

# The History of the Pentagram / Pentacle

The pentagram, or five-pointed star, is one of the favourite symbols witches and magicians love to use as a symbol of their religion. It has been so widely used throughout the past that the word 'pentacle', also originally meaning a five-pointed star, has become the familiar pentacle often used as a disc or plate of metal or wood, usually engraved with magickal symbols, on many a Wiccans' altars, and used in magickal rites.

The reason why the pentagram is regarded as the symbol of magick is because its five points represent the Four Elements of Life (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) plus Spirit (or Ether/Aether) the Unseen, the Beyond, and the source of occult power. For this reason, the pentagram should be drawn with the one point up, the point of Spirit presiding over the other four. It is Mind ruling over the World of Matter. The lower four points representing the world, or man, and the higher point representing spirit. In the pentacle,

with the star encircled, the circle surrounding the star means the universe, or Cosmic Egg. Symbolically, the entire pentacle means that man is the microcosm (little world) of the macrocosm (the universe as a whole).

The four points placed below the upper point represent the physical man - Earth, Air, Fire and Water. This becomes the idea of Spirit before Man - the seeking of the spiritual, the Mysteries within, returning to the Goddess and God. Placing the two points up, although we remain the microcosm of the macrocosm, it represents more the mundane Man - Man before Spirit - the seeking of the material, the loss of the Mysteries in search of gain from the world.

The apple has been revered throughout history as being sacred of the Goddess. In modern mythology, the apple became associated with the Tree of Knowledge, which Eve took and ate. The reason the apple is considered associated with the Goddess is revealed by cutting through the centre of the apple. Hidden in the apple's core, is a natural pentacle. This is the sign of the Goddess Kore (Core) - the Greek Holy Virgin, the inner soul of Mother Earth (Demeter). Just as Kore the Virgin was hidden in the heart of Mother Earth and represented the World Soul, so her pentacle was hidden in the apple. Kore is also an alternative name of Kali.

The pentagram has long been associated with many of the mystery schools, Wicca (Witchcraft) and magick. It is the simplest pattern of star shape that can be designed with but a solitary line; hence it is sometimes labelled "the Endless Knot." Additional titles are "the Goblin's Cross", "the Pentalpha", "the Witch's Foot", "the Devil's Star", "The Druid's Foot", and "the Seal of Solomon" (more appropriately characterized by the hexagram). It was known as the Endless Knot, because it can be drawn without lifting the pen from the paper, though it requires concentration and care to draw a symmetrical figure in this way.

It has long been believed that the pentagram was a powerful guardian against evil and sinister spiritual beings, hence it was an emblem of protection, and was sometimes worn as a talisman for happy homecomings. An old folk-song, "Green Grow the Rushes-O!" alludes to the function of the pentagram over doors and windows in the line: "Five is the symbol at your door." This was inscribed there as protection against evil.

The power and associations of the pentagram have evolved throughout history. Today it is a widespread symbol of Wiccans and neo-pagans with much depth of magickal and symbolic meaning. The pentagram symbol today is given many meanings and profound significance, though much of this seems to be of recent origin. Although this may or may not be the case, the pentagram has been utilized throughout history and in various situations:

The earliest known utilization of the pentagram dates back to around the Uruk period about 3500 BCE (Before the Common Era) at Ur of the Chaldees in Ancient Mesopotamia where it was found on potsherds collectively with additional symbols of the time associated with the earliest known evolution of written language.

In later ages of Mesopotamian art, the pentagram was employed in regal etchings and was representative of royal authority extending out to "the four corners-of the world".

Among the Hebrews, the symbol was attributed to truth and to the five books of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament or the Torah). It is sometimes (albeit incorrectly) termed the Seal of Solomon although its usage was similar to that of the hexagram.

In Ancient Greece, it was designated the Pentalpha, being geometrically composed of five A's.

Unlike earlier civilizations, the Greeks did not normally assign other symbolic interpretations to the letters of their alphabet, but certain symbols became connected with Greek letter shapes or positions (e.g. Gammadion, Alpha-Omega).

