

All About Wicca and Witchcraft

In This Chapter

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- ◆ Wiccan karma
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Have you noticed how many witches are featured on TV shows and in movies? It used to be that you heard about witches only in children's stories or fairy tales. But these days it seems like witches are everywhere. Why? Because witches are really intriguing and mysterious. Haven't you always been interested in witchcraft? Haven't you always been just a little bit envious of the witch's power and what witches know? Well, you're not alone. And that power and knowledge can belong to *you*, too.

But becoming a witch is not about power. It is about finding and developing your spirituality. It's about learning to connect with deity and with the

forces of Nature. Through Wicca, you will discover what you are capable of. You will also discover a nurturing deity and will come to know who you really are.

Welcome to Wicca and Witchcraft

Denise teaches a popular class on Wicca and witchcraft at her metaphysical shop in Baltimore, Maryland. After just the first class, many of Denise's students confided in



Book of Shadows

Today the term *Wicca* refers to a religion that many (but not all) witches practice. Wicca is an Earth-based religion that honors both the God and the Goddess. The word *witch* comes from the Old English words *wicce*, which means "female witch," and *wicca*, meaning "wizard." A witch is someone who uses magick in his or her everyday life.

her that they always felt something was missing from life, that a vital part of them seemed empty. But when they started learning about Wicca, students professed a sense of "coming home." And as you'll discover, that's only *natural*.

Wicca, the religion practiced by many witches, is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States. But what is Wicca? For now, let's just say that Wicca is an Earth-based religion founded on ancient beliefs. Wicca is a welcoming religion. Wiccans do not exclude anyone based on race, color, sex, age, national or cultural origin, or sexual preference. Not all Wiccans are *witches*, and not all witches are Wiccan, but a lot of them are.

Webweaving

Scholars believe that some witches in folktales were originally pre-Christian Goddesses. Baba Yaga, who appears in many Russian and Slavic stories, is an example of such a Goddess turned witch. She probably was Goddess of the forest and of death and renewal. Some people even think that she may have been the Great Goddess. In many tales, Baba Yaga is immortal and can change her physical form at will. In the real world, those talents sure would make her one super witch!

By the way, Wiccans don't use the word *warlock* to refer to male witches. Male witches are witches, too. A warlock is a person who has broken an oath, and because of that has been ostracized from the community. If you have violated an oath you can also be "warlocked," or ostracized and ignored.

There are many different traditions in the Wiccan religion. We're going to talk mostly about Wiccan witches, and in this book we will use the terms *Wiccan* and *witch* interchangeably. We'll explain more about Wicca, witches, and their history in the sections and chapters that follow. So read on, have a great time learning about Wicca and witchcraft, and welcome home!

Supernatural Abilities?

Everybody has the ability to channel energy. In a sense, everything you do happens because of this ability. You decide you want a snack. So you get up, go into the kitchen, pick up an apple, and take a bite. That's simple. You've used your physical energy to move your body. Everybody can use other more subtle kinds of energy, too. We all have an inherent power within us to (1) take control of our own lives and (2) make things happen. Because many of us have been taught by our religion, the education system, or our parents to always look to outside authorities, we have, to a large extent, repressed this ability. Using energy, or powers, to control your life and make things happen is just as much a part of the natural world as getting up from your chair.

There's nothing supernatural about a witch's abilities. Some people see these abilities as greater than ordinary and call them "supernatural," but the forces that witches use are available to all of us and are, thus, ordinary. Witches use natural energies to enhance their lives and to heal and protect themselves, their loved ones, and the Earth.



Banish!

Are you secretly hoping that a force over which you have no control will possess you? That it will make all your decisions for you and tell you how to live your life? No such luck! Witchcraft can help improve your life, but you still must make responsible choices. When you study witchcraft, you learn more about yourself, your needs, and your wants. That knowledge will help strengthen the inborn power you already have.

... Or Super Abilities in the Natural?

A witch's powers may be super or, well, powerful, but they are natural. We're not talking about powers like the ones Samantha Stevens from *Bewitched* had. What she did on that TV show often was unnatural! Just one twinkle of her nose cleaned her house in a flash. (Wouldn't that be nice?)

