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The Occult

Radically Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity



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THE OCCULT

Amulet, any object worn as a charm. An amulet is most often a stone, or piece of metal, with either an inscription or figures engraved on it. Usually suspended from the neck, it is worn as a guard against sickness or witchcraft. The ancient Egyptians wore amulets, sometimes in the form of necklaces. Among the Greeks, such a protective charm was called *phylakterion*. The amulets of the Jews, slips of parchment on which passages of the Law were written, were evidently worn as badges of piety by the Pharisaic school, but were also regarded as protection from evil spirits and from other harm. The use of amulets was inherited by the Christian Church, the usual inscription on them being *ichthys* (the Greek word for “fish”), because it contained the initials of the Greek words for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. Among Gnostic sects, abraxas stones, gems with the Greek word, *abraxas*, engraved on them, were often used. Amulets became so common among Christians that, in the 4th century, the clergy were forbidden to make or sell them on pain of deprivation of holy orders; in 721, the wearing of amulets was solemnly condemned by the Church. With the spread of Arabian astronomy, the astrological amulet, or talisman, became increasingly popular. Throughout the Middle East, the practice of wearing amulets is almost universal.

Ancestor Worship, reverence granted to deceased relatives who are believed to have become powerful spiritual beings or, less frequently, to have attained the status of gods. It is based on the belief that ancestors are active members of society and are still interested in the affairs of their

living relatives.

The cult of ancestors is common, although not universal. It has been extensively documented in West African societies (the Bantu and the Shona), in Polynesia and Melanesia (the Dobu and the Manus), among several Indo-European peoples (the ancient Scandinavians, Romans, and Germans) and especially in China and Japan. In general, ancestors are believed to wield great authority, having special powers to influence the course of events or to control the well-being of their living relatives. Protection of the family is one of their main concerns. They are considered intermediaries between the supreme god, or the gods, and the people, and can communicate with the living through dreams and by possession. The attitude toward them is one of mixed fear and reverence. If neglected, the ancestors may cause disease and other misfortunes. Propitiation, supplication, prayer, and sacrifice are various ways in which the living can communicate with their ancestors.

Ancestor worship is a strong indication of the value placed on the household and of the strong ties that exist between the past and the present. The beliefs and practices connected with the cult help to integrate the family, to sanction the gravitational political structure, and to encourage respect for living elders. Some scholars have also interpreted it as a source of individual well-being and of social harmony and stability. Because it is practiced by family groups, ancestor worship excludes proselytizing and rarely involves a separate priesthood. It has no formal doctrines and is ordinarily an aspect of some larger religious system.

Aquarius (astrology), the 11th sign of the zodiac, symbolized by the water-bearer. According to astrologers, people born between January 20 and February 18, are born under the sun sign of Aquarius. Aquarius, an air sign, is said to be ruled by the planet, Uranus.

Astrologers consider Aquarians to be brilliant, visionary, curious, open-minded, original, independent, and eccentric. Though emotionally detached, they also tend to be friendly and social. According to astrologers, Aquarians have a highly developed sense of social equality and often are attracted to activism or progressive political organizations.

Like other air signs, Aquarians are said to be less concerned with practical and physical matters than with intellectual pursuits. They feel most comfortable in the world of ideas; they find situations that require emotional responses, such as personal relationships, to be difficult. Astrologers believe that Aquarians have lightning-fast intuitive insight and can quickly grasp abstract concepts. Professions associated with Aquarius include inventing, research, social organizing or activism, astrology, communications, computer sciences, and electronics.

Aries (astrology), the first sign of the zodiac, symbolized by the ram. People whose birthdays fall between March 21 and April 19 are said to be born under the sun sign of Aries. According to astrologers, Aries, a fire sign, is ruled by the planet, Mars.

Astrologers believe that Arians have assertive, pioneering, competitive, and

courageous natures. Arians are said to have strong senses of self, and to frequently be selfish. Arians tend to behave in headstrong, impulsive, sometimes foolhardy ways. Although they anger quickly, they get over their anger quickly, and do not hold grudges. Astrologers consider many Arians to be natural athletes and to be drawn to physical activity.

Because of the sign's association with the planet, Mars (named for the ancient Roman god of war), people born under it are said to like danger and risk. According to astrologers, adventure appeals to Arians, and their natural gift for plunging into projects and activities with gusto, can make them successful leaders and good at motivating others. Professions associated with Aries include medicine, especially surgery; the military; manufacturing, especially involving metal or heavy machinery; sports; carpentry; and engineering.

Astrology, the study of how events on earth correspond to the positions and movements of astronomical bodies, particularly the sun, moon, planets, and stars. Astrologers believe that the position of astronomical bodies at the exact moment of a person's birth and the subsequent movements of the bodies reflect that person's character and; therefore, destiny. For many years, scientists have rejected the principles of astrology. However, millions of people continue to believe in or practice it.

Astrologers create charts called *horoscopes*, which map the position of astronomical bodies at certain times, such as when a person is born. A horoscope is illustrated by a circle, called the *ecliptic*. The ecliptic is the

plane on which the earth orbits around the sun in a year. It is divided into twelve sections, called the *signs of the Zodiac*, which include Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Astrologers assign every planet (which in astrology includes the sun and moon) with a particular sign, depending on where that planet appears on the ecliptic at the time for which the horoscope is cast. Each planet represents basic human drives, and each sign represents a set of human characteristics. When astrologers designate a person's sun sign—that is, the sign that the sun occupied at the time of the person's birth.

The horoscope also is divided into twelve *houses*, which make up the 24-hour period during which the earth rotates once on its axis. Each house deals with certain areas of a person's life, such as marriage, health, work, travel, and death. Astrologers make predictions by interpreting the position of astronomical bodies within the signs and houses of the horoscope.

Astrology is an ancient practice that different civilizations seemed to develop independently. The Chaldeans, who lived in Babylonia (now Iraq), developed one of the original forms of astrology as early as 3000 B.C. The Chinese were practicing astrology by 2000 B.C. Other varieties formed in ancient India and among the Maya of Central America. These people may have observed that certain astronomical bodies, particularly the sun, affected the change of seasons, and the success of crops. Based on such observations, they may have developed a broader system by which the movements of other bodies such as the planets affected or represented additional aspects of life.

By the 500's B.C., astrology had spread to Greece, where such philosophers as Pythagoras and Plato incorporated it into their study of religion and astronomy. Astrology was widely practiced in Europe through the Middle Ages, despite the condemnation of such Christian leaders as Augustine, who became archbishop of Canterbury about A.D. 600. Many scholars viewed astrology and astronomy as complementary sciences until about the 1500's. At that time, the discoveries made by such astronomers as Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei undermined some of the foundations of astrology. Since then, few scientists have accepted astrology as a science.

Black Mass, parody of a Roman Catholic mass involving the worship of Satan, or the Devil. Accounts of the black mass come primarily from literature and legend. They describe a number of rituals that generally contradict the message in a proper mass. Participants may suspend a crucifix upside down, recite traditional prayers backward, perform a mock blessing with filthy water, use a naked woman as an altar, sacrifice animals, or perform a variety of bizarre sexual acts.

The legend of the black mass probably originated during the Middle Ages, when some people combined Christian rituals with magic. Observers may have connected such practices with witchcraft or satanic worship. Some scholars believe that the modern image of the black mass has developed since the 1600's, when many people in Europe and the American colonies were executed as witches. Courts may have forced people accused of witchcraft to admit to practices described in the early legends. Organized

societies of witchcraft do not acknowledge the practice of the black mass.

Cancer (astrology), the fourth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by a crab. People whose birthdays occur between June 22 and July 22 are said to be born under the sun sign of Cancer. According to astrologers, the moon rules Cancer, which is a water sign.

Astrologers consider Cancerians to be nurturing, emotional, sensitive, conservative, and home-loving. Due to the sign's association with the moon, Cancerians often have widely fluctuating moods. Astrologers say Cancerians are artistic, have vivid imaginations, and have highly developed memories. Like people born under other water signs, Cancerians are thought to be much more aware of how they feel than what they think.

