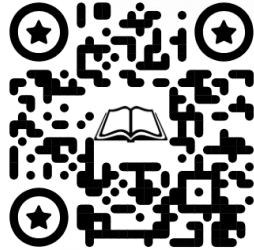


*May you find a path that fills your heart,
and sanctuary wherever you go.*



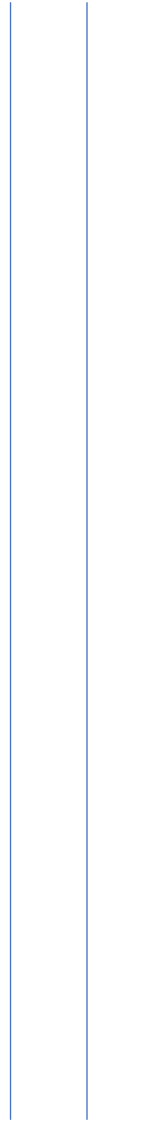
Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!

Death and Dying
Death and Dying

Death and Dying



By Ryan Robinson



She's In The Sun, The
Wind, The Rain
- Christy Ann Martine

She's in the sun,
the wind, the rain,
She's in the air you
breathe with every
breath you take.
She sings a song
of hope and cheer,
there's no more pain,
no more fear.
You'll see her in
the clouds above,
hear her whisper
words of love.
You'll be together
Before long, until then
listen for her song.

Immortality
-Clare Harner

Do not stand
By my grave, and weep.
I am not there,
I do not sleep—
I am the thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints in snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle, autumn rain.
As you awake with morning's hush,
I am the swift, up-flinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight,
I am the day transcending night.
Do not stand
By my grave, and cry—
I am not there,
I did not die.

Epitaph
-Merrit Malloy

When I die
Give what's left of me away
To children
And old men that wait to die.
And if you need to cry,
Cry for your brother
Walking the street beside you.
And when you need me,
Put your arms
Around anyone
And give them
What you need to give to me.

I want to leave you something,
Something better
Than words
Or Sounds.

Look for me
In the people I've known
Or loved,
And if you cannot give me
away,
At least let me live on your eyes
And not on your mind.

You can love me most
By letting
hands touch hands,
By letting
Bodies touch bodies,
And by letting go
Of children
That need to be free.

Love doesn't die,
People do.
So, when all that's left of me
Is love,
Give me away.

I'll see you at home
In the earth.

"To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."
— Oscar Wilde

The first thing to understand about death in Paganism is that the focus is on this world and our impact on this world. That's part of why they're sometimes referred to as Earth Based Religions; we aren't focused on an *afterlife*, we're focused on *life*. We recognize that in this life we're part of a great cycle, and that cycle continues. Stardust is eternal. The elements that we are made of will exist for the rest of time.

"All of the rocky and metallic material we stand on, the iron in our blood, the calcium in our teeth, the carbon in our genes were produced billions of years ago in the interior of a red giant star. We are made of star-stuff."
-Carl Sagan, *"The Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective"*

We recognize that all that lives must die, and all that dies has lived. When a loved one leaves us we look to celebrate the time we had together and the impact they left on the world around them. We honor the idea that once the tiny thread which is our individual existence becomes part of the fabric of our family, friends, community, world, or universe; we are always inextricably a part of them. We comfort ourselves knowing that they live on within us.

"A man is not dead while his name is still spoken."
-Terry Pratchett, *Going Postal*

In the cycle of life, we live and die a million times in our single existence. Many of our cells replace themselves multiple times over our lifetime. Each time leaving us as a copy of who we were before. Who we are as children is different than who we are as adolescents. We can be many people through our youth and adulthood. By the time we reach old age, some of us have multiple entire lives that bear little or no resemblance to one another.

"You only live once but, if you do it right, once is enough."
— Mae West

Dying

Most people don't think about death until they are faced with it. Either through the imminence of their own death or that of someone they are close to. Pagans focus on the cycles of life and whole experience, including the "dark" and painful aspects. As a result, we are slightly more likely to have spent significant time on the ideas of death and dying than members of other faiths and religions with similar life experiences.

Most Pagan beliefs on death are rooted in one or more of three perspectives. The common point is that death is not just the end of one thing,

The first perspective is that it is just a transformation and the beginning of another set of experiences. Those experiences may be an afterlife, another incarnation, or something else.

The second perspective is that all life comes from death. Death and decomposition are the fertile soil from which the next iteration of life springs.

The third perspective is that every part of life must be experienced to be understood; including birth, death, and everything in between. No experiences are wasted or useless, even the most heartbreaking and painful. Each teaches us something and helps us understand and become if we choose to learn from it. But none of them can be truly known until we pass through them ourselves.

We do not celebrate death.

We celebrate life.

We honor death as an inevitable part of the experience of life.

We celebrate transformation.

We honor death as a fundamental change in experience.

We celebrate those we have loved.

We celebrate those who have loved us.

We celebrate those who, in our time together, have become a part of us.

We honor those who have left a mark on us;

Who have helped us become who we are.

We mourn those who have left us;

Whether that parting is brief or long.

And so we honor the dead.

We do not celebrate death.

Hear me ancestors!

Those who forged the paths I live,

Those who love and bless me.

A part of my heart has left this world.

Greet them with joy and kindness,

Keep them safe and close,

Until we meet again.

You are the dust of stars,

and the hosts of heaven.

Your body is one with the Universe;

a part of the beauty of the green earth,

and the mystery of the waters,

and the dancing flame,

and the white Moon above the sky.