When you start to learn about your abilities, the natural energies you were born with, you'll start to understand what that force is—and that the energy is in all of us.

When you learn to focus on your natural energy, you'll learn to increase it, channel it, and send it out into the world. You probably won't be able to turn someone into a toad, but is that something you'd really want to do? Our natural energies make up



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You may think of the word *mundane* as meaning boring, humdrum, or everyday. Certainly the word is often used that way. In this context, “mundane” means worldly, earth-bound, ordinary, real-life, and nonmagickal.

our power, and we can use that power in the natural world to do natural things. Using your energy is not a substitute for mundane action, though. You still have to write up your resumé, mail it out, and go to interviews for that job you want. If you use your magickal energies, too, they may just help land you a great offer. Powers are a special blessing that we all have. Some witches believe that their powers come from the Goddess (we’ll discuss this a bit more later in the chapter). Wherever they come from, just know that you have them. If you open your heart and mind, you can use your powers. And the more you work with them the better, the more powerful, you become.

Embracing Our Energy

The abilities you have are natural and inborn, so there is no reason to be frightened of them. Some of us are more in tune with these innate energies and thus find them welcome tools to enhance our lives. Don’t worry. You won’t suddenly find that green sparks shoot out of your fingers every time you are annoyed. Your powers are *yours*. You control them. You’ll learn to respect your abilities and send them out to work for your own or someone else’s benefit. Don’t feel embarrassed by the fact that you have magickal abilities. Just because other people around you don’t use or understand their abilities, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use yours. That would be like ignoring the electric light on your desk and using a candle because your office mate doesn’t understand how electricity works! Have fun learning about your magical abilities as you read this book. Enjoy them. Soon you will come to rely on them.



So Mote It Be

Learning about your magickal abilities is a process of self-discovery. One useful tool in such a process is a journal. If you don’t already keep a journal, you might want to start one. As you learn more about Wicca and witchcraft, record your changing thoughts and feelings about yourself and the world around you. Some people like to write in their journals first thing in the morning so they can record their dreams before they forget them. Others write in the evening. Some carry their journals with them all the time so they can catch every impression. How you use your journal is up to you. Let it be fun! Include drawings or pictures from magazines, if you like.

What Do Witches Look Like?

For some of you, the first image that comes to mind when you hear the word *witch* is the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*, with her green skin and pointy, wart-encrusted nose. Or the ugly old witch from a book of fairy tales who wants to fatten up Hansel so she can eat him.

But witches, just like Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or Buddhists, come in many different packages. Denise likes to ask her students, “What do Christians look like?” Her students can rarely answer that question, but it does make them realize the global dimensions of our human diversity. And that diversity is true of witches, too. Witches are big and small, short and tall. Some witches are fat and some are thin. Some are brunets, some blond, some have purple hair, and some have no hair at all. The very young can be witches, and so can the very old. Witches are not ugly, old hags. They can be beautiful and sexy no matter what their age, just like any other person. (We think strong men and women are sexy, don’t you?) And actually, witches aren’t always women. As we’ve said, witches can be either male or female.

Webweaving

Why does the Wicked Witch of the West stick in our minds? Is it because she’s so ugly? Or because we all want to command a troop of flying monkeys? Maybe. But we think it’s because she represents an archetype, a universal symbol that speaks to us all. She is the shadow or “dark” side of each of us, and as such she scares many of us. Others of us are more comfortable with our own shadows and don’t find her that frightening. We all have a balance of shadow and light within us. The more comfortable we are with our own shadows, the less someone else’s “darkness” will bother us.

The superefficient person who sits next to you at work, your best friend, or that woman at the PTA—the one who’s a morph of June Cleaver and Katie Couric—could be a witch because, in short, witches look just like everyone else.

Are You a Good Witch or a Bad Witch?

