Personal Circles/Groups

INTRODUCTION

I have had so many of my students ask me how do you find a group to work with? What should I look for? Where do I begin? So I put this together from the research I had done and what I had learned first hand when I began my search for a group or circle that I felt I could fit into.

I found that finding a group/circle that you fit into could be a very stressful process, especially when you do not really know what to look for.

I have taken part in several groups before finally starting my own. It is my hope that you will find this helpful and useful in your search for a group to join, or in starting one of your own.

Short history of groups

Through out time, there has always been, groups of one kind or another. We have family groups, Church groups, and sports groups, just to name a few.

Pagan circles or groups were no different. There have been all kinds of groups from Wiccan to druids and everything in-between all around the world since the beginning of time.

The people from rural areas were called Pagani, which is Roman for country dwellers. These people were considered unenlightened by the Christians in their belief system.

They gathered together in small groups to worship the Gods and Goddesses during the turning of the seasons and the moon cycles. The turning of the seasons was a very important part of the culture then. The turning of the seasons told them when to plant and when to harvest. When to breed livestock and when birthing season has arrived.

At first the early Christian churches co-existed with the native religions, they built churches near the sacred sites of the pagans as well as setting up their holidays close to those of the pagans. By doing this they felt that all could be included and eventually the pagans would convert to Christianity.

As time moved on and Christianity grew, Christian affiliations with the pagan religions became dangerous. The Priests and their followers began a campaign to wipe out all pagan religions.

Many of the pagans converted to Christianity. Those who did not convert eventually moved their religions practices underground to avoid persecution. They formed small, close-knit groups in an effort to keep the old religions alive, and to keep from becoming totally isolated from others of the old religions.

They would meet under the cover of darkness, and maintained small individual groups.

A smaller number of members helped to keep them from standing out. A large group or circle would not be able to blend away into the darkness as easily as the smaller groups did.

Over the last decade or so, the number of pagans coming out of the closet, have increased, which in turn has caused the number of circles and groups to expand and become more visible to the public. This has in some ways helped make it a lot easier to find a group or circle to work with, but has brought with it problems as well.

What makes a circle/group   All circle or groups have something in common, something that has brought them together. The most common one is people with the same belief structure, a desire to be part of a group and a need to share with others and learn from others.

Most of us are looking for the same thing, others of like mind to gather with. By gathering together we can feel safe from ridicule since those that we gather with are of like mind, then there is no worry of ridicule or harm only comfort and strength that comes from joining together.

Most groups are made up of different people with different views, but with the same basic beliefs. They then combine their views together to make one that all can identify with. This is called eclectic group.

Personal groups are generally small, about 10 or less people, with varying degrees of knowledge. The larger circles or groups tend to be more for gathering together to do ritual, which I have found is generally open to all who would like to attend..

No matter how many groups that someone belongs to they will always bring something with them from each group they have been part of during their journey. Most of us will belong to several groups before we find one that fits us.

Most circles or groups have a code of standards, that their members are expected to follow. Some are elaborate, while others are minor. All generally contain standards that include, but are not limited to, respecting each other’s views as well as harm to none (if Wiccan based).

There is not usually a chain of command to speak of at least not like you would find in large organizations or large covens. There maybe one or two that could be considered the head of the group. However the smaller groups generally make decisions as a whole. All members have a say in what the group is doing.

Those belonging to a circle or group can, and generally do, become very close knit. Group members tend to spend time with each other inside and outside of the group. Contact is not solely based on just group time. They become an extension of each other a family.

The members within the group will also help each other out. Some even going out of their way to do so. Unfortunately this has a down side as well. Occasionally there will be that one person, or even a couple of people, that will take advantage of the situation. It is unfortunate since this will usually, in the end, cause a lot of hard feelings. It can be a very difficult thing to put a stop to once it has started. There are groups that have been totally disbanded due to problems such as this.

Each person will usually have a role within the circle/group. It is generally given to or chosen according to their strengths. Some may have good penmanship and they may have the job of keeping notes, or the minutes of meetings. They are considered to be the scribe for the group. Some may be good at cooking so they may be in-charge of organizing the feasts and offerings. Others may sew well and might be in-charge of the making of the ritual garb, Altar cloths, or any other things that may need to be made for the group. Everyone has something they can contribute to the group even if their strengths are not readily seen.