May your heart's desire call unto your spirit.

May you be one with the soul of Nature,

May you be beloved of gods and mortals,

At this passing,

Let your innermost divine self be unfolded

into the rapture of infinite joy.

Sin, Hell, and Damnation

We don't do that here.

There isn't really a Pagan "heaven," though some afterlives might be more preferable to some individuals than others. But getting to a pleasant afterlife is largely a matter of personal action rather than moral judgment. There also isn't a Pagan "hell." Those who find themselves in eternal torment have to be specially condemned by the gods or spirits for doing truly vile things. Committing horrifying transgressions against guests, their families, and the gods, repeatedly and without remorse. Such individuals find themselves in their own custom punishments, crafted to convey the nature of their crimes rather than simply to impose torment. Perhaps the most morally judgmental such event is the Egyptian declarations of innocence and weighing of the heart, which leads to oblivion rather than torment.

Similarly, there are very few lists of "sins." Breaking oaths, violating the sanctity of guests, harming family, and actively seeking to be hostile towards the gods and spirits are seen as misdeeds. However, these are generally perceived as wrongs committed and handled within the community rather than being seen as some manner of intrinsic blight within the person. Gods and spirits in these cases may be perceived or called upon as arbiters, providing some manner of trial or penance, especially if they are among those wronged. But other sources of wisdom in the community such as elders or scholars may serve these functions equally, depending on the tradition.

There certainly is no eternal condemnation for personal proclivities that don't effect others, for who someone is, for things done between consenting adults, or any other such perceived "wrong." In fact, for most traditions, both historical and modern, attempting to convince others such things are "wrong" is far more likely produce transgressions.

Disposition of Bodies

The prevalence of Abrahamic religions, particularly Christianity, has made preserved-internment the default and assumed method of dealing with bodies in most Western societies. Because this is such a strong cultural and legal norm, it is only recently that Pagans have been able to seriously evaluate other options. Cremation is the most common alternative to such burials.

Pagans who are able to explore other options generally focus on ideas of transformation over preservation of the body and harmony with nature. For this reason, cremation is often preferred to preserved-internment. However, there is a growing feeling that the carbon released in this process is undesirable. One trend is encouraging natural burials. In these, the preservatives and air-sealed caskets and coffins used in conventional internment are forgone and decomposition and connection to local plant life is embraced if not encouraged. Other modern options are becoming available but less common, such as "water cremation." Another disposition that is growing in availability is human composting.

Such options are still relatively uncommon. They often require pre-planning and preparation. There are a handful of resources to assist. One is:
<https://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/>

Funerary Rites

Funerals serve a number of purposes in any culture, and Paganism is no different. For the living, funerals serve as a way to help process the grief of loss. This may include telling stories or songs about the person, showing how they are still with those left behind. This may involve controlled releases of emotion- a Greek tradition is smashing plates as a way of mirroring and releasing the feeling of destruction and devastation trapped within. Screaming, crying, meditation, and standing vigil are all ways that people approach and release the feelings they are experiencing.

The purpose of funerals for the dead depends on the spiritual beliefs of the particular individual or group. For those who take the most materialist views, there is little purpose aside from management of the body left behind. But even these rites generally honor the aspects of rebirth inherent in the physical form of a loved one returning to the greater whole of the earth. Few Pagans who think about their death will choose a preserved burial.

For those who believe in a spiritual, metaphysical, dimension to existence the most basic rites are those that seek to ensure that the dead don't become stuck; lingering in the lands of the living as ghosts through desire or confusion. Other rituals seek intercession with guides or other sources of aid to ensure that the spirit makes it to the afterlife or an afterlife they prefer. Rites include gifts of equipment or energy to aid the departed in their travels. And, of course, for those who practice ancestor traditions any funeral rites are a starting point for new relationships with those individuals. Funeral rites can have many aspects, especially for those who believe in multi-part souls. The possibility of needing to confuse, weaken, and drive off the negative aspects of a departed loved one while making offerings in hopes they will watch over, guide, and guard the practitioner as an ancestor is not unheard of.