When Glinda, *The Wizard of Oz*’s Good Witch of the North, asked Dorothy, “Are you a good witch or a bad witch?” most of us, like Dorothy, just couldn’t take our eyes off of her glowing white dress and jeweled red hair. Glinda and her nasty neighbor, the Wicked Witch of the West, represent the polar extremes of behavior, archetypes of good and bad. But Dorothy was the real witch. Dorothy, like most of us, must choose how she will behave—that is, what kind of witch she will be. The ruby slippers that represent her newfound powers may be a gift from Glinda, but the

Wicked Witch of the East had worn those same red shoes. Dorothy must *learn* how to use her powers for the benefit of herself and others. In our very real lives, we are all learning how to understand and use our potential in the best way. And just like Dorothy, eventually we all learn that the power has been within us all the time.

Webweaving

Billie Burke, the actress who played Glinda in the original *The Wizard of Oz* movie, sure had some good ideas. She is often quoted as having said, "Age is something that doesn't matter, unless you are a cheese." We couldn't agree more! Burke was already 52 when she signed on to play Glinda. She worked in more than 30 films after *Oz*, finally retiring from the screen in her 70s.

Many types of people are witches—the hot-tempered and the meek, the wild and the patient, the forgiving and the demanding, and the stubborn—just as many types of people are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or Jews. Each and every one of us has the inherent ability to be nasty. It's a human failing. Witches do have the ability to behave in a negative way. But so do people of other faiths. Through spiritual understanding, Wiccan witches learn to curb the inherent human tendencies to get back at people or do negative things.

Dorothy's magical ruby slippers.



Wiccan witches do not work with the negative or with evil. Wiccans believe they must act for the good of all, including themselves. They don't believe they should benefit from another person's suffering. Sure, sometimes it's hard to deal with negative feelings that come up. But we know we don't have the good without the bad, and so we learn to deal with negative energies, but not act on them. You may feel as if you want to rear-end the person in the SUV who cut you off as you were pulling up to the tollbooth, and that's okay. Feelings are just feelings. What's *really* important is your behavior, how you act. Actually hitting the guy in his big vehicle in a spectacular display of road rage would not be okay. And, however tempting the idea might seem, it also is never okay to try to turn him into road kill.

As witches, we know we have to take full responsibility for our actions. No one and nothing else is responsible for them. So the devil did not “make” you do it! Wiccan witches are responsible for their own actions and are willing to pay the penalty for them without placing blame on others. Witches who use negative energy are always well paid back in kind for their actions. (And using positive energy also is paid back in kind.) You can always accomplish the things you need to get done without using negativity. You can reframe the question as a positive, simply turning the situation around. Or maybe there is a lesson to be learned from your inability to complete your task.



Banish!

Do you want to torture your ex by making him or her fall in love with you again so you can perform an extravagant revenge dump? Don't do it! Avoid using witchcraft to get back at another person or to manipulate that person. To do so would be unethical, and there's that little thing—the law of three—that says whatever you do will come back to you threefold. Ouch!



So Mote It Be

If you want to meet witches, check out your local Wiccan or New Age bookstore. Many have classes and workshops, and some hold holiday gatherings that are open to the public—all good events at which to meet like-minded folk. Look in your local paper for Nature festivals or whole-life expos. If you live in a college town, find out if there's a Wiccan group on campus. Many schools have them and their membership might not be restricted to students. You might also check the Internet for Wiccan web pages, chat rooms, message boards, even online classes. Do be careful when you meet new people, though, especially online; use good common sense.

If you are stuck in a negative situation or if something bad happens to you, try to make the best of it. One way to do that is to ask yourself, “What am I supposed to learn from this?” Katherine recently hurt herself while in her yoga class. At first she complained. (Okay, she complained a lot.) But then she asked herself what she could learn from this literal pain in her butt. After some thought, she realized that her injury was telling her she needed to slow down and take better care of her body—a piece of advice we could all benefit from! What it all boils down to is the old question: Is the glass half-full or half-empty? Think of the glass as half-full. Count your blessings. And remember that anyone of any faith who uses other people for their own gain is acting out of negativity. Wiccan witches act for the good of all. So be a good witch. It's for your own good.

Ever Met a Witch?

