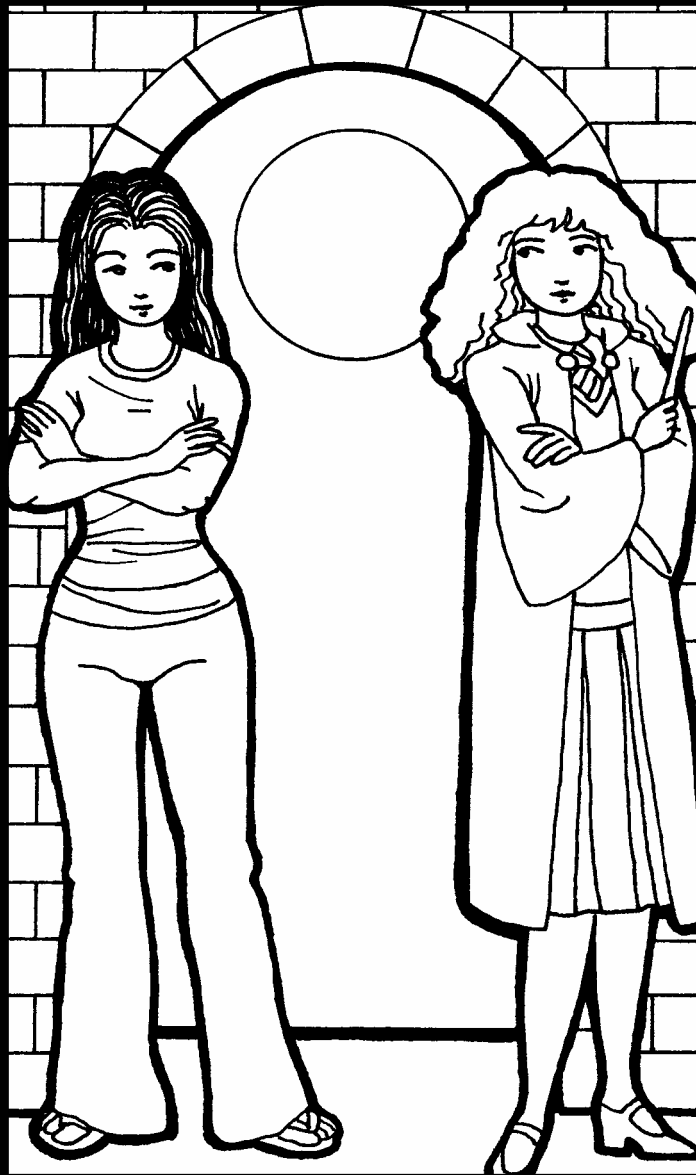
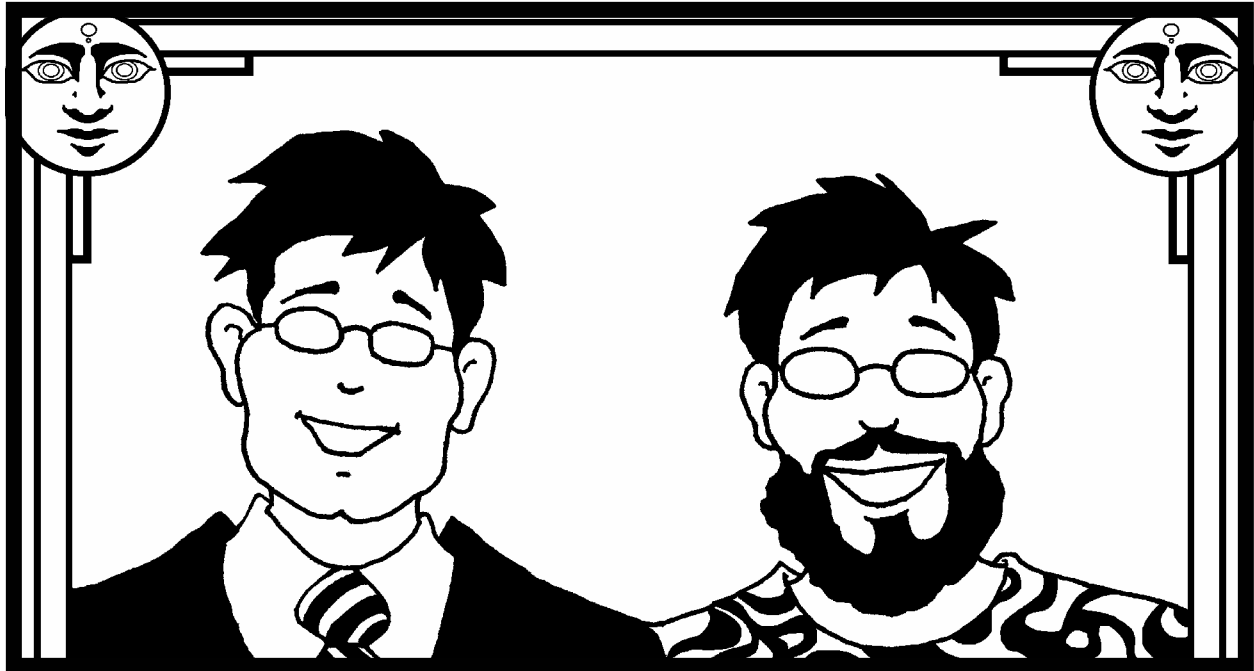