Ancestor Practice

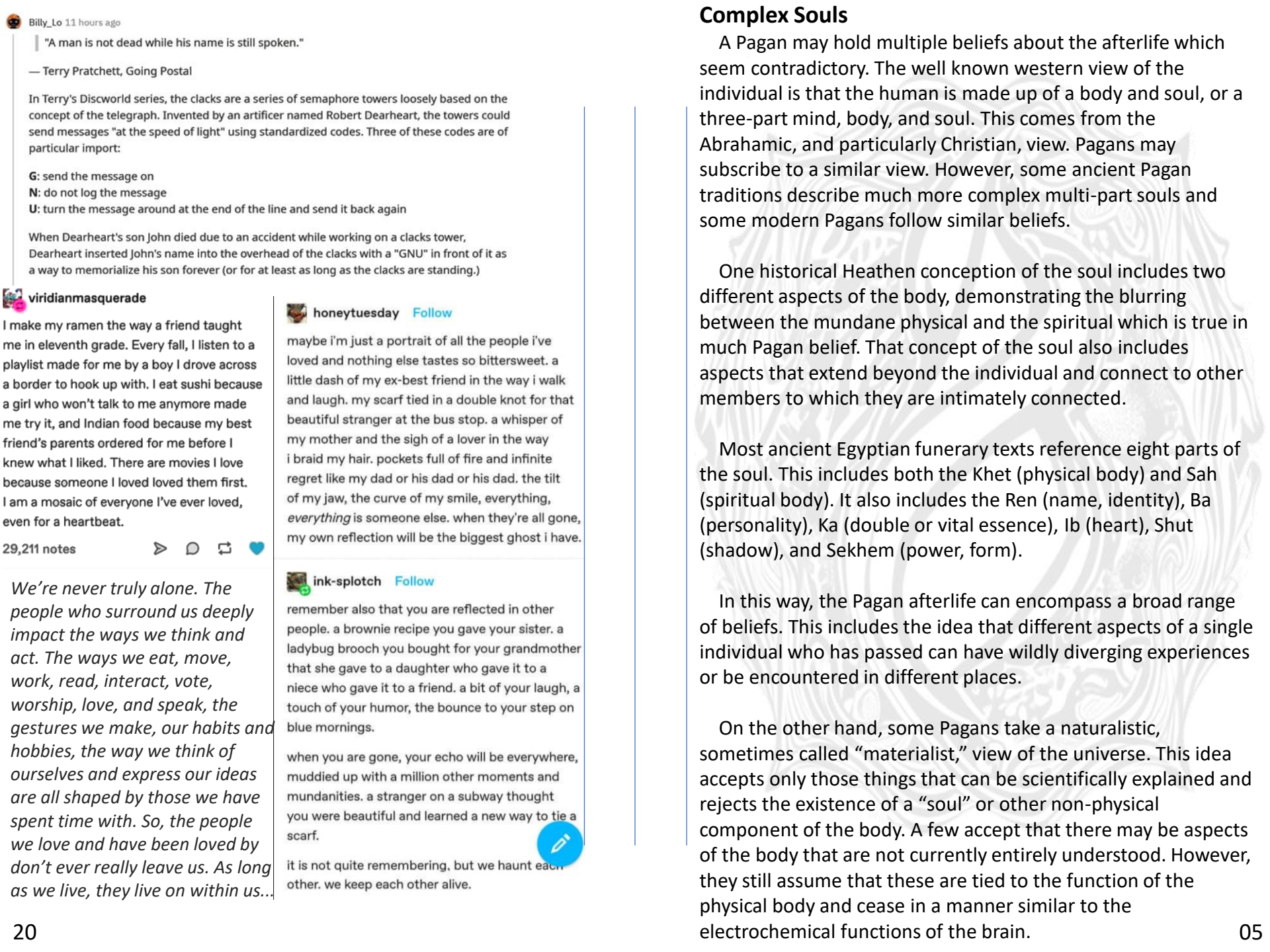
One tradition in some parts of the Pagan community are beliefs and activities designed to connect the practitioner to their predecessors. Ancestors in this case can be blood relatives, teachers, important figures in their professional or personal lives, religious figures, or others of significance to them.

There are a number of forms ancestor practice can take and purposes it can fulfill for an individual or group. For those who believe in certain types of post-life existence it can serve to ensure ancestors' continued well-being or involvement with the community, their positive disposition towards the practitioner or others (generally living or recently dead), or to ask for special favors or assistance. These practices can also serve to build or honor one's relationship with a group or individual by showing respect, loyalty, commemoration of those departed, or a desire to continue a lineage.

Some ancestor practices familiar to non-Pagans:

- Pilgrimages to historical sites / battlefields
- Halls of Fame
- Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- Missing Man Table
- Honor/Memorial Bracelets/Bands
- The United States Presidential Library System

Some practitioners may refer to these activities as ancestor "*veneration*." Seasonal or annual events focused around these activities may be called ancestor "*celebrations*," or simply holidays. The term ancestor "*worship*" is a sign of misunderstanding or disparagement.



