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Introducing Vegan Witchcraft

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A Legacy of Domestication

For many witches, animals are absolutely foundational to the practice. This is no accident. It is often the case that practitioners feel personally drawn to other animals, but, historically, women and other people on the margins were persecuted for their supposed connection with other animals (animals who were labeled as “familiars”). In modern practice, familiars have been intentionally and openly reclaimed as kith and kin. Many witches proudly live with and love other animals, sometimes even incorporating them into their magical practice.

From a feminist perspective, this reclaiming is important, because the stigmatization of women with other animals (especially single, widowed, or queer women) remains pervasive in 21st century society. Finding joy, companionship, and even empowerment in multispecies homemaking is an important means of resilience in an alienating, woman-hating world.

Nonhuman animals, too, have gained considerably from compassionate attention. Not only do companion animals often enjoy fulfilling lives cohabiting with humans, but their group status has increased considerably as the institution of petkeeping has popularized. Likewise, the rise of environmentalism beginning in the late 19th century saw a dramatic increase in the public’s appreciation for wild spaces and wild animals, resulting in a number of conservation policies and interventions. Witchcraft has characteristically championed the value of nature and fellow animals and certainly has played at least a peripheral role in protecting the nonhuman world.

That said, witchcraft tends to mirror mainstream culture by privileging some animals (such as those labeled as “pets” or “wildlife”) while invisibilizing or even harming other species (namely those labeled as “food” or “pests”). Witchcraft of the 20th century aimed to reclaim and recreate a path that honored the old ways of early modern, even prehistoric peoples. In doing so, however, it failed to relinquish the lens of the present. Even if modern witchcraft slightly altered the modern lens by challenging institutionalized religions, male rule, and the ecocidal tendencies of modern capitalism, it did little to undermine a supremacist position for the human species.

The majority of human history (which reaches back several hundreds of thousands of years) was characterized by a largely plant-based diet and a more symbiotic relationship with other animals. Humans (men, specifically) only introduced the cultural practices of hunting and domestication very recently in humanity’s historical timeline. Modern witchcraft, in its efforts to reestablish humanity’s birthright in natural ecosystems, usually remains trapped in this more recent patriarchal cultural history. This is a decidedly *oppressive* history given that it disrupted ecosystems by driving many species to extinction and warped others into unrecognizable variants through the process of domestication. In both hunting and domestication, for that matter, the end goal is killing. A patriarchal view of human ancestry, then, is unavoidably

harmful to fellow animals and seems misaligned with the much longer legacy of human-nonhuman coexistence.

In the 1970s and 1980s, West Coast ecofeminists began to adapt witchcraft for the purposes of challenging patriarchal histories, yet even they were largely complicit with the romance of “the great hunt” and domestication. Although they may not have recognized it, this complacency runs counter to feminist intentions. In robbing fellow animals of their wildness, it was also the case that women’s wildness was damped. As humans adopted an agrarian social structure, property and lineage became paramount. Domestication not only allowed for the control of animals; it encouraged the control of women. Both groups’ reproductive capacities were managed to maximize their exploitation and both groups’ social statuses plummeted as a result.

The Goddess in all her untamed, wild power (often explicitly linked to fellow animals in a variety of matriarchal spiritual traditions) had been tamed, corralled, milked, and sacrificed. Many of the sabbats in the witch’s wheel continue to celebrate the turning of the seasons, not so much in honor of the free movements of the earth, but in the contrived, heavily controlled movements imposed by a few powerful men and those obliged to serve them including farming, domesticating, and exploiting the forced labor of women, animals, and other marginalized groups.

The Great Gathering: Reclaiming Nature Before The Hunt

The historical premise of modern witchcraft, then, seems misaligned with its fundamental interest in connecting with natural cycles and cosmic movements, focusing instead on coerced cycles and *man-made* systems. In the climate-conscious 21st century, the ecofeminist and nature-based elements of witchcraft have persisted, but they have inconsistently adapted to the political realities of a globe in crisis. War and genocide shockingly persist, environmental decline remains unabated, and the number of animals killed—both land and sea-dwelling—in a now highly industrialized domestication system has skyrocketed to numbers reaching into the trillions each year (in the United Kingdom alone, 1 *billion* chickens are killed annually).

Although some witches have spoken to the relationship between social justice and witchcraft as an empowering state of mind and a strategy for social change with regard to war, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism, and even environmental destruction, the fundamental problem of speciesism—the systematic discrimination against animals—has gone largely unaddressed.

Vegan witchcraft thus speaks to this gap, arguing that the unwilding of nature and the otherization of our fellow animals is fundamental to the disconnect between humans and the earth. It advances a radical solidarity with other animals instead. Respecting other animals as persons rather than ritual ingredients, main courses on the feasting table, or stereotypes on oracle cards are key to unlocking humanity’s sacred space in a more symbiotic, multispecies ecosystem. Rather than focusing on the glory of the “hunt” (the romanticized destruction of nature and feminized beings), vegan witchcraft calls for a reclaiming of the glorious gathering.

As such, it focuses on reestablishing plant-based foodways as the legacy of all humans on the planet (plant-based diets, for that matter, have been practiced widely by the global majority until only recently dislodged by Western imperialism and industrial revolution). Indeed, most kitchen witchcraft books intuitively understand that the consumption of meat and dairy is counterintuitive to the magic of plant eating. Few grimoires espouse the magic of “meat” but focus instead on vegetables, plants, fruits, and nuts—the truly revitalizing foods of nature.

These vital foods lose magical potency when processed through the bodies of other animals and consumed vicariously from their dead flesh. More than this, they become toxic, as modern medicine has now linked the consumption of animal products with a variety of chronic ailments.

Vegan witchcraft also sees the practice of witchcraft as an important element of social movement strategy and self-care in a disenchanted, deadened world. Although not all witches identify as activists and are not interested in community healing, many of them are. The aforementioned social problems are already mobilizing many witches to action and vegan witchcraft can be an important tool in supporting this campaign.

Witchcraft can thus be harnessed as a means of setting intentions for the purposes of achieving wider structural change, establishing strategies of manifestation, and managing difficult emotions. Indeed, the ritual and meditation of witchcraft can be especially helpful for those experiencing compassion fatigue or even burnout. Grounding in nature and dropping a pin, so to speak, in the constant of the turning solar seasons and lunar phases can also be helpful for the activist's sustainability and wellbeing.

Vegan witchcraft thus calls on the witchcraft community to reconsider its relationship with fellow animals, *all* animals, even those who traditionally find themselves between hamburger buns or milking machinery. Seeing other animals as independent, feeling beings who also have a stake in this earth and a cosmic destiny of their own broadens our sense of family and belonging. Really *seeing* other animals, however, comes with a responsibility to care. If fellow animals are our familiars, we are also *their* familiars. It is a relationship of reciprocity. One that can only enliven us. Power and inspiration might be found again beyond the slaughter and sacrifice of fellow animals and can instead manifest in compassion, love, and mutual care.