

The British English Language Podcast



Improve your British English Language skills with Amy

Episode 5 - Paganism and my experience living within a pagan community in England

Hey everyone, my name's Amy, welcome back to The British English Language Podcast ! Before starting I want to say a big thank you to all the listeners of this brand new podcast ! It's amazing to see how many different countries students are listening from ! Students from Slovakia, Hong Kong, Russia and Germany, Iraq, Taiwan, Czech Republic and Poland, Spain, Mexico and the list goes on ! It makes me really happy to be a part of your learning processes and it's so cool to be reaching such a widespread audience !

As always I want to remind you that the text for each podcast episode can be found on my website - www.britishenglishlanguage.com. The transcriptions are free for you to download or print and my advice is to read the text whilst listening to the episode again.

The idea behind this podcast is to create content on diverse and interesting topics, for intermediate level students to enjoy the challenging process of learning another language.

Today's episode is all about the mysterious and ancient practices and beliefs of Paganism. Just to warn you, this episode might be more challenging to understand. The language structures are complex and I've also included some advanced level vocabulary, so I encourage you to read the transcription each time you listen and search for the meanings of any new words you find. I've separated the episode into subtitles to make it easier to follow and not get lost.

Episode 5 - Paganism and my experience of living within a pagan community in England

You might be wondering what is Paganism ? Well that might depend on who you ask. Many people will describe it as a religion. Depending on how you might define a religion, you could say that Paganism belongs in that category. How I would define it though, more than anything, would be that it's a way of life.

In 2019 and 2020 I was living in Glastonbury, a small town in the rural countryside of Somerset, in England. Of all the places I've visited in the world, to me Glastonbury is one of the most interesting. Glastonbury is a place where New Age meets Christianity, but where the main flavour is Paganism. All people, religions and belief systems are embraced in Glastonbury but what once attracted ancient pilgrims and now attracts modern day tourists, the same themes that give Glastonbury its mystery, enchantment and wonder, in my opinion, are the elements that make up Paganism.

Polytheism (belief in more than one god)

According to my research, and broadly speaking, ancient and modern Paganism/ Neopaganism is defined by two main characteristics. The first is that it is polytheistic, i.e. the observation of multiple deities (gods and goddesses). In Paganism this also includes the belief of other spiritual beings such as ancestral spirits or nature spirits (for example faeries, elves, power animals, elementals). Pagans see the Divine as present in both male and female and the devotion to multiple deities can be seen in early Pagans such as the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians.

Respect for Nature

The second key characteristic of Paganism is the deep reverence of Nature and of the Earth itself. By the way, the word 'reverence' means a deep respect for someone or something. To revere someone is to feel respect for and amazement of that person. It is to hold him/her in extremely high regard. Pagans see Nature as manifestation of Divinity rather than inanimate objects. Human beings are seen as part of nature, along with other animals, trees, stones and plants etc. The cycle of the natural year is seen by most pagans as a model of spiritual growth and renewal. Natural cycles of birth,

growth and death observed in the world carry profoundly spiritual meanings and most pagans believe in some form of reincarnation, viewing death as a transition within a continuing process of existence.

The spirit of Place is recognised in Paganism. Many pagans see the Earth itself as sacred and therefore are usually known to be Earth conscious. To demonstrate their respect, the ancient Greeks always offered the first pour of wine to the Earth. Pagans are known to personify (i.e. to represent in human form) places as well as natural features such as a mountain or a lake. An example of this would be the Lady of the Lake in Glastonbury. Another example would be Athena, Goddess of Athens.

Divination

Divination is an accepted part of life in Paganism. Divination means the practice of predicting the future and this might include reading the tea leaves left in a tea cup or reading the bloody intestines of sacrificed animals. Those practicing divination might also ask the universe to send a sign by throwing rune stones for example, and pagans usually trust that the divine world will answer their question.

Magic

Pagans believe that the physical world and the spirit world are in constant communication. A definition of magic is the intentional production of results in the physical world by spirit world means (methods). Like divination, magic is generally accepted in pagan societies too. Basically, magic is a special and focused form of intent (purpose) so some pagans call it 'wish craft' and it's similar to the act of praying (praying usually refers to the personal communication that religious people have with God). There are many different ways that magic can be practised. An example of someone who uses magic would be a healer, or someone who communicates with animals.

