

# A HEATHEN LITURGY



BY STEPHANIE BLAINE  
GYTHIA, MANNAHEIM KINDRED

## Cover Note about the Mannaheim Banner Elements

The Raven Represents Óðinn and his Ravens (Huginn and Muninn)

The Mannaz Rune Represents Mannaheim

The Sword Represents Tyr

The Keys Represent Frigga

The Vines Represent Frey

The Hammer Represents Thor

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This work is dedicated to our brother and Kinsman, Harris Spindle... And to Elisheva, because without her guidance and patience, Mannaheim as it exists today would not be possible.



# A Heathen Liturgy

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# A Heathen Liturgy

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Back at the beginning of the Internet, there were very few resources for people starting to practice Ásatrú/Heathenry (hereafter called Heathenry) on how to worship the Æsir and the Vanir; and, what that worship might look like without including the Western Mystery Tradition's circle casting with the four quarters and corresponding four elements. The one resource that stands out in my mind from that time is Ravenbok<sup>1</sup> by Lewis Stead of Raven Kindred North. Even today many Kindreds can trace elements of their own Blóts and Sumbels to that resource while never understanding the significance (of its differences) or know the origins of their ritual; and, many of us owe Lewis Stead our thanks and gratitude for taking the time to offer this ritual outline to us because it sets our style of worship apart from what they typically might see in "Circle".

In Ravenbok, Lewis Stead's "A Day in the Life (of an Ásatrú Organizer)"<sup>2</sup> describes what a Heathen Organizer (who is also sometimes the Kindred's Gothi or Gythia) goes through month after month, (year after year). It's a daunting task to take on the responsibility for being the one in charge of making sure that the public worshiping of the Northern Gods and Goddesses happens regularly. Typically, besides running ritual, that person opens up their home for the event (sometimes to strangers), feeds the guests (often with their own food if people don't bring enough to share), and puts things to right once the last guest leaves (occasionally without help, while considering who gets dis-invited next time). I remember reading those words years ago and not understanding what I was volunteering myself for.

When I felt called to start a Kindred with my husband and a few friends, I remember thinking it seemed like a lot of work, but that it could be a rewarding experience and fun. Reading Lewis Stead's words were comforting in that I knew that I was not alone; and, that by having a guide like his, whatever I came up with would less likely be judged as "wrong" or "not worthy" of the



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Gods that we were approaching to worship. Across the United States and in other parts of the world there were others just like me who were sitting at their computers on any given Saturday morning preparing to greet their day while finalizing their thoughts and words and actions for the monthly ritual before putting them to paper and printing it out to share with others.

Fast forward to today, 2020; it's been almost twenty-five years since I first read Ravenbok, and almost twenty years since Mannaheim was formed. While some things have remained the same, like "A Day in the Life..." some things have changed, (at least for us) like the Mannaheim liturgy.

The liturgy that I am about to share with you has most of the core elements from the Ravenbok ritual outline - Setting the Mood, Hammer Rite, Statement of Purpose, General Prayer, Personal Invocations, Invoking the Deity of the Occasion, Meditation, Offering/Sanctifying the Mead, Toasting the Deity of the Occasion, Remaining Toasts, Thanking Deity, Oath Ring Ceremony, and Pouring Libation<sup>3</sup>; and it rearranges the placement of some things, tweaks some other things and adds additional readings and meditations.

I intend to discuss each element of the ritual and explain why it is done (from my perspective) and then give examples of how it might be done alternatively to make it more personal for you and your Kindred.

But first, I want to provide my thoughts on what makes a good Kindred better, what makes an okay leader and/or Gothi (or Gythia) stronger, and, as a Heathen what are some ways to celebrate life's milestones in keeping with what we know about the Germanic/Scandinavian cultures and give it a modern Americanized flavor.

# **A Heathen Liturgy**

## **Why This Book?**

There are many outstanding books out there that describe the various aspects of Heathenry, the Northern Gods and Goddesses, the Runes and the Religion. However, there aren't many books out there that discuss the organizational principles at play or plausible liturgical practices providing a holistic view of what one might do regularly to call people together to worship the Æsir and the Vanir in a way that makes them feel spiritually fed in a format where all participants can share equally in the worship service, not just during the three rounds of toasts. And, for that reason, I felt called to share the method of how our Kindred worships and to provide some thoughts on why we've been so successful as an organization.

Please note that this book isn't about the Lore or the Sagas per se; nor does it stress that knowing the Lore, or the Sagas is the most important aspect of running a strong Kindred that will stand the test and trials and tribulations of time and modern life. This book is about giving you the rudiments to create your own brand, your own practices, and give you some ideas on how you can make YOUR beliefs YOUR version of YOUR Kindred's Heathen practice.

## **Who Are We?**

We are Mannaheim Kindred. We formed in 2002 in Northern Virginia. We have been flying the "Heathens Against Hate" banner since 2003, when it was available from the Woden's Harrow website. By conscious design, we are an independent Kindred. We do not affiliate with any local, state, national, or international organizations. We do not take direction from these organizations or from individuals acting in any capacity for these organizations. We deliberately rejected an affiliation with the Ásatrú Alliance, the Ásatrú Folk Assembly, The Troth, or any other Heathen organizations to keep our independence and to avoid combining our Wyrð and Örlög with people unknown to us.

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Mannaheim Kindred's norms are based on generic "Tribal Values" found across many cultures rather than the Nine Noble Virtues.

Mannaheim is the German word for "Midgard" (Miðgarðr), or Middle Earth, the place we humans call home. Because we live here in this place, we choose to be anchored in the "now".

We believe in respecting the Earth and we each work in our own way to improve the world in which we live. We are proud to have Ásatrúr, Wiccans, and other Neopagans in our membership and alliances.

We believe that everyone possesses the gift of speaking to the Gods and that the Gods speak through each of us in a variety of ways including our hands and hearts allowing us to create beauty, music, and items of utility.

While we do not require that our members "profess" to the gods and goddesses of the Northern Tradition, we request that only these deities be addressed during our Blóts, and, that only the Northern gods and goddesses be worshiped in our Hof.

We believe our deities look unfavorably upon those who mention other gods in their sacred space. We leave their fate in the hands of our Gods.

When visiting, it is perfectly acceptable to say "Hail to the Gods of my Hosts" during our Blóts if you are uncomfortable worshiping our deities. It is also acceptable to say "Hail the Gods".

Each of us pursues individual as well as shared interests. Engaging in esoteric education and are both group activities many of us enjoy. By coming together for group practice (Galdr and Seiðr) and scheduling weekend seminars with nationally known teachers we are constantly growing and

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learning unknown things. As a group some of us occasionally craft soap, make mead, and weave textiles, knit, and crochet.

We are normal people with normal jobs. We worship the Deities of the Northern Tradition wearing ordinary street clothes. Men and women equally pursue all aspects of the Northern Mystery Tradition.

Our symbol is the Elder Futhark rune, Mannaz; the rune of humanity. It represents both male and female energy and links us all at our most fundamental level. To us, Mannaz speaks of both gender and social equality. No one person is above another. Mannaz is the rune of community. It reminds us of our responsibility to others.

Mannaz represents the search for the inner Self. Ultimately, Mannaz is about people, tolerance, compassion, and kindness whether we are interacting in the workplace, our community, or in our closest relationships with our family, tribe, Kindreds, or Covens.

Mannaheim takes its name from the word “Manna/Mana”, meaning spiritual sustenance and power. It is like “Chi”, the life force of all things, which can be strengthened and manipulated.

Mannaheim is dedicated to creating a community that includes individuals, their children, and their kin. We are “inclusive” not exclusive. We do not discriminate based upon sexual orientation, race, creed, gender, or age. We follow the “No Tolerance For Intolerance” rule (and fly the Heathens Against Hate banner). We gladly accept LGBTs, non-Heathen family members, pescatarians, vegetarians, Soy/Gluten-free folk, and well-behaved children.

Our main goals are to provide a safe and supportive Tribal-centric environment that includes access to spiritual education and worship and to promote a child-friendly cultural heritage tradition-based exclusively upon the Northern Cosmology, Frith-Keeping, the study of the

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Hávamál, the Norse Sagas and Lore and, practical application of the Runes and other Northern Mysteries.

Our monthly rituals are instructive and focus on the Northern Mystery Tradition, the Elder Futhark Runes, the Heathen Liturgical Calendar, the Poetic and Prose Eddas, and the Northern (Germanic, Norwegian, and Scandinavian) Myths and Deities.

Our rituals are “participatory” in that readings are distributed among all willing attendees; and, we are always looking for strong readers.

We take pride because the group makes the mead used for our Sumbels and Blóts from prime ingredients such as artisan water; raw, unfiltered local honey; organic fruit and common culinary herbs and spices. We try to remember to announce the flavor/ingredients before Sumbel to alert anyone who might be sensitive, for example, to strawberries.

Besides the traditional three-round Sumbel, we share a meal together. We ask that people come prepared with a side dish that will feed about 15 people (the average number of participants).

We have been on Meetup.com since 2008; and, we have had over 300 events since we began keeping track of using Meetup.com. Being a Meetup.com Member does not automatically make someone a member of Mannaheim Kindred. There is a gradual/mutual getting to know period, and prospective members must consistently attend Monthly celebrations for at least one year before their membership in the Kindred is even formally discussed.

(Reprinted from an earlier version of our “About” page on Meetup.com; a version exists on our Facebook.com website)

## **A Heathen Liturgy**

### **Who Influenced Us In The Early Days (pre-2002)?**

#### **Authors**

- Aswynn, Freya – Northern Mysteries and Magick: Runes & Feminine Powers
- Gundarsson, Kveldulfr - Our Troth: History and Lore; Our Troth: Living the Troth; Teutonic Religion: Folk Beliefs & Practices of the Northern Tradition
- Holland, Kevin Crossley - The Norse Myths
- Hollander, Lee - The Poetic Edda
- Stead, Lewis - RavenBok
- Thorsson, Edred - Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic; The Nine Doors of Midgard
- Young, Jean - The Prose Edda

#### **Groups**

Approximately 20 years ago the Heathen community on the eastern seaboard of the United States that was known to us was very small. That doesn't mean that there weren't more groups, there probably were, but there were only five groups that we were the most familiar and interacted with:

- Raven Kindred North (mostly Massachusetts)
- Vingolf Fellowship (mostly New Jersey)
- Meadowburg Kindred (in western Pennsylvania)
- Raven Kindred South and Gladsheim Kindred (in Maryland, both way north of us)



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### Events

- The East Coast Thing is the longest continuously running Heathen event on the East Coast. It is sponsored mainly by Raven Kindred North, Vingolf Fellowship, Gladsheim Kindred, and others, and takes place in August at Camp Netimus in Milford, Pennsylvania. Meeting other Kindreds and sleeping in cabins with basic facilities and prepared food in the mess hall make this event worth attending. Mannaheim Kindred has attended over the years and found the fellowship with other Kindreds and shared activities to be helpful in shaping who we are today.
- Sirius Rising is one of the longest continuously running pagan events. It is sponsored by Brushwood Folklore Center and takes place in July in Sherman, New York. Mannaheim Kindred prefers attending an event that is both longer and has more people. This event is many of the Mannaheim Council members' only vacation.

### People

- Elisheva Kaftal of Adama Inc. is a Holistic Counseling Professional who taught Mannaheim over a period of years during weekend intensives the basics of organizational behavior, stages of team building (Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing) and the realities of resolving conflict among our members.
- Freya Aswynn visited with Mannaheim several times and provided insight into the Elder Futhark runes. Each time that Freya visited and spoke of the runes, she revealed another layer of meaning. We drove to New York City in the weeks after September 11th to take our first set of Seiðr classes with her.

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- Isaac Bonewits was a regular speaker in our early years. He gave incredible lectures on his books, Authentic Thaumaturgy, and Real Magick.
- Ragnar Hagmann Holm, Jr. is the Erulian Philosopher of the Denali Institute of Northern Traditions, in Chugiak, Alaska, who acted as my mentor in the early years as I struggled to find my place as a Heathen while working full-time in “mundania”. His biggest contribution to Mannaheim would have to be our shared understanding of the multiverse and Northern thought, the Northern Mysteries, and how it varied from the commonly understood Western Mysteries.

### What Is It Like To Be Heathen? (various)

*“It’s a total fulfillment of honor to yourself, your ancestors and your gods.”*

*“Having a relationship with the world and the Gods based on mutual trust and responsibility.”*

*“A spiritual journey you don’t travel alone. The Gods, the ancestors, and kindred are with you.”*

### What Is It Like To Be Part Of A Kindred?

Note: When I asked Kindred members to provide their thoughts, I was hoping that they would provide general insight into what it is like to be part of a kindred, not just being part of Mannaheim specifically. I am including their comments because while I think they brag on our Kindred, (and, the intent of this book is not to brag on how great we are, but to give you a guide on how you can build your own outstanding kindred) it gives you something to aspire to creating within your own group.

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**From Perris W:** Okay! So this is just from my perspective which I know will likely be different from others' perspectives.

- Mannaheim Guest: Being a guest of Mannaheim is a little intimidating. There exists a tribal familial dynamic that isn't taught in modern western societies, and it's a highly functional and cohesive unit. However, if you are able to recognize and adapt to this mindset, your time as a Mannaheim guest can only be described as fulfilling. There is a level of social, communal, and spiritual fulfillment that only a structure like a tribe can give. It can be described akin to coming home. You feel respected and heard as a guest, and you really start to understand that the Mannaheim values of guest hosting are practiced and upheld.
- Mannaheim Journeyman: When you have been invited to join the journeyman program and advance within the Mannheim tribal structure, there becomes this excited feeling. It can be a little intimidating facing down the sheer mountain of knowledge and experience standards you will start to be held too, but the tribe has now agreed you are on the path to becoming a voiced member so the weight of responsibility is a little offset by the willingness of tribe to support you. There's a much less anxiety to become an autonomous person and the fear of rejection from the tribe starts to ebb away. At this stage there is a lot more self-discovery as well. Being a Journeyman really tests your strength of faith and mind. This stage membership should not be taken on lightly.
- Mannaheim Kindred Member: In becoming a fully sworn member of the tribe there is a profound sense of acceptance. It feels as if your hard work both internally and externally have been validated and recognized by people you respect and look up too. Few achievements in life truly give this fulfillment and joy, but membership swearing is one of them. You understand that while your journey is not complete, your tribe has accepted and acknowledged that you are doing good on your path. However, membership doesn't feel like a completed circle. Rather, you understand far better the true weight of responsibility as now

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you are held to the highest Mannaheim standards. And you willingly accept the mantle because there is a deep well of trust and strength you have been building with your tribe since you were a guest. There is a new understanding that the work you do, and the values you uphold will far exceed your lifetime and everything you do now further adds to and cements that legacy in big ways. Membership, while coveted within a strong and amazing tribe, should not be taken lightly and only after thought, prayer and meditation should you decide to do this work.

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**From Samantha F.** Being a member of Mannaheim is something I have found to be both exceedingly simple but also surprisingly complicated. It's simple in the basic fact that as a member you are expected to uphold the Tribal Values and help others in the group to do the same. However, because it is an initiatory experience as well, there is a certain shift within your life that isn't always noticed at first. It's something that, at least in my life, built up until I am now faced with the choice of facing my own demons and darkness that has been in my past (also known as shadow work) or becoming increasingly more and more uncomfortable and feeling stuck.

