

PAGANISM

A brief overview of the history of Paganism

The term Pagan comes from the Latin *paganus* which refers to those who lived in the country. When Christianity began to grow in the Roman Empire, it did so at first primarily in the cities. The people who lived in the country and who continued to believe in “the old ways” came to be known as pagans. Pagans have been broadly defined as anyone involved in any religious act, practice, or ceremony which is not Christian. Jews and Muslims also use the term to refer to anyone outside their religion.

Some define paganism as a religion outside of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism; others simply define it as being without a religion. Paganism, however, often is not identified as a traditional religion *per se* because it does not have any official doctrine; however, it has some common characteristics within its variety of traditions. One of the common beliefs is the divine presence in nature and the reverence for the natural order in life.

In the strictest sense, paganism refers to the authentic religions of ancient Greece and Rome and the surrounding areas. The pagans usually had a polytheistic belief in many gods but only one, which represents the chief god and supreme godhead, is chosen to worship.

The Renaissance of the 1500s reintroduced the ancient Greek concepts of Paganism. Pagan symbols and traditions entered European art, music, literature, and ethics. The Reformation of the 1600s, however, put a temporary halt to Pagan thinking. Greek and Roman classics, with their focus on Paganism, were accepted again during the Enlightenment of the 1700s. Paganism experienced another rise in the 1800s and 1900s when modern forms of Buddhism and Hinduism were growing in popularity.

Following the interest in ancient civilizations that became popular in the 17th through 19th centuries, including the popularity of the Druid revivals, scholars in the early 20th century explored the ancient spirituality of the British Isles and Europe. The more current “Pagan Renaissance” grew out of a variety of sources that coalesced between the 1930s and 1950s.

Paganism represents a wide variety of traditions that emphasize reverence for nature and a revival of ancient polytheistic and animistic religious practices. Some modern forms of Paganism have their roots in the 19th century, e.g., the British Order of Druids, but most contemporary Pagan groups trace their immediate roots to the 1960s and have an emphasis on a spiritual interest in nature.

Paganism today is a movement that consists of many different perspectives. Most American pagan religions have practices that blend different traditions such as Celtic, Greco-Roman, Native American, ancient Egyptian and Norse. Pagan traditions draw from ancient beliefs as well as from modern beliefs formed in the last century. For example, Paganism found an ally in the ecological and feminist movements of the 1960’s and 70’s. Pagan philosophies appealed to

many eco-activists who also saw nature as sacred and recognized the Great Goddess as Mother Nature.

Recommended readings

Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions by Joyce and River Higginbotham; Llewellyn Publications; first edition, 2002. Presents the fundamentals of Paganism. It explores the Pagan sacred year, rituals, and Pagans beliefs about God, worship, human nature, and ethics.

Drawing Down the Moon by Margot Adler; Penguin Books; Revised edition, 2006. An updated resource guide of newsletters, journals, books, groups, and festivals as well as an in-depth look at the beliefs, experiences and lifestyles of modern America's Pagan groups.

The Triumph of the Moon by Ronald Hutton; Oxford University Press, 2001. This book has been described as bringing witchcraft “out of the shadows.” While it explores the “dark side of witchery,” it stresses the positive, reminding readers that devotion to art, the natural world, and femininity are central to the practice of Wicca.

The Basic Beliefs of Paganism

Because of the wide diversity in Paganism, there are a variety of resources about its basic beliefs. In general, Pagans celebrate nature and spirituality and encourage an eco-friendly lifestyle. Equality of the sexes is dominant. Women play a significant role in ceremonies and goddesses are of great importance. Pagans believe that there is divinity in the living world and, through rituals, they can connect with the divine. The festivals are related to their devotion to nature; e.g., the Summer Solstice celebrates the sun and the divinity that creates life.

Source: Paganism: Types of Religion (<http://www.typesofreligion.com/paganism.html>)

The following three items, taken together, provide a comprehensive overview of the basic beliefs.