HARRY POTTER
VS
REAL WITCHES
By Rev. Don Lewis





HARRY POTTER VS REAL WITCHES

In the years since the publication of “Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone” -or “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” as it is known in the US- J. K. Rowling’s fantasy novels about the magical world of Harry Potter have generated immense amounts of interest and admiration –and also large amounts of controversy. The interest and admiration arise from Rowling’s gripping portrayal of Harry’s adventures in a fantasy world of magic and witchcraft. The controversy because of many people’s preconceptions and misconceptions about magic and witchcraft in the real world, and the relationship between Harry’s magical world and the real life magical community.

This class is intended to compare and contrast the magical world of Harry Potter VS the real life magical community, and thus examine the relationship between them.

Their World

-What Harry Potter’s magical world is based upon VS what the real magical community is based upon.

The first thing we should look at is the foundational elements of Harry’s magical world and the foundational elements of real magical practice.

In Harry’s world magic is a skill. It carries no particular spiritual significance or point of view. Magic is learned through institutions and does not seem to influence the practitioner’s relationship to Deity and the spirit very much, if at all.

In the real world, magic is almost always part of a larger spiritual practice. Although people who practice magic come from many different spiritualities, they share many of the same or similar ideas about Deity and Spirit and almost always consider these to be foundational to their practice of magic. Thus, in the real world, magic is almost always a function of spirituality, not spirituality a function of magic.

The principle real world magical traditions include but are not limited to: Wicca/Witchcraft, Ceremonialism, Hermeticism, Cabalism, Alchemy, Spiritualism, Vodun, the New Age movement, and a variety of forms of Paganism including Druidry, Isianism, and Asatruism - to name just a few. Most of these groups would consider themselves to be religions in their own right, or denominations within larger religions, and almost all would regard magic as part of their spiritual discipline. This is not to say that magic is not regarded as a secular skill, but that most practitioners of magic regard it as a secular skill which is employed as part of their spirituality.

The use of word "Witch" in particular is often misunderstood by the wider community –in the magical community "Witch" and "Witchcraft" are almost always religious appellations shared by a number of more-or-less related movements, most of which are universalist in nature and focus on the idea of God as both male and female.

In this the world of Harry Potter is very, very different from the real world of magic.

Their Magic

-Harry Potter magic

VS real magical techniques.

The biggest difference between the world of Harry Potter and the real world is also its strongest connecting element –magic.

