Jeremy Adkison
Interviewed by Diana Brown in Lawrence, Kansas
June 20, 2014
Transcribed by Diana Brown

Abstract: Oral history interview with Jeremy Adkison conducted by Diana Brown in Jeremy’s apartment in Lawrence, Kansas, on June 20, 2014. Jeremy is a law student at Washburn, in his mid-20s. He attended KU as an undergraduate, and was at one point president of the Witches and Pagans Alliance/KU Cauldron. This interview discusses his middle school discovery of Paganism, the importance of the Internet, and his practice of both Wicca and Hare Krishna brand Vaishnavism/Krishna worship. This interview was conducted for the Religion in Kansas Project as part of a summer fieldwork internship funded by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies.

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DIANA BROWN: ‘Kay. Cool. So this is Diana Brown interviewing Jeremy Adkison. That’s, am I, I’m saying your name right?
JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah—Adkison.

DIANA BROWN: Adkison. Yes. Um, yeah, I got it right, I did it, okay. On this date, June—
JEREMY ADKISON: the 20th—June the 20th.

DIANA BROWN: the 20th—I’m very professional right now. June the 20th
JEREMY ADKISON: Summer does this to students.

DIANA BROWN: 2014. Okay, so I guess I want to start off by asking, basically, you know, where did it all begin, how did you, where did you come from religiously, like, was there, what did your family, what did you grow up doing.

JEREMY ADKISON: UM, family was a military family, um, my father was in the army, um, my mom was the religious person. They both met in St. Louis, they’re both from Missouri.

DIANA BROWN: Okay.

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, I think my father’s side of the family was some form of Protestant, um, I know I have a paternal uncle, um, not a paternal uncle, my grandfather’s brother is a minister, a Baptist minister, I think, maybe he’s Baptist, some sort of Protestant denomination out in the boonies in Missouri.

DIANA BROWN: Okay.
JEREMY ADKISON: Is everything good there?

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Sorry.

JEREMY ADKISON: Just checkin’ the, the iPod. But anyways, um, my mother was Catholic and her family was mostly Italian, um, her mother came from pure Italian immigrants, her father was just, you know, general, run of the mill mixed American, and I think in both my mother’s family and my family was kind of the same way, the mother was the one who was religious and the father just didn’t care. He was very agnostic, or just sort of like, neutral about the whole affair. So I was raised Catholic, uh, was baptized, went to first communion and all that stuff, um, like I said my father just was, very agnostic about religion, he really didn’t care so much about God unless the Cardinals were losing and then it was, God was directly intervening to make his life hard. Um, and I’m not being facetious, but it was always kind of amusing. Um, so, my mother never really engaged us with the Catholicism, like we went to church, we went to stuff, I knew certain motions that you do, you know, peace be with you, also with you, some of the hymns, Jesus lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, I kind of remember that stuff but there was never like, let’s go home and sit down and actually like talk parent to child, this is what we believe, why we believe it, you know, not using these words to a kid who’s like five or ten, but here’s our theology and the worldview behind it and the history, that never really happened. Um, so, was sort of raised Catholic, but I guess, I was just kind of there, I mean I felt like I was just there, like I wasn’t really a participant. Um, and I don’t think it was like something my mother was trying to do, I just, maybe she just wasn’t equipped to deal with that sort of interaction or it just didn’t occur to her to. Um, ‘cause you know, probably didn’t occur to their parents to sit down and have those conversations with them.

DIANA BROWN: Right, it’s just like, of course, this is the family custom, so you’ll do it.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah. And it’s just sort of assumed, this is what we do.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, drink break. When I was a teenager, I always knew I was gay at a very young age, and that, I think, was a big part of how my spiritual path developed, but I think we’re getting away from your question now if you have another question.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, we can talk about that, I mean, yeah, it’s whatever.

JEREMY ADKISON: I remember being a teenager about 13 and really about 10 or 11, thanks to HBO, like, I was able to realize, kind of cognizantly, like, I’m sexually attracted to men, not women, women don’t do that for me, and stuff like, I was at that point where I could recognize, I think I was even watching a movie called Species once, which was a terrible B-grad e horror movie, terrible movie about an alien woman who humans make because aliens send us this information and she’s this bodacious babe who also turns into a giant lizard monster and eats men like a praying mantis after sex, ‘cause that’s all she did, is had sex, it was a stupid movie. But I remember watching that and thinking, observably, this is a very pretty woman, this woman is super well, pretty, she’s tall and blond, she’s very attractive, but I like him better, and I always knew growing up really without any sort of abrupt confrontation, that like, Christianity plus gay equals not
really working, you know there’s some incompatibility there, depending on how you look at it, or at least some obvious tension and so when I was growing up I think it was just very obvious to me that, “well, I’m gay, and that’s Christian, and they don’t like us,” and you can’t really reconcile that, or at least I had no interest in it at the time, in trying to do so, so, it just never gave me any, it never held any sway over me. And then when I started looking into religious stuff, and actually starting having my own personal religious experiences as a kid growing up and then as an adult in college and then post-college, um, it was always just kind of, it just wasn’t Christian in origin.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. So you started like consciously looking into, like you had a religious impulse and you were looking into religion?

JEREMY ADKISON: It’s, it’s, it’s funny what happened, the cat’s about ready to get your soda, just, cat on the table folks at home, sorry.

DIANA BROWN: Is it okay if she plays with this.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, no she can play with straws, well it won’t stop her. But, back to your question, um, was I looking for other religions. I don’t think I was looking for anything in particular at first, like, this is the religious experience I’m looking for, I’m actually googling other faiths. If I remember what happened, when I stumbled into Paganism, and I remember this story very well, my friend Samantha was over with me and we were about 13 and I have to take that away from the cat, she’s trying to eat it. So, my friend Samantha and I were like 13, and this was back when the Internet existed, and it was late 90s, and—dial-up, of course, excruciatingly slow in hindsight—but we were googling, for some reason we had this reason to google “guided meditations,” so we googled “guided meditations,” and eventually we came on this website called “Spiritonline.com,” just totally New Age-y, sort of crystal-loving, all religions are great, late 90s website, really a product of its own time I think. And it had like sections for every religion, like, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Paganism, but it was very much so geared towards metaphysical Paganism, and you know, occult magic and systems of magic and things like that. Um, so like we found guided meditations there, we did some, which were actually kind of groovy from our 13 year old perspective, that was pretty fun, and then, I remember going back to that website and reading more and more about paganism, finding a couple of other sites, um, the Weather Wax Cottage, which I think still exists, um, it’s still online.

DIANA BROWN: What’s that?

JEREMY ADKISON: The Weather Wax Cottage was just, when the late 90s, when the 90s happened you kind of had this Wiccan boom, I feel like a lot of Wicca got really popular then, and I think it was because in part of television, I think it was Buffy and Charmed, that was a big part of it—but, popularly, and culturally, it just got very popular. Um, and, it was very common to see websites that were literally like, people’s versions of their 101 Wicca book, um, with their own spells, their own history, their own explanations for everything, and the Weather Wax Cottage was one of those. Now the web is generally so saturated, it’s hard to even find stuff like that, um, so, yeah, and then from there I found Silver Dove and the Spirit Wolf’s Lair, which was a terrific website, there was so much information there, um, I remember printing out parts of it
and thinking that they should have just made a book instead. They eventually took that site down because their path went a different way and they just didn’t want to have that site anymore, to maintain it, it may have been one they were paying for.

