on witchcraft and the occult, and Wayne Litke is one of the instructors. Litke explains that some of the misconceptions of witches can be traced back to Europe, to the time of witch trials. The misconception that witches worship Satan is one such myth of the period. The governments and Christian churches of Europe wanted to keep people fearful, so they created the idea that witches worship Satan, he explains. He adds that witches do not even believe in the existence of Satan, and that they follow one main rule: "Harm none, do what thou will."

Traditionally, the term "Paganism" was a pejorative term applied to anyone who did not follow the Christian or Jewish tradition, according to

Litke. Modern interest in paganism is called "neo-Paganism."

"Paganism today would be sort of a nature worship," Litke says.

Modern witchcraft is a form of neo-Paganism. Modern witches will often call themselves Wiccans, but not always, says Litke. Witches stress living in harmony with the world, and believe that the god and goddess symbolize the cycles the Earth experiences during a year.

"Their main belief is that world is alive," he explains energetically, adding that witchcraft is often—but not always—connected with feminism.

Litke explains that in witchcraft there's usually a god and a goddess, which symbolize the natural cycles (life, death, and rebirth) of the Earth. He mentions that witchcraft still continues to have appeal today because it's not authoritative, drawing instead on equality and balance.

Though modern witches do practice magic, Litke explains that the concept of "magic" is often portrayed inaccurately in the media.

"Magic is a natural form of working with the universe," he says.

Tonight, witches and pagans are celebrating their largest holiday of the year—Samhain. Litke explains that from the time the sun goes down tonight, to the time it rises tomorrow, the veil between the living and the dead will be lifted. Tonight is the time to remember and honour the deceased, and it's also a time of renewal, acting as the harvest festival.

Samhain was a celebration of the Celts to mark summer's end and the beginning of the cycle of the seasons. For Pagans, the evening of 31 October is the night before the new year begins. In the 9th century, the Christian church in England modified this holiday to fit its beliefs and practices. Thus, 1 November became All Saints Day, and the evening of 31 October was called All Hallow's Eve. We now refer to this as Halloween. Many of our current Halloween customs—like dressing up in costumes, trick-or-treating and carving pumpkins—have their roots in the traditions the Celts performed at Samhain, traditions that have remained for centuries.

Dee explains that she's going to honour the deceased at her home this evening.

"I usually leave a feast out for the dead. I have my grandmother's picture at home on my altar. I light a candle—I usually do candle magic around the time to honour the ancestors, I'll put out a feast on Halloween night for the dead, usually fruit and cookies," Dee says.

