

## What is a Book of Shadows?

A Book of Shadows is one of a Wiccan's holy books, one s/he writes individually. It's a record of a Wiccan's religious rituals, including not only Orders of Circle for Sabbats and Esbats, but descriptions of magic worked, often along with poems, songs, dreams, questions, musings, notes about books read, and even drawings.

There's no prescribed way to organize a personal Book of Shadows. While a lot of Wiccans use hard-bound sketch books available at art supply stores, a BOS (pronounced bee-oh-ess) can be in any notebook, bound or loose-leaf. It can even be a collection of loose papers in a file folder. A BOS can be plain or intricately decorated; some pages may be one way and some another. Whatever form it takes, it's still a Wiccan's holy book, and should be treated as such.

Most people have more than one BOS, and there are two main reasons for this. One is that some of us have a "formal" BOS, into which we carefully copy orders of service and descriptions of our rituals, after first taking notes on loose papers or in a "working notebook." The other is that it doesn't take long to fill a Book of Shadows, and we don't throw away the finished volume(s) when we start a new one.

A Book of Shadows' main purpose is to set out our orders of service and our liturgies – the words we use to conduct our ceremonies. But a BOS is also a record of our studies and of our explorations of our souls. When we look at our old Books, we can see how far we've come in our study and practice; we can see how many questions we've answered for ourselves, and how many new questions we've asked. Our Books help us develop self-discipline as we learn to record rituals and dreams and resolutions, and help us feel a sense of continuity in our worship.

Books of Shadows are sacred to Wiccans, and except for a few order-of-service pages we might share with co-worshippers, they're private, and should be treated with respect.

## Does Private Mean Secret? Does Secret Mean Evil?

"Private" is something you choose not to share with others, at least not with just anybody. Books of Shadows are private because people who do not have a background in Wicca, who are not familiar with its theology and practice, would not understand what they see in a BOS. We don't show our Books to non-Wiccans

for the same reason that trigonometry teachers don't want students who haven't mastered algebra.

There is nothing evil about Wicca. Wicca's rituals attune us with seasonal energies and remind us of our interconnection with life, the universe, and everything. Our rites are an expression of our worldview; in practicing our faith, we are not disrespecting other religions. Not talking about our rituals or magic is no more sinister than not saying what our wish is when we blow out our birthday candles.

## A Word About Wiccan Bibles

There are published books that call themselves Wiccan Bibles. However, there is no one book accepted as a "bible" by all Wiccans. Calling it a "bible" is usually the publisher's decision, made to convey the idea that the book contains services and spells, everything a Wiccan might need to practice. These books are usually written from very narrow perspectives, and none of them set forth an "only correct way" to practice Wicca.

(Mother Earth Ministries' priestesses have written a book that sets forth the very basic principles of Wicca, acknowledging that there are many "right ways" to practice, and offering suggestions for a general practice that does not violate prison regulations or threaten security. Although it's titled *Enchantment Encumbered: The Study and Practice of Wicca in Restricted Environments*, it is a Book of Shadows – and what some might call a Wiccan bible.)

Whether or not you have a published BOS, though, you should, if it's at all possible, keep your own.

## Starting a Book of Shadows

The first rule is ... write as carefully and legibly as you can. This not only makes it easier for you to read (especially in dim light), but it shows respect to your faith and the Goddess and God.

You may want to prepare a special first page – decorated or not – for your BOS. It might say something like this:

*written from (date you begin this volume)  
by (your name)*

*This is my Book of Shadows,  
a holy book of sacred rites and scriptures  
recording my worship of the Goddess and God  
and the ways they inspire me.*

If you can divide your book into sections, it

will probably be useful to put general orders of Sabbats and Esbat services in one section, and follow that with a section of records of the rituals you perform.

Another section can contain notes from books you've read and records of conversations you have with other Wiccans.

Be sure to include a section with notes about your dreams. You may want to keep poems and sketches in a separate section of their own, or include them with dreams.

If you keep orders of Sabbats and Esbats in their own section of your BOS, you can show those to other people because they will not contain any personal information. (The order of service for Sabbats and Esbats will be mostly identical; only a note about how, specifically, to celebrate each Sabbat or phase of the Moon will vary.)

If you do not want to share the words with which you cast, cleanse, and charge the Circle, call the Quarters, and invoke the Gods, put them at the back of the order of service section, or in your records section.