DIANA BROWN: What was that called again?

JEREMY ADKISON: Silver Dove and the Spirit Wolf’s Lair. It was this great, cheesy Wiccan website. Every page had its own midi music, which is like, for the folks at home who are hearing this, it’s like a modulated form of songs in a computer, so it’s mostly like beeps and stuff at different frequencies, but people make any of songs out of them—they make pop songs in the midi music, so it’s just this instrumental computer music, so it had a very enchanting quality to it, and I think part of the reason, especially at such a young age, that that resonated with me, why I was able to sort of look at this religious experience—I didn’t know the terminology at the time, but that numinous experience that they were presenting and how they went about it, the Pagans and the witches, the magicians—all lot of the stories that I was immersed in at that age were ones that involved things like that—magic, um, you know, sort of other-than-human beings, and I think that just sort of very naturally came across as very easy and not extraordinary to understand. It just seemed like, that’s a plausible way to view the world. Um, and so yeah, and then from, that’s when I kind of first discovered Paganism when I was a 13 year old on the Internet.

DIANA BROWN: I think it’s interesting that you discovered it with a friend too. Like was a, were people that you would interact with face-to-face in community, like was that, much of a part of a sort of your development?

JEREMY ADKISON: No. I was always sort of, classic solitary Pagan practitioner until college, in that you just sort of sit at home, you know, once I had this base belief that like—I actually like this sort of Wiccan viewpoint, I like this theology, this idea of a God and a Goddess, you know, just sort of, soft polytheism, where all Gods are one God, all Gods are one Goddess, or really all Gods are one God, it’s just the way we see it. That’s a very basic Pagan concept, and it differs for various people but I became very comfortable with that idea of the God and the Goddess, and so basically since I was a teenager, you know, this idea of a polytheistic viewpoint, of an actual you know, the divinity is out there and you can actually see it as more than one God, it’s not really in vogue the way it used to be, but it just, to me it’s a very natural way of looking at the world, it just doesn’t seem that strange.

DIANA BROWN: It’s not in vogue the way it used to be, you mean the, the soft polytheism thing, or—

JEREMY ADKISON: No, I mean in terms of like, historicity. [Mraow] She’s okay, cats can fly. You looked frightened, um, sorry folks I had to throw the cat off the kitchen table and the interviewer got a little, freaked out by it, but it’s all good.

DIANA BROWN: It’s okay.

JEREMY ADKISON: No what I meant by that is that, you know, and some of the religious theorists will tell you that this part of man’s natural evolution, that you’re going to go from a belief in magic and spirits and otherworldly beings that are not human and
god to eventually just having the belief in one god, um, and that sort of march, evolutionary, is just the way natural reasoned human progression goes. I think that’s kind of arbitrary, you know, who knows if we’d be doing that if it wasn’t for certain events in history, but, you know, when I tell people, when people ask about my religious beliefs and kind of come across this idea of more than one God or Goddess they, a lot of them act very incredulous, like, “you actually believe that? That’s like telling me the sky is... a rainbow,” you know, and of course, my perspective is, well, you’re believing in a God to begin with that you can’t prove and I mean, all material existence does not prove any concept of these things that we’re practicing and stuff, so it’s really no more extraordinary than anything else, when you really get to it.

DIANA BROWN: Interesting. So how important, um, you mentioned, like, some religious theory, like how important have books been, I guess, for you?

JEREMY ADKISON: Well, um, oh, I guess I didn’t say this in the beginning of the interview, I’m 26 years old—

DIANA BROWN: Oh, that’s a good thing to say actually, I should have asked you that, yes!

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, no, I’m 26 years old, I’m a law student at Washburn, I graduated with a degree in Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, um,

DIANA BROWN: And you’re from Leavenworth originally-

JEREMY ADKISON: From Leavenworth, military brat, family landed in Leavenworth, wow, we’ve both done this project before and we just totally borked out, like, that, that’s fine, but um—you can put a tag on the summary

DIANA BROWN: (writing) Ask—who are you?

JEREMY ADKISON: No, books were important, because when I grew up, you know, the Internet was still in dial-up, you know, it still charged by the minute! You know, it was a time period when books were still in vogue, when email barely existed, um, the print media was how most people in probably the 80s and 90s discovered any form of Paganism, um, so, I amassed a huge collection of you know, New Age Wiccan books over the years, and some not Wiccan, some other various versions of Paganism, um, and really read like a fiend, um, read everything from Scott Cunningham who’s sort of the grandfather of Wiccan books, he’s the 101 person, if you’re a newbie you have to get his books to begin with, to the fluffy stuff that people don’t like, like Silver Ravenwolf, to Margaret [sic] Adler, who wrote a treatise on Pagan religious experiences, called Drawing Down the Moon, um, so, books were pivotal, but it was also a time period when the Internet was a little different than it is now, you know, like I said you could find these sort of Wiccan 101 sites which were very personally made by one webmaster, um, back on angelfire, when angelfire existed as a web hosting service, and now the Internet is just so saturated with stuff, it’s very hard to find those websites, it’s very hard to cut through, and all the Pagan online marketplaces I mean, it’s, it’s not the same thing, and even the literary books now, have become very oversaturated with a lot fluff and um, really a lot of books that are just kind of trying to redo what’s already been written, um, so, books, books were pivotal, in a way that I don’t think it is for most Pagans now,
because now, you kind of can find everything online, if you look hard enough for it, but...it was presented in a much more personable way that I think is actually very preferable as a way of self-discovery, um, when you’re really reading it and internalizing it, there’s just something to reading that is, in itself, a very distinct learning process. I think it’s, something we get away from [garbled] superiorly technologically advanced age...if that was a word.

DIANA BROWN: So, I guess, what did your practice sort of start out looking like, or were you kind of armchair for a while, or did you immediately start doing something or other, how regular was it?

JEREMY ADKISON: Well, when I was growing up, you know, the basic precepts of Wicca is that there’s a God and Goddess, they have, magical ritualized systems in which they interact with the Gods, or sort of do a for b, you know, a spell for instance for something, um, so I do remember like growing up and kinda casting a circle and I guess, in hindsight, giving, like, sort of obeisances to the God and Goddess and stuff, which you know, from my teenage perspective, was just me alone in my room, but you know, it was a very powerful religious experience, I remember feeling like, this...is...unique, and I think with that sort of muddled recognition of was that first experience of experiencing that numinous, that religious ecstasy you get when you’re in the religious moment of whatever faith you’re doing, whatever ritual you’re doing, whatever you’re praying to, whatever you’re singing or saying and stuff, you kind of get into a headspace that feels a certain way, um, but, in terms of, like, group practice, that basically was nonexistent until I was in college, and, um, and even that branched off to a couple different other faiths I’ve sort of experimented with over time, um...

DIANA BROWN: Was there much, or is there much of a community in Leavenworth that exists? Are there resources, or--?

