

The daily duties of witches are similar to anyone else's, says Samantha. She has four children, and is educating her oldest son, Adam, at home. "You worship, we worship. You have babies, we have babies. You clean house, we clean house," she says.

Linda Jencson is a witch researcher who has studied the subject for three years. She completed her master's degree on witchcraft and now is pursuing the subject further as a doctoral topic.

There are two basic theories that are the basis of witchcraft says Jencson. One theory centers around the Mother Goddess and the Horned God, the other is based on the story of Demeter and Persephone, who most know as the classical mythology characters, Jencson says.

Persephone is Demeter's daughter who is abducted by Hades, lord of the Underworld. Although she is warned not to eat anything while in the Underworld, she is tempted by six pomegranate seeds and therefore must return to the Underworld six months out of the year to reside with Hades. Demeter, the Goddess of agriculture, mourns while her daughter is underground and the winter season comes with the death of plant life during this mourning period.

Mitzi Linn, a self-proclaimed healer, witch, psychic and tarot card reader adds historical significance to this myth. "In earlier mythology, Persephone

would go there as an initiation rite. She was the actual leader of the Underworld," Linn says.

Historically, by 2000 B.C. female goddesses had taken a back seat to males. During the earlier Paleolithic times, Women were dominant and occupied the roles of importance, Linn said.

More widely followed by witches though, is the theory that the Mother Goddess gave birth to the Horned God, whose life cycle sets up the pattern of celebration during the year for much of the pagan community, Jencson says.

There are eight celebrated dates acknowledged by the Craft, and the dates and myths accompanying them are sometimes debated, says Jencson.

"The Goddess creates everything, and the God is born on Winter Solstice (Dec. 21 or 22) and is growing at Candle Mass (Feb. 1). Brigitte is the Goddess of Healing and many spells for healing are usually done at these ceremonies.

"Spring Equinox (March 22) is more growth of the God and on Mayday or Beltane (May 1) the God reaches sexual maturity. Rituals of prosperity are done during these ceremonies. At the Summer Solstice (June 21) he is a full-grown adult and he sacrifices himself at Lammas (Aug. 1 or 2) so he can have harvest. This is a time to be thankful, to give something up," Jencson says.

At these ceremonies most witches give up something

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— Samantha

they care about by throwing it into the fire. "Chocolate chip cookies were popular at the last one I went to," Jencson says. Other items included a doll and baked bread.

Fall Equinox (Sept. 22) is a different kind of thanksgiving celebration, according to Jencson. "It's kind of a 'let's party' time."

Halloween, or Samhain, remains special to many witches. "It's the time when the God enters the other side, whatever the other side is. Magic works better on that night. The souls of the living and dead are going back and forth and the whole universe is thrown into a kind of time warp," she says.

For Samantha, Halloween is an important time of year also. "It's a time when we finally say goodbye to that which is dying. It's a time for soul-searching, a reflective time for turning inward. It's the halfway point between winter and autumn," she says.

Four witches are now stationed at the north, south, east, and west areas of the circle. They stand with their arms and legs wide and heads high, their bodies imitating the symbolic star as they believe the most energy flows through the body in this position. Some hold wands in their hand, others knives. They will call the direction spirits to guard the circle at each of the four directions of the circle. The witch at the southerly end of the circle begins in a low, powerful tone.

"Hail guardian of the south. Be with us this Solstice eve. Come! So mote it be!"

The medieval term, so mote it be, is repeated and a candle is lighted in each direction as the other witches invoke the individual spirits.

The practice of witchcraft seems to take two forms. There is the ritual and ceremonial side to worship, where witches gather in covens or "circles" to combine energy and create

magic. But a witch's magic can be used just as effectively in day-to-day life, according to Samantha.

She practices magic on a private level, and thinks there is magic in most aspects of everyday life. "If you have a child that is scared to death and you are able to hold him, comfort him and change that fear — that's magic," she says.

She is not, however, limited to this type of magical change, and described an incident of "dramatic magic" where a small group of witches performed a "binding" on James Watt, former Secretary of the Interior.

"We had a little doll we tied up in red yarn and we vowed he couldn't pass any legislation until he learned that the earth is alive and being ruined with his policies. He didn't learn so he lost his office," she says.

And this is about as black as the magic gets, she says. "It isn't harmful."

Local practitioners of the Craft acknowledge that images of satan worship, human and animal sacrifices and other devilish deeds all come to the minds of many with the mention of the word witchcraft. Jencson, however, has yet to come across any Satan worshippers in Lane County. "It kind of surprises me, because I've heard rumors about horrible things done in connection with Satan worship. It's incredibly well-hidden or it just isn't there," she says.

The confusion between witchcraft and satanism is a continual irritant to witches. Most reject completely all aspects of Christianity, according to Jencson. "Most are fairly feminist, believe in reincarnation, karma and a spiritual energy you can get in touch with. There is usually a callous disregard for Christian beliefs; most have slight respect for all religions but have the least respect for Christianity," Jencson says. Ray Noah, associate pastor at Willamette Christian Center, says Christianity does have a stand on witchcraft, though it

is not a "doctrine."

"We feel it is very unbiblical. The Bible talks about witchcraft and there are specific references in the Old Testament to the sin of witchcraft. Witches were put to death and outlawed in the land. Witchcraft has its roots in satanism. Its ties are in satanism and you can't divide the two," Noah says.

Samantha is feverishly disturbed by the idea that members of the Craft are somehow aligned with the Devil. "We don't have a devil. We don't externalize our fears like Christians do with the Devil. We take responsibility for our own lives," she says.

Samantha explained that while witches do acknowledge their own inner darknesses, they lack the base beliefs in Christianity necessary to believe in or revere a devil character. "The base idea that a god would sacrifice his child is repugnant and also that that same god would have only one child is repugnant. Also I have trouble with the idea that God is just kind of somewhere out there," Samantha says.

Noah does not invalidate witchcraft in its concept or power. "I believe there are certain powers that witches can have. Not only is God all-powerful, but Satan has the ability to manipulate people and countries and whatever. I think it is valid in the sense of being real and having power."

Back in a circular formation, the predominant leader in the group now stands before her fellow witches. She talks briefly about the significance of the calendrical holiday then there is a moment of silence before the chants begin which will call first the Horned God, then the Mother Goddess to the ceremony.

"Come people come to the radiant sun. Come people come to the radiant sun. Golden shining shield, radiance, radiance. Horned one come to us."

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