Magic can also involve special ceremonies and rituals, often with specific tools or particular ingredients, which help to focus your intent. Some people practise simple spell craft or candle magic, whilst others invoke (call on) the help of deities, nature spirits, faeries, elementals, or other supernatural beings. The purpose of ritual is to help with focusing the mind on the spell, wish, or intent, to improve the chances of its success. Some people who practise magic use wands, which they may have made themselves. They may use special woods, crystals and decorations which have been carefully chosen for the particular qualities or strengths they bring to the wand.

The practise of magic for unfair personal gain (reward) or for harm to another being is forbidden (not permitted), just like intentionally causing another person harm is not permitted in society.

Goddess

Goddess worship is central in Paganism. Pagans understand deity to be manifest within nature and recognise divinity as taking many forms, finding expression in goddesses as well as gods. Some examples of pagan goddesses include -

- Isis, the Egyptian goddess of magic, healing and marriage

- Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty
- Rhiannon, the Celtic goddess of the sun and inspiration
- Freya, the Norse goddess of love, beauty and fertility
- Gaia - the mother and protector of nature
- Yemaya - mother of the sea
- Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of war
- Hecate, the Greek goddess of magic and witchcraft

Druidism and Wicca

There are many forms of contemporary Paganism, each with their own distinct characteristics and practices. Druidism, a well known spiritual/religious movement of Iron Age Celtic origin, is often seen as a form of Paganism. Druids emphasise a deep respect for Nature, promoting the harmony, connection and reverence (there's that word again!) of the natural world, respecting all beings, including the environment itself. Many Druids like to perform ceremonies and rituals outside in natural landscapes or prehistoric sites such as stone circles. This is because a connection to ancestors is important to Druids. Performing ceremonies and rituals at sacred sites allows for a deeper connection to the ancestors of the land.

Wicca is another form of modern Paganism. Another name for Wicca is Pagan Witchcraft. This modern pagan movement was developed in England in the first half of the 20th century. Wiccans recognise a male and a female deity - the Horned God and the Triple Goddess, each representing different divine aspects. As the word 'witchcraft' suggests, performing magic is a typical practice within Wicca. Common spells include those used for healing, protection, fertility or to remove negative influences.

Summary

So it's clear to see that modern Paganism is diverse. It can be defined as a spiritual movement or cultural community with pre-Christian rituals and traditions. Pagans believe that the Divine is within humans as well as the natural world, so they believe in treating human beings equally. They usually view the world as a place of joy and life, celebrating the spirit world, nature, fertility and the feminine. Festivals take place on certain days of the year where pagans celebrate the natural cycles such as summer and winter solstice and the spring and autumn equinoxes. Magic and ritual is associated with Paganism and it's said that the wind that drove off the Spanish Armada was caused by a group of witches !

My Experiences of Paganism

I really enjoyed my time living within the pagan-influenced community of Glastonbury. Whilst I was living in Glastonbury I worked in a crystal shop so I had the opportunity to learn all about the interesting properties and healing powers of crystals, something I had wanted to do for a long time. I love the mystery of ancient history so I adore visiting sacred sites around the world such as stone circles or temples. One of the most famous sacred sites, one that attracts many pilgrims and tourists every year, is Glastonbury Tor. Glastonbury Tor is a small hill with a tower at the top - St. Michael's Tower. It can be seen for many miles as it's the highest point in the area. There is so much mystery associated with Glastonbury Tor and I love to read about the legends,

stories and theories that people have about it. Something else I love to do is to celebrate the Earth's cycles, for example the full and new moons, and also the beginning of summer and winter. There would always be a special way I could do that in Glastonbury as there are many different pagan festivals held during the year. I love to honour the earth, the trees and the animals, and I find ancient, native traditions and practices fascinating so I definitely see how some of my own values align with some of those which are within Paganism.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode on The British English Language Podcast ! If you got to this point and were able to follow the script, well done, it definitely wasn't easy ! And don't worry if you weren't able to understand everything, just visit my website - www.britishenglishlanguage.com, download the transcription and research the meanings of any new words. If you have any questions or comments about anything from this episode or about the English language in general then please send me an email at amy.britishenglishlanguage@gmail.com. I hope you enjoyed this episode on Paganism and I very much look forward to seeing you next time !