In the world of Harry Potter, magic is largely a matter of knowing the right formula or repeating the correct words and actions –"Swish and Flick" as it were. To perform magic the Witch or Wizard needs only the inborn power –a power only some are born with- and the right combination of external elements. If they grow especially powerful, they can dispense with external elements altogether, however a great deal of the power of their magic seems to reside in the formulae.

Now, this is not so different from real world magic, though only on the surface.

In the real world Witches do often use a variety of external elements as Keys which help them to access inner abilities –inner abilities everyone is born with, but only some learn to use. As they grow more skilled, these external keys are no longer needed, though they may still be used if desired. The difference is that these external keys are not regarded as the source of the magic, or as being truly necessary for it –they merely help one access ones own power.

We can get a better idea of this from a quick look at a few magical items from Harry's world and how they compare to similar items in the real world.

In Harry Potter's world, Harry's magic wand is made magical by the phoenix feather enclosed within its shaft. The Wizard needs the wand to do magic, at least unless very highly skilled, and if it should be lost or broken their ability to do magic is crippled –as we see when Ron breaks his wand in Book 2, or in Harry's battle with Voldemort at the end of Book 4.

In the real magical world a magic wand is merely a transmitter of the users own energy, though it may be held to influence that energy by being constructed of substances believed to increase power (such as quartz crystal) or believed to give it special features (such as lapis lazuli or amethyst for psychic openness). Without the user however a real-world magic wand is just a decorative stick, while without the

wand the user still has every bit as much energy as they would with it. The magic does not come from the wand, but from the person.

The same may be said of magical incantations in Harry's world, though an incantation might not normally be thought of as an "item" per se –yet it takes on that quality here. Exact words and phrases are very important in Harry Potter's world. "Wingardium Leviosa" can cause an item to levitate if said correctly, but it can lead to small explosions if mispronounced.

This is not the case in real witchcraft where magical incantations may be used, but are regarded merely as a focusing aid and are commonly made up on the spot. Some set incantations are occasionally used and certain incantations may be more common than others, but they are not normally regarded as having power in themselves. It should be noted, however, that certain magical schools of thought, notably Ceremonialism, regard that if an incantation or ritual form is used repeatedly, that it does build up a kind of reservoir of power –a kind of magical pattern that the user can tap into- but this is not a universal viewpoint by any means.

And of course the biggest difference is that in Harry Potter's world magic works instantaneously and affects things in very visible ways. Real magic tends to take some time to work, and the ways in which it affects reality tend to be rather subtle –that is to say, if you don't know it has been done, you wouldn't know. Magic reshapes the world, but usually it does so in such a way as to seem perfectly normal and ordinary to all except the person doing the magic.

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Their Structure

-How Harry Potter learns magic VS how real people learn magic.

In Harry Potters world, magic is systematically taught through schools and academies, is licensed and regulated by its own Ministry of Magic, and seems quite thoroughly quantified and structured. Although not fully addressed in the books, one gets the idea that in Harry Potter's world magic can only be legitimately learned and employed through these avenues –though it is quite clear that many Wizards flout the rules.

In addition, we are told that in Harry Potter's world these various magical institutions have existed for many centuries, side by side with, but hidden from the non-magical Muggle world. Hogwarts itself is said to be over a thousand years old.

Consequently, in Harry's world students can and do follow a regular curriculum reinforced by standardized testing (NEWTs and OWLS) intended to guarantee a uniform result. Textbooks or a trip to the library can usually answer questions, and there is little sense of mystery or uncertainty about it. Nor is there much sense of an expanding magical frontier – though we are told of new magical discoveries Professor Dumbledore has made in his career, and Lord Voldemort seems to keep on the cutting edge, but otherwise magical knowledge seems not only quantified but largely static.

