an advance feature from RQ#103

The Pearl Pentacle

Reclaiming was founded in 1980 as an organizing and teaching collective. Among the classes developed over the years was the Pearl Pentacle, adapted from Victor and Cora Anderson’s work in the Feri Tradition of Witchcraft.

Some early Reclaiming teachers studied with Victor and Cora, bringing Feri tools into the feminist and activist cauldron of Reclaiming.

The Pearl Pentacle, whose five points are Love, Law, Wisdom, Liberty, and Knowledge, provide a framework for developing self and group awareness, building intuitive skills, and for stepping into one’s power in the world. In Reclaiming, its companion is the Iron Pentacle — visit our website for more on the Iron Pentacle.

These articles were compiled for the upcoming issue of RQ, and are offered here as an advance feature. Included are interviews with Gwydion, Seed, and Rose, some of the teachers who helped integrate this material into the dynamic mix of Reclaiming.

To find out about Reclaiming classes and retreats internationally, visit www.Reclaiming.org. You can also join Reclaiming’s International Elist (RIDL) or the Bay Area elist (BARD). To join either list, email quarterly@reclaiming.org

Reclaiming Music CDs

Chants & Music available online

Reclaiming has released four CDs of Earth-based chants and music. All four are available on our website.

Many Reclaiming musicians and teachers have also released CDs. *Witches Brew* is a good introduction to Reclaiming’s musicians.

Visit www.reclaimingquarterly.org/music, or contact quarterly@reclaiming.org
The Pearl Pentacle is both a tool for personal transformation and one of four Bay Area Reclaiming core classes — see below for more on core classes.

Reclaiming’s Pearl Pentacle class, like the Iron Pentacle that preceded it by a few years, was adapted from Victor and Cora Anderson’s work in the Feri Tradition of Witchcraft.

The five points of the Pearl Pentacle as currently taught in Reclaiming are: Love, Law, Wisdom, Liberty, and Knowledge. Some of these points have other attributes as well.

The interviews on the next several pages convey some of the mystery and magic of working the Pearl Pentacle.

**What is Pentacle Work?**

Pearl Pentacle classes focus on each of the points in turn, devoting a session each to Love, Law, Wisdom, Liberty, and Knowledge. The work might include discussions, meditation or trance, embodied exercises, games, dyad or small group encounters, singing and chanting, etc.

We also “run the pentacle” through our bodies. The five points correspond to the head, hands, and feet. If we stand with hands and feet outstretched so we form a star, we begin from head/love and send a ray of energy to right foot/law, then back to left hand/wisdom, across to right hand/liberty, down to left foot/knowledge, and back to the head to complete the cycle.

Begin by grounding and centering your own energy. Then let it rise to a point just above your crown so you can feel it floating like a small ball of colored light, like an iridescent pearl. Focus on “love.” After a short bit, let that energy drop on a breath to just above your right foot. Focus on “law.” Then across the body to left hand/wisdom. And so on.

When you have run 3-5 cycles and returned again to head/love, run the energy around the outer ring – head, left hand, left foot, right foot, right hand, head. At each point, focus on the corresponding pentacle point. End again on head/love.

Finish by returning your energy to your center. Ground excess energy by touching the floor or your own center and breathing.

**Pearl Pentacle Magic: the Oyster Trance**

One common Pearl working is the Oyster Trance. We journey to the depths of the ocean to explore how the oyster anchors itself, how its body is shaped, how it feeds, how it lives.

A pearl begins to develop when an irritant penetrates the oyster’s shell. They attempt to expel it. If this fails, the oyster secretes layer upon layer of nacre, gently washing the wound over and over again. Eventually the irritant is completely coated with nacre, accepted, and transformed into a precious pearl.

In the same way, we learn to work with our own irritants and wounds, whether from the outside or from within, gradually transforming them into our own unique pearls.

**What is a Core Class?**

Core classes are the basic curriculum of Reclaiming, and lay the foundation for advanced magical work in many fields.

Bay Area Reclaiming has developed four core classes:

- Elements of Magic – an introductory class in Reclaiming-style magical practice.
- Iron Pentacle – Sex, Pride, Self, Power, Passion.
- Pearl Pentacle – Love, Law, Wisdom, Liberty, Knowledge.
- Rites of Passage – plumbing the unconscious via dreamwork, trance, and story.

These classes became “core” by being taught repeatedly until a consistent Reclaiming practice emerged. Although each class offering varies, there is a basic curriculum for each class.

Over the years there have been other classes suggested as core: Power and Mystery, Pentacle of the Great Turning, Tending the Community Temple, Advanced Elements, deity-based classes, priestessing skills, and more.

