

Episode 88: Getting Started in Witchcraft and Paganism

Welcome back to Round the Cauldron where we talk theology, philosophy, and everyday life as a modern witch. Today's topic deals in how to actually get started with witchcraft or paganism. So if you're ready to hop into the show, grab some coffee, pull up a seat, and join me 'round the cauldron.

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So today's topic was inspired by a response to a tweet that I had shared in my Facebook group. And the tweet says that research is important, but a craft without the work is wasted time and, you know, when we talk to new seekers, people who are learning or looking to learn about witchcraft or paganism, we always tell them read, read, read, read, read. Research. Look up everything that you can. Take in all of the information, but part of the learning process is actually doing the work. You're going to get more growth, more education, and more experience by actually doing the work than you will through just reading about doing the work. And so someone's response to this tweet on my...in my Facebook group was, you know, they read a lot, but they don't know where to start.

So that's what we're going to talk about today, and I'm going to talk about it in two different respects. We're going to talk about the witchcraft side of things, and we're talking...we're going to talk about the Pagan side of things. Now, as always, with every topic that I do about witchcraft and paganism, I do need to preface that this is the way I do it myself. I am not initiated into any specific religious or witchcraft tradition and I am an animist, so basically everything that I say, do, and believe is colored by my animist beliefs, my Pagan beliefs, and how I view witchcraft. So everything that I say here is going to be colored by those beliefs, so some things you might resonate with, some things you might not, but I think I've found several different things that pretty much anyone can do through starting witchcraft or paganism. I think they're going to be universal, but again, they might not. It just is going to be subjective to your particular tradition, how you learn, and if your witchcraft is religious or not.

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So when I talk about witchcraft in this sense, I am going to be talking about secular witchcraft, witchcraft that is not colored by any religious belief, just witchcraft itself. So a lot of the books that you read will give you some exercises and give you some theoretical information, but not a lot of them are going to tell you, hey, this is where you start. Start here. Step one. Do this first, or they're not going to give you a list of different things that you can do to start off and that can be an issue if you are someone who needs that help. If you're someone who needs the instructions to follow and you aren't completely connected to your intuition, or you don't completely trust everything that you've learned so far. Reading books can give you great theoretical information. It can give you a great theoretical understanding of how magic works but again, most of your learning, most of your education, is going to come from doing the witchcraft, casting the spells, doing the energy work, and making mistakes. You have to make mistakes in order to grow, and I liken it to learning how to drive a car, okay?

You can read the driver's handbook front to back. You can read the owner's manual of the car front to back, but most of your learning is going to come from experience behind the wheel. You can't just read the driver's handbook and read the manual for the car and watch some videos on how to drive a car and say, yep, I've got it. I can totally drive a car now. I'm a driver. Give me my driver's license. It doesn't work that way. The same thing goes for witchcraft. You actually have to do it. You can't just read, read, read, read, read.

So it can be overwhelming for someone who is new to witchcraft or even paganism -- we'll talk about paganism in a little bit -- but it can be overwhelming if you just don't know where to start and you don't have someone who can really help you figure that out for yourself. So I think this is important to talk about. I know that I mentioned books have exercises, and what I find a lot of the time when people are talking about reading books on witchcraft, is they go and they read a book in like two days and are like, yeah I read that book. Cool. And then they pick up another book and do the same thing, but it shouldn't be about how fast you can read the book and how much information you retain. A lot of these books have exercises in them for reason. They are there to help you practice your energy work, practice your focus. Make use of the exercises that are in these books. There is an exercise in Mat Auryn's *Psychic Witch* that basically everyone is talking about and it sounds easy in theory when you just read it here. Like oh, pshh, whatever. I could do that. Okay, but it's a lot harder than it sounds and...if I can remember the page number, I'll leave it in the description and in the show notes, but it's basically a practice on focusing and clearing your mind and basically getting your quote-unquote "monkey brain" to turn off. And you sit there in a meditative position, whatever is comfortable for you, you close your eyes, you breathe and then you count backwards in your mind from 100. And every time you lose track, you start over.

