

RAVENBOK: THE RAVEN KINDRED RITUAL BOOK

BY LEWIS STEAD & THE RAVEN KINDRED

3RD EDITION



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## FORWARD: THE HISTORY OF RAVENBOK

When I first became involved with Asatru, there was little available in the popular press on the subject of our faith, so I began to write an essay here and a pamphlet there on various topics of interest to Norse Pagans. At various times I entertained the notion of fleshing out these various pieces into a book and submitting it to a publisher. Eventually good quality books became available on Asatru, such as Kveldulfr Gundarsson's *TEUTONIC RELIGION*, and I decided to take a different route. While commercial books were available, the best contender was trapped in a publishers pipeline for almost 2 years, and there was a clear need for information to be made available quickly, and more importantly to people who didn't want to spend money to find out a bit about the Norse tradition. I compiled everything together in the Spring of 1993, and released the book to the public free of charge through various computer networks such as America Online, CompuServe, and the Internet.

So far, hundreds of people have downloaded (and presumably read) Ravenbok from various computer networks. This new medium has allowed us to reach people with an unprecedented speed and ease. It also allows frequent updating, since there is no cost to produce or obtain the most recent version. I have been very gratified by the comments I've received, and would encourage other would-be authors to think twice about whether we need yet another \$9.95 production from Mooncash books or whether our community would be better served by free information. I've always been most interested in getting the information out to people. If there's already something in bookstores, why not get it out to a new audience? After all, religion is about sharing the faith of the Gods, not making money. Ravenbok is a continuing project, and this third edition is new and expanded. It is the first one to carry the name Ravenbok, which comes from the original computer name of RAVENBOOK.ZIP. It first saw physical print in the summer of 1993.

Finally a quick word about intellectual property rights. While it has been released free of charge, Ravenbok remains copyrighted by me. It may only be distributed electronically, **FREE OF CHARGE, IN ITS ENTIRETY**, with nothing added or removed. Print copies are available at the address above, and Ravenbok may not be distributed in hardcopy form either free or for charge. The appendixes are pamphlets my kindred distributes, and are meant to be distributed. Feel free to copy them, and add your own kindred's name and address (please leave ours too!) and hand them out.

Finally, my thanks to my kinsmen for providing me with support, ideas, and contributions to this work. While I have done the bulk of the writing, this book represents the ideas and concepts of The Raven Kindred as much as they do my own.

Lewis Stead (Istead@cais.com) June 1994, Wheaton, MD

## INTRODUCTION

Less than a thousand years ago the elders of Iceland made a fateful decision. Under political pressure from Christian Europe and faced with the need for trade, the Allthing or national assembly declared Iceland to be an officially Christian country. Within a few centuries the last remnants of Nordic Paganism, which once stretched through all of Northern Europe were thought dead. However, Iceland was a tolerant country and the myths, stories, and legends of Pagan times were left unburnt to kindle the fires of belief in later generations. In 1972, after a long campaign by poet and Gothi Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson, Iceland once again recognized Nordic Paganism as a legitimate and legal religion.

Iceland and Sweden were the last two bastions of the Pagan religion originally practiced by the people of the various Germanic tribes. Today Nordic Paganism also known as Odinism, Heathenism, Northern Tradition, or Asatru (an Old-Norse term meaning "loyalty to the Gods") is practiced in virtually all the countries where it originally flourished as well as America and Australia. It is one of a body of religions calling themselves Neo-Paganism, which include Druidism, the revival of ancient Celtic Paganism, and Wicca or Neo-Pagan Witchcraft. However Asatru remains largely unknown even within the community of Neo-Pagan believers.

This book is intended as a basic introduction to the beliefs and practices of the Raven Kindred of Asatru. We do not pretend to be experts and won't act as if we were. Rather we are simply believers in the Old Gods seeking to share our practice and research with others who are true to the Aesir. Our aim is to present a simple guide which will allow easy understanding of the principles behind Asatru and to give hints for further study and exploration.

While we attempt to be historically accurate to our religion's roots, it's important to note that there are many things that we simply don't know or which aren't written in stone. It is very important to us to stay as true to the ways of the old Pagans as is possible. While we occasionally need to flesh out our systems where we don't have direct evidence of our ancestors' ways, we are not likely to simply make up things. In those places where the various myths, legends, and folklore are not clear, we have tried to indicate this.

The most important thing for modern people to remember about Asatru is that it is a religion. It is not a system of magick or spirituality or "New Age Practice" which can be grafted onto something else or onto which other "systems" can be grafted wholesale. Asatru is a word derived from "As" a God of the Aesir family and "tru" meaning troth. To be Asatru is to be bound by loyalty and troth to the Old Gods of the North. While we may believe in the deities of other religions and peoples, and even respect them, these are not our Gods. While we may take part in rituals dedicated to other Gods at Pagan festivals or ecumenical gatherings, which encompass many other religions, we must not forget that Asatru is our religion and our primary concern. One simply does not collect membership in Asatru (or any other religion) as if one were collecting stamps. Our Gods are real and worthy of our respect. For modern Asatruar,

truth also means being loyal to the ways in which our religion was practiced in the past; thus we are not eclectic and tend to focus on learning about our ancestors ways of worshipping. We do not present our way as the only "true" Asatru, but we do feel that all Asatru should be solidly connected to its roots in ancient Norse practice. Where we do not know the certain answer to a question, there is room for exploration, but not for simply making something up out of whole cloth. While inspiration from the Gods is an important part of our movement, this is not "make believe" and any additions to the historical system should be made with respect to our ancient roots.

Today many people "practice" a number of different religions feeling that this is the best way to avoid intolerance, we have a completely different view of the world. Asatru is not a universal religion. We do not see ourselves as a path for everyone. We are true polytheists and see the world as encompassing many religions, which worship many Gods. While we do not deny the beliefs of others, we also do not confuse them with our own. The idea that "it is all one" is anathema to the true Heathen. To claim that Odin is the same God as Zeus is madness. Would one claim that green and red are the same merely because they are both colors? If one disagrees with this perspective or finds it limiting so be it. Our belief is also that Asatru is not a path for everyone and it is better to find ones own way rather than bend the religions of others to fit ourselves.

In accordance with this non-universalist conception, as much as we have been able to, we have not adopted the practices of other Pagan religions or magickal systems. Those familiar with Wicca will note that most modern Neo-Pagan systems are derived from it. This is not the case with Asatru. Our religion began with reconstruction based on written sources dating from the ancient Pagan period. This has been followed by over 20 years of innovation and practice within the Heathen community. While we make no pretensions that this has resulted in a system that is identical with that of our spiritual ancestors, it is at least a system that is our own.

In saying this I would reiterate that we do not put down any religion for its beliefs. We merely ask for the integrity of our own. We are not rejecting other systems because they are wrong or because we think ill of them, we are rather choosing Asatru because of our love and devotion to it.

## THE RITUALS OF ASATRU

### The Blot

The Blot is the most common ritual within Asatru. In its simplest form a blot is making a sacrifice to the Gods. In the old days this was done by feasting on an animal consecrated to the Gods and then slaughtered. As we are no longer farmers and our needs are simpler today, the most common blot is an offering of mead or other alcoholic beverage to the deities.

Many modern folk will be suspicious of a ritual such as this. Rituals which are deemed "sacrifices," such as the blot, have a certain lurid connotation and have been falsely re-interpreted by post-Pagan sources in order to denigrate or trivialize them. The most common myth about ritual sacrifice is that one is buying off a deity e.g. one throws a virgin into the Volcano so it won't erupt. Nothing could be further from the truth. The other common misunderstanding of sacrifice is that the gain some type of energy from the action of killing or the fear or suffering of the animal. This is also untrue, in actuality, if you do any kind of slaughtering--ritual or mundane--correctly there is neither. Our ancient spiritual forebears were slaughtering animals because they were farmers, and sacrifice was simply a sacred manner of doing so and sharing the bounty with the Gods.

The Norse conception of our relationship to the Gods is important in understanding the nature of sacrifice. In Asatru it is believed that we are not only the worshippers of the Gods but that we are spiritually and even physically related to them. The Eddas tell of a God, Rig (identified with Heimdall), who went to various farmsteads and fathered the human race so we are physically kin to the Gods. On a more esoteric level, humankind is gifted with "ond" or the gift of ecstasy. Ond is a force that is of the Gods. It is everything that makes humans different from the other creatures of the world. As creatures with this gift, we are immediately connected to the Gods. We are part of their tribe, their kin. Thus we are not simply buying off the Gods by offering them something that they want, but we are sharing with the Gods something that we all take joy in.

Sharing and gift giving was an important part of most ancient cultures and had magical significance. Leadership was seen as a contract between a Lord and follower. It is said, "A gift demands a gift." A good leader among the Norse was known as a "Ring giver," and it was understood that his generosity and the support of his war-band were linked and part of a complementary relationship. Giving a gift was a sign of friendship, kinship, and connection. Among the runes, gebo G encompasses the mystery of the blot. In English, the rune is named "gift," and the two lines intersecting are representative of the two sides of a relationship both giving to each other. By sharing a blot with the Gods we reaffirm our connection to them and thus reawaken their powers within us and their watchfulness over our world.



A blot can be a simple affair where a horn of mead is consecrated to the Gods and then poured as a libation, or it can be a part of a larger ritual. A good comparison is the Catholic Mass which may be part of a regular service or special event such as a wedding or funeral, or it may be done as a purely magical-religious practice without any sermon, hymns, or other trappings.

The blot consists of three parts, the hallowing or consecrating of the offering, the sharing of the offering, and the libation. Each of these is equally important. The only physical objects required are mead, beer or juice; a horn or chalice; a sprig of evergreen used to sprinkle the mead; and a ceremonial bowl, known as a Hlautbowl, into which the initial libation will be made.

The blot begins with the consecration of the offering. The Gothi (Priest) or Gythia (Priestess) officiating at the blot invokes the God or Goddess being honored. This is usually accomplished by a spoken declaration with ones arms being held above ones head in the shape of the rune Elhaz Z. (This posture is used for most invocations and prayers throughout Asatru.) After the spoken invocation an appropriate rune or other symbol of the God or Goddess may be drawn in the air with the finger or with the staff. Once the God is invoked, the Gothi takes up the horn. His assistant pours mead from the bottle into the horn. The Gothi then traces the hammer sign (an upside down T) over the horn as a blessing and holds it above his head offering it to the Gods. He then speaks a request that the God or Goddess bless the offering and accept it as a sacrifice. At the least one will feel the presence of the deity; at best one will be able to feel in some inner way the God taking of the mead and drinking it.

The mead is now not only blessed with divine power, but has passed the lips of the God or Goddess. The Gothi then takes a drink of the horn and it is passed around the gathered folk. In our modern rituals each person toasts the deity before they drink. Although this sounds like a very simple thing, it can be a very powerful experience. At this point the mead is no longer simply a drink but is imbued with the blessing and power of the God or Goddess being honored. When one drinks, one is taking that power into oneself. After the horn has made the rounds once, the Gothi again drinks from the horn and then empties the remainder into the hlautbowl. The Gothi then takes up the evergreen sprig and his assistant the Hlautbowl and the Gothi sprinkles the mead around the circle or temple or onto the altar. If there are a great number of the folk gathered, one may wish to drop the drinking and merely sprinkle the various folk with the mead as a way of sharing it. In a small group one might eliminate the sprinkling and merely drink as the blessing.

When this is done the Hlautbowl is taken by the Gothi and poured out onto the ground. This is done as an offering not only to the God invoked at the blot, but it is also traditional to remember the Nerthus, the Earth Goddess, at this time, since it is being poured onto her ground. Many invocations mention the God, Goddess, or spirit being sacrificed to, and then Mother Earth, as in the Sigdrifa Prayer "Hail to the Gods and to the Goddesses as well; Hail Earth that gives to all men." (Sigdrifumal 3) With this action, the blot is ended.

Obviously this is a very sparse ritual and if performed alone could be completed in only a few minutes. This is as it should be, for blots are often poured not because it is a time of gathering

or festivity for the folk, but because the blot must be poured in honor or petition of a God or Goddess on their holiday or some other important occasion. For example, a father tending his sick child might pour a blot to Eir the Goddess of healing. Obviously he doesn't have time to waste on the "trappings" of ritual. The intent is to make an offering to the Goddess as quickly as possible. At some times a full celebration might not be made of a holiday because of a person's hectic schedule, but at the least a short blot should be made to mark the occasion. However, in most cases a blot will at least be accompanied by a statement of intent at the beginning and some sort of conclusion at the end. It might also be interspersed with or done at the conclusion of ritual theater or magic.