JEREMY ADKISON: For Pagans? It’s funny, a lot of people would think that Pagans and Wiccans and polytheists and Pagan reconstructionists, people who are practicing, like, Norse Paganism or Roman or Celtic or Greek Paganism, you would think that they’re just sort of hippie types that would be in liberal cities, um, I think that’s what a lot of people who aren’t exposed to that would think, “this is kind of strange and it’s probably something that happens on the east and west coasts,” but there really are quite a few Midwestern Pagans, um, there wasn’t much in Leavenworth, and I still don’t think there is in terms of actual Pagan, like, communities and organizations, I mean, I assume, it’s a big city, there must be a Wiccan coven, there must be a Wiccan coven somewhere, there’s someone there who’s probably celebrating the 8 major holidays with their friends at various points in the year, there’s also a military base, so I assume it’s very likely that there is probably some sort of, and I know there has been at times an army Pagan, um, group for people, but Kansas also has Camp Gaea, which is in McLouth, Kansas, it’s in Leavenworth County, and Camp Gaea is a, it’s really not a religious camp ground, and I mean, they say it’s not in theory, it’s owned by a not-profit, but it’s basically a very neutral happy campground where people can go, it’s clothing optional, and there’s Pagan groves everywhere, so for people who say they’re not, they’re not religious and they don’t have a religion, it’s sort of like Pagan non-denomination, but it’s also just a fun place to go and it kind of mixes some different
crowds and that’s a very big community geographical spot, they have festivals up there so, the great festival in the Midwest basically happens 15 minutes from where my parents live in Leavenworth, Kansas.

DIANA BROWN: And that’s Heartland.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, and Paganism is just so, so wide

DIANA BROWN: I didn’t realize that was in Leavenworth County for some reason.

JEREMY ADKISON: Mmhm, yeah, that’s in Leavenworth County, in McLouth, Kansas, I think McLouth is one of those tiny towns, it’s, um, not incorporated prob’ly, um, but you know, and it’s funny because, in the whole time I was growing up, you know, as a teenager, I always distinctly identified as Wiccan, as Pagan, like, I believe in this, I’m kind of on board with this, this is the way I like to see this religious experience played out, it makes sense, um, and I never knew Camp Gaea existed until I was in college. It was kind of like, wow, that was fifteen minutes from my home, that would have been fun to have known.

DIANA BROWN: That’s so, yeah. Huh.

JEREMY ADKISON: But no, there’s plenty of covens, many covens in Lawrence, at least three or four that I know of, um, groups in Kansas City, there’s um, one group I spent some time with, the Web of Oz, I believe some of their members have been interviewed for the same project, actually, and they’re a very sort of wiccan feminist based in their philosophy but very Pagan non-denominational and not really a coven per se, more like a, well, like a liberal Democratic group, you know, one of those groups where they meet and they have consensuses and planning meetings, and it’s, it’s very

DIANA BROWN: Oh, they’re Reclaiming right?

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, they’re Reclaiming tradition, they’re very beautifully, which, I don’t exactly know what Reclaiming tradition is, so if you’re at home, google it by all means, um, but you know, a very particular tradition, and, not really totally Wiccan per se but obviously very Wiccan influenced very generic Pagans are there that don’t identify as Wiccan, and so, once I got to college, I had this point where I was actually interacting with a lot of these groups.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Can you talk a, a little bit about the distinction between Wiccan and Pagan and how you’ve sort of identified over the years?

JEREMY ADKISON: That is, well, to answer the first part of the question, what’s the, what’s the definition, how I would define a Pagan or a Wiccan. A Wiccan is someone who worships, you know, this is kind of a silly way to say it, but the Wiccan God and Goddess, they have a viewpoint of a God and a Goddess as divinity, and the God are sort of like a lover God and a lover Goddess, they have a relationship with each other, they see these gods as representing the cycle of the seasons, um, and, you know generally the way they view it is that every other deity, I heard one person explain that Wiccans view divinity as like, almost a radio, you can tune into a different frequency, you know, you can just pray to this sort of generic God and Goddess, or if you have some specific concerns and whatnot and this is sort of a modern interpretation of, you
know, old religions [. . .] kind of God now, you might pray to that particular God and Goddess, Aphrodite for love, Hera for something, um, you know, maybe if you had some affinity for Cerridwen or Hecate, or Hecata, however you like to pronounce her name, these are various popular Pagan deities, so Wiccans follow, like a concept, there’s a God and a Goddess however they decide to see them or view them um and they generally have a belief in witchcraft, um, that you can make, that you can affect the world around you through magic, which is really just a ritual, a spell is really a ritual, if you’re looking at it from a theoretical perspective, and, you know, they celebrate eight particular seasons that most Pagans celebrate. Pagan and Wiccan are defined separately because every Wiccan is Pagan. Pagan is an umbrella term, just like the way Christian is an umbrella term. A Protestant is a Christian, A Catholic is a Christian, um, Mormons tend to [. . .] still Christian and stuff and it’s sort of the difference between calling someone a Pagan would be like calling a Jehovah’s Witness a Christian versus calling a Jehovah’s Witness a Jehovah’s Witness, that’s the distinction, is that you know, Pagans means, generally someone who believes in multiple deities, sees God in nature, internalizes God in nature, not necessarily as one with nature but a part of nature, however they view that. Generally they’re worshipping deities from religions that are now defunct, um, you know, Greek Paganism, Norse Paganism, things along those lines, and typically there’s a belief in magic, uh, which is very popular, um, and rituals and in the same eight holidays that Wiccans typically celebrate: Midsummer, Beltane, Yule, Samhain, all that stuff, um, but the difference is, is that they, they may not claim to believe in a Wiccan God and Goddess, they may just literally be a Pagan who follows one deity within the scope of that tradition, they may just worship, you know, for instance, Bacchus, the God of wine and ecstasy, a God whose religious adherents that the best we can tell were actually experiencing their numinous through ecstasy, through alcohol, through sex, through, you know, just ecstasy however you get there and stuff, so there’s Pagans who just worship Bacchus, there’s Pagans who just worship Hecate, and there’s Pagans who only worship the Norse Gods with a Norse worldview, and that something those people did, and so we’re all Pagan, but we’re all, you know, distinctly different. A Norse Heathen is a Pagan and a Wiccan is a Pagan, but a Wiccan and a Norse Heathen are not each other, that’s the, that’s the distinction. Now your second question was, how did I—

DIANA BROWN: How do you, or how have you identified yourself as time has gone on, if you have identified?

JEREMY ADKISON: You know, I would still, um, say that I’m probably distinctly Pagan, you know, through growing up I experienced Wicca and Paganism, went to KU, found the KU Cauldron, which was, you know, the Wiccan-Pagan Alliance, it was a student group, and, met with them and actually began group practices with them and from there I hung out with the Web of Oz, I experienced some other religious faiths, and in the interim kind of through my exposure in Religious Studies. I liked actually going out into the field and sort of experiencing what these people did. I hung out with Nichiren Buddhists for quite a bit of time, Soka Gakkai Buddhists, um, and, uh, even Hare Krishnas and Hindus, and, Hinduism has a lot that pulls me towards it in terms of its theology and philosophy so I feel like now, I am still doing distinctly Wiccan things, I still see God as a God and a Goddess but I think God is a big concept and that it can really
be interpreted in almost any way, 'cause that’s the way people do it, it’s , it’s a Wiccan God and Goddess, it’s Jesus, it’s Krishna, it’s all these things and so now I’m sort of in this interim where I feel like a Pagan and a Wiccan but I also feel like there’s certain Eastern religious beliefs that I sort of have all mingling together so I think on a form if I had to fill out I would put Pagan, but sometimes it’s also easier to just tell people you’re a Hindu, you know that you worship Krishna or something because it’s less startling to them and you get to skip a very monotonous conversation you’ve had your whole life many times, um, so I guess I would just say, I am safely Pagan at this point, but with very Wiccan roots and some Eastern leaning, it’s, it’s kind of a hard thing to define, you know, are you a Pagan, because Pagan is so particularly definable, I mean there’s people who will say I mean it has to have a particular religious set and there’s other people who will say being a Pagan is a way of life, it’s away of viewing the world around you, it’s even the culture of how you interact with people around you, and it’s not necessarily contingent upon any particular belief, but.