And it's a lot harder than it seems if it's something that you don't have experience with, if you can't focus like that, then you're going to have a difficult time with this exercise. However, this exercise, as simple as it is, can give you the fundamental skill of focusing your mind. These exercises are important, and a lot of exercises too are going to be similar across books. There's one exercise, it's like a grounding meditation. I even have

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a guided meditation that is like this because it's common and it's easy to visualize, but it is of visualizing yourself and your energy as a tree. You sit tall, you visualize the roots going down into the Earth. You are rooted and planted and grounded, and you're focusing your energy.

So one of the very first things that I would recommend is, while you're going through and you're reading all of these books about witchcraft, take the time to do these exercises and don't just do them once, you know? Move through them and practice them until they become easier and, once it's easier for you, don't just disregard it. Don't just say okay, you know, whatever. I can do it now. Keep practicing because those exercises are going to give you or help you get the skills that you need to make your witchcraft more effective or to make it easier for you to get into that state where you can focus and you don't lose your train of thought while you're practicing or while you're casting your spells. You don't lose your train of thought or get bombarded by a million different thoughts during a meditation. The exercises are in these books for a reason, and I think it's really important to practice them, especially if you're reading the book in the first place. You're already reading the book. You might as well do the exercises that go with it.

Energy work is also something that I think is a foundational skill when moving through witchcraft and beginning a practice, and even just continuing a practice that you already have. Witchcraft is, at its core, the manipulation of the energy around you.

And if you can't work that energy and move it and shape it and get it to do what you want, then your spells aren't going to be as effective as they could be. Or they might not work at all. Energy work is something that a lot of the exercises in those witchcraft books that we talked about deals with. It's pretty much an agreed-upon foundation in the witchcraft community at large. Energy work is important, so if you don't know where to start in your witchcraft practice, start with those exercises. Start with energy work; learning how to sense the energy around you, learning how to move it, and get it from point A to point B, or from, you know, in the palm of your hand to an object. It's a vital skill I think for having an efficient, effective witchcraft practice.

Then when you move on to actually casting full-blown spells, start small. A lot of times it can be difficult for those of us that come from a Christian background or a background where it was sort of passive, you know because in Christianity you pray for someone else to do something, whereas in witchcraft you're doing the work, right?

It can be hard for us to be comfortable doing these spells and using incantations and coming up with these rhymes, or just doing things that might seem strange, like waving your hands or piece of jewelry over some smoke, right? So start small.

Start with something that has a measurable outcome that is simple. I think this is an effective way to get comfortable with casting spells, but also to become confident in

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yourself and your ability to do the magic, to actually do the work. For me, a lot of the magic in the spell work is having that confidence in myself as a witch to be able to do this work and to actually have something happen. So start small with your spellwork. Do spells that have measurable outcomes and then, in a second, I'll talk about journaling and keeping a journal.

I also find it really important for my own witchcraft practice to have like a...there's a word. Oh my goodness. Like my core beliefs around witchcraft, my foundation that my entire practice is built upon. And this is going to be how I believe magic works, what it can do and what it can't, what my rules and my ethics are when it comes to practicing magic and using witchcraft, correspondences that I already have that are personal for me. I also think it's very important for a witch to learn how to use what they already have, so for one they don't have to run to the store if they need an ingredient for a spell.

And for two, it really helps you tap into your own intuition as well as learning how to communicate with your tools and your ingredients and figuring out what they do, what they are good at, and what they're not good at because you know, I wouldn't use aloe vera as a substitution for rose petals because aloe vera is not a plant of love. Not usually. Not in my communication with my aloe vera plant. It's just like love? No, that's not what it does. It's not something that it's good at. My aloe vera plant has told me what it's good at and what it can't do and having this core skill of communication with your ingredients and with the plant life and the spirit of that plant are super important in my opinion. So if you need another place to start with your witchcraft, start with the plants in your area. Learn how to identify them and then once you can identify them, learn how to communicate with them because I think that will help your spellwork be much more effective. It will help you be a much more intuitive witch. And then, instead of running to the store to get an ingredient that you forgot, you can figure out what you already have and make use of that.