If you want to see any of these classes offered, contact the CRAFT teachers cell, which offers classes and workshops in the greater Bay Area and around California.

You can find complete class listings at www.Reclaiming.org/classevents/ — or email quarterly@reclaiming.org
Reflections on the Pearl Points
from Men’s Pearl Pentacle class, San Francisco 2010

Love
My Law is Love unto all beings
Affection
My Love is poured out upon the Earth
Trust
Passionate
Nurturing
Divine
Aphrodite
Eros

Liberty
Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness
Liberation
Free Choice
Free Speech
Transformation
Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose
Power-with

Wisdom
Insight
Intuition
Gnosis
Athena
Discernment
Integrity
Wisdom of Fools
Earth Wisdom
Paradox

Knowledge
Know myself in all my parts
Know thyself
How do I know what I know?
Gnosis
Arcane knowledge
Tree of Knowledge
Common Knowledge

Law
Respect
Before the Law there came a man from the country...
Dharma
Law of Gravity
Consensus
Law of Threefold Return
Murphy’s Law
Jupiter
Do as thou wilt is the whole of the Law

Pearl words harvested from Men’s Pearl Pentacle class, San Francisco, Spring 2010: Gwydion, Alphonsus, George, Jason, Michael, Chionesu, Jonathan, Kevin, Henri, Ross, Abel, Leif, Mark. For more information contact quarterly@reclaiming.org
An RQ interview with Seed

How/when did you start working with Pearl? What draws you to it?

I was introduced to the Pentacle of Pearl in the mid 1990s as a Reclaiming initiation challenge: to run the Pearl Pentacle every day for month and a day. Once I experienced its power, I kept on running it, every day for over a year.

My initiation took several years, and during that time the Pearl Pentacle became a “boon companion,” a medicine. It sank in so deeply that I didn’t know if I was running it or it was running me – I would just recognize it continually arising.

It seemed to be laid out so beautifully — the points matched the natural way that my thoughts arose and my spirit worked in the world.

Was Pearl a core Reclaiming class at that time, or did you help introduce it into Reclaiming?

At that time it was not a core class, but it was being taught occasionally. I had taken it with Beverly Frederick, and others were teaching it. I was one of those who supported it becoming a core class. It is such a lovely balance to the Iron Pentacle, which was already a core class.

Tell us about your early work with pentacles.

I came to pentacles as a student, as an initiate. I stepped into a tradition that was already teaching pentacles. I accepted them on their face and began working with them. Those who studied directly with Victor and Cora Anderson may have a deeper sense of the origins of the pentacle practices.

What came to be meaningful to me — a personal meaning — is that the five-pointed star is such a deeply potent form in nature, and for us as humans.

A great number of the foods that we eat, the fruits and vegetables, are from plants with five-pointed flowers: berries, apples, pears, cherries. It makes sense that the pentacle is a symbol of abundance, nearly essential to the worship of the feminine divine.

The five-pointed star flipped, with point at bottom, is the sign of the horned god, much maligned by Christian culture. This is another primordial symbol of nurture and abundance – the hunt.

The human body itself is a five-pointed form. So, it makes so much sense that to honor ourselves and to honor the abundance and fertility of the Earth, we would be drawn to work with the five-pointed star.

What does working the Pentacle of Pearl mean to you?

Pearl energy is the energy of deep healing, the ability to be present with our wounded places in such a way that we can reclaim them and turn them into jewels. It feels very oceanic, with the influences of the full moon, of the deep mother energy.

When and how have you found it useful? Do you have specific Pearl practices?

The Pearl Pentacle is inside all of my practices. This is one of the beauties of Pearl – I’ve never had to set it aside. Certainly, whenever there is crisis in my life, Pearl tends to arise. At these times, it is mainly a tool for contemplation and for clarity. Holding the crisis in each point in turn: how is love manifesting in this situation, how are the laws of human emotion and of nature shaping it, what wisdom is being revealed, what possibility/liberty is opening up, what knowledge is gained and how can it be of service?

What is the relationship between the Pearl and Iron Pentacle?

Iron Pentacle energy tends to be brighter, more jagged – evoking
individual power, how we show up in the world. Pearl is more about embracing and integrating this power. It’s often said that Iron is more about the individual, and Pearl about being in healthy community. I think Pearl is also deeply individual, and Iron at its best is a blessing for community. There’s a universality to both.

Some have said that Pearl as a new-agey, ‘goody-goody’ Pentacle – I completely disagree. There is plenty that is challenging in all of the points of the Pearl Pentacle, as there is in the deep ocean and deep mother energy. We teach it in a way that plumbs those resonances, working with the irritant, the piece of grit that creates the pearl, and with the challenges of compassion.