I personally chose to walk through the tunnel and after being a member for just over 6 months at the time of this writing I would say I am nowhere near the end. However, what I will say is that when you are in a Kindred like Mannaheim you will find yourself with allies who are willing to help you through that work. It's not something you have to face alone. Different people will help in different ways: from giving hugs and a shoulder to cry on, to blunt honesty and calling you on your bullshit when you need it. If the Kindred is a good Kindred then there should be no reason you can't easily find those people around you and if you have been with that Kindred for several years before becoming a Member (which is how Mannaheim operates) then you already have developed those friendships with others in the group and they will be more than willing to help you, as your success is also success for the group as a whole.

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**From Rob N.** I felt like a full member of Mannaheim even as a guest/journeyman. The collective study groups, road trips, attending ECT, and especially attending monthly Blot, created an atmosphere of family and kinship. Mannaheim encourages personal growth and emphasizes teamwork. In Mannaheim, I found the support to take the oath to profess my Faith to the Gods. The profession of faith was a major milestone in my life, and it holds a special meaning since becoming a member of Mannaheim. To follow the Gods and to be part of Mannaheim takes work and commitment, but the effort is worth the time when one has a deep spiritual connection to the Gods and the Kindred. Doing one's part, sharing in the spiritual path of other members and journeyman, making guests feel welcome to Kindred events are just a few responsibilities when part of Mannaheim. The Gods call but it is up to every individual to put the effort in to make the relationship grow, it is the same for the Kindred.

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**From Christine K.** My journey began days after September 11<sup>th</sup> , 2001, in New York City when I attended intensive course work to learn of the runes and experience Seiðr work with Freya Aswynn. I was stumbling in the dark, trying to figure out who I was, what I believed in, and where I was supposed to go next on both a mundane path as well as a spiritual one. This is when and where I met the Gythia and Chieftain of Mannheim and life was never the same.

As you have read in previous accounts being Heathen is simple and yet complex in several ways. One of the things I value as a member of Mannaheim is the fact that I am allowed to be who I am and I am accepted for who I am. My thoughts, my feelings, my presence and participation, however small or large, is valued. It is the tribal system that is learned, instilled, followed, respected and honored, that allows this to be possible.

In the beginning it was a lot of learning, and trying to figure out that there is no power dynamic at play. I like to describe a tribe as a well-oiled machine, a fully functioning engine, and all of its parts are equally important and essential, just like all of the members. Having come from a brief

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experience of being in a coven, and learning its rules, dynamics, and hierarchy, I found there was always a power struggle. Who was willing to accept their place, who wanted more attention, who was seeking more power, and who needed to shine brighter than others. It made me feel uncomfortable. I am not a power seeker, or an attention seeker, and until recently I was not fully aware of the issues I personally struggled with regarding codependency, and boundaries.

Becoming a member of Mannaheim is, as someone else stated, is an initiatory experience. Have no doubt it will change your life. What it will do is make you a better person through and through, and while going through that experience, it will provide you with the best support team you could ever imagine. There will always be someone there. Mannheim and the runes, make it impossible to avoid looking and delving within. It sets you off on an internal spiritual journey that makes you look at all parts of yourself, like it or not, good and bad, and propels you to improve. Part of that involves learning what being a member of a tribe means, and how to function within it and how to maintain balance. Some will know that as frith.

You are not left to learn this alone, you are not left stumbling in the dark and feeling lost. Mannheim has your back the entire time, and training is offered. Everyone learns, grows, succeeds and fails together. Together is a concept many feel they understand but never fully experience, until you are a member of Mannaheim. There is a feeling of equality, that we all learn from one another, no matter the age difference, experience, upbringing, economic status, educational level, racial, physical, sexual orientations or gender. What is valued is who you are and how we function together like a well-oiled machine. Even the tiniest of bolts in an engine can cause a breakdown, and is as essential to make it run smooth, just like every member of this tribe.

What begins to happen, is these values become a part of your everyday life. They are not values you have to try to remember, or memorize. They are not rules like the Nine Noble Virtues, that are stoic and rigid, they are values that embody who you are as a whole person, spiritually,

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mentally, physically, and morally. They become part of your DNA, your Hamingja, and your ancestral lineage. It is impossible to live without honoring those values. The members of this group help you deal with things that pertain to the group, as well as things that pertain to mundane experiences. You are never alone and you truly belong to a tribe. This experience is like a mystery, it is not fully comprehended until it is experienced, and once it is, there is a cohesive bond that is unbreakable because of the level of respect, equality, and value each member has for one another without judgement.

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**From Aodan C.** I have thoroughly enjoyed being an attendee of Mannaheim. It has been a very open and welcoming place that is full of many opinions and great discussion. Being fairly new to Heathenry and Paganism the depth and breadth of knowledge has been amazing for my ability to learn more and to have engaging meaningful conversations about the faith. Being religiously active is incredibly important to me and I am quite happy to have found a great group of people who also take the religion seriously. Other less involved groups may very well have left me feeling spiritually and intellectually unsatisfied but Mannaheim has always taken the spiritual wellbeing of its members seriously and worked to create a functioning living religion.

### What Is It Like To Be A Gothi/Gythia/Chieftain?

Difficult. Frustrating. Exhausting. Thrilling. Rewarding. Seriously.

If you are in it for the power and the control, forget about it. Heathens are notoriously “rugged individualists” and subscribe to the “you’re not the boss of me” philosophy. This is the exact opposite to what it must be like to run a traditional Alexandrian or Gardnerian coven, where the High Priestess’s Word is Law. That said, once you can get people focused on the goal and working together toward making the Kindred successful, it is an awesome experience most of the time. But it is still tough because somehow as the Gythia, you have to convince people to follow you,

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and, no decision is ever made in a vacuum. Be prepared for all decisions you make to be up for discussion, even if they aren't!.

When we first started thinking about creating a Kindred in Northern Virginia, I reached out to Kindred leaders in the United States and across the world. If they had a website, I contacted them; and, I asked them about their experiences running a Kindred and their recommendations.

All of those that responded suggested starting small and not trying to do too much and guarding against burn out by not trying to be all things to all people. Some of them counseled getting together as often as possible to just hang out while others counseled that getting together too frequently makes people less likely to want to stay in the group because they get bored.

That said, based on what is on our Meetup.com website, I would hazard to guess that over the years Mannaheim has averaged 13 main rituals, at least three “quarterly” Council meetings, one or two weekend seminars, at least one craft project or community service project, one or two “away team” trips to visit other groups and the annual camp out in any year. Those activities are in addition to the monthly Heathen Nights Out, weekly training discussions and other Members-only weekend intensives. I assure you it isn't all me. Without considerable help from the rest of the Kindred what we do as a group is impossible for one person.

Being the Gythia is not a full time/paid position; and, most of us have other responsibilities like working inside or outside the home and/or taking care of children or parents. Balancing all the other roles and responsibilities does not leave a lot of time and energy for running a Kindred, planning rituals, and, providing comfort in times of need. Yet, people long ago did it just the same in between fighting petty skirmishes, milking cows, farming, and putting away food for the long winter before the conquering Kings took their Gods from them.

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I feel that I am doing my part to awaken the Gods and give them nourishment through my work as Gythia, and, I at least have the luxury of a gas-powered car, a supermarket, and, a home with electricity and heat and air conditioning!

As Gythia I control the moving contents of the ritual, the flow of the energy within the ritual, and the main course for the meal that follows ritual. While I keep running copies of everything that we do year to year, over time, and sometimes over the course of the year the ritual changes and evolves based upon input from the Council members either as part of a focused discussion or because it comes up in conversation and we agree that something needs to be added or removed or reworded or placed somewhere else in the ritual.

On the day of the ritual, I bring up the month's standard ritual on my computer. I then compare it to last month's to incorporate any last-minute changes and I read through it to make sure that the moving content is still relevant. Sometimes I add a reference to a current event; sometimes I might change one of the poems we read for that month; and sometimes I just review the readings to make sure that the hard to pronounce names are spelled phonetically. This takes a few hours and is done over coffee before going to the store to select something for the main dish. Depending on how many vegetarians are in the group I usually aim for one meat dish and one combined protein, like rice and lentils.

With burnout inevitable, this has not always been an easy discipline with me and I have coped by putting myself in the headspace that I am "gifting" my Saturday to the people I serve, the ancestors and the Gods so they can all be spiritually fed as they commune with one another in that ritual space. I try to do this with a light heart and still create a space in time for a period of hours where mead is shared and given to the earth, where bread is broken among friends and both laughter and sorrow are free to hold forth.

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Over the years it became difficult for me to feel that this was an even exchange; I felt like I was the one giving and that I wasn't getting what I needed back. However, when I have had to step away and physically be someone else due to family obligations and illness, the rituals happened just the same because others could step into the breach and do what needed to be done without missing a beat. This small act by the members of the Kindred made me realize that it's not just about me and my role as Gythia, it is all about the Kindred and the people we serve!

### CHAPTER 2. THE SECRET SAUCE

#### What Makes A Kindred Healthy, Growing, And Viable?

Early on Mannaheim consciously embraced the humanistic values inherent in organizational development theory as explained to us by Elisheva Kaftal of Adama Inc. Our organizational goals included:

1. Providing opportunities for people to function as valued individuals within the Kindred:
  - New people are asked to help with setup and take part in the ritual usually by reading something during the ritual.
  - As time goes on, they are given more responsibility or take the initiative themselves to lead a minor project; this is a key part of our Journeyman process.
  - Once they become members, we assign them a permanent job or role based on what they are good at.
2. Providing opportunities for each member, and for Mannaheim itself to develop to their full potential:
  - As stated in the “About” section on our meetup.com website: “Mannaz represents the search for the inner Self...”
  - In the “Boons and Boasts” round of the ritual people are encouraged to talk about what they might be working on, for example, obtaining a certification, a degree, meeting a personal goal, and when they are successful, having those successes are celebrated by the group. When they are unsuccessful, we encourage them to continue trying.
  - One of our core beliefs is that we believe that everyone possesses the gift of speaking to the Gods and that the Gods speak through each of us in a variety of ways including our

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hands and hearts allowing us to create beauty, music, and items of utility. So, while there is a “Priest Class”, people filling that role are no better than anyone else.

3. Seeking often to increase the effectiveness of Mannaheim in terms of all of its goals:
  - We have regularly scheduled Council meetings where we discuss everything from the calendar of events, what is working or is not working, changes to the ritual, membership issues, etc.
  - We have “hot washes” after major events to critique our performances and discuss what went well and what could have gone better.
4. Creating an environment in which it is possible to find exciting and challenging things to work on:
  - We encourage all members to suggest new activities or to support other people’s suggested activities. This can be as simple as showing up to a Meetup.com dinner suggested by one member. It can be as complex as helping someone start a new garden.
  - Many of my favorite memories have been taking part in an activity that I didn’t have to plan!
5. Providing opportunities for members to influence how they relate to Mannaheim:
  - This is accomplished through individual participation in ritual, becoming a full member, leading activities, and shaping Mannaheim’s future organization.
  - Through Council meetings, we develop group positions on certain things based on our Tribal Values and Heathen culture. We reach these group positions through consensus and by discussing the minor points to death.
6. Treating each member as a person with a complex set of needs, all of which are important:
  - We consciously attempt to talk to new people who visit to get to know them.



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- While we aren't trained counselors, we attempt to actively listen to what people are saying and offer help when and where we can.
- However, we cannot allow the needs of one person continually to become the entire focus of the group.

Our organizational goals are reflected in the statements of who we are and what we do on our Facebook.com website.

### Group Positions

(per our Chieftain, B. Johns)

A group position is your "corporate stance" on an issue. You have a publicly stated opinion that all members of the group share. The answer will always be the same regardless of which member in your Kindred is asked about a specific topic.

This is a distinction between "we" think and "I" think. Our norm is that we differentiate between the Mannaheim group position on something versus our own opinion on something, if they differ. It sometimes does.

Because we use the Tribal Values to facilitate our "shared language/values" we have developed a shared language around the values so we all know what we mean when we say something. These shared values create a group culture that has been reinforced over the years with many weekend seminars using our corporate coach and our own team building weekends. The work required to have a group position led to us growing as individuals as we all express our views and concerns during the process. At the end, each member of the kindred can express such a position with confidence. We know where everyone stands. Outside of the group, others can see that we stand for certain things and we can be depended on when called to do so, when we feel it is

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appropriate. Having group positions allows us to be proactive rather than reactive and in a time sensitive situation the group can act with precision and decisively.

It also has allowed us to get to know what everyone thinks and when someone new comes into the group and tries to disrupt us, it doesn't work as they might like because we have already discussed the subject and have group agreement. Extreme views are unlikely to become group positions because we all have to agree to support them. We call this, "How do we get to 'yes'?". What can people live with within the given parameters and what part do they not support?

Having a group discussion is key to air out great sounding ideas that need some more "polish" and to pull the thread on ideas that sound noble but are unwise. Group positions allow us to establish "diplomatic relations" with other groups. Do they have a set of values? Do we share those values? Having a group position means there is no question. It means that the Kindred has discussed it multiple times and it is where we stand as a group. Any members can express that view and live it and stand assured that the kindred supports it.

One of our group positions governs how we approach differing situations. How do we react? Do we:

- Observe and take notes
- Carefully stay out of it (no horse in the race)
- Take action

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### **Examples of Group Positions**

#### **Heathens Against Hate**

When Mannaheim started forming group positions as part of our “corporate culture” in 2003, one of the first group positions was to address how we viewed hatred. Our corporate coach Elisheva suggested flying a banner at events similar to the one she has that says, “Heathens Against Fascism”. After a group discussion we went with “Heathens Against Hate” (mirroring what was on the Woden’s Harrow website). Over time, in 2007, that lead to another group position about not knowingly attending events that included folkish groups or speakers.

#### **Gender**

In 2002 when we were looking at how to address “Who does what?”, Elisheva suggested that we follow the “non-gender specific” model of communes and kibbutzim. Which means whoever can do something well, does it and teaches others how to do it. This also means that we expect everyone to pitch in and help with whatever we are working on.

#### **National Groups**

Early on, we decided that we did not want the “Wyrð” and “Ørlög” of a national group to affect us. While people were free to join groups as they wanted, Mannaheim decided that we would rather interact directly with other congregations (Kindreds) and individuals.

#### **Other Group Positions**

- Children and guests eat first. As good hosts this ensures that everyone equally adheres to the Hospitality value.

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- Advocate for the vulnerable. We speak up when we see that someone is struggling with being heard or having their needs addressed.
- Being in the shade of our tent. The enemies of our friends and allies are our enemies. We don't eat at their table; we don't do business with them; we don't acknowledge them.
- No unwelcome attention. People must read and sign our Prevention of Sexual Harassment training document before they attend any of our private events. We also support the right of other groups to bar people for the behavior and will support them by not allowing these people to attend our events.

These are just some examples of our group positions that are directly tied to our values. They don't have to be yours, but, we would be flattered if they were!

### **Worthwhile Team-Building Activities**

There are all different kinds of Kindreds out there. Some come together for worship only a few times a year. The individuals don't know each other well and they may have nothing in common other than they show up, have a Blót, make small talk, and go home. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you have Kindreds who have solid relationships with most if not all of their Kinsmen and Kinswomen and they might be friends outside of the Kindred. Neither is better than the other, it is personal preference. But, if you have read this far, then obviously, you are interested in having a more robust Kindred experience.

