

No. 44

# Pan Gala

A PAGAN JOURNAL FOR THINKING PEOPLE

PLUS: LOVE SPELLS REVISITED  
PAGANS TEACHING TEENS  
CANAANITE RELIGION



## GIFTS TO THE GODS

Once we believed that the gods demanded blood offerings in return for their favor. Did They change Their ways — or did we? Or did the ancients know something that we have forgotten?

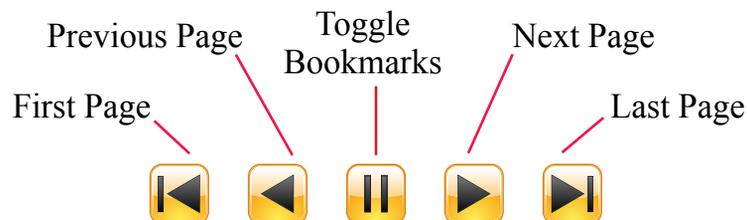


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# PanGaia: A Pagan Journal for Thinking People

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### COVER STORY: GIFTS TO THE GODS

Once we believed that the gods demanded blood offerings in return for their favor. Did They change Their ways — or did we? Or did the ancients know something that we have forgotten? An in-depth look at the “ultimate” ritual: human sacrifice, and its effects on Paganism, past, present and future. *By Archer, artwork by Cris Beetow... 15*

### SUN DANCE

The timing couldn't have been worse. How could I attend a Sun Dance in Green Grass on Sunday and have surgery in Rapid City the following day? Both events were crucial — and immovable. Nothing to do but accept what the gods — the Native American ones and the gods of medicine — had decreed. *By Marian Mathews Hersrud, artwork by Chris Beetow... 27*

### AN ALTAR IN THE WIND: BUILDING A MAGICAL OUTDOOR ALTAR

There's no better place to celebrate and connect with the forces of nature than in their true environment: outdoors. By building your magical altar outdoors, you can experience the gifts of Nature directly. *By Von Braschler, artwork by Chris Beetow... 42*

## ALSO:

### LOVESPELLS RECONSIDERED

Some say that “no real Witch would ever cast a love spell to control another's will.” This must come as a big surprise to the many practitioners, past and present, who do a brisk business in love charms, philtres, and spells. Is there a way to do such spellwork ethically? *By Kevin Filan, artwork by Chris Beetow... 31*

### NATIB QUADISH: REDISCOVERING THE GODS OF CANAAN

What do you do when you hear the call of a god you never knew existed? Some Pagans are brushing off the dust of millennia and rediscovering an almost-forgotten path: that of the Canaanite religion. *By Tess Dawson, artwork by Chris Beetow... 34*

### ENCOUNTERING PAN: A MEDITATION

It's just dawn. The green-gold Sunlight on your face eases you awake. There is honeysuckle on the air you can taste, and piping of morning birds, and the rolling hum of insects. As the gauze of sleep falls away, you understand — with some surprise — that you are *not* in your bed, in your room, in your home. *By Linnaeus, artwork by Chris Beetow... 39*

# PanGaia: A Pagan Journal for Thinking People



## FICTION

### PATSY'S CANDLES

There are eight of them on the painted shelf. White and uniformly sized, they are arranged in a straight line like slats on a picket fence. Three more, also white but of varying heights, perch atop the kelly-green hand towel precisely folded to fit the contours of the commode lid. *By Mitzi McMahon, artwork by Chris Beetow ... 46*

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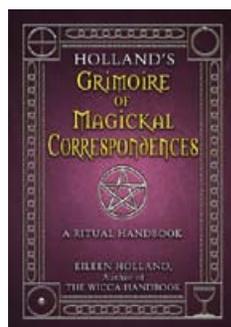
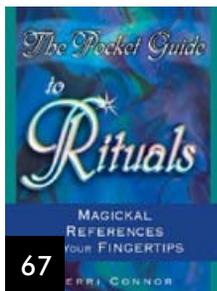
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Front Cover photo courtesy of Drents Museum, Assen, the Netherlands, ©2002.

