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**Swimming Upstream**

**By Kathryn A. Graham**

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Swimming Upstream

"I am alone and I am searching  
Hungering for answers in my time  
I am balanced at the brink of wisdom  
I'm impatient to receive a sign  
I move forward with my senses open  
Imperfection it be my crime  
In humility I will listen  
We're all swimming to the other side . . ."

From "Swimming to the Other Side" by Pat Humphries, © 1992 Moving Forward Music

May be heard on the Faerie Goddess CD, Elaine Silver vocals  
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I have been a practicing witch for more than thirty years, and up until very recently, I had believed that I had a fair understanding of my religion.

I was wrong.

Most of the world's religions today are "faith-based," meaning that they require a belief in an intangible deity or principle from their adherents. In contrast, most Pagan religions tend to be experiential in nature. As a wonderful acquaintance of mine likes to say, "'Works for me' has a rather special meaning for witches." He's right.

My own particular Pagan faith (and there are many), which happens to be Wicca, relies very heavily on observation of the world we live in. Our deities are male and female because we observe that it takes male and female to create life in nature. Most of our practices center around the changing seasons, the

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waxing and waning moon, changes in our own consciousness - all things we can see and taste and feel around us.

That being said, it is truly amazing how easily we can ignore what we see and know.

Wicca was at one time an honest attempt to recreate the ancient religion of northern European tribes, a religion which was practiced for something on the order of 25,000 years. It isn't a perfect reconstruction, of course. Too much has been lost. But what we do know has astonishing similarities to other faiths all across the world.

My fellow witches will probably want to burn me at the stake for saying this, but we have strong similarities even to Christianity.

Like Christianity, Wiccans are splintered into many sects. All Wiccan sects acknowledge a Goddess and a God. All Wiccan sects revere the Goddess. The treatment of the God, however, can vary all the way from equality with the Goddess to little more than a cosmic sperm donor. The latter sort of sect often appeals to women who have been bruised by a society shaped by 5,000 years of brutal patriarchy and patriarchal religions that only permit female spirituality behind the walls of a convent. Feminine sexuality and motherhood are not permitted to those with a Christian spiritual calling.

"There were those who came to power  
Through domination  
They were bonded in their worship  
Of a dead man on a cross  
They sought control  
Of the common people  
By demanding allegiance  
To the Church of Rome

"And the Pope he commenced  
The Inquisition  
It was a war against the women  
Whose power he feared  
In this holocaust  
In this age of evil  
Nine million European women they died . . ."

From "The Burning Times" by Charlie Murphey  
© 1991 Bal Music, LTD  
May be heard on the Faerie Goddess CD, Elaine Silver vocals  
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Small wonder that many women can find no spiritual home in Christianity!

Wiccan practices are based on the "Wheel of the Year," with four major festivals on fixed dates, four

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lesser festivals at the solstices and equinoxes, and sometimes minor festivals centering around phases of the moon. During this spiritual year, the Goddess changes but does not die. Our God weds the Goddess at Litha (summer solstice, on or about June 21st), then casts Himself into the fire at Lughnasagh (August 1st) to ensure the fruitfulness of the land for his pregnant wife. He is crowned King of the Dead at Samhain (October 31st) and is born again into the world as the infant Sun God born to the Goddess at Yule (the winter solstice - on or about December 21st).

Sounds similar to Christianity, doesn't it? The concept of a God who sacrifices Himself for the world He loves and is born again? The concept is also common to Persian Mithras and to many other faiths. This is not coincidence. Nor is it coincidence that the rebirth of the God takes place at the winter solstice.

With time, intermarriage, and cultural exchanges - not to mention the constant and often bloody Christian efforts to convert and "save" the "heathen" (heathen means person of the heath, or country person) - the lines between a great many religions have become increasingly blurred. Trying to learn the truth can become a puzzle of sorts, searching for points in common. Of course, historical "TRUTH" in capital letters doesn't mean a great deal to Wiccans, which is one of the sources of Christian

discomfort with us.

