

# Feedback loop

Letters from our Readers

## Greetings from Inside

Dear Ms. Niven,

I am writing to thank you for reading my letter. You wouldn't believe the excitement that ran through me when I received the magazine and your note. You don't know how much I wanted to find other worshippers of the Goddess.

Here on this unit, the Chaplain is very prejudiced against people like me. He calls us heathens, but I still walk around proudly displaying my pentacle. I've tried finding a book called *Witches Bible Compleat* on which to base my teaching in the Gardnerian path, but to no avail.

I have always felt the pull of the Moon's power and its effects on my feelings. It brings me great joy to see her in full glory. It's a feeling of joy deep down inside, because I know I'm never alone in this place. She's always there to oversee me and listen when I talk to her. I am never alone! Even as I write this I feel her power.

Even as a young boy I used to talk to the Goddess when I'd go night fishing. That's really where our bond was created. She kept me from being scared, all alone in the woods. She was always there, and I'd always go back out there. She'd follow me as I walked through the woods, between the grain fields, to get to the river.

The unit library isn't very resourceful; topics that are useful to our study are very limited. If you or your readers know of any congregations that donate books, I really would appreciate their addresses. Please print this letter; I'm trying to find some sisters to write to. I am Gardnerian but also interested in learning American Celtic. I will respond to all letters.

Adrian Sosa 753655  
P.O. Box 9200  
New Boston, TX 75570-9200



## Pagan Bookshelf Too Wicca-oriented?

I'm writing to offer criticism for the supposedly Pagan Bookshelf that is the subject of articles in issues #37 and #38. The stated goal of the articles is to provide a "list of recommended Pagan books." I'm inferring from that statement that the goal is to provide a recommendation of books that *all* Pagans would find useful on their bookshelves, at the least, or books that each Pagan should own to gain a wide-ranging understanding of all things Pagan. It is with that end in mind that I considered the list.

The heart of my criticism is simple: the list may be a list of works that Wiccans would find infinitely useful without serving non-Wiccans much at all. That is only a problem because the list is presented as being aimed at all Pagans and not only Wiccans. The fact that over half of the works listed present specifically Wiccan material that is likely of limited use to other Pagans serves as *prima facie* indication that the list doesn't meet the stated goal.

I imagine a list that all (or even most) types of Pagan would find useful would include works that provide either information that *all* can use or provide a thorough description of one single religion. Books of the former type can appear in any number. Books of the latter sort would be very limited in number; there's no reason to have more than one or two texts describing Wiccan thought and practice, for instance, the same as with Druidry and Asatru and Religio Romano and Romuva and on down the line.

If one is offering a list for Wiccans, I think the list provided in the articles serves fine. For those of us who aren't Wiccans, though, the list doesn't serve much purpose. I fear that such a list will get passed on to curious seekers who will then get the idea that Wicca is the whole of Paganism, and they won't then encounter the great diversity that marks the Pagan community.

— Larry, via email

Carl McColman, responds:

Dear Larry, Thank you for your letter and your comments regarding the Pagan Bookshelf series. The selection of titles featured in this series were nominated and voted on by a panel of over thirty

*PanGaia* contributors; it is inevitable that any list like this will be shaped by the values, interests, perspectives — and limitations — of those making the selection. The dominance of Wiccan titles in the series is due largely to the fact that Wicca continues to be the most widely practiced form of Neopaganism. Fortunately, Neopaganism has no central authority determining what is or isn't fit for people to read; speaking as a writer, it is my hope that more non-Wiccan Neopagans will pursue the writing, reviewing, and promoting of books that celebrate the true diversity of Pagan spirituality.

— Carl McColman

P.S. Any folks out there who would like to write in and tell us about books they would like to add to the list are welcome to do so.



## Thanks for Memorial Service

Thanks and thanks again to Cecylina and Dagonet Dewr for their Memorial Service in *PanGaia* #37. My circle of family and friends is joyfully ecumenical, with me the only Wiccan. When I asked my husband a few months ago if he would know what to do “in the unlikely event” of my passing, he said “No,” in that nervous tone of voice one uses when desperately trying not to talk about the unthinkable.

We have, however, told each other to write something down to make it as easy as possible for the one who is left. Needless to say, neither of us has done a thing.

So thank you for putting it down on paper for us. I made a copy and a few annotations and left it on my husband’s desk. After reading the service, he said that it was “dignified.” Hopefully, the paper will be yellow with age if he ever needs to use it!