For more information on the exhibition "The Mysterious Bog People" please see [http://media.civilization.ca/bog\\_e.htm](http://media.civilization.ca/bog_e.htm) or contact the Canadian Museum of Civilization at 1-800-555-5621.



## OUR FEATURED ARTIST

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## Why We Need Ritual

*The actor searches vainly for the sound of a vanished tradition, and critic and audience follow suit. We have lost all sense of ritual and ceremony — whether it be connected with Christmas, birthdays or funerals — but the words remain with us and old impulses stir in the marrow. We feel we should have rituals, we should do something about getting them and we blame the artists for not finding them for us. So the artist sometimes attempts to find new rituals with only his imagination as his source: he imitates the outer form of ceremonies, pagan or baroque, unfortunately adding his own trapping — the result is rarely convincing. And after the years and years of weaker and waterier imitations we now find ourselves rejecting the very notion of a holy stage. It is not the fault of the holy that it has become a middle-class weapon to keep the children good.*

— Peter (Stephen Paul) Brook

**W**e need rituals. We need ways to mark the milestones of life, our accomplishments and passages, holidays and anniversaries, joinings and partings, all the important changes that make up our journey from cradle to grave. We need ceremonies to make sense of events, to celebrate, to comfort, to formalize arrangements. Rituals can impose a pattern on occurrences that seem otherwise random, and place them into a context where we can understand what has happened. Ceremonies can define who a person is — or is becoming. We *need* these things.

Like religion and language, ritual appears in all known human cultures. The details vary; the concept is universal. It is, obvious therefore, that ritual is part of what makes us human. The particular ceremonies of a society help make it what it is and losing those ceremonies causes

terrible harm. A distressing number of “modern” societies have attempted to do away with “old-fashioned” rituals, seeing them as superstitious, pagan, or simply pointless. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We need ritual so much that we can’t do without it. When old rituals are abolished and nothing offered to replace them, we feel empty and adrift and quickly begin to seek ways of filling that emptiness. Sooner or later — and it’s usually sooner — we devise new rituals of our own. Even children do this. They do it even if they have never been told about ritual, or been told that ritual is wrong. They will invent little games and rules and rites of passage.

Because ritual is a powerful and delicate process, mistakes can be dangerous. People have died as a result of hazing, for instance — the kind of ceremonial harassment that precedes entry into such groups as motorcycle gangs and college fraternities. The need for ritual is so imperative that *it can actually override the survival instinct* in some cases. It can also drive us out of the religion and/or society into which we were born, if we find it unsatisfying and seek to meet our ritual needs elsewhere. Think about that. When you deal with ritual, that is the level of power you are handling.

The contemporary Pagan community draws much of its strength and magnetism from ritual. Where much of modern culture disdains ritual, we embrace it. Some Pagans feel drawn to ancient ceremonies, desiring to recreate as much as possible what their ancestors may have experienced. A cave, a bonfire, a circle of painted women surrounding a new mother, a cord of handfasting — these things give them an atavistic thrill of connection to something beyond the span of their own life-

time. Other Pagans feel compelled to ritualize *new* things, to make sacred the significant parts of modern life. These folks create ceremonies for such situations as entering college, buying a new car, or changing careers — activities and events our ancient ancestors never faced, but which make up a vital part of life today. We need both the old and the new.

Most ritual leaders in our community have put serious energy into learning what makes rituals *work*, so as to create ones that are meaningful, effective, and safe. We don’t always have a lot to go on, so we piece together ideas from psychology, history, other religions — whatever fits. This leads to an incredible diversity of ceremonial styles and subjects available to us in events, books, and periodicals.

Each individual Pagan seeks out the type of ceremonial experience that resonates for him or her. We may feel more attracted to solitary rituals or group ones, to traditional rites or innovative motifs; the details don’t matter. It’s the concept itself that matters, the process of ritualizing our experiences.

