

Birmingham talk:
Gay perspectives on British Traditional Wicca.

Intro:

David - and he's Geoff. We are a gay couple who are also the High Priests and Elders of the Coven of the Sacred Wellhead - a 4th generation mixed gender and sexuality Coven within the Initiatory Tradition of Alexandrian Wicca.

We're Members of several Pagan Organisations - and are involved in leading Public Sabbat Celebrations both in Cheltenham, where we live, and at Sacred Sites, such as the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire: the next one of which will be for Samhein - in case any of you wish to come (in which case please make sure to grab a card afterwards...).

We've run a Website for 6 or 7 years that deals with the Traditional Craft and aspects of gender and Polarity - and we have also previously given a talk to the Rainbow moot here in Birmingham - giving an introduction to our Alexandrian Tradition, and why it is particularly open to Gay people...

I guess it was on the basis of this background that we have been asked to come talk to this conference on the subject of "Wicca from a Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgendered perspective"

At first sight this might seem a straightforward topic, but we quickly realised that - like sexuality and gender - it's not really a black and white subject - and there are perhaps many different aspects that we might be expected to cover...:

For a gay person interested in Wicca maybe the key question might be "Where do I fit in...?". This is even more-so when Traditional Wicca has all too often been represented as simply a Fertility religion, with an explicitly Heterosexual Theology and practice... We might even be expected to answer the question of "Where are the gay Gods in Wicca?" or even "how do I work Witchcraft as a gay couple?"

However, we also feel that there is also a wider audience and a bigger question - that of our brothers and sisters in the Traditional Craft. Their question to us might be "What special insight on the Craft do we as Gay people have - what can we teach them about the Gods...?"

In finding the answer to these two questions we have to weave through the many different aspects of the Craft...

In doing so we hope to be able to show that perhaps the one thing that Lesbian Gay bisexual and Transgendered people bring to Wicca is a fluidity of gender that breaks through old Stereotypes and Dogma - that we genuinely show that witchcraft is much more than merely a fertility Religion - and that it has a great

deal to teach us all about the totality of what it means to be Truly human, and perhaps even genuinely Divine...

So - to start, perhaps a little explanation of where we are coming from as Alexandrian Witches...

Alexandrian Wicca is one of the British Traditional Witchcraft Traditions - a group of related religious traditions that share a common initiatory history, often tracing back to Gerald Gardner, who based his writings on the teachings he had received as an Initiate of a surviving coven of the "Old Religion" in the New Forest in the 1940's.

Traditional Wicca is an Initiatory, Oathbound, Magick-using, Pagan Mystery Priesthood, dedicated to the Great Goddess and her consort the Horned God - and celebrating it's Mysteries through the Eight Sabbats and the 13 Esbats...

In common with other Occult Traditions - we work our sabbats, Initiations and magick within a Circle, and use the 4 great Elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water as protectors and guides. Within this Sacred magickal space we invoke and work with the God and Goddess - and their interplay throughout the year as expressed in the Divine Cosmic Drama of the Seasonal Sabbat Cycle - the wheel of the year and the shifting tides of the Sun and Moon .

It is also in the regular working of these Mysteries, rituals and ceremonies that we are brought to a fuller understanding of our Selves.

The Alexandrian line itself has grown from the work of Alex Saunders in the 1960's - and all those within the line trace a direct Initiatory lineage to him and his coven's.

Alex himself claimed to have been initiated into the Craft as a child by his Grandmother - further developing his knowledge and practice through the Qabalah, Egyptian Lore and the Magick of Abramelin. In 1965 he was proclaimed "King of the Witches" in a Traditional ceremony attended by 12 Witch Queens from all over the Country. In the same year he was handfasted to Maxine - his Wife and High Priestess for many years.

There is a common misconception that the Alexandrian Tradition takes its name from Alex Saunders himself. This however is not the case: in fact the name Alexandrian is used in respect for the legendary Library of Alexandria - which was founded in 320 BC by Alexander the Great to collect, share and advance all knowledge. It was the largest collection of written knowledge in the Ancient World: Archemides, Euclid and Ptolemy all studied and made discoveries there - and as such was the Worlds 1st University; sadly, it was destroyed by fire – perhaps deliberately! - in the 2nd Century. It is said that it was rebuilt by the

Shining Ones on the other side of the Veil to house the Akashic records - and can now be rediscovered on the 30th path of the Qabalistic Tree of Life.

