

THE PLAGUE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

BY ZEHARA NACHASH

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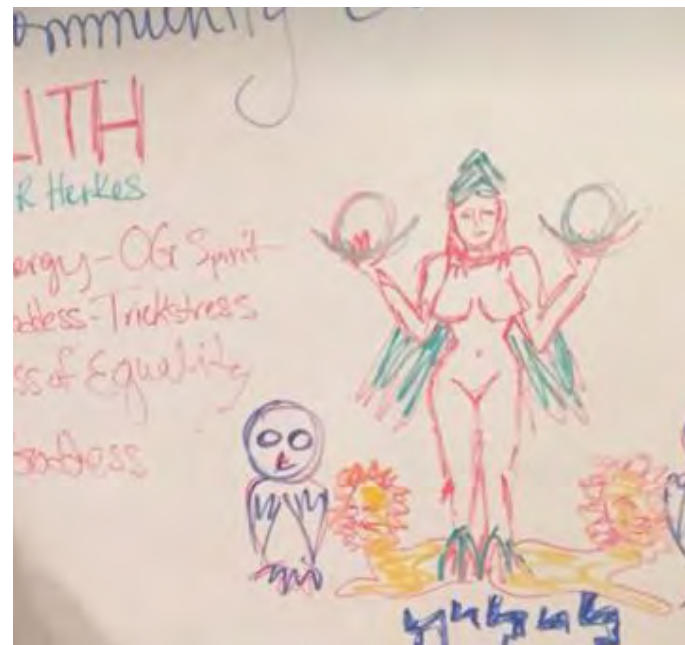
There has been a plague within the Pagan and magic community and it's something that gets pushed under the rug because no one wants to talk about it. With the overwhelming use of social media, the issues are coming out more and more. This plague is the idea that you are not Pagan enough, traditional enough, white or black enough, etc., to be included within a venue or group.

I find it strange how those who practice a religion that is constantly under scrutiny and fighting against being stereotyped could feel the need to exclude others from their practices. It is also odd that some of these groups and individuals that act like they know more than everyone else are essentially practicing a Reconstructionist religion, with no direct roots or rules to justify their actions.

Prior to writing this article, I had put my feelers out on social media, asking people who have been discriminated against, shunned, or closed out of certain groups, festivals, events, or classes to tell their stories (their names have been changed to keep anonymity). Some of these stories hit close to home and show the various types of discrimination used within these "inner circles."

Susan, from Boston, Massachusetts, told me that she attended a Witchcraft 101 class that was being taught through a local Adult Education program. This class was meant to teach those outside of the practice what witchcraft is and to help inform the public. Susan was already a practicing witch, with over 20 years of experience, and attended to see whether she could learn something new. During the class, the presenter had made some comments regarding traditions. Susan politely asked some questions during the discussion, at which point the instructor told her that she was not really a witch because she did not fall into any of those traditions. Additionally, he put down any questions or comments she had which left her not only angry, but feeling belittled as well.

Another woman, Kathy, told me that while she taught a class on the basics of witchcraft for a local women's group, a student in the class literally called her a liar. This was because the student's teacher was supposedly teaching the correct witchcraft tradition, and the student believed that Kathy was not.



I had **an African-American man** tell that he was not allowed to be a part of an Asatru festival because he was told by members that Asatru is only practiced by whites. Another woman told me that she was not allowed to participate in a Pagan festival because she was new in town and needed to be part of a coven in the community before she could attend anything the organizers put on. There have also been incidents in which transgender women were not allowed to join Dianic covens because they were born male.

All of these are just examples of the dark side of witchcraft, Paganism, and the occult communities that people are afraid to talk about. The idea that one practitioner feels they have more knowledge than

every other practitioner out there is nonsense.

There are those that act like they are hiding some deep mystery that only they know about, and to share it with those they do not deem "worthy" would unleash some sort of cosmic chaos. Additionally, I have heard countless remarks by covens and groups on how they were not allowed to attend an event because the organizers either didn't like them or believed that what they were engaged in was not the correct way of practicing witchcraft.

Then, there are the public feuds between individuals or groups. These are personal attacks on a person's tradition, race, gender, or how they run their storefront or online business. Some of these cases, which often include public slander, have often ended with either someone banned from the general community, or in some severe cases, in a courtroom.

I always find it ironic when people toss the word "community" around and then proceed to isolate certain groups or people for various personal reasons. Community, as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is "a feeling of fellowship with others, because of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals"; that "feeling of fellowship" should mean that when Pagans from all paths come together, they should feel welcomed rather than ostracized.

Additionally, I am seeing younger generations of Pagans that have zero respect for their elders. In some instances, these young Pagans feel that, because they have attended a single ceremony or ritual, they had gained some deep wisdom which allows them to bash the people that they were learning from! Younger generations should absolutely respect their elders. This is an essential function if one wants to be part of a larger community in the future. It also ensures that traditions are continued.



This was one of the many reasons why I remained solitary for so long. When the coven I was with for 10 years split, I tried finding another group in which I felt that familial spiritual connection. Unfortunately, I repeatedly came across groups that were secular and only let in those they felt practiced "the right way." I met with a woman who ran an Alexandrian coven, and she absolutely would not allow me in because my background was more eclectic, and she only wanted to admit those who, in her words, "practiced the correct tradition." It was not until I began to study Voodoo that I finally found my home, both literally and figuratively.

My point here, ultimately, is that for a group that has been stereotyped, mocked, and slandered, we should not be throwing stones at glass houses. Why exclude? Why start trouble with other practitioners? Why get so personal and spiteful? What are you protecting? Why can't a Pagan festival be just that, a festival for Pagans and witches? Regardless of what path one follows or which deities one believes in, it all gets dumped into the same category in society at large anyway. With the internet and social media, let's just have society see the best rather than the worst parts of the Pagan world.