One important thing to note about any Asatru ritual is that ours is a holistic religion. We do not limit our Gods or spirituality to a certain time and place. While the sacrament of the blot is usually poured as part of a ceremony, the feast afterwards, singing of sacred songs, reciting of poetry, toasts at mealtime, Morris Dancing, etc. are all part of our religion. At the first Raven-Thing, our annual festival, we began with a great feast, then we held a blot ritual which involved a mystery play of Thor and the Frost-Giants. Afterwards, we held a sumbel. All the gathered folk sat for the first three rounds dedicated to the Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors, but afterwards people came and went (politely and quietly) as they wished. The atmosphere of the whole evening was one of ritual and celebration. When done appropriately, there's no disconnection between the parts.

Asatru is also a very vibrant, intense, and somewhat rowdy religion. Invocations to the Gods, particularly outside, are often shouted at the top of one's lungs, and are punctuated by loud "Hails!" which are echoed by the folk. When someone in an Asatru ritual says "Hail!" or hails a God ("Hail Odin!" for example) it's appropriate to repeat after them in a similar tone and loudness.

## The Sumbel

One of the most common celebrations noted in tales of our ancestors is the Sumbel or ritual drinking celebration. This was a more mundane and social sort of ritual than the blot, but of no less importance. When Beowulf came to Hrothgar, the first thing they did was to drink at a ritual sumbel. This was a way of establishing Beowulf's identity and what his intent was, and doing so in a sacred and traditional manner.

The sumbel is actually quite simple. The guests are seated, usually in some formal fashion, and the host begins the sumbel with a short statement of greeting and intent, and by offering the first toast. The horn is then passed around the table and each person makes their toasts in turn. At the sumbel toasts are drunk to the Gods, as well as to a person's ancestors or personal heroes. Rather than a toast, a person might also offer a brag or some story, song, or poem that has significance. The importance is that at the end of the toast, story, or whatever, the person offering it drinks from the horn, and in doing so "drinks in" what he spoke.

The sumbel is also an important time for the folk to get to know each other in a more intimate way than most people are willing to share. Modern society is at two extremes. At one end are the emotionless beings who have been robbed of their soul by modern industrial secular culture. On the other side are those pathetic "sensitive New-Age guys" who spend their lives consciously attempting to stir their emotions and who force an unnatural level of intimacy between themselves and others. There are some levels of emotional intimacy which are not meant to be openly shared with strangers. Doing so reduces their meaning to the mundane. At sumbel, barriers can be lowered in a place which is sacred to the Gods and the Folk. Thoughts can be shared among companions and friends without embarrassment or forced intimacy.

One format for the sumbel with a history in tradition is to drink three rounds. The first is dedicated to the Gods, the second to great heroes of the folk such as historical figures or heroes from the sagas, and the third to personal ancestors, heroes, or friends which have passed from this world.

Another theme for a sumbel is past, present, and future. This type of sumbel is more of a magical ritual than one of celebration. The idea is to make toasts which bring up some aspect of your past and present situation, and a third toast or brag which represents your wishes for the future. One might make a toast to the first Asatru ritual one attended as the past, a second to the companions and kindred then gathered, and for his third toast might state that he intends to be initiated as a Gothi in the coming year. The purpose would be to link the coming event of his initiation with the two already accomplished events of pledging Asatru and finding a kindred -- two other important rites of passage. In this case initiation as a Gothi then becomes something which is linked to a chain of events that have already occurred, rather than an isolated action which might occur. Thus magically, this moves the person towards his goal.

A third and ever popular type of sumbel is a free-for-all where stories are told, toasts are made, and bragging is done until all the gathered Odinists are under the table. Perhaps this is not quite so esoteric or purposeful as the previous ideas, but it's certainly in keeping with the examples of our Gods and ancestors. In any case, no matter how relaxed a sumbel has become, I have never seen one that was merely a drinking event. Some of the most intense experiences I have had with people have come from such "open ended" sumbels.

These are only ideas. The sumbel is a very freeform type of thing and the framework is very simple to adapt.

The blot and sumbel make up the mainstream of our modern Asatru tradition. This does not mean that they are the only rituals that modern Asatru perform, but in one way or another most rituals revolve around one or both of these "generic" ceremonies.

## Profession

Profession is one of the most important ceremonies in Asatru. To Profess one's belief in and kinship to the Gods should be an important turning point in one's life and the beginning of a new understanding of the self. Profession is, however, a very simple and rather short ceremony. In our kindred we usually profess people during a regular meeting, but either before or after the blot offering.

Profession is not an occult or initiatory ceremony. It is nothing less than its name: one professes (declares, affirms) his wish to become one of the Asafolk. This oath is usually taken by the Kindred-Gothi on the oath ring or some other Holy object as follows:

The Gothi stands in front of the altar and says, "Will [insert name here] please come forward." After he or she does so "Are you here of your own free will? Is it your intention to solemnly swear allegiance and kinship to the Gods of Asgard, the Aesir and Vanir?" If the answer to both these questions is in the affirmative the Gothi takes up the oath ring (or some other holy object upon which oaths are sworn) and holds it out to the person professing and says, "Repeat after me. I swear to ever uphold the Raven Banner of Asgard, to follow the way of the North, to always act with honor and bravery, and to be ever true to the Aesir and Vanir and to Asatru. By the Gods I so swear. By my honor I so swear. On this Holy Ring I so swear. Hail the Gods." The kindred then replies "Hail the Gods!" and the Gothi finishes "Then be welcome to the service of Asgard and the Folk of the Asatru."

The essence of Profession is making a commitment to Asatru. It should not be undertaken without thought and prayer. When one Professes, one is leaving behind other faiths. If one isn't yet comfortable in doing this, then Profession should be put off, perhaps indefinitely. It should be reiterated here that there should be absolutely no pressure put on people to Profess. False or coerced Professions merely cheapen the ritual and the commitment that it represents. It should also be said that Asatru ritual is open to anyone. You do not need to have undergone a ritual of Profession in order to attend kindred events or worship the Gods.

There may be other celebrations connected to a Profession, just as other religions hold Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation parties. When someone joins our kindred, we hold a Sumbel of nine rounds; each dedicated to one of the values of Asatru (see below) and toast those values to the new kinsman.

## THE ASATRU VE

There are probably as many modern theories of what an ancient Norse Ve or Hof (temple, holy place) looked like as there were ancient Norse temples. I've heard everything (with full scholarly accompaniment) from groves in the woods to constructed buildings, which were the basis for the later Stave Churches of Scandinavia. In general, I think the multiplicity of descriptions throughout the history of our folk indicates that our people were of a wide and practical mind about what should be present in a temple and what form it should take. Our modern practice tends to reflect this.

The first distinction we might make in our modern practice is between altars that people have in their homes, and the setup of the rooms that we perform group rituals in. For rituals, we tend to use any place, which is large enough to fit everyone into. We try to mask the normal use of the room, which in the past has included such things as covering the television set with a cloth and moving some of the more obtrusive furniture out of the room. The one other preparatory thing that I can't recommend highly enough indoors is to line the room with candles and get rid of any artificial lights. The darkness isn't an important part of the religious elements of the ritual, but it gets rid of a lot of distractions.

The altar itself is actually a rather simple affair. We usually commandeer a small table for this purpose. There's no specific setup for an altar in Asatru, other than it should look pleasant and hold all the implements you will need during the ritual.

Other than whatever sanctification rite (hammer rite) you wish to do in order to consecrate your space, there's nothing else to be done: no squiggly Hebrew letters inscribed on the edges of a 9' circle, no alchemical elements or "quarter castings." The layout of the folk during ones rituals is determined by your space--there's no magical formula that requires a circle or any other shape. If the room is square, arrange people in a square. We tend to form up in a semi-circle with the altar in the front, and the Gothi and Valkyrie on either side of the altar.

Of course, whatever else one wishes to do to decorate ones ritual space is up to them. I know people who have decent sized statues of the Gods. Our kindred has a kindred banner (The Raven Banner!) which we usually hang behind the altar. Pictures of the Gods, statuary, etc. are all appropriate.

When one is outside, other considerations come into place. I would not recommend doing ritual outside at night or in darkness, unless one has been at the site during the day and/or one is planning on spending the night. Getting to the site and setting up in the dark tends to take too much time and detracts from the overall experience. I highly recommend rituals at dusk, or if you can drag your kinsmen out of bed, at dawn. Holding a Balder-blot, and meditating on his loss and the temporal nature of life while watching the setting sun is a truly incredible experience. The best places to hold rituals tend to be in groves that are sufficiently mature for

the shade to have killed off most of the ground vegetation (traditionally the continental Germans held their rituals in groves) or open fields where one can see the sky. Check that the space you have selected is reasonably flat and that if you plan on people sitting down that the ground is dry and without poison ivy. Unless you have a firepit, I don't recommend a fire--it's more trouble than it's worth. Forget candles and incense. These can be useful psychological aids indoors, but outside they look ridiculous--I'll never forget the ridiculous image of a Wiccan ritual I attended during which a person with utter seriousness and pomp carried a single stick of incense around the ritual site.

Most everyone I know who is a practicing Pagan of any type has some type of space set aside in their home for occasional honoring of the Gods. In some ways this may be a more important thing to concentrate on than the setup of your Ve for group ritual work because the form of your home altar takes the place of the ritual trappings found when working with a group. The major purposes of a home altar are to remind one of the place of the Gods in ones life, and to provide a convenient and regular place to make occasional offerings and prayers to the Gods.

Home altars tend to be very eclectic. In our home, we have the top of a bookshelf set aside with an altar holding our usual ritual tools, and a few candles. We have another friend who has no permanent shrine, but carries a statue of Thor in a small wooden box. One side of the box can be removed to display Thor, and under the God's seat is a small piece of lava taken from Thingvellir. It's not necessary to have all or any of the tools for the blot on ones home altar, unless one plans to perform full blots at it. Offerings in the home tend to be candles or incense; not traditional, but simple and part of our modern culture.

## THE HOLIDAYS

The ancient Norse knew four major holidays the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes which we call Summer and Winter Finding, and the two solstices which we call Midsummer and Yule. However, there were many other minor festivals and modern Asatru have added even more. A calendar of Raven Kindred rituals is provided in an appendix and I also encourage anyone to find as many as one is willing to meet for. We meet monthly, but some groups meet 8 times a year and also celebrate the cross-quarter days of May Day/Walpurgis, Halloween/Samhain, February eve or The Charming of the Plow, and Lammastide or Freyfaxi,

Most of our rituals also honor only one or a few Gods or Goddesses at any one time. However, there is no reason why the entire pantheon should not be offered prayers and thanks at any occasion. This would be particularly appropriate at the major holidays. Unlike most other groups in the Neo-Pagan movement, we do not necessarily honor Gods in male/female pairs. The boy/girl notion is one taken from the Pagan fertility religion of Wicca and isn't necessarily appropriate to our Gods, who often represent things other than fertility. So while a Spring ritual held in honor of Freya and Frey as fertility deities might wish to honor them together, there is no reason to include Frigg in a ritual dedicated to Odin as the God of War.

### Yule

Yule is the most important holiday of the year. Everyone is familiar with the shortness of the deep winter days, but in the Scandinavian countries this is of even greater importance. At the Yuletide there is almost no sunlight at all, and the climate would have people bound in their homes waiting for the return of Spring.

Yule is a long festival, traditionally held to be 12 days or more. After Yule the days began to get longer and the festival represented the breaking of the heart of winter and the beginning of the new year. Yule was the holiday of either Thor or Frey, although there is no reason not to honor both Gods in modern practice.

Frey is the God of fertility and farming and was honored at Yule in the hopes that his time would soon return. Frey is also an important God at this time as shown in the myth "The Wooing of Gerd." Gerd is Frey's wife, and she was once a frost giant. Frey had seen her while he was seated on Odin's High Seat, and was utterly taken by her, but she would not yield until Skirnir, Frey's messenger or perhaps Frey in disguise, threatened her with an eternity of cold. In this way, Frey brings back the summer times by wooing a daughter of cold and frost. His love for her brings warmth to her heart and to the land.

Thor's position at Yule is a bit more savage. He is the sworn enemy of the Frost Giants and Jotnar who rule the winter months, and as such is honored as the God who's actions fight off these creatures and bring back the spring.

Our kindred also honors Sunna, the Sun Goddess, at Yule. However, we feel she is more important at Midsummer, when she is at her height.

The most important symbols of Yule are still with us today. Most of the supposedly secular customs of Christmas are actually Pagan in origin. Evergreen trees and holly which remained green throughout the long nights and cold were a promise that spring would once again return to the land. These symbols may also have been a connection to the nature spirits who have sway over the return of the warm days. The modern conception of Santa Claus as an elf, for whom offerings of milk and cookies are left, is possibly a modern continuation of leaving offerings for the Alvar and other nature spirits. The idea of children staying up all night in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Santa Claus may be a remnant of people staying awake to mark the long night and remind the sun to return. (In the latter case it's considered an adequate substitution to leave a candle going all night to light the way for the returning sun.)

