

Damh the Bard:

Hello DruidCast listeners. I am sitting here in the London Magicians Club, reclining on an old leather chair, smoking a pipe and enjoying a rather nice single malt surrounded by old bookshelves on oak. And with me is the magician from the United States of America sitting on the opposite side of the Magicians Club chair here. So welcome Jason to this club. How are you, my friend?

Jason Mankey:

I'm doing well, my friend. It's so good to see you and chat with you. I wanted to do a voice, but it's too early for me here in the United States.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, no, I'm going to stop now as well, to be honest with you. But it is about eight o'clock, isn't it? Eight or 9:00 AM

Jason Mankey:

Yeah, it's almost nine.

Damh the Bard:

Thank you for coming back on DruidCast. Always a pleasure to talk to you. Always a pleasure to see you, Jason. It's been like the thing we were saying since 2019, since we actually sat down in the same room together at Paganicon, and then as we said, the world changed and everything went a bit different for a few years, didn't it?

Jason Mankey:

It did. And before that, I'd seen you for three years in a row because that's right, we were at PSG together. And the teepee was burned down, which was sad. 2018 I went to your house and stayed with you, Cerri. And then 2019 Paganicon and then the world turned

Damh the Bard:

And then that's it. And we haven't seen each other since. I've been keeping up with your travels though. Facebook is good like that to do that kind of thing. So what I'd like to do is talk to you about your path, and let's start with that really. How would you describe your path to listeners of DruidCast?

Jason Mankey:

I would say that I'm a Wiccan witch. Wicca is a type of witchcraft and I've always thought of myself as a witch, but Wicca is a particular set of perhaps rituals and ways of thinking, and that's what I've always been attracted to. And I've flirted with other traditions and paths, but the Wiccan and way of doing things has just always appealed to me. So yeah, Wiccan and witchcraft is what I like to use.

Damh the Bard:

Wiccan Witchcraft. And going back to the beginning, how did you discover your spiritual path?

Jason Mankey:

It all starts in 1990 with the LED Zeppelin box set

Damh the Bard:

That was

Jason Mankey:

Released. Yeah, I was a hair metal guy, but I was like, I need to go back and get the classics. And that box set came out at Christmas of that year and I fell in love hard with Led Zeppelin, was obsessed with Led Zeppelin for several years, maybe I still am. And when you read about Led Zeppelin though, you read about Jimmy Page and his interest in Aleistair Crowley, you read about Robert Plant and his interest in Celtic Myths. So I wanted to get all into that. I was at a bookstore in St. Louis, Missouri once and I stumbled across a book called Celtic Magic by DJ Conway, which is not a good book in any way. She argues that the Celts practised Wicca, which we know is not true, but she was a good writer and it had sort of the basics of Wicca. And I bought it because I thought it would get me closer to the mind of Robert Plant. And within four days I was saying prayers to the goddess and it just changed completely.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean you and me both. Do you remember Tipper Gore when those little stickers started to appear on CDs and they said Rock music will lead you down the path of the occult? Well, I think you and me, we are both living proof that she was right because

Jason Mankey:

She was.

Damh the Bard:

She's

Jason Mankey:

Absolutely right

Damh the Bard:

Because with you it led Zeppelin with me. It was Black Sabbath and Rainbow and Ronnie James Dio's lyrics and all that kind of stuff. Yeah. So before that box set though, did you have any other kind of interest in magic or spirituality? Was there something before that really?

Jason Mankey:

There really was. So it's kind of a story in two parts. I would always been interested in Criptids when I was a little kid, Lochness monster, Bigfoot. And if you know anything about American libraries, right next to those books are the books on witchcraft, vampires, werewolves, UFOs. So I read all of those books and had read some books kind of defining witchcraft, very sensational for kids. Not like they introduced me to Gerald Gardner, but I do remember reading about Alex Sanders in one of them. And that was in elementary school. And then between the summers of seventh and eighth grade, so I'm like 12 years old, maybe 13. I checked out a book from the library called Cast Your Own Spell by Sybil Leak.

It mentioned Wicca in that book and witchcraft and the Triple Goddess and things. So I had been exposed to things a little earlier than the Celtic Magic book, but I was very active in my local church youth group. I lived in the American South, became president of my Methodist church youth group. I

really wasn't ready for witchcraft back then, but at least I knew what it was. And I'd always been interested in alternative. And I'd never understood Christianity with the idea that our path is the only path and everyone else is wrong. That's just something I could never buy. I always assumed there were many different pathways to the divine. Certainly if you're a really smart God, why would you cut off over half of the population? That just never made any sense to me whatsoever. So even in high school I would read about Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, all those kinds of things. I always had this big interest in comparative religion, but using the words pagan and witch is a big step for

Damh the Bard:

A lot of us.