Some teachers feel Iron should be taught before Pearl, but that hasn’t been my personal experience. I’ve taught Pearl first and found it to be a complete working. I have observed that sometimes when people have taken Iron, they are eager for Pearl as a balm. I feel that anyone who wants to study either one would benefit. How do you run the Pentacle-points?

There are so many ways to run pentacle energy! Here, it’s good to mention that within Reclaiming, there are differences in the order in which the points are named. The way they are named in The Spiral Dance is Love, Law, Wisdom, Power, Knowledge, and this is how I was taught them.

Another permutation reverses the positions of Wisdom and Knowledge. I find it really evocative to place Wisdom before Knowledge. Our culture has a such a bulimic relationship to knowledge. We seem to feel, as a culture, that we need to have “ingested” all kinds of data before we eventually come to wisdom. It can be useful to first explore our own wisdom. To know what is calling to our spirit, and what’s deeply and most important, in order to then know what to study, what knowledge we want to gather and to share.

The word “wisdom” comes from a root meaning “to see,” close in meaning to the word “vision.” This is an exciting way to run Wisdom energy. I like running Knowledge as “service.” At the end of the road, what is worth sharing with the world?

More recently, the point named “Power” has been taught as “Liberty.” I have begun to teach it this way. We explore “choice” within Liberty. The word “choice” goes back to roots meaning “to enjoy” and “to taste,” or “gusto.” I love linking liberty/choice to intuition, to what feels and tastes healthful and good.

What are some skills and techniques you use to strengthen and balance the points??

We use trance, story-telling, healing, shadow work, enactments, scrying, divination, among other techniques. Healing work comes in more with Pearl than with Iron. The specific exercises arise out of the energy of the points themselves.

Any “cautionary tales” from your experience?

To me, the energy of Pearl is like a tonic herb – there are certain plants that are just good for people. I guess if you did nothing but run Pearl, it might be a little out of balance. If someone were running Pearl as a watery, deep energy, and what they needed was to balance with fiery bright energy, they would need to create that balance. Each of us is so unique in our needs and our creative paths. That said, the Pearl Pentacle is a wonderful tool, a deeply healing practice.

Seed has been teaching Reclaiming classes in the Bay Area since 1995. Her teaching is characterized by warmth, mischief, sensuality, and emotional depth. She has been involved in community building in many forms, including providing open circles, conflict resolution, mentoring, and working to promote inclusiveness throughout the community. She is an initiate of the Reclaiming Tradition and a longtime member of the San Francisco Bay Area CRAFT Teachers Cell.

RQ interview by George Franklin.
Pearl Pentacle

and the Roots of Reclaiming

An RQ interview with Gwydion

How and when did you start working with the Pearl Pentacle?

I was introduced to the Iron and Pearl Pentacles as part of Feri Tradition when I first began studying the Craft. Most of my work for the first five years focused more on working the Iron Pentacle. I explored the Pearl Pentacle occasionally during that time; I think that you can’t help but work the Pearl Pentacle when you are working Iron. I think it happens whether or not we are conscious of it.

My work with it really deepened when Thorn Coyle and I began teaching Pearl Pentacle together more than fifteen years ago. When I work on teaching a topic the process challenges my perceptions about it and transforms how I work with it. Part of the teaching process for me is figuring out how to articulate my thoughts and experiences with it which, in turn, deepens the work for me.

What does the Pearl Pentacle mean to you? What is its special significance compared to other magical tools?

Someone at work recently described the process of self-reflection and self-improvement as being like that of a pearl. It is taking qualities or experiences of ourselves which we find unpleasant or uncomfortable and choosing to accept even these aspects as part of our being (even though we might wish we could just spit it out); of allowing ourselves to be transformed by it and ultimately to find strength in it. For me, this is what Pearl Pentacle is all about. It is a tool to aid us in this work of self-reflection and self-improvement.

When and how have you found it useful? How is it different from the Iron Pentacle?

For me, Pearl Pentacle is a tool that helps me in my relationships with others, whereas Iron Pentacle helps me in my relationship with myself. Of course there is overlap, but when I’m having difficulty in my relationships with others I eventually manage to remind myself that I can only change myself and how I choose to interact with others.

Pearl Pentacle has given me the tools and courage to face myself and be willing to make changes. I’m not always able to do this right away, but eventually I come back to “what do I own in this situation, what can I do differently?”

In preparing for a class on the Wisdom point, I read an ancient proverb that said that wisdom comes to those who risk to make mistakes and then learn from those mistakes.