According to astrologers, Cancerians' ability to sense other people's needs and emotions makes them sympathetic and nurturing, and often personable and easy to get along with. They are said to place great importance on family and crave security. They often withdraw into themselves for protection. Astrologers believe typical Cancerians can have difficulty being objective, and are easily crushed by criticism. They also say that Cancerians worry too much.

Professions associated with the sign Cancer include ones related to domestic activities. These include hospitality, cooking, and catering; childcare; real estate; and writing or other jobs that require imagination.

Capricorn (astrology), tenth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by a mountain goat. Astrologers believe that people whose birthdays fall between December 22 and January 19 are born under the sun sign of Capricorn. The planet Saturn rules Capricorn, which is an earth sign.

According to astrologers, Capricorns have responsible, disciplined, practical methodical, cautious, serious, and sometimes pessimistic natures. Capricorns believe that anything worth having is worth working hard for, and they assign the highest value to things won through the hardest work. Typical Capricorns are aloof and shy, sometimes even awkward, because they stay so focused on responsibility. To them, life is serious business, and they sometimes have difficulty relaxing and having fun. Because of this, Capricorns may be lonely.

Astrologers believe that Capricorns respect power, authority, structure, tradition, and old things whose value and durability are tested by time. Capricorns are ambitious, and they typically are not satisfied unless they have reached a level of power and authority. They have a deep need for security, especially financial, and often will work very hard to get rich. Professions traditionally associated with Capricorn include banking; government, big business, and other situations with power hierarchies; mining; farming, and construction.

Charm (magic), any formula, act, or object supposed to have magical power to ward off danger or to bring good luck. Although the term originally

meant the chanting of a verse believed to exert occult influence, it came to mean an object worn or carried for protection or good fortune.

Clairvoyance, ability to see or visualize objects and events beyond the range of normal sight. Clairvoyance is a form of *extrasensory perception*, or **ESP**, which includes any ability to gain information by psychic means, rather than through the physical senses. According to belief, clairvoyance usually occurs when a person with clairvoyant powers is in a state of trance, during which that person can describe the objects or events that appear in his or her mind. Most scientists; however, deny that claims of clairvoyance have been supported by any substantial evidence.

There are several explanations for clairvoyance among people who believe it occurs. Some people believe that a clairvoyant person gains psychic visions through communication with spirits. Others claim that clairvoyance comes through *telepathy*, the ability to communicate with others using only the mind. Another explanation says that clairvoyant people get their information through their own special abilities, without direction from another person or spirit.

Demon, supernatural being, spirit, or force capable of influencing human lives, usually by evil means. Demons have played a role in the traditions of most religions and also have appeared in mythology and literature. Exorcism, the practice of expelling demons that possess people or places, has been carried out by many religions, usually by a person with special

authority. The study of demons is called *demonology*.

The belief in evil spirits and their ability to influence the lives of people dates from prehistoric times. Many early people believed that spirits occupied all elements of nature. Evil spirits or demons were the spirits of ancestors who brought harm to living people. Societies that practiced *ancestor worship* sought to influence the actions of both good and bad spirits. Some ancient societies, including those in Egypt and Babylonia (now Iraq), believed that such spirits were responsible for the functions of the body and that demons caused specific illnesses.

Spirits and demonic beings became an important part of Hinduism, the religion of India. Hindu scriptures called the *Vedas*, composed about 1000 B.C., describe a variety of evil beings, including the *asuras and the panis*, who harm people and work against the Hindu gods. The word, *demon*, originated from an ancient Greek term, *daimon*, which referred to beings whose special powers placed them between people and the gods. These beings had the ability either to improve people's lives or carry out the punishment of the gods.

Basic Christian ideas about demons originated from references to evil beings or "unclean spirits" in the Old Testament of the Bible. By the Middle Ages, Christian theology had developed an elaborate hierarchy of *angels*, who were associated with God, and *fallen angels*, or demons, who were led by Satan. Satan, himself, was considered the original fallen angel. In most English versions of the Bible, the term *demon*, is translated as *devil*, and in the New Testament, demon is identified with an evil spirit.

Islam also developed a complex system of demons. Muslim writings describe a group of evil beings, called *jinn*, who cause destruction and preside over places where evil activities take place. The original jinn was called Iblis, who was cast out by Allah for refusing to worship Adam, the first man.

Demons also have become part of folklore throughout the world. Many of these demons have peculiar qualities. They include such familiar creatures as vampires, who suck the blood of living victims. Another variety of demon, the Japanese *oni*, are said to bring on storms. In Scotland, legendary *kelpies* haunt pools, waiting to drown unwary travelers. Popular belief in demons and evil spirits has steadily declined since the 1700's.

Devil, in later Hebrew and in Christian belief, the supreme spirit of evil, who for immeasurable time, has ruled over a kingdom of evil spirits and is in constant opposition to God. The word is derived, via the ecclesiastical Latin *diabolus*, from the Greek *diabolos*, an adjective meaning "slandorous," used also in ancient Greek as a noun to identify a person as a slanderer. The term was used in the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, not to refer to human beings, but rather to translate the Hebrew *ha-Satan* ("the Satan"), an expression originally used as the title of a member of the divine court who functioned as God's roving spy, gathering intelligence about human beings from his travels on earth. Because aspects of this heavenly figure were probably drawn from experience with agents of ancient Middle Eastern royal secret services, it is not surprising

that the Satan should also be seen as a character who attempts to provoke punishable sedition where he finds none, thus acting as an adversary of human beings, bent on separating them from God. In all speculation about the Satan, the major problem being addressed is that of the origin and nature of evil.

In later Jewish tradition, and thus, also in early Christian thought, the title becomes a proper name; Satan begins to be seen as an adversary not only of human beings, but also -- and even primarily - - of God. This development is probably a result of the influence of Persian dualistic philosophy, with its opposing powers of good (Ormazd) and evil (Ahriman). But in both Jewish and Christian systems, the dualism is always provisional or temporary, the devil being ultimately subject to God. In the writings of the Qumran sect, the devil emerges as Belial, the Spirit of Wickedness.

In some strains of rabbinic thought, Satan is linked with the “evil impulse,” which, is thus, personified to some degree. This personification is a Jewish form of the widespread and ancient assumption that human beings can be subjected to malevolent forces distinct from their conscious minds. Thus, both in Judaism and in Christianity, the belief is found that human beings can be “possessed” by the devil or by his subordinates, the demons.

Perhaps the core of Christian teaching about the devil is that Jesus Christ came to break the grip he and his demons have on the whole of humanity (the “possession” of some is a symptom of the general domination of all), and that in the crucifixion, the devil and his henchmen, working their worst, were doomed, paradoxically, to ultimate defeat.

In the Middle Ages, the devil played important roles in art and in folklore, being almost always seen as an evil, impulsive animal-human with a tail and horns, sometimes accompanied by subordinate devils. The thought that the latter could take up residence in human beings served more frequently to differentiate the possessed from the normal than to indicate something about the state of all humanity.

The complexity, mystery, and corporate nature of evil have caused some thinkers to believe that a place must be found for the devil, even in modern thought.

Divination, practice of attempting to acquire hidden knowledge and insight into events -- past, present, and future -- through the direct or indirect contact of human intelligence with the supernatural. The practice was closely allied with religion among pagan, Hebrew, and early Christian peoples.

Contact with the supernatural is usually sought through a psychic medium, a person supposedly endowed with supernormal receptivity. In direct divination, the medium acquires knowledge through direct contact with the unknown. The oracle, a medium or diviner who figured prominently in the beliefs of a number of ancient peoples, including those of Babylonia, and Greece, typified the mediumistic method. Oracles employed various techniques in establishing contact with divinity. Some, such as the oracle at Delphi, passed into a trance and, in this condition, uttered divine

messages. Others practiced oneiromancy, or divination by dreams, and necromancy, the art of conjuring up revelations from the souls of the dead. The direct method of divination is closely approximated in much of modern spiritualism.