Jason Mankey:

So I wasn't ready for that step until I was 21 years old.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Did you have a religious family around you? Was there an influence like that to that interest in spirituality and religion?

Jason Mankey:

Not really. My grandmother was pretty religious, but she would often take us to Sunday school and then skip church to make breakfast for the family. And my dad was never religious. I liked religion. I kind of liked some of the trappings of church periodically, but my family wasn't really religious. My stepmother played lip service to the idea, but didn't really walk the walk or talk. She talked the talk but didn't walk the walk. Yeah,

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Would you say that your Wicca was a spiritual path, a religious path? Both.

Jason Mankey:

It's definitely spiritual, but I think it's religious first and foremost. And I

Damh the Bard:

Think

Jason Mankey:

That word has really fallen out of favour.

Damh the Bard:

And

Jason Mankey:

I think if you honour deities and have a particular worldview, I think that's a religion. So for me, it definitely is a religion. And I think we're of the same age. And in the nineties when you would read these

books, it was always like witchcraft is a religion over and over and over again in a lot of them. And now that's sort of fallen out of favour. But for me, yeah, very much a religion.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I think religion probably that word has such associations with negativity and violence and disagreement, and I think spirituality is much safer word. But essentially I think a lot of the time what people are saying is very similar. And I think religion just means bringing people together. I think that's the root of that word is to bring people together, which it doesn't seem to do does it, it seems to separate people. Book before last, I think it was, correct me if I'm wrong, your last one was the Greek God's book, but the book before last was all about the Horned God of the Witches.

Jason Mankey:

There was even one in between those two. There was

Damh the Bard:

Another one in between. Oh, well it's too late to edit that out. So there we go. Yeah,

Jason Mankey:

It's fine. There are nine. I get them confused now.

Damh the Bard:

But you had the Horned God of the Witches, which is a good tome and it really goes into some incredible depth with exploring the Horned God. Your view it feels in the book is that these horned gods are very distinct separate deities from different lands. Apart from that, tell me about a kind of formative relationship with the Horned God, where did that come from?

Jason Mankey:

It came about because of him. I didn't want to worship a Horned God, that was the one thing that was sort of left over from Christianity.

That's the devil. That's not what you want. I always thought, I'm going to worship a God like Apollo right, flowing blonde locks. I'm going to worship Apollo. That seems safe. That's what I want. And there was just sort of this energy, this insistence that you are going to talk about the great God Pan. You are going to honour Pan in ritual. You're going to say his name and you're just going to have to acknowledge him. And I put it off for a long time, it was just something I didn't want to do, but I would be in ritual and I would just feel this thrum like Pan, Pan, Pan, Pan. And then finally in ritual, I just kind of yelled his name once we were all a little bunch of college kids and just sort of made things up as we went along so you could basically do whatever you wanted doing ritual.

So I just screamed the name Pan and I felt this energy kind of fall into me and it reminded me of the first time I'd ever prayed to the goddess, I felt something very similar, this power that I could feel, this energy that was acknowledging me and allowing me to acknowledge it. And that was really kind of the beginning of the love affair and then other horned gods follow. I'm a believer in the Horned God as this bigger figure, but I also honour separate antlered and horned gods like Pan and Cernunnos as well. It's all very complicated, are you a polytheist? Are you a neoplatonist or whatever, right. I mean it is deity. I assume it's greater than us and operates in different ways than we do,

Damh the Bard:

And we find our own way of connecting to it in whatever way we can or do. So from what you've just said, your connection to the feminine principle for the goddess came before your connection with the Horned God. So how did that come about?

Jason Mankey:

It was all reading that book Celtic Magic. It's weird how formative that book was, and as we've both said, it's a terrible book, but it had this principle of the goddess in it. And when you think about the world, there are a lot of women in the world. The idea that deity should be entirely male and exclude over half the world seems really silly. So it made a lot of sense to me to worship a goddess very, very quickly. And when I was starting out for the first three or four years, that was really my focus entirely was goddess worship. I wanted to be close to her and everything I did was really about her. And then there was the thrumming and I didn't have much choice.