It should surprise no one that the real-world magical community is very different. In the real world magic is wide open and extremely individual. Most people who practice magic, or who practice Witchcraft/Wicca as their religion, are self-taught. Their teaching is acquired through books or now through the internet. What they learn depends entirely on what materials they encounter.

Those who are not self-taught have usually been taught under the apprentice system: However when an actual teacher can be found, or a teaching institution such as a Temple or Seminary, both the quality and the curriculum vary widely.

There is no standardized system, nor any agreement on what elements are necessary to a solid magical education. This is true in the community as a whole, and even within individual Traditions.

Consequently, people's understanding and practice of real-world magic is highly individual and idiosyncratic. It has been said in reference to Witchcraft in particular, that there are as many different forms of Witchcraft as there are Witches. Overall the magical community is extremely tolerant of the extreme differences in point of view that result from this heterogeneous state of affairs –but occasionally people's views prove to be irreconcilable, and hard feelings may result.

There are within the community various Temples and Seminaries which set specific standards of training. There are also a number of Traditions which have various standards for training. However these are the exception rather than the rule –and even in the presence of basic standards of training, there is still a great deal of individual variation which must be expected to be encountered.

Their World

-Harry Potters Magical World VS the real Magical Community.

Let us now consider how the world of Harry Potter compares to the real magical community.

In the Harry Potter Books the “Wizarding World” exists side by side with the ordinary world, but is hidden from non-magical eyes and so is unknown to all but a few “muggles.”

To be honest, the real magical community sometimes feels this way. We live side by side with everyone else. There are lots of us. We have stores of our own, and our books can be found in places like “Barnes & Noble's” and many libraries. We have been the subject of movies like “The Craft” and televisions shows like “Charmed” – albeit often in distorted form. Moreover, various branches of the magical community go back many centuries. Yet many people seem to have no idea that the magical community exists. Others have such distorted ideas about the magical world, it is clear they base their opinion upon rumor and prejudice, and have never actually seen any part of our community.

How is this possible?

Well, Harry Potter's Wizards are afraid of the non-magical world and hide from it as much as they can –presumably out of fear of persecution. Considering this, the Death Eaters' hatred of muggles and muggle-borns takes on a somewhat different significance.

The real magical community, whether Alchemist Witch, or even New Ager, is also often very much afraid of persecution at the hands of the non-magical world. Often this fear is exaggerated – but sometimes it is quite well founded. Because of this many magical people live “In the Broom Closet” as Witches put it. They hide their magical activities and beliefs from others. Sometimes even those closest to them.

In this way, Harry Potter's Wizarding World and the real-world magical community are very much alike.

Just as fear of persecution, real or imagined, forces some in the real magical community to hide in the “Broom Closet”, it causes some other who are more public in their beliefs to become extremely flamboyant and sometimes quite offensively strident in the magical identity. Convinced that they can never be accepted by others, they sometimes affect quite extreme dress or behavior as a statement of their independence from and defiance of real or perceived social judgment. Of course such extremity often serves to provoke the very social judgment that the person resents.

Between these two extremes of behavior fall many people who are pretty much ordinary except for being part of the magical community. They live their lives in varying degrees of openness without being either pathologically secretive or wildly flamboyant. They are “just like everybody else.”

In this too, the real magical world is much like Harry's, where Wizards range from the flamboyant Blacks in the grand guignol mansion at Grimould Place, to completely closed Witches like “Mrs. Figg” living secretly in suburban neighborhoods – with people like the apparently unremarkable James and Lily Potter in the middle.

There is another important similarity between Harry Potter's world and the real magical world: The Death Eaters. Granted the similarity between Harry Potter's Death Eaters and real world magical separatists is not a close one but is a similarity worth remarking on nonetheless.

In Harry's world the Death Eaters hate all non-magical folk, and consider themselves superior to everyone else, placing a strong emphasis on purity of descent and not mixing magical and non-magical elements.