Yule is a weeks long festival, not just a single holiday. The Yule season begins on the solstice, which is the Mother Night of Yule, and ends with Twelfth Night on January sixth. As a point of interest, January seventh is St. Dystaff's day, which Nigel Pennic has suggested may have been a day sacred to Frigg, whose symbol is the distaff.

While one might expect a rather dour theme to a holiday held in the darkness and cold, Yule is a time of feasting and gladness.

The most important custom at Yule for modern Pagans is the swearing of Yule oaths. Our kindred does this at Twelfth Night (aka New Years Eve). We hold a sumbel and we keep the Yule wreath handy for anyone who wishes to swear an oath for the coming year.

There are simply so many different Yule customs, both ancient and modern, that one has almost limitless possibilities even when staying within Scandanavian and Germanic customs. In modern practice one might honor Sunna on the Mother Night, then hold a blot a few days later to Thor, a feast for New Years day which is shared with the house and land spirits, and then finish on Twelfth Night with a ritual to Frey, whose time is then officially beginning.

## Summer Finding

Summer Finding is also known to many groups as Ostara, the holiday sacred to the Goddess for whom the modern Easter is named. She is a fertility Goddess and her symbols are the hare and the egg. She was an important Goddess of spring to the ancient Saxons, but we know little else of her other than this. Some have suggested that Ostara is merely an alternate name for Frigg or Freya, but neither of these Goddesses seem to have quite the same fertility function as



Ostara does. Frigg seems too "high class" to be associated with such an earthy festival and Freya's form of fertility is more based on eroticism than reproduction.

The obvious folk tradition at this time of year involves eggs. These were colored as they are today, but then they were buried, or more appropriately, planted in the earth. Some have suggested that the act was purely magical, the fertility of the eggs would then be transferred from the animal realm to the plant realm and would increase the prosperity of the harvest. It's also possible that they were left as an offering to the alvar and the spirits of the plants.

In any case a blot should be prepared to the Goddess of Spring, however one wishes to honor her, and also to the spirits of the land.

## Midsummer Day

The summer solstice was second only to Yule in importance to the ancient Northmen. Some groups mark this day as sacred to Balder, but we disagree with this. While Balder can be seen as a dying and resurrected Sun God, in the mythology we are most familiar with, he does not return to life until Ragnarok and it seems like "bad karma" to symbolically kill the sun when you know Baldr doesn't come back until the end of the world. Instead, we mark this day as sacred to the Goddess Sunna, who is literally the sun.

One idea for midsummer is to remain awake all night and mark the shortest night of the year, then at sunrise to perform a "Greeting of Sunna" and a blot to her.

Another midsummer custom is the rolling of a flaming wagon wheel down a hill to mark the turning of the wheel of the year. If fire would otherwise be a hazard, one could parade a wheel covered with candles for similar effect. It is also a time for general merriment and in the Scandinavian countries many of what we know as the traditional May Day rituals such as May Poles and Morris Dances were celebrated at Midsummer rather than in May.

In our area Midsummer occurs during a large local Pagan festival, and we have gone all out in making it a major holiday with blot, sumbel, feasting and drinking. We are currently in the process of constructing a "sun ship" which, with sails of copper reflecting the light from small torches, represents Sunna will be brought forth at dawning and dusk.

## Winter Finding

I have not come across a great deal of distinctive traditional lore about the Autumn Equinox that would distinguish it from the Harvest festivals found worldwide. It seems to have been overshadowed to some extent by the Winter Nights which we celebrate at the equinox rather than at the more traditional time of mid-November.

Winter Finding should be treated as a general harvest festival. Whichever Gods you invoke for fertility of the land would be most appropriate to invoke again at this time. We have honored Frey & Freya and Nerthus & Njord for this purpose. You can take your pick. Even more so than other holidays, a large feast is appropriate at this time, perhaps concentrating on local vegetables and grains more than meat.

## Winter Nights

The Winter Nights are the traditional festival honoring the Disir or family spirits. It is a time to remember your family, the dead, and your ancestors. (For more information on the Disir see the chapter "Elves and other Spirits.")

A Freyablot may be performed at this time as Freya is known as the Vanadis (i.e. the Dis of the Vanir) or the Great Dis, and she seems to be the Goddess of the Disir themselves. This is probably connected to Freya's position as recipient of half the battle-slain or her ability with seidhr. One might also simply want to honor the Disir as a whole, or attempt to summon and pour offering to your own family's Dis. A sumbel which toasts ones ancestors and passed on friends would also be in order. If a feast is held, it should be quiet and respectful of the character of the season. Another idea is a silent "mum feast," a custom which is found the world over.

The various Halloween customs such as dressing in costume or celebrating this time as a time where the worlds of the living and the dead connect are more Celtic in origin than Nordic and probably should not be part of an Asatru celebration.

## THE GODS OF ASGARD

The Old Norse reckoned that there were three races of Gods: the Aesir, the Vanir, and the Jotnar. The Aesir are those beings most often referred to in the ancient literature simply as "the Gods," in fact the word "As" means "God." They are the Gods of society, representing things such as Kingship, Craft, etc. The Vanir are more closely connected to the earth and represent the fecundity of the land and the natural forces which help mankind. Once there was a great war between the Aesir and the Vanir, but this was eventually settled and Frey, Freya, and Njord came to live with the Aesir to seal the peace. The Jotnar are a third race of Gods and at constant war with the Aesir, but there is not and never will be peace in this battle. The Jotnar are never called Gods, but rather referred to as giants. They represent the natural forces of chaos and destruction as the Aesir represent forces of order and society. Just as fire and ice mix to form the world, this creative interaction of chaos and order maintains the balance of the world. In the end the two sides will meet in the great battle of Ragnarok and the world will be destroyed, only to be reborn.

The Norse notion of the Gods was very much involved with tribalism. The Aesir are the Gods of the tribe or clan. The Vanir are those Gods who are allied with the clan, but who are not part of it. The Jotnar or Giants are the "outlanders" or more simply everyone else.

The Norse Gods were not held to be all-powerful or immortal. Their youth was maintained very precariously by the magickal apples of the Goddess Idunna. More importantly at the end of the world a good number of the Gods will die in battle. The Northern view of the world was a practical one with little assurance for the future and little perfection and the Gods are no exception.

It is very important to understand that the Gods are real and living beings. They are not mere personifications of natural forces, nor are they Jungian archetypes that dwell only in our minds-although Jung's work may be helpful in understanding them. Those divinities who we call "Gods" (i.e., the Aesir and Vanir) are also "personal deities" who take an active interest in the affairs of mankind, and seek relationships with their followers. This is important to remember when we perform ceremonies or pray to the Gods. They aren't magical symbols to be manipulated, nor is our religion some type of giant cosmic vending machine where sacrifices are inserted and blessings come out. The Gods are living beings and offer us benefits because we are their friends and companions.

### The Gods in the Temple: Odin, Thor, and Frey

The three most important Gods were held to be Odin, Thor, and Frey. These were the deities whose statues stood at the altar of the temple at Uppsala. They are considered the most important because of what they represent. Mythologer Georges Dumézil has linked these three

deities with the three classes of Indo-European culture: the Kings, the Warriors, and the Farmers. Although the fit is not an exact one, it is probably true that these three deities most concretely symbolized the various aspects of Norse life and culture and most people would have found a God who represented their life-experience in one of these three deities.

Odin is the Allfather, remembered today best as a God of war and of the berserk rage of the Vikings. However, he has other aspects which are just as strong or stronger. In the Eddas, he is the leader of the Gods, but this is a position which most of the Germanic peoples attributed to Tyr. It's likely that Odin only became ruler during the Viking Age, when a God of wile rather than strict justice was more necessary. Being the Allfather, his original position of leadership was probably familial rather than legislative. Most importantly he is a God of transcendent wisdom and in relation to that a God of magick. He is the God of the Runes, the magical alphabet which holds the mysteries of the universe within it. In most of the non-Viking countries, Odin's warrior aspect was played down. In England, where he is known as Woden, he is a gray-cloaked wanderer (the inspiration for Tolkien's Gandalf) who travels the country, usually alone, surveying his land. Here again we see him in the position of a father figure, a warder of the land but not necessarily a King. Odin is also a God of the dead. Half of the slain in battles go to him to prepare for the Ragnarok. (The remaining half go to Freya.) He also has associations with the dead as a practitioner of Seidhr, a form of shamanic magick which he learned from Freya and used on various occasions to travel to Hel and seek the knowledge of those who have passed from this world. It's difficult to classify Odin simply because he was such a popular God during the last stages of Norse Paganism and thus absorbed many traits of other Gods.

Thor is probably the best known of the Norse Gods. He is a simple God, the patron of farmers and other folk who are "wise, but not too wise" as the Eddas advise us to be. Thor is best known for wandering the world in search of adventure; usually found in the form of giants or other monsters to kill. He possesses tremendous strength and the hammer Mjolnir, which was made for him by the Dwarfs. Mjolnir is considered to be the Gods' greatest treasure because it is sure protection from the forces of chaos. Using Mjolnir, Thor is a warrior figure, but he is less a professional warrior than a common man called upon to defend his land. He loves battle not for itself as do the berserkers of Odin, nor does he have a strong code of honor such as that of Tyr--in fact he chronically breaks with honor and kills giants whether they have the protection of "hospitality" or not. Thor is associated with thunder, and is also the God of rain and storms, but it's important to note that he is not the God of destructive storms. Thor is nature as a benefit to man. The Jotnar are held to be the source of the destruction found in nature. Thor was the God of "everyman." He was simple in purpose, strong, and free. He was most beloved of the freemen farmers who populated the Germanic lands.

Frey is a God of peace and fertility. If Thor is the God of the farmer, then Frey is the God of the crops themselves. He is a God of the Vanir, but lives with the Aesir to secure their treaty with the Vanir. His symbol is the priapus and his blessings were sought at planting and other important agricultural festivals. The word "Frey" means "Lord" and it's unsure if this is the Gods name or his title. He is also known as Ing or Ingvi, so some have speculated his title is properly

Frey Ingvi--Lord Ingvi. We do not know a great deal more about Frey as few myths have survived which give us any insight into his character. As much as he is a God of fertility, he is also a God of peace and Ing was said to have brought a Golden Age of peace and prosperity to old Denmark. Horses are held to be sacred to Frey, probably because of fertility connections.

## Goddesses

In general we know much less about how our ancestors worshipped the Goddesses than the Gods. Later Norse culture was very bound up with the Vikings and it is likely that the Goddesses were deemphasized at this point. More importantly, virtually all the mythology we have today was recorded during the Christian period and Christian culture had little respect for women, least of all independent and strong women like those of Nordic society.

Freya is the most important of the Goddesses or at least that Goddess about which we know the most. She is the sister of Frey and along with him was sent to live with the Aesir in order to seal a peace agreement. Freya is a Goddess with two distinct sides to her. First, she is the Goddess of love and beauty and second a Goddess of war who shares the battle-slain with Odin. Unlike our modern culture, the ancients saw no contradiction in this. She was also a sorceress who practiced the shamanic magick known as Seidhr, which she taught to Odin. Freya is the Goddess most often invoked by independent women.

While she is a Goddess of beauty, she is not dependent on men as is the stereotype of so many love Goddesses, but is strong and fiercely independent. She is also known as the Great Dis and probably has connections to the family spirits known as the Disir. In many ways she is like Odin in that she is a Goddess of many functions which are not always obviously related. In modern Asatru, many groups have placed Freya alongside Odin and Thor on the altar, in place of her twin brother Frey.

Frigg is a most misunderstood Goddess. She is the wife of Odin and many people are too willing to let her be known simply as that. However, the old Norse had a much different idea of the place of women and of marriage in general. While marriages for love were certainly known, marriage was also a business and social arrangement and there were important duties for a wife. These were symbolized by a set of keys which hung at the belt of all "goodwives." This symbolized that the home was under the control of the woman of the house, who was equal to her husband. Today we think these duties as very minor, but a thousand years ago they were far from trivial. Up until this century most of Europe lived in extended families. A house, especially a hall of a warrior, was not a small building with a nuclear family, but an entire settlement with outbuildings, servants, slaves, and an entire clan. The wife of the house was in charge of stores and trading with other clans. It was she that saw to the upkeep of the farm, the balancing of the books, and even to the farming itself if her husband was away trading or making war. It was as much a job of managing a business as it was being a "wife." For these reasons Frigg is still very important and can easily be invoked beyond the home. She would, for example, be a natural patron for someone who owned a business. Frigg also shares a lot of

characteristics with her husband. She is the only other God who is allowed to sit in Odin's seat from which can be seen all that goes on in the nine worlds. It is said that she knows the future, but remains silent, which is entirely in keeping with the way women of the time exercised their power: namely indirectly. While in a better world this might not be necessary, it is still an important tool for women who must exist in a world where men are sometimes threatened by them. While Freya is a Goddess who acts independent of "traditional" roles, Frigg is a Goddess who works within those roles, but still maintains her power and independence.