Damh the Bard:

You're saying the goddess as the feminine principle and then there's Pan, and so you named the Horned God, but you aren't naming your goddess.

Jason Mankey:

I think it was because when I was starting out, it was always The Goddess, right? Capital G, the goddess maybe O triple goddess. And everything was really focused on goddess, the lady, the Lord. Not specific names, but by the time I got to Pan, I'd been doing this for a couple of years and I've been reading more myths and things and was beginning to talk about deities with specific names about this time too, I began to really like the goddess Bridget. So there was that sort of shift into naming a particular goddess instead of just saying the goddess. But for a long time it really was that sort of bigger picture, like the charge of the gods come to life by Doreen Valiente or something

Damh the Bard:

With all those names. That's a beautiful piece of prose, isn't it? Absolutely beautiful. So Pan was there knocking on your door, finally said his name, shouted his name. In ritual, I'm sure a lot of listeners to the show will have experiences when finally you just say, okay with me. I remember my path into that was ceremonial magic. Right now, ceremonial magic if you have a kind of nominal Christian background, is actually fairly safe because a lot of it is based around the Kaballa. A lot of it is based around the Tree of Life. And it was for me, quite a big step to suddenly open a book on paganism to see Pan again, weirdly enough, Pan again sitting there on a rock playing his pipes with his cloven hoof. And in the back of my mind, I could feel that call as well. I could feel that call as well. That call of I guess the earth and mud and nature, it felt like to me just really getting back to the absolute roots of what it is to be human or a human animal, shall I say. Why do you think Pan?

Jason Mankey:

I think it was Pan just because he's so very different than I am, that sort of primal, feral energy that go out and get whatever you want, that very insistent energy. And I've always been very polite, yes ma'am. No sir. Sort of standing in the background and things. And so having him in my life sort of gave me the courage and the energy to write books and to talk to people, do workshops, go on podcasts or whatever else it is I needed in my life. It was incomplete I think before that. And I also think if you read his myths, I

mean he's this very insistent, God, I'm going to try to get what I want, and if he wants you, he's going to get you eventually and he'll wear you down and he'll come in the door.

Damh the Bard:

He's one of those deities. I think that a lot of our modern pagan paths, I think owes a great deal of thanks to people like Arthur Machan and those and the Victorians who looked for Pan within nature and brought him in no matter how wrong historically it may have been. It feels to me looking back that there are times in history where humans need something and it may not match the original story of Arcadia and Greece and all of those, but somehow in our modern society we need an energy because of something that's happening whether it's climate change or our attitude to other life forms. And it just feels to me that energy came through in those writings of those, like I say, the Great God Pan book and all those, and we're kind still riding that wave. Do you reckon that's how it was?

Jason Mankey:

Oh, absolutely. I mean, I'm fascinated by the rebirth of Pan that you have this sort of rustic Greek God become the God of the English countryside and praised by English poets and they transform him into something that's really different than what he was in the ancient world. And to me, mythology doesn't end. Gods are not stuck in Amber. They're not exactly like they were in the year 300 BCE, right? So in a way that poetry about Pan is new Pan mythology, a different way of looking at the God so that you can experience the God and grow closer to him. And Jesus is not a very good link to the natural world.

I mean, maybe he talked to shepherds or something, I don't know, but he's not a great link to the natural world. And these people needed something and they settled on Pan because he has those hooves of a goat and those legs and stuff. I mean, it's just very natural to see him in all of that. Yeah, so it makes sense to me and that language in those poets poems is what we still use when we do ritual to talk about the Horned God, I think it's been super influential and a lot of people are really, really unaware of the influence of that poetry. And some of those people in the 19th century, I'm pretty sure were pagans.

Damh the Bard:

You

Jason Mankey:

Couldn't

Damh the Bard:

Say it. Yeah,

Jason Mankey:

I couldn't say it. Couple of letters here and there that really hint at it amongst Shelley and stuff, but really early on.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah,

Jason Mankey:

I love that your thoughts are like my thoughts.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I remember when I first came to this path, there were two books that everyone said you must read, and that was *The White Goddess* and *The Golden Bough* by Fraser. And everyone said, these are the books that are going to guide you down the path. They're absolutely astounding. And I guess it was probably more, well, I lose two years because of the pandemic, so I guess it was more like six or seven years ago I started to hear words. There are two books you must not read, and those are *The White Goddess* and *The Golden Bough*. And I read both back in the day and I couldn't help but pick up the same feeling as I got from reading those Victorian poets that there was something that needed to come out. And it may not again, have been historically accurate, but it was something, there was a zeitgeist going on at the time that needed to be expressed in words. And I think that those two books to me, they don't hold historical fact. No, but they're still inspiring to this day of something like an expression of what was needed at the time. Yeah,

