

2022-2023 *ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE*

DECEMBER MONTHLY FOCUS: EARTH-BASED RELIGIONS

This month covers a multiplicity of spiritual and religious practices under the umbrella term “earth-based” or “earth-centered” traditions. These are traditions for which connections to the earth, its elements, seasons, and cycles, form the basis of ritual celebrations, ethical actions, and meaningful living. While there may be some shared practices, such as calling the four directions, there are many, many different ways that people have expressed their spiritual connection to the earth. There is no standardized dogma, nor centralized religious body. Native American spirituality is one broad earth-centered tradition with its own plurality of expression by tribe, region, and time. Paganism, or the more contemporary neo-Paganism, is another broad grouping of earth-based spirituality, which includes the Wiccan, Celtic, and Shaman traditions among many others. Some understand paganism as rooted in the pre-Christian European indigenous cultures. While there are vast differences of expression, common threads include the sacredness of the earth as the centering source of spirituality, practices of gratitude for the abundant gifts from the earth, and living in sustaining, reciprocal relationship with the earth.

Some Notes:

- The [Wheel of the Year](#) is a symbol of the eight Sabbats (religious festivals) of Neo-Paganism and the Wicca movement which includes four solar festivals (Winter Solstice, Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice, Fall Equinox) and four seasonal festivals (celebrating or marking a significant seasonal change).
- The term “Pagan” was first applied in the fourth century by early Christians for those who engaged in polytheistic, traditional religious practices. Today “Neo-pagan” refers to the contemporary practice of pagan, earth-based spiritual practices.
- Within the diversity of [Native American spirituality](#), a common thread is a sense of connectedness and oneness. There is a strong belief that everything exists in relation to everything else, which also means there is not a strong distinction between the spirit world and the tangible world.
- Earth-based religions are found throughout the world and millennia from ancient Roman and Greek paganism to contemporary [shamanism in Siberia](#), an area considered the ancient heartland of what may be the world’s oldest spiritual practice.

Words of the Tradition:

Spiritual development in Paganism can be measured by the maturity of your actions and the degree to which you participate in the interconnectedness of the universe.

Joyce & River Higginbotham

The end may be defined as life in accordance with nature or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe.

Zeno of Citium

The voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers.

Zitkala-Sa, Yankton Dakota

I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.

Crazy Horse, Oglala Lakota Sioux

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

Chief Seattle, Duwamish

Magic, indeed, is all around us, in stones, flowers, stars, the dawn wind and the sunset cloud; all we need is the ability to see and understand.

Doreen Valiente, Natural Magic

Among the many aspects of Wicca that distinguish it from other, more widely recognized religions is its emphasis on the feminine, as symbolized by nature, the Earth, the Moon, and feminine deities (or goddesses).

Lisa Chamberlain, Wicca For Beginners

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.

Frank Lloyd Wright

The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson