



**Ask Rose Ariadne**  
<http://www.askroseariadne.com>

## **An Overview of Wiccan Covens**

Human beings polarize towards other human beings who share interests, are likeminded, have similar philosophies and analogous beliefs. We define ourselves not only in isolation, but also in relation to others. Polarizing results in the formation of groups. The group creates a feeling of safety because of the common grounds shared. Members in a group often feel that they can rely on the other members and that they can be depended upon in return. The group dynamic creates a natural hierarchy in which each member functions in a way to make the group function properly.

This group hierarchy is common in most religious systems and certainly no exception in Wicca.

Wiccan groups are called covens. The word 'Coven' or 'covan' originated from the Scots about 1500AD, and describes any kind of gathering. In Wicca, the word 'coven' describes a gathering of witches. The first noted use of the word coven, in the context of describing a gathering of witches, was at Isobel Gowdie's heresy trial in 1662 when there was mention of a witches' coven of 13 members.

The number of the members may vary, but anything above the number of two is called a coven. Ideally there will be thirteen coven members: six men and six women led by a High Priestess or a High Priest. This is rarely the case though. There are many male only and female only covens. There are also many more women practicing the craft than there are men, so chances of a 50/50 split, is remote. In addition, some traditions prefer having both a High Priestess and a Priest. All of this makes it rare to find a coven numbering thirteen exactly.

There is – in addition to being an esoteric belief -, also a practical consideration surrounding the number thirteen. Common belief is that a number larger than 13 is not very practical and can place unnecessary





pressure on the High Priestess. As a result, the larger group normally splits into smaller groups. Those groups have to last one year and one day to be considered a true coven.

It also requires one year and one day of learning to be initiated in Wicca. If the tradition makes use of a degree system, additional time will be dedicated to study to progress through the higher degrees. Most covens concur that students (sometimes called Seekers or Dedicants) should experience one turn of the Wheel of the Year prior to dedicating themselves to the Goddess.

There are serious matters that you need to consider before you make your final decision to join a coven. It requires a substantial investment in terms of time and effort. It involves doing an in-depth study of the Craft and a great deal of introspection, amongst others. Even if, as a student / Seeker / Dedicant, you are not quite sure that this is path you will eventually follow, that which you learn on this journey of discovery, will bring a new perspective of self and of the Universe.

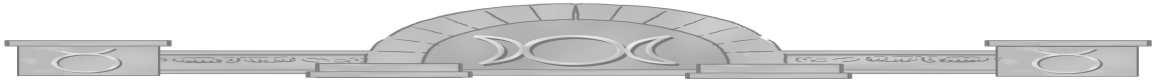
Once you have completed your year and one day learning the basics as a student / Seeker / Dedicant, you become an Initiate. When you are initiated, you make a commitment to Wicca and a commitment to the coven. You will be welcomed in a formal way into the group with a ritual of death and rebirth. The Elders in the coven will have spent at least two years in learning the path of Wicca – sometimes much longer. By the time you become an Elder, you will have mastered the skills to lead rituals and to serve as a teachers. High Priestess / Priest need to have mastery of the Craft and possess the attributes of tolerance, wisdom and leadership.

The coven gathers to observe the Sabbats and Esbats through ritual, Magick and celebration. Every member represents one link of the chain to make ritual effective. As a result, the attendance of Sabbats and Esbats is obligatory.

Covens can vary greatly in terms of composition and dynamics. Once you are accepted into a coven, and it is a coven that you are comfortable with, you will find that it is – in some ways – like a small family. Sometimes the bonds can be even closer than real families. Acceptance is not necessarily easy. If as little as one member of the entire coven has any doubt about a candidate, with or without given reason, he / she may end up not being granted access.

Choosing a coven needs to be done with care. You should like, trust and respect the coven members. You also need to be comfortable with their tradition, the workings, the hierarchy and the leadership. There are many covens nowadays to choose from. The following URL contains lists of covens by city, and is very helpful when exploring the option of joining a coven near you: [http://www.witchvox.com/vn/vn\\_index/xgroups.html](http://www.witchvox.com/vn/vn_index/xgroups.html)





The old maxim says: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear".  
Perhaps the same holds true for covens.

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