— Ms. Kyle Z. Bell  
Alexandria, VA

## Liked Issue 38

Dear *PanGaia*:

I just got my issue #38 and what can I say, but that I’m humbled by the scholarship and clarity of the articles for this issue. I want to congratulate everyone for producing such well thought-out work. I particularly enjoyed the article on the Minoans (and the balanced way the author treated the evidence — or lack thereof — for human sacrifice), the one on clay, the matrilineal one . . . Well, okay, *all* the articles. Wow. This issue gave our readers a lot to think about. At least three months worth.

And the illustrations, varied and rich. Intimidatingly good. Thank you.  
— Archer

## Politics and Spirit

In the late spring of 1970, I was living at my parents’ home with my two toddlers while their father was in Vietnam for a year. One morning my

mother and I were sitting in front of the TV watching the Dick Cavett-show when Seymour Hersh came on with his mind-blowing exposé of the My Lai massacre. This was a moment of profound significance in my life — I have never been the same. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Seymour Hersh for turning the key in my political awakening process — a karmic debt according to my understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. Today I listened to him again on

Amy Goodman’s *Democracy Now!* as he elaborated on his recent exposure of the American torture and inhumane treatment of Iraqi detainees. His view of the American

soldiers is measured and compassionate (he repeatedly referred to them as our “children,” reminding us that there is a difference between our fantasy of “soldier” and the reality of the kids who are actually fighting this war). But his courage in bringing the truth of what is happening into the American living room is the same as it was all those many years ago — direct and uncompromising. “This is unacceptable,” he seems to be saying, “this is not who we are.”

I have been thinking a lot recently about the apparent schism between political activists and spiritual practitioners. On Beltane as I drove to the Bay Area, I heard a wonderful show on KPFA about the IWW (International Workers of the World). Interesting that we, the Goddess movement, and the IWW share that holiday. We call it Beltane (Beltaine) and celebrate it as a “feast of fire,” one of the four cross-quarter days between the Solstices and Equinoxes; the IWW celebrates it as the true “labor day.”

For most of my adult life I have been involved in the Goddess movement. I have been a spiritual teacher, mystic, and practitioner of female shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism,

and Goddess spirituality. Yet it is frequently the so-called “political” types that inspire and move me to action. I love the courage and audacity of the Left, how their truth-telling stirs things up, and I value their commitment to the long haul. There is really no separation between us at all — like myself, those political writers and speakers are fueled from deep within by a profound spiritual fire. Whether they articulate the principles of social justice through song, written word, speaking into microphones at peace marches, or proudly laying their bodies down in resistance to local or global injustice, they have served as models for me of what it means to be alive.

Starhawk’s peace work (Reclaiming Collective) and the Catholic nuns who dismantle nuclear plants (Ploughshares) exemplify this radical solidarity and integration of spirit and action. One organizer on the May Day KPFA show sang a song, “Have you gone to jail for justice?” And I thought to myself, “Well, no actually, I haven’t — and maybe it’s about time I did.”

It’s not that I think we all have to go to jail, but surely we must speak out even as it becomes more dangerous to do so. We can march for reproductive rights, or get out the vote, or stop pollution. We could refuse to go to work or stop paying taxes that support the war. These times are so unprecedented, they demand unprecedented responses from us.

One longing I have is for more coalition to happen between the so-called spiritual and political types. We have a tendency to fall into two camps and keep a holier-than-thou attitude toward each other; this seems ridiculous and wasteful, given what we’re up against.

Spiritual practitioners are threatened at the rage expressed by activists, and activists seem to think we spiritual types are flakey or airy-fairy navel gazers. Yet it seems so obvious that if you’re not angry about the current state of affairs, you’re probably in denial; and if you’re not doing some kind of spiritual practice, you’re probably not



## Between The Worlds A Grand Magickal Congress

November 4 - 7, 2004  
Wyndham Hotel, Wilmington, DE

Between The Worlds is a major interfaith esoteric conference sponsored by the Assembly of the Sacred Wheel, a Wiccan nonprofit religious organization. Between The Worlds is not an annual event. After this one the next BTW will not be until 2007. Don't miss this rare opportunity for deep learning and dialogue.

