

Toe-to-Toe

A Forum for Controversy and Opinion



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Should we embrace “Pagan Standard Time?”

Just Say “No” to PST

You’ve anticipated the event for weeks and arranged travel to get there. Old friends are coming; you’re looking forward to meeting new folks. Opening ritual is at sundown.

The sky is fading, gray mingling with fuchsia and coral in the west, so you join others in the designated area. The sun sets. More people appear. But dusk creeps in, and you’re still waiting for the ritual to start; you’re growing tired of standing and hear a few grumbles, but you also notice the inevitable shrugs ... Admit it, your enthusiasm and pleasure have been diminished by a tradition far too many Pagans uphold with pride: P. S.T. – Pagan Standard Time – or, as a friend of mine refers to it, “Pagan Selfish Time.” I have to agree. Nowhere in our lives is tardiness so tolerated as in the Pagan community.

Spontaneity and a casual atmosphere are appealing – I like that, too, about our path – yet neither should be an excuse for behavior that disrespects others. An acquaintance of mine recently attended a number of public events held in our community, but then stopped going despite enjoying the events due to this issue. It is very hot in Phoenix most of the year, and delays can cause genuine harm, especially to elders and children. (Not to mention that hanging around idle in the sun does little to create a spiritual mood.)

I propose we take a critical look at our attitude toward tardiness and dispense with P. S. T. If a secret poll were taken, my guess is that a majority would agree that when participants straggle in, it dishonors the leaders that have spent a good deal of time preparing for the event. When the leaders are tardy, it’s even worse, and show disrespect of participants who might, for instance, be under time constraints. Viewed on a larger scale, lateness implies disorganization. We want our path to be seen as legitimate by those outside the community, lateness implies disorder, which undermines this goal.

Pagans assimilate – change is one of things we do best – and eliminating P. S. T. can start with leaders setting the example. Next time you’re teaching and your workshop is set at 2 p.m., *start on time*. If you’re the priestess at a public event, beat the drum or begin the chant a few minutes ahead of the announced hour; it will get early-birds in the mood and encourage stragglers to get the lead out. Then begin the formal part of the ritual at the announced time, and don’t admit latecomers. Being left out might just convince the perpetually slow to change their ways. P. S.T. should be regarded as *gauche*, and you can help start that trend. ▲

– Joan Robinson-Blumit is an accountant, writer, and priestess. You can email her at jrbrowan58@hotmail.com.

Just Grow Up, People!

The first time I heard the phrase “Pagan Standard Time,” I had no clue what it meant. After being “in the broom closet” for almost a decade, I slowly began coming out, started joining email groups and talking to other people about my beliefs. It was on one of these list I first heard about P. S.T. The moderator was announcing a ritual and commented that her group didn’t use Pagan Standard Time and that the ritual would begin promptly on schedule. I had to email and ask for clarification. The moderator explained to me that “Pagan Standard Time” means that event participants would arrive whenever they desired and eventually everyone would be there and the event could begin. I was shocked; it seemed so strange to me that spiritual folks would show such disrespect to other people.

Since that time, I have, of course, heard this term used over and over. On one e-list I even watched as a person flamed on about “how dare society expect us to conform to the times it deems acceptable.” This person thought the entire world should operate on P. S. T. So, just for a minute, let’s observe a world which runs on Pagan Standard Time.

No

“Spontaneity and a casual atmosphere are appealing, yet neither should be an excuse for behavior that disrespects others.”

Need some breakfast granola? Oh well, sorry; the little store down the street isn't open yet because hey, the clerk didn't feel like showing up. What about the movies? Remember that obscure little film you wanted to see? The theater manager says they will play it when the house is full — you could be sitting there for weeks. Going on vacation? Well, just come down to the airport whenever you want, because the pilot is going to take off whenever she wants to, so you may be waiting a few hours, or you may already have missed your flight. Or when you think you are having a cardiac and head to the emergency room, too bad; the staff decided to sleep in this morning.

