

The Mother Goddess is symbolized by the moon, which waxes and wanes every month, as women do, and the high position of each room. The Father God is represented by the sun and the high ground.

Wiccans are not black magicians; they do not work the devil.

"A black magician gets a kick out of using the forces destructively," Lady Slyph wrote. "A member of Wicca is more interested in using the forces for healing, or helping someone else find a harmonious way through life."

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To the Mother Goddess "bind us together in these three days of rebirth."

To the Father God: "Make us with strength for the good of all. Join our hearts in great words of understanding and brotherhood."

It was 10:45 Saturday morning, and two members of the House of Barnwood were performing the evening rituals, tributes to the god and goddess. Dressed in black robes, they invoked the help of the winds, the mountains and meadows and forests as they prepared for the day's ritual.

They are public witches — acknowledging their religion openly.

"Our dedication is the fact that we are public witches in that we really believe in our beliefs it is true to be public for those of us who are," said Lady Sittina, high priestess and founder of the House of Barnwood. Sittina, a native-born woman, was dressed in rich tapestry that set off her hair, which goes in color from a pale reddish gold at its roots to a deep brown at its ends halfway down her back. Lady Sittina was speaking in — as she delightfully referred to her self-jargon — "The joys of Runic, a Public House."

Only those witches who are strong in their religion should be public, she said. Wiccans do not need followers. Those witches who do choose to be public should do so for the right reasons, she said, not to create a church that can claim tax exemptions, or to have an excuse for "a non-territorial lifestyle."

The House of Barnwood holds open house every Friday night, she told her audience. "This gives people a chance to come in, see a little about us and learn from us. It also gives our young people exposure."

"We tell our students to guard the secrets well, and reveal them constantly."

Then, with a dignified "You'll have to excuse me," the Lady Sittina fell to the floor in a faint — her left arm outstretched gracefully in a pose that would have done any Elizabethan lady proud.

After a few minutes of silence, she arose, crossed herself again, and her high priestess flanked the talk.



By PHOTODISC, INC.

Some Of The Items On Sale At The Psychic Seminar

Outside the hotel, James D. Vernon of the Jesus Place Inner City Mission in Atlanta walked back and forth carrying his Bible. The tall, gray-haired man with a full live voice had stayed until just midnight the night before and planned to do the same again.

"We've tried to be cordial to the participants," he said, "but we've expressed our views about what we believe. I told them that I believe Jesus Christ to be the virgin-born son of God who was raised from the dead."

Vernon and some of his friends had sung a chorus of "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" to a Wiccan woman earlier in the day. She had replied with "I love you."

"We love you, because Christ loves you," they had said to her.

Vernon was delighted when he heard of Lady Sittina's feat. He considered it an answer to the prayers, and those of other Christians all over the city and the country.

"We weren't praying for any harm to come to her," he said, "but for her to be obedient, for communication to break down."

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It was Saturday night, Lady Slyph Lark, a sensitive woman in her late 50s wearing a long, flowing, loosely fitted blue gown, addressed her fellow Wiccans, tackling the three great speculative questions: Where did we come from? Where are we now? Where are we going?

"We came from the beginning," she said, before man had turned to the sun, the moon and the stars, to guide him over the ocean to discover other lands, other cultures.

"As man grew more wise, he realized that there must be something in the universe even greater than himself."

Out of that realization, she said, grew the "simple, natural religion, that, today, we know as Wicca, the craft of the wise — before any other orthodox religion."

Other religions came, took part of Wicca and discarded other parts, she said, "but still there were those who kept in the old religion. Still it remained."

Lord Lark, who now lives in Florida, comes from a long line of ministers, she pointed out, and she is the first Pagan in Maryland. In her own thoughts, she said, she had fought many battles for her beliefs, the greatest and the first of which was with the British Parliament.

"When I was young, I was a fighter," she said. "I wanted the laws against witchcraft rescinded. It took 20 years — with the help of other people, but I was the hub — and we stormed the British Parliament."

After the British laws prohibiting witchcraft were rescinded in 1801, Lady Slyph felt peace and euphoria, she said, but she had learned that the moments of peace in witchcraft are few and far between.