In naming our Tradition after this great Library, Saunders hoped that his Craft could be a conduit through which these great ideals of Wisdom, knowledge and understanding could be continued...

It is interesting that of the various forms of British Traditional Wicca, the Alexandrian path is possibly the most open to gay people - There are several reasons for this:

Like his name-sake: Alexander the Great, our founder - Alex - was himself bisexual. A lot of his early work on the Tradition was centered on Ceremonial practices and worked with a male partner. He then went on to work with the broader aspects of polarity with his later partner and High Priestess, Maxine - as well as continuing to work towards a marriage of Traditional Wiccan and Ceremonial practices. Much of this teaching was passed on though the Initiates that followed him.

Importantly - Alex himself felt that gay people had a profound role to play within the Craft - and perhaps even the Spiritual evolution of Humanity itself. In his final rituals, and again on his deathbed - he repeatedly spoke about the "Cup Bearers of Ganymede" - and the knowledge they would bring with them...

In some Tribal societies the potential for gay-people to freely transcend the boundaries of gender roles often led to a special place for them - their breaking of the "norm" - their "Fey-ness" - was seen as something powerful - it made them "other-worldly" and was believed to give them the ability to see through the veil - and therefore to become a bridge to the Gods... e.g. the "two-spirited" Berdache tradition in American Indian societies, the shape-shifting Shaman in Northern Europe and the cross-dressing priests of Deva in Southern India...

It is interesting that in Greek myth Ganymede is both the young lover of Zeus and the bearer of the cup of Sacred Ambrosia - the drink that gives the Gods their immortality. As such he was placed in the heavens as the constellation of Aquarius - which in itself governs the Age of Aquarius - a time that promises enlightenment and deepening Spiritual understanding. Likewise, the corresponding card in the tarot is "The Star" - which in itself represents Hope, Inspiration and Spiritual Love - and whose symbolism shows the Divine light of the Unmanifest pouring down upon the Earth through the twin forces of Chokma and Binah: the Supernal Father and Mother of the Kabalistic Tree...

This understanding that we relate to the Greater Divine through the Polar forces of the Masculine and Feminine itself reflects an essential aspect of Wiccan practice: that although we understand the Divine to be manifest in all things, still, we work with that force in a dynamic polarity - Masculine and Feminine /

Solar and Lunar / God and Goddess.

In working this polarity - and understanding the complex ebb and flow between them - we see the One become Two, the two become many - and in that birthing the diversity and multiplicity of all Life.

We also come to see our own lives and identities reflected - and come to understand that each of us *is* a manifestation of the Greater Unmanifest Divine - reflected through the polarity of the God and Goddess...

In the Traditional Craft The Goddess is our central figure - she is the Goddess that is all Goddesses - She is One, yet has many faces, and we know her by many Names:

She is Mighty Isis - Throne of Egypt and the Mother of nations.

She is Diana the Huntress of the moon,

She is Ishtar from Great Babylon - Queen of heaven and bright Star of the Sea,

She is Hecate who stands at the Crossroads and brings men to their fate - she sets in the twilight sea as Persephone and leads us to the Halls of Hades -

She is Cerridwen - the great Sow, and keeper of the cauldron of rebirth..

She is the Beauty of the green Earth, and the white moon amongst the stars - and she tells us that all acts of love and pleasure are her rituals...

As witches we invoke Her as the Moon - and she speaks to us through the words of the Great Mother Charge - saying:

“call unto thy soul: arise! and come unto me - for I am the soul of nature who gives life unto the Universe. From me all things proceed and unto me all things must return. And before my face - beloved of gods and men - let thy innermost Divine Self be enfolded in the rapture of the Infinite!!!”

As the moon, the Goddess is the Feminine cycle - She is all women, and all women are seen in Her.

