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## Introduction

Witches call to us from thresholds, crossroads, sea-shores, swamps, and mountain tops. Fairy-tale witches beckon from within wild forests. Urban witches mingle in stores stocked with candles, crystals, statues, and mysterious books. Witches fly through the air and dig twisted roots from the ground.

Beautiful witches dance beneath the stars. Robed magicians chant in arcane tongues. Alluring witches ensorcell with the power of potions. Cadaverous hags stir steaming cauldrons. Flower- and pentacle-bedecked witches celebrate the seasons. Hideous witches lurk in horror films, working their wiles and *definitely* up to no good.

Witches peep out of greeting cards. They appear in advertising for hosiery, alcoholic beverages, and



sandwich meat. They commandeer the pages of comic books, appearing in the guise of both villain and heroine. Witches consistently steal the show in movies and television, whether live-action or animated.

The obviously witchy dress in black and wear peaked hats. Other witches remain resolutely discreet, appearing totally ordinary and nondescript: nothing about their appearance reveals that they are witches. Witches gather herbs, draw down the moon, roll in morning dew, commune with animal familiars, perform magical feats and miracles of healing, live harmoniously with nature, and impose their will upon others. Witches hex, bless, curse, and remove curses cast by others.

So, what exactly is a witch? How can you recognize one? Is it possible that you *are* one?

A field guide is a book intended to help readers identify living beings or objects of natural occurrence (sea shells, for example). This may be a straightforward task when it comes to identifying butterflies or wild flowers, but witches are another story. Witches defy simple classification.

Since the earliest days of humanity, witches have been admired, adored, loved, feared, trusted, mistrusted, loathed, persecuted, killed, lusted after, and worshipped. Every culture around the world acknowledges the existence of witches, or at the very least recognizes some kind of witch. Witches inspire, in one form or another, every creative art: theater, music,



paintings, dance, cinema, television, literature, and so forth. Witches appear in the most ancient myths and folklore. As brand new forms of entertainment, such as video games, emerge, witches continue to make their presence felt.

As time marches on, witches are more prevalent, not less. Even so, attempts to define exactly who—or what—witches are consistently leads to confusion and impassioned argument. Although very many are convinced that they know the true definition of “witch,” their many definitions contradict each others’. Part of the problem is that one little word—“witch”—has evolved into an umbrella term encompassing many different concepts.

A “witch” is commonly defined as someone who practices magical arts, a spell-caster, or occultist. Many understand “witch” to be a synonym for “magic user.” Other synonyms include *enchantress*, *sorcerer* and *sorceress*, *wizard*, *magician*, *mage*, *magus*, and its feminine counterpart, *maga*. A host of comparable words exist in multitudes of languages.

The magical arts are a broad field, not restricted to the casting of spells. Historically, at one time or another, alchemists, astrologers, mediums, seers, and fortune-tellers have all been classified as witches, although some would object to this classification. Some people do not differentiate between shamans and witches; others do. Over the centuries, the term “witch” has also encompassed midwives, herbalists, and other



traditional healers. Healing and midwifery were once perceived as magical professions even though they may not be perceived that way today.

Some consider devotees of the Wiccan religion to be witches, regardless of whether or not a particular individual casts spells. Some perceive witches as those who live harmoniously with Earth's natural rhythms and resent the automatic association of witches with the occult.



Yet according to still others, magic isn't what witches *do*; it's what they *are*. Some define witches as members of a special magical race living amongst humans. Witches may look like people, but that resemblance is only superficial. Witches have superpowers that are innate or inherited. These witches are commonly found in popular culture; the TV shows *Bewitched* and *Charmed* and the *Harry Potter* series spring to mind.



Although some people consider this type of witch sheer fantasy, others sincerely believe that they exist.

East Asian lore takes this concept one step further: just as some people possess superpowers, so do some animals. Certain animal species, especially cats, foxes, and snakes, may also produce witches. The truly powerful are shape-shifters who can convincingly assume human form.

These animal witches tend to be female, which underscores another common perception about witches. Many consider witches and women to be intrinsically linked, although whether positively or negatively so is in the eye of the beholder.