If something is really important to you, you make sure you are there for it. If ritual is important to you, get there on time, if not, just skip it entirely. This whole concept is an extremely bad reflection on Pagans, and I for one don't appreciate it. Anyone who buys into it is giving Pagans a (deserved) reputation for being lazy, rude, and self-centered.

Some people may say, well, "what about festivals where things are more laid back?" Yeah, what about them? Is this a vacation where you are supposed to just lounge around all day, or are there workshops being offered? Are there group activities? If I'm sitting around for an hour waiting for someone to show up to lead a workshop, do I really want to learn what this person plans on teaching? Nope, not at all.

When it comes right down to it, so called Pagan Standard Time is nothing more than an excuse for laziness and disrespect. Hey, guess what? Grow up, get over yourself and get your life together. Show up on time! ▲

— Kerri Connor needs a bio here.

PST not a Pagan virtue

One of the things I really like about the Pagan path is that, for the most part, each of us takes responsibility for our own actions. We don't have a convenient devil on which to blame our transgressions, and most of us soon grow to understand that we must be able to count on ourselves first. Pagan Standard Time, or PST, flies in the face of that reasoning. By assigning the term to an entire, wide-reaching spiritual group, we're doing nothing more than making the assumption that *none* of us is capable of being responsible enough to do anything on time.

P. S.T. doesn't apply to nature — so why should it apply to nature-worshipping people? Songbirds don't wear wristwatches, but you can be sure that just before the sun comes up, our feathered friends are awake and singing. On the other hand, trying to get a group of Pagans together at the other end of the day for a sunset ritual can be downright frustrating. There are lots of rituals that can be delayed for a number of reasons, but there's no way we can keep the sun from setting because the person calling the South hasn't yet picked out a ritual robe.

I don't wear a watch, and that appears to put me right at home in Pagan settings — as a group, we're only slightly more likely to be wearing watches than those songbirds. I know that if I had a watch on, I'd be checking the time every few minutes. That's counterproductive when I'm in meditation or ritual. Given that, I remove the need for a watch by arriving for ritual early enough that I no longer need to know exactly what time it is.

What are the consequences of arriving early? As a person who's hosted a number of rituals over the years, I can attest to the idea

that there is certainly such a thing as *too* early: showing up six hours before ritual, unannounced, is not going to get you anywhere. But getting in the habit of showing up one hour early just might win you a few points — not only are you there and accounted for, but there are always last-minute tasks which could benefit from an extra pair of hands.

I know that when I'm planning or hosting an event, and the start time for that event has been made known to everyone in the group, there are few good excuses for showing up thirty minutes late. Even if it's not intended by the tardy person, the message still comes through loud and clear: "My time is more important than yours." Still worse is, "They wouldn't dare start without me!" If you make a regular habit of that sort of thinking, you might discover that your sense of self-importance is larger than reality.

I am not claiming that everyone who shows up late is irresponsible, rude, or playing power games. There are excellent reasons for delay, from problems at home to difficulties encountered on the road. In some cases, even the gods may be reaching out to prevent you from arriving on time, and that possibility certainly needs to be respected. But in the vast majority of cases, tardiness has a simple cause: bad time management, and there's no reason to believe that this trait is a Pagan virtue. Discipline and forethought — with a little personal responsibility thrown in for good measure — will usually do the trick. When all else fails, a phone call and an apology can go a long way toward stamping out the collective concept of Pagan Standard Time. ▲

— Kurt Hohmann lives in Central New York with his wife and a small menagerie, and tries diligently to start his rituals and workshops on time.

No

"Songbirds don't wear wristwatches, but you can be sure that just before the sun comes up, our feathered friends are awake and singing."

Let Go of Consensus Reality

This is such a pet peeve of so many Pagans, but, really, what are we arguing about? The general laxity around time is a very subversive and often-maddening aspect of Pagan culture. So much of what we do in ritual is set up deliberately to shake us out of consensus reality and make us break away from the distractions and masks of mass culture. For this reason when we enter magical space, we take off our watches, we leave behind our cell phones and shut off the computer. We shift into a “time that is not a time,” between the worlds. It should come as no surprise to anyone that one sacrifice we modern Pagans have to make is our culturally based need to control time.