The accomplishment of indirect or artificial contact with the supernatural depends on the interpretation by a medium of the behavior of animals and natural phenomena, which might convey messages from the supernatural. In antiquity, common artificial or inductive means of divination were the casting of lots; haruspication, the inspection of animal entrails; and ornithomancy, the study of the activity of birds. In ancient Rome, augurs or priests performed their divination in elaborate ceremonies, called auguries, by reading auspices or omens. To determine the will of the gods, they utilized such forms of divination as haruspication, ornithomancy, and the interpretation of dreams and visions. These augurs, members of a college that existed in Rome from the founding of the city until late in the 4th century A.D., exercised enormous power. No Roman would embark upon a major undertaking unless the augurs decided the auspices were favorable. The forms of inductive divination, best known today, include astrology; crystallogomancy, or crystal gazing; bibliomancy, the interpretation of secret messages from books, especially from the Bible; numerology, the study of numbers; and the reading of palms, tea leaves, and cards.

Divination in China followed a different course. In the Shang dynasty, shoulder blades of oxen and the bottom shells of tortoises were inscribed and heated. A message was derived from the pattern of cracks formed across the inscription after heat was applied. The founder of the Chou

dynasty is said to have established the traditional patterns of lines and added the judgments of their significance. His son, the duke of Chou, is said to have composed the commentaries. The collected judgments are known as T'uan and the commentaries as Yao.

In the time of Confucius, additional texts, the Wings, were appended. The result was the text known as *I Ching* (Book of Changes). The interpretations found in the Wings are sometimes attributed to scholars of the Han dynasty.

The cosmological principle behind the *I Ching* is simply that of change. Change is the movement between the cosmic forces of yin and yang, as represented by the divided and undivided lines of the traditional patterns, the 8 trigrams, and the 64 hexagrams formed from them by casting lots. Three divided yin lines signify earth; three undivided yang lines signify heaven. The 64 hexagrams, therefore, represent all possible situations or changes in creation. Examination of the hexagrams will furnish a description of the universe at that particular moment in its endless process of change and will provide hints of its future course of development.

Divining Rod, forked stick of wood or metal used to locate water, minerals, or other material underground. Sticks used specifically to locate water are called *dowsing rods*. A person using a divining rod grasps it lightly by its two forks and holds the end out. According to belief, the divining rod moves downward or upward independently when the person walks directly over the water or other material.

References to the use of divining rods appear in the records of ancient Egypt and Rome. The practice is still common in many parts of the world, particularly for locating wells. People who search for water by this method are called *dowsers*. Many scientists have dismissed belief in divining rods as superstition.

Exorcism, practice of expelling demons or evil spirits from people or places that are possessed, or are in danger of possession, by them. Exorcism usually is performed by a person with special religious authority, such as a priest or shaman. The practice was common in ancient societies and was based on the practice of magic. Ancient Babylonian civilization, in what is now Iraq, had special priests who would destroy a clay or wax image of a demon in a ritual meant to destroy the actual demon. The ancient Egyptians and Greeks had similar rites. Many religions in various parts of the world continue the practice of exorcism.

The Bible includes a number of references to demons and exorcism. The New Testament describes occasions when Jesus Christ expelled evil spirits by prayer and the power of His command. In the Roman Catholic Church, exorcism is an order that priests may practice with special permission. It is mainly used as a preparation for the sacrament of baptism.

Fetishism, a term used in anthropology to identify the concept of devotion to objects, and in psychology to identify the concept of devotion to desires.

In anthropology, fetishism applies to a form of belief and religious practice in which supernatural attributes are imputed to material, inanimate objects, known as fetishes. The practice includes magic, often with many attendant ceremonies and minor rituals. The fetish is usually a figure modeled or carved from clay, stone, wood, glass, or other material in imitation of a deified animal or other object. Frequently it consists of fur, feathers, hair, or a bone or tooth of a tutelary animal. Sometimes it is the animal itself or a tree, river, rock, or place associated with the tutelary in the mind of the devotee. In some cases, the belief is so definitely crystallized about the object that the original connection with the tutelary is obscured, and the belief merges into idolatry. At one time, fetishism was thought to be practiced only in West Africa, but it is now known to prevail among peoples in all lands. Anthropologists of the 19th century limited the use of the term to the doctrine of potencies (or spirits) attached to, or conveying influence through, material objects. According to more recent data, however, fetishes need not be connected with spirits, except to the extent that they are employed to thwart malevolent beings.

In psychology, the term applies to a sexual disorder in which sexual urges and fantasies persistently involve the use of nonliving objects by themselves or, at times, the use of such objects with a sexual partner. Common fetishes in Western society are feet, shoes, and articles of intimate female apparel. In general, psychologists believe that fetishism serves to alleviate feelings of sexual inadequacy, usually among males.

Nature Worship, religious devotion paid either to nature as a deified

collective entity or to all things in nature, including the elements, celestial bodies, plants, animals, and humanity. The worship of the elements does not seem to occur in the most rudimentary religions, but frequently arises in later stages of religious development. The worship of fire, found among many primitive peoples, reached its highest development in the ancient Parsis sect of Persia. Celestial bodies have been deified in the religious systems of primitive and highly civilized peoples alike. The Khoikhoi of South Africa, worship the moon; sun worship was practiced by the Iroquois, the Plains peoples, and the Tsimshian people of North America, and reached a high state of development among the Native Americans of Mexico and Peru. The sun was also a Hindu deity, regarded as maleficent by the Dravidians of southern India, but considered benevolent by the Munda of the central parts. The Babylonians were sun worshipers, and in ancient Persia, worship of the sun was an integral part of the elaborate cult of Mithras. The ancient Egyptians worshiped the sun god, Ra; they also apotheosized the moon and the star, Sirius. Other Egyptian deities included the constellations and the circumpolar stars.

Plants and trees have been worshiped as totems or because of their usefulness, beauty, or fear-inspiring aspect. They are considered either as holy in themselves or as the dwelling places of spirits. Both the soma plant of India and the coca shrub of Peru have been worshiped for the intoxicating properties of products derived from them. Field crops, regarded as harboring spirits of fertility, have been worshiped both by primitive tribes and by the peasants of Europe, among whom, traces of the cult may still be found.

Fire Worship, religious devotion to fire as a divine or sacred element. Like sun worship, from which it cannot always be distinguished, the veneration of fire is one of the earliest forms of religion. The flame itself may be the object of adoration, or it may be regarded as the material manifestation of a divinity or fire spirit.

In almost every mythology, there is an account of the way fire was brought to humankind. In Greek legend, the Titan **Prometheus** is represented as having stolen the precious flame from Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, or as having ignited a torch from the burning rays emitted by the chariot of the sun god, Phoebus. A legend, among the Polynesian Cook Islanders of the South Pacific, describes the descent of the culture hero, Maui, to the underworld, where he learned the art of making fire by rubbing two sticks together. Early inhabitants of the Caroline Islands believed that mortals received fire from the gods through the bird, Mwi, which brought it to earth in its bill and concealed it inside trees. Human beings then obtained this fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together. The Native American tribes, like the tribes of West Africa, paid homage to ancestral fire spirits. The **Aztec** of Mexico acknowledged in their worship, the fire god, Xiuheuctli, who resembled their sun god. The **Inca** of Peru also worshiped a fire god. Various Semitic peoples propitiated the fire god, **Moloch**, with the sacrifice of their firstborn children, and ritual offerings to fire gods were made by the Egyptians and other peoples of the ancient world. Fire worship occupied a central position in the religious rites of the early Indo-European peoples. Among the early Hindus, sacrifice to the fire was one of the first acts of morning devotion, and the hymns

addressed to the fire god, Angi, outnumbered those in praise of any other divinity. The ancient Greek cults of **Hestia**, goddess of the hearth, and **Hephaestus**, god of fire, like those of their Roman counterparts, Vesta and **Vulcan**, were integral features of the religion of classical times. Fire worship also was generally practiced among the ancient Slavic peoples, and the Celts offered prayers to Bridget, the patroness of fire, hearth, and fertility.

The worship of fire had its fullest development, however, in ancient Persia, where from earliest times, the ceremonial keeping of the flame was the chief characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion. Fire was believed to be the earthly manifestation of the Divine, the heavenly light. The term for “priest” in the Zoroastrian scriptures is *athravan*, “belonging to the fire.” The conquest of Persia by the Muslims was symbolized by the extinction of the holy flame in the Persian temples, and when the Zoroastrian **Parsis** fled, as religious exiles from their native land to India, the sacred fire they carried with them was as much a sign of their nationality as of their faith.