The way to get from a group of strangers who are worshipping together to a Kindred that is tight knit is to do things together, have shared experiences. They don't have to be expensive. One

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thing that our Kindred has learned because of COVID-19 is that we can still have virtual experiences using a variety of social media platforms. We use Facebook and Discord for chatting and sharing files. Facebook is more of our “public-facing” social media tools whereas Discord is more for our “in-kindred” communication.

While waiting for social distancing to ease, these things can be accomplished virtually:

1. Studying the Lore
2. Learning the Runes
3. Spinning, Weaving, knitting, etc. (people do these activities while chatting on-line)

Once you’re able to meet safely face to face again, these activities can be a way to obtain shared experiences:

1. Facilitated Weekend Intensives (Seiðr; Sitting out; Group Dynamics)
2. Breaking bread (Heathen Nights Out or group dinner in someone’s home)
3. Camping
4. Hunting
5. Making mead
6. Making soap
7. Woodworking
8. Horn carving
9. Ironworking, smelting
10. Day trips to museums, parks, movies, plays

If all of you in your Kindred or group of friends are just starting and have little or nothing in the way of food and drink, you can practice something I like to call “Stone Soup”. Have each person

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bring one or two things to the Blót to put in the pot to make a soup or stir-fry, items to make a quick bread or fried rice, and a healthy fruity dessert or salad.

Also, in our Kindred, it is not just “two Yules” and you’re automatically given a chance at membership. You must have attended most Blóts, as well as a few extracurricular events such as Pagan Pride Day or Viking Fest, and one weekend/overnight activity such as a group camp out or weekend intensive. We want a chance to see people doing mundane things and get a sense of who they are.



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### **Where Are The Nine Noble Virtues?**

We don't use them. They are individually focused traits (and we've always been more collaborative) so they never fit with what we've been doing. Following the events that led to the creation of Declaration 127<sup>4</sup> we no longer reference the Nine Noble Virtues in any of our literature. However, we do have picture with us and our banner that we've since retired because it lists them along with our Tribal Values.

### **Our Tribal Values**

First, let me explain what I mean by Tribal. According to Dictionary.com, tribal means “of, relating to, or characteristic of a tribe”<sup>5</sup>. Tribe is defined as “any aggregate of people united by ties of descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same leaders, etc.”<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia defines tribalism as “the state of being organized by or advocating for, tribes or tribal lifestyles”<sup>7</sup>. Tribalist Heathens believe that anyone can be Heathen, but there must be a deep adoption of Norse culture in order for someone to call themselves Heathen.<sup>8,9</sup>

### **How does tribalism work within Mannaheim?**

Anyone meeting the outlined Membership requirements may join Mannaheim and become part of our tribe, or a friend/ally of our tribe, as long as they live by the Tribal Values and respect our norms. While Mannaheim is not politically or ethnically tribal, Mannaheim divides people into “us versus them” based upon a person's actions and beliefs and whether those actions and beliefs follow the Tribal Values. Adherence to the Tribal Values is the most important factor in determining if someone is a part of Mannaheim and/or a friend/ally of Mannaheim. Anyone refusing to do their best to adhere to the Tribal Values cannot be a part of Mannaheim or a friend/ally of Mannaheim.<sup>10</sup>

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### **Where/how did tribalism become taboo?**

Unfortunately, Tribalism has become taboo over time due to its being lumped into Folkish thought by knee-jerk neo-liberal politics. When Googling tribalism<sup>11</sup>, several results discuss tribalism from the political standpoint of each party being their own tribe and sworn enemies of each other. Thus, it is my opinion that the anger and hatred of “them” which has become so ingrained in US politics has bled into tribalism as a whole and tainted this concept. Mannaheim has worked with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker / Organizational Behaviorist and has adopted the following “Tribal Values” to govern our behavior toward one another. Desert cultures and Snow cultures share many of the same cooperative / collaborative behaviors in order to survive and we in Mannaheim feel that these behaviors also work well in an intentional community setting.<sup>12</sup>

### **What are the Tribal Values?**

Note: These values are copyright protected by Elisheva Kaftal of Adama Inc. and may not be duplicated without her permission. I would encourage you to reach out to her (or us) if you would like to know more about them. Reading these words and trying to incorporate them without having weekend lectures where you go through each one of them line by line and discuss how they might apply to your situation or group will not net you the same result!

#### **1. Autonomy –**

Practice sovereignty in your soul.

Develop the abilities needed to fend for yourself.

Develop pursuits that earn you a right and decent livelihood.

Take care of your body lest you endanger or harm others.

Do not live as a parasite; do your share (and more).

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### 2. Cooperativeness –

It is not good for humans to be alone.

Value the strength of more than one arm, the richness of cooperating minds.

Live in symbiosis; with the Earth and with other people.

Do not hesitate to offer or to ask for assistance.

### 3. Courage –

Be daring. Dare to try new things, scrutinize, and improve things.

Dare to stick with old things, if they work for you.

Respect Courage. Do not be an accomplice by remaining silent.

### 4. Generosity –

Be charitable of mind, of heart, and with resources.

Do not be small-minded and petty.

### 5. Honor –

Respect yourself and others.

Do not sully your sword.

Keep your word, your commitments, and, your contracts.

### 6. Hospitality –

Be a good host.

A guest in your house becomes a guest friend.

Do not dispense your guest friendship lightly, lest you regret it.

### 7. Family –

Respect family of blood and family of choice.

Give family its due.

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### 8. Frankness –

Speak your mind.

Say what you mean.

Mean what you say.

Do not keep a shameful silence.

### 9. Friendship –

An alliance with others is a commitment.

Do not choose friendships lightly, lest you find yourself defending an unworthy friend.

### 10. Moderation –

Exercise self-control in all things.

Do not engage in over-intoxication of any kind, lest you be called upon to use your wits.

Eat with restraint both so that others may eat, and you are not slowed down by excess weight.

Have passion, not fanaticism.

Live for a cause; do not kill for it.

Seek balanced ideas and ideology, lest people avoid you and your opinions.

### 11. Simplicity –

Keep it simple.

Don't clutter your life with useless people or things.

### 12. Steadfastness -

Keep your contracts and your commitments.

Stand by your friends.

Stay on course.

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### **What is a Benevolent Dictatorship and How Does It Make or Break Your Kindred?**

A Benevolent Dictatorship is a theoretical form of government in which an authoritarian leader exercises absolute political power over the state but is seen to do so for the benefit of the entire population. A benevolent dictator may allow for some democratic decision-making to exist, such as through public referenda or elected representatives with limited power.

If you have children, you know what I am talking about. The role of a benevolent parent is one of absolute power and control while giving the illusion of freedom and choice to the children. In the beginning stages of your fledgling Kindred, this style of management is helpful and probably necessary. Because just as soon as you have done all the heavy lifting and have created something brilliant, worthy of showing off at the next Althing or Moot you will attract to your group the very people who would just as soon relieve you of your organization. Controlling the power of the purse, surrounding yourself with staunchly loyal people, and, knowing when to use the iron fist in a velvet glove will ensure that while the wolves may come circling, they will soon be set back on their heels. Having an iron-clad set of bylaws is very necessary.

### **Money**

As you decide whom to invite to be in your Kindred, it's good to ask yourself what that person brings with them that will help your group. While bringing funds is immensely helpful, keep in mind the axiom, "He who has the gold rules". If you want to retain control of the group and not have it wrestled away from you because of money/power squabbles, think carefully before accepting an offer of money or a meeting place.

If it's your gold, it's your rules, and so much the better. Controlling the money and the meeting place keep the power of the group squarely where it belongs, with you. That said, having the money and the place will not buy you a Kindred long term. As you learned on the playground, if

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you don't place nice and are careful with your friends, they will leave you to eat lunch by yourself. This does not mean that people have the right to abuse your wealth or your home, it merely means that you should be gracious with the funds you provide and use it as "seed money" to help the Kindred grow and flourish, and, graciously accept offers of help early and often.

We found it is far simpler to keep the funds "in-group" and to be a pay-as-you-go organization. We don't collect dues and we try to stay within our means and plan for major expenditures in advance by saving money to pay for them. That means that it might limit the number of people you have in your Kindred because you don't have a big enough ritual/meeting space; that means that your rituals/meetings might be limited to warm weather if you live in a cold climate and need to have them outside to accommodate the number of people you have; that means that if most your members are living hand to mouth, you may have to scale back planned activities because they can't afford to attend and do not want you to pay their way time after time. Unless you have a lot of young people in your Kindred, it is just not a good idea to be the one always paying for everything. If they don't have it to give, do without, and scale way back. Be okay with that in the short term and take the long view.

Through your interactions with the ancestors and the Gods, they will provide to improve their environment. It may not be what you want, but it will be what they need.

### **501(c) (or Not)?**

A 501(c) organization is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization in the United States. The most common type of tax-exempt nonprofit organization falls under category 501(c)(3), which is a nonprofit organization is exempt from federal income tax if its activities have the following purposes: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition, or preventing cruelty to children or animals.

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The first step in the process is to get an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service. Once you have an EIN you can open a checking account at your local bank and take donations and write checks against it for paying speakers, site rental, food for events, and supplies that support the event (paper goods, copier expenses, for example). You can give people receipts for the fair market value of what they have donated and for cash donations.

Keep in mind that many banks require that you keep a minimum balance for that account to remain viable. Groups typically run into difficulty when the account falls below the minimum and the monthly service charges cause them to lose money.

For many groups, having an EIN is usually all that they need to keep the organization on track. Some people like being able to take the exemption out at tax time. Food (and beer) add up over the year and if you keep your receipts you may be surprised at exactly how much you are spending in support of your Kindred events.

The second step of the 501(c) non-profit status is to then apply for 501(c) status through your state. In some cases, this is a straightforward process, in other states it is a long, drawn-out, tedious affair. The main reason that you may want to have the state recognize your 501(c) is that the goods that you purchase that are solely used for that event or in support of your organization are tax exempt. If you are buying a lot of expensive things for your group, then having a formal state-recognized 501(c) might make good sense to you. Additionally, any large purchases like tents, portable garages, van rentals for transport, group brewing equipment would be tax-free.

Unless you are fortunate to have the perfect home for Blóts and Sumbels and other life event celebrations you may have to rent a site for these occasions. Sums of money collected can then go toward paying rent, utilities, and site improvements.

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Other organizations aspire to build a Hof. This is not an inexpensive endeavor. If it is built with donations it belongs to the organization, usually represented by the Board of Directors, not to any individual. When the organization ceases to exist, the Hof, if it is a physical building that is owned and not rented must be sold. There are ways around this. Be sure to consult an attorney or other person who is knowledgeable on how all of this might work for you.

### Wo(Man)power

Mannaheim neither distinguishes “Women’s Work” from “Men’s Work” nor does it divide religious participation along gender roles. In 2002, the Kindreds of our acquaintance in the northeast had Gythias as well as Gothis. There never seemed to be an emphasis on it being an assigned role based upon gender, rather it was more who felt comfortable standing in front of the group and running ritual, or who’s home the ritual was being held in. Furthermore, while there seemed to be a preponderance of women who sat on the High Seat (if, indeed it was even part of the Kindred’s practice), there didn’t seem to be a rejection of men who wished to do that either. Consequently, if a man wishes to sit on the High Seat for Seiðr, no one in Mannaheim says that he can’t because he doesn’t have a vagina; or that he is unmanly (Ergi) for having the desire to sit on the High Seat.

Raven Kaldera writes in the book, *Wightridden: Paths of Northern-Tradition Shamanism*, Ergi: The Way of the Third,

“It’s also often observed that when it comes to tribal sex-roles and the tasks and taboos differentiated between them, there are really three gender roles - men, women, and shamans. Regardless of the shaman’s gender presentation, they are permitted to do what is not permitted, because their position sets them apart, and because doing so gives them power - not just in public opinion, but in the web of maegen and hamingja. Male shamans could be around women in



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childbirth without harm to themselves; women shamans could touch sacred objects usually restricted from female contact.”<sup>13</sup>

For other issues, when Mannaheim was unsure of how to handle gender issues as part of our Americanized Heathen culture, we tended to look to modern Germany and the Scandinavian countries for clues and guidance first, before looking to the Lore, which we felt was heavily influenced by Christian politics in Snorri Sturluson’s time.<sup>14</sup>

Pernille Lønne Mørkhagen, in her article “The Position of Women in Norway”, for ExploreNorth.com, states that: “We live in a culture where women have a prominent position and where the general attitude is that nothing that is possible for a man is impossible for a woman. Other cultures may even perceive Norwegian women as being somewhat mannish due to their open and direct way of dealing with others.

“At the same time our enlightened and equalized society has a flipside, and that is that even though women have broken every barrier and entered every male bastion, the work women do is on the whole not valued as highly as the man’s. Our highly regulated society has not been completely successful in creating a framework in which the care-giving tasks traditionally carried out by women alone are equally divided between women and men or provided by professions in a completely satisfactory manner.

“It has been said that as long as men do not and are not expected to participate as much on the home front as women are now doing in public life, we will not have real quality in Norwegian society. But there can be no doubt that we have come a long way.”<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, Mørkhagen alludes to influence from the Christian Right to persuade women to stay home full time with their children as a direct reaction to the Norwegian government’s focus on gender equality.

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“In recent years we have seen two different reactions to the Government’s active promotion of gender equality. One is that equal rights should focus on the rights of men from now on while the other is a campaign by the Christian Right to persuade parents (i.e. mothers) to stay home more with their youngest children.”<sup>16</sup>

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I would hope that newly formed Kindreds would assign tasks to whomever is the best at them rather than assigning tasks based upon gender roles.

In Mannaheim culture, if a person helps with meal preparation or cooks something for the meal, they are generally excused from doing the dishes or cleaning up afterward providing that there are enough people to get the cleanup done quickly. You should encourage people to help with taking out the trash, putting your house back in order, and providing paper plates, cutlery, sodas, and ice. Over the long term, it will help them feel as if they belong and keep you from feeling overextended and resentful.

Regardless of one’s position in the Kindred, each person is expected to take part and help with various aspects of the Blót. That means that although I might run ritual, I am the one cleaning my house, doing the shopping and some of the cooking!

I could say that in managing most things day-to-day Mannaheim uses the “distributed” power model and divides labor among the most capable and the most willing members of the Kindred. Unless a person displays a willingness to take part, get their hands dirty, or lead a minor event they are not ever considered for permanent membership within the Kindred. They can come, they can be “long-term” hangers-on, but they will never be a full Kindred member. This is not an

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awful thing. These “friends of” can be delightful guests and will usually never cause you any political strife.

If I have the Kindred, I have a better than even chance of thriving in the face of adversity, and if it involves the Zombie Apocalypse, I’m golden. Every Kindred member is good at something and we can usually figure out how to make something useful from scraps and junk, fix whatever is broken, cobble together sumptuous living quarters for a dozen people in the space of a few hours and feed a nourishing meal to a hungry hoard from a seemingly bottomless pot.

We have “backups” for our leadership positions so that in the case of an illness or other unforeseen event, the ritual or other scheduled event goes on as planned. As Gythia, I have planned for my eventual retirement and have trained my replacement, many times! Any one of the Mannaheim “Gythia-in-Training” people can fully conduct the ritual, providing constructive direction and standing in regarding whichever circumstance the community might find itself. Other positions are similarly structured so that willing hands have roles and responsibility and when that function is required, they are in charge and everyone must follow their lead. Because of cross-training, over time people have developed a useful portfolio of practical skills that carry over into their mundane lives.