While I concede that it’s appropriate for large events with many attendees to adhere approximately to a schedule, I don’t think a certain flexibility is bad thing. Delaying events or rituals to accommodate circumstances is not undisciplined — it is making service to your community a priority. Who are we serving — a timetable, or each other, and the Gods? Since so many of us lack regular access to Pagan fellowship, it is important that we not let a strict adherence to structure become exclusionary.

Unlike a performance, or an appointment, or any other kind of event, Pagan ritual observances are mystery-based. It is not a fully objective process; there is a certain ineffability that draws together the actions, the energetics, the language, the props and then Spirit moves in. This process is nearly impossible to make run successfully on a schedule. By adhering too closely to plans and timetables we potentially miss out on the gifts of the moment, connections and synchronicities that are unplanned but add depth and meaning

to the working. Also, sometimes delays and derailments are signals to abandon or modify our plan. Maybe there’s a reason those delays are there! Ours is not the only tradition where this happens. In Voudoun and Santeria practice, up to twelve hours can pass before the ritualists feel the energies are propitious. Compared to that, even the most “flow-y” Pagan event is a model of efficiency!

I see “Pagan standard time” as more often an issue of communication than timing. Communication is the key to making sure people’s needs are met with this issue. If timing needs to be flexible, let people know so they can schedule appropriately. If timing is important in a ritual or event, let people know that yours is going to start on time, no matter what. Communicate your expectations and needs so everyone can come to understanding, and make decisions for themselves. No one likes their time wasted, to let them make the choice about where their comfort level is. Conversely, if timing is an issue for you, check with the event planners if possible, to find out whether ‘PST’ is operating or not. Communication can handle a lot of these missteps in advance.

And of course, check your astrology because if Mercury is retrograde, timing issues will be even trickier! ▲

— Leni Austine needs a bio here

Live in the Flow

If we are Witches and magicians, why live by such a mundane instrument as a watch? I am convinced that the ability to measure time to the *n*th of a second is one of the greatest disservices that humankind has ever imposed upon itself. Consider how much worry about being

late contributes to stress, and how that can manifest in the body in terms of panic attacks, heartburn, high blood pressure or even heart attacks. Yes, we do need to have some idea of when a store opens or when a ritual starts, but will fifteen or thirty minutes really make that much difference in the grand scheme of things? What about quality of life? What about allowing one other to be human?

I’m not advocating that we live by Pagan Standard Time. I’m advocating that we live by Divine Universal Time.

It is my belief that there is a Divine “Flow” to the Universe, just as there is a Divine Web of energy connecting us all. It is Reiki, Chi, Prana, but it is also Time and Space; Karma and Fate. It is the words I type upon this keyboard and the paint the artist scatters across the canvas. It is the voice that tells you not to travel your usual path to work today, guiding you to avoid an accident you otherwise would have had. It is the urge that takes you to the place where you meet the person who changes your life. It is the Lady and the Lord, and all that is even greater than them.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written numerous books on living and working “in the flow,” or “in the zone” as athletes describe it. To me, this place of being is also the place where magic happens — it is found in the liminal times and spaces. Folk magic repeatedly goes back to these thresholds: doorways, midnight, crossroads, dusk, dawn... the times that are without time. They are neither one nor the other, and at the same time, they are both. It is that space we seek to create when we cast a circle saying, “We are between the worlds, Beyond the bounds of time.” (Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*).

“It should come as no surprise that one of the sacrifices we have to make is our culturally-based need to control time.”

Yes

Toe-to-Toe: A Call for Submissions

"Toe-to-Toe" is our forum for dialogue and opinion. Upcoming topics include:

"Is the God/dess Good?" In some religions, all acts taken by deity are, by definition, morally sound. "If God does it, it must be good," goes the rules. But how does this apply in a polytheistic religion? Are (or should) god/desses be bound by moral rules developed by humans? Do the same guidelines apply to everyone? What happens if a god/dess commits an immoral act?