DIANA BROWN: I mean, that’s what I was gonna, I mean, I wonder if you can be sort of one thing in terms of like a lot of your practices but sort of have a Pagan ethos about it, you know?

JEREMY ADKISON: Right. Well when I was an undergrad, I eventually befriended a bunch of Hare Krishnas, which, for the viewers at home, you know, people call them Hare Krishnas, it’s, it’s, they’re really just Hindus, for all intents and purposes, and you know that was my exposure to you know Hinduism and that stream of Vaishnavism and worship of Krishna or Vishnu, and that always struck a chord with me, I really appreciated their culture and their history and their teachings, but it’s also not very Wiccan, and Wicca isn’t very that either, but in some respects, Wicca doesn’t really preclude any other religious faith because the basic concept is that there’s a God and Goddess but you can really view them any which way so it doesn’t really matter if you’re worshipping, you know, Krishna or a witch’s God and Goddess, it’s, I don’t think there’s really a huge distinction, or, how do I balance them, is that what you’re asking?

DIANA BROWN: Um, no, I mean that could be, that’s a question actually, but, you know—

JEREMY ADKISON: Well, Wicca and Paganism doesn’t really preclude the existence of anything else, I mean, one of the basic practices is that nobody’s going to proselytize to you if you’re a Pagan, in fact I make fun of it to my friends all the time because it’s so abhorrent in the culture that we get proselytized to all the time, we just want you to keep your religion the hell away from us, and we’ll keep ours away from you. But, you know, the idea, when you look at the basic Wiccan beliefs, are, um ,the God and Goddess, that can be viewed many ways or interpreted as you know one deity or every deity is a reflection of just them, um, it doesn’t really preclude praying to another God, and that’s a very unique thing about this religion, and even Hinduism too is somewhat unique in that respect, you know, worshipping a witch’s God and Goddess doesn’t actually preclude me from also praying to Krishna or praying to, um, Lord Narayana, or Ganesha or something like that, I mean, they’re not mutually exclusive and stuff. Now there’s some other traditions in other religions thought that depending on those sects might say, you can’t do that, period. There’s some stuff that is, you know obviously hard to
mix, it’s hard to mix typical Christian beliefs with Wiccan beliefs because Christian beliefs have this whole Nicene Creed, they really call for very explicitly their savior through one God, I mean it’s hard to mix some stuff.

DIANA BROWN: You have to do a lot more, sort of personal theological work to make that work for yourself.

JEREMY ADKISON: There’s a lot more hoops to jump through, um, so, you know, my various religious experiences, I mean they’re very different, but, I don’t feel like they totally negate each other, I think in some ways they complement each other, ‘cause when I do kirtan with my Hindu bunch of friends and we’re worshipping Krishna in their way, that is a form of devotion, or they would call it bhakti, I call it bhakti now, because I’ve been so enamored by it, which is a Sanskrit word meaning devotion, that sort of singular devotion to God, isn’t really something you get in Wiccan circles, Wiccan circles are much more experiential, we call the God and Goddess to commune with them directly, we give an offering and then generally we’ll do some sort of magical device or application or ritual for x purpose, whether it’s to help people, or heal a particular person who’s ill, um, in our group, or, you know, just as a generic offering to the […] that good blessings come to us, that type of singular savior God bhakti, that sort of just humbly praying at the feet of God, that isn’t entirely there, and that’s not bad, it’s just that they’re two very different religious experiences, and I, I feel like it complements themselves. UM, but I, it does make my labels hard. You know, when I’m celebrating Wiccan and Pagan holidays eight times a year with friends, but I’m also reading the Bhagavad-Gita and, um, observing some Vaishnava holidays, um, with vegetarians, you know, it’s um, it’s, it’s, I expect it will all probably change as things go forward like all things do, um, there was times when I felt very particular about identifying as I am Wiccan, I am clearly just a Wiccan, and now I know it’s not accurate to say I’m just a Wiccan. It also wouldn’t be accurate to say I’m just a Hindu, I mean, it’s, it’s, it’s like I’m a Pagan-du, it’s like I’m somewhere in-between, and, and really there’s a whole subset of people who do that, I mean, who are kind of, I won’t say between faiths, but between systems that sort of work in their own way, that don’t really have a laid out path, um, so it’s a bit unique. Sometimes now in life it’s actually gotten easier to just tell friends who ask me what my religious views are, I’ll just tell them, you know I’m Hindu, or I’m a Krishna worshipper, because it’s easier than saying, oh I worship a witch’s God and Goddess and I see the Goddess in the moon and the God in the sun, and I also do this, and I think it all is fine, and then they look at you like you’re crazy. And of course I say that as we put this all online so God knows, if I ever run for office…

DIANA BROWN: Um, I guess I wanted to ask, awhile back, um, you were talking about Heartland and Gaea and how, um, a non-profit runs Heartland that’s not necessarily like a religiously affiliated—

JEREMY ADKISON: Well, no, Gaea and Heartland, in, in Kansas, within Kansas’ Pagan culture, Camp Gaea’s a big place, it’s a huge thing ‘cause there’s literally Pagan groves out there, I mean there are sacred spaces out at Camp Gaea. I imagine if you, if the readers at home, or listeners at home, look up any other Pagan interviews with anybody else, from the Religion in Kansas Project, you’ll probably hear about Camp Gaea. Um, and so Camp Gaea is run, I believe, and folks at home, double check this, don’t hold me
to it, ‘cause I mean, they know their history better than I do, I believe it’s run by Earth Rising Incorporated, and that’s a not for profit that owns the land and they have cabins there and you know, some meadows and places you can walk and tons of place to camp, and Heartland Pagan Festival is the Midwestern Pagan festival, um, generally they’ll have anywhere between 600 and 2000 people. Um, and, it’s, you know, it is just, like I said it’s, it’s a big Pagan festival with workshops, and various networking opportunities, vendors, and concerts, and lots of musicians and talent that comes in, and it’s just sort of a family environment, hanging out, camping around, um, meeting folks, and I’ve been going out there for years now and I’m at the point where I recognize people and people recognize me and we have nicknames for each other and it’s just one great big Pagan extended family. Um, and it’s very important for some people because some people don’t live like me, in, you know, happy liberal Lawrence, Kansas with lots of Pagan folk and religiously diverse people, they may live in Podunk, Somewhere, and they really are the only one of their kind there, um, and, and the campground itself is probably the closest thing most Pagans in this area will have to like an actual church or a cathedral, because there are actual physical places on the land that are, we would call them groves, you know, um, places of worship. There’s Venus Mound, near the lake, which is literally a mound, and on this mound are a lot of Goddess imagery, you know, a giant roped web tapestry with offerings and necklaces on it and it’s just this Goddess centered space, and across the lake, you know, and you have to go through a trail to get there, there’s Herne’s Hollow, which is the opposite, it’s a God-centered space with the Green Man, and the tree, and an altar and people will go and they’ll leave trinkets and stuff and they’ll leave offerings, or they’ll even just go down with their groups and have rituals there, um, and there’s various places like that all throughout camp, um, that have, you know, very important significance to the people that are going there, so it’s, it’s been pretty integral, actually, um, and it’s really cool that we have that, ‘cause I mean, I imagine it was a very different time when you didn’t have a place like that that was distinctly ours.