You've probably met at least one witch in your life. Maybe more! There are a lot of witches out there. And the numbers keep increasing. Of all the many religions practiced in the United States, Wicca is among the fastest growing. Witches have all different kinds of jobs. Witches are schoolteachers, bus drivers, chefs, construction workers, computer programmers, actors, nurses, bankers, doctors, lawyers ... you name it. Witches are parents and even grandparents. Witches go bowling, play tennis, and attend baseball games.

When you first meet someone, do you ask that person what his or her religion is? You probably don't. In fact, in most cases, the subject rarely comes up. Remember Denise's question: What does a Christian look like? Usually you get few clues about a person's belief system from his or her outward appearance. So because witches look just like everyone else (just like Christians!), you probably have already met a witch without even realizing it. Witches not only look like everyone else, they are a lot *like* everyone else. Witches go shopping, drive cars, eat ice cream, pay taxes, and ultimately die, just like everyone else.

What Do Witches Believe?

In the 1970s, the Council of American Witches, an organization that no longer exists, drew up a list of basic principles. We'll paraphrase them here to give you an idea of what they sound like (for more on witches' principles, see Chapter 5):

Webweaving

You can recognize some witches by the jewelry they wear. A teenage witch in a Detroit suburb was told that she could not wear her pentacle necklace to school. The American Civil Liberties Union argued in court that the prohibition violated her First Amendment rights under the U.S. Constitution. The court decided the school was wrong, and the teen returned to school wearing the symbol of her Wiccan faith.

- ◆ We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces.
- ◆ We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment.
- ◆ We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than is apparent to the average person.
- ◆ We conceive of the creative power in the universe as both masculine and feminine. We value neither gender above the other.
- ◆ We recognize both outer worlds and inner, psychological worlds, and we see in the interaction of these two dimensions the basis for paranormal and magickal exercises.
- ◆ We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy.

- ◆ We see religion, *magick*, and wisdom-in-living as being united in the way one views the world and lives in it.
- ◆ Calling oneself a “witch” does not make a witch, but neither does heredity itself, or the collecting of titles, degrees, and initiations. A witch seeks to control the forces within him- or herself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with Nature.
- ◆ We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness, that gives meaning to the universe we know, and to our personal role within it.
- ◆ Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy of life, is that its institutions have claimed to be “the one true, right, and only way” and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practices and beliefs.
- ◆ We are not threatened by debates on the history of the craft. We are concerned with our present and our future.
- ◆ We do not accept the concept of absolute evil, nor do we worship any entity known as “Satan” or “the devil” as defined by Christian traditions.
- ◆ We work within Nature for that which contributes to our health and well-being.



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Is *magick* with a *k* different from *magic*? You bet. Both words come from the same root, meaning “to be able, to have power,” but magic is what an entertainer does on stage—card tricks, making quarters disappear, sawing a hapless volunteer in half. **Magick** is the realm of witches and may include spells, healing, the harnessing of psychic forces, and even divination.

Basically, Wiccan witches try to live in harmony with Nature and take responsibility for the environment. Wiccans believe that the Goddess is in everything and is not some force standing “out there” watching us. In the faith of Wicca, we believe in one deity—the All. We divide that into a male spirituality and a female spirituality, the God and Goddess, or Lord and Lady. Neither the male nor the female is stronger or better or more important. Wiccans also work with the demigods, different, smaller aspects of the All. The All is so big that most witches find it helpful to visualize it in a more personally comprehensible form. For example, a witch might keep on his or her altar a statuette of the Venus of Willendorf. This Goddess, with her big hips and enormous, full breasts, is the epitome of fertility and motherhood, but at the same time is part of the All. (There’s more about the Venus of Willendorf in the next chapter.)

You don't have to practice magick to be Wiccan, but most Wiccans do. Magick is part of the Wiccan worldview. Wiccans honor teachers and leaders, but do not recognize authoritarian hierarchies because no one is intrinsically better than anyone else is. You can become a witch through solitary study, study with a family member who is a witch, or by joining a *coven* where you will be taught. (We'll tell you more about covens in Chapter 3.) Witches are not anti-Christian, nor do they harbor negative feelings about other religions.

Venus of Willendorf.