With all of that being said, an important tool that I think every new witch should have, or even someone who's been practicing for a really long time. --I still have one -- is a journal. Some practices or some traditions call it a Book of Mirrors. It's not necessarily your Book of Shadows where you keep all of your information and your spells and your sabbats and stuff, but a Book of Mirrors for me is a witchcraft journal. Whenever I cast a new spell that I've never done before, I write it in my Book of Mirrors, and I keep track.

I'd say exactly what I did and exactly how I feel or felt at the time and my expectations. Then over the course of whatever time frame, I write about how it's working or how it's not working because it's a learning experience and even someone like me who's been practicing witchcraft for more than 10 years? I still make mistakes and I still get things wrong because it's a practice and it's not necessarily something that you can master. So keeping a journal is super important because it helps you with that learning experience, but it also gives you a place to reflect when things go wrong or when things go right and maybe you can't figure out why they went right because you made a mistake, but it's still working. It is another learning resource to look back on your past spells, your past

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emotions, and the things that you did to grow. My last thought here about beginning witchcraft is to just do it. Start a daily practice where it's something simple, something you can do every day to get you into that mindset and remind you, hey, I'm a witch and I can do things because I have found in speaking with a lot of newer witches is that half the battle for them is not feeling silly while they do it because we're brought up to think that witchcraft and magic and spells is just fantasy, and it's not something that can actually be done.

So just do it. You're going to feel silly at first and you might laugh at yourself. Or you might think like, oh my God, what am I doing like...ugh...but that's part of the battle that you have to have with yourself. And I believe that building a daily practice of something as simple as lighting a candle and saying a quick little spell for a good day, or meditating and practicing your energy work, or even something that I still do every day is I make my coffee with intention.

I have specific ingredients that I use. I have a specific way I stir it in my French press, and I have a specific little phrase that I say as I'm stirring it. Something as simple as that can help you stay in the mindset of this is who I am. This is my power, and this is my right, and I don't need to feel silly while I'm doing it.

Okay, so we've talked about how to begin a witchcraft practice, but I also want to talk about how to begin a Pagan practice because, again, there's not a lot of books on it. The one book that I always recommend for new pagans is Althaea Sebastiani's book *Paganism for Beginners*, a guide for the new seeker. That's totally not the full title, and I messed all of that up, but I'll leave the link in the description and in the show notes. And I've also done a book review for that book, so I'll leave that link down there too.

But not a lot of books on paganism -- paganism only, not witchcraft -- really cover how to get started and it's going to be different depending on your particular flavor of paganism, right? For example, I'm an Irish Pagan, so I worship and honor the Irish gods and goddesses.

My paganism is going to be different than even a Celtic Pagan because someone that is a Celtic Pagan doesn't limit their pantheon or their paganism to one particular area of the Celtic people. It's all of it. Then you have, oh my goodness, Hellenic Polytheism for the Greek deities.

So I have, I think three different things...one, two, three, four. I have four different things that I want to talk about briefly for beginning a Pagan practice because it's going to be vastly different for each person and their path and tradition. And then you also need to think about too, are you a reconstructionist, a revivalist, a neopagan? There are many different types of paganism out there too, not just what pantheon someone worships or honors. So I have four things here that I believe will work for any flavor of paganism, but

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take what you will and leave what you won't, okay? Because paganism is subjective and it's vastly different.