Some perceive any sexy woman to be a “witch”; she’s literally *bewitching*. This might be meant as a compliment, but it could also be construed as a warning. At times when women’s beauty was perceived as dangerous—and in some places today—alluring women have sometimes been accused of being witches. The roots of the practice of veiling women may lie in attempts to protect vulnerable men from witches’ wicked wiles.

To some, the word “witch” is a compliment, a badge of honor. Witches are emblematic of a certain kind of innate female power. A “witchy woman” is a creative, confident, resilient, indefatigable woman, walking her own path, comfortable in her own skin, in control of her own sexuality, beholden to no one.

Yet to others, “witch” is a potent insult. The word is frequently used to describe a defiant woman, one who



doesn't know "her place," as well as any mean-spirited, nasty woman, regardless of magical skill or power. Many perceive "witch" as but a rhyming synonym for "bitch." In the 1939 MGM movie musical *The Wizard of Oz*, actress Margaret Hamilton portrays two characters: the green-skinned, black-hatted, magical practitioner called the Wicked Witch of the West, and the despised spinster neighbor, Miss Gulch. Both characters are referred to as witches.

Although historically many have been falsely accused of being witches, in fact, witches *do* exist: many different kinds of witches. Yes, of course, there are folk-tale witches and fairy-tale witches, literary witches and Hollywood witches. But most especially, there are countless living, breathing witches who bear that title with pride.

That doesn't mean that witches are easily pigeon-holed. Witches come in all shapes, sizes, ages, colors, ethnicities, and genders. Witches live in every community and around the world. Some follow ancient paths; others forge and pioneer brand new ways.

There are Luddite witches and techno-witches, witches who have emerged from the secrecy of the broom closet and witches who fiercely guard their privacy. Witches belong to every political party and subscribe to many political creeds, from the most liberal to the archconservative. Historically, there have been fascist witches, anarchist witches, and monarchist witches.



Witches observe many religions and walk many spiritual paths. Although many modern witches are Wiccans, others have no religious affiliation, considering themselves atheists or agnostics. Still others identify themselves as Pagans, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and virtually any other religion that can be named. Although many find the concept of Christian witches contradictory, others do not.

Witches cannot be identified solely by appearance. A witch costume (black dress, peaked hat and often a broom) has been among the most popular Halloween costumes for generations, yet many who don the garb of the witch on that holiday would laugh if it were suggested that they were witches.

What then, do witches have in common? Is there a common denominator that unites these diverse people? Is there something that is intrinsic to being a witch?

In fact, there is. Witches of all kinds certainly do share something in common. The clue to what they share is hidden in the word “witch” itself. Rather than by apparel or appearance, a witch’s identity is defined by something within.

The English word *witch* derives from an Anglo-Saxon root word, *wicce* (feminine form) or *wicca* (masculine form), meaning “wise one.” (The word *Wicca* derives from the same source.) Witchcraft is the craft of the wise. Witches are the wise ones; the ones who *know*. Witches are knowledge seekers.



*To know* is not the same as being smart or educated. What witches possess or strive to attain is deep spiritual knowledge, the wisdom of Earth, sea, and stars. Witches are privy to Earth's secrets. They possess knowledge of traditional lore whose roots first emerged in the depths of time.

Words in many languages acknowledge this concept of the witch as someone who possesses deep knowledge. For example, *ved'ma*, a Russian word for "witch," translates as "one who knows." The Congolese word *nganga* is translated as "witch," although a more accurate translation might be "medium"; someone who serves as a bridge to the spirit world. This word derives from a Kikongo language root word meaning "knowledge" or "skill" but with the specific implication of spiritual and magical knowledge.

Basic, universal magical theory suggests that everything that exists exerts and radiates some type of magic power. Different species, individuals, things, colors, fragrances, and objects all radiate their own unique powers. (No, this has not been scientifically proven, but bear in mind that until the very end of the 19th century the existence of radioactivity was unproven and was, in fact, pooh-poohed by very many distinguished and educated scientists. Absence of proof is not proof of absence.) Although these powers may not be visible, physically tangible, or measurable by current scientific means, still they exist and may be manipulated for good



or ill by those who know how. Witches are the ones who know how or who have the potential, capacity, or desire to learn.