Wiccans believe in the morals that are common to most faiths. But Wiccans do not believe in the Christian concept of original sin. Wiccans live in the now. While Wiccans do believe in reincarnation, life is to be lived for what it is in the present so

that we may learn from this lifetime on Earth. As Wiccans, we do not deny ourselves pleasure or put up with unnecessary pain. We are not waiting for some reward that we will get only after we are dead. We enjoy life's pleasures so that we can learn what it means to be on this Earth and to be part of life on Earth. Wiccans believe that we all have a job to do, or a lesson to learn, or maybe a debt to pay from the last lifetime. Once we have succeeded in our mission, we must move on to the Summerland, where we can reflect and choose our mission in the next life.



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A *coven* is a group of witches who practice their religion together. *Coven* probably comes from the Middle English word *covent*, which means "a gathering." The English words *convent* and *convene* come from the same root.

We believe that we are put on Earth to live in harmony with Nature, never to abuse it. While Wiccans don't believe there is a hell to punish sinners, Wiccans do believe there is a universal law, called karma, that puts our behavior on display so that we can learn from it. Think of it this way: When a small child first learns to walk, you let the child stumble and sometimes fall so that he or she can learn balance. That's what the Wiccan concept of karma does. Karma doesn't punish us; it operates like a feedback system and makes us think about our past actions.

Wiccans believe that people are basically good. A person's behavior might be unacceptable, but that person is not inherently bad. We are all made in the image of the Lord and Lady. Nobody is born evil. Some people may act that way or harbor those energies, but the evil or negativity is not inborn.

Three Times Bad and Three Times Good

Witches know that whatever energy or actions they send out, whether it be negative or positive, will come back to them threefold. If you punch someone in the eye, that does not necessarily mean that you will get punched in the eye three times, but you may fall down the stairs and break your ankle. And that fall will be three times worse than the punch you sent out. You may get temporary pleasure out of ratting on someone at work, but in the end, you could be the one who loses your job even though you had more seniority. That's how karma works. The negativity might not come back to you right away, but it will come back. Usually it gets you at the most inopportune time. And hopefully you will remember what you did to deserve the payback and not repeat the same mistake!

If you send out positive energies, you will get positive energies in return. In this way, your life will continuously expand and improve. Think about tossing a pebble into a pond. Every positive ripple you send out has the potential to affect many, many people. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, the Jimmy Stewart movie that often plays on television at Christmastime, Stewart's character, George Bailey, is about to kill himself out of despair and frustration. But before he jumps off that bridge, an angel helps George by reminding him of all his good deeds and kindnesses. George then sees all the positive ways in which he touched so many peoples' lives, and he decides not to jump. Instead, George decides to embrace life. All the good that he sent out came back to him at the

Webweaving

In 1986, a federal appeals court ruled that Wicca is a legal religion. That means that the practice of Wicca is protected by the U.S. Constitution. Ever since the ruling, more and more Wiccans have "come out of the broom closet." People estimate that there are between 250,000 and 1 million Wiccans in the United States alone.

moment of his despair—when he needed it most! That’s a great example of Wiccan karma.

And If It Harms None, Do What You Will

Because there are many different types and traditions of witches, witches believe a variety of things. If you ask 200 witches a question, you will probably get 400 different answers. But there is one core belief common to all Wiccan witches that none will deviate from. This central principle is called the Wiccan *Rede*, and it is expressed, in somewhat archaic language, like this: “An it harm none, do what ye will.” If you think about it, this statement covers many of the Christian Ten Commandments in one phrase.



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Rede is an archaic word that means “advice” or “counsel.” It can also refer to a narration or story. In this context, a *rede* is a good rule to live by!

Wiccan witches do think about the *Rede* and its implications. Just like Christians, Wiccans know it is wrong to kill, deliberately hurt, steal, or bear false witness. Because the *Rede* does not list all the things that you should avoid, you must take responsibility for living according to its rule.

“How can I cause the least harm?” This is a question that Wiccans ask themselves all the time (especially when doing magick). For some people, this may mean avoiding recreational drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes because these substances hurt the body and thus cause harm. Everyone agrees that inflicting pain on animals for fun is wrong; Wiccans believe strongly in the integrity and freedom of the animal kingdom. Some witches believe in vegetarianism. Wiccans who do eat meat give thanks to the animal that gave its life in order for others to eat. They don’t wear furs for vanity or take an animal’s life just to be able to hang a trophy on the wall. They try to cause the least harm to all living things in Nature.