Today, she said, in the "when are we now" part of her speech, Wiccans must still be prepared to fight for those moments.

"One of our tenets is perfect love, perfect trust," she said, "but rarely is it reciprocated. We must be ready for the times when it is not."

Not all the growth and openness of modern-day American witchcraft is good, she said. Some covers in the United States have grown at almost unimagined rates — far past the traditional 11 members she advocates — to almost unmanageable proportions. People are being initiated too quickly. In the land of instant coffee and instant soup, shall we also have instant Wicca?

Already, she said, it is possible in America to become a witch by correspondence course.

Where Wicca is going, she said, is not yet clear.

"Are we going to sit at an enormous house of people partially turned out? Or are we going to have a small number of teachers painstakingly trained? Are we going to have an evangelical movement all over the country? It's a temptation," she said, "but I don't think the world is ready for total acceptance yet."

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Following Slyph Lark's lecture, it was time for another "signature," this one titled "An Tribute to Lady Slyph."

The gathering would be serious, less serious than the previous evening's.

Lady Slyph sat in a high-backed white chair, flanked by other elders of the craft — Gavin and Yvonne Frost, who also started out in England and had come to teach at the seminar; and Lady Sittina.

It was time for the members of Barnwood — about 10 of them — to say "thank you." They rose, one by one, each carrying a candle and a rose, singing.

Lady Slyph rose and divine, as these words' hands

contain...
Children live in burning light

Darkness ahead, your light
Let them stand at the old cross stood

All in the House of Barnwood

When it is done, Lady Sittina's grandsons collected the roses and presented them to Lady Slyph.

The formal procession over, the congregation moved on to brother songs — "Yes, His Love Me" (my words told me not, "Are You Wiccan" in the tune of "Fever" by James Brown), and "The Witch Who Wouldn't Be Bound" to the tune of "M.T.A." — the Kingston Trio's late 1960s hit about the subway riding. "The man who never returns"

Across the hotel lobby, members of Kappa Alpha fraternity danced at their Old South ball, each wearing Confederate gray and holding in the area a fair lady in a hoop-skirted dress.

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Sunday morning, the Christian Sabbath, the Wiccans were ready for another session of morning rituals, more lectures — on "Witchcraft vs. ESP," and a workshop. After lunch, Lady Slyph answered questions from her audience.

Yes, she believes that the ancient city of Atlantis existed. Psychically, 1984 is going to be a crucial year. This summer there will be another nuclear war.

In the hotel lobby, a Catholic mother from Kansas arrived with a sign — "And Every Knee Will Bow to the Lord Jesus Christ, Get Out of Here."

Behind her on this Mother's Day afternoon were her two daughters, 11 and 1, and her husband.

The sign was accented by a security guard from the hotel to the sidewalk, where she joined James D. Vernon. Then, she decided to go back in, to buy a ticket, to hear what the witches were saying.

The organizers of the seminar refused to sell her one.

"They like to feel that they're being discriminated against, well, they're discriminating against me," she declared.

Vernon, now unshowered, still walked back and forth with his Bible. He had not put in more than 25 hours at the seminar.

"God didn't promise me the sun wouldn't smite me by day," he said.

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Inside the bathroom, a Wiccan landscaping was beginning — a white's wedding. Two of Lady Sittina's disciples are waiting.

Calling upon the great ones of the North, East, West and South, and "those of the fairy kingdoms," Lady Sittina and her high priestess consecrated a circle in the Georgian ballroom of the Atlanta-Biltmore hotel.

In the circle, before the great ones and the high priest and priestess, two witches promised to love each other "wholly and completely," to desire each other and be desired by each other, to possess each other and be possessed by each other, without sin or shame "for sought or given" in the purity of their love.

They drank "from the cup of love and life," and the priest and priestess tied their hands together with a red ribbon. Two friends pulled them by the ribbon in a gentle run around the circle. They returned, and the ribbon was returned.

In the name of the goddess and the god, the high priestess stated that their love "is evidence that it is love, light and balanced flame forever."

The spirits were thanked. The couple was married.

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It was Sunday night. The seminar participants were tired. A television camera crew had come to tape interviews.

Suddenly, the room was quiet except for the voice of