For Wiccans, the only meaningful cosmic truth is one which works. Anything which makes us better human beings is "truth." The rest is meaningless. We don't have to believe. We aren't about faith. We seek out spiritual practices which help us to grow and develop, and we tend to experiment spiritually and ritually far more than our Christian brothers and sisters. Most Christian sects actually discourage such experimentation, and some even forbid it, which is another reason why we are shunned and feared.

Wiccans are secure in the knowledge that we have however long it takes for us to achieve spiritual enlightenment. We are not limited to one lifetime, which is why the word "salvation" has a tendency to make a Wiccan chuckle. We have no need of it, nor ever will, as we are not now and never were lost. Our view of time is quite different.

But as a result of the backlash against patriarchy, much of the best of our religion is often forgotten or ignored. I propose that this has been a mistake.

I initially found my way into Wicca as a teenaged rape survivor, and the sect I found my way into at the time was of the "cosmic sperm donor" variety. All of the emphasis was on the feminine. In all honesty, it was what I needed at the time, and it helped me to heal. It didn't take long, however, for me to realize that my rejection of the masculine was just as wrong and unfair as Christianity's rejection of the feminine.

So I "converted" to another sect, as it were, and I remain there to this day. It is a sect in which men and women celebrate side by side. and physical sex has been restored to the joyful activity it should always have been.

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"Balance" is a basic tenet of wisdom.

Nevertheless, I was fooling myself. All of these years, I feared masculinity, or ignored it, or detested it, or enjoyed it on a purely physical level - but I never honestly tried to understand it or to cherish it in myself. We are all of us part male and part female, and we need to understand both sides of our natures to achieve our fullest potential.

The popular image (if your name isn't Bob Barr) of a practicing witch is that of a tree hugger. We tend to be conservationists, even to the point of being more than a bit impractical about it, and we are almost invariably animal lovers. We are nurturers. We cherish all life. I'm up to my backside in spoiled animals myself, having four cats and a four-month old German Shepherd pup that have my heart firmly in thrall. I couldn't change that if I wanted to, and I certainly don't want to. That is the feminine aspect of my deity, and I am proud and delighted to be a woman right down to my toenails.

But that isn't all that I am. I am also *Homo sapiens*, proud descendant of thousands of generations of hunter-gatherer tribesmen.

We need to remind ourselves that Wicca was the religion of an extremely robust hunter-gatherer culture. Humans have been hunter-gathers for 99.9% of our history, and many of the world's ills today can be traced to our efforts to change that.

As an animal lover, I have always abhorred hunting, but much of that feeling comes from being a city

girl. The hunters I knew for most of my life, including one unlamented ex-husband, bought six or eight cases of beer every year, drove out to a deer lease where they got drunk out of their minds and shot up the woods, and a very, very few stayed sober enough to hit something besides each other and came home with a grisly trophy to hang on the wall. The vast majority didn't even know what venison tasted like, and would be honestly horrified at the idea of trying to cook it. City hunters, and their lack of respect for life, appalled me - and they still do.

Hunting horrified me so much as a teenager that I even tried earnestly to become a vegetarian, and damned nearly killed myself with malnutrition in the process. I held a sneaking suspicion that vegetarianism was the only truly decent way to live, and eating meat from the supermarket was a dirty little secret addiction.

I don't have that luxury anymore. Wicca is about observation, and my body dropped some pretty major observations on me - with the weight of a good-sized anvil - about four years ago. Chief among them was that if I kept eating agricultural products - namely sugars and starches - I was going to die. Cut and dried. Eating meat was no longer a matter of choice.