Closely associated with fire worship is the religious ceremony of fire walking. Practiced by many peoples in all ages, it is still performed in Tahiti, Trinidad, Mauritius, the Fiji Islands, India, and Japan. The ceremony involves the procession of a priest and other celebrants, barefoot, across large stones that have been heated upon a bed of burning logs. Various explanations, none of them altogether satisfactory, have been offered to explain why fire walkers apparently suffer no burns or pain. Some observers have maintained that a religious ecstasy in the celebrants produces temporary insensibility to pain. In ancient times, particularly in

India, the rite, is said to have involved passing through the flames, rather than walking upon them. Some authorities believe that participants may have been able to walk through the flames without being touched by them.

Parsis or Parsees (Old Persian *Parsa*, “Persia”), followers of the ancient Persian religion known as Zoroastrianism, living in India, Iran, and Pakistan. Their ancestors fled from Persia in the 7th and 8th centuries to avoid persecution by Muslim invaders. They now number some 155,000, of whom, some 90,000 live in and around Bombay; many Indian Parsis are engaged in business. Pakistani Parsis, some 5200, live mainly in Karachi.

The Parsis divided into two sects in the 18th century over a calendar disagreement, and almost all present-day Parsis belong to either one of these sects. The religious and ethical literature of the Parsis is derived chiefly from the Avesta. Their priesthood is hereditary, and they regard fire as purifying and sacred. A fire is kept constantly burning in the main temples by priests, and prayers and sacrifices are offered before this fire on all festival days. In the past, to avoid defilement, the Parsis left their dead exposed on towers to vultures and other carrion-eating birds, but this practice is no longer widely followed.

Hestia, in Greek mythology, virgin goddess of the hearth, the eldest daughter of the Titans Cronus and Rhea. She was believed to preside at all sacrificial altar fires, and prayers were offered to her before, and after meals. Although she appears in very few myths, most cities had a common hearth where her sacred fire burned. In Rome, Hestia was worshiped as

Vesta, and her fire was attended by six virgin priestesses, known as vestal virgins.

Vulcan (Latin *Volcanus*), in Roman mythology, the god of fire. Originally an old Italian deity who seems to have been associated with volcanic fire, Vulcan was identified with the Greek god, Hephaestus, in classical times. At Rome, his festival, the Volcanalia, was celebrated on August 23. He was particularly revered at Ostia, where his was the principal cult.

Fortune-Telling, practice of predicting the future through psychic means, such as the interpretation of signs or communication with supernatural forces. Many people use astrology as a method of fortune-telling. Other methods include palmistry, the practice of interpreting the lines in hands; *cartomancy*, the prediction of the future, using special cards, such as *tarot cards*; and *necromancy*, in which people predict the future through communication with the spirits of dead people. Some methods of fortune-telling involve *clairvoyance*, the ability to perceive events or objects beyond the range of the senses. Although fortune-telling has little support in science, it remains popular in many countries, including the United States.

People have practiced various forms of fortune-telling for thousands of years. It became a widespread practice in many ancient societies, particularly among rulers, who often sought advice from fortune-tellers. In ancient China, for example, emperors had court astrologers and special

diviners, who predicted the future, using a set of sticks, called the *I Ching*. In ancient Rome, special priests called *augurs* predicted the future by interpreting certain signs in nature. The ancient Greeks consulted *oracles*, who supposedly learned of future events by speaking directly with the gods.

Gemini (astrology), the third sign of the zodiac, symbolized by twins. Astrologers consider people whose birthdays fall between May 21 and June 21 to be born under the sun sign of Gemini. The planet, Mercury, named after the ancient Roman messenger god, rules Gemini, which is an air sign.

According to astrologers, Gemini's tend to be quick-witted, changeable, talkative, versatile, and sometimes crafty or mischievous. Gemini's are known for their ability to express themselves, and are witty, clever, and often well-read. They usually have something to say about everything. Astrologers believe that typical Gemini's have highly developed intellects, and that they place greater importance on learning than on emotional or practical issues. However, they consider Gemini's to be so clever that they can give the impression of deep emotion or of the practicality of their desires.

Astrologers believe Gemini's have the ability, and often the need, to do more than one thing at a time. Gemini's are so interested in everything that they get bored easily and often cannot resist moving on to the next subject, tendencies which can make them seem shallow and fickle. Professions

associated with the sign Gemini include teaching, journalism, publishing, sales, and other professions that require verbal skills and flexibility.

Ghost, nonmaterial embodiment or essence of an organism, especially of a human being. The term is sometimes used virtually as a synonym for soul or spirit, and in the Christian religion, in the form, Holy Ghost (now, more often, Holy Spirit), it has a specialized meaning. More frequently, however, the term *ghost* is applied to an apparition, usually of a dead person, that varies in apparent solidity from a mere foglike mass to a perfect replica of the person. A wraith, in contrast, is the visible spirit of someone still alive. A doppelganger is a special form of wraith that makes its appearance at a time when the physical body of the subject is observed at some distant place.

In many religions, and particularly in primitive faiths, the belief exists that the spirit wanders away from the body during periods of unconsciousness such as sleep. Such religions also teach, that after death, the spirit lingers near the body of the dead person. A common practice of groups, holding such beliefs, is to propitiate the ghosts of the dead by offerings of food, clothing, and other objects that the ghosts may find useful in the spirit world. In many primitive civilizations, the personal possessions of a dead man, including his weapons, his pets, and sometimes even his wife, are buried or burned with his body. The practice of ancestor worship, as well as the mourning rites of many modern civilizations, probably originated in the belief in ghosts.

Horoscope, illustration of the position of the sun, moon, and planets from a

given latitude and longitude on earth at a given moment, usually that of birth. The construction of the horoscope is based on the Ptolemaic system, in which the earth is stationary and the heavenly bodies move around it in fixed patterns. Astrologers have divided the heavens into 12 sections, each thought to be ruled by a different sign of the zodiac belt through which the sun, moon, and planets move in 12 fixed positions called *houses*. Once the particular sign and houses have been established, the mythological characteristics of the heavenly bodies, modified by the geometrical relationship between them, are used to foretell events in the life of the individual for whom the horoscope has been

Leo (astrology), the fifth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by a lion. Astrologers believe that people whose birthdays fall from July 23 to August 22 are born under the sun sign of Leo. The sun rules Leo, which is a fire sign.

Astrologers believe that Leos have regal, self-centered, generous, and warm-hearted natures. Leos are said to be protective of people close to them, especially children and those who are weak. They also have a strong need to be the center of attention, and may be surprisingly sensitive. Astrologers think that Leos tend to be inordinately fond of praise and can be swayed by flattery. They consider Leos to be creative and dramatic. Leos also have strong organizational skills and make natural leaders.

According to astrologers, Leos love to enjoy themselves and believe that life is not worth living unless it is filled with some degree of elegance and

class. Night life, games, and parties, and gambling appeal to the Leo sense of the showy. Leos are said to believe they deserve the best, and often this belief attracts good things to them. The typical Leo makes bigger and bolder plans than other signs do. Even if these plans fail, Leos can usually look on the bright side, sometimes to the point of being unrealistic. Professions associated with the sign Leo include entertainment, including performing and promoting; the arts; beauty and cosmetics; speculative investing; and gambling.

Libra (astrology), the seventh sign of the zodiac, symbolized by scales (used for weight measurement). Astrologers consider people whose birthdays occur between September 23 and October 22 to be born under the sun sign of Libra. The planet Venus rules Libra. Libra is an air sign.

According to astrologers, Libras have diplomatic, refined, intelligent, thoughtful, warm, and social natures. Because of the sign's relationship with the planet Venus (named after the ancient Roman goddess of beauty and love), Libras tend to be romantic and crave relationships. Typical Libras, however, want an idealized meeting of the minds in an atmosphere of civility, refinement, and reasonableness. They do not place as much importance on deep emotional intimacy or physical passion. Libras also enjoy comfort and luxury.