(1) Basic Principles of Paganism. Although principles vary from one pagan religion to another, most pagan religions follow the same general set of principles in some form.

-- Responsibility of Beliefs. “The most basic tenant of paganism is that it is your own responsibility, not the responsibility of any government, institution, church or other people to choose what you believe in regards to spirituality, values, ethics, the nature of Divinity, etc.”

-- Personal Responsibility for Your Actions and Personal Development. “The development of your personal beliefs, morals and ethics is your own responsibility it is the responsibility of each individual to learn to recognize what is right from wrong, regardless of our early environment.”

-- Everything is Sacred. “Most pagan religions believe that everything in the universe is sacred, but the definition and level of sacredness applied to an object will generally vary from one pagan to another. For some pagans, all parts of our universe are considered divine and, as such, sacred and worthy of our deepest respect.”

-- Freedom of Choosing Deity. “In all pagan religions, it is up to the individual to determine

what Deity means to them, who or what Deity is right for them and how they ultimately develop their relationship with their chosen Deity. Pagans have many different ideas about what encompasses Deity and how their Deity is represented. It is up to the individual, through study of their religion, meditation and, in some cases prayer, to determine what image of Deity is right for them.”

-- Scope of Consciousness. Many traditional pagans “believe that consciousness extends far beyond the restraints of human form and physical existence. All life forms contain some level of consciousness, from the smallest insect to the giant redwood trees....consciousness survives death and exists simultaneously on multiple levels of reality.”

“Since the term paganism is something of an ‘umbrella’ term, used to cover a wide range of spiritual paths, it would be virtually impossible to provide a detailed and comprehensive list of principles that apply to all pagan religions. For the most part however, these very basic principles can be found in almost all forms of paganism.”

Source: “What are some of the basic principles of paganism?”

(<http://exotic-pets.yoexpert.com/exotic-pets-general/what-are-some-of-the-basic-principles-of-paganism-2192.html>)

(2) What Contemporary Pagans Believe . “The central beliefs of modern Pagans differ in specifics yet share many fundamentals. Deity is seen as immanent rather than transcendent. Experience is preferred over doctrine. It is believed that there are and should be multiple paths to the Divine....While there is no set of beliefs shared by all Pagans, most would agree that similarities far outweigh differences. There are a number of beliefs held by the vast majority of modern Pagans.” For example:

- Multiple paths to the divine exist as symbolized by many goddesses and gods. These are often seen as archetypes or gateways to the unconscious.
- Respect and love Mother Earth essentially as a living being....
- The physical world, as an emanation of the divine, is good and to be enjoyed by all living beings in love and harmony.
- Ethics and morality are based on avoidance of harm to other beings, including Earth as a whole, which mandates environmental activism as a spiritual responsibility.
- Human interdependence implies the need for community cooperation.
- A strong commitment to personal and planetary growth, evolution, and balance are vital.
- One's lifestyle must be consistent with one's beliefs.
- A minimum of dogma and a maximum of individual responsibility in all things are goals to strive for. Thus a healthy skepticism is to be fostered, and ideas are not to be accepted without personal investigation of their validity.
- All beings are personal emanations of the Divine.

Source: Modern Paganism (http://www.paganlibrary.com/introductory/modern_paganism.php)

(3) The three principles of the Pagan Federation

The principles are intended “to provide a general outline of some key mainstream Pagan attitudes and beliefs concerned with how we relate to the Earth, how we relate to others, and

how we relate to the divine.”

-- Love for and Kinship with Nature.... This principle recognized that “human beings are part of nature and that our lives are intimately interwoven with the web of life and death.”

-- A positive morality “in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community. This is often expressed as ‘Do what you will, as long as it harms none.’”

-- Recognition of the Divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the female and male aspect of Deity.

Source: The Pagan Federation (<http://www.paganfed.org/about-princ.shtml>)

(Note: The Pagan Federation International includes members from the United States and across the world.)

The Key Principles of humanism

Numerous statements by both organizations and individuals express the principles of humanism and include our shared worldview with Paganism which can be summed up in one word, naturalism: “the system of those who find all primary causes in nature.”