Complex Souls

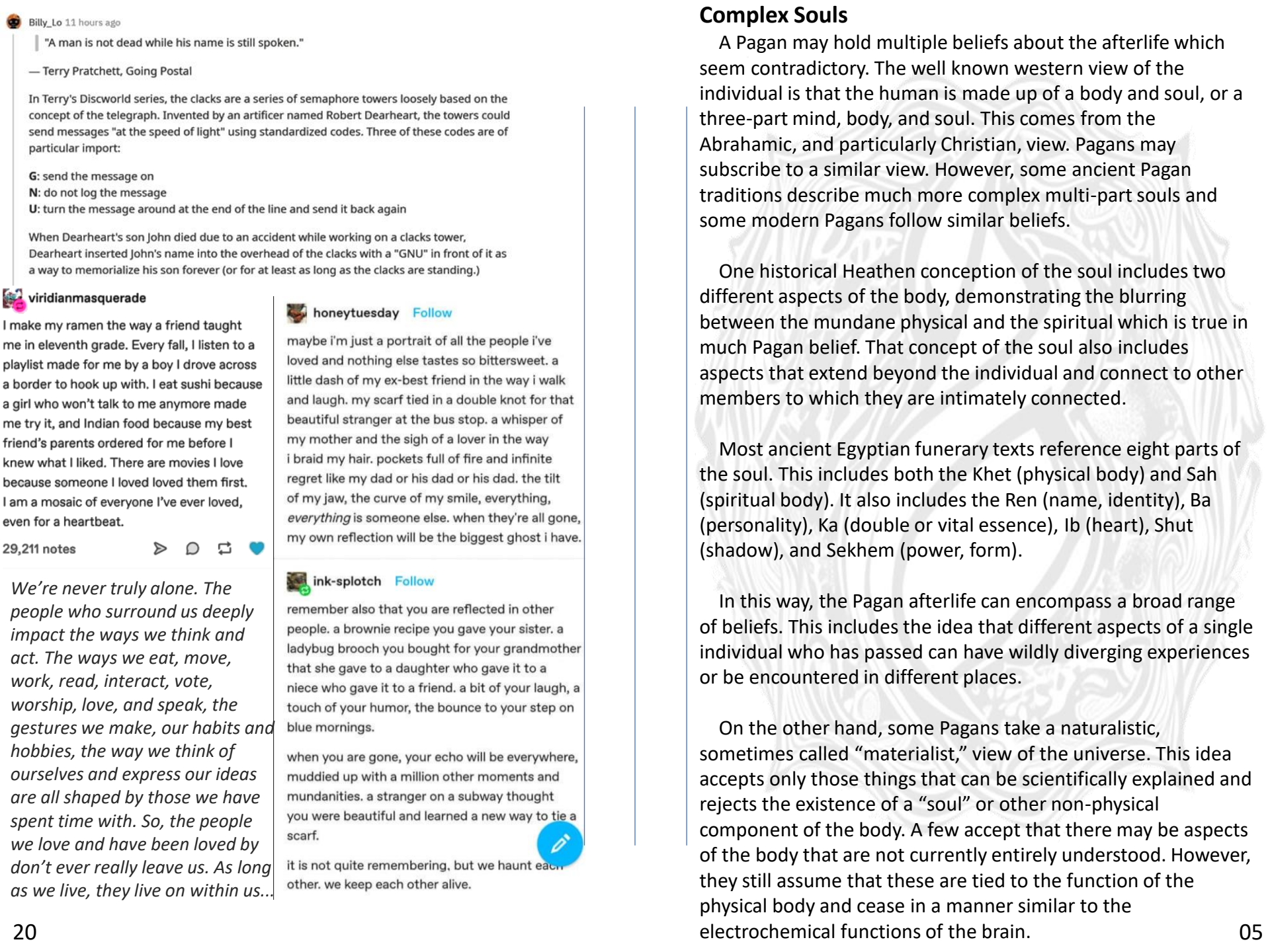
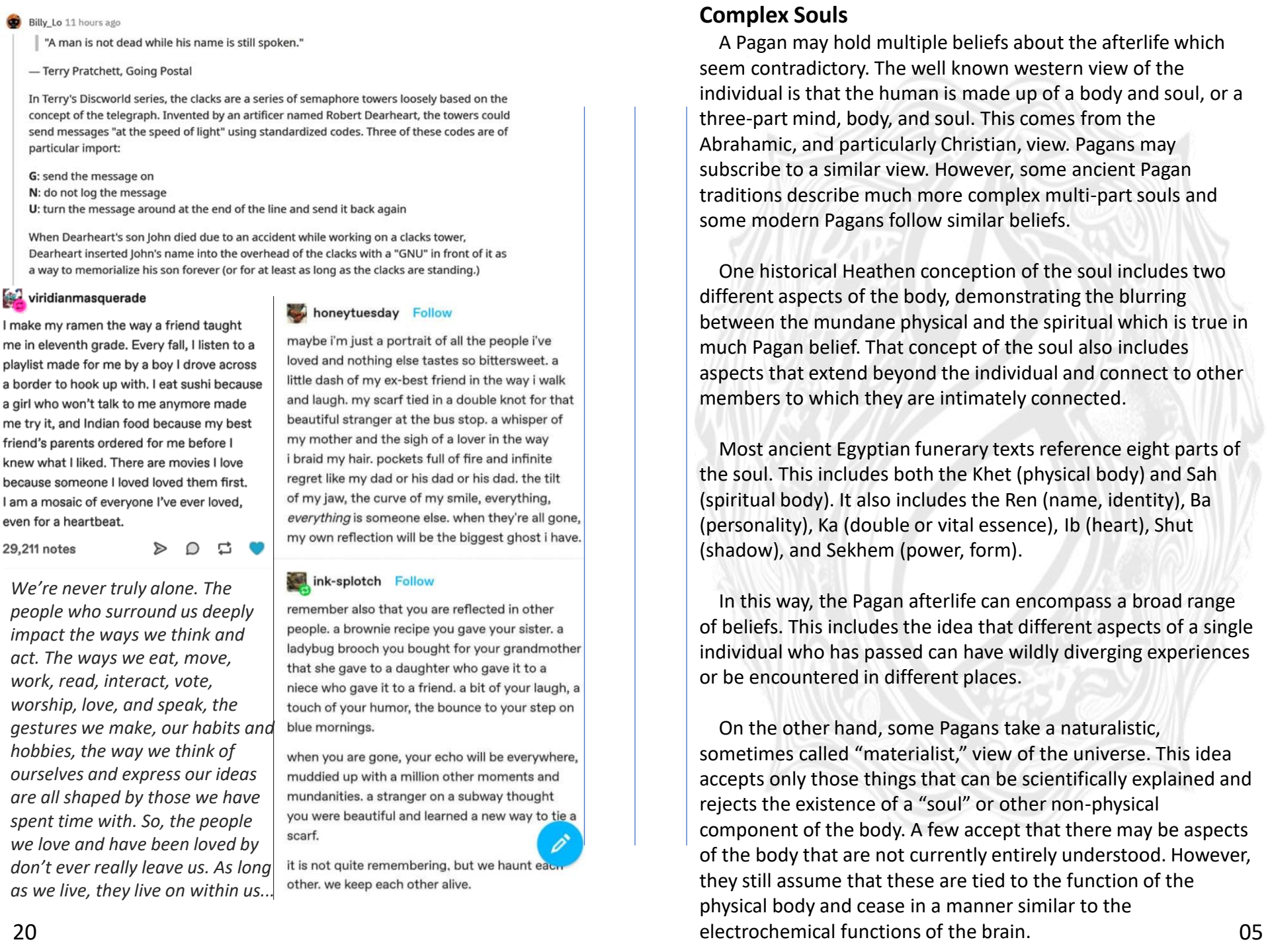
A Pagan may hold multiple beliefs about the afterlife which seem contradictory. The well known western view of the individual is that the human is made up of a body and soul, or a three-part mind, body, and soul. This comes from the Abrahamic, and particularly Christian, view. Pagans may subscribe to a similar view. However, some ancient Pagan traditions describe much more complex multi-part souls and some modern Pagans follow similar beliefs.

