

MAKING MAGICKAL CONNECTIONS

Forming a Lasting Coven

Lisa McSherry has been a long-time member of the Church of All Worlds and often performs ritual with Oberon Zell-Ravenheart at the legendary Starwood, Pagan-central in California for nearly 50 years. She is a member of the JaguarMoon coven and has written a brilliant book on forming and strengthening magickal working groups called *Magickal Connections: Creating a Lasting and Healthy Spiritual Group*.

Spellcraft got a chance to chat with Lisa and just had to ask her some often-pondered questions about building a strong coven.

How do you find a group of people with similar magickal working needs and ideas?

Lisa: *The traditional way was to look for notices posted at your local metaphysical bookshop, ads in the back of pagan-focused magazines, or to post your own ad. These techniques still work but now we can look online – <Witchvox.com> has a huge listing – for groups and can meet people through chat rooms and e-lists.*

Finding people and then meshing with them is more complicated. It helps if you clearly know what it is you want. For example, if you are only interested in working with Celtic deities you can pass on working with people who worship the Egyptian pantheon, or, if you have a flexible system of morality that does not adhere to one form or another of ‘an it harm none’ you can skip trying to work with people who adhere to that code.

I recommend not expecting that every group will be the right one, or the wrong one, and try to avoid extremes. Allow time to learn the group and the individuals who make up the group before you decide that it’s the best place to be. I recommend that you do not leave your brain at the door and allow others to cause you pain, in whatever form; but, paradoxically, at the same time I strongly recommend that you don’t leave at the first sign or feeling of unease. Conflict can be a valid teacher and many of us need training in working with strong, negative emotions.

How does one form this into a solid working group?

Lisa: *A solid group needs, first and foremost, time. It doesn’t happen in a year, it may not happen in two or even three years. Many Pagans follow a seasonal cycle – how can you imagine a group being truly stable unless you have all worked together for at least a year? Secondly, stable groups benefit from strong leadership. This does not mean there must be a single leader, but someone has to consider process, individual strengths and weaknesses and goals. Finally, a solid working group must DO the work. That means being present, doing the preparation and seeking out growth as well as whatever the work itself is . . . am I allowed to say, ‘Read my book?’*

How do you discover what the norm is for etiquette, manners and morals?

Lisa: *Talk it out. I feel that new groups, or groups with new members, benefit from extended periods of ‘just talking’. Yes, having a topic can help get a quiet group started, or direct the group more precisely, but however it happens, it is good for people to share. The flip side to that is listening. When someone is sharing, listening – with active attention and consideration – is a powerful gift. Sharing information and listening to what is being said is the fastest way to discover how people conduct themselves.*

How can you deal with conflict within a magickal working group or coven?

Lisa: *If the two sides can come together in neutral space to discuss perspectives and avoid polarisation, that is a strategy worth exploring. Trusted, experienced group members, who take the time to uncover hidden motives or fears that are creating or prolonging the conflict, can play a vital role.*

Overall, remaining clear about your desired outcome can help mitigate conflict, although it may also heighten it, depending on your role, especially when you have taken the time to think through the consequences of that outcome. Having a ‘fall back’ position that you are comfortable working with, if you do not get your ideal outcome, is also useful. Finally, being aware of your limits – of when you will walk away, literally or figuratively – is a powerful tool, as well as incredibly liberating.

What do you do when you find your group destabilised by conflict?

Lisa: *Try to step outside the conflict for a moment and ask: ‘Is this healthy conflict?’ There is value in having new energy in a group and that energy may disturb patterns and placements that feel stable. But there can be a dotted line between stable and stagnant. When the pattern is stagnant, new energy often foments conflict.*

If unhealthy, it can help to remind the group that conflict does not mean destruction; that the pain has a source which is not necessarily one person or a subset within the larger group. Treat the pain like physical healing – do ritual, sit in sacred space, talk and give space in equal measure.

How can you reform after conflict?

Lisa: *Fundamentally, I feel that we just DO. The first moment of ‘We didn’t blow apart’ is a shuddering relief. Then comes the ‘Why did it happen?’. For some people, knowing why is much more important than ‘How did we conduct ourselves?’ and ‘What did we learn?’. I think that if a group can ask ‘What did we learn?’, they are well on their way to healing and reforming in a stronger, healthier fashion.*

Treating one another tenderly will ease the pain from the conflict. Doing ritual – healing rituals and ones that form new linkages between group members in particular – will also speed the healing.

How do you foster core stability within your group/coven?

Lisa: *I do my best to be honest all the time. I ask hard questions, don’t ‘promote’ people who aren’t ready and do a lot of listening to my intuition, actively listening to others and being open to guidance from the universe.*

JaguarMoon has been slowly transforming from a hierarchical group into a wheel. It has taken us a couple of years, and some personnel changes, but we achieved it. Now we are a group of equals with a strong centre and most tasks are shared by a core of people who are committed to seeing it work.

LISA'S BOOK *MAGICKAL CONNECTIONS: CREATING A LASTING AND HEALTHY SPIRITUAL GROUP* IS PUBLISHED BY NEW PAGE BOOKS AND IS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE SPIRIT GUIDE BOOKSTORE. YOU CAN CONTACT LISA ON LISA_@_CYBERCOVEN.ORG, OR BY VISITING HER WEBSITE AT WWW.CYBERCOVEN.ORG