As stated earlier, there is some impression that the virulence of the Death Eaters against Muggles and the Muggle-born may be viewed as only the most extreme form of the extreme separation between the Wizarding and Muggle worlds, which itself arises from fear of persecution.

The real magical world also has its separatist elements, though they take a somewhat different form from Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

The real magical world is composed of many different branches including but not limited to: Ceremonials, Hermeticists, Religious Witches, Voodooists, various other kinds of Pagan, Shamanists, New Agers etc.... In this we are very different from Harry's mostly homogenous Wizarding world.

These various groups do not by any means always get along well, nor do they always even consider themselves part of the same community. Moreover most have many sub-branches who are often divided by deep animosities. The result is a very heterogeneous community.

The majority of people in the real magical community are eclectic in their practices. That is to say, they gather from various sources the elements that best express their personal spirituality or best suit their personal magical needs. This sometimes creates highly idiosyncratic combinations and interpretations. The majority of the community accepts and even celebrates this diversity, but there are Purists, roughly analogous to the Pure Bloods of Harry's world, who are horrified by this and often attack with as much zeal as any Death Eater – or any “Hard shell Baptist” for that matter.

Such people often strenuously object to mixing elements from different metaphysical traditions despite the fact that many metaphysical traditions have their root in just such mixing. It is to be noted that huge sections of metaphysical tradition come down from an origin in Ptolemaic Egypt and the deep mixing of Egyptian and Hellenistic Greek ideas – subsequently mixed still farther with European ideas. This is true particularly for Hermeticism, Alchemy, and Ceremonialism, and consequently anyone influenced by them in turn.

Our separatists often take special exception to the idea of “mixing pantheons” – failing to grasp the fact that a “pantheon” is a fairly modern academic concept of little actual relevance to ancient Pagan religion which varied much more by locality and temperament and mixed more extensively than the artificial concept of the “pantheon” suggests.

The separatist element within the real magical community is most obvious however in the internecine struggles between branches of movements such as Wicca, Religious Witchcraft, and the Afro-diasporic Traditions such as Voodoo, Santeria, etc. The varying denominations within the different movements are

often quite disdainful or even hostile to each other and not infrequently are bitterly resentful of and opposed to eclecticism.

This has resulted in decades of “Witch Wars” and other conflicts strongly reminiscent of the conflicts in Harry’s world.

In all these areas Harry’s magical world and the real magical world are pretty similar. However, there is another way in which they are fundamentally and radically different.

Harry’s magical world is very well organized.

The Wizarding world of the Harry Potter novels is presided over by the powerful and somewhat dictatorial Ministry of Magic, which licenses, regulates, and polices magic. The Ministry of Magic works with a Council called the Wizengamot, a large assemblage of distinguished Wizards and Witches.

Ministries of Magic appear to be organized on national levels, because in Book Three we learn that in addition to the British Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, there is also a Bulgarian Minister of Magic – and presumably many more. We also learn of international Magical Confederations and accords, though we are shown little about them.

The highest political organization in the real magical world is the leadership of the various traditions – most of which are essentially personality cults, though a few have actual structure. Despite occasional attempts at non-denominational community organizing, such as The American Congress of Witches and the various Pagan Leadership Conferences, the fierce independence of the traditions has prevented the formation of effective community-wide structure.

Though there are many powerful tradition Heads and other prominent figures in the real magical community, there is no one remotely resembling Harry Potter’s Minister of Magic, nor is there anything resembling the Wizengamot, except possibly the Correllian Witan Council or the Isian Arch Priesthood Union. The Grey Council of Wizardry might also be mentioned in this connection, but is essentially an honorary body with no actual administrative power.

Matters of Perception

-What Harry Potter is really about VS what people think it is about.

Ask anyone who knows what the Harry Potter Books are about – especially the narrow-minded people who regularly boycott them or try to get them banned from libraries – and they have no trouble telling: The Harry Potter books are all about magic and witchcraft.