One historical Heathen conception of the soul includes two different aspects of the body, demonstrating the blurring between the mundane physical and the spiritual which is true in much Pagan belief. That concept of the soul also includes aspects that extend beyond the individual and connect to other members to which they are intimately connected.

Most ancient Egyptian funerary texts reference eight parts of the soul. This includes both the Khet (physical body) and Sah (spiritual body). It also includes the Ren (name, identity), Ba (personality), Ka (double or vital essence), Ib (heart), Shut (shadow), and Sekhem (power, form).

In this way, the Pagan afterlife can encompass a broad range of beliefs. This includes the idea that different aspects of a single individual who has passed can have wildly diverging experiences or be encountered in different places.

On the other hand, some Pagans take a naturalistic, sometimes called “materialist,” view of the universe. This idea accepts only those things that can be scientifically explained and rejects the existence of a “soul” or other non-physical component of the body. A few accept that there may be aspects of the body that are not currently entirely understood. However, they still assume that these are tied to the function of the physical body and cease in a manner similar to the electrochemical functions of the brain.



Billy_Lo 11 hours ago

"A man is not dead while his name is still spoken."

— Terry Pratchett, Going Postal

In Terry's Discworld series, the clacks are a series of semaphore towers loosely based on the concept of the telegraph. Invented by an artificer named Robert Dearheart, the towers could send messages "at the speed of light" using standardized codes. Three of these codes are of particular import:

G: send the message on

N: do not log the message

U: turn the message around at the end of the line and send it back again

When Dearheart's son John died due to an accident while working on a clacks tower, Dearheart inserted John's name into the overhead of the clacks with a "GNU" in front of it as a way to memorialize his son forever (or for at least as long as the clacks are standing.)

viridianmasquerade

I make my ramen the way a friend taught me in eleventh grade. Every fall, I listen to a playlist made for me by a boy I drove across a border to hook up with. I eat sushi because a girl who won't talk to me anymore made me try it, and Indian food because my best friend's parents ordered for me before I knew what I liked. There are movies I love because someone I loved loved them first. I am a mosaic of everyone I've ever loved, even for a heartbeat.

29,211 notes



We're never truly alone. The people who surround us deeply impact the ways we think and act. The ways we eat, move, work, read, interact, vote, worship, love, and speak, the gestures we make, our habits and hobbies, the way we think of ourselves and express our ideas are all shaped by those we have spent time with. So, the people we love and have been loved by don't ever really leave us. As long as we live, they live on within us...

honeytuesday Follow

maybe i'm just a portrait of all the people i've loved and nothing else tastes so bittersweet. a little dash of my ex-best friend in the way i walk and laugh. my scarf tied in a double knot for that beautiful stranger at the bus stop. a whisper of my mother and the sigh of a lover in the way i braid my hair. pockets full of fire and infinite regret like my dad or his dad or his dad. the tilt of my jaw, the curve of my smile, everything, *everything* is someone else. when they're all gone, my own reflection will be the biggest ghost i have.

ink-splotch Follow

remember also that you are reflected in other people. a brownie recipe you gave your sister. a ladybug brooch you bought for your grandmother that she gave to a daughter who gave it to a niece who gave it to a friend. a bit of your laugh, a touch of your humor, the bounce to your step on blue mornings.

when you are gone, your echo will be everywhere, muddled up with a million other moments and mundanities. a stranger on a subway thought you were beautiful and learned a new way to tie a scarf.

it is not quite remembering, but we haunt each other. we keep each other alive.



Afterlife

Pagan faiths don't generally focus on the specifics of what comes after death. Some Pagans are openly agnostic on the subject. They consider the truth of that experience to be unknowable while alive. Consequently, different individuals and traditions hold a wide variety of beliefs. As usual, much of Pagan belief stems from individual research and experience. Not all Pagans even believe there is a meaningful, coherent, individual existence after death. However, even these "non-afterlife" beliefs can take a variety of forms.

To make the situation even more mystifying; because the Pagan idea of the soul can be so complex the various aspects of a single person can experience multiple, different "afterlives" simultaneously. This is similar to how a single soul and body would part ways when separated by death, with the body decomposing and the unified soul moving on to whatever afterlife awaits. For those who believe in such things, one aspect of the self might remain with and watch over loved ones, while another aspect stays at the site of their body or their death, another part moves on to a more traditional afterlife, and still another becomes one with their deity or the universe itself.

All Hallow's Eve vs Día de los Muertos

The rituals of Samhain are closely tied to those that have become Halloween and Día de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead). The contrast between the approaches of these two holidays emphasizes two major spiritual practices.