DIANA BROWN: Are there other sort of like, I don’t know, I would, I guess I’m wondering if sort of land and particular spots are important to you, so like, are there any other sort of places that are important, like Gaea is, or have some sort of sacred quality to you.

JEREMY ADKISON: Um. Well I’ve been to the Hindu Temple once or twice in Kansas City, and that is a place where you know, you go in with a lot of reverence because they have statues there and from that particular religious perspective God has descended into the statue and stuff, so the God is literally a part of the statue, um, it’s one of those things, it’s like, do not touch! Do not touch, if you’re there. Um, and I liked going there, and it held a certain quality to me, but I also went there, I went there twice sporadically and you know, when you’re a white boy walking through a temple full of a bunch of Eastern Indians who are speaking Punjabi or Hindu, they’re kinda like, there’s a hippie there, you know, so, I felt a little bit out of place there, um, but the other place that’s a land that I go to that, you know, has a spiritual quality for me is when I, I typically go out on Saturdays to go visit these um, this group of Hare Krishnas who live south of Lawrence, sort of a little bit out of town, kind of out in, sort of out in, you know, farmland, um, and they have, you know, this big swath of property, three houses, various families
live there, it’s not a commune or a co-op, it [ . ] sort of a little village, everyone has their own personal life and their jobs and their bills to pay, but they’re all very distinctly connected and it’s a land where they have cows, which are very important to Hindus and people who worship Vishnu or Krishna, they’re seen as very holy animals, and inside the house that we typically meet at, you know, we’ll have a reading there from scripture of some sort, the Bhagavad Gita, some commentary related to it or other Vaishnava literature and we’ll sing Kirtan, which is chanting the Lord’s name, like when people are actually in the street singing Hare Krishna what they’re doing is called San Kirtana, chanting the Lord’s name, um, which is just singing to God basically, it’s, you know, it’s just a hymn, uh, and in their temple room, they have an actual temple room, there’s various deity statues, and again it’s that same concept that those deity statues are God in the statue, that when you’re in front of them you’re really acting as if this is God in front of you, that’s how you’re engaging the deity, you know, this divine concept in that moment, and so they have a whole program, and, it’s just something you have to see, they sing, they have [ . . ] sing first, they dance, and they have Hare Krishna chant, and then they have these ways of ending it, and then we feast and eat food, so geographically, that’s like another area that’s, you know, for lack of a better analogy, it’s got that church quality to it. It’s like when you go to Camp Gaea, it’s like going to church, when I go see the Hare Krishnas, it’s like going’ to church, if I go to the Hindu Temple, it’s like goin’ to church, um, it kinda has that, that bearance upon you, if that’s even a word.

DIANA BROWN: That sounds, that sounds right to me somehow anyway.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, yeah. I guess, can you tell me a little bit about, uh, the now defunct KU Cauldron?

JEREMY ADKISON: Oh, yes! Um, in fact if you look on the Religion in Kansas website there’s a couple of interviews, at least one or two, with people who are from KU Cauldron, and when I first went to KU, and I was you know a freshman, didn’t really have any friends, was totally new to Lawrence, was just kind of on my own in this giant university, um, I looked up, ’cause I knew, campuses have student groups! So I looked up you know the Pagan student group and saw when they met, which was I think on a Monday or some day in the week, and I went up there in the venin got the union and was trying to find them, had barely ever been in the Kansas Union before, which, for folks who haven’t gone to KU but are hearing his interview, that’s the student union where the cafeteria is and meeting places are, where the, you know, a lot of the basic how to run the university faculty meets, and um, I was in the cafeteria area trying to find this meeting room, which was like adjacent and sort of snuck away, and this random woman walks up to me and she just sort of looks at me ‘cause I had that look of a lost person at 7 o’clock at night in an empty student union, and she’s like, are you looking for some place? And I’m like, yeah, I’m trying to find a student group. And she’s like, well, which student group? She’s trying to coax it out of me, I can already tell, she, she clearly knew who I was, it was, clearly, you’re not gonna say Pagan student group to most people ,but I finally said KU Cauldron, and she’s like, Oh yeah, we’re meeting over here. And so, I ended up meeting them, and sat with them ,and they were my first
clique, they were my first group of friends when I came to college, and KU Cauldron was, you know, a student group that met every week and generally had a Pagan topic, we’d set topics for the week, and so we’d all come and we’d talk about a particular part of Paganism or occultism, or something that was interesting, and sometimes, you know, we had very deep philosophical discussions about the concept of God, and how to worship God, and various ways in which we did that, and we learned from that, and there were other times we just talked about goofy stuff like crop circles, you know, ‘cause that’s fun, um, ‘cause you know people like a little mystery, so. That was good, and eventually I became president of KU Cauldron, made friends there that I’m still friends with for years, became president of KU Cauldron, ‘sounds so prestigious—it wasn’t. Uh, it was fun, but um, you know, I graduated, and I left the club, and moved away from that, and eventually moved from practicing group religious with the students, who were a little bit unfocused ‘cause we were all students, and then I moved into some actual other groups that were a little bit more sophisticated, and kind of graduated, I would say, in a sense, to a different form of religious expression in the Pagan community and eventually KU Cauldron folded because the student population they just didn’t have the numbers for the group and there wasn’t an interest there. I expect it’ll get started up again someday, but, now I have a good group of friends that basically amount to a coven, and we worship, but you know, for geographical spaces, I didn’t mention that either, the coven, the convenstead. In Pagan or Wiccan vernacular, if there was a home you went to that your group of practitioners went to to worship and have their rituals and stuff, you might refer to that as a covenstaed. Our high priestess has a home out in the land, um, “in the land,” out in the country, in the country, in Bonner, um, Bonner Springs, and, it’s a big swath of property and they have a giant grove in the big that we do rituals in, um, with a big fire in the middle, and a giant stone altar, and when there’s like 15-20 people around there in a circle, like, it can give you the heebie-jeebies, it’s pretty cool. Um, but that’s also another quality, is when I’m with the coven folk, it’s sort of like going to church, um, you know, that’s, it’s a very personal thing going on there.

DIANA BROWN: Are you an initiate of any particular coven?

JEREMY ADKISON: No. I’m not an initiate of any particular religion, um, and this is, uh, I’m not. Our coven, the way it works, um, you know, there is a first degree, a second degree, a third degree, the high priestess sort of, you know, gets to decide when people are ready for that and stuff, and so people are encouraged to take part in the rituals, lead a ritual, engage in some of the liturgy, um, but no, I’m not initiated. I might be someday, I suspect I probably will, if I put money on it, I’d say that would probably happen at some point, but um, that’s also kind of a quandary for me, because when you take like a religious initiation or vows, I take that very seriously, which is part of the reason I haven’t made like, Hindu vows or Krishna vows, because, you know, when you make a vow, you keep it, so I would kind of always want to know, you know like, what am I actually getting into, you know, if I feel like I’m reciting something like the Nicene Creed, that precludes my belief in other things, I probably wouldn’t want to do it, but, as Paganism being what it is, that’s unlikely, so. I’m not initiated, I’d like to be, but, you know, just it’s sort of a formal process, for people at home, it’s just a process in which you sort of recognize people’s knowledge and commitment to their, to the Craft, as
witches would call it, or to their religious experience, and first degree, second degree, third degree, is the way it goes, third being the highest, and once you’re third degree, that’s the point where, if you wanted to go start your own coven, and start directing people how to, you know do these things and stuff and actually kind of form your own little church somewhere, that’s when you would go do that, um, but, Paganism being as diverse as it is, there’s some people who don’t even do initiations, they don’t like, they don’t even do them, they don’t like the concept, they think it’s goofy, but, it’s whatever works.