Of course, this knowledge also explains the mistrust that so many bear toward witches. People are often uncomfortable with those who know more than they do, especially if that knowledge is powerful and difficult to access. Witches are repositories and guardians of occult knowledge. The word *occult* means “secret” or “hidden.” Occult knowledge is buried treasure, humanity’s secret heritage. For millennia, during certain historical periods and in many locales, those in positions of authority have attempted to control access to knowledge. Attempts were made to destroy or censor information, especially that of a spiritual or magical nature that was deemed inconvenient or that contradicted official teachings. These attempts were often successful: very little documented evidence now survives regarding the spiritual traditions of pre-Christian Europe or pre-Islamic Arabia, for instance.

One quality witches often share is a tendency to resent and resist any attempt to limit access to knowledge. Witches are the ones determined to know, regardless of rules or regulations. Despite centuries of terrible persecution, witches have preserved and transmitted sacred information, often orally to one another and often at great personal risk.

Another characteristic many witches share is comfort with the liminal. The word *liminal* derives from



the Latin *limen*, or threshold. Liminal indicates the in-between: states that are simultaneously neither and both. Liminal space simultaneously divides and bridges two realities. Thus the shore divides land from sea and simultaneously connects them. The two liminal times of day, twilight and dawn, are neither night nor day and yet merge the energies of both. The standard opening line of central European fairy tales—the equivalent of “Once upon a time”—is “Once there was and once there wasn’t . . .,” indicating that the story about to be told exists in a liminal region. When you are kind of awake yet still partially asleep, you are in a liminal state. If you stand with one foot in water and one on dry land, you are standing in the liminal.



Witches thrive in the liminal zone. An old northern European nickname for witches is “hedge riders.” Once upon a time, massive hedgerows divided villages from forests. Witches were believed to perch on these hedgerows, thus living simultaneously in the civilized world *and* in wild nature.

An American folk name for “witch” is “two-headed,” as in a two-headed woman, a two-headed man, or a two-headed doctor (as in witch doctor or Voodoo doctor). The witch possesses two metaphorical heads because he or she lives in two worlds simultaneously: The mundane world *and* the magical world; The world of people *and* the world of spirits

Witches possess the skill, knowledge, and instincts to safely navigate these worlds. They serve as bridges and mediums. An individual witch may or may not possess this knowledge, but she or he possesses the power to access and assimilate it if needed or desired. Witches know the secrets of plants, animals, rocks, and other people. They understand the power projected by colors, numbers, and words. Witches can banish ghosts and welcome kind spirits. They can see the future in cards and see your past reflected in the palm of your hand.

The world of witches is filled with passion, magic, high spirits, and joy. It is a world where the sacred is ever-present, a world in which even the most mundane objects possess deep spiritual significance. The world of witches is a world of wonder in which every color,



incident, creature, sight, or sound has some sort of magical import. A succinct definition comes from author Aline DeWinter, who writes, “A Witch is a person who sees everything as alive and powerful. We walk in a sacred manner and all of nature responds.”



Although the history of witches is punctuated with tragedy, witches famously love to revel and have fun. So grab your field guide, and welcome to the world of witches—let’s explore! Let’s meet some of the world’s most fascinating witches.

*The Weiser Field Guide to Witches* embraces a broad definition of witches with a primary focus on witches as practitioners of magic.

Just so that we are on the same page, in this book:

- ♦ *Witch* refers to *any* type of witch, regardless of spiritual or religious affiliation.



- ✦ *Wicca* refers to the modern religion first formalized by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s.
- ✦ *Wiccan* refers to devotees of Wicca.
- ✦ *Vodou* refers to the African Diaspora spiritual tradition that arose in Haiti.
- ✦ *Voodoo* refers to Vodou-related magical traditions specific to New Orleans.





## CHAPTER I

# Types of Witches

What does a witch believe? What does a witch do? The answers to those questions are extremely complex. There are many ways to be a witch. Witches ply their craft in many ways. There are *many* witchcraft traditions. It is virtually impossible to condense complex belief systems into a few sentences, and so what follows is but a brief sampling and should not be considered definitive. Witchcraft is a fluid, vital art. Perhaps you, too, possess a unique perspective on how to practice

witchcraft and will pioneer new ways and crafts.

Many people are perplexed by the differences between Wicca and witchcraft. Witchcraft is a broad term that encompasses many styles, perspectives, and practices. Wicca refers to a very specific spiritual tradition. One person may be both Wiccan and a witch, but not all witches are Wiccans and perhaps vice versa.