“Secular humanism is philosophically *naturalistic*.... Naturalism asserts that supernatural entities like God do not exist, and warns us that knowledge gained without appeal to the natural world and without impartial review by multiple observers is unreliable.” -- Council for Secular Humanism (<https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/3260>)

“There is no divine realm. Of course there are strange or as yet unanswered questions about the world, but when we really know or understand the answers then these phenomena are always brought into the natural world or under the laws of nature” -- The International Humanist and Ethical Union (<http://iheu.org/humanism/aspects-of-humanism/>)

“Since the word ‘humanism’ can be used in different ways, we often add the adjective ‘naturalistic’ to suggest a self-sufficient worldview that does not require the intervention of any deity. However, some naturalists, past and present, have attached non-traditional meanings to the definition of God, for example, Spinoza: “God is nature but exhibits no will, no purpose, no design.” Some humanists concede that a poetic or non-traditional usage of the word need not conflict with Naturalism -- the claim that any process in the universe can be explained without recourse to non-natural forces.” -- The Humanists of Utah (<http://www.humanistsofutah.org/1992/art3nov92.html>)

“The only reality is what we can detect through our senses – can see, hear, touch and so on – or else detect by the use of scientific instruments. There is no ‘second layer’ to existence – no gods and ghosts, no souls or spirits of the place – and our only route to sure and certain ... knowledge is through an assumption of naturalism.” -- “Humanism: Beliefs and Values”; David Pollock, British Humanist Association and European Humanist Federation. (<http://david-pollock.org.uk/humanism/humanism-beliefs-and-values/>)

We also suggest that you go to the sources noted below for a more complete presentation of the key principles of humanism. The principles cover a wide array of humanist concerns. We have drawn from several statements.

From Humanist Manifesto I (1933)

-- In place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer, the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

--The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good.

(http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I)

From Humanist Manifesto II (1973)

-- From the Preface: "Humanism is an ethical process through which we all can move, above and beyond the divisive particulars, heroic personalities, dogmatic creeds, and ritual customs of past religions or their mere negation."

-- From the Closing: "We will survive and prosper only in a world of shared humane values.... At the present juncture of history, commitment to all humankind is the highest commitment of which we are capable." (http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II)

From Humanist Manifesto III: Humanism and Its Aspirations (2003)

"...Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone."

(http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III)

From the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 (International Humanist and Ethical Union)

-- Humanism is a lifestance aiming at the maximum possible fulfillment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

(<http://iheu.org/humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>)

From "What Is Humanism?" by Fred Edwords

Former AHA Executive Director and currently the director of the United Coalition of Reason, Fred Edwords has written prolifically about the principles of humanism. In an essay on *What Is Humanism?* he concludes with a keen observation: "So, with modern humanism one finds a lifestance or worldview that is in tune with modern knowledge; is inspiring, socially conscious, and personally meaningful. It is not only the thinking person's outlook but that of the feeling person as well, for it has inspired the arts as much as it has the sciences; philanthropy as much as critique. And even in critique it is tolerant, defending the rights of all people to choose other ways, to speak and to write freely, to live their lives according to their own lights. So the choice is yours. Are you a humanist? You needn't answer 'yes' or 'no.' For it isn't an either-or proposition. Humanism is yours -- to adopt or to simply draw from. You may take a little or a

lot, sip from the cup or drink it to the dregs. It's up to you."
(http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/What_is_Humanism)

Helen Bennett describes her personal views in her poem "What Humanism Means to Me" in her book, *Humanism, What's That? A Book for Curious Kids* (Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2005).

Humanism means to me
I've got the opportunity
To realize that I am free
To take responsibility.

To me, it doesn't seem so odd
That many people pray to God
Whenever they are feeling low --
It's just the way they have to go.

But when I do not know the way
I do not feel the need to pray.
I use my brain to figure out
What the problem's all about.

