

What Do You Mean, You Don't Believe in the Devil?

Wiccans don't believe in the devil – because the devil is a Christian figure, and Wiccans aren't Christian. And it's far from being the devil-worship some people call it. Wicca – the best known of a number of Neo-Pagan religions, and which itself includes a number of Traditions (denominations) – is a life-affirming nature religion.

Our Horned God is the game that dies so the hunter's tribe can live. This self-sacrificing aspect of deity was recognized long before Christianity; many ancient kings and religious figures (including Moses!) wore horns to signify their royalty and authority. Moses lived and began to enforce monotheism about 1,500 b.c.e. Before that, we were all Pagans, worshiping the Great Mother's fertility and the dying-and-reborn God's annual sacrifice in grain and game.

The Mother's life-giving fertility and eternal nature are reflected in the cycles of the constellations and the Moon. The more active *métier* in which human life unfolds is symbolized by the Horned God. He wears the horns and antlers of the game, yes – and He also has a vegetation aspect, in recognition of the annual harvests and rebirth through Spring planting. The Sun, dying every evening and rising again every morning, fading through the Autumn months to be reborn at the Winter's Solstice, is another of His symbols.

Just as we don't have to think that yellow flowers are “ugly” if we think red ones are pretty, we don't have to think that other religions are “evil” when we find one that works for us. Wiccans recognize that all the world's religions express important perspectives on our relationship to deity. Well, one aspect of the Goddess is Flora – all the flowers. And we think it's okay for other people to have different favorite flowers; life really is a mixed bouquet.

There was – and is – nothing evil about the reverence ancient Pagans showed, and modern Wiccans still show for the natural cycles of growth, death and rebirth. There's nothing wrong in the healing power they drew and we still draw from love and experience. But in the first and second centuries of this common era, when the Church began to conquer Europe by force, native gods were demonized. Not until then did the Biblical devil have horns!

In the Judaic Old Testament, “the satan” was a sort of prosecutor who challenged the dead, demanding proof of a soul's worthiness to enter heaven. Because the Pagan gods (Pan in Greece, for instance, or Herne in Britain) had horns and hooves, and because they had to be vilified as native religions were suppressed, the Christian devil came to have these features. That's when the devil came to represent an opposition to the Christian god – just as Pagans opposed being conquered.

What do we mean when we say we don't believe in the devil? We mean that the devil is a Christian concept, and we're not Christian.

Our religion is based on the idea that life's polarity, expressed in the planet's cycles of night and day, in animals' male and female genders, and in a thousand other ways, is complementary. Our Goddess is all that is eternal and generative. Our God is all that dies and is reborn. Their dance is the natural cycle of life, the universe and everything, the Spiral Dance.

There's no place in our cosmology for a devil. We recognize that ignorance, and fear, and unbalanced brain chemistry can and do lead us to make bad decisions or do “evil” things – but we don't believe in a devil.

And *that's* what we mean when we say we don't believe in the devil.



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