Among the crucial differences between Wicca and witchcraft is that most Wiccan traditions require initiation and thus direct transmission from one member to another. Self-initiation is a controversial topic within the Wiccan community. There is no concept of initiation in many traditional paths. It's not that it's not required; it doesn't exist. There is no hierarchy. Each witch is an independent practitioner on his or her own path.

## **Alexandrian** **Wicca**

This tradition's name pays tribute to its founder, Alex Sanders, and also to the ancient library of Alexandria, Egypt, once the largest library in the world and a repository of sacred, mystical wisdom. Alexandrian Wicca was established in the United Kingdom in the 1960s.



## ❧ **Atheist Witches** ❧

As atheists, these witches do not acknowledge a Supreme Creator or the Wiccan conception of a Lord and Lady; but work their magic using Earth's natural powers and energies. Some may work with elemental spirits such as land spirits or fairies.

## ❧ **Cabot Tradition** ❧

This tradition, based on the teachings of Salem witch Laurie Cabot, emphasizes that witchcraft is a science, art, and religion. The Cabot Tradition also emphasizes psychic development.

## ❧ **Chaos Magic** ❧

There is no one specific school of Chaos Magic, also spelled Chaos Magick, nor do its practitioners adhere to one specific philosophy or spiritual tradition. Instead those who define themselves as chaos magicians share a certain attitude toward magic. Chaos Magic is defined as the primal creative force in the universe.

Chaos magicians learn and experiment with various magical techniques in order to tap into this underlying, primal, creative force in whatever ways work best and most effectively for them. Chaos Magic is influenced by the work of visionary artist and magician Austin Osman Spare, who wrote, "What is there to believe, but in Self?"



## **The Clan of Tubal Cain**

This tradition, founded by English witch Robert Cochrane, is based on practical traditional witchcraft, shamanism, Celtic mysticism, and Cochrane's interpretation of Druidry. The American branch of the Clan of Tubal Cain is known as the 1734 Tradition.

## **Dianic Wicca**

Sometimes also called Wimmin's Religion, Dianic Wicca is a feminist spiritual tradition and the only form of witchcraft that is exclusively female. Women's rights and rites are combined in celebration of female divinity. The name of the tradition pays tribute to the Italian goddess, Diana. Among Dianic Wicca's founding mothers is author Z. Budapest, who formed the Susan B. Anthony Coven in Los Angeles on the Winter Solstice of 1971.

In 1975, Budapest self-published *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows*, a collection of rituals and spells that became the basic text of Dianic Wicca. It has since been republished as *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting and Other Womanly Arts*. . . . Dianic Wicca may be considered similar in essence to the women's mystery traditions of ancient Rome.

Most Dianic covens are exclusively female.



Sybil Leek sometimes called her own tradition Dianic, but what she practiced was not the same as Dianic Wicca.



## Faerie Witchcraft

This shamanic tradition involves actual interaction with fairies. Faerie witches, also spelled fairy witches, practice Earth-centered magic with emphasis on plant and animal familiars. Historically, many witches have worshipped and communed with fairies. In 1662, while being interrogated, Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie described her visits to the Fairy Queen. Similar testimony was given in French, Italian, and Hungarian witch trials.

Faerie Witchcraft is profoundly influenced by Scottish clergyman Reverend Robert Kirk's mysterious account of Fairyland, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies*, written in 1691 but not published until the early 19th century. Influential modern practitioners of Faerie Witchcraft include authors R. J. Stewart and Aline DeWinter. Faerie Witchcraft is not the same as Feri Tradition, nor is it the same as the various Wiccan traditions identified as Fairy Wicca.





## ~ ~ ~ Feri Tradition ~ ~ ~

This shamanic, ecstatic, initiatory, spiritual, and magical system, also sometimes spelled Fairy, Faery, or Faerie Tradition, began its modern incarnation in the 1940s when author, poet, and witch Victor Anderson (1917–2001) began initiations. Anderson is typically described as Feri’s “founder,” but he described himself as a transmitter of ancient information. Another branch of Feri Tradition is known as Vicia. Anderson taught that Feri Tradition derives originally from a primordial people who emerged from Africa thousands of years ago, the original fairies—although they are known by many other names in different cultures. Their teachings were transmitted orally over the generations.