Halloween, or All Hallow's Eve, focuses on the darkness of facing death and the dead. The suffering of the process, the pain of separation from loved ones, the fear of not knowing what is to come for the spirit, and the horrors of the bodies to which we are attached decomposing. The jack-o-lantern and wearing of masks serve to drive away ill spirits and conceal one's identity. Trick or treating comes from any of a variety of ancient traditions where spirits need to be appeased.

By contrast, the Mexican celebration of Día de los Muertos is perhaps the best known of many ancestor celebrations around the world. These focus on reconnecting with loved ones who have died. Honoring the joys their life brought, the treasured memories their shared experiences left behind, and the blessings they have left in this world by their passage through it.

Samhain

The holiday of Samhain (pronounced saw-win) is one of the most significant holidays in the calendar, and is tied closely with the death rites of many Pagan traditions. As a fire festival it is celebrated based on traditions, rather always strictly tied to an astronomical event, on dates between 31 October and 7 November.

Samhain is the last of three yearly harvest festivals. Coming late in the year represents the end of the harvest season. It celebrates the last of the produce from fields and orchards being laid in for storage. With the stores of produce to see the community through the winter fully accounted for, a grimmer harvest would begin. At this time livestock are as fat and healthy as they will get; so a decision must be made which among them will eat from the community stores through the winter, and which would better serve the community as part of those stores.

This is a time of winnowing, of passings, and sacrifice. It is a liminal time, after the work of the growing seasons are done but before the stillness of winter falls. So for those who believe in such things, the veil is thought to be thin and spirits of all types close. During this time Pagans reflect on those who have gone before. Ancestors who set the foundations on which our lives are built. Loved ones who made the threads of our experiences, but are now gone from them. Those who have sacrificed themselves, in whole or in part, for us and our communities. Once we are done with our remembrances and commemoration, it is also a time for shedding the things of the past year that no longer serve us in preparation for the cold winter to come.

Pagans often like to think of ourselves as children of love, light, pleasure, power, joy, and beauty. But Samhain, like death, is a reminder that every light casts a shadow. People instinctively draw back from shadows in fear. But to live in harmony with the world requires not simply turning away from that which makes us uncomfortable. It requires willingly taking up the weight of knowledge, and finding a way for our time with hard truths to give us wisdom.

Samhain is the holiday where we acknowledge those shadows for being as much a part of the world as the light.

Reincarnation and Rebirth

Many Pagan paths hold views that include some manner of reincarnation. For some, this is an automatic thing. The after-life is one's next life. For others, reincarnation only occurs once the soul has a chance to process, and possibly be cleansed of, the experiences (and traumas) of their last life.

Reincarnation frequently coexists with other types of afterlife. These afterlives may be way-stations between lives or places to be attained through the experiences of life. Different Traditions have different beliefs and approaches.

If reincarnation is a part of a Pagan tradition, it may not be a required experience for all souls. For some, reincarnation is entirely an optional experience. Even when reincarnation is a part of a cycle that all souls experience, beginning a new life is rarely a thing that "just happens." It is extremely rare for birth to be the death-like experience of being forced to move on when the time comes.

The cycle of life and death remains central in Paganism even for those who don't believe in a reincarnation of a soul. We honor the parts of ourselves that become part of the natural world around us. We honor the experiences and teachings we leave behind in others. And we honor how these represent the eternal rebirth of life from death.

The Void and Unity

Naturalistic Pagans typically believe there is no afterlife. However, those who believe this view it as peaceful; like the void of restful sleep. There is no pain, suffering, loneliness, loss, or unmet desire. They point out that for those in such deep, restful, sleep where the self is entirely absent; discomfort is experienced only when individuals become aware.

Even among the many Pagans who do believe that there is a spiritual aspect that persists beyond death, some still may not believe that the afterlife is a coherent, individual experience. One belief is that the soul of the individual re-integrates with the greater spiritual existence of the world or universe. This pantheistic belief sees the individual like a drop of water. A raindrop is only a raindrop as long as it is falling. Once that journey is complete, the raindrop merges with other drops of water, then streams, and rivers, until it reaches the sea. The experience is characterized by ever-expanding knowledge, understanding, sense of place in the universe, and even love for self and others.

Some Pagans who believe in individual afterlives also believe that these types of after-afterlife also await. They believe that just as our lives are journeys of discovery and learning, so too are our deaths. That the cycles of death and rebirth continue through this physical world and spiritual worlds until we remove ourselves from the cycle; reaching one of these far shores of eternity.

Transformation

Another type of afterlife that appears, especially in certain ancient writings, is a transformation that remains relatively close to the mortal world. The closest parallel in modern stories are ghosts and the restless dead. However ancient Celtic writings suggest that some individuals become certain types of fae upon death. Another transformation common among northern European traditions and echoed elsewhere in the world is to become a wight. Barrow wights are the most common; a type of relatively neutral ghost that haunts the grave or memorial site of the dead. However, there are indications that land-wights, or the spirits of specific places, might be the spirits of an ancient or powerful ancestor or group of ancestors associated with the place.

Norse Halls of the Dead

The Norse believed that there were many halls where the dead might arrive. Some were a function of where the individual died such as the Hall of Rán, where those who drowned at sea might abide, or Fólkvangr and Valhalla, where those who died honorably in battle might find themselves selected to go.

Other halls were a function of how one's life was lived. The hall Sindri is made of red gold, filled with good men who were pure of heart, while Gimlé is a golden-roofed building in Asgard where righteous people may go when they die, and the hall of Brimir in Okolnir, the Never-cooled Plain, is said to have "plenteous abundance of good drink." By contrast there is Nástrand, where those who have broken oaths and committed murder wade rivers of venom, and Hvergelmir, where "the cursed snake tears dead men's corpses."