Astrologers believe that Libras have strong senses of justice. They carefully weigh opposing sides of any issue and are keenly aware of other people's preferences. Although Libras like to take leadership roles, their

need to be fair and to please everyone equally, can sometimes make it difficult for them to make decisions. Typical Libras are skilled peacemakers and diplomats, who desire balance and harmony in all situations and will do almost anything to avoid confrontations. Professions traditionally associated with Libra include the law, politics, the arts or design, mediation, diplomacy, and counseling.

Magic (Sorcery), art of attaining objectives, acquiring knowledge, or performing works of wonder through supernatural or nonrational means. Techniques used in magic typically include chants and spells, gestures or actions, that often have a symbolic relation to the desired result (for example, acting out a successful hunt of the past to make a future hunt successful), and the use of substances, believed to have a special relationship with the powers needed to accomplish the intended purpose.

Types of Magic

Anthropologists distinguish three types of magical practice: *homeopathic magic*, or the use of small portions of a thing to represent and affect the whole; *sympathetic magic*, in which a symbolic action (for example, sticking pins into a doll) affects an object with which the symbol is in “sympathy” or harmony; and *contagious magic*, the influencing of one thing through contact with another that is believed to be magically charged. The theoretical foundation for most magical practices is a belief in *correspondences*, or hidden relationships among entities within the

universe -- especially between human beings and the external world. According to this view, the application of the right colors, objects, sounds, or gestures in a given context, can bring about the desired result. The theory of correspondences affirms the power of thought to confer reality on products of the imagination, particularly when these thoughts are expressed through significant symbols.

Magic is widely practiced in primal and traditional societies. In such contexts, magic is not simply a prescientific way of attaining practical ends - it may also involve at least a partial symbolic recognition of the society's spiritual world view and of its gods and myths. In this respect, magic often merges with **religion**, and indeed the line between the two is frequently blurred. Religion, however, is usually regarded as the public acknowledgment of spirituality, while magic, tends to be private and oriented toward power and gain by supernatural means rather than toward worship. A distinction can also be drawn between white and black magic: White magic is employed for benign ends, and black magic is used to harm others. Black magic is sometimes referred to as **witchcraft** or sorcery, even though many people who practice witchcraft do not seek to cause harm.

Magic, in the supernatural sense, is different from stage magic, in which apparent magical effects are produced for entertainment through such means as sleight of hand. A distinction is also made between magic and **divination**, which is the art of foretelling the future course of events: Magic attempts to affect the future, not merely, to predict it. By this definition, occult practices such as **astrology**, card-reading, and **palmistry** are not

magical, whereas concocting love potions and casting spells are magical practices, as is the art of invoking spirits by means of chants and gestures. Many practitioners of magic also believe that these techniques must be combined with concentration of thought upon the desired objective.

Origins and History

Euro-American traditions of magic have deep and complex roots. Some spells and practices can be traced back to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome, particularly those spells and practices related to spiritual evocation, gemstones, and numbers. During the Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century), science, religion, and magic often were not clearly distinguished in either

Judaism or Christianity. In medieval Europe, ancient magical traditions became deeply intertwined with the Jewish mystical system called *Cabala* and also with surviving *pre-Christian* folk magic, which involved a wide assortment of spells, charms, customs, and beliefs.

From the 15th century to the 18th century, during the period of the *Renaissance*, the *Reformation*, and the *Age of Enlightenment*, the relationship between science and magic underwent a fundamental readjustment as *Western* society entered the scientific era. The *Renaissance*, at first, seemed to promise a rebirth of magic. Intellectuals such as *Italian* philosopher, *Pico della Mirandola*, rediscovered classical

philosophy, including its occultist and magical practices, and protoscientists such as *German* physician, *Paracelsus* affirmed these practices, partly in defiance of medieval religiosity. *Both the Roman Catholic Church* and the new *Protestantism*, however, turned more sharply than ever against magic and the occult arts. One result of this turn, was the torture and burning of women, accused of witchcraft -- that is, the practice of magic. At the same time, science was gradually constructing a model for understanding the world that appeared to undercut the main premises of magic, particularly the theory of correspondences. By the end of the 18th century, magic had few serious adherents among the educated classes.

Folk magic and “underground” magic, however, have continued. In the *Americas*, for example, traditional forms of religion, that resemble magic, have mingled with *West African* practices to produce living institutions like voodoo and Santeria, both of which combine a robust religious world- view with magical practices. From the sociological and psychological points of view, magic often provides a means of self-affirmation and empowerment for those who feel excluded by the dominant classes of a society and its educational and scientific institutions.

Despite its apparent incompatibility with current scientific thought, magic reflects deeply rooted tendencies of the human mind. The manipulation of symbols is evident, not only in religion, but also in art, poetry, politics, rhetoric, and commerce. Ancient magical processes of mind are also reflected to varying degrees in common practices such as the use of mascot figures, and the enshrining of photographs, and even locks of hair of loved ones on a dresser or mantle. Whereas most people expect that

such practices influence only their way of thinking about a particular circumstance, the magician believes that these practices affect external reality.

Medicine Man, a religious specialist in some non-*Western* cultures, whose main function is to cure disease.

Medicine men base their healing methods on the assumption, that most, if not all illnesses, are caused by supernatural power and that supernatural powers are required to cure them. The individual may fall ill because of having offended one of the gods, or through the machinations of witchcraft or sorcery, or through the unprovoked attack of an evil spirit. The task of the curer is to diagnose the disease, usually by divinatory techniques, and then to apply the spiritual remedy, such as retrieving a lost soul, removing a disease-causing object, or exorcising an evil spirit. (In conjunction with these spiritual techniques, medicine men may also, at times, employ physical remedies such as herbal applications or massage).

The effectiveness of the medicine man's treatment seems negligible in light of *Western* medicine.

Anthropologists have, however, observed that the work of medicine men occasionally has beneficial results. These may be due to a process of psychological release and consequent physiological healing. Faith healing in *Western* societies may be effective, in part, through the same process.

Nostradamus, (1503-1566), *French* physician and astrologer who wrote *Centuries*, a famous collection of prophecies published in 1555. The prophecies in *Centuries* appear in four-line rhyming verses called *quatrains*. In vague language, they describe events from the mid-1500's through the end of the world, which is predicted to come in A.D. 3797. Many people have interpreted the prophecies in *Centuries*, connecting certain ones with events that have taken place since Nostradamus's time. The name "*Nostradamus*" is a *Latin* name he used in place of his original name, *Michel de Nostredame*.

Nostradamus was born in Saint Remi, in southern France, and was raised as a Roman Catholic. He studied medicine in Montpellier, and started a practice about 1525. Soon after, he began to treat victims of the plague in communities of southern France. Nostradamus used innovative methods of treatment, and his success in curing extremely ill patients earned him a reputation as a specially gifted healer.

About 1550, Nostradamus moved to Salon, where he began to write his prophecies. The publication of *Centuries* increased his fame, bringing many people to visit him in Salon during the rest of his life. Catherine de Medicis, queen of France, asked him to plot the horoscopes of her husband, King Henry II, and their children. In 1560, King Charles IX of France appointed Nostradamus court physician.

Occultism (Latin *occulere*, “to hide”), belief in the efficacy of various practices -- including **astrology**, **alchemy**, **divination**, and **magic** -- regarded as being based on hidden knowledge about the universe and its mysterious forces.

Occult knowledge characteristically depends upon the notion of *correspondences*, or postulated relationships that unite all things -- stars, planets, gemstones, colors, or even parts of the human body and life events -- to one another and to invisible realities as well. Those, who subscribe to this view, believe that they can use occult knowledge to effect healing or to predict the future, for example. Occultism may also include a belief in beings, such as **angels**, deities, or spirits, who can be contacted by those who possess the appropriate knowledge. Occult knowledge is believed to be obtained through initiation by those who already have it, or through the study of the texts in which it is expounded.