I'm grateful that I have my eyes
To see the beauty of the skies,
I'm glad I have my ears to hear
The voices of my friends so dear.

But best of all, my brains the one
That figures out what must be done
To help me run a better race,
To make the world a better place.

For additional essays on Living the Humanist Life, Humanism and Traditional Religion and related issues, see: http://americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism

Types of Paganism. The website, Lost Civilizations (<http://www.lost-civilizations.net/celts-wicca-paganism-page-4.html>) has defined the following types of Paganism:

Paleo-paganism: the standard of paganism, a pagan culture which has not been disrupted by 'civilization' by another culture, e.g., ancient Celtic religion (Druidism); religions of the pre-patriarchal cultures of Old Europe, Norse religion, pre-Columbian Native American religions, etc.

Civilo-paganism: the religions of ‘civilized’ communities which evolved in paleo-pagan cultures: Classical Greco-Roman religion, Egyptian religion, Middle-Eastern paganism, etc.

Meso-paganism: a group, which may or may not still constitute a separate culture, which has been influenced by a conquering culture but has been able to maintain an independence of religious practice, e.g., many Native American nations.

Syncreto-paganism: similar to meso-pagan but having had to submerge itself into the dominant culture and adopt the external practices and symbols of the other religion, like the various Afro-diasporic traditions.

Neo-paganism: attempts to reconnect with nature, using imagery and forms from other types of pagans but adjusting them to the needs of modern people. Some examples: Wicca -- in its many forms; neo-Shamanism; neo-Druidism; Asatru and other forms of Norse neo-paganism; neo-Native American practices; the range of practices labeled ‘Women's Spirituality.’

Modern Paganism has been described in this way: “In the present day, the Pagan tradition manifests both as communities reclaiming their ancient sites and ceremonies (especially in Eastern Europe), to put humankind back in harmony with the Earth, and as individuals pursuing a personal spiritual path alone or in a small group ... under the tutelage of one of the Pagan divinities. To most modern Pagans in the West, the whole of life is to be affirmed joyfully and without shame, as long as other people are not harmed by one’s own tastes.” Source: Pagan Federation International (<http://www.paganfederation.org/what-is-paganism/>)

In addition, there are other Pagan belief systems which are highly relevant: Secular Paganism, Naturalistic Paganism, and Humanistic Paganism.

Secular Paganism

Secular Paganism is a set of principles shared by diverse groups around the world. It is a natural outgrowth of many peoples’ personal ethics and beliefs about life. It is not a religion but rather an ethical view based on the belief that nature is sacred and must be respected and treasured. Secular Pagans believe that we are a part of nature, not her master. There are no particular religious views connected with Secular Paganism. While there is no organization or group designating these beliefs, there are commonly held principles.

There are many reasons why people call themselves Secular Pagans. Many have a deep and abiding love for the natural world and the environment. Many believe that all things in nature have a spirit or soul that is unique to them. Many are people whose ethical code is built on their respect for Earth and the environment. Many are scientists who have come to the belief through their research. Secular Pagans include environmentalists, farmers, academics, retail workers, scientists, students, artists, performers, teachers, laborers, writers, teenagers and children. Many are atheists or agnostics. Meditating on nature and one’s place in it is a ritual of many Secular Pagans as is protecting the environment.

It is not the belief in a deity that unites Secular Pagans but rather a belief in the 15 Guiding Principles of Secular Paganism. Some of which are:

- Ethical behavior does not require a religion
- The equality of genders, races, and all humans
- Our health depends on the Environment's health
- Our individual actions can and do have consequences
- Evolution is an ongoing process that occurs in all species
- Respect for ourselves requires respect for the Earth
- Gods and Goddesses can be seen as metaphors

Source: For the entire list, see: Secular Paganism (<http://www.spiralgoddess.com/SecularPaganism.html>)