Gaining or losing members also has an effect on the dynamics of the group. When new people come into a group there is always a shift of energies since all of us have our own energy field. There is also the moving and shifting of responsibilities to accommodate the new members that come in.

Losing members can cause the same shift but on the opposite end. The loss of a member can cause a shift in energy that causes a slight and temporary shift in the group’s dynamics. A gap in the membership structure with responsibilities left open.

You will find that most small groups do not charge membership dues, some may ask for donations from their members to help cover the cost of supplies, ritual items, and other expenses that occur, or the members will share in the responsibility of buying the things that are needed.

Where do these groups meet and what do they do Small personal groups usually meet in someone’s home. Some times they will take turns holding the meetings at each other’s houses. This way each one can host a gathering or a meeting instead of it always falling on one person’s shoulders.

Places like the local library or on nice days the local park is a good place to use as well. Each group has its own reasons for meeting and how often they meet. Some will meet once a week, others will meet every other week, some once a month.

Some of the things that are done during the meetings are:

1) Studying. There are study groups for those that are learning a specific tradition, or just a topic they are interested in learning more about. Sometimes they even have little workshops they do.

2) Ritual Planning. Some groups meet twice monthly the first one for planning the ritual the next one for the Ritual itself. These groups seem to be more formal and do not generally have the same close knit between members like the others do.

3) Ritual. Most all groups will get together at least once a month for ritual. However there are some that only study and do not do ritual, or do ritual only.

4) Companionship. This is the big one; it is always nice to get together with others of like mind just to talk to. With so many pagans still in the closet it is always nice to meet and gather with others, it helps keep you from feeling you are all alone. With life these days being so busy the meetings are some times used just to get away from the mundane, a chance to let your hair down and be you with out fear of repercussions.

5) Hands on work. Meditating, making tools and other craft  works, energy work. Plus many more things that the group may want to do.

All groups are different, so their makeup and structure will also vary according to each group. Each group will have its own special dynamics, thoughts and beliefs. This is only a very basic set of examples and ideas of a group.

Where to start when you are ready to find a circle/group

There are a few things that you should consider and know before you begin the search for a circle or group to join.

1. You should have an idea of what you want to gain from joining one. Most have different reasons for wanting to join a group. One of the first and foremost reasons for wanting to join is to have a place to feel at home instead of feeling like an outsider everywhere. Some may want to learn a new tradition. Others may just want to grow spiritually. There are even those who want to know more about paganism and feel joining a group will help them in their understanding.

2. Do some research. There are so many different practices that you should know what it is you comfortable with and what you are not. During your research make a list of things that you like and a list of things that you might not agree with in practicing. Keep that handy when you go to talk to a group. A good example of this would be a group that practices sky clad, would you be comfortable with that?

3. How much time do you have that you can dedicate to the group. All groups have their own ideas on how much time they spend together so you will want to think about the time you have to give to the group. Some groups can be demanding on your time.

4. What specific things are you looking to learn. Do you want a specific Tradition? Or something more eclectic?

5. What type of group are you looking for? There are so many different kinds of groups to choose from. Some examples of different groups are:

A family group, where kids are allowed to join in and learn.

An adult only group.

A Dianic group where there is only the Goddess is worshiped and only females are in the group.

A group with duel deity, a Goddess and God, and has both females and males within their group.

Once you know what it is you are looking for in a group you can start looking for local circles/groups.

An online search is a good way to start looking. There are sites like The witches Voice (witchvox) that list groups and events in all areas. This way you can network with other Wiccans in the country.

Your local paper may carry advertisement for public circle or group gatherings. You can subscribe to various Wiccan publications.

You could even run an ad in the local paper advertising that you are looking for a group to meet with.

Check out pagan festivals and even heritage festivals in the area, since they are almost always, a good contact spot for pagans.

It is best not to jump on the first one that comes along, wait and check them all out.

Things to consider before joining a group

Before joining a circle/group there are some things to keep in mind and consider first. Remember you may end up joining several before you find the right one.

1. Try to do a little research on the group before you decide to join, ask around find out what others think of the group. Is the group known in the area or is it new.