There are occult practices within nearly all traditional civilizations. Western occultism has its roots in ancient Babylonian and Egyptian lore, especially as recorded and transmitted through **Neoplatonism** and the **Hermetic books**. Powerfully augmented by Jewish mysticism, occultism was an obscure but important presence in the European Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century). Medieval occult practice included astrology, alchemy, and ceremonial magic rites for evoking spiritual beings. Eminent scholars such as 13th-century Italian theologian, **Saint Thomas**

Aquinas and his contemporary, English philosopher, **Roger Bacon**, assumed the efficacy of alchemy and other occult arts.

Along with the rediscovery of classical learning, the **Renaissance** (15th century 17th century) witnessed a burgeoning of occultism. In Florence, Italy, the court of the **Medici** sponsored a revival of Neoplatonism by establishing a Platonic Academy. Later, figures such as 16th-century German physician, **Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus**, who blended Neoplatonic philosophy with a rigorous empiricism, personified the transition from ancient occultism to modern science. Fraternal orders such as the **Rosicrucians** also pursued esoteric wisdom. In the late medieval and early modern period (13th century to 15th century), however, occultism came to be increasingly regarded by the Church as connected with the worship of Satan. This development resulted in the persecution of **witchcraft** during the Renaissance, when thousands of women were tortured and killed under the accusation -- usually false -- that they engaged in occult practices.

Despite both religious persecution and the rise of modern science, occultism continued as an intellectual presence in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, occultism came to be valued more for its spiritual meaning than for its prescientific world-view. For the father of hypnotism, late-18th century Austrian physician, **Franz Anton Mesmer**, the occult offered a means of affirming both the fundamental nature of the universe as consciousness and the power of the human mind to interact with the universe directly. From this spiritual perspective, occultism easily moved into alignment with 19th-century **romanticism** and its emphasis on the past, on symbolism, and on the creative power of imagination. These themes were important in such 19th-century “reinventions” of occultism as the **Spiritualism** movement, the Theosophical Society

(1875), and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1889). The last two groups, in particular, included many members of the **symbolist movement**, in addition to other artists, poets, and thinkers.

In the 20th century, another rebirth of occultism can be seen in the counterculture movement of the 1960's, with its interest in astrology, divination, and magic. The **New Age** movement of the 1980's and 1990's may be considered another manifestation of occultism. Though severely criticized by some orthodox religious groups and mainstream scientists, occultism has remained vital.

Palmistry, also chiromancy (Greek *cheir*, "hand;" *manteia*, "divination"), art of characterization and foretelling the future through the study of the palm. It was known among the Chaldeans, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Hebrews and was recognized by such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. Widely accepted during the Middle Ages, it was revived during the 19th century, especially in France. Since the turn of the century, it has been regarded as a branch of fortune-telling.

Palmistry is chiefly concerned with the mounts of the palm, the lines on the mounts, and the lines interlacing the palm. The left hand supposedly reflects inbred and the right hand acquired characteristics. Each mount signifies a certain personality trait. The mount of Jupiter denotes honor and a happy disposition; of Saturn, prudence and therefore, success; of Apollo, appreciation of beauty; of Mercury, scientific, industrial, and commercial interests; of Mars, courage; of the Moon, a dreamy disposition;

and of Venus, an amorous nature. The four most important lines represent life, intelligence, the heart or sensation, and personal fortune. Other markings of the palm corroborate or modify by their positions, the deductions made from the mounts and lines.

Pisces (astrology), the 12th sign of the zodiac, symbolized by two fish. According to astrologers, people whose birthdays occur between February 19 and March 20 are born under the sun sign of Pisces. The planet Neptune rules Pisces, which is a water sign.

Astrologers consider Pisceans to be sensitive, emotional, sunny, impressionable, dreamy, creative, psychic, and mystical. Pisceans tend to be idealistic; sometimes the real world gets too harsh and ugly for them. To escape unpleasant realities, some Pisceans retreat into their own dreams and fantasies and become evasive, even deceitful. Others escape productively through charity work, the arts, religion, meditation, and solitude. Pisceans make good listeners, can see different sides of issues, and often have great sympathy for the suffering of others.

According to astrologers, typical Pisceans do not have great physical stamina. Pisceans can be delicate and vulnerable, especially when under emotional stress. However, they are capable of great strength, in part, because they are adaptable and can maneuver around difficult situations. They also have the ability to take life as it comes. Professions associated with Pisces are music, film, dance, and other arts; charitable work; counseling, jobs involving water, chemicals, oil, or drugs; clergy; and

nursing.

Sagittarius (astrology), the ninth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by an archer. Astrologers consider people whose birthdays occur from November 22 to December 21 to be born under the sun sign of Sagittarius. Sagittarius, a fire sign, is ruled by the planet, Jupiter, named after the wise ruler of the ancient Roman gods.

Astrologers believe that Sagittarians have fun-loving, friendly, philosophical, intellectual, straightforward, and expansive natures. Sagittarians are optimistic, and sometimes, have a naïve belief that everything will turn out fine despite any obstacles. Good luck often follows typical Sagittarians, and because whatever they need usually comes effortlessly to them, they tend to be generous and willing to share. Sagittarians also value frankness and honesty, and their comments can sometimes be blunt.

According to astrologers, typical Sagittarians dislike being confined or tied down; they seek change, especially through travel. Sagittarians require freedom of thought and ideas, but they otherwise tend to be fairly conventional and respect tradition. Professions traditionally associated with Sagittarius include higher education; law; medicine; importing and exporting, or other activities that involve foreign countries; and publishing.

Satanism, the worship of Satan (*Devil*), traditionally associated with occultism, witchcraft, and the Black Mass. Although some scholars

believe that before the 19th century, the Black Mass was largely a literary invention, it has usually been considered the central ritual of Satanism. The celebrant wears vestments resembling those worn by Christian priests celebrating mass, except that the chasuble may bear the figure of a goat, an animal often associated with Satan. Other features of the Black Mass may include the suspension of a cross upside down, parodies and inversions of Christian prayers and creeds, animal sacrifices, and ritualistic orgies.

Satanism seems in great part, a survival of the worship of demons, for it does not regard Satan as beneficent or ill-treated, but as a fiend, more powerful than the forces of good, which have been unable to keep the promises they have made to the world. The history of Satanism is obscure. It is possible that the French marshal, Gilles de Rais, who was tried for heresy, Satanism, and child murder, was an early adherent. Satanism seems to have been revived during the reign of Louis XIV of France and has maintained itself since that time, usually shrouded in secrecy, but occasionally coming to public attention.

Scorpio (astrology), the eighth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by a scorpion. According to astrologers, people whose birthdays fall between October 23 and November 21 are born under the sun sign of Scorpio. The planet Pluto rules Scorpio, which is a water sign.

Astrologers consider Scorpios to be energetic, passionate, deep, intuitive, and secretive, with a great deal of self-control. They also believe that

Scorpios can be willful, stubborn, and easily made jealous. Scorpios are thought to be keen observers of people, and potentially calculating and manipulative. Seeing more of people's deepest motivations than others do, they have a tendency to be cynical. They are sensitive and never forget a hurt or a slight -- for the typical Scorpio, forgiveness can be difficult.

Astrologers consider Scorpio perhaps the most extreme of all signs. The intensity and focus of Scorpios gives them great ability to see a project through despite all obstacles. Their strong leadership qualities, incisive analytic abilities, energy, and desire for financial security can make them motivated career people. Many Scorpios also like to flirt with danger and push themselves and those close to them to their limits. Professions traditionally associated with Scorpio include forensics, law enforcement or detective work, the military, medicine, psychology, big business, and recycling.

Spiritualism, belief that the dead manifest their presence to people, usually through a clairvoyant or medium; also, the doctrine and practices of those people who so believe.

Although spiritualism has been practiced in one form or another since prehistoric times, modern spiritualism is the result of 19th-century occurrences and research. About 1848, in the U.S., an alleged child medium, Margaret Fox, was exploited by her sister and father and aroused sensational news stories that spurred the creation of a cult of spiritualism. It was given impetus by the writings of another medium, the American,

Andrew Jackson Davis, who asserted that he was capable of performing certain intellectual feats while in a trance that he could not perform normally. About this time, the British surgeon, James Braid, provided a scientific explanation of mesmerism and thus, helped to establish the modern technique of hypnosis.