One of the first things that I think is important in every Pagan practice is an altar or shrine of some sort. Now, these don't have to be elaborate. They don't have to have statues and like a million candles and five different kinds of incense. They can just be a place in your home that is dedicated to a particular God or Goddess or pantheon. It's sort of like their space in your home. This is where they come. This is where they are welcome. This is where they visit, right?

And I think that's pretty consistent among most types of paganism. Again, I'm not sure, but you would want to obviously first have a foundational knowledge of the particular pantheon or type of paganism that you are working through or that you are, basically. There's probably a better way of saying that, but I hope you understand what I mean.

To go along with your altar or shrine is offerings. Offerings are something that is very simple to do, and it is a great way of honoring the deities, Gods and Goddesses, that you want to honor. Obviously, again, you'd need to have a foundational knowledge of the particular God or Goddess that you're giving an offering to because you don't want to inadvertently offend them. But offerings are really easy to do, and I have actually done a video on offerings and devotions. I think it was also a podcast episode. I don't remember, but the link for that will be in the description and in the show notes.

With offerings, please make sure they are appropriate to whatever God or Goddess you are offering to. For example, I would never offer Brigid margarine. Never. Not margarine, not almond milk. Not anything like that that is supposed to be dairy because dairy is extremely important in the Irish Pagan practice. Dairy is a sacred part of Irish history, and butter, especially butter and milk. I would never offer Brigid margarine. That is just asking for Brigid to take offense to my offering and completely reject it. And since I work very closely with her and she is very important to me, offending her is like the last thing that I want to do because she has a hand in my life and if I offend her, my life might flip upside down because that is the nature of working with and honoring gods and goddesses.

It seems like these tips for paganism are all going in order because the next tip that I have for getting started in paganism is to pray. Now, a lot of us in the Pagan community, I guess you would say, have a huge shadow with the word prayer and the idea of prayer, and that's something we need to work on, but prayer is literally just talking to your God or Goddess or Gods or Goddesses. Just speaking to them.

They...you worship them or work with them for a reason. You honor them for a reason and it's sort of like, you know, depending on your relationship with those deities, you have open lines of communication. If they are like Brigid who is a Goddess of the forge

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and healing wells and fire and poetry and creativity and all kinds of stuff, I can go to her in prayer and ask for healing or ask for protection or just unload my heart to Her because it's okay with Her. It's what She does for me.

And prayer, I think, is really important as a Pagan because we honor these Gods for a reason and we should be okay with speaking to Them, and prayer is the way that we do that. So you would give an offering, you would pray at your altar or your shrine, and then the fourth thing for just paganism is to just make a daily practice. Now a daily practice for paganism is going to look different for everyone and even for me, it's not the same every day. Some days I wake up and I light my candle and I say good morning to Brigid and I have an offering for Her of fresh clean water, and some days it's just waking up in the morning being so busy and having so many things that I need to do but taking the time to take three deep breaths, focus myself, remind myself who I am, what I'm doing, and to say thank you to Brigid for the opportunity to live and work on myself another day.

So I hope that this has been helpful. I hope it's given you some ideas if you just didn't know where to start or maybe you've been practicing for a while and you just needed to go back to basics.

Whatever you need to use this for, I hope it was helpful. And the final thing that I want to say for both getting started in witchcraft and in paganism is to just do it. Just do it. Don't be scared. Don't let the fear hold you back from fulfilling your dreams and doing things that you want to do. If you live your life in fear, you're never going to grow. It's just...it's going to be hard for you to grow if you're always afraid to try new things or to just jump right into doing it. I know the safety of just reading and not actually practicing can be comforting, but you need to get out of your comfort zone. Or, as Joanna Devoe would call it, get out of that zone of lies because it's what it is. Your comfort zone is just that area where you can lie to yourself, basically, and say everything is fine. I'm okay doing it this way and I don't need to do anything else.

Get out of your zone of lies and just do it.

Thank you so much for being here and listening to this podcast episode. I hope it helped you in any way that you needed, and I will talk to you soon. Bye for now.