Naturalistic Paganism

“Naturalistic Pagans support the view of the world that includes those things which one can observe or conclude from observations. Their conception of reality consists of the natural world as supported by scientific understanding. As for claims for which there is no evidence, Pagan naturalists maintain that ‘We are careful to limit our claims about reality to what we can experience and measure On all else, we are content to admit ‘we don’t know.’” Source: What is Spiritual Naturalism? (<http://spiritualnaturalistsociety.org/about-us/what-is-spiritual-naturalism/>)

“Philosophical naturalism seeks to explain the universe without resort to supernatural causes. For most Naturalistic Pagans, ‘naturalistic’ is synonymous with ‘scientific.’ In general, they adopt the most current explanations of science and are skeptical of claims not supported by science.... Naturalistic Pagans are skeptical about things like magic(k), psychic abilities, communication with spirit entities, attributing intention to inanimate nature To the extent that Naturalistic Pagans speak about ‘magic’ or ‘gods’, they tend to use these words differently than their common usage.... Naturalistic Pagan ... may understand ‘gods’ as metaphors for natural phenomena.” Source: What is Humanistic/Naturalistic Paganism? (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/2014/09/04/what-is-humanisticnaturalistic-paganism/>)

In short, Naturalistic Paganism integrates mythic, meditative, and ritual practices with a worldview based on the most compelling scientific evidence.

A paper by the Spiritual Naturalist Society (<http://spiritualnaturalistsociety.org/>) raises a number of relevant questions which we have abstracted below.

- What defines us? “First, we are *Pagans*. Our spiritual practices are inspired by ancient non-Abrahamic cultural-religious traditions we draw inspiration from old ways while embracing modernity. Second, we are naturalists. This worldview unites our many varieties and makes us unique among Pagans. What most Naturalistic Pagans mean by it can be summed up simply: ‘only natural causes affect the universe; if there are supernatural causes, there is no reliable

evidence yet to support that idea.’ natural causes are best discovered via the current most compelling scientific evidence. ... we adopt an appropriate skepticism toward any supposed divine or magical causes outside nature, i.e., supernatural causes as well as those within nature unsupported by the best evidence.”

“While we find little evidence to support most of the metaphysical claims made for deities and magic, we find plenty of evidence for the capacity of Pagan myth, meditation, and ritual. As a result of our reliance on demonstrable evidence, several tendencies emerge, including these two: (1) We tend to view deities as metaphorical, poetic, or psychological in some sense, and not as causal agents external to and independent of the individual. (2) Because our worldview does not include afterlives or hidden realms, we tend to be focused on life.... cherishing each moment and improving the world for all life on Earth.”

-- Practices. “Although there is great variation, some common practices include: exploring mythology for inspiration and insight; discovering our world through experience and scientific inquiry; and changing ourselves and our society through responsible action. ... we may invoke deities although the meaning may be allegorical.”

-- The role of science. “Faith claims, extra-sensory perceptions, personal visions, and the like have proven unreliable as guides to reality.... scientific method, though imperfect, has proven the most reliable to date..... we look to the current most compelling scientific evidence.”

-- The role of Paganism. “Pagan myth, meditation, and ritual cultivate a nature-based, richly-symbolic subjective experience.... those who come to feel more akin to the environment are more likely to protect it.”

Source: Spiritual Naturalist Society (<http://spiritualnaturalistsociety.org/what-is-humanistic-paganism/>)

Humanistic Paganism

Humanistic Paganism, as well as Naturalistic Paganism, describes the Pagan path for those who are uncomfortable with or skeptical of the supernatural or metaphysical elements of contemporary Paganism. They are Pagans who are firmly rooted in the physical world.

Humanistic Paganism “is a naturalistic path rooted in ancient Paganism and contemporary science.” -- Source: Humanistic Paganism (<http://humanisticpaganism.com/what-is-humanisticpaganism-2-0/>)

“Humanistic Paganism is a form of religious or spiritual humanism. Religious humanism can describe any religion that takes a human-centered ethical perspective as contrasted with a deity-centered ethical perspective. What is good is defined in terms of human experience rather than the will of any god or gods. Religious humanists tend to be atheistic or non-theistic. For religious humanists, human experience and reason provide a more than sufficient basis for ethical action without supernatural revelation.... Humanistic Paganism can embrace the notion that we humans are part of a much larger community of beings to whom we have ethical obligations. The adjective ‘humanistic’ is intended to contrast with ‘theistic’; it excludes gods, but not other living beings.” -- Source: “What is Humanistic/Naturalistic Paganism?”