In 1872, a former British clergyman, William Stainton Moses, became editor of the spiritualist paper, *Light*, and wrote several books concerning spiritualism. The movement was publicly discredited after the appearance of a number of charlatans, whose demonstrations were recognized as simple tricks of prestidigitation. Margaret Fox herself, as a grown woman, claimed that she had used tricks to make her “spirit rappings.” Nevertheless, serious investigators believed some truth lay behind the reports of other mediums. The Society for Psychical Research was founded and a fund was established to examine the claims of spiritualism.

A number of eminent people have supported investigations of the field, among them two British writers, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge. More recently, a former Episcopal bishop, James Albert Pike, working with a former minister of the Disciples of Christ, Arthur A. Ford, a noted medium, engaged in attempts to communicate with Pike’s dead son.

Several organized bodies of spiritualists exist, with about 400 congregations and a membership of more than 180,000 persons in the U.S., in the early 1980’s. The larger organizations include the International

General Assembly of Spiritualists, with headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia; the National Spiritual Alliance of the U.S.A., in Keene, New Hampshire; and the National Association of Churches, in Cassadaga, New York.

Superstition, a belief or practice generally regarded as irrational and, as resulting from ignorance, or from fear, of the unknown. It implies a belief in unseen and unknown forces that can be influenced by objects and rituals. Magic or Sorcery, witchcraft, and the occult, in general, are often referred to as superstitions. Examples of common superstitions include the belief that bad luck will strike the person in front of whom a black cat passes or that some tragedy will befall a person who walks under a ladder. Good luck charms, such as horseshoes, rabbits' feet, coins, locketts, and religious medals, are commonly kept or worn to ward off evil or to bring good fortune.

In general, superstitious practices and beliefs are most common in situations involving a high degree of risk, chance, and uncertainty, and during times of personal or social stress or crisis when events seem to be beyond human control. The question of what is or is not superstitious, however, is relative. One person's beliefs can be another's superstitions. All religious beliefs and practices may be considered superstition by unbelievers, while religious leaders often condemn unorthodox popular practices as a superstitious parody of true faith.

Taurus (astrology), the second sign of the zodiac, symbolized by the bull.

According to astrologers, people whose birthdays occur between April 20 and May 20 are said to be born under the sun sign of Taurus. Taurus, an earth sign, is ruled by the planet Venus, named after the ancient Roman goddess of beauty and love.

Astrologers consider Taureans to be loyal, stable conservative, and practical. They are also thought to be patient, affectionate, and good-natured people. However, their tempers can erupt dramatically if they are pushed beyond their limits. Astrologers believe Taureans are home-loving and tend to have deep sentimental attachments to people, things, and places. They also can be jealous and possessive. Astrologers do not consider Taureans to be fond of change, making the typical Taurus both reliable and committed, as well as inflexible.

Astrologers consider Taureans to be very attuned to the physical world. They have acute senses and appreciate beauty and pleasure in all forms. Taureans tend to be very aware of the value of things, an ability which can make them skilled handlers of money and good judges of the quality of merchandise. Professions traditionally associated with the sign Taurus include banking and business, especially trade; accounting; clothing or interior design; real estate; singing; farming; and architecture.

Vampire, in folklore, a corpse that rises from the grave during the night, often in the form of a bat, and, for nourishment, sucks the blood of sleeping humans. Various talismans and herbs supposedly avert vampires, but, according to tradition, they can be destroyed only by cremation or by stakes driven through their hearts. Belief in vampires originated in ancient

times and was especially widespread among the Slavs. The novel, *Dracula* (1897) by the British writer, Bram Stoker tells the story of the Transylvanian vampire, Count Dracula, who became one of the most popular subjects of horror films.

Virgo (astrology), the sixth sign of the zodiac, symbolized by a virgin. People whose birthdays fall from August 23 to September 22 are said to be born under the sun sign of Virgo. Virgo, an earth sign, is ruled by the planet Mercury, named after the ancient Roman messenger god.

Astrologers believe that Virgoans are practical, no-nonsense people. They like to talk and are good communicators, but prefer to put their words to practical use. Thus, they are not very interested in idle conversation, and they can be shy. The typical Virgoan also has a tendency to be critical. According to astrologers, Virgoans often have a great concern for health and hygiene. They also like to be well-groomed and keep their surroundings very tidy.

Astrologers consider Virgoans to be detail-oriented, analytical, intelligent, and hard-working. They handle complex tasks with seeming effortless because they are flexible and good organizers.

They are said to be more concerned with doing their jobs well than with personal acclaim, and as a result, tend to be humble. They also can be perfectionists and worry when projects or situations do not meet their high expectations. Professions traditionally associated with the sign Virgo include nursing; jobs in the service industries; health and nutrition;

secretarial or office administration; teaching; and editing.

Witchcraft, practice of **magic** or sorcery by those outside the religious mainstream of a society; the term is used in different ways in various historical and social contexts.

Many people participating in the contemporary revival of witchcraft, known as the neopagan revival, identify themselves as benign witches. Therefore, the practice of witchcraft should not be associated with evil or the infliction of harm, nor with *diabolism*, (the invocation of Devils). In addition, many accusations of malicious witchcraft -- especially in some primal societies and in early modern Europe and North America -- have been unfounded and have sprung from irrational fears and social anxieties.

This article discusses witchcraft under three main headings: *sorcery*, with reference primarily to witchcraft in primal and ancient societies; *diabolical witchcraft*, with a focus on the persecution of alleged witches in Europe and the United States and on the social pathologies that accompanied this persecution; and *modern witchcraft*, dealing with contemporary witchcraft in the neopagan revival. These are different phenomena, and perceptions of witchcraft, drawn from one arena, cannot be applied indiscriminately to another.

Sorcery, Simple sorcery, or the use of magic, accessible to ordinary people, such as setting out offerings to helpful spirits or using charms, can

be found in almost all traditional societies. Although the distinctions are often blurred, practices, such as these, differ both from **religion**, in which gods are worshiped in awe or implored through prayer to help, and from the sophisticated arts of alchemists and ceremonial magicians. Sorcery is intended to force results rather than achieve them through entreaty, and it is worked by simple and ordinary means.

From a sociological point of view, the widespread practice of sorcery within a tribal or peasant community, serves to reinforce and consolidate beliefs about the supernatural world and the relation of humans to that world. Psychologically, sorcery provides a means of establishing a sense of control over nature, and thus, mitigates the anxieties caused by disease, uncertain seasons, and natural disasters. When such eventualities occur, despite preventive measures, they can be interpreted as the result of malicious witchcraft, and the alleged perpetrators may then be sought out and driven from the community. The function of the so-called witch doctor or **medicine man** in many societies is to counter the power of evil witchcraft through good magic. **Shamans** may also heal through comparable means by performing rites that expel pestilential spirits or by retrieving lost and stolen souls. Characteristically, they do this with the aid of helping spirits or gods invoked through incantations and rites.

Practices such as these were known to the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans. In the Old Testament, the apocryphal book of **Tobit** contains an account in which, at the instruction of an **angel**, an evil spirit is expelled from a bridal chamber by the odor of a smoldering fish heart and liver (Tobit 6:14-18). Nevertheless, the Bible also contains injunctions

against witchcraft, such as “You shall not permit a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18), a command that was used to justify the persecution of witches in medieval Europe. The Greco-Roman world was permeated by belief in witchcraft. Roman poet, **Horace** refers to hags who clawed the earth to invoke spirits of the underworld, and philosopher and novelist, **Apuleius** mentions the practice of nailing owls over doors with wings outspread to deflect storms. After the Christianization of the Mediterranean world in the 4th century, countless customs like these -- as well as comparable practices in northern Europe in the 4th century, countless customs like these -- as well as comparable practices in northern Europe-- were perpetuated as folk magic or were superficially Christianized in such practices as inscribing the Lord’s Prayer on a piece of paper and keeping it in one’s shoe as an amulet against bewitchment. Certain local sages or “wise women” were experts in popular witchcraft or sorcery, which often represented remnants of pre-*Christian* religion.