## Other Gods

There are of course many other Gods and Goddesses. Some of these have important places in the myths, while some others are mentioned only once along with their function.

### Loki

The most perplexing God of Asgard is Loki. He was probably originally a fire God, but he is best known as the troublemaker of Asgard. In various minor scrapes Loki arranges to get the Gods into trouble, usually by giving away their treasures and then arranging to return them. This is very much in the traditional role of a trickster, who keeps things interesting by causing trouble. However, it's sometimes difficult to see Loki merely as a trickster because his actions are sometimes simply too evil to be ignored. Balder was the most beautiful and beloved of the Gods and a pledge was extracted from all the things in the world that they would not harm him. The sole exception to this was the mistletoe which was deemed too tiny to be a threat. Amused by his invulnerability, the Gods took turns throwing objects at Balder, which of course had no effect on him. Loki took the blind God Hod and put a spring of mistletoe in his hands and guided him to throw it. The dart pierced Balder's breast and he died. Later a deal was arranged wherein Balder would be allowed to return to life if all the creatures of the world would weep for him. Only one refused, an ogress who said she cared not a whit for Balder when he was alive and thought him just as well off dead. The ogress is believed to have been Loki in disguise. For these actions Loki was chained beneath the earth and it was arranged that venom would drip upon him in punishment that would last until the end of the world. With the death of Balder, Loki goes beyond the level of trickster and becomes a truly evil figure. It is known that when Ragnarok comes, Loki will lead the legions of chaos against the Aesir and bring about the end of the world.

Indeed Loki's actions certainly do seem harsh, but they are entirely in keeping with the Norse way of looking at things. One of the functions of a trickster God is to keep things from becoming stagnant. The trickster causes trouble so that people may evolve, for nothing brings about ingenuity like need. The Norse did not believe anything was eternal. In the end even the Gods would die in the battle of Ragnarok, which would also destroy the world. Balder's invulnerability was not natural. As the Edda says "Cattle die, and men die, and you too shall die..." It was deemed much more wise and valiant by the Norse to live up to one's fate than to try to avoid it. It would likewise be unnatural to return from the dead. One can see Loki as

merely acting as an agent of nature to return things to their normal and correct course. In such a view, it was not an act of evil, but an intervention to stop an evil against the natural order. Likewise Ragnarok must come. It is in the nature of the world to be destroyed and then be reborn.

On the other hand, Loki is a God of darkness. As far as we know Loki was never worshipped, at least not in the same way as the other Gods were. Recognition of his action and his place in the universe is essential, but Gods of this type are seldom welcome. It is "fashionable" today to laugh at trickster Gods and see them as a sort of jester figure, but we must not forget that their nature is much darker than this even when it does serve a purpose. Change is important, but nothing changes the world faster and more thoroughly than war.

## Tyr

While seldom reckoned today among the most popular of the Gods, Tyr is extremely important. He is the God of battle, of justice, and (secondary to Odin) of Kingship. The most important myth concerning Tyr shows both his bravery and honor. He gave his hand as surety to the Fenris Wolf that no trickery was involved in the Gods binding of him. When the fetter in fact did bind the wolf, Tyr lost his hand. The honor and reliance on ones word is often overlooked in this myth in favor of an interpretation of self-sacrifice. However, throughout the myths various deals are made and the Aesir easily get out of them. It's likely that Tyr could have escaped his fate as well, but one's word is one's word and thus Tyr lost his hand because it was less valuable to him than his honor and word. Tyr was held to be the God of the Thing or assembly. While the ancient Norse were not truly democratic, and in fact held slaves, within the noble class all were reckoned to be roughly equal. The Thing was a place where the landholders would meet for trade and to iron out disputes among them, in the hope of avoiding feuds. Tyr was originally the chieftain of the Aesir and the God of Kingship, but he has been gradually supplanted by Odin, especially during the Viking Age. It is likely this was because of Tyr's strong sense of honor and justice. For raiding and pillaging, Odin, the God of the berserker rage, was a much better patron than Tyr, the God of honorable battle. This is an important thing to note about Northern religion: it is extremely adaptable. There are not hard and fast rules about who is what and while the nature of the Gods cannot be changed they are more than happy to have the aspects most important to their worshippers emphasized. Just as a person uses different skills and "becomes a different person" when they move or change jobs, so the Gods too have adapted to new climates and needs.

## Baldr

While we only know the myth of Balder's death, it is clear that he was a God of some importance. Unfortunately, modern writers, coming from a Christian background, have tried to turn Balder into a Christ figure. Balder was a God of beauty and goodness, but his name also translates as "warrior." It is a mistake to turn him into a "Norse Jesus." The mere fact that he died and will return after Ragnarok is not enough for this equation. Another interpretation of Balder is that of the dying and resurrected God of the Sun. This also seems a mistake, as Balder

does not return from the land of death. It makes a poor symbol to honor Balder on solar holidays, lest the sun not return! The remaining major interpretation of Balder is as a God of mystic initiation. While this fits to some extent, we unfortunately no longer know. The equation with Christ has wiped out a great deal of lore about Balder and we are left to rediscover his place in our modern practice.

## Minor Gods

Of the other important Gods, Heimdall is the guardian of Asgard. He, as Rig, is also one of the Gods who fathered mankind. Njord is the God of sailing and sailors. Unless one travels on the sea, he is probably of little importance to you, but if one does sail, he is your natural patron. If Njord is the God of sailing and of man's use of the sea, then Aegir is the God of the sea itself. He is married to Ran who takes drowned sailors to her home after their death. Aegir is considered to be the greatest of brewers, and our kindred honors him in a special holiday due to the importance of mead in our modern religion. Bragi is a much-overlooked God who is the patron of tale-tellers and bards. Other Gods more or less overlooked in the myths include Forseti, who renders the best judgments, Ull, a God of hunting who is the male counter to Skadi, Vithar, the son of Thor who is as strong as his father, Vali, Odin's son who will avenge his father's death at Ragnarok, and Hod, the blind God who was led to slay Balder.

While we might say that certain Gods are more important than others, this is in many ways not accurate. We would be better served to say that some are more popular. The Norse concept of the relationship between men and Gods was one of friendship. A man would honor all the Gods as worthy and existent, but would usually find one as his special patron. It is not surprising, considering this, that Thor is the most popular of Gods. If the average person was searching for a God very much like himself, Thor would be the obvious choice. Likewise, a God such as Njord would have been extremely important to sailors and fishermen, but would have been almost completely unimportant as a patron to inlanders. The less well-known Gods are just as powerful as their more well-known contemporaries, they merely have power over a less well-known aspect of life.

There are also many Goddesses other than Frigg and Freya, but we know very little of them. Eir was said to be the greatest of healers, and is for this reason very important. There is no healer God as the ancients held that medicine was a craft for women and not for men, but modern male healers should certainly invoke her. While Skadi has a very small part in the myths, many modern Asafolk find her a compelling figure. She is the snow-shoe Goddess, who travels in the isolated mountains hunting with her bow. She is married to Njord, but they are separated as Njord can't abide the mountains, and Skadi can't sleep in Njord's hall where she is kept awake by the pounding of the sea. She is an excellent role model for women who work alone and who are independently minded. Oaths are sworn to the Goddess Var, but little else is known of her. Lofn might some day be of importance to you, she is known to bring together lovers who are kept apart by circumstance.



I have merely touched upon the Gods here. It is important for everyone who would practice the religion of the North to get to know the myths and the Gods. An appendix is included which outlines various sources for more information.

## The Jotnar

The Jotnar or giants are the sworn enemies of the Gods. While the Aesir represent order and the Vanir represent the supportive powers of nature, the Jotnar represent chaos and the power of nature to destroy man and act independent of humankind. In the end, it is the Jotnar who will fight the Gods at Ragnarok and bring about the destruction of the world.

In essence despite being called Giants or Ogres, the Jotnar are Gods just as much as the Aesir or Vanir. In many cases they correspond very closely to the Fomoir in Celtic mythology. Most simply put, the Jotnar are the Gods of all those things which man has no control over. The Vanir are the Gods of the growing crops, the Jotnar are the Gods of the river which floods and washes away those crops or the tornado which destroys your entire farm. This is why they are frightening and this is why we hold them to be evil.

The Jotnar are not worshipped in modern Asatru, but there is some evidence that sacrifices were made to them in olden times. In this case, sacrifices may very well have been made "to them" rather than shared "with them" as was the case with the Vanir and Aesir. It would be inappropriate to embrace them as friends and brothers in the way we embrace our Gods. One doesn't embrace the hurricane or the wildfire; it is insanity to do so.

As I've suggested earlier, the Jotnar aren't grouped so much by their commonalities, but by their non-membership in the Aesir. Thus, some of them are benign, while others are apparently evil to the core. Aegir, Skadi, and several of the wives or mates of the Aesir are from Jotnar stock. Others, such as those appearing at Ragnarok, seem to have no redeeming characteristics and are entirely hostile.

## ELVES & OTHER SPIRITS

The world of ancient Paganism was hardly limited to the worship of the Gods. There are various other beings who were honored, and "Elf worship" was often the hardest part of Paganism for Christians to destroy. It was easy enough to substitute one God for another, but it was quite another to tell the common people that the elves which brought fertility to the land were not real!

In the various folktales and sagas we find very little which would lead us to a concrete system of what spirit was responsible for exactly what. Today, we call these various figures, who are neither mortal nor God, "Wights." We are sure of the place of the Valkyries, who were responsible for bringing the slain to Valhalla, and also for choosing who in battle would die. They seem, judging by their actions, to be supernatural beings of some type. However, Valkyries appear in various places as very human figures and their exact nature is difficult to determine. Sigrdrifa was a Valkyrie who was cursed by Odin because she refused to bring victory in battle to those whom he had chosen. Her punishment was to be married to a mortal, and the implication is clear that this would end her days as a Valkyrie. It's equally clear that she has great knowledge of the runes as she tutors Sigurd after he awakens her. In most respects she seems to be a normal human woman, although a very wise and independent one with great powers. Elsewhere, Voland and his brothers are said to have found three Valkyries sunning themselves without their swan-coats. When the brothers steal their feather-coats and hide them, the Valkyries again appear as otherwise normal women. This does not seem entirely in keeping with a supernatural origin, and it's possible that some kind of magickal order of Priestesses has become confused over time with the supernatural beings we know as Valkyries or that mortal women may somehow ascend to the position. The swan-coat seems very similar in description to Freya's falcon-coat and the entire issue may be something related to the practice of seidhr. As far as we know, the Valkyrie were not worshipped as such, but were considered more the messengers of Odin. They also serve the mead at Valhalla, and because of this whoever pours the mead into the Horn at Blot or Sumbel is today known as "the Valkyrie" (no matter what sex).

The other spirits whose place seems fairly clear are the Disir. These are spirits who are intimately linked with a family. There is also some indication that they are linked with the land, but this would be in keeping with the old ways. We forget sometimes that many landowners in Europe have been living in the same place since before this continent was discovered. The land becomes an intimate part of the family and its identity, so it is natural that family spirits would also oversee the family land. Disir are seen as women who appear at times of great trouble or change. They are somehow linked to the family bloodline, and seem most closely linked to the clan chief. There is one scene in one saga where a spirit, apparently a Dis, is passed on from one person to another who are not blood relations. However, these two friends are closer than brothers, so while the link is apparently not genetic, it is definitely familial. We know the family Disir were honored with blots at the Winter Nights and that they have great power to aid their

family. As far as their origin, it's possible that they are ancestral in origin. They may be ancestors whose power was so great that they were able to continue to see to their clan. Or it's possible that the Disir are the collective spirit of the family ancestors. Freya is called the great Dis and there may be some linkage here to her position as a seidhrwoman. We know from the sagas that Seidhr was involved with talking to various spirits (including the dead) and it's possible that this is the source of Freya's name. It is also possible that she performed much the same function as a Dis to her tribe the Vanir.

Closely linked to the idea of the Disir is the Fylgia. These spirits are attached to an individual person in much the same way that the Disir are associated with a family. Fylgia usually appear either as animals or as beautiful women. They correspond to the "fetch," "totem," or "power-animal" in other cultures. Most of the time the fylgia remains hidden and absent, it is only with truly great or powerful persons that the fylgia becomes known. They may have something to do with Seidhr as well, because many sagas offer evidence of spirit travel in the shape of animals. This corresponds exactly to notions of shamanism found in other cultures.