Wicca is about observation. My only choice to restore my health was to accept some pretty unpalatable observations, beginning with the fact that I am a carnivore. And so are you, if you are *Homo sapiens*. You cannot escape it, and you have not evolved beyond it. The very worst thing that ever happened to your health was the development of agriculture. Unless you were actually engaged in the back-breaking labors of planting and/or harvest, you became sedentary, because crops tie you to one

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place. And if you are honest enough to hold your diet to your beliefs, you almost certainly eat foods that range from the merely very bad for you to the outright poisonous. And no, I am not joking. Most legumes are quite dangerous if not handled properly, yet they are touted by medical science as being the most "healthy" source of protein!

In addition, higher brain development requires the longer chain proteins available only from a meat diet. ADHD was almost unknown to our hunter-gatherer ancestors.

You say you do eat meat? Really? Abhorring hunting while going to the store to buy your steaks is just about the ultimate in self-deception.

I no longer have the luxury of self-deception.

I couldn't resolve this conflict for myself and achieve any personal comfort level at all until I moved to the country and met a different kind of hunter - the hunter who hunts for meat, and prunes the cherished herd with care. A real hunter kills quickly and cleanly. He enjoys testing his abilities in the woods and pitting his intelligence against that of his prey, but he takes no pleasure in cruelty. Naturally, he enjoys the fruits of the hunt, often feeding his family for weeks or months on the meat. If he takes a trophy, it is secondary in importance to the meat unless the prey was at least as dangerous as man.

Such a hunter often has more respect for the life he harvests than many who claim to have never harmed a housefly or a spider, and I count several such as my close and respected friends today.

Still doubtful? Are you Wiccan? Have you ever listened - really listened - to the drums? Can you honestly tell me that your heart does not pound, that you cannot feel the rush of blood in your veins echoing the running of the King Stag with the Horned Hunter close on his heels?

If you are a man, do you know the wild joy of testing yourself against the most difficult thing you can imagine - and winning?

If you are a woman, have you never tasted the tenderness and violence of a man who wore his antlers with pride?

Have any of you, man or woman, held that big, heavy rifle in your hands and taken astonished pride in actually hitting that little bitty target that seemed so many miles away?

When the God stretches out His hand to you, do you join in the dance?

The God has as much place in our lives as the Goddess. The wild woods, the rampant sexuality, the playfulness and the courage are all woven into His dance. We dance with Him when we fly, when we skydive or scuba dive, when we race cars and boats - and yes, when we hunt. If we leave the dance behind, we also leave behind that which makes us human. To do it, we must give up courage, and we must give up joy. If we do that, we might as well be dead.

Wicca is about attuning oneself to the rhythms of nature. Wicca is about reaching way down deep in

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our genetic heritage and finding the courage to become what we truly are, what our loving Creators always meant for us to be. Wicca is about tasting the full measure of what life has to offer. There can be no compromise here. Anything less is swimming upstream against Nature, back-breaking, heartbreaking and ultimately doomed to failure.

My decision to taste the hunt was not an easy one, but it is made. I am eagerly waiting for the first freeze this year. Two of my most trusted friends have promised to take me on a wild pig hunt (I hate venison, and I love pork). I know I am a good shot, but I have never killed anything more sentient than a paper target. I honestly don't know if I will have the strength or courage to pull that trigger, which is why I am grateful for their backup - as I do know that wild pig is very, very dangerous. But if I can work up my courage enough to do it, that pork will taste better than any other meat I have ever eaten. I will have earned it with my own skill and my own courage.

My mouth is already watering, just thinking about it.

What are you having for dinner tonight?

"When we get there we'll discover  
All of the gifts we've been given to share  
Have been with us since life's beginning  
And we never noticed they were there  
We can balance at the brink of wisdom  
Never recognizing that we've arrived  
Loving spirits will live together  
We're all swimming to the other side . . ."