Feri is an experiential tradition and various distinct Feri lineages and teachers now exist. Different lineages are influenced to different extents by different spiritual traditions including Celtic, Hawaiian, and Vodou. What most Feri practitioners share in common is direct personal interaction with spirits or deities. They do not subscribe to the Wiccan Rede (*Do what you will but harm none*); instead, each practitioner must take personal responsibility for her or his own actions.



## **Gardnerian** **Wicca**

Gardnerian Wicca is the oldest, most formal modern Wiccan tradition. Based on the teachings and practices of Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), it is named “Gardnerian” in order to honor him but also to distinguish this tradition from older, less formalized traditions.

The term Gardnerian Wicca may originally have been coined by Robert Cochrane, who was not a fan of Gardner or of his tradition. Its standard text is *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, which Gardner co-authored with Diane Valiente. At the time of its writing, Valiente and Gardner believed that they were involved in the evolution of an old faith, not the creation of a new one. More information about this tradition is found in the discussion of Wicca on page 31.

## **Hedge Witchery**

No initiation is necessary to be a hedge witch. Hedge witches are unaffiliated, solitary practitioners. The term “hedge witch” derives from “hedge rider” and similar northern European synonyms for witch. A hedge is a dense wall of bushes and other shrubbery. Once upon a time, large, dense hedgerows separated a village from surrounding forests. The hedge is a liminal zone, simultaneously a barrier and a threshold between



the civilized world and wild nature. Witches were the hedge-riders who navigated this zone.

The modern term “hedge witch” is sometimes used as a synonym for “kitchen witch” or is intended to serve as an all-encompassing name for the large community of non-affiliated, non-initiated, non-Wiccan witches. The term “hedge witch,” however, possesses shamanic undertones. By definition, a hedge rider or hedge witch travels between at least two worlds: the world of conventional reality and a spirit or afterlife realm.



## Hereditary Witchcraft

By definition, a hereditary witch comes from a family in which at least one other person is or was a witch. Most hereditary witches derive from a lineage of witches; the trait is often passed down from parent to child, although sometimes generations are skipped. The term is also sometimes used by someone with one



long-ago ancestor who was a witch or believed to be one. “Hereditary witch” is not a definitive term, and different people may interpret it in different ways. Some hereditary witches share traditions that are unique to their own families, but others do not. Fictional witches are very frequently hereditary; for instance, the Halliwell Sisters from the television series *Charmed*, or the Pure Bloods of the *Harry Potter* universe. Most modern witches are not hereditary.

## Hoodoo

A high percentage of the enslaved Africans in the pre-Civil War United States were of Congolese origin. They brought a sophisticated system of magic with them to North America, where it merged with European folk magic, Native American, and other African traditions to form a whole new magical system now called Hoodoo. A practitioner of Hoodoo is traditionally known as a “worker.” Hoodoo is very closely related to New Orleans Voodoo; the names are sometimes used interchangeably.

Hoodoo is a system of practical magic, not a specific spiritual tradition. Hoodoo practitioners may belong to any or no religion. There are Pagan, atheist, and Jewish Hoodoo workers, for instance. Some Hoodoo traditions are intensely Christian. Many Hoodooers incorporate sacred texts into their practice, especially the *Book of Psalms* or the *Book of Job*.



## **Independent Eclectic**

Most modern witches are not affiliated with any one specific tradition. Most witches incorporate whatever works for them or complements their own spiritual beliefs. Urban witches, in particular, may have many influences that are then integrated and incorporated in independent and eclectic ways. No one category may be sufficient to identify their practice; hence they are independent and eclectic.

## **Jewitchery**

This informal and eclectic tradition incorporates witchcraft, magical practice, and often shamanism with Judaism or Jewish self-awareness. Emphasis is placed on individualism. A Jewitch may or may not be a religious Jew. Judaism may be understood as a tribal group rather than as religion, and so essentially a Jewitch is someone who identifies as both Jewish and as a witch.

Some Jewitches incorporate traditional Jewish folk magic or Jewish angelology into their practice. Others identify with pre-exile or pre-Second Temple Jewish traditions that may have been less monotheistic than modern Judaism. Still others identify with Canaanite traditions. Jewitches may or may not also consider themselves Jewish Pagans. Some Jewitches are Wiccan; others are not.