As the new moon she is the Maid - and we see in her life in it's fresh potential and the promise of new beginnings - the power of an energy as yet untapped. She is Springtime, the dawn - the hatching egg... She is also the Huntress, running through the woods in pursuit of her quarry - her hounds besides her. She is danger if abused, but She is also the joy of Life itself.

At Full moon She is The Mother: ripeness and the mounding of life within the womb. She births, nurtures and teaches - and from Her life streams across the skies. She is fertility itself. She is also the Hearth - the center of the home, and the center of the Craft. In Her everything comes to fruition in the rich red of menstrual blood.

Lastly, as She wanes into the Dark moon she becomes the Crone - who is wisdom, bright Kore become grey-eyed Persephone - Keeper of Mysteries and Queen to Hades. As such she can seem terrible - the withered hand of death that plucks life from the vine - yet she holds within her, eternal knowledge and the Hidden Mysteries beyond the Veil - and she leads us by the hand beyond Death and on through rebirth...

As the Goddess is to all women - so the God is to all men. He is the God who is all Gods - the Divine spark within us all.

We invoke Him As the light - formed from Her first Darkness, he turns the wheel of time.

He is Osiris - brother and lover of Isis - father to Horus - the Lord of the twin horizons.

He is Pan - cloven hooved and shaggy thighed - Shepherd of Goats upon the Wilds Hills way

He is the Horned lord - the GreenMan - the pulse of life within the seed and within the vine - and the rhythm of nature within us all.

He is Lugh - Strong-armed in battle and far seeing in wisdom.

He is Sol - the sun God at the height of his power - lord of life and lord of light.

He is Zeus - King of the Gods - and lover to Ganymede

He is Herne, surrounded in mists

The dread Lord of shadows - the comforter and consoler...

As we see the Goddess in the ebb and flow of the moon, so the God is felt in the pulse of light and life that is the great Wheel of the Solar year, reflected in the 8 Sabbats:

His cycle is the journey of every man from childhood innocence, to the power of maturity - and the final embracing of Wisdom in Death, in the knowledge that sacrifice brings Rebirth.

In the Dark of December he is born as the spark of life - the Sun reborn from the Womb of the Great Mother - Born of the Dark, son of the Hunting God - the leap of life from the infinite darkness of oblivion. He is the Child nursed at the breast of the Madonna - all innocence and fresh potential.

With the lengthening days of Spring he is life bursting from the bud - and we find him again as Pan in the Greenwood - the grinning, rutting, laughing God of life and love and Wisdom. With him we discover the rising tide of life both within ourselves and the greening world about us.

He is the Masculine thrust of life and potential - and the hot pulsing throb of life within us that yearns and seeks for connection and fulfillment. He is the Hunter and the warrior - and pursues both Truth and Life with full abandon.

With Beltain and the rising tide of life, so that masculine thrust of Solar potential finds it's match and it's mate in the receptive and opening arms of the Maid...

It is beneath the blossoms of Beltane that the God embraces the Goddess - they love and are one - in the union of their twin energies the Sacred Marriage is revealed - and all life engendered. In their conjoining are both transformed...

As the year turns and the life swells within the womb of the Earth so the God grows into full manhood and takes on the nurturing, protective role of the Father: Midsummer finds him at his height as Sun King and Father of All: "Lord of Life, Lord of Light, Golden One and King of Glory" - His power brings the year to fruition, and ripens the corn in the fields - yet the red of the poppies warns of the sacrifice to come.

At Lammas The year starts to turn and the God makes that ultimate sacrifice: he is cut down as John BarleyCorn and gives His life to be the bread that will sustain all mankind through the rigors of winter.

As the days start to wane at Autumn Equinox He begins his descent into the underworld - and tastes the bitterness of life in it's ebbing; yet in embracing all that time has taught him he also learns Wisdom - and transforms into the seed that is at the Heart of the Elysian Mysteries...

His inward journey of self knowledge ends at Samhein with his Crowning as King: Hades - lord of the Underworld - and the gates of Death are thrown open for the Faerie folk to ride free.