The remaining spirits include Alvar or elves, Dokkalvar or dark elves or Dwarfs, kobolds, and landvaettir. While some have defined one being as doing one thing and another serving a different function, I'm not inclined to draw very sharp distinctions between these various creatures. They all seem "elfish" in origin, and there seems to me to be no pattern of associating one name with a specific function. We know that various landvaettir or land spirits were honored with blots. We also know that Frey is the lord of Alfheim, one of the nine worlds where the alvar are said to live.

Of all the remaining spirits, the dwarfs are the most consistent in description. We know that the dwarfs are cunning and misanthropic in character and incredible smiths, capable of creating magickal objects so valuable they are considered the greatest treasures of Asgard. Thor's hammer Mjolnir, Freya's necklace Brisingamen, and Sif's golden hair are all creations of the dwarfs. They live beneath the earth and have little to do with mankind or the Gods unless one seeks them out. What place they had in the religion we no longer know. It would seem wise to invoke them as spirits of the forge, but I can think of little other reason to disturb them.

Elves are the most difficult magickal race to pin down. Mythological sources tell us that the Alvar or light elves live in Alfheim where Frey is their Lord. However, we also have the enduring belief in folklore of the elves as faery-folk: beings associated with the natural world. These two conceptions of elves might still be linked, however, as Alfheim is known to be a place of incredible natural beauty, and Frey, their leader, is an agricultural deity. To further confuse this issue, Norse folklore has a strong belief in the Landvaettir, or land spirits who may fit into either or both of these categories. I'm inclined to lump them all together as similar beings that we simply don't know enough about to tell apart. What is important is that Asatru, like all Pagan religions, honors the natural world and the earth very deeply. Whether one calls the spirits of the land as the elves, the faeries, or the landvaettir, or uses all of these terms interchangeably, respect is all important. Asatru is known for being one of the most politically "conservative" of the modern Pagan religions, but you'll find few of us who aren't staunch environmentalists.

One of the most important spirits to honor is the house-spirit. Folklore is also filled with stories of various spirits variously called faeries, elves, kobolds, brownies, tom-tin, etc. who inhabit a house and see to its proper conduct. In the usual form of the tale, they offer to perform some housekeeping functions, but eventually turn on the owners of the house when they are insulted by overpayment. We don't have any concrete evidence for how our ancestors honored these beings, but this is not surprising because such a thing would not be a public observance and it's unlikely it would be recorded in the sagas or Eddas. We usually leave a bowl of milk out when we feel we need their help in something.

In general folklore does not paint the various elves and spirits as particularly benevolent figures. With the exception of house spirits, who as spirits of a manmade object are bound to us on some level, they seem most interested in staying out of the dealings of mankind. There are numerous stories of people who spy upon elf women and force them to become their brides. Inevitably the women are unhappy and eventually escape, leaving their husbands emotionally devastated. There are also numerous stories of spirits who haunt the woods and who will drag wayward travelers into rivers to drown or to some other untimely death. When people do have dealings with the elves these beings seem to operate on an entirely different set of expectations than we do. Most of us would be gratified by the gift of a "bonus" from our employer, yet time and time again in folklore this is the easiest way to anger a house spirit. We know that elves were honored with blots, but it's just as possible that these ceremonies were made in propitiation to them rather than in kinship as are our blots made with the Gods. We suggest caution in dealing with beings with a set of values so foreign from our own. They should be approached in the same way one would approach a person from a country whose ways are very very different.

In general, we're also very reticent to make decisions about classifying the various "other peoples." It would be very easy to draw lines and place certain spirits into little boxes which label their function, but that seems overly mechanical and of little utility. Elves and other "wights" are not human, and it might be too much to try to classify them in other than subjective terms. It's probably best to simply make your intent clear, experiment, and use the terms which work for you.

## Demi-Gods

There are a whole classification of Gods which are not truly part of the Aesir, Vanir, or even the Jotnar. Wayland the Smith is the best example of this that we can offer. Wayland, called Volund in the Norse version, is the greatest of smiths, but it's clear in the mythology that he was more or less a human man. The myth tells of how he lost his wife and was enslaved by a human King. While his powers allow him to outwit and take vengeance on the king, it's clear throughout that he's not on the level of a Thor or an Odin. What one does about these demi-Gods or local Gods is a good question. I see nothing wrong with pouring a blot in their honor and dealing with them as you would any other God or Goddess. On the other hand, they are not part of the Aesir

and I think it might be disrespectful to honor them with the Aesir or as part of a ceremony dedicated to the Aesir as they seem of a different nature.

## Ancestor Worship

Honoring ones ancestors was one of the most sacred duties of the Norsemen. One of the most important parts of greeting new people was the exchanging of personal lineages at sumbel. The worship of the Disir is closely linked to ancestor worship. However, it is difficult for modern day Pagans to seriously engage in ancestor worship. We are, for the most part, without a strong connection to our heritage, and even if we feel motivated we would probably need to skip at least a thousand years back to find ancestors who would not have been appalled by our Heathen beliefs. One substitution for ancestor worship in the modern Asatru movement has been the veneration of heros from the Sagas and legends of our people.

The manner of how we honor ancestors is also somewhat troubling. I reserve the blot ritual to Gods and other powers, and I'm not sure if it's appropriate to pour a blot to an ancestor, no matter how important he was. I think the most important part of ancestor worship is remembering, and the sumbel seems the most important part of that.

While we discuss ancestry, I must mention that some modern Asatru groups, in part because of holdovers from 19th century cultural movements, have placed a great deal of emphasis on ancestry in terms of race and ethnic heritage. Many (although not nearly as many as some hysterical commentators would have you believe) have held that Asatru was a religion for whites or Northern Europeans only. In my not particularly humble opinion, this is pure idiocy. The basic argument for this is that people of other cultures do not share the same background and values. This is certainly true, but the key word in my opinion is culture, and all Americans by definition share a culture. Also, while I admit I would think it doubtful that people from outside of our own cultural heritage would be attracted greatly to Asatru, if they are it is for a reason and they should be welcomed and not shunned. It proves the worth of our religion and way of life that it is so strong that one would leave his own cultural path behind to take up ours.

As far as culture is concerned, the ancestry of the ancient North is alive and well in modern America. A thousand years ago settlers sailed to Iceland to avoid the growing influence of powerful kings and centralized government. This centralization of power was one of the things which Roman Christianity brought with it. Two hundred years ago, we in America rebelled against our king for much the same reasons. Our culture is much more profoundly influenced by the Vikings than most would care to admit. Our law is based on English common law, which in turn has roots in Norman and Saxon law. (Both the Saxons and Normans were descended from Germanic tribes.) Our culture is based on many of the same ideas which the Northmen held dear: the importance of the individual and the belief that individual rights outweighed collective rights. Thus, it is my assertion that we are all descended, at least in part, spiritually from the ancient Norse.

## ORGANIZATION

Scholarship offers us little help in determining how organized the ancient religion of Asatru was. We know that there was a large temple at Uppsala, and we know that some areas had taxes which were clearly intended to support the religion. We also have abundant evidence of a much less organized system in which people met in sacred groves or built their own Hof's and thus became a Gothi (Priest) or Gythia (Priestess). Such temples were generally maintained by the family after the builders' death, the title being more or less inherited by whomever was lord over the land.

Today, most Kindreds are independent. The Ring of Troth is the largest organization and is highly structured in governing, but very unstructured in beliefs or practices. They offer clergy recognition, charter Kindreds on three levels, depending on how organized the group is, and have a system of regional stewards to coordinate local activities. There are also many smaller organizations, either regionally based or formed from groups with other links, such as The Raven Kindred Association or Skergard.

### The Priesthood

The clergy of Asatru are known as Gothi (Godman/Priest) or Gythia (Godwoman/Priestess). These are honorary titles only. Being called Gothi does not mark any administrative or religious power or rank within Asatru as a whole. The Gothar are those who have chosen to take on more responsibilities. Anyone in Asatru can reach the Gods through their own prayers or blots without being a Gothi. As to what makes one a Gothi, the requirements would vary from group to group. Some might have written criteria, while others might leave it up to the person's heart. The true test of a Gothi is not one of credentials, but of whether the folk take one seriously or not. Certainly a Gothi is one who has a long term relationship with the Gods and Goddesses. One does not, for example, simply read this book or practice the religion for a few months and then proclaim oneself Gothi, to do so would invite scorn and laughter. A competent Gothi should have studied the Eddas and Sagas and know the history of our religion. He or she should also know a bit about the runes, and the other mysteries of our tradition. One should also note that this is a public office and the Gothi of old had responsibilities as leaders of the community. Most importantly one must be sincerely dedicated not only to the Gods, but to the duties and calling of being a religious leader. There's no push to move to a "higher" level of the Priesthood as there are in religions or magickal orders with "degree systems" and if you do not feel compelled to take on the responsibilities of being a Gothi or Gythia, there is no need for you to and much to say that you should not.

Most persons who were given the title Gothi in the old days were dedicated to a single God. The title most often formed their last name: Thorolf Thorsgothi for example. This dedication to a God or Goddess was usually part of one's family heritage and was passed down to your

children. While there is no compelling reason why one cannot act as Priest to the entire community of Gods and Goddesses, it is most common for one to be dedicated to a single deity. A kindred may have persons who are each dedicated to a different deity, or it may orient itself towards a single deity as did families in the Sagas.

One national organization, The Ring of Troth, offers official ministerial recognition on two levels: Eldership and Godmen. The Elder program entails a great deal of study in the ways of our ancient forebears. Elders are intended not so much to be everyday ministers, but to be teachers and sources of information for the Folk at large. The second program, entitled one Godman or Godwoman, is intended for more day to day clergy. A Godman must be informed about the lore of our modern religion and familiar with the Gods and rituals of Asatru and capable of performing them, but does not go into deep academic study in the manner of an Elder.

## The Kindred

The most basic unit of Asatru religious worship is the hearth or homestead. This is nothing more than it sounds like: a household of Asafolk who worship the old Gods and Goddesses. Several individuals or hearths may group themselves into a "kindred," which is a term that has many meanings to many different groups. Some Kindreds have many members and function like mainstream churches, others are more family like and attempt to hold to their privacy. The place of a kindred is more or less analogous to a clan or small tribal group. A kindred is made up of people you are familiar with and with whom you meet in person and in it's best sense it's an organic grouping, however it's not the same sort of bonding that one would find in a single family or even in an extremely close knit group of friends. In a true Pagan society, the kindred would be found on the level of a farmstead or small village.

The ritual blots are most commonly done on the level of the kindred, or in meetings where more than one kindred comes together. The rituals of a Hearth might be less formalized and more "homey" in atmosphere. The blot ritual is based on a religious observance that was part of the official public aspect of ancient Asatru, and it's likely that there were many other private rituals that would not necessarily be appropriate for a kindred to take part in together. For example, a kindred might not honor the individual family Dis or the house-spirits unless all members of the kindred lived together or were tied by blood as well as companionship.

Most persons will want to join or found a kindred in their area, however, before one runs out and begins to solicit people, you should think about what you are doing. The very name of our groupings, "kindred," implies a great deal more than does membership in a church. Today we are accustomed to religious institutions that are more or less anonymous and sterile. A kindred should not be this way. While we must be open to all, we need not act as if we were a public facility with no more intimacy than a department store. It is best to start small and gather people as they come to you.

Once you are established, get involved in the local Pagan community if you are not already. Attend a few events of the local Leif Erikson society or the Sons of Norway. Open one of your blots to the public and take note of people who are attracted to Asatru.

A kindred is something which should form organically. It's not a good idea to push ones friends into joining unless they are sincerely interested. In the Raven Kindreds we usually wait until people ask to formally join, unless we perceive they are waiting to be asked. On the other hand, Asatru is not a secret religion or one open only to "initiates" as many Neo-Pagan faiths are. We must be open to outsiders who are truly interested.

People in a kindred should be aware that they are making a commitment to the group. The first duty owed to our Kindreds would be regular attendance. The kindred cannot function if people do not attend. I have heard some say that making a monetary donation should be sufficient. I say this is simply not true. While the money most certainly does help, it cannot make up for the impression made on new people when they are the only ones showing up for a ritual. Also since Asatru is still a growing religion a lack of regular attendees will lead to only one view being put across instead of many peoples personal takes on a subject.

The next duty we have to our kindred is loyalty. I will assume that every kindred has some sort of leader whether it be an elected leader or not. This person has taken on the responsibility of being in charge of the kindred as a whole. I say that we should ask these leaders what we can do for them to make there job easier. I am not saying that we have to center our lives around whatever kindred we may belong to, but sometimes just asking if we can pick up the mead will take a lot off the mind of the person in charge.