I’ve spent many years exploring the Pagan community. During that time, I’ve participated in solitary rituals, small coven rituals, and large group rituals full of people I barely knew. I have the same hunger, the same need for ritual as others, and I recognize that this hunger needs to be fulfilled.

I have danced skyclad around a bonfire, raising energy for a rite of fertility, one body among many all moving together, wrapped in wind and shadow and heat and light. That was *old* magic, ancient power — such a rite could have been performed by our ancestors, thousands of years ago.

I have also stood in a gymnasium with other Pagan leaders, taking part in a water sharing that gathered together water from sacred wells, mountain springs, far-flung oceans, and previous rituals. Water sharing is a modern ceremony, inspired by the novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but it feels older somehow.

# PanGaia

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I have helped a friend compose a ritual to honor the spirit of her car which was destroyed in an accident, a car she felt sacrificed itself to keep her safe, crumpling into a ball around the passenger compartment. There is nothing like this in old grimoires ... except the concepts of ceremony, of honor, of thanksgiving. So we made a new ritual, carefully pieced together from what I knew of ritual design and what she needed to accomplish.

Over the years, I've taken part in a great many ceremonies. Sometimes I get my needs met, other times I don't. I've participated in rituals that left me exhilarated and exhausted; and others that left me yawning. But this I know: I get what I need more often by seeking it than I would by *not* seeking it. That's what keeps me coming back for more.

Besides these rituals, which happened once and have been followed by others, there are some that recur regularly. For instance, this is my 20<sup>th</sup> editorial for *PanGaia*. Twenty times now, I have sat down in front of a blank screen, looked over the set of features for the current issue, and spun forth my thoughts upon the theme. When you do something that many times it becomes a pattern, and the pattern becomes a part of you. Writing this editorial has become a ritual for me. This is my chance to share why I chose a particular topic for an issue, what it means to me, why I consider it important, what I have to say about it. This is one of the ways in which I mark the passage of time: another issue completed, out of my hands and into the world. These editorials are more than introspections: they are markers, milestones, accomplishments — in short, they, too, are rituals.

As you read this issue, you will find accounts of other authors' ritual experiences, the singular and the regular, the subtle and the splendid. Think about the ceremonies you have experienced, the ones that worked and the ones that didn't work. Think about how — or whether — you get your ritual needs met. Maybe you'll find ideas for something new that you'd like to try.

In this issue of *PanGaia*, we have collected articles which reveal some of the many types of ritual and ceremony. Our cover story, "Gifts to the Gods" by Archer, investigates the topic of sacrifice, up to and including human sacrifice. Archer delves into the underlying import of sacrifice and what it signifies about our relationship to the Divine. The examples connect the past to the present, showing how sacrifice touches our lives today.

"Sun Dance" by Marian Mathews Hersrud shares an intensely personal story about this traditional Native American ceremony, one still practiced in contemporary times. It involves self-sacrifice, prayer, healing, and sometimes visions. Of course, it wouldn't do to talk about ritual work without including a how-to piece! Von Brascher explains the construction of a magical outdoor altar with "An Altar in the Wind."

Other articles include our "Point of View" piece "Dumb Supper" which describes a thought-provoking ritual for communing with our honored dead and "Lovespells Reconsidered" a look at the ethical and practical considerations of romantic magic. Learn about Canaanite deities and traditions in "Natib Quodesh" by Tess Handspin. Finally, join Linneas for a guided meditation on "Encountering Pan."

Our debate question is "Should Pagans Teach Minors?" with arguments from Kurt Hohmann, Leni Austine, Caroline Ailanthus, and Judy Harrow. (Editor's note: Judy Harrow's essay includes a tragic example of what can happen when ethical groups turn away minors; if you are especially sensitive to such issues, read with caution.)

So sit back and let our authors sweep you away with tales of rituals from far-flung times and places. Maybe you'll be inspired to seek out something similar yourself. ▲

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