## Record Pages

Many people just make the equivalent of diary entries about their rituals, but some prefer to use a more regular format. Here's one possibility:

_____	date & time
_____	location
_____	Sabbat or Phase of Moon
_____	Who is in the Circle [use Craft names when possible]
_____	
_____	
_____	....
_____	cast the Circle
_____	cleansed the Circle
_____	charged the Circle
_____	called East
_____	called South
_____	called West
_____	called North
_____	invoked the Goddess
_____	invoked the God [usually not on a Moon ritual]
_____	for "Cakes"
_____	for "Ale"
_____	for "oil"
_____	for "incense"
_____	To celebrate this Sabbat we
_____	
_____	
_____	OR
_____	At this Esbat we
_____	
_____	
_____	[describe any magics worked or lessons/discussions]

If different people bid the Gods farewell, or release the Quarters, add their names to the list, too. If new liturgical words were used, new chants or songs learned, or new stories told, jot them down too. Make note of who wrote those words, or at least who brought them to Circle or class: it's important to give credit where it's due.

### **Making Mistakes**

We all misspell a word sometime, or write on the wrong line; we all make mistakes. Of course we're careful, but .... An error or two won't spoil your whole BOS. The easiest way to deal with a mistake is just to cross it out neatly and carry on.

But – even if its pages are pretty formal, your BOS is a diary of your relationship with the Goddess and God, and with the Elements, so you want to honor them with every entry. If your writing is hard to read, work on your penmanship. If your spelling is poor, invest in a dictionary so you can improve your spelling. Remember that the effort you put into that sort of thing is an offering to the Gods.

### **Consecrating Your Book of Shadows**

Your BOS is one of your tools, so plan to consecrate it the first time you take it into your Circle. Here's one way to do it:

Take your Book to the East. Fan the pages and say, **By the power of Air, I vow that in this Book I will record only the truth as I know it, and never any malice. So mote it be.**

Take it to the South. Hold it to your heart and say, **By the power of Fire, I vow that that this book will be a record of my determination and courage. So mote it be.**

Take it to the West. Sprinkle a bit of water on the cover and say, **By the power of Water, I vow that I will record my inspirations in this Book, in hope and love. So mote it be.**

Take it to the North. Sprinkle a bit of salt or earth on the cover, and say, **By the power of Earth, I vow that this Book will be a record of my trust and growth in Wicca. So mote it be.**

Lay the Book on the altar and say, **By Spirit, in the names of the Lady and the Lord, I consecrate this Book of Shadows, to do my will in their service. So mote it be.**

Though the Book can lend its consecration to added pages, you can, if you like, consecrate every new page this way: **By Earth and Water, Fire and Air, I bless this Book of Shadows page in the names of the Lady and the Lord. So mote it be.**

### **About Mother Earth Ministries-ATC**

Supported by volunteers, Mother Earth Ministries' mission is to provide accurate information about Wicca (and some other Neo-Pagan and Heathen religions) to interested inmates and prison staff, and to facilitate as much as possible Pagan prisoners' study and practice of Wicca and other Neo-Pagan/Heathen religions.

Lady Carol Garr is a Third Degree Wiccan priestess, seven years the Coordinator of TAWN (the Tucson Area Wiccan-Pagan Network). A witch for nearly three decades, she is authorized as a religious volunteer by the State of Arizona's Department of Corrections. She's the founder and the driving force behind MEM.

Other members of MEM's Board are practicing Pagans with years of experience serving the local Neo-Pagan community.

Lady Ashleen O'Gaea is MEM's writing priestess. Also a Third Degree Wiccan, she has been corresponding with inmates since the late 1970s, and she is a founding member of TAWN. She is the author of most of MEM's brochures and flyers, and of several books, including *The Family Wicca Book*, *Raising Witches*, the two volume set *Celebrating the Seasons of Life*, and several novels.

Together, Lady Garr and Lady O'Gaea wrote *Enchantment Encumbered: The Study and Practice of Wicca in Restricted Environments*, recognized as helpful by the Administrator of Pastoral/Volunteer Services for the Arizona Department of Corrections; Ladies Garr and O'Gaea are recognized as experts by several states' Departments of Corrections.

For more information about Wicca, please contact Mother Earth Ministries:

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from  
**Mother Earth Ministries-ATC,**  
a little bit about

## WICCA'S



What is a Book of Shadows, anyway? What's in it? If you're Wiccan, how do you make one? If you're not Wiccan, should you be worried about a "BOS"?

Written by an experienced and ordained Wiccan priestess, this brochure answers those questions – for Wiccans and non-Wiccans alike.



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to visit our website instantly.