Jason Mankey:

Graves with the white Goddess, he was never really trying to write history. He was just trying to write what he thought was poetry in prose form

Damh the Bard:

And to

Jason Mankey:

Make it as inaccessible as possible to most readers. But there's a real beauty to it, and I'm with you. I mean, I think that these myths speak to us. Maybe they're not historically true, but there's something inside of us that relates to them and they speak the truth in a different way.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. And if you look at folk songs, for instance, a folk song sung in one village may be completely different to the folk song sung in the other village, but the Francis Child or the Copper Family, or these folk song collectors only spoke to Kevin in Village A and didn't go to Jonathan or Amanda in village B. So her version of that song died out and that one was then written down. And suddenly that becomes the truth. That becomes the absolute origin of the story. And I just always think that that's the same with mythologies as well. The stories, the actual mythologies that we've inherited are probably just one of a myriad of different versions of the tales that were told all over the place and of Pan being one of them.

Jason Mankey:

As someone who wrote a book about the Greek Gods, it's really interesting to me how most people don't really know about the truth of the myths. I mean, they were very different from city state to city state. And because of writers like Bullfinch, we have this sort of sanitised idea that this story really works and everything links up in a way and it all sort of makes sense. But that wasn't the way at all in the ancient world mean.

Damh the Bard:

What was that? What was it was animistic, was it more animistic linked to landscape or something?

Jason Mankey:

The stories of the gods were really different from place to place, right? Instead of this very organised way of looking at them and how a God was seen could be very different. In Athens for instance, they didn't like Aries very much, but if you were in Thebes, Aries was really, really important. So it was just sort of different. And goddesses, like Aphrodite for instance, we always think of her maybe as being a trifle or flighty or something obsessed with how she looks. But there were times when she carried a spear, Julius Caesar wore an Aphrodite ring. I mean, people thought that she was very fierce in her own way. Hera's mythology makes her out to be extremely unlikable, and yet worshipers loved her. They felt close to her that there was a real sort of comforting energy to her. So sometimes the myths take away from how the gods were seen in the ancient world or present a view that isn't really how they were seen everywhere. I mean, I think a lot of what we look at is, oh, that's Athens, but Athens wasn't the only city state. I mean, things were different in Sparta, things were different in Thebes.

Damh the Bard:

And I guess being in the UK or America and worshipping and working with Pan also is different. Do you think it's connected with the way you connect with Pan? Is that reflected with the land that you walk on by walking on the land of the United States of America? Is there an influence on that?

Jason Mankey:

I think how it expresses himself is a little different from place to place depending on where you are. But I mean, I certainly feel him here. There are places where I'm really convinced that he's at in California where I live. I mean, I'm convinced that the Greek gods have moved out to Northern California a long time ago, and they all live here now. We make a lot of wine. We control the tech industry. I'm pretty sure that they set up shop here.

Damh the Bard:

So where would be the Mount Olympus in California

Jason Mankey:

In northern California? The Mount Olympus to me where Zeus is, the Bay Bridge, which connects San Francisco and Oakland, the Bridges, it's like the spot that connects everything

Damh the Bard:

And

Jason Mankey:

Zues was the God that connected all the other gods to each other.

Damh the Bard:

We're talking American gods by Neil Gaiman here, aren't we?

Jason Mankey:

Yes.



Damh the Bard:

So okay. I mean, I know you have a connection with Dyonisis and I can't help but feel that one of those connections. I was at P S G years ago with you and you did a Jim Morrison ritual and I couldn't get to it for whatever reason. I can't remember why I couldn't get to it, but I saw it on the programme. I thought, I've got to get to a Jim Morrison ritual. He's a big hero of mine as well, but I wasn't there. Now is that ritual hidden under some occult kind of shadow that you can't talk about unless you actually was at the ritual or what was

Jason Mankey:

No, no, no.