Occasionally, if the person is more perceptive, they may say that the books are about the importance of friendship, or about personal integrity, or a classic battle of good vs. evil.

Well, all of the elements are important in the Harry Potter Books to be sure, in varying degrees – though I would say there is another deeper theme that though blindingly obvious is almost universally ignored.

There is at first glance plenty of magic in the books, of course. However, the magic is in many ways a superficial element in the stories. Magic is never really dealt with at any depth – and for good reason. The books are stories whose real themes are quite universal. Because everyone is busy enjoying the magic, they don’t really notice as they absorb the deeper message.

The theme of friendship and loyalty is quite obvious, as is the self-sacrifice that sets the stage for the entire series; when Lily Potter sacrifices herself to save her infant son and in doing so destroys the power of Lord Voldemort (if not Lord Voldemort himself) and conveys a powerful magical protection to baby Harry. Harry himself is frequently in a similar position placing himself in danger for the sake of others and many of the characters including Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Molly and Arthur Weasley, Sirius Black and many other demonstrate a willingness “to sacrifice all for the cause”-and several are called up to do so.

Personal integrity – illustrated in part by the theme of self-sacrifice – is a major element in the books. Interestingly this theme of personal integrity, of doing what is right despite opposition despite opposition or punishment, is among the things that most upsets the Books’ critics. Many times Harry, Ron, and Hermione are called upon to risk punishment – and sometimes receive it – in order to do what they know to be right. Adult characters also find themselves in this position: in Book 5 Albus Dumbledore is stripped of many of his titles and offices because he refuses to keep silent about the return of Lord Voldemort. This infuriates conservative critics who complain that the books encourage their readers to disregard rules. These critics are absolutely correct – the books do encourage readers to put right action above abstract rules, and in no uncertain terms represent willingness to risk punishment in a just cause as an aspect of personal integrity.

This brings us to that deeper and largely unobserved theme in the Harry Potter books, or rather deeper themes: racism and authoritarianism, and the importance of resisting both.

The entire Harry Potter Oeuvre revolves around the issue of racism. Lily Potter is killed in part because she is of mixed race. Hermione Granger, the “brightest Witch of her generation” is frequently harassed or excluded, particularly by the Slytherins, because she is of mixed race. The noble Black family has disowned many of their members who did not support the doctrine of racial purity. Lord Voldemort’s entire movement seems to revolve around racial purity and what is too-kindly termed “ethnic cleansing”.

The Wizards keep the House Elves as a slave race, even at Hogwarts – to Hermione’s utter horror. The Goblins while not slaves appear to be thoroughly dominated after a series of long-past wars. The Giants have been virtually terminated and Hagrid is the recipient of considerable prejudice because of his half-human status – notably from Delores Umbridge for whom half-human is sub-human. But Delores is obviously not alone in this opinion for Olympe Maxime – despite holding a fairly exalted status as Head Mistress of Beau Batons Academy finds it necessary to hide her ancestry altogether, even breaking with Hagrid over the issue early in their relationship.

In short, the evils of racism and the importance of opposing racism, are much larger themes in Harry Potter than magic, which is merely the sugar the helps the medicine go down.

In addition to the evils of racism, the Harry Potter Books also focuses on the evils of authoritarianism. Harry and his friends are often but not exclusively under Delores Umbridge – or the Ministry of Magic itself. As early as the second book when Hagrid is unjustly sent off to Azkaban on the mere assumption that he “must” be guilty, it is clear that the Ministry of Magic is not always to be expected to come down in the side of right. As time goes on, the hypocrisy of the Ministry of Magic and Cornelius Fudge in particular becomes clearer still. It is also clear that while the Ministry has the services of virtuous characters like Amanda Bones and Bartemius Crouch, it is also served by less admirable individuals like Delores Umbridge and Lucius Malfoy. Arthur Weasley is also employed by the Ministry of Magic, but despite earnest efforts can make little headway there – while his odious son Percy quickly rises in the ranks.