DIANA BROWN: No, I would say there are probably a lot of people who, because so many people are solitaries, I think, the sort of you know, book industry, the Pagan book industry would indicate, its sales would indicate that there are many more people who are reading those books than are participating groups. So…

JEREMY ADKISON: Oh, yes, absolutely, absolutely. And you know, that’s part, you know, like I said, that’s why something like Camp Gaea is so important to people who live four hours away in the boonies, because there are no Pagans where they live, um, you know, I was basically full on, interested in Paganism, well versed in it, would have considered myself Wiccan you know, years and years and years before I ever actually met other Wiccans because, you know, it’s a tiny religious movement.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, and I think that’s really typical.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, um, but so, yeah, there are some people who are just kind of solitaries their whole lives, um, and some people just prefer that, um, there’s an argument though that you can’t really be a Wiccan unless you’re initiated because Gerald Gardner started the religion, he had a particular tradition, but Wicca has sort of morphed and expanded and evolved into something that’s not so stringent, um, and so it’s sort of branched down from one group of people and you know, if you ask people to define what a Wiccan is, a lot of them may give you different answers, but, yeah.

DIANA BROWN: So, so I know because you’re at Washburn, in law school, you lived in Topeka for a year. Was there, was there anything, any sort of, did you find much of a Pagan community or resources or anything in Topeka or at Washburn?

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, I don’t believe, there was no Pagan groups, um, student groups at Washburn, not undergraduate student groups, I think I looked up at one point, but there wasn’t, but I wouldn’t expect it to be, it’s, Washburn’s a great school, but in Topeka, it’s a commuter school, I think about 60 to almost 50 percent of the people that go there commute, um, I lived in Topeka because [. . .] close to the law school, first year was kind of intensive, um, and I actually, I mean, I know Pagans in Topeka, um, many of the folks from the Web of Oz, she’s going for, the cat is going for your glasses, sorry, but many folks from the Web of Oz, which is another one of those titular Pagan groups in Kansas, it’s been around for like, a decade or more, um, many of their members lived in, uh, Topeka, but I never got with them because I was a law student in my first year of school, I was too busy, um, but it was, it was only twenty minutes from Lawrence, so, that’s, I was just able to come down and do stuff with my typical group, so I didn’t really have much of a need to, there are some metaphysical shops there, and I expect there’s,
you know, it’s a big city, Topeka’s a big city, there’s a coven somewhere, you know, I guarantee you.

DIANA BROWN: Interesting. Okay. So I guess, um, what does your, what does sort of your practice look like now, I know that, for instance, like you were talking about how, like you’ll go out to, um, hang with the Hare Krishnas and participate in like devotional activities, and I think you do that at home as well, and you attend you know, celebration and stuff at the covenstead. Like, what, what, I guess what does your home practice kinda look like?

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, like most Pagans, I have an altar, um-sorry, cat be gone! Sorry folks, at home, the cat is running the table—um, you know like most Pagans I have an altar, it’s very common for Pagans to have an altar, we get accused of idolatry all the time, but of course idolatry to one person is theologically explained in a very different concept to the person accused of it, but um, I have an altar, it is big and sprawling and just kind of grown over the years, it’s basically a little coffee table with all sort of nick nacks on it, um, there’s some deity statues of Krishna and Rhada, Ganesh, Lord Narayana, and then various representations, you know, more classic Pagan representations of the God and Goddess, the Pagan God symbol and the Pagan Goddess symbol on the stone, and so the altar is, my altar is sort of you know, a center of holy space, I mean it’s kind of that sacred space area of the apartment, you know, I light incense offerings in a bowl, um, generally once a day, um, and when I do I might pray, you know, if I’m being very formal, I have a little bell that I might ring, and, generally I’ll, you know, do a very Eastern thing and bow my head and chant a mantra, of some sort that I find important, um, or that means, you know, a pertinent thing, uh, um, but the actual practice, I mean, you know, I go visit the Hare Krishnas every Saturday for their program and their Arti service which is when they sing in front of the deity statues and I find that very moving, um, and I like that sort of Krishna bhakti, that Krishna devotional religious movement in Hinduism, that speaks to me, um, which is actually very ironic because it’s really not dissimilar to Jesus, and people who worship Jesus, it’s just another savior God, except he’s blue and drinks milk, um, but uh, as for the Pagans, you know, we have eight holidays. The wheel of the year, if you want to google that at home, you can do that, the wheel of the year is what Pagans celebrate, their holidays, which are basically Celtic holidays, um, and they’re probably celebrated in a way that is morphed and unique and is not even resembling what they were like when they were actually in vogue, um, but such is the march of time.

DIANA BROWN: It’s a creative…religion.

JEREMY ADKISON: So, we’ll go to the coven and we’ll celebrate in the various ways that you do, there’s various traditional things that you do in a Wiccan coven to celebrate holidays like Samhain is very, Samhain is what everyone else calls Halloween, Halloween is what Samhain, Samhain is what evolved into Halloween, let’s put it that way, um, and for Pagans we view that as a day in which the veils between the worlds, if you will, that’s sort of, I mean it’s just the veil between the worlds, it sounds as kind of goofy as it sounds, but that’s what we believe, that’s how we approach it, it’s very common to have vision quests, and have stations that you stop at and everybody will go through the vision quest and then the last person at the station will continue the quest
once the last participant ends and then it all just sort of folds in on itself and everyone’s done. That’s very common, um, and Samhain, it’s also traditional, very traditional, even if I wasn’t, even on Halloween night, if I’m not actually celebrating Samhain on the night it exists, ‘cause typically we meet on the weekends ‘cause schedules and work and stuff, so Saturday closest you would go out and you would make a plate of food and you would go out and you would leave that food out in the woods somewhere, very traditional idea would be at the crossroads, many faiths look at the crossroads as a place where life and death meet, it’s where spooky things happen, lots of ghost stories are set at crossroads, and you leave a plate of food there as an offering to you know your ancestors and your deceased loves ones and other people who have been deceased, you know, an offering to the dead, just in recognition of the people who’ve come before you. Um, Mabon is a harvest festival that I often refer to as like Pagan or Wiccan Thanksgiving. You know, it is basically a potluck feast holiday, where it’s not the usual potluck, it’s the potluck where everyone goes all out, and they actually make something really nice and they bring it there. Yule is you know the winter solstice, um, traditional Pagan thing to do at Yule is to do an all-night vigil while you’ll stay up all night, um, generally with your friends, however you choose to, and you will wait until sunrise and then you will go outside and you will greet the sun, typically that’s when you would have the ritual is at the moment of sunrise, you can figure these things out in almanacs now, so it’s very nifty. Also means you can just sleep and wake up. But the idea is that you know, you greet God as the coming year, ‘cause the sun is recognized as God, you greet God in the coming year as he rises up, some Pagans have a cheeky view of it in that you know, they lay down to go to bed to make sure the sun rises tomorrow so everyone else can sleep and stuff and people will often greet it with noisemakers, they’ll make a ton of racket at the moment of sunrise, um. You know, those are the various ways in which I celebrate with the witches. The Hare Krishnas when we have holidays, Vaishnavism, which is what you would call this particular form of Hinduism, the worship of Krishna or Vishnu, Vaishnavism, um, have, they have holidays for everything, it’s hard to keep up. Um, and since I’m not really an initiate, I haven’t taken vows…although I might someday, who knows, you know, generally Janmashtami, Krishna’s appearance day or his birthday is a big one, the appearance day of their uh, guru, Srila Prabhupada, those are big ones, and generally that’s just like a really big arti festival and a lot of food. Um, but you know, it’s kind of the same thing, so that’s kind of what I do.