I was at a P S G in the nineties and there was a man there who was doing a Jim Morrison ritual and was in the programme and I went and Jim Mad Dog Reynolds was his name, and he passed maybe 10 or 12 years ago. But he was doing it and he just sort of played a Door's greatest hit cd and we read some poetry, we did some things, and I was taken by it though. I love the doors and I think musically, the Doors are great for ritual. Nothing else sounds like the Doors. And I was like, this could be better. I could make it a little more theatrical. I could make sure that whatever I was doing was synced up with the music that's playing at the time. If you're going to cast a circle and start the ritual, you got to play Break on Through

Damh the Bard:

And

Jason Mankey:

We call the Goddess, we play, Hello, I Love You won't you tell me your name. We'd call Dionysis. We'd play a Whiskey Bar, show me the way to the whiskey bar. So started doing these rituals and the idea of the ritual is that Jim Morrison is the 20th century incarnation of Dionysis. He wants you to walk the path of excess, but there's also a lesson in it. There's only so far you can go on the path of excess or you fall. And even in the myths of Dyonisis he's like, here is the grape, enjoy, inebriate yourself, but if you went too far, you could do bad things or wake up with a hangover. He didn't want you to abuse these gifts. He wanted you to find pleasure in them. So that was sort of the idea of the Morrison ritual. So Jim is Dionysus, and basically we just call Dionysus and then we call on Ariadne/Aphrodite. Ariadne is the wife of Dionysus, but also is connected to Aphrodite. And sometimes in the ancient world, goddesses and Gods sort of merge together. And Ariadne/Aphrodite is an example of that. And we always call Eros too discordia because if you don't, she just shows up and she's much nicer when she's invited. So

We do all that part of the ritual. And then the meat of the ritual is you can be initiated into the Jim Morrison clan if you're a new ritual goer, and we give you Mardi Gras beads and then you get to pick a Morrison name. So then you're like, whoever, Morrison, right? Ris Morrison, Couch Morrison is a Morrison, lots of names. And sometimes people make out during the ritual, people drink. Of course during the ritual, if you've bid initiated, you could be reinitiated into the clan because that's fun. And we're just playing Doors songs while we're doing it. And the guy who originally did it, he would take some beer and baptise your head, which I thought was pretty gross to do at a festival. So a friend of mine and I, we came up with the Mardi Gras beads and I've been doing

Damh the Bard:

Mardi Gras beads, so I missed out getting my Morrison name. I'll never get my Morrison name. There you go. What can I do?

Jason Mankey:

It was really interesting doing it at P S G because the first time I did it at P S G, I almost got kicked out of P S G. So I was a young dumb kid. And while we were doing the Morrison Ritual, I was like, we should all be taking some Acid man. And I was just kidding around. And the security guy heard me and he thought that I was dealing drugs and they were going to kick me out of P S G. And I was like, you can go through my tent. There's nothing here. And eventually I'd made friends with somebody who was on staff and talked him down, but Selena didn't even know about this. And when I told her at the PSG we were at, she just laughed. Just laughed really hard.

Damh the Bard:

I can imagine.

Jason Mankey:

Was like that was the longest four hours of my life. And here you are laughing at me.

Damh the Bard:

God. Well, hopefully I will be able to attend a Jim Morrison ritual at some point. That sounds amazing. Sounds amazing. I wrote a song called Time Machine, and one of the places I would go would be to see a classic Doors performance. I hope it wouldn't be one of those things that disappointed you, do you know what I mean? You build up these things and if I ever really did get the chance to go back, I don't think it would. I think he was just such a showman. Absolutely incredible. So you are in California?

Jason Mankey:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Is there something within your Wiccan path, how does that help you to connect with the land beneath your feet and your locality? For instance?

Jason Mankey:

It was a challenge because I'm not from California. I've lived here for 12 years. I grew up in the American south near Nashville, Tennessee, and in the Midwest. And when we read books about the Wheel of the Year and how culture portrays the wheel of the year, it's very sort of English and American northeast. These are the cycles of agriculture. It's going to snow at Christmas time, it's going to be hot at this particular point. It's going to be colder in October. It's going to be 90 here on Thursday, so it's not colder here in October. And that's really tough to deal with. So I began to really sort of reevaluate my place on the Wheel of the Year when I moved out here trying to connect to the rhythms of this place, which were very different than the rhythms of Michigan. And I think that my witchcraft has allowed me to do that because it allows me to get closer to where I am, to feel the energies of the place that I am so I can sort of adjust my wheel of the year as needed.

Damh the Bard:

Did you say 90 degrees?

Jason Mankey:

Yes. Not Celsius, but Fahrenheit.