(<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/2014/09/04/what-is-humanistic-naturalistic-paganism/>)

“For those who struggle with anti-pagan prejudices and stereotypes, Humanist Paganism might be a powerful educational tool. It can show that a pagan can be a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and enlightened person, and that a pagan culture can be artistically vibrant, environmentally conscious, intellectually stimulating, and socially just.” -- Source: Brendan Myers, an author known for his contributions in environmental philosophy, Druidry and Neo-Druidism, mythology, and applied virtue ethics.

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/brendanmye616110.html>)

“... Humanistic Paganism is a naturalistic way of life rooted equally in science and myth. Modern empirical science has revealed a startling universe that is a wonder to behold, and we have every reason to stand in awe. At the same time, the world’s ancient mythic traditions reveal our inner, psychological universe. Both are valuable in the 21st century. When it comes to science and religion, there’s no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater. One way of life that fully embraces both is Humanistic Paganism.” -- Source: “Exploring Humanism and Paganism with B.T. Newberg” (Cited in “The Humanist Contemplative: Essays in Spiritual Naturalism” by D. T. Strain)

(<http://humanistcontemplativeblog.blogspot.com/2011/10/exploring-humanism-and-paganism-with-bt.html>) Note: B.T. Newberg is the editor of the website Humanistic Paganism.

Humanistic Paganism. The mission of the website, HumanisticPaganism.com, “is to amplify the voices of Pagans engaged in naturalistic spirituality.” The four goals are “to share reflection on beliefs and practices, to aid connection with others of like mind, to develop and debate a Pagan naturalistic way of being-in-the-world, and to educate other Pagans and the general public about naturalistic spirituality.” The website includes a section on activism which begins with this ancient Greek proverb: “Hermes will help you get your cart unstuck, but only if you push.” “In other words, if you want the world to change, you would best begin with your own two hands.” They also provide “resources to help you in your quest to live responsibly”. The resources are in environment and green living, humanitarian concerns, gender issues, and interfaith dialogue.

In many ways, we are on “the same page” as you will see in the following quotes, first from the Pagan perspective and then the humanist.

We Are On The Same Page

“We can open new eyes and see that there is nothing to be saved *from*, no struggle of life *against* the universe, no God outside the world to be feared and obeyed.” -- Starhawk, author of many works on the Goddess movement and Earth-based, feminist spirituality.

“Trees have from time immemorial been closely associated with magic. These stout members of the vegetable kingdom may stand for as long as a thousand years and tower far above our mortal heads. As such they are symbols and keepers of unlimited power, longevity, and

timelessness. An untouched forest, studded with trees of all ages, sizes and types, is more than a mysterious, magical place - - it is one of the energy reservoirs of nature. Within its boundaries stand ancient and new sentinels, guardians of the universal force which has manifested on the the Earth.” - - Scott Cunningham was an American author of several books on Wicca and other religious subjects.

“I am a Pagan.

I am a part of the whole of Nature.

The rocks, the animals, the plants, the elements are my relatives.

Other humans are my sisters and brothers, whatever their races, colors, ages, nationalities, creeds, or sexual preferences.

The earth is my Mother and the sky is my Father.

The sun and moon are my Grandparents, and the stars my ancestors.

I am part of this large family of Nature, not the master of it.

I have my own special part to play and I seek to play that part to the best of my ability.

I seek to live in harmony with others in the family of Nature, treating others with respect, not abuse...”

-- Selena Fox is a Wiccan priestess, interfaith minister, environmentalist, pagan elder, author, and lecturer in pagan studies and comparative religions.

