

On Pagan Solidarity

Full Comment

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1. Is Pagan community solidarity important? If so, why? If not, why?

Yes, I believe that it is. There are a great many Pagans worldwide who can easily stand alone and on their own if they so choose, however as human beings many of us have the need and desire to reach out to other people from time to time and be able to not just know, but experience the fact that there are other like-minded individuals out there like ourselves with whom we can share knowledge, ideas, and from whom we can learn. I for one am greatly relieved to know that due to our Pagan community solidarity, I have at least forty-plus people who I could name off the top of my head who are there to support me if I ever run into a problem I feel that I cannot handle on my own, whether it is spiritual or otherwise. They're like extended family to me, and it gives me a sense of security.

2. How do you see us building and maintaining solidarity with such a diverse, independent (almost indefinable) faith-based community?

Solidarity as defined in the dictionary has a few uses, but in this case I am looking at the definition of solidarity "Unity or agreement of feeling or action...mutual support within a group." The "group" would be the Pagan Community as a whole, and the "agreement of feeling or action" would be in the ability to come together once in a while to share our knowledge and experience with others, and to learn from the knowledge and experience of others as well. Most Pagans I know have an insatiable thirst for knowledge and wisdom, however we as individuals only get our own points of view and those of other authors we have read from. By coming together to learn a certain respect for other people's practices and beliefs, we are able to learn how to coexist with one another which enables us to learn from one another and be able to gain a fresh perspective on things we don't know as well as on things we already know. Having groups or non-profit organizations who organize events year-round for people of various walks of life to come to in order to congregate and learn from one another, is one such way to facilitate an awareness of solidarity. People will learn things and make wonderful friends at just such an event that could last a week or could last a lifetime. It is important to have options available to you. That is the purpose of organizations for solitaires. They open doors and bring people together, without anyone having to leave their solitary practice behind. You still have a solitary practice, but knowing that you have a group you can go to whenever you feel like getting out and making friends of like-mind, can be a wonderful and heartwarming experience. Groups like that are reminders that while you may have a solitary practice, you aren't completely alone. Other such ways to maintain solidarity is through community projects that are able to be passed on from place to place, almost like a scrapbook that has a little piece of everyone whose life it has touched. Things like this can help heal people and communities; I've watched it in action myself.

3. A concern was raised about the legitimacy of Pagan Solidarity. Is a *Solitary Solidarity* an oxymoron?

No, it is not an oxymoron, and anyone who says it is, in my opinion, is confusing "solitary" for "lone wolf." Being solitary doesn't mean you absolutely must always stand alone at all times. The defining point of being a solitary practitioner isn't to make yourself a hermit every time you practice. It is so that you can develop your own working spiritual system that is right for you, without having others interfere and tell you that it's not the right way to do things. Solidarity doesn't mean giving up your solitary practice. It just means you have support behind you, people who not only can, but want to stand beside you if and when you need them. People who are willing to share their spiritual power with you when you are feeling down or weak, people to talk to about your experiences, people to bounce ideas off of and commune with from time to time. The best part is, you do it on your own terms! You have no higher spiritual authority to answer to other than yourself and your respective Deity. Solitaries and group-workers alike come to events such as the Atlanta Pagan Marketplace of Ideas and Beltane Bash which are neutral places for Pagans of all paths and walks of life to come together to learn from one another in a celebration of not only their similarities, but also in their differences. We celebrate the things that define us as groups as well as individuals. So, yes, I do believe that Pagan Solidarity is legitimate as I have seen it in action myself, and nobody loses their solitary practice or identity in the process of taking part in solidarity. Anyone who says otherwise just hasn't found the right community yet.

4. Does Solidarity naturally mean institutionalization of our religion (in Judeo-Christian terms)?

Again, referring back to the definition of "solidarity" as being a unified agreement of a feeling or action or mutual support within a group, in this case I would like to clarify that solidarity does not mean conforming. Naturally, being a very opinionated race, we as human beings naturally believe things that are unique unto each individual person. You can find common or mutual ground on some things with just about anyone, even if 96% of what the two of you believe are complete opposites when juxtaposed with one another. That 4% is still able to bring people together on common grounds to learn from one another. Organizations are merely facilitators helping to make these connections possible. Solitary solidarity doesn't bring structure into their practice, they already have that on their own, a system that works just right for them. It just brings warmth, support, additional sources of knowledge and wisdom, and shared tales of experience. One of the most basic principles of Paganism is that we are all interconnected to everyone and everything around us. Solidarity helps us to solidify those connections and harness them to help one another grow.