Another duty we have to our kindred is helping the other members of that kindred. This could include the simple willingness to give a ride to events, but also on a deeper level to really be there for each other in times of need. We must remember that while our religion espouses the glory of the individual, that individual usually only as good as the community from which he came. We also do not want to be like other religions we member of the same church are strangers to each other. The fact that we have chosen the word "kindred" to name our religious bodies should mean, in practice as well as definition, a much closer relationship to each other then is found in most, but certainly not all, mainstream churches.



## THE VALUES OF ASATRU

One of the basic functions of a religion is to offer a set of values on which mankind is to base its actions. This, sadly, is one area where Paganism has often failed. The cult of anti-values has held sway, taking moral relativism to extremes perhaps even farther from common sense than fundamentalist moral legalism, even to the point where I have heard rape, murder, and genocide defended on the basis of "cultural differences."

However, values remain important. All one needs to do is look at the morning paper to see the results of a society that has in many ways embraced the cult of anti-values. Thievery, murder, and plunder exist in our cities to extents which would have appalled our ancestors--no matter how many times they went a' Viking. While this is hardly what the Pagans who have embraced the cult of anti-values had in mind, it is to my belief a natural outgrowth of the same basic philosophical concept. The chaos in our country is the dark shadow of the modern rejection of moral legalism. What should have been an evolution from a legalistic moral/religious culture to one of flexible honor based values and self-responsibility has instead become a morass of chaos and immorality. The lesson we should all learn is that while there is no definitive list of sins; right and wrong still exist.

As usual Asatru offers a sensible solution. Our faith deals not in legalisms and rules nor in unchecked chaos and relativism. We instead acknowledge the existence of right and wrong, good and evil, but we deal with actions according to basic philosophical concepts that are applied by the keen intellect of Odin, the simple common sense of Thor, and the solid honor of Tyr--the gifts of the Gods to us.

Asatru posits that the basic place of moral judgment is within the human heart and mind. We as human beings with the gift of intelligence are sensible and responsible enough to determine right from wrong and act accordingly. The Gods teach us through the examples of their lives, as chronicled in the Eddas, and through various pieces such as the Havamal which directly offer us advice. In the modern history of our faith, various Asatru organizations have outlined simple sets of values which they hold up as simple guidelines on how to live one's life.

The Odinic Rite (the major Asatru group in England) has one of the most cohesive and sensible of all those we've seen and this set has been adopted by the Raven Kindred as an "official" statement of our beliefs. We do this not only as a moral guide for our members, but also to say to the world what it is that we stand for--our good name in the community being important to us. Finally, this list is used when someone formally joins the Raven Kindred and we hold a sumbel and toast the 9 virtues to the new member in the hope that they will apply them to their life.

The Odinic Rite lists the 9 Noble Virtues as Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance.

It would be hard to get much argument on any of these values from anyone. They simply and briefly encapsulate the broad wisdom of our Gods and ancestors.

## Courage

In virtually every statement of values applied to Asatru, Courage is listed first. As Stephen McNallen has said, courage and bravery are perhaps the values which the Vikings are best known for. However, despite our history, few of us face such turmoil as a literal battle for one's life. In fact, I believe it might be easier to manifest courage in such a situation than to do so in the many smaller day to day occurrences in which courage is called for.

The most common of these occurrences for modern Pagans, is the courage to acknowledge and live one's beliefs. It is also, sadly, the one that we most often fail at. While we may often be full of the type of courage that would lead us to face a shield wall, many of us quake at the thought of the topic of religion coming up at the office or a friend asking what church we attend. We won't offer easy answers, but we ask this: if you toast the courage of your ancestors to fight and die for what they believed in, can you trade away your religious identity for a higher salary or social acceptance?

In an essay on values there is also the question of moral courage. The way of Tyr is difficult--to lose one's hand for one's beliefs--but, Tyr thought the price worth paying. In a million ways modern society challenges our values, not just as Asatruar who are estranged from mainstream religious practice, but for religious people in an increasingly not just secular, but anti-religious culture. Values are also not in favor in modern society. Breaking or getting around the rules is encouraged to get ahead. Living honorably is simply too inconvenient. I think most people, Asatru or otherwise, find this repugnant, but the only way to change it is to have the courage to refuse to take part in it.

## Truth

The second virtue, that of Truth, is the one that most led our kindred to embrace the Odinic Rite's statement of values as our own. Early in our discussions, we decided that no matter what values we chose to hold out as our own, truth must be among them. It is a word that holds so much in its definition, and includes such a wide variety of moral and philosophical beliefs that we were all drawn to it as a simple statement of what we stood for.

At least one of the reasons we wanted to adopt it was the simple issue of honesty. As Bill Dwinells said at a recent sumpel while toasting truth and honesty: "if you don't want people to know about something, don't do it." Truth, in the sense of honesty, is essential to personal honor and also to any system or morality that is not based on rigid legalism. If one is to uphold an honor code, one must be brutally honest with oneself and with others.

Truth is also the Truth that comes with a capital T--the kind of Truth that one talks about in terms of religion or morality. It's common to talk of different peoples having different "truths," but it's equally important to remember that while we acknowledge that each person or people has their own belief as to what Truth is or where to find it, there finally is a single Truth. This is not the Truth as we believe it, but ultimate Truth. While we may respect other people's "truths" and seek our own, we must never forget our search for The Truth. Like the Holy Grail of Christian legend, it may never be ours to reach, but when we cease to search we perish.

## Honor

Honor is the basis for the entire Asatru moral rationale. If anything comes out in the Eddas and Sagas it is that without honor we are nothing. We remember two types of peoples from ancient times: those whose honor was so clean that they shine as examples to us and those who were so without honor that their names are cursed a thousand years after they lived. Good Asatruar should always strive to be among the former.

However, honor is not mere reputation. Honor is an internal force whose outward manifestation is reputation. Internal honor is the sacred moral compass that each Asatruar and God should hold dear. It is the inner dwelling at peace which comes from living in accordance with ones beliefs and with ones knowledge of the Truth of what one is doing. It is something deeply personal and heartfelt, almost akin to an emotion. It's a "knowing" that what one is doing is right and decent and correct.

In many ways while the most important of all the virtues it is also the most ephemeral in terms of description. It is all the other virtues rolled together and then still more. The best way I have found to describe honor is that if you are truly living with honor, you will have no regrets about what you have done with your life.

## Fidelity

Fidelity is a word that is far too often defined by it's narrow use in terms of marital fidelity. By the dictionary it simply means being faithful to someone or something. In marriage this means being true to ones vows and partner, and this has been narrowly defined as limiting ones sexual experience to ones spouse. While I have found this to be great practical advice, many treat fidelity as if there were no other ways in which one could be faithful or unfaithful.

For we Asatruar fidelity is most important in terms of our faith and troth to the Gods. We must remain true to the Aesir and Vanir and to our kinsmen. Like marriage, Profession (the rite in which one enters the Asatru faith, similar to Christian confirmation or Wiccan initiation) is a sacred bond between two parties; in this case an Asatruar and the Gods. In order for such a relationship to work, both must be honest and faithful to each other.

Asatru, although currently being reborn, is at its roots a folk religion and we also uphold the value of fidelity to the ways of our ancestors. This is why historical research is so important to the Asatru-folk: it is the rediscovering of our ancient ways and our readoption of them.

## Discipline

In any discussion of the values of Asatru, discipline is best described as self-discipline. It is the exercise of personal will that upholds honor and the other virtues and translates impulse into action. If one is to be able to reject moral legalism for a system of internal honor, one must be willing to exercise the self-discipline necessary to make it work. Going back to my earlier criticism of society, if one rejects legalism, one must be willing to control one's own actions. Without self-discipline, we have the mess we currently see in our culture.

Looking at discipline in terms of fidelity, we see a close connection. Many Pagans go from faith to faith, system to system, path to path. Asatruar are much less likely to do this. The discipline of keeping faith with our Gods and the ways of our ancestors is part of our modern practice. In this way, we limit ourselves in some ways, but we gain much more in others.

## Hospitality

Hospitality is simply one of the strongest core values at the heart of virtually every ancient human civilization. In a community/folk religion such as our own, it is the virtue that upholds our social fabric. In ancient times it was essential that when a traveler went into the world he could find some sort of shelter and welcome for the night. In modern times it is just as essential that a traveler find friendship and safety.

In our modern Asatru community, we need to treat each other with respect and act together for the good of our community as a whole. This functions most solidly on the level of the kindred or hearth where non-familial members become extremely close and look out for each other. It can mean hospitality in the old sense of taking in people, which we've done, but in modern times it's more likely to mean loaning someone a car or a bit of money when they need it (that's need, not want).

Part of hospitality is treating other people with respect and dignity. Many of our Gods are known to wander the world and stop in at people's houses, testing their hospitality and generosity. The virtue of hospitality means seeing people as if they were all individuals with self-respect and importance. Or perhaps from time to time, they are literally the Gods in human form. This has profound implications for social action in our religion. Our response to societal problems such as poverty (that's poverty folks, not laziness) is in many ways our modern reaction to this ancient virtue.

In terms of our modern community as a whole, I see hospitality in terms of frontier "barn raisings" where a whole community would come together and pool their resources. This

doesn't mean we have to forget differences, but we must put them aside for those who are of our Folk, and work for our common good.

## Industriousness

Modern Asatruar must be industrious in their actions. We need to work hard if we are going to achieve our goals. There is so much for us to do. We've set ourselves the task of restoring Asatru to its former place as a mainstream faith and by doing so reinvigorating our society and culture. We can't do this by sitting on our virtues, we need to make them an active part of our behavior. Industry also refers to simple hard work in our daily vocations, done with care and pride.

Here's a few concrete examples. If you are reading this and don't have a kindred, why not? Stop reading now. Go and place ads in the appropriate local stores, get your name on the Ring of Troth, Wyrd Network, or Asatru Alliance networking lists, and with other Pagan groups. Put on a workshop. Ok, now you're back to reading and you don't agree with what I'm saying here? Well, be industrious! Write your own articles and arguments. Write a letter to the editor and suggest this material be banned--better that than passivity. Get the blood moving and go out and do it. That's how it gets done. The Gods do not favor the lazy.

The same holds true for our non-religious lives. As Asatruar we should offer a good example as industrious people who add to whatever we're involved in rather than take from it. We should be the ones the business we work in can't do without and the ones who always seem to be able to get things done. When people think of Asatru, they should think of people who are competent and who offer something to the world.

This doesn't just apply to vocational work, but to the entire way we live our lives. It is just as much a mentality. The Vikings were vital people. They lived each day to its fullest and didn't wring their hands in doubt or hesitation. We should put the same attitude forward in all that we do whether it is our usual vocation, devotion to the Gods, or leisure time.

## Self Reliance

Industry brings us directly to the virtue of Self-Reliance, which is important both in practical and traditional terms. Going back to the general notion of this article, we are dealing with a form of morality that is largely self-imposed and thus requires self-reliance. We rely on ourselves to administer our own morality.

Traditionally, our folkways have always honored the ability of a man or woman to make their own way in the world and not to lean on others for their physical needs. This is one of the ways in which several virtues reinforce and support each other. Hospitality cannot function if people are not responsible enough to exercise discipline and take care of themselves. It's for those that strive and fail or need assistance that hospitality is intended, not for the idle who simply won't take care of themselves.

In terms of our relationships with the Gods, self-reliance is also very important. If we wish the Gods to offer us their blessings and gifts, we must make ourselves worthy of them--and the Gods are most pleased with someone who stands on their own two feet. This is one of the reasons for the Asatru "rule" that we do not kneel to the Gods during our ceremonies. By standing we acknowledge our relationship as striving and fulfilled people looking for comradeship and a relationship, rather than acting as scraelings looking for a handout from on high. It takes very little for a God to attract a follower, if worship simply means getting on the gravy train. We, as Asatruar, are people who can make our own way in the world, but who choose to seek a relationship with the Gods.

In mundane terms being self-reliant is a simple way to allow ourselves the ability to live as we wish to. In simple economic terms, if one has enough money in the bank one doesn't need to worry as much about being fired due to religious discrimination. We can look a bigot in the face and tell him just where he can put it. It's also nice to have something in the bank to lay down as a retainer on a good lawyer so we can take appropriate action.

On the other side of this is self-reliance in the sense of Henry David Thoreau, who advocated a simple lifestyle that freed one from the temptations of materialism. Again, here we are able to live as we wish with those things that are truly important. Religious people from all faiths have found that adjusting ones material desires to match one's ability to meet them leaves one open for a closer relationship with deity and a more fulfilling life. While our ancestors were great collectors of gold goodies, they didn't lust for possessions in and of themselves, but for what they stood for and could do for them. In fact, the greatest thing that could be said of a Lord was that he was a good "Ring Giver."