In Hades is that masculine force come through to it's full potential: the True Gold of our lives hidden in the dark night of our selves. He is the grey bearded Elder, the teacher and Guide - the calm steady pulse of Maturity that is the balance to the wild thrust of youthful indulgence. Ourselves at the end of our days.

At Yule He is born again - and the great Wheel turns once more.

In the interplay of the God and Goddess we see all the many faces of ourselves – reflections of everything that it is possible to be: from lover to child, brother to king, maid to mother, and lover to Crone. But because we work so strongly with the God and Goddess – and with their polarity – some people think that the Craft is not suitable for gay people.

Unfortunately, in the past there have even been some within the craft itself who have fed this idea – and who have written that the Craft is a “fertility religion based on a natural maleness and femaleness of mind” (whatever *that* means!) – based on such a limited view of gender – and of sexuality - they could not embrace what they saw as “feminine men” or “masculine women”...

Thankfully, those old ideas are largely ignored in Today’s Craft.

It is worth remembering that we understand the Divine through the lens of our own times and cultures – often even rewriting the myths and ideas of the past in the light of our own cultural understanding... Those who wrote with horror about gay people did so in a time when homosexuality was still a crime – and gay people were seen as psychologically sick. In their Prudery, they covered or removed the genitals of Greek statues, hid away “Licentious” images - and erased all reference to “The love that dare not speak its name” from the myths and legends of Greece. Those they did not erase, they reinterpreted – to protect the “innocent eyes of women and children” from corruption...

It is interesting that such a limited – and Patriarchal – view also enshrined the idea of Masculine supremacy – and the ideal of the passive and assenting Woman. As such it limited and restricted **everyone**.

But - even unlike those religions that base themselves on the words of the past, we of the Wicca are a living and evolving Tradition – our roots are old, but we live in the **NOW**. And now we live in a culture that recognizes and embraces the diversity of Human experience – and human Sexuality...

Most coven’s today do not consider the sexuality of its members to be an “issue” – Sexuality is embraced and celebrated as an integral part of each of us and of how we relate to the world - and the Divine – *but whether you are gay or straight, it is your calling to the Goddess and your gift for the Craft that is important.*

In all our years in Wicca – our sexuality has never really been an issue to our Brothers and Sisters – any more than theirs is to us.

Of the hundreds of Covens that we know around the world, many are openly

“gay-friendly”, a few have transgendered members – and several – like ourselves – are led by either Gay or bisexual High Priests or High Priestesses. It is interesting that of these, the majority work within the Alexandrian path...

In the same way that women in the 1970's looked to Wicca and the Goddess-based religions to provide both Spiritual and political empowerment of themselves - and in doing so rediscovered old Mythologies - so gay People today are attempting to reclaim their own mythological past from the puritanical blinkers of past generations.

There is much rediscovery yet to do, but it would seem that the Ancients understood their own Gods to be far more polymorphously perverse than the popular myths that we now have would lead us to believe!

Zeus was not the only God to take a male lover - and even Hercules blessed the union of two of his bravest Male warriors. In Rome, it was common practice for same-sex couples to pledge their love in the Temple of...

Dionysus himself was raised as a girl and in later life would go on to display “feminine” qualities and a tendency to cross dress. He also had homoerotic affairs with Adonis and Hermaphrodite.

And how many know that the original myth of Hyacinthus told of how the beautiful youth was transformed in death into a sweet smelling flower by a grieving Apollo - after having been killed by Zephyrus the god of the West wind when he grew jealous of the youth's love for the more beautiful god of the sun...?

Or that in one story the reeds that form the pipes that Pan blows so sweetly upon were formed from the body of one of his favorite male lovers...

It is also worth remembering that to the Greeks Pan was the God of sex - the thrill and thrust of passion and the driving hunger of lust. As such He represents *all* sex - regardless of sexuality. Likewise Aphrodite was Goddess of Love - she blesses and inspires all love: regardless of whether that is between two men, two women - or any other loving relationship...

Rediscovering these aspects of the Gods – hidden from us by the sexual morality of an age that did not understand us – allows us to see a part of ourselves in the Divine – just as the Beltain Chase shows our straight brethren that sexual side of themselves transformed into Cosmic drama;

In rediscovering the Gay gods we are provided with a brief reflection of one aspect of what it means to be gay.