## Kitchen Witchery

Kitchen witchery is a practice, rather than a specific spiritual or magical tradition. What distinguishes the kitchen witch from other witches is that the majority of her tools and ingredients are readily found in the home. A kitchen witch can cast a spell using ingredients found in her kitchen cupboards. Her magical tools may or may not be indistinguishable from ordinary household tools.

The concept of kitchen witchery is ancient. For centuries, it was not safe to be an obvious witch. Low-key, discreet magical practice helped keep witchcraft—and witches—alive. Most kitchen witches are solitary practitioners who are well-versed (or learning to be well-versed) in herb lore and folk magic. Much kitchen witchery involves magical protection of the home and family. Associations with the kitchen are no accident; spells are often cast in the form of delicious meals. A kitchen witch might be conscious of stirring eggs in a clockwise (also known as sun-wise) direction, for instance, in order to draw in positive solar energy. A synonym for kitchen witch is hearth witch.

A kitchen witch also refers to a kind of doll, a household amulet in the form of a flying witch that is



traditionally hung up in the kitchen to bring good luck. These kitchen witches are of Scandinavian origin and recall Swedish Easter witches. (In Sweden, witches are associated with Easter, rather than Halloween. Children dress up as witches for parades and folkloric traditions similar to American trick-or-treating. Swedish Easter witches wear the guise of old peasant women, rather than black hats and dresses.)

## Non-Wiccan Witches

This term was invented in response to the now-common assumption that all modern witches are Wiccan. Non-Wiccan witches may belong to any tradition other than modern Wicca. Non-Wiccan witches may belong to any spiritual or religious tradition or none—agnostic or atheist witches are typically considered non-Wiccan.

Shamanic witches who perceive spirits as unique individual beings rather than as aspects of the Lord and Lady may also identify as non-Wiccan. Those who do not subscribe to the Wiccan Rede are, by definition, non-Wiccan.



## **Shamanic Witchcraft**

By definition, shamanic witches blend elements of shamanism into their witchcraft. Some use the term “shamanic witch” to indicate a spirit worker, but a shamanic witch may incorporate trance and shamanic soul journeying into her practice, practices not necessarily done by a spirit worker. Please see page 128 for more information about spirit working.

## **Traditional Witchcraft**

This is a loose definition; there are many schools and kinds of Traditional Witchcraft. Essentially, traditional witches are practitioners of forms of witchcraft that pre-date modern Wicca and New Age practices. Some people use this term to refer to hereditary traditions that are exclusive to specific families. Others use the term for specifically British traditions pre-dating Gardnerian Wicca. Others consider traditional witchcraft to be a worldwide phenomenon that refers to any practitioner of folk magic.

## **Wicca**

Although some people use the word “Wiccan” as a synonym for any kind of witch, in general, Wiccans



perceive Wicca to be a specific religion or spiritual tradition, not just magical practice, which may or may not be encouraged. By definition, Wiccans subscribe to the Wiccan Rede, which states, *Do what you will but harm none.* (*Rede* is an archaic word for “rule.”) Those who do not subscribe to the rede are not Wiccan.

Wiccans worship a male and a female deity, the Lord and the Lady. (Dianic Wicca is an exception, as most Dianic Wiccans only worship the feminine divine.) Wicca has a religious calendar, as does any other religion. Festivals, known as sabbats and esbats, honor the Wheel of the Year, the cyclical turning of nature’s seasons. The most famous Wiccan sabbat is Samhain, which falls on Halloween. Other Wiccan sabbats include Beltane, Imbolc, and Yule. Wicca tends to be an initiatory religion, but it is not exclusively so. There are different denominations of Wicca, with different rules and restrictions, in the same way as Protestant denominations.

Modern Wicca is based on the teachings of Gerald Gardner, but the word is also sometimes used to refer to pre-Gardnerian British witchcraft traditions, as in Rhiannon Ryall’s 1989 book, *West Country Wicca: A Journal of the Old Religion*. To add to the confusion, there are also those, usually outsiders to witchcraft, who perceive the word “witch” to be derogatory, like a racial slur. They may use the word “Wiccan,” perceived as less offensive, as a generic synonym for “witch” because they are trying their best to be polite.