Damh the Bard:

No, I know. I know. Think

Jason Mankey:

We're going to melt.

Damh the Bard:

It's still pretty hot though. Yeah. And so is approaching, what kind of temperatures do you get at the time of Samhain?

Jason Mankey:

Hopefully 60, 70. You don't know.

Damh the Bard:

A little cooler.

Jason Mankey:

The thing about where we are the hottest months of the year are August, September, and usually the first half of October.

Damh the Bard:

So

Jason Mankey:

In September when everybody's excited about fall, that's when we're maybe having a 95 degree heat wave for four or five days.

Damh the Bard:

That's amazing. So that is really fascinating for me, one of the biggest gifts, I was asked once if people from the future could look back at what we did with Paganism when it was right in its, I mean, we are right at the beginning here really, aren't we? It's a little seed in our hand still. And if people in a thousand years time look back to us and say, what, from what we do now, would you want to still be practised in a thousand years time as like an ancient practise of ancient Wiccans and Druids? Because we will be the ancient Wiccans and Druids at some point. And for me, it'd be the wheel of the year. I mean, it really would still be the wheel of the year. But what I've noticed when I come to the states, when I go to Australia particularly as well, you have to develop your own relationship with it. You can't just pick up the South of England Gardner Wheel of the Year and plonk it somewhere else and say, that's it. And so snow drops come up in February and all that kind of stuff. However, those points I still think can be relevant to the locality you are living in. So do you feel the veil thin in California at Samhain?

Jason Mankey:

Absolutely. I mean, I feel the Sabbat's still. It's just that they're different a little

Damh the Bard:

Bit,

Jason Mankey:

But you still feel that change of energy in early September. I think maybe it's not the 68 degrees that I would've wanted it to be in the Midwest and it's 90 instead or whatever, but there's still this energy that changes you'll still feels like you'll, even though I can just walk down the street without having to put a coat on

Damh the Bard:

A lot

Jason Mankey:

Of the time, I mean, the energy still shifts. And one of the things too is the sun still changes. The days are shorter, the days are longer, the days are equal. And that amount of sunlight, I think has a big impact on us and how we see things. There's still something very powerful about it becoming night earlier and earlier and earlier, no matter how warm it might be.

I think we still keep up with it. It's just Imbolc to us really is the height of the rainy season, that's when it's green here is Imbolc. March, April. And then in the summer when people are like, oh, it's so nice out and everything's green, everything here is dead

Hasn't rained for five months. So you just look at it differently, but you still feel those energies. Summer feels a certain way. Autumn feels a certain way.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. So during summer it is just like you say, brown. Do you have any, this is a real ignorant British person question coming up. I'm really sorry, but I'm going to have to, are there fields of, well, we would call it corn, but I think would it be wheat or maize to yourself? What would it be on Sure.

Jason Mankey:

Call it corn.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. Are there any of those, do you still have, when is the harvest, I guess is the question? Where is the harvest in your locality?

Jason Mankey:

That's a great question because one of the things about where we live is the harvest is year round.

Just different things are harvested. So there's a lot of citrus plant, a lot of citrus trees. So in January we get oranges, tangerines, and then in June and July we get stone fruits like peaches. And that's about the time we get our first good tomatoes that come out. There's green bean season, which I really like a lot of

root vegetables in the winter along with the citrus. California produces 90% of the United States's agriculture, but it produces all of the weird things that aren't green. So you can drive not too far from where I live and see giant fields of artichokes, for instance or something. So there's a harvest season, but it's year round. So we have a local farmer's market that I love visiting because then you sort of see what is in season where we're at, and we get excited. I love Apple season. We're in Apple season right now. It's short in California, but I love it. And there's different varieties of apples that they grow out here than they grew. And we lived in Michigan because the climate's different. So we're adjusting to the apples, which I really like.

Blueberry season is earlier here than it was when I lived in the Midwest. So there are all these different things. So I do gardening too. So we have tomatoes that we're bringing in right now, and we had cucumbers earlier and things. So it really is all year round where I live.

Damh the Bard:

Here it's grain harvest and fruit harvest. That's probably about it really. Yeah. One of the things that's happened over fairly recent years, I think is a shift and a very welcome shift to more inclusivity in Paganism. And OBOD has looked at it and Druidry has looked at it. And I think that in the past, Wicca has been seen as a very Duotheistic, masculine feminine balance. What have you noticed within Wicca over recent years that I'm sure it is? Is it trying to address a balance of inclusivity

Jason Mankey:

As a

Damh the Bard:

Tradition?