After you are firmly established as a Kindred, do consider assigning some younger people to help with the simpler ritual tasks and have training sessions where you explain the elements of your ritual, where they came from, what your thought processes were for doing certain things. Sharing your wisdom and power with others is a lot like love... it increases what you have to give.

It’s helpful when I am running around at the last-minute popping people’s food into the oven, finding dishes or serving spoons to have the younger people tasked with assigning ritual parts, setting up the altar, and finding a vase for offered flowers. This gives them a sense of belonging and added responsibility.

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### **Win-Win Vs. Win-Lose (also known as “Either We Both Win or You Lose...”)**

At Mannheim’s beginning (2002) each founding family/individual in the Kindred was allowed one voice or seat on the Mannaheim Council. This allowed each family to be heard without creating voting blocs within the families that could derail Kindred/Council decision-making. Today, because of the hard lesson of experience, the Mannaheim Council is comprised of the five permanent Board of Directors and the officers appointed by the Council. All decisions made by the Council are final.

Our Council and how we are organized is not a secret. We have found that providing people with information about our membership and governance process sets the tone for new people and reduces misunderstandings.

Until you find your sweet spot with your core group, limiting your Council or Board to initial represented member families or individuals prevents churn in your Kindred if a newly minted member suddenly wants to change how things are done, or blocks efforts in motion, or becomes a petty tyrant drunk on their newly gained Council or Board member seat. It can happen to the best Kindreds.

Once your group goes through its initial “Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing” stage it is better to bring in new members slowly to ensure that your new members don’t dilute or overpower what your group has built up and struggled to create. Give the new people a chance to gel with the rest of the group before bringing in more new people. We have a rotation inward that takes about two years from the time we vote that we like what we see in an individual and want to bring them closer to becoming full members. They attend Kindred Blóts and open events consistently for one year. Then if they “pass muster” with the group, they serve at least one year as a Journeyman and are then invited to “closed events” for at least a year to see how they do. Then, we (and they) decide whether we want to make them full members.

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We have discovered that people change over time or reveal themselves slowly. It is prudent to take the time to let the process play out. There is nothing worse than watching an organization that you have built up with your own money, time, sweat, blood, and tears being torn asunder by strife bringers who think they are entitled to come in and change everything to suit themselves. It may happen once or twice before you and your Kindred members see some warning patterns of behavior.

When it happens, go back to your Council or Board to gain support, arrive at a consensus on the way forward, and try to achieve at a solid win-win position within the core group. If you cannot arrive at a consensus with the individual, then it is probably wise to tell them that in retrospect your group probably isn't a good fit for them after all and offer to help them find a group more suited to their talents and abilities. Usually, that isn't necessary because if you have the rest of your Council or Board beside you, the individual then usually leaves in a huff.

This is what I mean by a Benevolent Dictatorship. Because you facilitated the group position from win-win to a group position of win-lose, you will be seen as the bad guy for facilitating this broadsided all-out stop. However, you are doing it for the greater good. It's a lot like pulling the fire alarm. Do it too many times and your group will lose respect for you and you might even lose all your members. A minor disagreement now and again is healthy. A display of initiative, even when the idea is way out in left field could be a welcome show of personal empowerment that could be channeled and put to good use, for both their and the Kindred's benefit.

In most cases it is best to take a step back and actively watch and wait to see how it all unfolds; check in with your Council and see what they think. It is only when disagreements or the proposed initiative threaten the previously agreed-upon norms, values or traditions by limiting healthy discourse, causing dissent between members, or threaten the agreed-upon status quo should you put the kibosh on people's desire for change. Listen to your core group. If they say there is a problem or that they are uncomfortable about someone trying to enter the group, they

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are probably right. If you don't have the stomach for standing up for your group and being the bad guy under these circumstances, being a Gythia of an Heathen Kindred is probably not for you.

Being a Gythia of an Heathen Kindred means that you focus on five things or more when hosting a Blót or other gathering. Rely on your Council and core members to be your eyes and ears. Ensure that they know that they can tell you when they hear or see something that might be a cause for concern. Many times, members of the Kindred have assumed that I know all and see all, but, I don't unless they tell me. This is especially true if you are the homeowner. Your Kindred and guests should know that they can come to you if something is not right.

Americans are overly polite and will do anything to avoid conflict. They will watch the elephant in the room breaking all the things and whisper about it but will not address it with the elephant. That's what your Council is for. Discuss the problem and decide and then follow through. Do not make excuses for why you need to continue to allow a toxic person to break all your things.

An issue that came to our attention rather late was a recently sworn member's unsolicited sexual attention of female guests at events and other gatherings. These guests were afraid to speak up because they felt that if they did, we would see them as strife bringers and would no longer be welcome. This was our introduction to unsolicited "dick pics". As an older adult, I had never heard of such a thing, and, once the situation unfolded, the Council got an unholy education! We bumbled our way through it because we never expected that we would have to deal with something like this. We learned a lot about how useful the bylaws were, because, let's be honest, once you write them do you ever read them? And, in the hot wash afterward, the real question, was, "How did this ever happen and how can we prevent it from ever happening again?"

As part of that discovery process, which coincided with the "Me Too" movement, we realized that unless a millennial was affiliated with the military or government, many of them had no

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exposure to sexual harassment training. They did not understand that such a thing as sexual harassment training even existed.

Our answer was to appropriate the Veterans Administration's Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) training, and our version is now required reading by anyone who comes to events at our home. It is on our Facebook page and they must print out the certificate and sign it to show that they have read the document and understand that:

1. If they see something, they should say something;
2. If something happens and they are uncomfortable, they should say something; and,
3. If they do anything and are told it's unwelcome and they continue to do it, they can be refused entry to future events.

Over the years, there have been two main things that we have seen that can cause serious strife within the group: new people with radical ideas who don't understand our norms who upset the balance of power, and the dissolution of long-term life partner relationships of Kindred members.

First, everyone must go through the membership process and be approved by the Kindred. This doesn't mean that you won't have issues with a Member's new partner, or, that they still won't cause problems. But it keeps things in perspective. Just because that person is with your Kinsman or Kinswoman, that doesn't make them "you", e.g., part of your Kindred. It doesn't matter what they contribute to the group or who likes them or even if all of you like them. If the Kindred members haven't formally accepted that person for membership they are not part of the Kindred.

In our experience, one sure way to derail the Kindred structure and lose core members is to allow people to hop-skip-jump through the often tedious but time-tested burning in process for new members. This usually happens when someone single brings in a new partner who expects to be treated the same as the long-time sworn member, or when we've tried to incorporate a long-

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time friend of ours or that of one of our Kindred members. Make everyone follow the same process! If it's two Yules for Jack, then it should be two Yules for Jill. And if they met New Year's Eve and are crazy in love, Jill can still wait for two Yules.

Another way to derail the Kindred normative thinking process is to take sides when two members cease being a couple. When Kindred Members break up with one another the Kindred rarely takes sides unless civil law or our Tribal Values were violated in some way. If Members feel that they need to break with us over the end of the relationship, then so be it. The Kindred's role is to exist for the entire group, not for just one individual.

### **Social Division by Class**

The writer, William R. Short, relays Dudo of St. Quentin's recording of an encounter between a party of Danes and King Charles of the Frankish kingdom in his website article, Social Classes in Viking Society on [www.Hurstwic.org](http://www.Hurstwic.org):

"In the presence of the king, the Danes were ordered to show their submission by kissing the foot of the king. The leader of the Danes refused. One of his followers complied. But, rather than kneeling to kiss the foot of King Charles, the Dane stood, grabbed the king's foot, and lifted it up to the level of the Dane's own head, dragging the king out of his seat and onto the floor. With the king held upside-down, the Dane kissed the foot."<sup>17</sup>

Enough said about that!

While Mannaheim is philosophically egalitarian, I do suppose that members are "more" equal than a nonmember is to a member. Other differences may be due to education or "genius" factor, one of our members has a theorem named after him; another is a gifted pianist; still, another is a published author. But are they "better" than our Iraqi veteran or another member? No, they

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are not. Does being on the Council or being an Officer or being a Gythia make one of us better than someone who isn't? No. We don't view the positions as status symbols. They are part of the infrastructure needed to keep things running smoothly, and that's it.

### Leadership and Teaching Others

*"You have been told that, even like a chain, you are as weak as your weakest link. This is but half the truth. You are also as strong as your strongest link. To measure you by your smallest deed is to reckon the power of the ocean by the frailty of its foam. To judge you by your failures is to cast blame upon the seasons for their inconstancy."*

— Khalil Gibran, The Prophet

### Leading

Not everyone right out the gate can be both a great Kindred Leader and an outstanding Gythia. Some Kindreds even split the leadership roles into two positions to provide a balance and counterweight between the Chieftain and the Gythia for that reason. Don't be afraid to share the power and the responsibility for your Kindred.

I think that it helps that my husband acts as "Chieftain" of the group. He provides a sounding board as well as conducts many of the weekly classes. He's more extroverted than I am and loves to meet new people. I do better in smaller groups with people that I know. Along with the other three Council Members and Mannaheim Officers, there really isn't that much heavy lifting except on the day of the Blót.

Leading a Kindred day to day and leading them in Ritual takes two distinct skill sets. Know that. Accept it. Take a long serious look at your strengths and weaknesses and figure out how not to

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suck. Don't just assume that you know everything there is to know about motivating others and leading them.

To be a strong leader and to be respected you need to have some working knowledge about human behavior, the nature of conflict, and how to weather change. It helps to be strong enough to take constructive criticism from your friends. You don't want to surround yourself with people who say yes to your face because they are afraid to tell you the truth. While that might work in the short term, it will not work for the long haul.

You might get some good leadership training through your job, the local community college, or on-line. Many of the top universities have free online classes and lectures. TED Talks, You-Tube, and other venues, like your local Unitarian Church, are excellent resources. Don't just assume you know how to speak to people, lead them, or teach them to lead themselves.

Conflict is normal. Being able to recognize it for what it is and how to manage it will keep your Kindred healthy.

### **Teaching**

Our shared language is in the Tribal Values, which shapes normative behavior in the group. Our strength lies in our shared experiences. We attempt to ensure that Kindred leadership seeks to match the jobs or tasks that need doing to the needs and interests of the people who do them to promote cooperation among the team members and meet individual needs for personal growth, development, and satisfaction at work.

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### What does that mean exactly?

It means that people agree to follow a set of group rules so that everyone can get along with each other; and that because people are doing what they like and what they are good at within the group and are valued for their contributions, they are happy; happy people doing happy things equals a happy group.

In Mannaheim, people do the things they are good at, and that makes them happy contributing within the group. For one person that might mean cooking food on the grill, for another it might mean getting to know the new visitor and making them feel comfortable, and, for another, that might mean overseeing setting up the tables and organizing food. It could mean handing out pages of the ritual to guests for them to read and explaining to them how the ritual is structured. The other part of what makes this model work is that the contribution must be done well to be recognized within the group and to add value to the group experience. There is a group expectation that if you oversee something that you will show up ahead of time, follow-through, complete your task, and that it will be done properly. No pressure.

As stated previously, everyone in Mannaheim is good at something and each position that we value has back up and someone is trained to be the alternate in that position if the primary person isn't available to do it. It can be as simple as appointing someone to make sure that there are ice and water available for the guests and it can be as complicated as performing the ritual.

Over the years we have spent a lot of time together. We've been camping for days at a time; we have sat in the same leadership and team-building classes; and, we have had each other's backs during Seiðr practice sessions. From the classes that we have had as a group, we have learned that many hands make light work, and sharing knowledge increases the group's power. In the past years, we took turns teaching each other how to do things just so we would have that shared experience. We encourage people to work on a team and follow the Team Lead's direction.

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For example, when we go camping, someone is in charge of setting up the tents and the portable garages for the kitchen and the seating area; another person is in charge of setting up the kitchen; and, still, another person is in charge of the coolers and the food. Other people are assigned to work with that Team Lead. This keeps us from getting in each other's way and allows us to maximize the range of people for set tasks.

We have been fortunate over the years to have several younger people come through the Kindred on their way to somewhere else. Some came to Mannaheim because they were Heathen and others came just for the party. Either way, we made efforts to include them by giving them things to do and if there were children, and if they could read, they got parts to read.

If you look at the culture of Heathenry and the modern countries' whose ancient traditions that we claim to embrace as we worship (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden), the people from these countries today are cooperative and inclusive once you get to know them; and, they adore guests and children. The people love to share knowledge and work together with people they know.

If you are managing your Kindred using the traditional hierarchical leadership model you are missing out on an opportunity to stretch yourself, your members, and reach greater heights both as a leader and as a Kindred. Telling someone what to do is far easier than teaching them how to do something and then sitting back and letting them do it. It can be a great opportunity to learn how to lead others effectively, work as part of a team, and enhance life skills like getting along with others.

It allows for organizational longevity, reduces the "Cult of the Individual" syndrome, and creates a naturally occurring succession plan for your Kindred, should you be so inclined. Your bylaws should outline your roles and responsibilities and who does what and in what order. For example, Professed Members of the Council are first in line for Gythia duties based on longevity. Any other

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Professed Members (in order of seniority) are tapped should none of the Council members be available or desire to fill the role. This allows for people to be prepared and plan if I cannot perform that function.

### **The Pitfalls of Clergy and Pastoral Counseling**

Unless you are a certified mental health professional, an attorney, or a physician by education and licensure, practicing anything related to those fields under the guise of pastoral counseling can lead to unintended consequences for both you and for the person you are counseling. Depending on your state of residence the consequences can be legally and financially crippling.

Become acquainted with a reputable source through your state so you know where that line is and how to stay on this side of the line. Know what your legal responsibilities are concerning what happens when you are made aware of things through “counseling sessions” that could make you legally responsible for knowing something and not reporting it to the authorities.

Always ensure that you counsel no one by yourself. There should be at least one other person aside from you and the person being counseled. State early and often that you are not a certified mental health professional, an attorney or a physician; that what you are saying is just your opinion; and, that they must make the final decision as to what they are doing about whatever it is they came to you about.

This is critically important when you are having a conversation with someone in the group about their behavior and how it doesn’t reflect your norms and values. Make sure you have concrete examples of what they did, why it wasn’t okay, and outline your expectations for how they should behave. Follow-up with a short neutral email to document the conversation for your records.

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Get some training/read several books on mentoring and how to make the conversation about the person or persons you are talking to. Key skills include knowing how to paraphrase what you have just heard, what sort of additional questions could be asked to get more information, why open-ended questions will often lead them to their answer, and why reflecting their answer back to them helps them to feel that you are engaged, concerned, and are open to being a sounding board for them. It is an excellent idea to have a few low-cost resources that you can refer people to that will honor them and their religion and allow them to help themselves. This could include sliding-scale mental health professionals, legal aid, and health clinics.

Whatever is shared during these conversations is private and should not be shared with anyone else unless you have learned something that needs to be shared with local authorities.

### **Conducting Ritual**

This part presumes that you will create or conduct something more complex than a three-round Sumbel and that you will have more than a couple of participants. What I am describing is a more complex ritual that is designed for more than a few people.

Writing and conducting rituals are art forms. Both require being able to stand between your participants and the Ancestors and the Gods and to create that space where they can commune together. You must be able to discern the emotion in the room; know how to hold and move the flow of energy; know when to comfort and when to stand firm and hold the space. Having a flair for the theatric is helpful but isn't required.