This reclaiming is an essential part of gay Spiritual and Mythological heritage - and is the one area that we most get asked about via our website - however, we feel that it is one that can ultimately be a dead end if looked at in exclusion.

If as gay people we concentrate **just** on the sexual aspects of ourselves, then we risk becoming trapped into that same stereotyped identity that labels us **as** "Gay" or "Homosexual" – by defining ourselves purely by our sexuality we lose so much else of what it means both to be gay – but also more importantly human.

In the process we also risk validating a world where men fear physical contact with each other and "Male-bonding" is only understood as a euphemism – a world where a game show contestants care for his gay housemate leads to a flurry of media titillation over his own possible sexuality...

Likewise, we risk allowing ourselves to be pigeon-holed into those stereotypes that the media reduces us down to: where gay people are "fabulous freaks", "Team Diva's", Fashion advisors to the world – or some comedy fag-hag's butch, but ultimately sexless best friend...

It's the same trap that Straight people have fallen into in their mediated post-porn world – where we drool over perfect-bodied celebrities and their perfect lives and relationships – and hate ourselves for every extra inch around our waists, every blemish and line... A media world where women are either lipstick bitches or obsessive "fat friends" – and men are either dumb slabs of meat to be drooled over, or impotent fools...

In the multiplicity of the Gods and the Transcendence of Ritual, The Craft shows us all the importance of seeing every aspect of ourselves – to see that whilst sex and sexuality is an essential part of who we are, still it is only a **part** of who we are – and a small piece of the whole that we can eventually become...

In each of their faces, the God and Goddess reveal to us the many aspects of what it means to be fully male - what it means to be truly female. The God's journey through the seasons show that being a man is as much about our ability to love and nurture, as it is to protect and make personal sacrifices for the greater good; the Goddess shows us that strength and wisdom are as much "Feminine" traits as beauty and Fecundity.

We believe that it is this which is the biggest gift that the Craft can bring to the Gay community - that it helps us to embrace and explore the many aspects of ourselves - and to not become trapped by a limited view of identity or sexuality.

In working with the Goddess, we explore our Feminine - in working the God we embrace our Masculinity - in exploring Diverse pantheons we recognise and

embrace the many faces of the Divine - and thereby free ourselves from the stereotypes that others may project upon us...

But this is also a gift for all those who work the Craft - whether gay or straight: that by invoking the God and Goddess in their many forms, we come to manifest, explore and understand the many archetypal aspects of ourselves and the Divine - regardless of our physical gender and sexuality.

In invoking and embracing the Gods in their many aspects we come to understand the multiplicity of our own Identities – and the power that we carry within us. We come to see that none of us can be reduced to a single aspect of our selves – that the Divine itself is so vast, so Immense, that it can only truly manifest itself in a thousand different faces, a multitude of names – and in the endless, eternal flow of life and love between them.

When we look into such Diversity, we see the richness of our selves reflected back – and realize that we **must** embrace that fullness within our own lives.

Within Wicca that multiplicity of creation is focused within the polarity of the God and Goddess.

The Goddess is the Great Mother - the God the All Father - but it is in their *union* that balance is found - and all life created.

It is within their coupling - and their cosmic union - that the pulse of the greater energies is worked and manifested within the rituals of Witchcraft - and the Greater Mysteries of life and love are fully understood - on both an external - and more importantly INTERNAL - level.

To some gay people, this apparently hetero-centric focus on the union of the God and Goddess excludes them - but in truth it is simply embracing and accepting the physical reality of our own lives – for, regardless of our gender or sexuality we are **all** the child of a man and a woman!

But it is also important to realise that the God and Goddess reflect much more than the polarity of the sexes - in their dynamic polarity they embody both active and passive, light and dark, sun and moon - it is the blending and weaving of their energies that is the warp and weft of the Cycle of the year - and the engine that drives the seasons.... On every level from the physical to the spiritual, we are their children - born of their union and manifesting them upon Earth.