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Pentacle also influences or acts as a tool to help us in the Reclaiming roots of anarchist politics and feminism.

Let’s take feminism first: at its core principles, feminism is about how we value, respect, and treat one another regardless of our differences (especially those of gender and sexuality).

Ultimately it is the manifestation of the principles of equality and liberty. And yet, how can we achieve these principles if we do not reflect on our own relationships with our selves and with those around us? How can we treat our co-workers, lovers, friends, and family with respect and see their inherent value (even when we are angry with them or feeling hurt by them) without expanding our own capacity for Love? Through our own work on self-liberation and learning from our own mistakes, we gain the capacity for compassion and empathy.

Reclaiming’s structure and decision-making process derive from its roots in anarchist politics. In order for a network of semi-autonomous cells all connected to a central hub to work, there needs to be trust, empowerment, and acting from a place of stewardship of the community. Through the Pearl Pentacle, we are able to come to agreement on our core values and make agreements on the processes we will use to work together.

Can you share a few Pearl stories from working with other teachers in the Reclaiming and Feri Tradition?

One of my favorites is the Devotional Dance movements that Thorn created for each of the Pearl Pentacle points. These are simple repetitive movements that really help to anchor each of the points, the qualities of those points within our bodies. This transforms abstract concepts into physical manifestations, which I think makes the points more accessible for people to work with.

Another favorite is some of the workings Alphonsus and George and I did in the Men’s Pearl Pentacle class. We worked to push the boundaries and take risks even where one or more of us found the exercises challenging and uncomfortable. I found it challenging, healing, and powerful to be playful, physical, and intense in a diverse group of men.

What are some skills for strengthening and balancing the points? How do you strengthen the weaker points?

I think the best way for strengthening and balancing the points is simply to run the energy through the points and around the circle on a regular basis. Not only does this work to strengthen and balance the points, I also find that it energizes me.

Anything else you’d like to share?

I once heard someone in Reclaiming say that what is missing in our tradition, our community, is the power of forgiveness. I’ve often felt this way as well. I think Pearl Pentacle is a strong tool to aid us in the power of forgiveness for it teaches us that though we take risks and may fail, we learn from those mistakes and act differently. Through this process we gain the knowledge to discern when we are wrong. Through our own empowerment we gain the strength and courage to apologize to those we may have hurt, and forgive our selves and others.

Gwydion is a queer witch and a science geek. He is a Reclaiming priest and has taught Reclaiming classes, workshops, and witchcamps locally and abroad for nine years. Gwydion has been a member of the SF Bay Area Reclaiming community for over 20 years.

RQ interview by Abel Gomez.

For further reading

• Evolutionary Witchcraft, by T. Thorn Coyle.

• The Spiral Dance, by Starhawk

• “Reclaiming and the Iron Pentacle” — articles from the RQ Archives — visit www.ReclaimingQuarterly.org
Some thoughts from Brook

I was first introduced to Pearl Pentacle through Feri study, not through Reclaiming (though I was and remain, of course, very much Reclaiming in conjunction with Feri).

My mentors gave me the points and suggested that I run energy through my body-as-a-Pearl-Pentacle, and then meditate on each point in turn, doing this in invoking order. Pearl was never “described” to me.

I ran Pearl energy almost daily for about 6 months, I think. I did it consistently until the points developed deep personal meaning, solidified somatic meaning in my body.

Then I added an exercise I had read on a Feri list where one runs iron energy through each point in turn on ones body in invoking order, head/Sex, right foot/Pride, etc. Each Iron point is brought to a bright orange flame, as a piece of iron heated in a fire.

On the second pass, each orange, flaming, iron point is turned into a blue, pearl flame, from Sex to Love, from Pride to Law, and so forth, through an invoking pentacle-in-the-body.

I did this daily for 2-3 months. As the magic worked me, this series deepened not only my personal relations with Pearl but also revealed relationships between Iron and Pearl.

This Feri Pearl work was all done solo. It was a big change to start thinking about pearl work as group work, as community work. It was a big change to (somewhat) disconnect pearl from iron once again as a distinct body of work.

Another anecdote that may be of interest:

I was introduced to Pearl with Wisdom at the upper left point of the pentacle and Knowledge on the bottom left point. Later, when I started to work with Reclaiming Pearl, I had to re-do these associations, as my co-teachers typically had these two points switched: Knowledge on the upper left point, Wisdom on the bottom left.

My associations built up over years with the flow of Pearl and with the relationship between Iron and Pearl points had to be reformed. During this same period, many Reclaiming folk changed Power, as I’d learned the upper right point (just like Iron), to Liberty.

Ah, back to daily pentacle work we go. “She changes everything...”