### Featured Teachers:

Aeptha; Andras Corban Arthen  
Page Bryant; T. Thorn Coyle  
Morganna Davies; Ivo Domínguez, Jr.  
Lon Milo DuQuette; Skip Ellison  
Selena Fox; Judith Harrow  
Diana Paxson; Mark Stavish  
Wabun Wind; Shakmah Winddrum

and more...

### A Grand Magickal Gala

In addition to the conference, there will be a Friday evening gala filled with dancing, merriment, and an auction to benefit

The New Alexandrian Library  
([www.sacredwheel.org/nal.html](http://www.sacredwheel.org/nal.html)).

### For Information & Updates:

[www.sacredwheel.org/btw](http://www.sacredwheel.org/btw)  
(302) 855-9422  
[sacredwheel@sacredwheel.org](mailto:sacredwheel@sacredwheel.org)

centered. We need each other. We are fueled by the same source. I have long imagined political rallies as opportunities to do chanting or healing work, and have always used my own healing workshops as opportunities to raise political consciousness.

I've had some interesting discussions in the last year with my friend Tulku Thubten Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist lama whose work is fresh and non-doctrinal. We both feel a strong connection to the Black Dakini "Throma," whose name means "angry woman." Throma is the deity who graces the cover of my 1991 book, *Shakti Woman: Feeling Our Fire, Healing Our World*. Throma can be interpreted as a symbol of the feminist movement characterized by the sharp, critical intelligence known as "prajna" in Tibetan Buddhist terms. This is not anger in some small ego-centered way, like a personal grievance or reactive explosion, but rather the luminous wrath of the conscience — awake, witnessing, and refusing to accept injustice. Like the Greek Nemesis, the Black Dakini says "no" — and like an ancient Amazon, she arouses in us the necessary fearlessness required for egoless action on behalf of the whole.

So, at this time of crisis, I call in Throma, the Black Dakini, and her retinues of sky-walking women and peace-loving men to inspire and awaken our hearts.

In love and solidarity,  
— Vicki Noble

### More From Pagans in Prison

Dear Friends,

I would like to thank you for the free sample copies of *PanGaia* and *newWitch*. I am incarcerated in a state prison in Texas. I dream of having the religious freedom that is given to federal prisoners. I have been fighting for religious items and freedom to assemble since I arrived. My first unit was fairly tolerant. Although we were not allowed to formally assemble, the warden allowed us to meet on the recreation yard. After filing a grievance and appealing it, I was given a list of approved

devotional items. After approval by the chaplain and warden, I ordered a lodestone and medicine bag from Azure Green (who were very helpful in returning the approval forms with the order). I planned on ordering other items but I was returned to the district court (I'm trying to overturn my conviction).

I was reassigned to the Neal unit in Amarillo. I was hoping for more religious freedom here, as this is a designated Native American unit and there are at least twice as many Wiccans here as Native Americans. I also hoped that since Amarillo is a large city, we could find an outside volunteer to come into the prison. Not having a chaplain is the holdup on having any religious ceremony or study group. I've been told again and again that Wiccans must have an approved volunteer first. After several attempts, I met with the unit chaplain. Not only did he say he would *never* assist in a Wiccan ceremony, but he refuses to even issue a pass for my religious items.

That is the least of my troubles. I have a pentagram medallion that was sold through the commissary. Two officers stopped me and told me that my medallion was offensive and that I'm forbidden to wear it. When I tried to explain that it was an approved religious item sold through commissary, they screamed and cursed at me and threatened me if I was ever seen wearing my pentagram again. Then, during a "shakedown," the sergeant searching me told me three times I need to change my religion. Then she asked if I'm trying to recruit Wiccans. I told her we don't recruit, but she was unconvinced. I later learned that she is in charge of "gang intelligence" As if Wicca is a gang!

A lot of this abuse is because I'm very forward with my beliefs; also I'm blessed with family who supplies me with an abundance of Wiccan reading material. Also, I proudly wear my pentagram, hoping to find other Wiccans.

I didn't complain about the sergeant, but I did file a grievance on the two officers who threatened me.

I won a partial victory, as the warden said I may wear my pentagram at all times and she would speak to the staff supervisor and I shouldn't have any more problems. However, the officers involved were not reprimanded in any way.