DIANA BROWN: What is arti mean?

JEREMY ADKISON: Arti is when Hindus, arti’s a generic term, it’s not just Hare Krishna or Vaishna specific, arti is when Hindus would you know sing hymns and worship God and generally they’re standing in front of statues or deities or representations and they’re waving offerings of incense and flame, that’s kind of the thing arti is, I think it means fire, but that’s the idea, is when they’re offering the flame because it’s pleasing in the eyes of God, and they offer water and incense and stuff and the food that they’re about to eat they’ll offer a portion of it to God and stuff and you know, so arti is that sort of formal standing in front of the deity and the statues and just standing in front of God and just worshipping and stuff, it’s a very particular ritual in itself.
DIANA BROWN: Yeah. I knew an Indian girl named Arti, so I was wondering. Um…so your parents know about all of this—

JEREMY ADKISON: Mhm.

DIANA BROWN: And they’re like supportive and cool and everything.

JEREMY ADKISON: I wouldn’t say they’re supportive. Like my mom’s Catholic and kind of Christian she’s sort of like, eh, doesn’t like it, doesn’t particularly like it. My father’s agnostic and doesn’t really care either way, although he did ask me once, he was, how does Hare Krishnas jibe with Wicca? Which is funny, ‘cause, [laughter]

DIANA BROWN: “I do what I want.”

JEREMY ADKISON: Exactly. And that’s kind of hard for you know, middle America, raised in Protestant or Catholic Christianity, you know it’s kinda hard for those people to understand something that just seems so jumbled and odd, they don’t see the value in it because they don’t see the order in it, because it’s not what they’re used to. I wouldn’t say she’s aghast by it. She doesn’t really care, it’s not like they give me a hard time, but I mean, if you had to rate her enthusiasm on a scale of one to ten, it probably wouldn’t get the highest.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, my father doesn’t really care and stuff, although they, the one thing that, probably, they complain about more than anything is they hate the smell of incense, they hate the smell of incense.

DIANA BROWN: That’s funny. How long have they known about it, and how long have you been sort of open about it, I guess?

JEREMY ADKISON: Since, you know, since like I was a teenager. I was like this is what made sense to me. Um, I mean it was very natural and stuff. I think they were quiet for awhile and then as I became less and less of a kid and more and more of an adult I think they probably have a much more mature approach to it now than they did, it’s not really a topic of conversation, I really haven’t sat down with them and discussed it, um,

DIANA BROWN: You just like, openly did what you were doing, and they were like, okay.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, I kind of had, I kind of had that sort of ethos, which is like, screw you guys, I’m gonna do what I want, um. But yeah, not really an issue. But like I’ve told them before, like, if I’m going out and I’m going to see them later that night like sometimes I’m like, hey, I’m gonna come out Saturday night but I’m gonna go see the Hare Krishnas first. Oh, I can’t do that Saturday with you, Dad—we have Midsummer to celebrate, it’s something, I can’t get out of that, you know, my friends will lynch me, I can’t get out of that. Um, so I mean, yeah, they’re very aware of it. I don’t think they particularly mind at all. But my parents and I have had more fights over my being a liberal Democrat than like, a gay relationship oddball, you know, yeah.
DIANA BROWN: Interesting. So, I guess a little bit different, is there, is there any connection that you see between sort of like your chosen work and your I don’t know, your spirituality, religion, practices, whatever? Is one sort of involved in the other, or—

JEREMY ADKISON: Um. You know, I wouldn’t say so. Like most people who want to enter the law, law, um, law marketplace, most people who just want to be a lawyer, let’s put it that way, for most people who want to be a lawyer I think you know, you have these grand ideas that you would like to help people, you would actually like to be of service, um, and that is nice, um, I don’t see a whole lot of crossover between my religious views and my career goals, um, you know, because of certain religious views there’s probably certain entities I might not want to work for, but I doubt that will really be a problem in my life, um, you know, there’s no sort of overtly altruistic motive, it was just that, this is kind of what I always knew I wanted to be, I always wanted to do. I remember growing up, you know growing up as a gay teenager and I remember when Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage in 2004 and you’d think the world would have lost its mind, but that kind of was a big thing, ‘cause, you know, as about a 14 or 15 year old the idea of like, I knew I was gay, but the idea of me being married it was just like, that thought had never occurred to me, because that’s something they did, we don’t get that, you know, it was just, it was a very natural like, that didn’t occur to me, and then it was like, gay people can marry now, that’s very different.

DIANA BROWN: I forgot that that was that long ago.

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, it wasn’t long ago. It’s funny, ’cause even now as a 26 year old, I meet people who grew up, they grew up in the world of Obama, they didn’t grow up in the world of Bush, they came to age in a very very different experience, and, people forget, and I remember, I mean this has less to do with religion and more why I like my profession, I remember watching not just, um, I remember watching, live streams of all of these different state supreme courts tackling the issue of gay marriage and I remember watching these lawyers talking all these different state supreme court justices—some of them they won, some of them they lost, um, and, you know, having this really aggressive back and forth, and debating this very visceral concept of equality and human rights and how that evolves over time and how we do that in our constitution, how we do that in our country with our laws and our common law and our legal system, and the fact that some people think we shouldn’t do that at all, that that’s alien, that it’s all cemented, and you can’t, you know, you’re creating something out of nothing that existed before and other people who say, no, we move forward in time, we have human experience, that is how we learn and update things and things aren’t so solid and so issues of justice will change, and I remember watching in California, I think, in New York, uh, just all these different, you know, back when it was mostly, um, court cases that were establishing this and not the voters and the legislatures and I remember just watching these lawyers talking to these state supreme court justices and just thinking: “that’s cool. That’s important. That’s really affecting people.” I just remember being a teenager, and just knowing very naturally—that’s what I want to do. That’s what I want to do. There’s not a whole lot of religious application to it, um, but I guess, you know,

DIANA BROWN: I guess there could be gods you call on, or rituals you perform [. . .]
JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, and there are some people who do that, um, I mean, when you have people who view a concept of magic and ritual, which is really what a magical system is, a spell, however fantastical it might seem to the people who are listening, or however they might think it’s just something on charmed, it really is just a basic ritual, and it’s no different than any other religious ritual. You are doing a and b, because a plus b equals c. You’re doing a and b and you want to get c. You are doing a ritual to protect you because you want a to happen, so you go through these motions and you say these words and things, you know, Catholics often will light candles with a picture of their loved ones. That’s a very basic—witches will tell you, that’s a very basic form of sympathetic magic. You’re doing an action, you are letting something physically happen to something else to represent someone else, and you’re petitioning God or whatever to make x happen, and that’s really what a ritual is. So, I mean yeah, I suppose, you know, there are, Llewellyn publishes anything under the sun these days, so there are Pagan books for lawyers and how to cast spells to win your cases although I think you probably oughta just prepare for court and research and meet with your clients and stuff. You know the idea of magic isn’t something that I look at like, hokey pokey, this problem’s in my life, I’m gonna do a spell, this problem’s in my life, I’m gonna do a spell, I want a, b, x, y and z, I’m gonna do a spell—I don’t believe in that sort of thing, and, and most people don’t do it because it’s, it’s sometimes it’s a pain in the ass to do, you know, you have to get everything together, you have to figure out your ritual, then you, you know you want it to actually work the way you want it to and most people, many people don’t even do spells, they just go to the ritual celebrations and stuff, um, but, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I’ll probably pray to the gods for the best results and stuff, but I don’t think I’m gonna mix too much of that together.