Then there is the realm of Hel. The deathless lands, where Baldur and his wife sit a feast in places of honor. While it is described sometimes as the place where those who have died of sickness and old age go, this is solely sourced to the writings of a Christian monk who largely shapes Hel to be a contrasting threat (Hell) against the solitary "heaven" (Valhalla) to be strived for. More commonly it is considered a hidden, deathless land which may lay beyond the cold and shadow of Niflheim/Niflhel, but where those who arrive experience just existences.

The most common Norse afterlife, however, is to exist within a barrow or mountain. Experiencing an existence among one's ancestral spirits, and to be called upon as an ancestral spirit. Of course, because of multi-part souls, aspects of an individual might experience this as well as journeys to some other hall or afterlife.

Polytheist Afterlife

The polytheist afterlife is much like the polytheist belief in gods. There isn't just one, there are many. Each person experiences afterlife based on their life, beliefs, experiences, and so on. The details of these afterlives vary based on their nature, but there are a few common features.

The most significant common feature is that the polytheist afterlife is generally a literal life after death. As with most Pagan beliefs, at its core we believe that life is followed by more life. Reflecting this, only a few afterlives involve the subject arriving immediately upon death. Such afterlives are often tied to the means of death, such as the Norse Hall of Ran where those drowned at sea often find themselves for at least a time. Most afterlives start with a long walk. Because of this, figures like Chiron, Njord, and Mannan Mac Lir who provided guidance from one world to another and helped ease passage were honored by the dying and those who survived them.

Pagans don't generally believe in eternal "damnation." While there are some extremely unpleasant afterlives; in Pagan thought the vast majority of people have no need to visit those, and only those who committed the worst violations or violence against their fellow humans and the gods will spend significant time there, let alone eternity. It certainly is not the result of minor infractions against a single god, having trivial difficulties with your neighbors, or some ancient action by an ancestor.

In some Pagan thought the time spent in the afterlife is a period of cleansing. However, this is only trivially in the sense of "removal of wrongdoing." It is more about healing the soul of the injuries and injustices they experienced in their previous life. While the Christianized world views Hades, Hel, and other pre-Christian underworlds as places of darkness, shadows, and often torment; they were often described as places of feasting, restoration, and leaving behind the ills of the world.

Various Afterlives

When the idea of many co-existing afterlives within one belief system is introduced one of the first questions often asked is how one ends up in one afterlife rather than another. A common assumption is that there is some ranking of progressively better heavens and worse hells. Polytheists have relatively few places that compare cleanly to heaven or hell.

The most common answer to where one spends their afterlife is they spend it with whatever spiritual beings they already have established relationships with. This can be gods, ancestors, fae, or other types of mystical and divine beings. In this way, those who die become houseguests or members of households with those who are waiting for them.

Assuming, of course, the deceased can get to their desired afterlife from where they die. However, that is most often a geographical and logistical challenge rather than anything related to morals.

Elysium

Sometimes called the Elysian fields, Elysian planes, Fortunate Isles, or Isles of the Blessed. Only the most noble and heroic souls, often those directly related to the gods, were deemed worthy of the Elysian fields. In early Greek culture, this domain was specifically limited to those with direct familial ties to the gods. Over time, the Greeks came to believe that those chosen by the gods, the righteous, and the heroic could all gain access.

Some descriptions of Elysium place it outside of Hades, at a far point in the world. However, even in these stories access to it is similar to access to the remainder of the underworld. Those select few who went to Elysian Fields were blessed to live in a paradise of joy and happiness, and indulging in whatever pleasures and enjoyments they appreciated in life.

Hades

Hades itself was free from the concept of time. The Greek dead that arrive here are aware of both the past and the future. In poems describing Greek heroes, the dead prophesied and told truths that were otherwise unknowable to the hero. Humans communicated with the dead through difficult means or journeys.

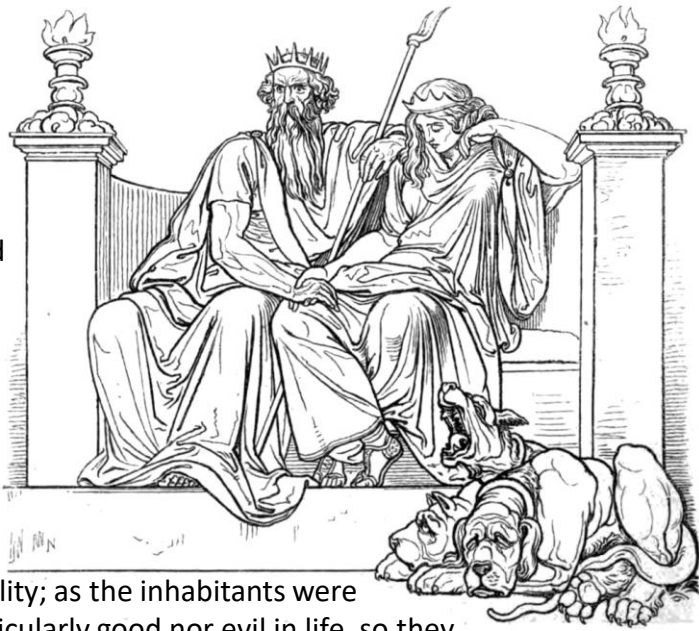
However, souls of the dead are insubstantial, floating around the underworld without a sense of purpose, *menos* (strength, and thus influence on earth), or *phrenes* (wit, leaving them unengaged with the things around them and in the world of the living). Aside from the different realms to which they might be sent, all social statuses and political positions are eliminated in the underworld, leaving no one the ability to use their previous lives to their advantage.