Best advice ever: Practice. When you were young and you wanted to ride a bicycle without training wheels, and then later when you wanted to ride with no hands or stand on the bicycle seat without crashing into parked cars, you practiced and you crashed into things and you got banged up. You may never be a skilled orator, but you can conduct a decent ritual just by

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following some basic public speaking techniques. Stand up straight. Enunciate your words. Project your voice.

If you are not a strong reader, then practice reading out loud. Have your friends critique you, or, find someone who is a strong reader and a public speaker to do that part. Public speaking is a learned skill. Very few people know how to do it well without some practice and perhaps a class or two.

Some people like to wear ritual garb for their Blóts and celebrations. We made a conscious decision to not wear garb because we often have non-Heathen visitors and we wanted them to feel included, not excluded, by their clothing. This is a Mannaheim preference only and is not meant to cast dispersions on those who like to wear ritual garb. We live in a very diverse neighborhood and one of our mantras is: “Don’t scare the neighbors!”

Also, if you are just starting a Kindred, it’s likely because there isn’t one near where you live. Once people find out that an active Kindred is holding open Blóts near them, they will drive some distance just to attend. You want to make it worth their while. Your ritual needs to be spiritually satisfying and the fellowship afterward should make those who attended feel good about the drive, what they experienced, who they spoke with, what they ate afterward, and, if the mead tastes great, so much the better.

That’s why I like the Ravenbok ritual format so much. It’s basic, it gets the job done, and; it has all the right elements: a beginning, middle, and an end. With practice, it’s easy to do. While Mannaheim has embellished on that format, many elements from that basic ritual are still present in ours and many other Kindreds I suspect.

Finally, there is quite a bit of controversy about Magick’s place in a Heathen Ritual. Both sides will argue the point vigorously and with conviction. I am in the camp that believes that if you

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believe in the existence of the Gods and Goddesses and all the other creatures that inhabit the multiverse then Magick itself is not that much of stretch; if you're not in that camp, then you can stop reading this section right here.

If you are the camp that believes in Magick, your group position might be that formal Magick in ritual is reserved for Kindred Members only or for that portion of your Kindred membership that is interested in pursuing that specific ritual. Or, like Mannaheim, we believe in making Magick a "teachable moment".

Whatever you decide, please ensure that you practice appropriate "Magickal Hygiene" and that whoever oversees that aspect of your group has the experience and is qualified to be leading the group in those endeavors.

Setting up a sacred space with runes or through some other means that creates a boundary between this reality and the next is a must. Banishing negative forces either using the Hammer Rite or something else is important. In some Seiðr rituals, for example, the Dwarves Norðri, Suðri, Austri and Vestri ("Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western") are used at the cardinal points and as the Warder traverses the circle, it is closed to outside forces. We do a great deal more than that to ward our "traveling" territory.

Furthermore, depending on the Magickal practice it is imperative that people leave afterward unharmed and do not pick up any "hitchhikers" as they traverse the Nine Worlds.

There are distinct differences between the Western Mystery Tradition and the Northern Mystery Tradition. One Kindred might mix a little of each and another might work diligently to ensure that only the principles of the Northern Mystery Tradition are used. It is your responsibility to know enough about what you are doing so that an informed choice is being made, whatever you decide. There varying opinions as to where Heathenry falls on the Mystery Scale between the



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Western Mystery Tradition and the Northern Mystery Tradition. Some contend that Heathenry isn't part of the Northern Mystery Tradition at all because it's not Norse Paganism, it's a separate religion/tradition altogether. Remember too, that Heathenry, just like Christianity, has its Anglicans and Catholics (High Ritualists), Lutherans (Low Ritualists), Baptists (No Ritualists) and Universalists (Whatever Works Ritualists) and not everyone is going to agree that what someone else is doing is exactly right! And, in my opinion, that is A-Okay.

Just know why certain aspects and elements are included in your ritual and give the people who are taking part in it the courtesy of explaining what you are doing, why you are doing it, what role that you are asking them to play and how they can opt-out of any part that they might not feel comfortable with. The ritual is not about you, or how great a Gothi or Gythia you are. The ritual is about you creating a sacred environment for the participants to communicate safely with the Gods, the Ancestors, and each other.

### CHAPTER 3. ELEMENTS OF RITUAL

What is a ritual? A ritual for our purposes is a repetitive act that has significance to the doer and/or participants. It can be as simple and mundane as always kissing your lover goodbye when parting and hello when you meet again. It can be as complicated as a Catholic Mass in which the Communion wafer made from flour, water, and vegetable shortening becomes the Body of Christ. It can be something performed frequently, like smiling and nodding to someone when you pass him or her on the street or in a hallway at work. It can be performed infrequently, for example, the middle of January on the Capitol steps every four years when a new president takes the oath of office, “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” Each of these activities is an example of a ritual.

For Heathens our rituals bind us to the Folk (defined here and throughout this book as other Heathen people — however they define themselves), the Ancestors and to the Gods. Regardless of where you go, if you mention the Hammer Rite, The Blót, or Sumbel to another person who is Heathen, they will know what you are talking about. His or her ritual may not be the same as the one that you perform, but the intent of these rituals is the same.

#### **Explaining the Ritual**

Mannaheim often has guests new to the religion; or, who are attending out of curiosity; or, who are there because their child or significant other is Heathen . One of our Tribal Values (and one of the Nine Noble Virtues) is Hospitality. We want our new guests to feel as comfortable as possible. One way we do that is to explain everything about the coming ritual to the regulars and guests. If they are not Heathen at all, usually the person who is handing out readings will take them aside, ask them if they have ever been to a non-Christian/Heathen ritual and show them

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the Ritual Outline and go over it with them. That person will find out if the guest wants to read something like a poems or passage from the Eddas or if they would like to pour the libation at the end of the ritual.

Once we are assembled and ready to begin, I go over the Parts of the Ritual again for everyone and let them know “Why Everyone is There”. This part can be skipped if there are no new people. I tell everyone assembled that they should only participate if they are comfortable; and, I go over some basic dos and don’ts.

I let them know what is acceptable: Hailing the Gods of our Hosts, if they are not inclined to Hail our Gods directly; Kissing the Horn or Holding the Horn to their Forehead, if they are ill or not able to drink alcohol; and, Leaving in the middle of ritual if they have to take care of a child or go to the bathroom.

We let them know what is unacceptable, the biggest being Hailing a Deity outside the Northern Pantheon. One of our group norms is that what is spoken in ritual stays in ritual. Personal comments, cross talk, and references to what someone has said either inside or outside the ritual, especially if it is serious or references trauma are discouraged. This is like the 12-step meeting norm where what is said in the room stays in the room and is not repeated outside of it.

### **“Hail the Hall!”**

There are probably less classy ways to signal to your participants that the ritual is about ready to start that are just as effective like a shrill whistle, a cowbell, or a “Yo!”. At various Heathen events that Mannaheim has had the privilege of attending, someone yelling, “Hail the Hall”, and/or thumping a staff on the floor seems to be a favorite method of getting everyone’s attention.

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For Mannaheim, this is usually the “5-minute” pre-ritual warning for people to make a last trip to the bathroom, grab something to drink, hotbox that cigarette, take things off the stove, turn off the oven and open the oven door. A few words are spoken to direct new guests or to make sure that any readings have been distributed to the participants.

### Signaling the Start of Ritual - Óðinn, Vili, Ve

There needs to be a way to transport your participants from “Mundania” into sacred space. Ravenbok, notes: “To begin each ritual we offer a three-round chant of “Óðinn, Vili, Ve.” This serves two purposes. First, we are linking ourselves to the Gods of creation and thus to the connections between Midgard and the Gods. Second and perhaps more appropriately it allows people to get themselves mentally prepared for the service.”<sup>18</sup>

I would offer a third purpose; the words and tones open our hearts and minds and souls to the harmonic vibration of the multiverse. There is no disputing that something happens when certain words and tones are repeated harmonically and are shared by a group of people for a sacred purpose.

Dr. Rick Strassman notes in his book, “DMT: The Spirit Molecule: A Doctor’s Revolutionary Research into the Biology of Near-Death and Mystical Experiences”, that “Meditative techniques using sound, sight, or the mind may generate particular wave patterns whose fields induce resonance in the brain. Millennia of human trial and error have determined that certain “sacred” words, visual images, and mental exercises exert uniquely desired effects. Such effects may occur because of the specific fields they generate within the brain. These fields cause multiple systems to vibrate and pulse at certain frequencies. We can feel our minds and bodies resonate with these spiritual exercises. Of course, the pineal gland also is buzzing at these same frequencies... The pineal begins to “vibrate” at frequencies that weaken its multiple barriers to DMT formation: the

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pineal cellular shield, enzyme levels, and quantities of anti-DMT. The end result is a psychedelic surge of the pineal spirit molecule, resulting in the subjective states of mystical consciousness.”<sup>19</sup>

The “Óðinn, Vili, Ve” chant can cause the throat and subsequently the roof of the mouth to vibrate in certain people and might lead to stimulation of the pineal gland which, could lead to a change in personal consciousness. Each person is unique and not everyone may, or want to, experience this.

As the Ravenbok suggests, Mannaheim does the chant three times. Know that using this chant or others like it in a specific tone and frequency can lead to losing your place in counting the number of rounds to the chant. I stand with my feet apart, square with my shoulders and hold my hands a little off and down at my sides and use my fingers to keep track of which round that I am on. I breathe deeply, center myself, and then sing the chant from my diaphragm. If there are new people, I will give them a one-round example of what we’re aiming for.

I would encourage you to develop additional chants as part of your opening ritual if you have a specific theme where other Gods and Goddesses might be more appropriate.

### Setting/Warding Space - Intoning the Runes

Not everyone feels that Setting/Warding Space is necessary for Heathen practice, especially when the Hammer Rite is performed. We intone the Runes in order at the beginning of our ritual (starting in the North) for several reasons.

First, it is a reminder that there is another way to ward space that is not affiliated in any way with the more common circle casting technique found in the Western Mystery Tradition. It creates a space within a space.

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Second, it gives participants a chance to practice warding using Runes. We have a cheat sheet for each Aett that provides a guide to the symbol used, the phonetic spelling, and a brief description of each accepted meaning.

Third, it is a not-so-subtle reminder that we are in sacred space, something that might not be necessary for one's homes, but is always necessary when one is performing a ritual somewhere else.

For the sake of courtesy, if I am conducting a ritual in someone's store or someone else's home, I always go over the ritual with them in advance and privately to explain what I am doing and why.

Unlike circle casting in the Western Mystery Tradition, there is no banishing nor is the "circle" taken up when we have completed our ritual. Banishing and appeasing the Landvaettir or House-elves should be the responsibility of the family if done at all and it is not my place to disturb what they have done. I am merely creating a barrier or a "Magickal longboat" for our journey and communion with the Gods.

I don't want other people to know the specific aspects of how I ward my home or banish things I don't want there, so, that is not part of my ritual for the Blót.

### Statement of Purpose

***"We gather together today to celebrate [name of feast or activity] as our ancestors might have if they lived in our time. [A few sentences about the significance of the feast or activity would be appropriate]. We honor the gods, our ancestors, and our bonds as an intentional community dedicated to Mannaheim's Shared Tribal Values. This Blót is sacred to [God/dess, who was known for (mention something about them)]."***

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While the format stays the same, the name of the feast or activity changes month to month.

I included the phrase, “We honor the gods, our ancestors, and our bonds as an intentional community dedicated to Mannaheim’s Shared Tribal Values”, each month because that is the underlying reason that we are convening regularly. It is the “raison d’être” that we get together every month and spend time together with other activities.

While I think noting the Gods and the Ancestors is self-explanatory, “our bonds as an intentional community dedicated to Mannaheim’s Shared Tribal Values” may need a little explaining.

Mannaheim is at its core an intentional spiritual community dedicated to the ideals expressed in the Mannaheim-specific Shared Tribal Values. Based upon an individuals’ interpretation of the Values, Mannaheim judges them to be worthy of membership and invites them to take the oath to uphold the Values. Worshiping together is a “Tribal Activity”.

### **Appropriate Readings About the Occasion**

Depending on the month, the feast, or other activity, and, the audience, there is a lot of material out there in the public domain that can be leveraged to give some life and color to your rituals. I make a point of citing the source and the author for any reading that I pull for rituals.

Because not everyone may know how to pronounce Old Norse or High German, I add phonetic spelling for any names or phrases that are not in English. I enjoy calling particular attention to known pagan poets by including poems by William Butler Yeats and Walt Whitman for example.

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### General Invocation

The General Invocation is something that will repeat month to month that could be used to remind your participants why they are who they are. It can be a poem written by one of your members; a specific passage from the Hávamál, or something more contemporary that means something to your Kindred. For example, based on our Kindred banner, we might say:

***“The Gods stand with us within Midgard -  
We are guided by Óðinn’s ravens, Thought and Memory;  
And, Tyr’s sword, while ever ready, remains at rest.  
Like, Frigga, we keep silent counsel,  
While accepting Frey’s many blessings.  
We trust Thor’s hammer is ready and will defend if there is need.  
Hail the gods!”***

### Invoke Deity of Occasion

For us, this changes month to month and is specific to the deity being celebrated. However, some Kindreds have a patron deity (or deities) that they want to celebrate with all year. But, for this example, in September, the Deity Invocation for us would be:

***“Our Lady Sif, sister kin; your golden hair has been compared to a sheaf of wheat – food of the folk, wealth of nations. Holy Sif, Rowan wife, Lady of the Harvest and Whispered secrets,  
your arms enfold us as the Light of the heavens fades.  
Hail to thee, Sif, wife of Thor; hold us close as Sunna descends. Fill our tables with the riches of the harvest; bless us with food and fuel, and family health this winter.  
Hail Sif! (Hail Sif!)”***



## A Heathen Liturgy

By looking through the Lore and the Kennings of the Gods it is possible to weave exquisite descriptions together that are both pleasing to the ear and reflect your knowledge and devotion to the gods.

### **Meditative Prayer (Prayer of People That Binds Them to The Gods)**

One of our members wrote this prayer about the meaning of the “Gebo” rune and we liked it so much that we have asked her to include it in our monthly ritual:

*“May we be Gebo -  
May we give back to our Gods, ourselves, our kindred,  
our family and friends, and, our society.  
May we give back, when and where we can, to the best of our abilities.  
May the Gods hear us; may we hear them.  
May they know us, just as much as we know them.  
May they be better beings for knowing us.  
May we be better beings for knowing them.  
May they love us just as much as we love them.  
Hail!”<sup>20</sup>*

### **Hammer Rite**

For many Heathens, the Hammer Rite is the focal point of the three-round Sumbel and has remained unchanged from that which was provided in the way back early days of Edred Thorsson.

Mannaheim’s version of the Hammer Rite is as follows (it was a bonus that it is hammer shaped!):

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*"Mjólnir –*

*Hail, Hollow, and Hold this Site*

*Sanctify this Offering with Your Might*

*Kvasir no Giants come - Into this Holy Space*

*Share Your Wisdom - As we taste*

*Hail Thor!*

*Hail Kvasir!*

*Hail Óðinn!*

*Hail the Æsir*

*Hail the Vanir!"<sup>21</sup>*

Mannaheim conducts the Hammer Rite facing the altar and over the Mead, Horn, and Offering Bowl. Rather than hallowing the space (we completed that with the runes, remember?), the Hammer is used to sanctify the Mead, Horn, and Offering Bowl making them holy and worthy of the Gods before the Sumbel and Blót Sacrifice of Mead. It is in essence a quick reference to the Mead of Poetry and reminds us of its significance to humankind.