The geometry of the pentagram and its metaphysical affiliations were examined by the Pythagoreans (named after Pythagoras, 586-506 BCE) who deemed it an insignia of perfection. Collectively with other learned knowledge of geometric figures and relationships, it progressed into post-Hellenistic art where the pentacle may be seen in the layouts of some temples. Pythagoras was known to have travelled all over the ancient world searching out the mysteries (mystery schools) into which he was initiated, and it seems likely that his travels took him to Egypt, to Chaldea and to lands around Asia. There may be a correlation here with the presence of the pentagram in Tantric art.

To the Gnostics, the pentagram was the 'Blazing Star' and, like the crescent moon, was a symbol relating to the magic and mystery of the nighttime sky.

For the Druids, it was a symbol of the Goddess and Godhead.

In Egypt, it was a symbol of the 'underground womb' and bore a symbolic relationship to the concept of the pyramid form.

The Pagan Celts revered the pentagram as a sign of the goddess Morgan. Some old Celtic coins show the figure of a pentagram upon them. Something like the five-pointed star occurs naturally upon some fossils, and these objects have always been prized by Witches for this reason, as being highly magickal. One kind of fossil with a five-pointed figure upon it is the so-called shepherd's crown, a fossil sea-urchin.

Early Christians attributed the pentagram to the Five Wounds of Christ and from then until medieval times, it was a lesser-used Christian symbol. It is sometimes found in church architecture. There is a very beautiful form of a pentagram in one of the windows of Exeter Cathedral. Before the time of the Inquisition and the burning times, there were no 'evil' associations to the pentagram. Rather its form implied Truth, religious mysticism and the work of The Creator.

The Emperor Constantine I, who, after gaining the help of the Christian church in his military and religious takeover of the Roman Empire in 312 CE, (Common Era) used the pentagram, together with the chi-rho symbol (a symbolic form of the cross) in his seal and amulet. However, it was the cross (a symbol of suffering) rather than the pentagram (a symbol of truth) that was used as a symbol by the Church which subsequently came to power and whose 'manifest destiny' was to usurp the supreme power of the Roman Empire, using as an instrument a forged document - 'The Donation of Constantine'. The annual church feast of Epiphany, celebrating the visit of the three Magi to the infant Jesus as well as the Church's mission to bring 'truth' to the Gentiles had as its symbol the pentagram, (although in present times the symbol has been changed to a five-pointed star in reaction to the neo-pagan use of the pentagram).

In the legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the pentagram was Sir Gawain's glyph, inscribed in gold on his shield, symbolizing the five knightly virtues - generosity, courtesy, chastity, chivalry and piety. This was also to honour the Goddess Morgan.

In Medieval times, the 'Endless Knot' was a symbol of Truth and was a protection against demons. It was used as an amulet of personal protection and to guard windows and doors.

The pentagram with one point upwards symbolized summer; with two points upwards, it was a sign

for winter.

The Knights Templar, a military order of monks formed during the Crusades, gained great wealth and prominence from the donations of those who joined the order and from treasures looted from the Holy Land. The centre of the Templar order around Rennes du Chatres in France is noteworthy for the almost perfect natural pentangle of mountains spanning several miles around it. There is good evidence of the creation of other exact geomantic alignments and pentagrams as well as a hexagram in the area, centered on this natural pentagram, in the location of numerous chapels and shrines. It is clear from remaining traces of Templar architecture that architects and masons associated with the powerful order were well aware of the geometry of the pentangle and the golden proportion and incorporated that mysticism in their design. Alas, the whole Templar order fell victim to the avarice of the Church and of religious-fanatic Louis IX of France in 1303 CE and the black times of the Inquisition, of torture and false-witness, of purging and burning, began, spreading like a slow-motion replay of the Black Death, across Europe.

