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Analysis Of The Wiccan Rede

The Wiccan Rede

Bide ye Wiccan laws ye must,
in perfect love and perfect trust.
Live and let live, fairly take and fairly give.
Form the circle thrice about, to keep all evil spirits out.
To bind ye spell every time, let ye spell be spake in rhyme.
Soft of eye, light of touch, speak ye little, listen much.
Deosil go by the waxing moon, singing out ye Witches' Rune.
Widdershins go by the waning moon, chanting out ye Baneful Rune.
When the Lady's moon is new, kiss your hand to her times two.
When the moon rides at her peak, then ye heart's desire seek.
Heed the North wind's mighty gale, lock the door and trim the sail.
When the wind comes from the South, love will kiss thee on the mouth.
When the wind blows from the West, departed souls may have no rest.
When the wind blows from the East, except the new and set the feast.
Nine woods in ye cauldron go, burn them fast and burn them slow.
Elder be ye Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed ye'll be.
When the wheel begins to turn, soon ye Beltaine fire'll burn.
When the wheel hath turned to Yule, light the log the Horned One rules.
Heed ye flower, bush and tree, by the Lady blessed be.
Where the rippling waters flow, cast a stone and truth ye'll know.
When ye have and hold a need, harken not to others greed.
With a fool no season spend, nor be counted as his friend.
Merry meet and merry part, bright the cheeks and warm the heart.
Mind ye threefold law ye should, three times bad and three times good.
When misfortune is anow, wear the blue star upon thy brow.
True in love ye must ever be, lest thy love be false to thee.
In these eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill,
'An ye harm none, do what ye will.





(Published in the Green Egg magazine in 1975)

Introduction

The Wiccan Rede is a poem. Being a poet myself, I know that the true meaning of any poem lies with the poet and as such, the reader will have to accept the fact that the interpretation that follows will be the interpretation of the Rede according to Lady Sirius.

Finding corroboration in books and on internet sites for my original interpretation has proven difficult, if not nearly impossible. Every second site on the Internet and the majority of books published do contain the Rede in one form or another, but I could find none analyzing the poem comprehensively. It appears that only the last two lines of the Rede is receiving attention and that extensive writings exist on these. Perhaps it is defensive, perhaps it is informative or perhaps it is the easy way out.

Still, it is an interesting - and in its own way -, beautiful poem and to Witches all over the world, of great importance. Who wrote it and when was it written? That is open to debate. I have seen the Wiccan Rede accredited to Lady Gwynne Thompson's grandmother - A. Porter, but in analyzing the poem one gets the feeling that it comprises of bits and pieces put together by different authors at different times. There is also a small dispute as to when it was written. A poem from antiquity it is not and the academic analysis still continues to this day to determine if it is pre- or post 1954. None of this is really important. The importance of the poem lies in the message it contains and the guidance it provides to witches on many different areas in the Craft.

The language used is a little hard to understand and pseudo archaic. Instead of translating the poem stanza by stanza into understandable English (which by the way will not make the poem any clearer), I am going to offer the reader - where appropriate - with an interpretation instead, thus clarifying the message I believe it holds.

The first thing that struck me about the poem initially was that when I put the various stanzas together in a logical poem format instead of in a list format, the text took on a moon shape. It is not a perfect circle though, but appears to be more like the reflection you would see of a full moon on water. To me this is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the moon is associated with the Triple Goddess - Maiden, Mother, Crone. Secondly, the poem reflects on the ethics, conduct and worship of witches. Whether the shape that emerged was intended, only the original poet will know.

Rede, by the way, does not mean "Law" as is often implied. The very first line of the poem instructs the Witch to abide by the Laws of the Witches, so perhaps that is where the confusion comes from. "Rede" is an archaic word





meaning advice or explanation. So perhaps, the Witch's Rede offers both. But on what? I personally believe that we do not have a view of the full picture. The poem offers advice and explanation of the Law. Which Law? There have been many written by many covens and institutions over the years. Assuming that Adrianna Porter wrote the Rede, it would be helpful to obtain the specific Laws she refers to for the sake of clarity.

Analysis

"Bide ye Wiccan laws ye must,
in perfect love and perfect trust".

If you want to call yourself a Witch, adhere to the Laws of the Witch. It is written in love and with your best interests in mind. Trust it because Wisdom is the Mother of the words of this Rede. It has been implied by some treatises that the "In Perfect Love and Perfect Trust" bit refers to our relationship to the Goddess. Whilst that is true in general, it is out of context for this poem. In the context of the poem, it refers to what our attitude should be towards the word of the Law.

"Live and let live, fairly take and fairly give."

Do not take more than is your due when using the Craft as a trade. An equal exchange of energy is acceptable, more than that is not. This energy that you receive in return can be services, money or goods. The motto here is Live and Let Live. Do not add a premium because the layman requesting your services is in awe of the mysticism surrounding you.

"Form the circle thrice about, to keep all evil spirits out.
To bind ye spell every time, let ye spell be spake in rhyme."

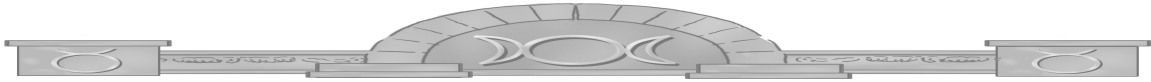
Always practice your Craft in a properly cast circle for protection. According to the Rede, the witch needs to literally walk the circle three times when casting a circle. It is a fairly standard practice to walk the circle first with the athame, wand, or staff, then with the water and salt mixture and finally with the incense. The sequence may differ from tradition to tradition and coven to coven, but the "thrice about" remains fairly consistent.