But, as well as celebrating that outer fertility of tribe and nature, it is also a central part of the Craft that we nurture that greater aspect of fertility that is the alchemy of the Spirit: the bringing together of the Masculine and Feminine within – to celebrate our bodies, but to also be able to transcend them and step

between the worlds...

It is this understanding of one's Feminine or Masculine side - and the balancing of this internal polarity - that many straight people find the hardest to achieve - for in their lives they rarely have to look so deeply at the nature of Gender - or their own sexuality...

But as gay people we have already made the leap towards a "two-spirited" identity - as we grow up and discover our sexuality we are forced to look deeply into ourselves and realise that we contain both Feminine and Masculine qualities - and transcend the limitations of gender identity that society places upon us. For many of us this "coming-out" process is a painful but ultimately liberating experience - and one which potentially gives us a unique perspective on the Craft...

In the Traditional teaching of *some* Covens it is said that a man can only seek the Goddess through the priestess - and the woman the God through the Priest. All too often that literally means that the Priest subconsciously projects his entire feminine side onto the Priestess and the Priestess her entire Masculine onto the Priest - neither is able to fully see the opposite within themselves - and both only see a distorted **reflection** of the True nature of either force.

In Jungian terms this is the projection of the Anima or Animus - the manifestation of our inner selves as the cross-gendered - and ultimately impossible to understand - "Other"... For a man the higher Self is experienced as the Feminine Anima - for a woman, the masculine Animus.

But - True Spiritual growth can only come from reconciling this division and the resulting divorcing of our selves from our Spirit - a psychological process that Jung described symbolically as the Heiros Gamos - the Sacred Marriage.

Traditionally that seeking and reconciliation is seen in sexual terms - and in the Craft is partly expressed through the Great Rite.

In expressing this reconciliation in terms of a sexualized ritual Wicca attempts to raise the physical to the Divine - to use the power implicit in sex to unite the opposites and create a fusion that liberates and enlightens both partners - and creates them both anew...

However because of projection, all too often the Rite becomes purely sexual - in personifying the Gods in each other's bodies the Priest and Priestess can easily lose sight of the Transcendence of the Gods in the veil of their own flesh - instead of a unification of the supernal Masculine and Feminine, it becomes the joining of an individual man and woman. The Great Rite then becomes about the pleasure and enjoyment of the sexual act - or the intensity of feeling that develops between the partners who enact it - a beautiful and truly moving

ritual of sacred sex – but one that fails to make that leap into Spirit and unification...

As Gay people when we perform the Great Rite we have already begun that process of internalisation - instead of seeking to find the Goddess or God within our magickal partner, we have already started to find them both within ourselves - and in that balance encourage our Partner to do the same.

In this we reflect and enhance the words of the Goddess in the Charge:
"If thou can not find it within, thou wilt never find it without..."

From this unique position we come to the Great Rite on a more internal and symbolic level - we stand with our magickal partner as complete within ourselves and the ritual becomes one that works those energies at a higher level than the purely physical.

In doing so we remind everyone that the Great Rite is far greater than simply a sexual Rite between a man and a woman - and that the conjoining of Chalice and Blade must *truly* become the Sacred Marriage of the Masculine and Feminine within.

In Jungian terms we must each unite the Anima and Animus, and attain True Individuation and oneness with ourselves - represented by the Tao, the Caduceus - and the middle pillar of the Tree.

We become like the Star in the Tarot – standing in a place of balance where we draw on the twin powers of the Masculine and Feminine, with the Divine light of Kether above us - pouring that light down into manifestation...

We feel that perhaps it is **this** that Alex meant, when he spoke of the wisdom that the Cupbearers of Ganymede would bring....

When the Great Rite is performed as an internalised, Symbolic act between two balanced individuals, We embody it's greater Esoteric meaning as the Sacred Marriage and elevate it to it's true place as an act of High Magick.

We transform both the Craft and ourselves though it's Spiritual Alchemy - and raise Wicca from being merely a Fertility Religion to truly being a Mystery Tradition in the mold of the Elysian Mysteries:

We answer the Goddesses own call and "let our innermost Divine Self be enfolded in the rapture of the Infinite!!!"