

On Pagan Solidarity

Full Comment

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January 2013

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

Yes, I think we are well-served by fostering Pagan solidarity. In fact, I've spent more than 30 years trying to do just that.

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

Building trust person-to-person, which tends to spread to friends of those people who begin learning who each other is, how they think, what their concerns are, how they express their spirituality. Fear and mistrust are founded on ignorance. When one learns more about others, then one has real information upon which to base an opinion.

Further, conversing with others, sharing personal experiences, perhaps engaging in deeper philosophical and religious discussion, doesn't mean one is betraying one's own ways and beliefs. It simply means one is sharing them. And one is enriching one's own understanding of others by listening attentively to others, regardless of whether one resonates with what the other is saying. One often gains new understandings of one's own practices, or learns something new they'd like to incorporate into their lives, or gains a greater appreciation of one's own particular Pagan path than one would have had without having the opportunity to compare.

I think one of our greatest assets as Pagans is our diversity. Monocultures don't work well for long when it comes to growing the crops that feed us, and it doesn't work well in religion. Look at all the discord in the world, all the people needlessly killed, in the name of religion, often the same religion. The early Christian church was rife with that, still is. Same for Moslems, just to mention two huge demographics.

Further, such social interchange helps us clarify the vagueness you suggest when you say "almost indefinable."

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

No, I don't think it's an oxymoron. One may choose to practice one's spirituality solo, but everyone on this planet is part of the human community and as such is interdependent -- upon both other humans and other life forms and Earthly phenomena, such as weather. One need not belong to a formal religious group in order to identify with, and participate in, larger Pagan efforts any more than one needs to belong to a particular political party to vote

4. Does solidarity naturally mean institutionalization of our religion?

Institutionalization is a big issue for me, always has been. It's something I've resisted because of the bad and/or dysfunctional examples I've grown up knowing. In more recent years my attitude has softened. Years ago my friend Sam Webster insisted that we needed to establish institutions because institutions are the only thing that lasts. Individual humans pass on.

Since our conversation a long time ago, I've become involved in helping to create the first and only Pagan seminary in the world. Cherry Hill Seminary works to prepare Pagans of all kinds to assume roles in society that are customarily performed by clergy people. (I dislike the connotations of the word "clergy," so for that reason prefer the term "ministry," because we are ministering to/serving our communities.) CHS does not take a position on which kind of Paganism is better than another, or truer, or more authentic. CHS accepts students who are already Pagan, of whatever kind they are, and assumes they are that kind of Pagan because they chose to be and that they come with whatever training that particular Pagan group gives, and that now they wish to deepen their knowledge of our heritages or serve their home community more effectively. Pagans come to CHS for two reasons: personal enrichment and community service.

We at CHS work to prepare Pagans to participate ethically, knowledgeably, and skillfully in their own communities and in contemporary society at large.