During the long period of the Inquisition, there was much promulgation of lies and accusations in the 'interests' of orthodoxy and elimination of heresy. The Church lapsed into a long period of the very diabolism it sought to oppose. The pentagram was seen to symbolize a Goat's Head or the Devil in the form of Baphomet and it was Baphomet whom the Inquisition accused the Templars of worshipping. Around this time also, poisoning as a means of murder came into prominence. Potent herbs and drugs brought back from the East during the Crusades had entered the pharmacopoeias of the healers - the wise - the witches. Prominent deaths by poisoning caused the Dominicans of the Inquisition to move their attention from the Christian heretics to the pagan witches, to those who only paid lip-service to Christianity but still followed an Old Religion and to the wise-ones amongst them who knew about drugs and poisons.

In the purge on witches, other horned gods such as Pan became equated with the Devil (a Christian concept) and the pentagram - the folk-symbol of security - for the first time in history - was equated with 'evil' and was called the Witch's Foot.

The Old Religion and its symbols went underground, in fear of the Church's persecution, and there it stayed, gradually withering, for centuries.

In the foundation of Hermeticism, in hidden societies of craftsmen and scholarly men, away from the eyes of the Church and its paranoia, the proto-science of alchemy developed along with its occult philosophy and cryptic symbolism. Graphical and geometric symbolism became very important and the period of the Renaissance emerged.

The concept of the microcosmic world of Man as analogous to the macrocosm, the greater universe of spirit and elemental matter, became a part of traditional western occult teaching, as it had long been in eastern philosophies. "As above, so below." The pentagram, the 'Star of the Microcosm', symbolized Man within the microcosm, representing in analogy the Macrocosmic universe. The upright pentagram bears some resemblance to the shape of man with his legs and arms outstretched. A pentagram occurs in Tycho Brahe's *Calendarium Naturale Magicum Pefpetuum* (1582) with a human body imposed and the Hebrew for YHSVH associated with the elements. An illustration attributed to Brae's contemporary Agrippa (Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim) is of similar proportion and shows the five planets and the moon at the centre point - the genitalia. Other illustrations of the period by Robert Fludd and Leonardo da Vinci show geometric relationships of man to the universe.

Later, the pentagram came to be symbolic of the relationship of the head to the four limbs and hence of the pure concentrated essence of anything (or the spirit) to the four traditional elements of

matter - earth, water, air and fire - spirit is The Quintessence.

In Freemasonry, Man as Microprosopus was and is associated with the five-pointed Pentalpha. The symbol was used, interlaced and upright, for the sitting Master of the Lodge. The geometric properties and structure of the Endless Knot were appreciated and symbolically incorporated into the 72 degree angle of the compasses - the Masonic emblem of virtue and duty. The origins of freemasonry are lost in the depths of history, obscured by the traditional 'craft'- secrecy of the order, but there are signs throughout history of the associations of craftsmanship and ritual and symbolism that have remained known only to a few, and the history of the pentagram has remained occluded in the same kind of mystery. The women's branch of freemasonry uses the five pointed 'Eastern Star' as its emblem. Each point commemorates a heroine of biblical lore.

No known graphical illustration associating the pentagram with evil appears until the nineteenth century. Eliphaz Levi Zahed (actually the pen name of Alphonse Louis Constant, a defrocked French Catholic Abbot) illustrates the upright pentagram of microcosmic man beside an inverted pentagram with the goat's head of Baphomet. This illustration and juxtaposition have led to the concept of different orientations of the pentagram being 'good' and 'evil'.

Against the rationalism of the 18th century came a reaction in the 19th century with the growth of a new mysticism owing much to the Holy Kabbalah, the ancient oral tradition of Judaism relating the cosmogony of God and the universe and the moral and occult truths of their relationship to Man. It is not so much a religion as a system of understanding based upon symbolism and the numerical and alphabetical interrelationships of words and concepts -the Gematria.