Asphodel meadows

Most souls who reached Hades found themselves sent to the Asphodel meadows.

This is sometimes described as a land of utter neutrality; as the inhabitants were neither particularly good nor evil in life, so they are treated in the afterlife. Some descriptions state that all residents drink from the river Lethe before entering the fields, thus losing their identities. It's been suggested that this outlook on the afterlife for those who make little impact may have been created to encourage action and engagement in Greek cultures as it developed in parallel with a democratization of access to the fields of Elysium where those who became heroes were rewarded with everlasting joy. Later Greek poets wrote describing the meadows as untouched, lovely, soft, and holy.

Those in the meadows passed time with simple activities like playing games. Many viewed grave gifts as carrying over into the underworld, so items such as clothing, jewelry, food, and even dice and game-boards were left by the living for the dead to use. There is evidence of belief in the possibility of marriage between those in the underworld, implying the meadows were considered similar to the world of the living. It is even implied that the dead could have sexual intimacy with another, although no children would be produced.



Summerland

Wiccans, Theosophists, and certain other Pagan Traditions call the afterlife the Summerland. However, their description of this existence varies widely.

Scott Cunningham's Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner describes this as: "neither in heaven nor the underworld. It simply is: a non-physical reality much less dense than ours. Some Wiccan traditions describe it as a land of eternal summer, with grassy fields and sweet flowing rivers, perhaps the Earth before the advent of humans. Others see it vaguely as a realm without forms, where energy swirls coexist with the greatest energies: the Goddess and God in their celestial identities."

Some conceptions of Summerlands regard it as an intermediate step in the afterlife. For some, there are further afterlives that can be moved towards, either through effort within those afterlives or through reincarnation. One of these views sees the Summerlands as a way-point in the move toward a final unity with the divine.

Depending on the conception of the Summerlands, the dead may need to travel to it as a specific place or they may find that it has always been a short distance away from them, just along a dimension of distance that can only be traveled by a soul moving away from the three dimensions occupied by physical bodies.

Hellenistic (Greek)

One of the best-known polytheist afterlives is the Hellenistic or Greek. After a mortal's death, they would make their way to the underworld. Sometimes at the moment of death, an individual's essence (psyche) is transported to the underworld. Other times, they are left to wander. The deceased could enter the kingdom of the dead through several routes, though a common superstition is that the deceased can't enter until they receive a proper burial. A famous example is Patroclus and Hector in the Iliad.

Many gods served as psychopomps, transporting or assisting the dead in reaching the underworld. Hermes could be relied on to do so, sometimes Thanos, the god of non-violent death, and his sisters the Keres, the spirits of diseases and slaughter, could provide transport or direction, as could the goddess Hecate. The most common, however, is the ferryman Charon who would take souls across the rivers Styx and Acheron to the underworld.

The underworld itself was the kingdom of Hades. This is the name of both the domain and the king who ruled over it. The eldest brother of Zeus and Poseidon, Hades' responsibility extended to power on earth as well, including all the wealth within it and growing from it. However, Hades himself is rarely seen outside his domain, the most notable occasion being when he abducted and married his wife, Persephone, who rules alongside him in what is described as one of the happiest marriages among the Greek gods. To the living, his intentions and desires are a mystery, but the ruling pair are depicted as stern, dignified, and just.

An arriving soul would be sorted into one of three destinations. Tartarus, the Asphodel meadows, or the Elysian fields.

Tartarus

Upon reaching Hades, only those who had committed the most vile of acts, earning the direct condemnation of the gods, were condemned to Tartarus. This fate is incredibly rare and such wicked souls rarely arrive under their own power. Instead they are often brought there personally by the angry gods. The titans, the forebears of the gods, were chained in Tartarus. But, the best known of those condemned to Tartarus are the Kings Sisyphus, Tantalus, and Ixion. Each of these committed grave wrongs against guests, their families, and the gods.

King Sisyphus killed guests and travelers at his castle in violation of his hospitality, seduced his niece, and considered himself a peer of the gods who could rightfully report their indiscretions. For this, he was simply to be chained up in Tartarus, but he tricked his way free instead, shackling Thanos. Sisyphus again escaped Hades entirely, returning to the world of the living. This resulted in him being condemned forever to try to roll a large boulder to the top of a mountain slope which would always roll back to the bottom.

King Tantalus killed his son Pelops, cut him up, boiled him, and served him as food to the gods. He also stole items from the Gods, including the ambrosia the secrets of which he shared with his people. Tantalus' punishment was to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree where, whenever he reached for the fruit, the branches raised and, whenever he bent down to get a drink, the water receded.

King Ixion committed the first kin-related murder, slaying his father-in-law. His neighboring rulers demanded Ixion be denied cleansing of his transgression, but Zeus took pity on him and invited him to a meal on Olympus. In Olympus Ixion attempted to seduce Zeus's wife, Hera, even after Zeus warned him to stop. When Ixion went to sleep, Zeus sent a cloud-clone of Hera to see how far the mortal would go to seduce her. Ixion made love to the clone, and Zeus drove him from Mount Olympus and struck him with a thunderbolt. Ixion was punished by being tied to a winged flaming wheel that was always spinning.