In trying to cause the least harm, many Wiccans have become serious environmentalists. Wiccans recycle and pick up trash on the street. Some Wiccans compost their food scraps or put them out for animals to eat instead of adding them to large landfill projects. For others it means buying only organic produce—fruit and vegetables that have been raised in such a way as to cause the least harm to the Earth and its inhabitants.

We’ll discuss the Wiccan *Rede* in more detail in Chapter 5.

Witches Do Believe in God

Wiccans hold the complete pure energy of the All, of the God and Goddess, most high. When you get to know a witch, you will see that witches have a great reverence

for life. If, for example, a witch cuts a branch from a tree, the next action is to give something back to the tree—some compost or leaf mold to help nourish the tree in its continued growth. When a witch harvests a plant, he or she tries to do it in such a way that is the least harmful to the plant. A lot of the organizations that help animals are made up of Wiccans. Because Wicca is a Nature religion, Wiccans see the Goddess in everything. Wiccans not only see the Goddess in everything, but Wiccans honor the Goddess in everything by living in harmony with Nature.

Witches Don't Believe in Satan!

The idea that witches worship Satan is one of the most common misconceptions about witches. This mistaken idea probably developed hundreds of years ago because some Christian leaders encouraged their followers to view non-Christians as anti-Christian. If you weren't a believer in Christ, the embodiment of the good, you *must* be a believer in his evil opposite—Satan or the devil. The all-evil Satan is a Christian concept that plays no part in the Wiccan religion.

Witches do not believe that negativity or evil is an organized force. Most of the time, negative beings act simply out of self-interest to effect their own personal gain, and, therefore, they're more like independent contractors. Neither do Wiccans believe there is a place (hell) where the damned or the evil languish and suffer. And as we said earlier, witches do not try to gain power through the suffering or misfortune of others.

Are You Ready for Magick?

Everybody has the ability within him or her to do magick. Everybody does magick every day of their lives without even realizing it.

Have you ever ...

- ◆ Said a little chant to find a parking place and then, *voilà*, a space appeared right in front of the building you had to visit?
- ◆ Made soup for a sick friend or relative to help make that person feel better?
- ◆ Worn a lucky outfit for a job interview or a sports competition?
- ◆ Thrown salt over your shoulder or knocked on wood to prevent a bad thing from happening?

Every time you ask for that parking place and get it, every time you make your special chicken soup to help cure someone, you perform magick. When you make that soup,

you add your own special ingredients. (We know you've got your own trademarked recipe!) And you put your own loving energy into the soup's preparation, your hope that your friend or child or uncle will feel better. The sick person eats the soup and feels better. That is magick.

Your lucky outfit is magick, too. Maybe it just gives you confidence, you say. Well, perhaps the extra confidence is all it is, but maybe there is something magickal about that, too! Every time you engage in a "superstition," throwing salt over your shoulder or knocking on wood, you are invoking part of an old belief system that predates Christianity. You're using magick.

Performing magick makes you feel good. It's a healthy form of self-expression because the magick in witchcraft comes from the power that is already within you.

If you are ready to make your life better, to take control of yourself, to empower yourself, to explore who you are and who you want to be, if you are ready to look at the world in a new and different light, then you are ready for magick.

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ Wicca is a recognized and legitimate religion with hundreds of thousands of people, women *and* men, practicing Wicca in the United States today.
- ◆ Witches do believe in the pure energy of the All, the union of masculine and feminine energy. Witches *don't* believe in the Christian concept of Satan.
- ◆ Witches are everywhere. You probably already know at least one witch!
- ◆ Witches are not inherently good or bad, but, just like all other human beings on Earth, must choose how they will use their powers for the benefit of themselves and others.
- ◆ According to the Wiccan concept of karma, whatever you do, good or bad, comes back to you threefold.
- ◆ If you remember nothing else, remember this basic tenet of the Wiccan Rede—harm none, and do what ye will.