From "Swimming to the Other Side" by Pat Humphries  
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May be heard on the Faerie Goddess CD, Elaine Silver vocals  
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At a tiny 5'1", Kathryn A. Graham is a licensed private investigator, pilot, aircraft mechanic and handgun instructor in Texas. Also a prolific author, she has written numerous articles, short stories and a science fiction novel. <http://www.kathryngraham.com/>

### **Going With The Flow (Instead Of Swimming Upstream)**

**By Sibyl McLendon**

#### **Going With The Flow (Instead Of Swimming Upstream) by Sibyl McLendon**

One of the biggest lessons that I have learned in this life is how futile it is to fight inevitability. Life is change; if we stop changing, we stop growing. Life is never going to go exactly the way that you want it to. Something is always waiting to pop up and bite you. The more that you attempt to make life go your

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way the more that it won't. Your life will be so much more peaceful and smooth if you just learn to stop swimming upstream.

Now, I am not saying that you should just stop making decisions and go whatever way the wind blows. We all have to make decisions every day. We need to make certain decisions, that is just using our personal power to its fullest. But when you come up against an obstacle that you have no control over and that you really don't like, what do you do? Maybe it is a change at your job, a change in someone close to you, or even a change in your health. If this is a major change, and you have no control over it, then the more that you fight, the worse it will be. The only thing that you will get from batting your head against a stone wall is a headache. The chance of you breaking down the wall is nil.

Constant resistance to a change that you cannot control has negative effects on your health, your emotions and the people around you. When presented with a major change that one is resistant to, people tend to obsess about it, quickly becoming a pain to be around. Constant worrying and stressing over a change that you cannot control leads to all sorts of physical problems. And not one of these reactions is going to change the core problem.

It is so much better if you can recognize what is changeable and what is not. If something has manifested in your life that you cannot change, then you must change instead. Being flexible is a true virtue. You must learn to go with the flow, so to speak, instead of always trying to swim upstream, against the current. Ask yourself if this is a change that you can learn to live with. How much does it really impact your life? If it has to do with a job, then maybe you will have to adapt or find another one. If it is a major illness, then flexibility may save your life.

Again, I am not telling you that if you have contracted a major illness, to just lie down and die. But if you have gotten something such as diabetes, MS, or something similar which requires a life-style change, then going with the flow or swimming against it can determine if you survive or not. Chances are, you made this life script for yourself before you decided to come here. You were giving yourself the opportunity to transmute Karma in a big way. Don't blow it by being inflexible and angry; learn your limitations and do the very best that you can every day.

Say that a loved one has adopted an attitude that is causing you pain. After telling them in the best way that you can that they are hurting you, they choose not to change. You can't change them. We can never, ever, change another person. We can only change ourselves. Rather than experiencing constant pain, wouldn't it be better to let it go? Your pain is caused by your wish that things would be different. If they aren't going to be, then adapt.

Your life is going to be just as easy, or just as difficult as you decide it is going to be. Learn to relax,

learn to accept, learn to flow. You will be surprised at the inner peace that acceptance can bring.

The Serenity Prayer:

GOD, grant me the serenity

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to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living ONE DAY AT A TIME;

Enjoying one moment at a time;

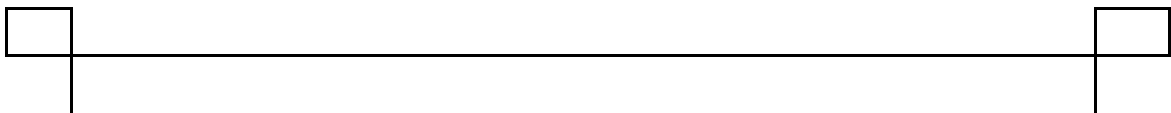
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.

As my son once told me, the most profound line in this prayer is "the wisdom to know the difference".  
Learn that, and you have learned the secret to true peace and happiness.

Sibyl McLendon is 1/2 Navajo. She is the owner of Spirit Web Design <http://www.spirit-webdesign.net>.  
She has been designing sites for 3 years. Visit Spirit Web Design for useful information on website marketing.



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