Diabolical Witchcraft

In the early Christian centuries, the Church was relatively tolerant of magical practices. Those who were proved to have engaged in witchcraft were required only to do penance. But in the late Middle Ages (13th century to 14th century), opposition to alleged witchcraft hardened as a result of the growing belief that all magic and **miracles** that did not come unambiguously from God came from the **Devil** and, were therefore, manifestations of evil. Those who practiced simple sorcery, such as village wise women, were increasingly regarded as practitioners of diabolical witchcraft. They came to be viewed as individuals, in league, with Satan.

Nearly all those who fell under suspicion of witchcraft, were women, evidently regarded by witch-hunters as especially susceptible to the Devil's blandishments. A lurid picture of the activities of

witches emerged in the popular mind, including *covens*, or gatherings over which Satan presided; pacts with the Devil; flying broomsticks; and animal accomplices, or *familiars*. Although a few of these elements may represent vestiges of pre-*Christian* religion, the old religion probably did not persist in any organized form beyond the 14th century. The popular image of witchcraft, perhaps inspired by features of **occultism** or ceremonial magic, as well as by theology concerning the Devil and his works of darkness, was given shape by the inflamed imagination of inquisitors and was confirmed by statements obtained under torture.

The late medieval and early modern picture of diabolical witchcraft can be attributed to several causes. First, the Church's experience with such dissident religious movements as the **Albigenses** and **Cathari**, who believed in a radical dualism of good and evil, led to the belief that certain people had allied themselves with Satan. As a result of confrontations with such heresy, the **Inquisition** was established by a series of papal decrees between 1227 and 1235. Pope **Innocent IV** authorized the use of torture in 1252, and Pope Alexander IV gave the Inquisition authority over all cases of sorcery involving heresy, although most actual prosecution of witches was carried out by local courts.

At the same time, other developments created a climate in which alleged

witches were stigmatized as representatives of evil. Since the middle of the 11th century, the theological and philosophical work of **scholasticism** had been refining the Christian concepts of Satan and evil. Theologians, influenced by Aristotelian rationalism, increasingly denied that “natural” miracles could take place, and therefore, alleged that anything supernatural and not of God must be due to commerce with Satan or his minions. Later, the **Reformation**, the rise of science, and the emerging modern world -- all challenges to traditional religion -- created deep anxieties in the orthodox population. At the dawn of the **Renaissance** (15th century to 16th century) some of these developments began to coalesce into the “witch craze” that possessed Europe from about 1450 to 1700. During this period, thousands of people, mostly innocent women, were executed on the basis of “proofs” or “confessions” of diabolical witchcraft -- that is, of sorcery practiced through allegiance to Satan -- obtained by means of cruel tortures.

A major impetus for the hysteria was the papal bull, *Summis Desiderantes*, issued by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484. It was included as a preface in the book, *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), published by two Dominican inquisitors in 1486. This work, characterized by a distinct antifeminine tenor, vividly describes the satanic and sexual abominations of witches. The book was translated into many languages and went through many editions in both Catholic and Protestant countries, outselling all other books except the Bible.

In the years of the witch-hunting mania, people were encouraged to inform against one another. Professional witch finders identified and tested

suspects for evidence of witchcraft and were paid a fee for each conviction. The most common test was pricking: All witches were supposed to have somewhere on their bodies, a mark, made by the Devil, that was insensitive to pain; if such a spot was found, it was regarded as proof of witchcraft. Other proofs included additional breasts (supposedly used to suckle familiars), the inability to weep, and failure in the water test. In the latter, a woman was thrown into a body of water; if she sank, she was considered innocent, but if she stayed afloat, she was found guilty.

The persecution of witches declined about 1700, banished by the **Age of Enlightenment**, which

subjected such beliefs to a skeptical eye. One of the last outbreaks of witch-hunting took place in colonial Massachusetts in 1692, when belief in diabolical witchcraft was already declining in Europe. Twenty people were executed in the wake of the **Salem** witch trials, which took place after a group of young girls became hysterical while playing at magic and it was proposed that they were bewitched. The subsequent witch hunt took place in the context of deep divisions between the Church and a controversial minister. Personal differences were exacerbated in a small, isolated community in which religious beliefs -- including belief in the reality of diabolical witchcraft -- were deeply held. By the time the hysteria had run its course, little enthusiasm for the persecution of witches remained in Massachusetts or elsewhere.

Belief in traditional witchcraft, in the sense of sorcery, remains alive in India, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. A belief in the possibility of

something akin to diabolical witchcraft can still be found among some conservative Christians.

Modern Witchcraft

In the second half of the 20th century, a self-conscious revival of pre-*Christian* paganism occurred in the United States and Europe. The foundation of this revival was witchcraft, or *Wicca* (said to be an early Anglo-Saxon word for witchcraft). Wicca is interpreted simply as the nature and fertility religion of pre-*Christian Europe* and is based on books such as Charles Leland's *Aradia: The Gospel of the Witches* (1899), **Margaret Murray's** *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), and Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948). Although they are now considered unreliable by scholars, such books gave inspiration to some people seeking spiritual alternatives. The writings of Englishman, Gerald Gardner, who in his book, *Witchcraft Today* (1954) claimed that he was a witch initiated by a surviving coven, imparted much of the alleged lore and rituals of English witches. Although his claims have been questioned, covens of modern witches sprang up under Gardner's inspiration and spread to the United States in the 1960's. This form of witchcraft -- with its feeling for nature, its colorful rituals, its love of fantasy, and its challenge of conventional religion and society -- harmonized well with the counter-cultural mood of the 1960's and grew rapidly during that decade.

Modern witchcraft continued to prosper during the subsequent decades. Many followers of the ecological and feminist movements found in Wicca, a religion with congenial themes. Wiccans emphasized the sacred meaning

of nature and its cycles and the coequal role of gods and goddesses and of priests and priestesses. Some wiccan groups, called Dianic (after the goddess Diana), include only women, and worship the goddess exclusively. Closely related “neopagan” religions have also appeared in revivals of ancient Egyptian, Celtic, Greek, and Nordic religions.

Wicca perceives itself as a modern religion based on the broad themes of ancient pre-*Christian* paganism, although it is not drawn directly from paganism -- for example, Wicca eschews some features of the old paganism, such as animal sacrifice. Increasingly, Wicca draws from many pagan traditions, with the result that the distinctions between witchcraft, occultism, neopaganism, and various strands thereof have become blurred. Modern witchcraft is entirely different from Satanism or the diabolical witchcraft imagined by the persecutors of past centuries. Major wiccan themes include love of nature, equality of male and female, appreciation of the ceremonial, a sense of wonder and belief in magic, and appreciation of the symbolism and psychological realities behind the gods and goddesses of antiquity.

Zodiac, imaginary belt in the celestial sphere, extending about 8 degrees on either side of the ecliptic, the apparent path of the Sun among the stars. The width of the zodiac was determined originally so as to include the orbits of the Sun and the Moon and of the five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) that were known to the people of ancient times. The zodiac is divided into 12 sections of 30 degrees each, which are called the signs of the zodiac. Starting with the vernal equinox and then proceeding eastward along the ecliptic, each of the divisions is named for

the constellation situated within its limits in the 2nd century B.C. The names of the zodiacal signs are Aries, the Ram; Taurus, the Bull; Gemini, the Twins; Cancer, the Crab; Leo, the Lion; Virgo, the Virgin; Libra, the Balance; Scorpio, the Scorpion; Sagittarius, the Archer; Capricornus, the Goat; Aquarius, the Water Bearer; and Pisces, the Fishes. Because of the precession of the equinoxes about the ecliptic, a 26,000-year cycle, the first point of Aries retrogrades about 1 degree in 70 years, so that the sign, Aries today, lies in the constellation, Pisces. In about 24,000 years, when the retrogression will have completed the entire circuit of 360 degrees, the zodiacal signs and constellations will again coincide.

It is believed that the zodiacal signs originated in Mesopotamia as early as 2000 B.C. The Greeks adopted the symbols from the Babylonians and passed them on to the other ancient civilizations. The Egyptians assigned other names and symbols to the zodiacal divisions. The Chinese also adopted the 12-fold division, but called the signs rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey, hen, dog, and pig. Independently, the Aztec people devised a similar system.

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