- We call on Kvasir; the God born of the spit of both the Æsir and Vanir because his blood was made into the Mead of Poetry by the dwarves Fjalar and Galar<sup>22</sup>
- We mention the Giants because they are the ones who hid it away; and, we are asking for his inspiration as we taste the mead so we may learn things about ourselves and be open to the Gods
- We hail Thor because we are borrowing a hammer dedicated to him to do the hallowing
- We hail Kvasir, for the reasons previously stated
- We hail Óðinn, for it was he that brought the Mead to humans

## A Heathen Liturgy

- We hail the Æsir and Vanir for the reasons previously stated

This is the part of the ritual signals that a conversation is ready to begin between us and the gods within the presence of Kvasir and that we are opening ourselves to insights as part of that conversation.

### Prayer to The Gods to Bless The Mead

This changes from month to month and is specific to the deity being celebrated. For example, in April, (Hexennacht) the prayer to the Gods is along the following lines:

***“Óðinn, Freya, in this time when the Bifrost Bridge opens a path for us between the worlds,  
we offer this mead made with our own hands and imbibed with our Spirit and Intentions.  
We ask that you enhance our Intuition with Divine Guidance from the Gods so we might  
Reach Forward and Grasp the Messages that the Ancestors may have for us.  
Please continue to Bless us in All Things in this Season of Uncertainty – that we may have  
continued health, prosperity, and the love of our Kin and Gods.  
Please accept this Mead and charge it with Your power.  
Hail Óðinn! (Hail Óðinn!) Hail Freya (Hail Freya!)”***

We acknowledge the time of year, season, current event, or other reason that we are reaching out to them. I do this because I like to notify the Gods that we are coming to call on them. In my mind it's like phoning ahead before dropping in on someone. We tell them why we are calling on them, current conditions, what we are offering in return for their ear and help. I am not implying that all of this is necessary or that the Gods don't appreciate a spontaneous bottle of beer between friends spilled on the back lawn or a bottle of wine offered to the ocean.

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We often have visitors with no reference point for the Norse Gods. Part of the reason I do this ritual is that it allows for many teachable moments throughout the readings, the Sumbel and the Blót.

### Toasting the Deity of the Occasion

Our Blóts are both formal and informal occasions when we converse with the Gods, depending on the situation and the time of year and sometimes at the same time. We have within ourselves each built a trusting, working, and mutually beneficial relationship with a wide range set of Gods and Goddesses. We speak with them as if they are our close friends and family that we love and respect. We may speak out loud to them for all to hear and other times we may do it in our minds, silently viewed by the rest of the room.

A few folks are fond of saying, ***"You know what I want, You know what I need, Hook me up! Thanks! Hail!"***

Other people will write poems or songs or just bring up letters to be burned to them at the end of the evening after the Blót bowl is emptied.

Our Gods love to laugh, tell jokes, and have a good time. We try to make them and ourselves laugh. Depending on the occasion, sometimes we laugh so hard during the ritual that our sides are splitting.

### Toasting the Ancestors

Unless it is a memorial service or a specific Blót to the Ancestors, we consider it appropriate for anyone "not here" to be remembered during this round. It includes people who have passed on and those who might live far away that we want to include because we miss seeing them. In my

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## **A Heathen Liturgy**

mind, acknowledging and remembering that we love and miss someone is as important for people both living and dead as it is for the Gods. I have found that I have learned a lot about my Kin during the Ancestor round by hearing them tell stories about their relatives.

### **Boons and Boasts**

For us, this is more the “Concerns” and “Joys” part of the ceremony. As mentioned previously, depending on what is said, people may react, but normally, we don’t discuss what someone might have said unless they bring it up during the feast or ask for input. This part of the conversation is between them and the Gods. We cheer people’s successes loudly. While we don’t discourage oaths or promises made to the Gods, it is not one of our norms to make public declarations or oaths to the Gods in front of Kindred members; I think “declarations of love”, engagements and weddings are the only exceptions.

### **Libation to the Gods**

Many versions of this prayer are offered all across the web. I like this one because it is short and simple and to the point. We usually allow a guest who is new or the youngest or the oldest to carry the Blót bowl outside and offer it to the earth. Depending on the angle where I am standing, sometimes I even think I see the Earth reaching up to grab the libation.

***“From the Gods to the Earth to Us***

***From Us to the Earth to the Gods***

***A Gift for A Gift!***

***Hail!”***

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### CHAPTER 4. WHEEL OF THE YEAR

First a few words about the term, “Wheel of the Year”. While it is true in a modern context that it is mostly attributed to British Traditional Wicca and Norse Paganism, there is evidence that viewing the seasons in a cyclical context is far older and spans across many continents and cultures both ancient and modern. I know that there is a tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to Heathenry and to eschew anything that might seem to be “that Wicca thing”, however, I would encourage you to consider it as part of your research. There are so many more well documented on-line Heathen resources (than were accessible to me) where you can get ideas for seasonal slants for your monthly Blóts and Sumbels.

I looked at many of those ideas that were available at that time before finally deciding on an Agricultural theme following the seasons. I chose one of the widely suggested/normally celebrated Heathen themed holidays that occur during a specified month. Sometimes, that holiday might have been directly adopted into our calendar but in other cases, it might appear somewhere else altogether in that group’s calendar. My sources included the Óðinnic Rite, the Ásatrú Free Assembly, as well what other Kindreds with published calendars were celebrating both here in the US and abroad. Remember this was 2002 and the internet was but a wee babe compared to today -- and we didn’t know what we know today about some of those sources.

I am not a supporter of the Óðinnic Rite, Ásatrú Free Assembly, or Ásatrú Alliance. I merely used their information relating to Heathen calendar/celebratory ideas, and, since that time, I have evolved into someone who chooses carefully where I might go to find ritual ideas and what I use as ritual material. For example, this year we changed the name of the August Blót from Frey Faxi to Frey’s Feast based upon some concerns raised about the origins of the name “Frey Faxi”.

In many cases, I chose to call attention to both a God and Goddess that fit the month’s theme that we were celebrating. Sometimes, they may not have been the suggested deity from the

## A Heathen Liturgy

material for monthly celebrations. I did not choose both a God and Goddess to ensure that the Lord and Lady were represented at each of our Blóts, as might be the case in Norse Paganism, but rather because I wanted to place more emphasis on feminine deities because I felt that I had to balance the preponderance of masculine focused worship within some Heathen circles like the Óðinnic Rite and Ásatrú Alliance.

While I try to keep the Equinoxes and Solstices as close as possible to the actual dates on the calendar I am mindful of family holidays, like Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, etc. and try to schedule these Blóts either the weekend before or after to give people a chance to spend time with their families. This increases attendance by accommodating people's family holiday schedule. This is also the reason that there is no Blót in July. This gives people who want to schedule family vacations around Blóts a chance to do so. There is considerable time in August (after Frey's Feast) through the end of September (Winter Finding) for additional family vacations.

In times past, I included a few runes for Rune Galdr that were appropriate for the monthly theme. Sometimes it seemed to work well, other times not so much. It just depended on who was there and whether they understood (or cared) what and why we were doing it. We haven't done it for a few years because it hasn't come up as something the Kindred wanted to do again.

As part of our general readings each month I try to include information about the monthly theme, stories about the deities, and a classic poem or a passage of literature. Some of these repeat every year and others might change to something different, depending on people's reactions. If they like it, it stays and becomes part of the living repeatable tradition for that month, year after year. This format month after month ensures some consistency in the ritual and creates the "liturgy" and gives folks something to think about and talk about during the potluck feast that always follows our ritual.

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I encourage you to look at the variety of resources available today and choose a theme and deities that best reflect your beliefs, rather than accept what I am providing as dogma. This is “the religion with homework”, after all!

### **January - Charming the Plow – Gefjun and Thor**

Charming the Plow was an ancient practice observed by farmers everywhere in the world with four seasons. While it may have been called something else, the intent was the same. Bless every part of the seed propagation process to ensure a good harvest. In other calendars, it is typically celebrated later in the winter months.

I placed the observance in January because we become introspective after the holidays and seed catalogs seem to arrive (along with Christmas credit card statements). “Tilling the ground under” includes tilling our thoughts and our intentions for the New Year.

And while none of us have plows in Northern Virginia, many of us have lawn mowers, rototillers, and wheelbarrows; and, at the first break in the weather, we walk around the yard and plan our gardens in our minds and look over lawn equipment to see if we need to repair anything. Some Kindreds decorate their farm equipment and make them part of the ceremony.

If we celebrated the plow, then it made sense to celebrate the earth in the form of the Earth Mother, Gefjun (“giver”). Gefjun was a seeress and goddess. “Gefjun” is one of the alternate names of Freyja, the Norse goddess of procreation.

Thor, besides being affiliated with thunder, is recognized as being a fertility God and is the son of the Earth Mother and Óðinn.



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### **February - Vali's Blót (the Festival of Family) – Frey and Freya**

In Norse mythology, Vali is a son of the god Óðinn and the giantess Rind. Vali has many brothers including Baldur and Thor. He was birthed to kill Hodr as revenge for Hodr's accidental murder of his half-brother, Baldur. He grew to full adulthood within one day of his birth and slew Hodr. Vali is fated to survive Ragnarök. In my opinion, that whole story is really depressing.

"Vali" naturally falls into the place of our Kindred celebrating the modern Valentine's Day. I chose to honor both Frey and Freya because they are the archetypes of fertility and passion.

The highlight of this Blót in Mannaheim is the re-enactment of the short play "Gerd Meets Frey", which tells the story of the thawing of the frost giant Gerd under Frey's ministrations, with the help of his faithful friend Skirnir. Usually read by two of our young adults, it is a lot of fun and filled with lots of ribald laughter.

### **March – Summer Finding (Feast of Ostara) - Idunna and Braggi**

We celebrate Summer Finding as close to the vernal equinox as possible. Our enormous feast includes edible bitter greens, milk and egg dishes, and other spring produce like asparagus, leeks, and/or radishes and spring lamb.

I chose the Goddess Idunna because we feel "renewed vigor" in the Springtime after the darkness of winter and to me, her golden apples represent the emerging golden sun, in whose light "we begin to feel young once more".

Braggi was included because he is Idunna's husband. I like the fact that besides having runes carved on his tongue, he inspired poetry in humans by letting them drink from the mead of poetry.

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For this Blót, as a meditation, we read *The New Earth (After Ragnarök)* by Hamilton Wright Mabie from his book *Norse Mythology: Great Stories from the Eddas*. It's a very calming and earth centric meditation and always makes me think.

### **April - Hexennacht (Night of the Witches)– Óðinn and Freya**

Walpurgisnacht (or Hexennacht, meaning Witches' Night) is a holiday celebrated on April 30 or May 1, in large parts of Central and Northern Europe.

Winifred Hodge writes in *Waelburga and the Rites of May*, "Since this is a turning-tide when the season is not quite one thing or another – a 'between-time,' it is very suitable for occult divination and spell-craft: a time to take advantage of the thinner veils between the worlds and the fact that our minds are temporarily focused away from everyday affairs and onto the magical energies of Nature's spring tides. This is a time for looking into that which is coming into being and which should be, for seeking deep roots of life-knowledge and life-mysteries, for love-magic and spells of growth and change, conception and birth – in fact, for almost all the elements of what is often called 'women's magic'."<sup>23</sup>

Óðinn and Freya were the most logical choices. We might have formal rune readings after the feast part of this Blót because of Óðinn's association with the Runes; or, we might practice Seiðr because of Freya's association with Seiðr.

There have been on-line conversations about the validity of Walpurgisnacht as a real Heathen holiday since it takes its modern English name from Saint Walpurga, an 8th-century abbess hailed by the Christians of Germany for battling "pest, rabies, and whooping cough, as well witchcraft.

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I view celebrating “The Night of the Witches” as an affirming act of female empowerment - for who were the witches? They were women of substance, with personal power, or they just had something that someone wanted, so they were branded witches or heretics and killed. To me, it is an acknowledgment that Freya is just as powerful as Óðinn.

### **May – Feast of Mead Making – Kvasir, Beyla (Bee) and Heidrun (Goat)**

Mannaheim has been making Mead as a Kindred activity for about fifteen years. When we make Mead, we make it in May. It is usually warm out; the flowers are in full bloom and the bees are working their way across the lawn sipping nectar from late Spring plants. It is a daylong process. While we aren’t experts, we seem to have more success with it than failures. We have even facilitated an in-depth PowerPoint instructional: “How to Make Mead” at a local pagan-friendly store.

On the day of the activity we set up an assembly line for the initial Mead making process that includes sanitizing all the equipment, pouring in the raw unfiltered honey and vigorously mixing it, adding blended fruits for flavoring, and, finally blessing it and the yeast in ritual with the Feast of Mead Making Blót. Six months or so later the assembly line convenes again to rack each carboy, wash and sanitize the empties and taste test each one, and critique our handiwork usually before the November Blót. Finally, the following May we get to the business of bottling what we have made.

We take pride because we use Mead that we’ve made in our rituals. There is something to be said for sacrificing highly drinkable Mead that you have helped make with your own hands to the Gods and contributed your own money to. Also, when we share our Mead with others, we see it as an extension of our ritual and our core values. For when we drink it with guests that visit us, we are offering Hospitality and, when we take a bottle to share at someone else’s home we are engaging it as a “Gift for a Gift” – a gift of Mead in exchange for Hospitality.

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We dedicate the Feast of Mead Making Blót to Kvasir, the wisest of the Vanir and whose blood was mixed with honey to form the Mead of Poetry; to Beyla (whose name we associate with bees); and, to the goat Heidrun, who stands on top of the world tree eating its leaves, and from whose teats runs the mead drunk by the Einherjar.

### June – Feast of Midsummer – Sunna

In the southeastern United States, Summer is full-on by the Solstice. The Kindred's thoughts are turning toward weekend cookouts, patio fires, fishing expeditions, festivals, and camping. It's hot, sticky, and buggy and perfect. Beer and sodas in the cooler; burgers and dogs on the grill; there is no finer thing to do long after the Sun has finally set than to sit out on the patio after ritual long into the night and talk and laugh around the fire.

This is one of my favorite Blóts and Sunna is one of my favorite Goddesses. This Blót belongs to her and no one else. I like the fact that in northern lore the Sun is a woman. I specifically use the Saxon name, Sunna, rather than Sol, because it is more feminine sounding. On Solstice Morning she reaches the height of power but by the end of the day, her power declines toward balance and then wanes further still until the morning after the longest Night when her power begins to wax once again.

One of our favorite passages are the words included from RavenBok:

***“Hail to thee Sunna, light of Har newly risen. She whose holy light shone upon our ancestors of old and she who's light will shine upon our children. We give you hail and welcome. Fill our hearts on this Solstice morning with your warm rays that your fires may burn in our hearts throughout the year. Hail Sunna!”<sup>24</sup>***

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I realize that there are detractors that state that the Midsummer bonfire isn't an authentic part of the celebration because having a bonfire was pointless in the land of the midnight sun. However, they had to cook and they had to keep the bugs at bay, and what better way to do that than with a bonfire?

My thought is this: use your brain. This is YOUR religion and you get to do what makes you feel great about your relationship with the gods and goddesses you worship. In the United States, unless you live in the far north of Alaska, summer bonfires are a thing and I see nothing wrong with incorporating them into our Midsummer ritual. However else would you toast marshmallows?