"Are the gods real?" Do we believe that the gods and goddesses really exist in the same way we do, that the physical world does? Do we believe that the stories about Them based in reality? Can we hear Their voices, feel Their presence, do Their will? Or are they, in fact, mythic concepts, psychological projections, useful archetypal constellations, or wistful projections and the stories of their exploits simply "just-so" stories? In short, do we believe the gods are literally true or metaphorically real?

"Do angels have a place in Pagan practice?" Interest in angels and other "Higher Beings" is a fever pitch, and most, if not all, popular ideas about angels stem from Christian sources. In spite of this many Pagans believe that angels are a legitimate part of Pagan cosmology, although they may refer to them as devas, guardians, or celestial beings. What's your take on this conundrum: is belief in angels an unwanted spillover from the dominant religious paradigm or transpersonal beings we all could use to know?▲

To share your opinion or to suggest a topic, write to: Toe-to-Toe, PanGaia, P O Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116 or email (preferred) meditor@pangaia.com.

The Flow is not analytical, left-brain and controlled. It is right-brain, creative, and free. It seems unstructured, but it creates its own structure as it flows. It is Maat: the order of the universe itself. We can choose to ride, and enjoy it or to fight it. By learning to listen, see, and perceive it, and then to go with it, we can lead more magical lives.

Watching the clock, whether in ritual, at work or simply walking down the street, prevents us from slipping into these spaces outside of place and time, and experiencing their synchronicity. That's fine if you are afraid of the World of the Fairy, and never want to look beyond the Veil. But if you want to bring more magic into your daily life, you have to give it room to happen.

When you find that place of Flow, you *will* be at the Right place at the Right time. No, it may not be the time on your calendar, but it is the time you are meant to be there. You may be late, but arrive just as everyone else does because they were held up by traffic. You may be early, and find just the person you needed to speak with waiting there for you.

If you take a look at the Major Arcana cards in the Rider-Waite deck, you will notice that many figures in the deck have one foot on the earth (the manifest world), and one foot in the water (the world that is beyond). Finding and living this balance is the way of the Magician, the Priestess, the Shaman. But keeping the balance is something we have to work on daily.

How can we apply this idea to our meetings and rituals? These are my rules; yours may vary:

- If you are responsible for an event, be there early and allow plenty of buffer time for last minute changes.

- Again, for leaders: have backup. Cars break down, people get sick. We are all human. Ask everyone who is taking a role to arrive early. If you are in charge, ideally you should have a second-in-command who can take over if something catastrophic happens. At any rate, have the cell phone numbers of your staff so that you can check in as needed.

- Never do anything simply because someone says you "should," and that includes your own inner critic. Fear and judgment disconnect you from the Flow. Learn to feel the energy, and you will know what to do and when to do it.

- Plan, plan, plan! Have backup plans and backups to the backups. But once you are in ritual space, relax and allow the magic in.

- Allow for the fact that participants will be wherever they are supposed to be. If they are meant to be there, they will be. If something holds them up, they weren't meant to be there or they had something more important to experience. If someone needs to leave early, let them, as quietly and unobtrusively as possible, respecting the space and the ritual energy. It is not a negative reflection on your ritual if someone has to go to work, go home for childcare reasons, or if they are tired or sick, or simply need to be somewhere else.

- As a participant, know the rules for the group. Is it okay to cut a doorway in the circle and enter belatedly? Are there some times and ways that are better than others to enter or leave quietly? Or is no one allowed in or out once the circle is closed? If you arrive late and the door is open, it was meant to be. If you get there early, and the door is closed because your information was wrong, then it was not.

Accept responsibility for your decisions, but in doing so, try to find the balance between the worlds. Learn to listen to the Flow which directs this world, and stop watching the clock that holds you back from it. Time is a human invention, but in life, as in ritual, we are also co-creating with the Divine. By attuning ourselves to the Flow, rather than restricting ourselves to mundane time, we allow the Universe to assist us in our work and in our lives. ▲

— You may learn more about Lady Moondance at: <http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/ladymoondance/> or reach her via e-mail at: LadyMoonDance@aol.com