Being self-reliant also means taking responsibility for ones life. It's not just about refusing a welfare check or not lobbying for a tax exemption, but also refusing to blame ones failures on religious intolerance, the patriarchy, or an unfair system. The system may, in fact, be unfair, but it's our own responsibility to deal with it.

In societal terms, we have become much too dependent on other people for our own good. As individuals we look to the government or to others to solve our problems and as a society we borrow billions from our descendants to pay for today's excesses. Most problems in this world could be solved if people just paid their own way as they went.

## Perseverance

The final virtue is Perseverance which I think most appropriate because it is the one that we most need to keep in mind in our living of the other values. Our religion teaches us that the world is an imperfect place, and nothing comes easy. We need to continue to seek after that which we desire. In this imperfect world there are no free lunches or easy accomplishments--especially in the subjects we have set before ourselves. If we truly wish to build an Asatru community that people will hold up as an example of what committed people can do, then we

must persevere through the hardships that building our religion is going to entail. We must be willing to continue on when we are pushed back. If one loses a job for ones religion, the answer is not to go back and hide, but to continue until one finds a vocation where one can more forward and live as an Asatruar should.

Finally we must persevere when we simply fail. If one's kindred falls apart because of internal strife, one should go back and start over. Pick up the pieces and continue on. If nobody had done this after the disintegration of the Asatru Free Assembly, this would probably never have been written. We must be willing to continue in the hard work of making our religion strong--not just when it is convenient and easy to do so, but when it gets hard, inconvenient, or just plain boring. To accomplish without striving is to do little, but to persevere and finally accomplish a hard fought goal brings great honor.

## MAGIC

As with most Neo-Pagan religions, Asatru posits a belief in magic and the spiritual realm. However, people must remember that the bedrock of Asatru is faith in the Gods, and magic is but a part of our customs and folklore, not a substitute for faith or something separate from it. Practicing magic, even magic of a Northern type, does not make one Asatru, nor is the practice of magic a requirement to be an Asatruar or to perform rituals in honor of our Gods.

The most common type of magic found in the Asatru tradition is that of the runes. The runes are a magical alphabet which in various forms was found throughout the Germanic world. The most common form used in Asatru today is the "Elder Futhark" (runic alphabets are called futharks, a word constructed from the first 6 runes) which is believed to be an older and more true form than the later versions such as the Anglo-Saxon set of 33 runes.

People are most familiar with the use of runes for divinatory purposes, and they are indeed used for this purpose. Asatru believes that there are forces, shaped by our past and the history of the world, that affect the world and the way the future comes to be. We believe that the forces of Wyrð and Orlog (without a dissertation to explain them fully, both words translate roughly to "fate") can be examined and to some extent tell us what is going to happen. On the other hand, we do not believe in predestination. Future events are shaped by our actions, and we can change them. If we change our actions, we change the future. So the runes are not a perfect prediction of what will occur because the future is in flux. They are, however, an important tool for exactly the same reason.

The most common way to read the runes is to pull forth three runes representing the past, present, and future. All of these are important, because only in looking at the past and present can we understand a prediction of what will occur in the future.

However, divination is but a small part of runic magic. The runes are important and powerful symbols that represent the very forces that hold the nine worlds together, and they make very powerful meditational symbols.

The runes are also useful in active magic. The most common way to use them in this manner is to carve a "bind rune" or a symbol made up of more than one rune, all of which together are intended to produce an effect. The most common of these would be a rune carved on a single line with one rune pointing to the left and the other to the right. However, the more complex a rune is, the more powerful it can become.

For more information on runes, consult the books recommended in the appendix.

Another important type of magic is called seidr, which seems to have been a "shamanic" tradition within ancient Asatru. This type of magic involves going into a trance, and journeying



to the other worlds. Here, one could journey to consult the spirits of nature, the Disir, or the ancestors. Unfortunately little information is left to us about seidhr. We know that Freya was a skilled practitioner and that she taught it to Odin. It was considered to be a woman's magic, and Odin is taunted about it by Loki. Although today most persons exploring seidhr are women, there is no such prejudice against men interested in it.

In what records we do have, the trance of the seidhrwoman was created through another person singing songs or chanting while the seidhrwoman was elevated on a platform. We don't know much else about the practice. However, around the world shamanic techniques are remarkably similar, and the main difference seems to be the cultural context, which provides a map to interpreting the otherworlds. The best approach might to be explore some of the material on the general phenomenon of shamanism, and then apply that to what little we do know.

The third major type of magic found in modern Asatru is "galdr" or chant magic. The simplest form of this is "rune galdr" or the simple chanting and "vibrating" of the sounds of the runes in order to invoke their powers.

## RAVEN KINDRED CALENDAR

The Raven Kindred meets on the first weekend of each month and for the four major Norse holidays: Summer and Winter Finding (Spring & Fall Equinox), Summer Solstice, and Yule. Traditional festivals which have been moved to fit our monthly schedule have their traditional date in parenthesis. Festivals marked with a "\*" are particular to the Raven Kindred. There are other holidays which our kindred does not meet to celebrate, but which are recognized by Asatru and celebrated on an individual or family basis.

### Snowmoon/January

1st weekend -- Frig's Distaff -- Celebration of Frigga and the home (Trad. 1/2)

### Horning/February

1st weekend -- Disting -- Celebration of Freya and the Disir (Trad. 2/14 )

### Lenting/March

1st weekend -- Founding of the World. Celebration of Odin, Vili, and Ve\*

3/21 -- Summer Finding - Celebration of the Goddess Ostara. Also a celebration of the Raven Kindred's founding, Spring Equinox 1991.

### Ostara/April

1st weekend -- Alfarblot. Sacrifice to the elves and nature spirits (traditionally celebrated as part of Disting)

### Merry-Moon/May

1st weekend -- May Day/Walpurgis. Celebration of spring which we dedicate to Njord and Nerthus. (Trad. 5/1)

### Fallow/June

1st weekend -- Festival of Mead dedicated to Aegir and also to Bygvir and Beyla\*

3/21 Summer Solstice -- Dedicated to Sunna, Goddess of the Sun

### Haymoon/July

1st weekend -- Blot in honor of Baldr\*

### Harvest/August

1st weekend -- Freyfaxi, first harvest and celebration of Frey and his horse (Trad. 8/1)

#### Shedding/September

1st weekend -- Discovery of the Runes, celebration of Odin as the God of Wisdom (Odinic Rite holiday celebrated 8/25)

9/21 Winter Finding -- Disirblot (Disirblot traditionally 10/13-10/15)

#### Hunting/October

1st weekend -- Tyrblot, celebration of Justice and Honor. (Supreme Court session begins 1st Monday in October)\*

#### Fogmoon/November

1st weekend -- Einjerhar, celebration of war-dead and Ragnarok Dedicated to Odin and Freya (Trad. 11/11 -- Armistice Day)

#### Wolfmoon/December

1st weekend -- Winterblot, dedicated to Skadi and/or Ullr\*

12/21 -- Yule, multiday festival dedicated to Thor et al

(Traditionally a festival lasting from the Mother Night 12/21 to New Years Day)

## RAVEN KINDRED RITUAL OUTLINE

The Raven Kindred has developed a slightly different form of the Blot ritual, which we use. This has come to pass because of a desire for more personal involvement as well as a smaller group of people than would be appropriate for a major blot.

The major change, outside of a few cosmetic differences, is that we have added a "mini sumbel" to the blot ritual in place of the sprinkling in which we offer three rounds of toasts: the first dedicated to the God or Goddess being honored and the remaining two to anything the participants deem appropriate which is not inimical to the purpose of the blot. (i.e. don't toast the Jotnar during a ritual to Thor.)

### Setting the mood: Chant to Odin, Vili, Ve

To begin each ritual we offer a three round chant of "Odin, 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.

### Hammer Rite

We offer an invocation to Fire and Ice which are the central elements of the creation of the world. We ask that the place we are meeting be blessed and Holy for the coming of the Gods.

### Statement of purpose

We far too often ignore this, but it's a good idea to have the Gothi or Gythia who is presiding greet the participants and state something general about the purpose of the ritual. It need not be complicated "We gather together today to celebrate the Winter Nights as our ancestors did. To honor our ancestors, the Disir, and Freya the Great Dis and to renew our bonds as a family [kindred]."

### General Prayer

At this point one of our members usually offers up a prayer to the Aesir and Vanir collectively to thank them for their bounty since the last time we met and to ask their blessings upon the kindred and its members.

## Personal invocations

We reserve a time between the opening of the ritual and the blot ceremony for people to offer any prayers or other invocations they feel necessary. This is the time when we Profess new members of Asatru. Other activities done at this time have included a kindred member, thanking Saga, the Goddess of wisdom, for her recent graduation from college.

## Invoke deity of occasion

At this point we make a point to specifically invoke and honor the deity that we are blotting. We attempt to list as many names and or functions of the God as possible and this serves a dual purpose in reminding the attendees of who the God is and why we are honoring Him. This is, however separate from the offering.

## Meditation

At this point we like to remind ourselves why we are here and what the Gods mean to us. We sit and someone either offers a spoken meditation or more often reads a story from the mythology. While most of us enjoy the poetic edda, we usually use a modern prose version of the myth as it is easier to follow.

## Offer/sanctify mead

The Gothi takes up the horn and his assistant (often called "The Valkyrie" by Asafolk) fills it with mead. The Gothi then steps to the altar and holds the horn aloft and asks the God to partake of it and charge it with his power.

## Toast to the deity of occasion

This is when we begin to deviate substantially from the standard Asatru blot ritual. Beginning with the Gothi the horn is raised and a toast drunk to the God. The horn is then passed around to the Folk and a personal toast repeated. The only rule here is that the round is dedicated to the God invoked. Many times the toasts are personal thanksgiving or requests for aid or wisdom.

At the end of the round the remains of the horn (and there should be some) are poured into the blotbowl.

## Remaining toasts

We then take two more rounds to toast whatever Gods, ancestors, and beings each person wishes. There is not necessarily any continuity from one person to the next. Brags or oaths are also appropriate at this time. Professions, other major oaths, and major works of thanksgiving or praise are usually done before the blot. The second and third toasts are usually reserved for small things.

## Thank deity

Finally we always remember to thank the deity and ask for his continued blessings on the Folk present.

## Oath Ring ceremony

Our kindred has a ceremony that affirms our dedication to each other, to the kindred, and to the Gods. Each full Professed and accepted Kindred member comes forward and takes hold of the oath ring. (We are blessed in having a 6" diameter brass oath ring made for us by a kindred member.) One person then recites a rede concerning itself with the symbol of a ring and something which connects us to the Gods, the Earth, and to each other.

I should repeat, only kindred Members participate in this. If you haven't sworn on the oath ring, you don't take part in the ceremony. We have enlarged this at public events to all Professed persons, but change the rede to remove references to the kindred.

## Pour libation

Finally we leave the Hof and pour a libation on the physical earth, adjourning outside to do so if we are indoors. The blot hitting the ground signals that the ritual is truly over. When we are working indoors in a living room or other non-dedicated space I always make sure I am the first to return and extinguish candles, turn on electric lights, etc. This provides a good hint to people's minds that the ritual is, in fact, over. If we had a dedicated space, the procession outside to pour the blot would also empty the Hof and we would adjourn to the feast rather than returning to the temple.

## HAILING THE SUN: A SAMPLE BLOT TO HONOR SUNNA AT THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

This ritual would be ideally performed at sunrise on the day of the summer Solstice. If possible the folk should gather while it is still dark or even better, remain awake throughout the night in vigil. A secondary time would be at noon on the Solstice. This ritual should not be performed at night.

At any point in this ritual, within the realm of logic and dramatic flow, the parts marked as Gothi and Gythia may be shared among the folk. In addition, the parts are not necessarily sex specific, but the terminology is used as a convenience.

### Set Up

An altar should be placed in the center and the folk should form a circle around it, leaving space in the center for the "action" to take place. For this ritual you will need some sort of mead or beer, a horn or chalice, an offering bowl, a hammer for consecrations, and a wheel of some sort, preferably a wagon wheel to symbolize the turning of the wheel of the year. Any reasonable tools may be substituted. The Wheel is placed on the ground near the altar or on the altar with candles around the rim (unlit).

### Consecration of Space

The Gothi goes to the center of the folk and forms the invocational position of the elhaz rune, both hands in the air at a rough 45' angle.

Gothi: We gather here to honor our sacred lady Sunna, who on this Solstice Morning, reaches her height of power. All hail Sunna!

All: Hail Sunna!

The Gythia takes the hammer and walks to each of the four corners and consecrates the space.

Gythia: Hammer, hallow and hold this holy stead, that it will be a fitting place for our worship of our sacred lady Sunna! Hammar, Helgave thetta ok hindra alla illska!

Gythia returns hammer to altar and faces the altar.