When you do spell work, rhyme and rhythm increases the effectiveness of the spell. This is because the drama and emotion evoked by poetry awakens the child within (subconscious). This in turn increases the focus and enhances the energy.

"Soft of eye, light of touch, speak ye little, listen much."

Be gentle in the way you act towards others and be gentle in the way you look at others. Your actions and looks can influence someone's state of mind





– both negatively and positively. (Remember the old belief of the 'evil eye'?)
Become a good listener – we all have two ears and but one mouth. Do not be boastful and do not jump to conclusions. Mind your tongue.

"Deosil go by the waxing moon, singing out ye Witches' Rune.
Widdershins go by the waning moon, chanting out ye Baneful Rune."

With the waxing moon, perform spells to create. Cast the circle clockwise. Do spell work by using an appropriate Rune. A Rune is an incantation which can be chanted or clearly spoken etc. This adds power to the spell.

With the waning moon, perform spells to banish. Cast the circle counter-clockwise. Yet again, do work by using an appropriate Rune.

"When the Lady's moon is new, kiss your hand to her times two."

It is customary for a witch to send two kisses to the New Moon. This is an ancient practice.

"When the moon rides at her peak, then ye heart's desire seek."

The greatest time for magick is at the full moon.

"Heed the North wind's mighty gale, lock the door and trim the sail.
When the wind comes from the South, love will kiss thee on the mouth.
When the wind blows from the West, departed souls may have no rest.
When the wind blows from the East, except the new and set the feast."

Celebrate the Sabbaths in honor of the Lady and the Lord. Wicca is about celebrating the movement of the sun, the cycles of the moon, the slow passing of the seasons and the bounty of mother earth herself. The four directions referred to can be interpreted as the four seasons with North being the winter, South the summer, West the Autumn and East the spring.

"Nine woods in ye cauldron go, burn them fast and burn them slow."{

Most people concur that the nine woods referred to in the poem are those used in Beltaine fires:

Birch – represents the feminine.

Oak – represents the masculine.

Rowan – represents life. It is depicted as the Tree of Life.

Willow – represents death and is Hecate's tree.

Hawthorn – represents purity and belongs to the Faery Folk.

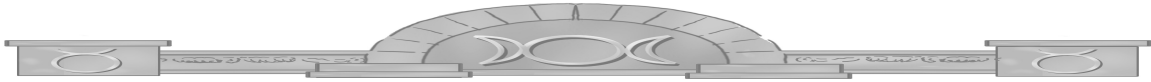
Hazel - represents wisdom.

Apple - represents love and fertility.

Vine - represents joy and its juice is said to cause heightened awareness.

Fir - represents immortality and well suited to Beltane





"Elder be ye Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed ye'll be.
When the wheel begins to turn, soon ye Beltaine fire'll burn.
When the wheel hath turned to Yule, light the log the Horned One rules.
Heed ye flower, bush and tree, by the Lady blessed be."

Elder is the tree of the Goddess. It may not be burnt because it is sacred to the Lady. On a practical level, you would not want to anyway. The smoke produced when burning Elder, is harmful.

Beltaine falls on the 1st of May. The Maypole is burnt in some Traditions at Yule, which falls on the 21st of December. During Winter the God rules, whereas during the Summer, the Goddess rules.

Witches are required to be ecologically friendly and to take care of the environment. Respect Nature.

"Where the rippling waters flow, cast a stone and truth ye'll know."

This line refers to water divination. Cast a stone into a river and read the ripples made to foretell the future. Personally, I think that all forms of divination are covered. The art of divination is a skill all witches should acquire as it is helpful in verifying whether a spell should be cast or not.

"When ye have and hold a need, harken not to others greed.
With a fool no season spend, nor be counted as his friend.
Merry meet and merry part, bright the cheeks and warm the heart."

These four lines of the poem provide some guidance on relationships with others. Do not allow greed to overcome you – be it your own or another's. Also do magick only when in need and never for greed. You will be known by the company you keep, so choose your friends wisely. Your best friends are those you enjoy being with, and who you look forward to being with again.

"Mind ye threefold law ye should, three times bad and three times good."

Whatever you put out – both good or bad, will be returned to you multiplied by three.

"When misfortune is anow, wear the blue star upon thy brow."

The star is the pentacle. The blue may come from an old Welsh tradition where a blue crescent was worn on the brow. This line may well refer to psychic protection and recommend that the pentacle be used for this purpose.

"True in love ye must ever be, lest thy love be false to thee."





Be true to your lover unless he or she is untrue to you. In that case, the vow is annulled.

"In these eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill,
'An ye harm none, do what ye will."

As long as no harm is done to anyone or anything, directly or indirectly, the Witch is free to do as her or she sees fit. It also means that the witch can do nothing without carefully considering the consequences of each action taken, each response made and each spell cast.

Conclusion

Although a somewhat incoherent poem, the Rede contains many wisdoms of which only some were revealed in this analysis. The Wiccan Rede offers a common ground in the diverseness of Witch Craft and in its own small way has managed to unite witches worldwide. It may be a loose union, but in the greater scheme of things it is a union nonetheless.

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