Jason Mankey:

Absolutely. I think things are changing. I mean, there's still a lot of that Lord and Lady, but now it's about the Lord and the lady and everything that lies between those poles. So it's everybody. The gods are reflective of everyone,

Whether they're straight, gay, trans, non-binary. There's a place for everybody in the circle. And I think especially sort of a younger generation, and I'm 50 and I consider myself part of that younger generation, which really seems wrong, but we're out there and we're seeing what we do change and becoming more accepting and giving everybody a place in the circle. In the United States there's a lot of fighting about that from small groups who are very, very loud, which is a real shame. But I want everybody to be in a circle. I want us all to be together. And I think we have to change our language sometimes too, to make that, I don't want to ever use language that alienates somebody. I don't see myself reflected in what we're doing. I want to make sure that everybody sees themselves reflected in what we're doing.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Myself and Cerri, we've been holding open rituals for years. You came up the hill to where we hold them by the Long Man of Wilmington. And one of the challenges was always Beltane. Funnily enough, it was always Beltane because particularly here as well south of England, you have the old traditions of the May Queen and the May King and all that kind of stuff. And we just heard people just say that maybe they didn't feel quite as included as other people. We also used to split off into two circles of men and

women to explore male and female mysteries and stuff like that. And of course, some people just didn't know which one to go to or which one would they be welcome at? And it would've been quite complicated. So we changed the main May King and Queen to be the spirits of Nwyvre and of creativity and life force and to people who want to still connect to those energies as May King and Queen they still can. But for those of you that find that more difficult, then really you still have that twin energy of coming together, but with no gender aspect attached to it. It was unnecessary. And we had a beautiful thing happen because of that, because we used to have a hunt that the men used to go on, and the women used to hold the energy of a cauldron where they chose the May queen and it was separate. And one year a little girl said to her dad, and it was overheard by a lot of people, said, why can't I go on the hunt Daddy? And alarm bells went off in mine and Cerris head at that moment, and we just thought, why can't she go on the hunt? And so we started to shift things and change things up from that moment onwards. And last year everybody queued up to go to the hunt and everybody can therefore chase down the life force and everybody can engage with power of creativity as well. And something happened that could never have happened before. And I don't know statistically how it would've happened, but from 65, 70 people, the same person received both. And that would never have happened before. And it was just a real celebration of diversity and inclusivity. And I think we've finally cracked it with that one.

Jason Mankey:

Beltane is the hardest though, I think of all of them because I think you growing up and there's these expectations, the male female may pole thing we used to do sort of chasing the goat boys would chase the young maidens and stuff. And I began to realise how weird that was and how not inclusive that was. And we stumbled upon an old Scottish ritual of running cattle through between fires or making cattle jump over fires at Beltane. So that's what we started to do. We turned it into a protection. And maybe with my wife and I, it's still a naught Beltane, but we just do that in private.

Damh the Bard:

I think that's the thing is when you do the open rituals and things like that, it needs to be inclusive when they're open and stuff. What you do personally is entirely up to anybody. That's it.

Jason Mankey:

We're doing the Green and Grey thing.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. So I've finally got onto TikTok. I'm down with the kids now. I'm on there. I'm not posting frequently, but I'm on there. And I just get this impression. There seems to be a shift away from initiatory traditions and I dunno if that's what I'm just picking up because of the people who come up on my feed or from what I see on Facebook, but do you still think that initiatory traditions have a place within paganism of these days?

Jason Mankey:

I think it's still there. I just think people come to it later. I think one of the things too about our magical community today is they're more and more solitary practitioners. So to be an initiate, you can't be a solitary practitioner. You have to do things in a group really to be initiated. I mean, you could have maybe a self-initiation, but when we're talking about initiation, we're usually talking about those groups. And I think people get there. They just get there in their thirties or their forties, maybe even their fifties

or sixties when they want to maybe see if there's something that takes what they do up to a higher level. I do think there is that resistance to organised groups. We talked before about how religion is not popular. So the idea of joining a group where there are a couple of people in charge just doesn't appeal to people.

And I think that's fine. Whatever makes people happy. But I think they're still there. Sometimes I get to go to Gardnerian gatherings and things where it's just Gardnerians or people who are Gardnerians along with those interested. And there's still a lot of young faces. One of the things I really love about, there's a lot of people in the trans community who go to those things. So the idea that Wicca and especially Gardnerians and Alexandrians and Wicca is pushing those people out the door just isn't true in my experience. They're there with us and a part of everything.