So, what's the point of this letter? Every person I talk to says we need an outside volunteer. There are twenty wings here, so all the Wiccans are spread out. I'm hoping that somewhere in the Amarillo area there is a Wiccan or coven who would volunteer to give us a little leadership. As Mr. McPhaden stated in his letter (Issue #38), there are always plenty of Christian volunteers but so few Wiccans. My personal theory is that Christians are just after "numbers" while Wiccans are cautious about involving themselves with criminals and are afraid they will be taken advantage of. While I cannot speak for everyone, I know there are some really good people here who either made a mistake or got caught up in a not-always-fair justice system. Anyone who volunteered would have enough control so that they could NOT be used unfairly; and as far as money spent for supplies, I would personally hold myself responsible to reimburse them for reasonable expenses. I just need someone to step forward and say they will help with organization.

I was reading Ms. Adaire's comments on Pagan solidarity (Issue #32). I believe standing up for those whose religious freedoms are most oppressed is an important step in having our religion "accepted" by society at large. I know Wiccans are among the most giving people in our country. We just need someone brave enough to give us the outside support we so desperately need.

For my part, I will continue to fight the system until we are afforded the same rights as followers of other paths. Anyone who would like to help is welcome to write, although we cannot send or receive letters from other correctional facilities. Even if you are geographically far away, if you have suggestions or comments, please write. If you are interested but don't know how to

help, you can write to TPPMA (Texas Pagan Prison Ministry Association) at 1192 CR143, Liberty, TX 77575.

If nothing else, please send us your positive energy. Thank you and brightest blessings.

Sincerely,

— Tom Doyle Jr. 1137378  
Neal Unit 9055 Spur 591  
Amarillo, TX 79107

Dear PanGaia:

I'm an incarcerated solitary Wiccan practitioner who is seeking information to add into my Book of Shadows. My access to information is limited, so any information will be greatly appreciated.

In particular, I am looking for the following information: The "Charge of the Goddess," words of Goddess, Drawing Down the Sun, Charge of the Golden Horned God, Rite of Fertility, Queen of Enchantment, Witches Prayer, Witches Chant, 8-fold path, 8 elemental tools, 9 Knotts of Intentions, etc. If anyone has any information on any of these subjects, please write to me.

Blessed be and merry part,

— A.V. Samabria 92A3536  
555 Devil's Den Road  
Altona, NY 12910

Editor's note: We are now receiving as many as six requests a day for free subscriptions, books and other material from Pagan and Pagan-seeking prisoners, mostly men. Alas, we simply do not have the funds to provide free subscriptions to prisoners; however we do extend our low-income subscription price to all, no questions asked. (We also accept payment in U.S. postage stamps.) We offer a free sample of *PanGaia* and *newWitch* magazines to anyone who asks, including prisoners. (For security reasons we do not send *SageWoman* or *The Blessed Bee* into men's prisons, although we do offer them to female prisoners.)

We love your letters!

Please write us at:  
Feedback Loop, PanGaia,  
P. O. Box 641, Point Arena, CA  
95468 or email us at  
feedbackloop@pangaia.com. ▲

# News and Notes

From the Publisher

## Three New Columnists!

With this issue, we welcome three new columnists. Joanna Powell Colbert returns with a discussion of Tarot, focussing on how the individual cards combine to create the "Tarot Journey." Judy Harrow brings her experience of human nature and her training in both psychology and as a Priestess to her column "Mind and Magic." We enjoyed Archer's hard-hitting analytical articles so much that we decided to make them a regular column. See "Connections" for a detailed explanation of important Pagan objects and ideas, traced from their history through contemporary use. We hope that you enjoy these new columns as much as we do. Dagonet and Cecylina Dewr are on vacation this issue from "World and Wheels" but promise to return in the fall.

## Last "Last Words"

"Last Word" columnist Sylvia Stevens signed off from her column in June and sent us this letter,

*Folks, it's been a wonderful time! I've loved this column, this magazine and this experience. Currently, we are dealing with family things (of a wonderful and happy nature) and I confess that I have been distracted in a very good way. Truly, I stand on a hillside, looking toward a dawn of the spirit and I have many people, including PanGaia and my readers, my editors and friends to thank for it! One last bit of advice for you all: We face some scary times. Each and every one of us is a beacon of light in the darkness. Never let that light fade. Smile at each other and especially at yourselves in the mirror. We smile when they wish to show friendly intent. Smiling is international, intergenerational and even interspecies. Smile. And know that you are loved.*

— Sylvia Stevens