DIANA BROWN: So, let’s see. I guess…oh, um, I guess have you experienced any issues as a Pagan, any, I don’t know, have you had any problems as you’ve been sort of open about it with people, because of it?

JEREMY ADKISON: No, uh, no, not really. Um, like I said the only thing that really gets irritating is sort of the monotonous conversation of, “Oh, you’re a Pagan, you’re a Wiccan, what is that, explain your views to me,” and then having to sort of recite this almost memorized, you know, speech about what you believe and why you believe it, and some people just think it’s weird and unique and kind of like, oh, you’re just trying to be special, um, but they don’t take it very seriously, and I’m like, no, really, all religions are this marvelous and phantasmal if you think about it, there’s no difference, honestly, it doesn’t matter, um, but no, I’ve not had problems or issues per se. Um, I think there was one time I wore a pentagram necklace which, I don’t like, ‘cause I actually, I mean I don’t mind the, the symbol, but I don’t tend to wear that jewelry just ‘cause, I actually don’t think it looks good on me, but uh, the one guy kinda gave me a funny look, and I think he, you know, probably thought it was some weird satanic thing, and stuff, which is just total misinformation, but um, no, I’ve not had much in terms of issues, um, I’d hope not, I mean I’m not, I’m very, I’m kind of open about it, if someone has an issue with me over anything in my life, I would rather they let me know, so I can not be around them, you know, I’m not gonna hide anything, but I don’t feel like I wear it on my sleeve either. Um, like I said, that conversation gets so irritating sometimes that I’ll just be like, I’m Hindu, I’m, I’m a Krishna worshipper, I’m, I’m a Krishna bhakti, I’m,
sometimes I’m, there’s been times I’ve even said to people, “I’m just a Hare Krishna,” which I don’t mind if they think I’m a Hare Krishna, that’s fine, but it’s just, it’s easier to say than, you know, this sort of monotonous conversation that you only get in America if you’re not a Christian, or Jew, but everybody else has to sort of explain everything, that gets a little tiresome. I’ve not really had issues. It’s also probably a product of being around very intelligent, educated people, not really being out in the boonies, I’ve always been in cities, I’ve always, you know, I’ve been in a college town my whole life, and this isn’t unusual here, it’s fairly expected.

DIANA BROWN: And then I guess, I don’t know, what kind of language would, do you use to, you know people prefer to talk about what they do in different ways, sometimes they want to say it’s religious, sometimes they want to say it’s spiritual, sometimes they want to talk about it just in terms of a practice, or, all of them in different contexts…

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, functionally, I think, the terms religious and spiritual are like, a person who says that they’re religious versus a person who says that they’re spiritual, in many respect I think they are functionally distinctions without a difference, um, because, if you’re, if you’re just accepting that this thing that we call religion is a word and define it as the experience of interacting with this concept of God, or divinity, or whatever you describe it, whether you’re doing that spiritually versus doing that religiously doesn’t really matter, one just has more bells and whistles. Um, so I think people who say they’re spiritual tend to say so because they feel less restricted, they feel less tied down, they’re not really following some sort of orthodoxy, they’re not following, you know, we have the Catechism, we have the Wiccan Rede in various concepts in Paganism, we have Vaishnava vows and stuff, and they’re not doing that and stuff. But I feel like I am religious, um, you know, even when I feel like I’m engaging in just the purely Wiccan aspect of my beliefs or Pagan aspects of my beliefs versus the Hindu ones, um, it doesn’t feel like laissez-faire spiritualism, it doesn’t feel like, I’m doing this sort of you know haphazardly, it’s like, no, this is what I do, and when I think you’re at that point when this is what you do, and this is naturally what you do and what you want to do, that doesn’t really feel spiritual, it feels like religious, so I would say I’m religious. Um, I would define myself as a religious person.

DIANA BROWN: Well, um, I guess, do you think there’s anything—this is sort of a, I don’t know—do you think there’s anything special about sort of being a Pagan in Kansas, anything special about the experience of it, or—

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, well, yeah. There is a basic truth which is that when you are in different shoes you will see things in a different way. You know, if you are, the majoritarian religion in the state is Catholicism I believe, you know, and if you’re a white Catholic, the way you experience the world and the way the world interacts with is gonna be different than if you were a black Protestant, than if you were a gay Christian, or a gay Pagan, or a Hindu, so, I think that there is absolutely a life value to my being a Pagan, to my being kind of in these religious minorities, to my being a gay man. I experience and interpret the world and probably see things in a way many other people don’t, because I think we learn to relate a little bit differently and recognize that people do have individual experiences and, it sounds kind of cheesy, but their own realities, um. It’s harder to really recognize that naturally when you’re not on the outs, um, you
know, when you’re, you know, if you’re the popular kid at school, I mean, it’s just hard to notice those things, ‘cause you don’t ever have to deal with those things. Um, so, yeah, there’s something worldly about you know being firebrand Democrat, gay Pagan Hindu Hare Krishna in Lawrence, Kansas, because you know, you, you, I have a very different perspective than a lot of the people who I hang around, um. And I also expect that if, you know, I was all that on the east or west coast it would probably also be very different than the way it is here, but yeah, I, I feel like there is something unique about the experience that gives you kind of a different lens and a different way of viewing things. Pagans in general don’t tend to be, um, the in-crowd people. You know, that may seem like a strange thing to say and there are some Pagans who’d probably get irked when I say that, but you know, it does seem to attract certain types of folks, and, they are, it’s a sort of, you know, self-proclaimed seekers, you know, the mystics, the people who don’t want to sit in a pew or in a temple just sort of bowing in one person’s direction, they actually want to be a part of that action, they want to experience that sort of numinous physically themselves, and stuff, so there does seem to be a certain type of person who’s gonna be drawn to Paganism versus the type of people who would be drawn in other faiths.

DIANA BROWN: I guess finally just, is there anything else that you want to say?

JEREMY ADKISON: Um, not really.

DIANA BROWN: Not really?

JEREMY ADKISON: I can’t think of much else.

DIANA BROWN: Think we’ve done it?

JEREMY ADKISON: Yeah, uh, yeah, I guess the lesson from my interview is that you really can be a mix of things and I think that’s kind of okay.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Awesome.

JEREMY ADKISON: So yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Thank you so much. This was fabulous.

JEREMY ADKISON: Hurray!

DIANA BROWN: Yea!

[01:00:01]

[End of recording]