Damh the Bard:

So

Jason Mankey:

I think it's there, but there are people who really don't like Gerald Gardner who are quite loud on TikTok.

Damh the Bard:

I've noticed that. Yeah. Yeah.

Jason Mankey:

But they say things about him that aren't true sometimes. I mean, there was one recently where they're like, Gerald Gardner made up the name Mabon. Like no, no, he did not. No. Please stop.

Damh the Bard:

No, I know. Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's a whole different thing. That's a whole different,

Jason Mankey:

That's a whole hour we could do.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, that's it. Maybe next time. So I'll ask you one more question and then we'll call it a day. If you were to think of three things and maybe there are more, I don't know, I'm not going to do that kind of like three things and stop there. Three gifts that Wicca has brought to your life over the years, what would they be?

Jason Mankey:

The first is magic. I mean, I think that's the one thing that most of us really share in common is magic. And I love magic because it allows us to control our circumstances and take control of our lives. And I also just think magic empowers people. It makes you confident. It makes you feel like you can stand up for what you believe in. It makes you feel like you can fight the system when you need to fight the system. So magic is so important to me. And the older I get, the more and more important magic becomes. And sometimes it's not even just doing spells specifically, it's about feeling your own power, feeling your will inside of yourself and then projecting that outward. To me, that's magical. So magic is

first. I love my relationships with deities. We talked a lot about Pan, but there's also Dionysus and Cernunnos floating around out there, Aphrodite, Persephone, Aradia. We have these household deities and we give them offerings often and they really truly feel like a part of our lives and give us purpose. And we feel close to them. They're a part of the family. Their shrines are in the living room and are fed often. And I love that and I love the community sense. What are the things about Wicca and witchcraft especially is I think it was made to be done by 13 people in a room.

I think you lose something when there's a hundred people in the room. I think you lose something when there's only four people in the room. I think it was designed for small groups, and I think it was designed so that we could be close to each other. And I really feel those bonds. I don't think Gerald Gardner was a very good writer. And I always tell people not to read Gerald Gardner because it's awful, but there's a couple of instances in his writing that are really special. And one point when he talks about death and rebirth, he says, let it be with those that we love so that we might know them and love them again. And to me, Wiccan witchcraft especially, and maybe the greater magical community is a reincarnation cult. You meet people and you just feel bonded to them in a way you can't describe really quickly after meeting them. And I truly feel like it's probably some past life thing where we find each other again and are close to each other again. And I like to think it's just people in my Coven, but I don't think that's the case. I think that you and I a thousand years ago were out doing something together. We had long hair and we were out doing something together.

There other people in the community that aren't in my Coven, I feel the same way about. And then the world as big as it is, there's like attracts and we find each other again. And maybe we don't get to see each other as much as we want. Or maybe we go a year or two, maybe even without speaking to each other. But when we get back together, everything works because of that knowing that we had before that

Damh the Bard:  
Connection.

Jason Mankey:

I really love that. So maybe that was four things, three things, somewhere in there.

Damh the Bard:

I reckon that was three. And those three things are beautiful things. And I think that connection, I really like that reincarnation cult idea. I really like that it kind of explains that feeling that so many people and listeners to the show will know it too, is that when you finally find that you aren't alone and you find others like you are, and suddenly you use that word, it feels like home that I've come home. I think that's why my Cauldron Born song is a popular song because that pretty much is what it expresses, that you aren't alone and when you find out you're not alone, it's such a wonderful feeling. Lovely. Well, thank you Jason for spending the time talking to me. Where can listeners to the show find out more about Jason?

Jason Mankey:

There are only four Jason Mankeys in the entire world, and I come up first in every search, much to the wind of the preacher in Indiana.

My wife said that you have to kiss Cerri for her. That's what she said.



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Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Jason Mankey:

So I had to throw that in there. Told her last night, I was talking to Damh this morning, she's like, Damh, she's like, oh Damh! You tell him for me.

Damh the Bard:

I shall deliver the kiss very well. She's over the allotment at the moment, but when she comes back, I will do that. That's brilliant. Well, thank you Jason. It's been lovely to speak to you.

Jason Mankey:

Thanks.

Damh the Bard:

Let's hope it's not another X amount of years before we see each other again.

Jason Mankey:

Absolutely

Damh the Bard:

Blessed be.