2. If possible make your first meeting with them in a public place. By doing this it will help put everyone at ease.

3. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, learn as much as you can about the other members. Look at the dynamics of the group.

4. Find out what their requirements are, make sure you can uphold them.

5. Make sure that there is nothing in their group that you are uncomfortable with so make sure you ask them about the things you are not comfortable with.

6. Are they willing to talk about the group structure, beliefs and activities.

7. Is there mutual caring and respect between the members

8. Do they promote spiritual growth

9. Do they seem to know what they are talking about or does it seem like they are just reciting something they read.

10. Do the members seem to be happy and content, is there laughter and enjoyment or do they look ill at ease.

11. Do things seem to run smoothly. Are activities and events scheduled ahead of time or are they done at the last minute.

12. Do they spend time outside of the group. If so that usually means that those members have indeed formed a family group. (As I like to call it)

13. Do they have membership fees and if so they are what you can afford, or do you even want to pay a membership fee?

Things to beware of

1. Are they over eager to recruit you

2. A lot of secrecy surrounding the group

3. Are they encouraging the use of alcohol and drugs

4. There is no foundation or structure for the group.

5. Do the group members look uneasy or unhappy.

6. Does only one person seem to speak for the whole group.

7. Proselytizing, groups will advertise to an extent, but do not try to convert others.

8. Does the group charge a large membership fee with out any explanation as to why and what it is used for.

9. Is there a lot of pressure to join them right now? This is a caution sign; you might want to find out why they are so anxious for you to join them.

Organizing your own group

So you think now you might want to start your own little group. Well there are several reasons why some of you may want to start your own group.

Here are a few of the more common reasons:

1. You have a feeling of being called upon to create your own group, this can be a difficult one since those who are just starting out may not recognize it as a calling more of just a need to do it.

2. Wanting to help yourself and others grow spiritually. This is a big reason for groups forming. When you have others to work with it can make the growth more enjoyable and not so overwhelming.

3. There are no groups in your area, or you just cannot find the one that you feel comfortable with or are compatible with.

Starting your own group or circle will not be an easy task. It will take a lot of work, planning and perseverance to see it through.

Do not look for your circle or group to take off right away it will take time to build up members.

There are some things you might want to ask yourself before you begin:

1. Are you prepared to take on a task that will take much of your free time, energy and effort?

2. Are there enough pagans of like mind in the area to warrant a group?

Once you decide to start your group you will need to formulate a plan.

1. What do you call your group?  The name, even though it is just a name, is important. You want to be able to catch the attention of those that are of like mind without causing uproar with the non-pagans. The name should represent something about your circle/group and the members.

2. What kind of group do you want? A study group? A group for planning, and doing ritual together? A group that just gets together and enjoys time with others of like mind? If you do not know what type of group your developing how are you going to advertise it for others?

3. What do you hope to achieve with your circle/group? Do you want to find ways to help educate the public about paganism, maybe you want to just be able to provide an environment that others can feel safe to practice their beliefs, maybe just a combination of both.

4. Do you want your group open or closed? Can anyone come to the meetings or just the members? If you do ritual is that open for anyone or just members. You might want to start out with a closed group and later on open it to all.

5. How are you going to let others know about your circle/group? You need to advertise your group some how. Will you run an ad in the local paper, use the internet, print flyers, or use just word of mouth? Most will do a little bit of all the different ways to get the word out.

6. Last but not least, where are you going to hold your circle/group? Are you going to use your own home? A room at the library, or maybe outside, in a park.

With all this in mind you are now ready to start setting up your own group. Don’t rush the process, remember your group is only as good as the one who starts it and those who you let join it, so do not be afraid to be picky about the way you want your group and those you chose to become members. Remember it is your group, and you are going to get out of it what you put into it. .

Conclusion

My hope is to help you make an informative decision on looking for and joining a group or even starting one of your own.

The one thing to always remember is to not make a hasty decision on joining or starting a group or circle. Take your time and when you find the one that is right for you it can be a very rewarding experience.

Blessings, Karla

Coven Craft, By Amber K

In the Circle By Elen Hawke

[A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0875421180/witchschoolco-20)

by Scott Cunningham

The Sacred Round  By Elen Hawke

Calling the Circle  By Christina Baldwin

Origins of Modern Witchcraft, By Ann Moura