### **July – No Blót – Community Potluck/Camping at Brushwood**

For as long as I can remember we have spent time at Brushwood Folklore Center in Sherman, NY during July with about 1000 of our closest friends. Over the years “Leftover Thursday” with Camp Sashu down the hill from us evolved (or devolved, depending on your perspective) into a who's who of honored guests and their compatriots at Brushwood and the Heathen/pagan lecture/book circuit. In recent years it has gotten so big that we even had it in the North pavilion a few times. One of the most miraculous features of this event is that no matter the size of the crowd there is always enough food.

To me, this camp out is reminiscent of what I have read about a traditional Althing where disparate groups of friends and families come together to trade, meet potential mates, discuss pressing issues of the day and tell stories about their adventures and lives over the past year.

If there isn't a camp or festival near you, perhaps your Kindred could start an ecumenical potluck at a local park with some other pagan/Heathen groups in your area. You could always drink iced

## **A Heathen Liturgy**

tea or fresh-pressed cider from the horn and leave cream and honey for the Landvaettir and have traditional Althing or picnic games for the participants.

### **August - Frey's Feast (formerly Frey Faxi)**

This Blót is sacred to Frey and his boar Gullinbursti (Golden Bristles).

In years past we have roasted suckling pig and had an open feast and invited all our Heathen-friendly, mundane friends and families. Other years we have had our traditional Blót and grilled outside afterward. For this Blót, we typically focus on the harvest of ideas, actions, and the results of our intentions and personal reflections made at the New Year.

The boar represents the spirit of abundance and prosperity; and, his sacrifice was thought to help to ensure bountiful crops the following harvest. It is possible that the boar represented the sun. This creature could run as fast as any steed and glowed with a golden light that could drive away shadow and turn night into day. I could see the sacrifice of a boar symbolizing the death of the sun.<sup>25</sup>

### **September - Winter Finding (Second Harvest Feast) - Sif**

"Winter Finding", is the Norse New Year. It is celebrated in various ways throughout Northern Europe from the Autumnal Equinox to Oct. 15th, Winter's Night. We typically celebrate it as close to September 21st or 22nd as possible. Sif, a goddess of the home, fertility, fidelity, and women's magic very much in line with aspects of Freya and Frigga, is the focal point of this Blót. Her name is used to designate the Earth in the Skáldskaparmál. Gold was called "Hair of Sif". And, her hair often is the personification of grain.

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Some of our readings focus on common German Winter Finding traditions, like aspects of the Erntedankfest (roasted chicken) and the Erntekrone (an altar centerpiece with apples and grain). We read a poem about Sif written by a Northeast Heathen.

### October – Dísir Ritual (The Norns/Freya)

A very moving aspect of this Blót includes reciting the names of the women from whom we've descended, our Dís (both living and departed), and calling them to stand with us and witness our words. People share stories and memories, recite poems, and just commune silently with their loved ones during this portion of the Blót. Depending on your family, you may easily have access to the information about your great grands; and, if you don't, there are many resources out there with which you can trace your lineage, a common one being Ancestry.com. Fostering and adoption were both very common among the Northern Europeans for various reasons.<sup>26</sup> So, if you are adopted, the family you know is your family, and you know your Disir.

Recent research has discussed the relation between the myths associated with Norns and Valkyries and the actual traveling Völvas (Seiðr-workers), the women who visited newborn children in the pre-Christian Norse societies to determine their fate for the community.<sup>27</sup>

I included the Norns in this Blót because each person's life is a thread in their loom. The length of the thread is the length of the person's life. There is no luck, there is no randomness; destiny determines everything.

We call upon Freya in this Blót to draw attention to the fact that through Seið we might have a glimpse of our fate and perhaps mitigate it, "For while the Dark Fairy's curse could not be undone..." it could perhaps be softened (personal opinion).

## **A Heathen Liturgy**

### **November – Einherjar - Óðinn and Freya**

On the 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th-hour veterans across the country commemorate not only the end of World War I, but also the memory of those who died. Because Mannaheim is in the Greater Washington DC area, over the years many active-duty military and retired veterans have come to our Blóts. This continues to be a very popular Blót for us.

This Blót is sacred to the Einherjar, the heroes who have died with great bravery on the battlefields; and their patrons, Óðinn and Freya.<sup>28</sup>

One of our traditional readings for this Blót includes the essay “The Einherjar, Odhinn’s Chosen”<sup>29</sup> by JS Pereira, which was updated after September 11th to include a passage about including those “in various professions that involve voluntarily going into danger (police, firefighting) and who died while performing their duty perhaps join the ranks of the Einherjar.”

I include a contemporary poem from a recently returned wounded veteran (which changes year to year) so that their voice is also heard at this Blót.

### **December - Post Hunting Feast - Skadi and Ullr**

This is our time to pause during our holiday frenzy to honor the gods, our ancestors, and our bonds as an intentional community dedicated to Mannaheim’s Shared Tribal Values. This Blót is sacred to Skadi and Ullr.



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This is a very popular Blót. We always have some game meat; bison is available from the local supermarket, and, our local butcher usually carries a variety of game meat for the Blót if we haven't otherwise had a successful hunting season.

We read two poems written by people in the Northeast Heathen community. The poems embody the stark winter aspects of the hunt, the sense of urgency, and the direness of going without.

For nonmembers, this is the last Blót of the year. Yule is an hours-long Sumbel and we just don't have the room to crowd any more people into our basement without it being a fire hazard.

### **December - Yule Feast - Winter Solstice (Sacred to Óðinn, Frey, Thor, Balder, and others)**

Everyone looks forward to the Yule feast; it's a Sumbel to our Twelve Tribal values, and it's when we bring in new members who have demonstrated over a two Yule cycle a willingness to live by the Tribal Values.

As part of the membership process, the five Council members interview prospective members in October; the Council convenes again in November to discuss and vet with the current members. Prospective members are then notified that they "made the cut".

### **December - 12th Night - End of Yule Celebration (Sacred to the Family)**

I realize that in the Christian Calendar that the Twelve Days of Christmas begins on December 25<sup>th</sup> and ends on January 5<sup>th</sup>. I made the decision to "Heathenize" the event by pushing the start date back for us to before the Winter Solstice so that 12<sup>th</sup> Night is New Year's Eve. In our family we celebrated these 12 days with little gifts (straw goats, tomte, and items for my daughter's

## **A Heathen Liturgy**

“fairy house”, a multi-leveled tree home for her fairies, trolls, and dragons) and we cooked themed holiday meals from Scandinavian countries. This period culminated in an “up-all-night” celebration that was basically just a big party and then people stayed over and had brunch before going home to crawl back in bed.

That has since evolved into 13th Morning, because, well, we’re older...

### **January 1st - 13th Morning Brunch**

This is a combination of a pot-luck brunch and an Open Mannaheim Council Meeting. We set the schedule for the year; identify which events we want to go to, assign tasks for craft days, identify which speakers we want to bring in and let people know how much they need to start saving up if they are planning on attending.

We have a rule that if a person agrees to monetarily support an event then, unless there is an excellent reason, we expect them to put their money where their mouth is and have their “butts in a seat”. There is nothing more embarrassing than to have a well-known speaker come for the weekend and have no one show up.

We play Cards Against Humanity, Exploding Kittens, and other games to pass the day.

### CHAPTER 5. THE NITTY GRITTY

#### Social Media

As previously mentioned, we primarily use Meetup.com and Facebook. Facebook is our “public face” and no personal information or locations to Blóts are provided in that forum. We screen people on this site based on whatever information we can see. On Meetup.com we have two groups: Mannaheim Heathen Pub Moot and Mannaheim Kindred.

The Mannaheim Heathen Pub Moot (also called Heathen Night Out (HNO) or Family Dinner) is the open group where people sign up to meet us in a public place. This is where the first screening takes place. We look at their picture and their groups. If their groups are set to private, then that is an automatic disqualifier. Once we have met the person and we have screened them, the Council and Members decide whether we want to allow them in our homes. If they pass, then they are invited to join the Mannaheim Kindred Meetup page, so they have access to the schedule of events.

You can do the same thing on Facebook (create multiple groups) and achieve many of the same objectives as Meetup.com (which has a considerable cost).

Over the last 20 years, we have tried having a Kindred website many times, and it was always felt that for the cost many social media platforms served the same functions for free and weren't that complicated. Recently we rethought the website idea and are actively working to put one together.

For our members, journeymen, and regular guests we use a Discord channel to communicate and “hang out” virtually.

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### Typical Qs & As (For Your Social Media Presence)

Here is a list of Questions and Answers that we use for informational purposes on all our public-facing social media platforms. They have been borrowed and adopted from various sources.

**Question:** What exactly is a Blót?

**Short Answer:** "Blót" is the basic religious ritual for Heathens.

**Longer Answer:** "Blót" (pronounced "bloat") simply means "sacrifice", or occasionally "worship". It is a Heathen religious ritual that in ancient times would have likely involved a sacrificial animal. Mannaheim uses the Blót as its primary religious and community-building observance. As not all members of Mannaheim are "Ásatrú", we may do it a little differently than some other groups; we follow a basic format that involves dedicating the space, intoning the runes (Aetts), hallowing the space ("Hammer rite"), followed by various readings appropriate to the purpose of the Blót, three rounds of toasts to the Gods, to the ancestors, and a boast/boon, and finishing up with sacrificing the remaining mead/ale to the Gods.

**Question:** Hey, where's the High Priest (or High Priestess)?

**Answer:** In Ásatrú, a Gothi (male) and/or Gythja (female) typically lead rituals. It is important to realize that Ásatrú is not a "Norse Wicca" variant. Being polytheistic, rather than dualistic, Ásatrú doesn't require the male/female polarity often seen in pagan rituals. However, many of our rituals include both a God and a Goddess.

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**Question:** I see some people leaving or coming in during the Blót ...isn't that breaking the sacred space?

**Answer:** While typical Ásatrú rituals will “sanctify” the space to welcome the Gods, there are no circles or artificial boundaries to cross. Excessive comings and goings should be minimized because they can diminish the mood of the ceremony. But the good news is that it means that parents can leave to attend to kids or kids can come into the room to be with their parents during the ritual without worrying about committing a social faux pas.

**Question:** If I hail a specific deity, does that obligate me to them, or them to me?

**Short Answer:** It depends on how you meant it. In our rituals, if you'd rather, you can simply say: “Hail the Gods” or “Hail the Ancestors”.

**Longer Answer:** Yes and no. One common theme in the Northern Tradition is that “a gift deserves/demands a gift”. By hailing a particular deity (always a northern deity, in our rites, please!) you are acknowledging their importance in our lives, and this may imply some degree of mutual obligation. For those uncomfortable with this, an excellent alternative would be to “Hail the Gods”. However, just hailing a particular deity doesn't mean that you have forsaken any other god(s), nor entered into any kind of patronage. You'd have to swear much stronger oaths to do that, e.g. profess. As a group, Heathens view the gods as our beloved elder kin who deserve our respect, rather than as superior beings who demand our obeisance.

**Question:** It's my first time here, and I've seen no energy work done. How do they expect any of this stuff to work without raising energy?

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**Short Answer:** There are different ways to raise energy and ward space, and the ways we use may not be familiar to you.

**Longer Answer:** Many of our guests have a background in Wicca or Ceremonial Magic(k), so this is a very natural question. An excellent introduction to the similarities and differences between Wicca and Heathenry is available in the article “The Pentagram and the Hammer” by Devyn Gillette and Lewis Stead.<sup>30</sup> The way Mannaheim conducts Blóts incorporates several energy-raising techniques that may not be obvious to the casual observer. Unlike most Heathen Blóts, we ward our space using the Elder Futhark runes. And the passing of the horn gathers our respective energies into the sacred mead, which we then sacrifice (libate) to the gods.

**Question:** Why are all these people bragging about things that have nothing to do with spirituality?

**Short Answer:** Many Heathens believe that the accomplishments of each of the attendees are an accomplishment for us all. Therefore, it’s not so much bragging as it is recognizing our communal achievements.

**Longer Answer:** It takes time and experience to grasp this. Critical to understanding this are the concepts of “Wyrð” and “Ørlög”. Put simply, Wyrð is the idea that our future actions are determined by our past ones, an idea both similar to and different from fate or karma. Ørlög can be thought of as the “layers of the past”, those past actions and our heritage that are the raw material used by the Norns to spin the cord of our lives. The more difficult an accomplishment, the more it contributes to the “Well of Wyrð”. We are each affected by this shared resource, and the boasting helps to ensure that our achievements are added in full measure.

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**Question:** The Eddas and the Sagas are neat, but it's hard to read casually. Where can I find modern retellings?

**Answer:** Sacred Texts has a lot of older written material available at no cost, including a retelling of many of the stories in *The Children of Óðinn* by Padraic Colum, published in 1920. It's written for young adults, apparently meaning that they don't bombard you as much with strange names :)

**Question:** How should I dress?

**Answer:** Most of us dress pretty casually. Shoes are occasionally optional.

**Question:** What if I'm late?

**Short Answer:** Join the crowd. We TRY to start on time. We rarely succeed. Regardless, just come anyway. Our schedules and our rituals are informal and nobody will mind.

**Longer Answer:** Traffic in the DC Metro region is unpredictable. Please plan ahead, especially if you live more than 45 minutes away. If you realize that you are going to be more than 15 minutes late, please let us know, if it is safe to do so.

**Question:** Where do I go?

**Answer:** We are meeting in a private home. The phone number for directions is listed on the meetup page.

**Question:** Can I bring kids? Can they stay with me?

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**Answer:** Absolutely! Kids are required to stay with their parents if under a certain age.

In addition to this F.A.Q., we provide a “Welcome Packet” on Facebook that provides an overview of information about the group. It includes a copy of the Tribal Values, overview of Mannaheim Group Norms, Path to Membership, and instructions to read the by-laws and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) training.

### Membership Gates

Mannaheim has seven distinct groups, and levels of affiliation called membership gates. The membership gates may seem like overkill to some people, but they might strike a chord with others. People want to know “Who is us” and “Who are them” and within the “Who is us” group, they want to know “Who is more us than others.”

**Querent:** Someone who has expressed an interest in meeting in a public setting to determine mutual interest and approval for attending private events.

**Attendee or Guest:** Someone who has been cleared via a public event or is known to someone in the group who attends events. Note: An attendee or guest is prohibited from bringing additional guests without first clearing it with a Mannaheim Board Member or homeowner.

**Applicant and Journeyman:** Someone who has transitioned from being an Attendee or Guest by expressing a desire to become a Sworn Member, if the Kindred is receptive to the idea. This person has likely attended other Mannaheim-sponsored events (Heathen Night Outs, Camp-outs, Speakers, etc.). People are not penalized for “just” attending Blóts. But, by not coming to other events, it lengthens the process in the “getting to know” someone well enough to consider transitioning them to Sworn Member via the Oath Ring Ceremony. At a minimum, this process



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takes two Yule-cycles. They “apply” to be a Journeyman. They transition to Journeyman once they are approved to do so by Council discussion and vote.

**Friend of Mannaheim:** Someone who comes to a lot of events and likes us, (and we like them) but, is not interested in becoming a Sworn Member of Mannaheim. Some suggest that this be formalized as a “lighter oath”. This could include the non-Heathen family members of Sworn Members. Not that someone must be Heathen to be a Sworn Member. The sworn oath for this has not taken off, and, it is more of a parking place for the “undecideds” and the significant others of Members who are not interested in Membership. In my previous example, this is where Jack’s girlfriend, Jill would be after he becomes a member if she has not been invited or declared herself to be on the Applicant/Journeyman path.