Many of the Ministry’s positions are clearly wrong – such as the aforementioned slavery of the House Elves and treatment of other non-human races. By Book 5, it is clear that the Daily Prophet is actually manipulating and at times suppressing the facts, even to the point of ruining innocent people. The Ministry employs the Dementors, to Dumbledore’s distaste, at Azkaban prison even though they are “evil” and had been supporters of Voldemort. The actions of the Ministry often seem quite Draconian and Cornelius Fudge repeatedly makes clear – sometimes almost in as many words-that he is more concerned

with order than justice: he would no doubt say that is thinking only of “the good of the many.”

It is against this background that the “rule breaking” so decried by Harry Potter’s critics must be considered. When the rules are wrong, is it right to obey them? Many Nazis made the excuse after WWII that they were only following the rules – “just obeying orders.” The world has generally regarded this is not an acceptable excuse – and JK Rowling clearly of the same opinion.

If many people have a mistaken idea of the real themes of the Harry Potter books, especially people who have never read them. It is nothing compared to the misconceptions many people entertain about the real magical community.

One of the biggest misconceptions people have about the real magical community is that it is a thing of the past. That maybe someone USED TO do that sort of thing, but certainly not today. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only is the magical community very much alive – it is robust. The magical community is larger and more diverse than ever. It is likely that more material has been written about magic in the last hundred years than in all the hundreds of years before. Magical though has never been so broad, so deep, or so widely distributed as it is today.

At the other end of the scale many people have the mistaken idea that the magical community is a very new thing: that until the 1960s the world, and the US in particular was populated exclusively by devout Puritans living in a rustic paradise that did not include magic, sexuality, or any sort of discontent. The reality is that the magical community has always been a fairly strong strain in society, its various branches accepted or rejected according to the time and place. Alchemy, Hermeticism, and Ceremonials have been hugely influential with movement over the course of many centuries, exerting an affect in politics, the arts, and science. Isaac Newton for example, the Father of Newtonian Physics, was also an alchemist. Movements such as Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, and various Pagan Revivals have had huge effect on the social and political history of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. And all of these movements as well as many new ones are active in the magical community today.

But of course, the biggest misconception that the unenlightened sometimes have about the magical community is it is somehow “evil”.

Magic is the study of God, the Universe, and the Soul. There is nothing “evil” in any of this. Through this study we seek to be closer to God (who different people and movement see in different ways), to move more in sync with the Universe, and to access the Higher powers of the Soul in order to improve our lives.

Or course, we all know that some people think that ANY spiritual ideas other than their own are “evil”.

This is not to say that there are no bad people in the magical community – people are people, no matter what movement they are in. No matter where you look, you will always find both good and bad people. But the magical community is about spirituality and spiritual abilities, and most of its people regardless of the branch they belong to, are trying hard to be the best people they can be.

Conclusion

In conclusion it will be seen that there are some striking similarities between the world of Harry Potter and the real magical community –as well as some glaring differences.

Notably, magical practice in the real world is usually an aspect of spirituality and religion, while in Harry’s world magic is a physical skill without a direct connection to spirituality. Remember, in the real world, magic is almost always a function of spirituality, not spirituality a function of magic.

Harry Potter has the benefit of an organized world that teaches him what he will need to know about magic. Practitioners in the real world have to learn from each other and the vast amounts of information on the Web and in books. Though it can be harder, the benefit is that unlike Potter and his uniform magic, the magic they learn will be diverse and unique, allowing everyone to find their own relationship with Deity.

Moreover we see that both Harry's magical world and the real-life magical world are the subject of a number of mistaken ideas, and that many people assume that they know all about them when in fact they are basing their ideas upon mistaken assumptions.

The real magical community can certainly be as fascinating a place as the magical world of Harry Potter, but it is by no means the same place.

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