Eliphas Levi was a profound expositor of the Kabbalah and was instrumental in opening the way for the rise of the Victorian lodges of western mystery tradition - the Order Temporalis Orientalis (O.T.O.), the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (G.D.), the Theosophical Society, the Rosicrucians (Fellowship of the Rosy Cross), and several others, even the modern lodges and traditions of speculative freemasonry. Levi was also instrumental in taking the tarot from being a gypsy fortune-telling device to a powerful set of symbolic images relating closely to the Kabbalah (or as it is now called in the west, to distinguish its development from the original Judaic form - Cabala). Levi designed upon the form of the pentagram such associative inscriptions as in the Pentacle of the Tetragrammaton and renamed the suit of 'coins' as 'pentacles'.

The workings of ritual magick in the orders took the symbolism of the pentagram and its elemental attributes, along with those of the hexagram, and incorporated them as ritual flourishing or signing of the athame (ritual knife) to symbolize invoking or banishing in respect to elemental associations.

The Golden Dawn did much to advance and disseminate the roots of modern hermetic Cabala around the world in its time of strength (from 1888 to around the start of the First World War), and through the writings and work of a number of its adepts and adherents, notably Aleister Crowley, have come some of the most important ideas of today's Cabalist philosophy and magick.

Aleister Crowley also had association with the remaining traces of the old pre-Reformation 'hereditary' witches, notably through Old George Pickingill, and, with Gerald Gardner, considered by some the founder of modern witchcraft.

In the 1940's Gerald Gardner adopted the pentagram with two points upward as the sigil of second degree initiation in the newly emergent, neo-pagan rituals of witchcraft, later to become known as Wicca. The one-point upward pentagram together with the upright triangle symbolized third degree initiation. (A point downward triangle is the symbol of First Degree Initiates). The pentagram was also inscribed on the altar pentacle; its points symbolizing the three aspects of the Goddess plus the

two aspects of the God in a special form of Gardnerian Pentacle.

The writings of Gerald Gardner, an initiate of old Dorothy Clutterbuck, and of his associate Doreen Valiente, brought the long-withered stem of witchcraft - the Old Religion - out into bloom once more, after centuries of secrecy and seclusion, with the caution that the general misrepresentation of its former nature had made wise, and the modern form of the religion of Wicca was born.

It was not until the late 1960's that the pentagram again became an amulet symbol to be worn. Coincidentally with the rise of popular interest in witchcraft and Wicca and the publication of many books (including several novels) on the subject, there was a reaction from the Church.

In its extreme, one aspect of that reaction was in the establishment of the satanic cult - The Church of Satan - by Anton La Vey. For its emblem, this cult adopted the inverted pentagram after the Baphomet image of Eliphas Levi. The reaction of the Christian church was to condemn as 'evil' all who took the pentagram as a symbol and even to condemn the symbol itself, much as had been the post-war attitude to the swastika.

The distinction between the point-upwards and point-downwards pentagram forms became accentuated in the minds of pagans and led to the concepts of 'white'

witchcraft and 'black'. Those who took onboard the strong personal ethical code of Wicca - the Wiccan Rede of "An it harm none, do what you will" - did not wish to be tarred with the same brush as the Satanists whose philosophy is one of the domination of the spirit by the physical body - the priority of matter and physical existence.

Hence, despite the use and the different meaning of the inverted pentagram as a symbol of Gardnerian initiation, other Wiccans, notably in the USA where the fundamentalist Christians are particularly aggressive to those who do not share their beliefs, are against any usage of the symbol. It is sad to say that even the use of the 'upright' pentagram gives rise to social discrimination against pagans in some communities.

Otherwise, the pentagram or pentacle has become firmly established as a common neo-pagan and Wiccan symbol, acquiring many aspects of mystique and associations that are today often considered ancient folk-lore!

The antiquity of the pentagram is certain; its meanings and associations have evolved and richened throughout its history. Its use within modern neo-paganism as a group symbol is as important as the cross has been in the history of Christianity and it is in the ubiquity and the attributed meanings of the symbol that its potency lies rather than in its antiquity. From the Earth-aware attitudes and respect of life of modern pagans has already come the movement towards protecting and conserving the ecology and resources of our planet. Perhaps they will see the dawn of a real new age of hope or perhaps just the end of an age of humanity.

By Lady Hawkwind