“Science makes people reach selflessly for truth and objectivity; it teaches people to accept reality, with wonder and admiration, not to mention the deep awe and joy that the natural order of things brings to the true scientist.” -- Lise Meitner was an Austrian physicist and part of the team that discovered nuclear fission for which she and her colleague were awarded the Nobel Prize.

“Man is a product of nature, a part of the Universe. The Universe is operated under exact natural laws. Man is a product of millions of years of evolution. He adapts himself to the laws of nature or he perishes.” -- James Hervey Johnson was an American Atheist Freethinker, writer and editor of *The Truth Seeker*.

“Yes, I'm a materialist. I'm willing to be shown wrong, but that has not happened — yet. And I admit that the reason I'm unable to accept the claims of psychic, occult, and/or supernatural wonders is because I'm locked into a world-view that demands evidence rather than blind faith, a view that insists upon the replication of all experiments — particularly those that appear to show violations of a rational world — and a view which requires open examination of the methods used to carry out those experiments.” -- James Randi, retired stage magician best known for his challenges to paranormal claims and pseudoscience. In 2012 he was awarded the American Humanists' Lifetime Achievement Award.

How many Pagans are there in the United States?

“The diversity of Pagan traditions has made a comprehensive census nearly impossible. Practitioners also point out that social discrimination against Paganism has kept many from practicing openly.” (<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Pagan.html>) There are, however, several sources that present some data on this.

It is estimated that there are more than 750,000 Wiccans in the United States, making Paganism the fifth largest religion in the United States behind Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. –Source: The Eight Largest Faith Groups in the United States (<http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=11805>)

Wiccan churches and other Neo-pagan institutions are becoming more common in the United States. However, estimates of their numbers vary widely. Most of the 1990s studies put the number of between 200,000 and 1 million (0.1% to 0.5% of the total population). A 2008 Pew Forum survey put “New Age” religious believers, including Neo-pagans, at about 1.2 million.... More conservative estimates are from 150,000 to 200,000. Others estimate a total of about 300,000 people associated with the “overall movement” of Wicca. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neopaganism_in_the_United_States)

What is the next step?

Humanism As the Next Step by Lloyd and Mary Morain (the Humanist Press, Washington, DC, new revised edition 2008) presents a concise overview of the history and principles of modern humanism. We also suggest that you begin to dialogue with humanists in your area on the common principles outlined above and look for additional commonalities which you are certain to find.

Also, if you harbor any doubts about the concept of a divinity, as many Pagans seemingly do, the next step would be to explore the American Humanist Association’s website (americanhumanist.org/) where you will find a wealth of information about humanism, our local groups, programs, publications and resources of all types for people of all ages. You can, of course, follow the American Humanist Association on Facebook and Twitter and become a member of the AHA. Perhaps you may wish to identify yourself as both a humanist and a Pagan. As you see from this report, you surely would not be the first to add the humanist identity to your beliefs. Many Pagans realize that they have a home in humanism. We welcome you.

For additional information and for answers to any questions you might have about the humanist worldview and lifestance, please contact us at: aha@americanhumanist.org

A final word: We are on Common Ground

“There is a spectrum of interpretation regarding many Pagan paths. On one end is a literal interpretation whereby gods and spirits are believed in supernatural terms, and on the other end, they may be seen as metaphoric personifications of fully natural forces or aspects of nature, or

as useful archetypes.....” Source: What is Spiritual Naturalism?
(<http://spiritualnaturalistsociety.org/about-us/what-is-spiritual-naturalism/>)

We share a naturalistic worldview. Pagans venerate nature; humanists value nature for its central position in our worldview. Venerate and value. Both can be the meeting place as we work together to make the world a more humane place, a goal we both support. What do we have in common? Compare what is said on the websites of both groups:

-- Our worldview doesn't include afterlives or hidden realms.” (humanisticpaganism.com)
-- We are living the only life we'll have, in the only world we know about. The responsibility for the choices we make are ours and ours alone. (americanhumanist.org)

Can one be both a Pagan and a humanist? Many already are.