**Sworn Member:** Someone who has gone through the membership process and has by word and deed exhibited the qualities outlined in the Tribal Values. Sometimes they have asked about membership; other times they have been approached by one of the Board of Directors and asked if they would like to be considered for full membership. Sworn Members swear to the Tribal Values on the Mannaheim Oath Ring.

**Elder:** Someone who has been with the Kindred a very long time. Includes a founding member (1999 – 2002), or someone who has been with the Kindred for at least 10 years. Elders are expected to set an example and do the same work as everyone else, if not more. While often active in an Executive Board Member/Officer/other leadership role, some might be inactive/retired and they might show up for some events, and new people have no idea who they are. If they haven’t attended in a while, I recommend you introduce the Elder around and ask them to share a story about the “early days” of the Kindred that might give some insight into how it got to where it is today.

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### **Joys and Concerns - Birth and Death and Grieving**

In the life of this Kindred, we have known joy, and we have known sorrow. I like joy so much better. Marriages, handfastings, fertility, and baby blessings are times of joy. For these rituals, I include the Kindred and guests in a three-round Sumbel: Advice to the couple or parent(s); Funny story or more advice; and, Wish or Blessing for the couple or parent(s) or the baby.

For those sorrowful times, one of the best pieces of advice I can give you is to be present for your Kindred. You are the captain of the longboat that is sometimes riding the terrifying waves of uncertainty to certain death. Your job is to hold the main oar and push into the experience with them.

Not everyone in their family may be Heathen. The family may not let you near your Kinswoman or Kinsman in their darkest hour. You can have a conversation with your group well in advance to help them prepare for this. Become familiar with Advance Directives, the Five Wishes, and other documents that will help make sure they have the death and the funeral they want to have. These documents vary from state to state. Have the documents signed and notarized. Sometimes it makes a difference. AARP (it's not just for old people) has a great selection of resources.

This is not the time to wear your ritual garb and jewelry. This is the time to blend in and be as vanilla as possible, especially when visiting someone in their home, at the hospital or hospice.

Our Kinsman Harris had all the documents and an attorney. At the hospital, however, it was still up to the family. We dressed nicely; we didn't wear any obvious jewelry; we were there for them, and his friends as much as we were there for Harris. We blended. We did our ritual work discretely, and with humility. Holding space for the family is as important as holding space for your loved one. This is not about you. This is about doing the work and being present, tuned in, and solid.

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His public funeral service was “very vanilla”. We had a few funerary readings that were nature-based. We had a three-round Sumbel where we explained in advance to his family and friends what we were doing and relayed the intent of the Sumbel and how we would be doing things. I dedicated the first round to a story about him; I dedicated the second round to something we learned from him; and, I dedicated the third round to what we thought he would want for us individually. We learned a lot about him from one another and his family got to know us a little better. At the end of the ceremony, we listened to the bagpipes and everyone just lost it. His attorney later said to me he had had some grave concerns about us based on his preconceived notions of pagans and heathens (he was an old-time southern lawyer). But we pleasantly surprised him. My advice to you is to be that man or woman who surprises, surpasses, and continues as if nothing spectacular just happened.

Once Harris was cremated, his will requested that his ashes be turned over to us for burial, and that we find a Druid to conduct this burial, in Sherwood Forest, in England. We reached out to the Ár nDraíocht Féin (ADF) Arch Druid, who put us in touch with Druids in England, who said, “Sure, come on over and we’ll help you do this thing.”, which is how another Mannaheim Councilwoman and I ended up taking Harris’s ashes to England.

As part of this funerary process, I learned about death certificates and the fact that you can’t just UPS ashes. It costs more to buy a seat for a dead person than a live person; and as long as you wave the death certificate around and have the ashes in a cardboard cannister on the conveyer belt, TSA will leave you alone.

I have learned and continue to learn a lot about myself as I sit and prepare to assist with Kindred life events. I have tried to approach my Gythia role as the person who holds the space for others as opposed to creating the space for myself and my ego.

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### **Oath-Taking**

As a policy, Mannaheim has only two formal Oaths: 1. Becoming a sworn member of Mannaheim; and, 2. The Heathen Profession of Faith.

On principle, we discourage taking and swearing oaths to one another except for oaths of marriage. Blood oaths are neither endorsed nor, recognized.

It is the Kindred's opinion that such oaths can disrupt the overall well-being of the Kindred and may sow seeds of resentment, perhaps leading to the dissolution of the Kindred when these oaths are broken, resulting in schisms within the Kindred because people may feel the need to take sides.

Some groups have a Jarl or Thane to monitor both formal oaths made on the Oath-ring or Hammer and oaths made in Blóts or Sumbels. We do not. Mannaheim believes that while we as a group share in the cumulative energy or Hamingja that is created out of our collective worship of our Ancestors and Gods, the oaths, and boasts are made individually and are therefore between that person and the Gods.

### **Mannaheim Oath-ring Ceremony**

As previously noted, no matter how much we may like someone, we bring prospective Kindred members in slowly so they can gel with the rest of the group. We judge them by their tenacity and their value, e.g., what they bring to the group. We conduct the Mannaheim Oath-ring ceremony once a year, at Yule, unless there are extraordinary circumstances, like critical illness, pending surgery, military deployment, or for a young person who is "off to see the world". Then with group consensus, that person is brought in so they can enjoy the group's luck and protection. This was a conscious decision because we do have a lot of visitors and we wanted to be inclusive

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rather than exclusive and it was felt that having the Mannaheim Oath Ring Ceremony every month made our visitors feel left out.

People don't swear to Mannaheim or its members, they swear of their own Free Will to uphold our Tribal Values; to be True to themselves, and to their Family and Gods, however they define them. They swear by the Gods and their honor.

This oath focuses on the person's ability to live by the values/norms of the group. It demands that they be true to themselves above all else and to their Family and Gods. It's focused inward, then outward, and then upward. It demands that they focus on bettering themselves by upholding shared values; defining what family/community means to them; and how they relate to the Gods.

The amount of implied personal responsibility is huge, and, sometimes, it is a truly life-changing experience. It creates a lifelong contract with oneself aimed at personal growth and becoming one's "best self".

Over the last 18 years, I have facilitated many people taking the Mannaheim Oath and to me, this oath has all the aspects of an initiatory experience; it signals that a great deal of inner work is about to happen. Mannaz is the rune of the perfected human. To become "perfected" and be "true" to oneself, a person begins the journey to be "fully realized or fulfilled". A person has made the oath in front of the Kindred and the Gods. It's not a pretty experience. It's a leap of great personal growth. The first year to eighteen months following a person's taking the Mannaheim Oath causes "all the things" to come out of the woodwork; it forces people to complete their shadow-work, or it beats them up and takes a toll on their relationships both in the Kindred and with their families. Sometimes they confront addictions; in other cases, they confront their very lives: where they live, who they are with and why they are in the jobs they are in.

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### **Heathen Profession of Faith**

While most, not everyone, in Mannaheim is a professed Heathen. It is unnecessary to “Profess” to the Northern Gods to be a member of our Kindred. This was a Kindred decision and distinguishes us from some more traditional Kindreds in which everyone has professed.

There are pros and cons to both approaches.

#### **Pros to Requiring That All Members Profess:**

Each person in a Kindred that practices this approach has a similar relationship with the Gods and with each other because everyone has professed. Everyone is “like” everyone else.

#### **Cons to Requiring That All Members Profess:**

The Kindred that practices this approach might alienate some people such as spouses or friends who might otherwise make great contributions to the group, and, who may over time influence your professed members to stop attending because they don’t feel welcome in your home or at your rituals.

Sometimes it is just a lucky coincidence that most of the members have professed. A synergy exists within the group that doesn’t exist when many members haven’t professed. And while I appreciate that synergy, you can still have a great Kindred composed of people from distinct paths who like one another and just want to come together to worship the gods and drink with their friends.

Sometimes, I have observed what I like to call the “Revival Phenomenon”. When one person professes, other people also seem to feel the need to profess (and it’s usually in the springtime).

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And, because a profession should never be coerced, nor judged by others, it puts the Gythia in a weird position because there will be times when one wonders if the person is doing it for the right reasons, for themselves and the Gods, or, because they want to feel more included, or accepted by the group.

For that reason, I treat every profession as a teachable moment. Their public profession is part of a Mannaheim Blót and is scheduled weeks before the next Blót. I email them a copy of the RavenBok section on Heathen Professions and the oath; it at least gives them time to think about it.

According to Ravenbok, ***“Professing one’s belief in and kinship to the Gods is an important turning point in one’s life and is the beginning of a new understanding of the self. It is not an occult or initiatory ceremony.”***<sup>31</sup>

***“Professing includes making a commitment to Ásatrú/Heathenry; leaving behind other faiths (and Gods); making a public declaration; and, being recognized as having dedicated his or her life to the Gods and Goddesses of the Northern Tradition and the Nine Noble Virtues the Ásatrúar Religion.”***<sup>32</sup>

There are several Profession ceremonies out there; some even include “taking back the Gods” and “undoing” a Christian Baptism. For example, the oath that Edred Wodanson recommends in his book, Ásatrú – The Hidden Fortress says:

**“I hereby reject and forsake the false alien god and all the false alien cults and religions that have enslaved our people! I cleanse myself of all connections to any alien, religious past by placing my hand upon this Thor’s Hammer. I will trust in the Might and Main of our Holy gods and goddesses! I will trust in the Wisdom and Cunning of my ancient Ancestors! And I will stand beside my Brothers and Sisters of Ásatrú and Óðinnism, until drawing my last breath, my sword**

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**falls from my hand. Forsaking not the ways of old, but holding to these ancient gods, I hereby pledge my sacred Troth and Oath to the High /Æsir and the Holy Vanir! May I be struck down by mighty Thor, if I ever break this Sacred Oath! ... So Be It.”<sup>33</sup>**

Mannaheim’s position is that each of us spiritually comes from a distinct place. Some people have a lot of toxic baggage affiliated with their religion of origin. Other people do not, they just feel that the Northern Gods speak to them more clearly than the Yahweh god.

Mannaheim’s version of the profession oath was adopted from the Ravenbok:

***“Repeat after me:***

***I swear to follow the way of the North,***

***To always act with honor and bravery,***

***To be ever true to the Æsir and Vanir***

***By the Gods, I so swear.***

***By my honor, I so swear.***

***On this Holy Ring, I so swear.***

***Hail the Gods.”<sup>34</sup>***

The reason that we use the Ravenbok oath with the reference to the Nine Noble Virtues removed rather than an oath like Wodanson’s is because it was our opinion at the time that there is much more power in embracing our faith full-on rather than speaking ill of another God and harping on past wrongs done to a people and many of our ancestors as part of our Profession.

We thought Profession should be a positive experience and be about walking through that door of our Heathen faith into a new fruitful relationship with the Gods.



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The one distinction we make about Professing is that it is a personal declaration of faith. It does not make you a member of Mannaheim Kindred, that is a separate oath. You can be an “oath-sworn” member of Mannaheim without Professing and still have a robust role in the day-to-day administration of the Kindred. Conversely, you can be a Professed Heathen and decide not to be a sworn member of Mannaheim.

Furthermore, a person need not profess publicly. Profession can be private, and no one has to know, and, as Gythia, I have to take their word for it.

Another Mannheim Kindred decision/norm is that only Professed members can run rituals and attend to the spiritual needs of the group since we feel that it is important to have some distinct roles and responsibilities reserved for our clergy. Not that members who have not professed are made to feel like outsiders, they take part through readings and in supporting roles (Valkyrie, assisting with tending the sick, putting together ritual space, etc.)

### **By-Laws**

Your by-laws are perhaps the most important and overlooked tool for having a successful Kindred. Our by-laws were first put together with an emphasis on becoming and maintaining 501(c) status. Fortunately, they had an iron-clad administrative directive section, which we found to be very useful in addressing what we have called “Antagonists in the Church”<sup>35</sup> after the book of the same name written by Kenneth C. Haugk. The book provides insight into how to identify and deal with destructive conflict within a spiritual, organizational context. I’m not claiming that it’s the best book out there, but it was what we had on the bookshelf at the time and it worked.

There are many great by-law examples out there, so I won’t include ours here. However, if you are curious, they are available on our Facebook page. We recently updated them to address the

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many situations we have encountered over the last several years because we wanted to be clear that certain things were just not acceptable.

### **Record Keeping**

Your record-keeping can be simple or complex depending on what you feel your needs are. We use Meetup.com as an official record of scheduled events and RSVPs. We use Facebook.com to confirm that people are coming and what they are bringing. The Mannaheim Secretary keeps a record of who showed up. This becomes important for membership eligibility purposes. Some people may have met the time requirement, but they may not have attended enough events to warrant their inclusion for membership.

We don't have a bank account and we don't have nonprofit status, so our purchases are not tax exempt, so we have no need for that level of record keeping.

### **Money (Again)**

We all try to contribute equally to whatever activity we are planning. This means that if some more well-established members want to do something that the others can't afford, then these members must step up and assist, otherwise, the others can't go, or the event doesn't happen at all.

This has to be balanced carefully against members using money and gifts to influence other members, upsetting the dynamic of the group. Everyone should feel that their standing is based upon their deeds, not how much influence they could buy with members within the organization.

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### Training

Throughout the years Mannaheim Kindred has brought in teachers for both Kindred Members and a wider audience. We meet three times a month for generalized classes on a wide-range of Heathen topics that are facilitated by Kindred Members and our Chieftain. These include Heathen-related current events, issues being discussed on various Heathen list-serves, the Eddas, our Tribal Values, norms and by-laws.

This training has successfully addressed past issues where people didn't bother to acquaint themselves with our organizational structure and our expectations for Guests, Journeymen and Members. Annually, the Kindred votes on topics for "deep-dives" into more esoteric areas of study and, as Gythia, I develop a core curriculum, syllabus and a booklist to accompany that topic.

These classes are held monthly for Journeymen and Members. Occasionally I will facilitate weekend intensives on a specific focus area that compliments the annual deep-dive study topic. Overall, these classes assist with facilitating more group experience activities and creates a tighter knit group within the Kindred.

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### CHAPTER 6. LAST WORDS

A Heathen Liturgy has been rattling around in my brain for over six years. I have stopped and started several times, and, recently, I just felt I needed to finish it. Please take my words in the spirit that I intended them. They are my opinion. You don't have to agree with me; in fact, I would prefer that you didn't agree with me and that your own Kindred rituals and organization emerge as a reaction to my ideas. If there was a reference that was not cited or not cited correctly, it was an oversight. It was not excluded intentionally.

Modern Heathenry is a relatively young religion, and it's still growing. Depending on where you live, you may not meet another single Heathen or, you may know ALL of them in your area. We have a rich tapestry of stories and traditions; we can trace some of these stories and traditions to the early roots of our ancestors; and, we've made up or borrowed other traditions from other religions to fill in the rest. Still, other more recent traditions emerged from us sitting in a circle around the fire and discussing the merits of adding this thing or that.

Continue to be unique. Don't let anyone be the boss of you or say you're are doing it wrong. Aspire to be that man or woman in the longboat guiding your kindred. Put your best self forward and walk with the Gods!

I want to thank Aodan Chadwick, Samantha Fischer, Jess Howard, Burt Johns, Christine Kenahan, Jennifer Povey, Robert Nix and Perris Weiland for their editorial comments and written contributions to this work.

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