Gythia: I consecrate and hallow this altar to the work of our sacred lady Sunna! Here on this Solstice morning may the might of the Gods be brought to our holy stead. May the warm light of Sunna heat our hearts and hold our spirits.

Gothi: Our holy lady watches and waits for the blot in her honor. Hail Sunna!

All: Hail Sunna!

(At this point it would be most appropriate for a song or reading to be performed. It should obviously be about Sunna or the sun or something appropriate to the day.)

## Invocation

Gythia: Our lady Sunna is the light of knowledge, the warmth of love, and the heat of our passion. Let us spend a moment in silence, contemplating those things which she brings us.

Leave a few moments for silent prayers and meditation.

Gothi: Holy Sunna. Lady of the Sun. Light of the heavens. Ever pursued and ever free. We gather to greet and welcome you and offer you gifts on this day. We offer to you our prayers and love, our devotion and strength, our kinship and honor.

All face the sun and form the elhaz posture.

All: 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!

A few moments of silence are appropriate here.

## Blot

Gothi: Now it is time to offer sacrifice to our holy lady.

Gythia takes horn and Gothi fills it with mead. Gythia holds horn above her head, in the direction of the sun.

Gythia: Here is our sacrifice, the essence of our love and spirit. We offer it to you as a token of our kinship and our love. As you drink of it, may your power fill this holy hlaut and feed our spirits.



Gythia drinks from the horn and it is then passed around the folk, each taking a drink, with the horn returning to the Gythia.

Gythia: Hail to thee Sunna!

Gythia pours remainder of horn into the offering bowl. Gythia and Gothi take the bowl and evergreen sprig and walk around the folk, sprinkling the mead to the four corners and on the folk. Finally they return to the center and sprinkle the wheel.

Gothi: Hail the sacred wheel of the sun. Now it is the longest day of the year and the sun is triumphant, but all changes and the wheel turns.

Gythia lights candles on the wheel and members of the folk take it up and parade it around the grounds. A song or chant would be appropriate at this time. "The sun burns, the wheel turns!" for example. Once the procession is done (this decision should be based on the subjective feelings of those involved and not planned out) the wheel should be returned to the altar.

Gothi & Gythia assume the invocation position

Gothi: Sacred Lady Sunna, Summer Sun now strongest. We thank you for your blessings of warmth and light. May you reign long.

All: Hail Sunna! Hail Sunna! Hail Sunna!

## Libation

Gothi takes up the hlaut bowl.

Gothi: Now our rite is ended and the sacrifice is made. The wheel turns. To Sunna, to the Gods, to the Goddesses, and to Earth, mother of us all, we offer this holy mead, from the Gods to the Earth To us. From ourselves to the Earth to the Gods. Hail!

Gothi pours contents of the hlaut bowl on the ground, possibly in the center of the wheel. If this ritual is done indoors, the libation should be poured outside afterwards. We usually trek outside immediately even if the ritual is in an apartment. The physical action of pouring the libation is an important psychological trigger to both Gods and men that the ritual is over.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE: A BLOW BY BLOW ACCOUNT OF RUNNING A RITUAL

Our rituals are held on the afternoon of the first Saturday of each month. We tell people to arrive at 2:00pm, and plan for a ritual at 4:00 followed by a feast. This is a rough timeline, intended to shepherd people through a complete ritual from when one awakes in the morning, to when people go home.

At least one week before, get invitations and/or schedules in the mail. If you give folks some sort of paper to hold onto they will be much less likely to forget about the ritual.

9:00 Get up. Fritter away time answering e-mail, watching Scooby-Doo reruns, etc.

10:30 Clean the house. Get personal items such as bills and checkbooks out of where people might see them. Stash excess books in bedroom. Sweep and vacuum floor. Clean kitchen, make sure the dishwasher is run and dishes put away so there will be enough for the Folk. Put any food or drink items away that one doesn't want the Folk to eat. Check altar, clean and dust it, offer a prayer and light the 24 hour candle on it. Put out any new magazines or books of interest on the coffee table.

12:00 Shower and get dressed.

12:30 First people arrive--at this point the only folks present are a few "core" members of the kindred who are there to help, not just to attend. Immediately send people out to buy food and drink.

1:30 Food arrives. Unpack it and determine what we've forgotten. Put out munchies, make sure beer/wine is chilling.

1:45 Other "core" kinsman calls as he is about to leave for ritual site, let him know what previous "foraging" trip failed to obtain (in our kindred's case, usually gravy mix), and have him/her stop to pick it up on the way. Arranging for someone living close by to call just before leaving for exactly this purpose is a very good idea.

2:00 First people begin arriving at house. This is when we tell people to arrive, but generally they float in throughout the afternoon. As a few people begin to arrive, seek "volunteers" to help with any food prep tasks that can be done at this point like slicing vegetables or making stuffing. When this is done, stash it in the refrigerator.

2:30 If everything has gone well, all the prep cooking stuff should be done and the dishes used washed and dried. Hosts, cooking people, and organizers can now relax and socialize.

3:45 Person who assured you last night they would be coming calls to announce they can't make it. Begin to get people to think about ritual and divide up any parts that aren't previously spoken for. If you are cooking something like a roast that requires more than an hour of cooking, put it in now. Get the ritual space cleared out and the altar set up. Take phone off hook or turn off ringer

4:00 If you do so, get dressed (tunics, etc.) for ritual. Begin Ritual. If you have any new people, even if they purport to be Asatru, once you have gotten the candles lit, the blot-drink open, and everyone ready, go over each step of the ritual. This is also a good way to make sure that each person knows when their part is, and remembers that they are doing it.

Set the mood: Chant to Odin, Vili, Ve--When the Gothi/person in charge is sure that everyone is ready, start the Odin, Vili, Ve chant. This goes for three rounds.

Hammer Rite--Appropriate person steps forward and takes up hammer, and performs hammer rite.

Statement of purpose--Gothi ritually welcomes people to the blot and announces what the purpose of the ritual is and otherwise reminds people of why they have come together.

General Prayer--Someone steps forward to the altar and offers a prayer to all the Gods and Goddesses for their blessings and asking that they help us to have continued prosperity.

Invoke deity of occasion--Gothi steps to front of altar, raises hands in Z position and calls for the God or Goddess of the occasion to come forth to Midgard.

Meditation--Person leading meditation indicates that people should sit. A few moments of silence are offered for people to get comfortable. Meditation is offered. When it is over, the keyword we usually use is "rise now and receive the blessing of Odin (or appropriate god-name)."

Offer/sanctify mead--The Gothi takes up the horn and his assistant (called "The Valkyrie") fills it with mead. The Valkyrie replaces the bottle on the altar. The Gothi steps to the front of the altar and holds the horn aloft and asks the God to partake of it and charge it with his power.

Toast to the deity of occasion--After offering the horn to the deity and making the first toast, the Gothi passes the horn to the person next to him. If there are a large number of people the Valkyrie should watch and if necessary come forward with the bottle to refill the horn. At the end of the round the remains of the horn (and there should be some) are poured into the blotbowl by the Gothi usually with some appropriate words, and the Valkyrie then refills it. This process is repeated for the next two rounds.

Thank deity--The Gothi thanks the deity and bids him/her continue to watch over the Folk.

Oath Ring ceremony--The Gothi takes up oath Ring and the full kindred members come forward and grab ahold. The recognized kindred leader offers up the rede. The Gothi then replaces the Ring on the altar.

Pour libation--Someone, often the Valkyrie, takes up the blotbowl and leads the people outside for the libation. The Gothi is the last person to leave, and makes sure the door is closed, etc. After the libation is finished, the Gothi hurries back to be the first one in and turns on the lights, which is an important cue to everyone that the ritual is indeed over.

5:00 Ritual Over. Put someone in charge of getting the room back to normal. Person in charge of food grabs a few "volunteers" and sets them to work getting the rest of the food together. Other folks socialize or help as they wish.

5:30 Set tables and put out anything that people don't need to get for themselves such as napkins, salt & pepper, butter, etc. Offer a "last call" for folks to get drinks before the food is served. Slice roast and anything else that needs to be. Get serving spoons where they'll be needed or put food onto serving platters, etc.

5:45 If you are serving food out of the kitchen bring it out. If you aren't, cook and "volunteers" grab plates full and then announce food is ready for the rest of the people. Much feasting ensues.

5:55 Person who called at 3:30 announcing they couldn't make it arrives. Says he called, but the phone was busy. Host puts it back on hook.

6:30 All the food being gone, the feast is declared over. Host is thrown out of kitchen and told to sit down while folks wash dishes and clean up. (If this doesn't happen, reconsider who is invited.)

7:00 First person leaves. Hit everyone up for \$\$ for feast contributions (this would be better done when they arrive, but it rarely happens that way). Write down anyone who doesn't have the cash and owes you. If this happens with any frequency, reconsider who is invited.)

8:00 Put The Vikings in the VCR.

10:30 Vikings movie finishes. Most guests leave.

11:30 Guests have drifted out until "core" kindred members are the only folks left. Talk over ritual and how it went. Bitch and laugh about flakey visitor who will never come back (you hope).

12:30 Last people leave. Go to bed.

## HOW TO MAKE MEAD

Mead is one of the oldest drinks known to man. In the ancient Norse tradition it is beloved of both Gods and men. The patron God of mead and brewing is Aegir, a God of the sea, reckoned as one of the Giants, who is the greatest of brewers. It is to him that the Gods went to when they wanted mead and ale brewed for Asgard. Bygvir and Beyla are servants of the God Frey; their names reckoned as "barley" and "bee." "Kvasir's blood" is a kenning for mead. Kvasir was an early God, who was murdered and his blood brewed into mead that gave wisdom. Snorri tells us that Odin ate no food, but drank only mead.

In modern Asatru, mead is an important part of our basic ritual known as the blot. In ancient times, the blot was a sacrifice in which the blood of a slaughtered animal was offered to the Gods. Today, we generally offer mead or ale in a similar manner.

The essence of brewing is a true wonder of nature. One introduces yeast in to a liquid that is rich in sugars. The yeast eats the sugar and excretes alcohol. In wine, the liquid is grape juice. In beer, it is a mixture of water and malted grains. In mead, it is a mixture of honey and water, although occasionally people will mix in fruit for flavor.

To brew mead you will need the follow ingredients for each gallon of mead: 2 1/2 lbs. of honey, 2 teaspoons of "acid mix" (Sold as pre-mixed in winemaking stores. It contains malic, tartaric, and citric acids.), 1 teaspoon of yeast energizer, one packet of wine yeast (1 packet of yeast will do for 1P5 gallons of mead, I suggest champagne yeast and highly recommend against mead yeast. I have never had a decent mead made with mead yeast. Bread yeast is absolutely not acceptable.). You usually make mead in 5-gallon batches.

You will also need some equipment. First, if you don't already have one, you'll need a good quality pot that will hold at least 2 or 3 gallons. It should be made of either stainless steel or enameled--your basic corn or lobster pot will do. Second, you'll need a variety of goods sold at the local beer and winemaking store. If you are just starting out, you are probably best off buying a kit which will contain the following: a five gallon plastic keg the cover of which has a hole in the center meant for a stopper (the primary fermenter), a plastic siphon hose attached to a piece of hard plastic tubing (a racking cane), a piece of hard plastic tubing molded into an "S" shape (an air lock), a little device that either looks like a tiny plunger or two pieces of plastic, one of which fits over the other (a corker), a device that looks like a giant glass thermometer (a hydrometer), a bottle brush, a package of "sanitizer," and a bag of corks. Oh, you'll also get a little booklet that will give you helpful advice on brewing grape wines. I've found these booklets are generally good, but tend to go into more work than is necessary for mead.

The kit will run around \$30P\$50, and the individual items about a third more than that if you buy them separately. If you are buying them separately, you don't really need the hydrometer and you can use household bleach instead of the sanitizer. The yeast and chemicals will run you

another \$10, and the honey another \$20. I recommend looking at a health food store, where you can often get higher quality all-natural honey in different varieties and larger quantities at prices much cheaper than at the supermarket. Most beer and winemaking stores will be happy to sell you bottles, but I recommend asking at a local restaurant as they are usually eager to get rid of a few. You can't reuse corks. This is all you need. Your bill for making your first 5 gallons will be about \$80, and will make 20 or so bottles. So, the cost for home-brewed mead is around \$4/bottle for the first batch, and \$1.50 thereafter.

Making mead is easy. First find a good quality pot that will hold 2P5 gallons. It should be either stainless steel or ceramic coated (a "corn" or "lobster" pot is usually a good bet). Rinse it out either with the sanitizer (following the directions on the package) or with a 10P20% bleach solution. This is to sterilize it. Everything you use must be completely sterile, including any spoons or siphons or anything else that comes in contact with the mead including your hands. Of course, after sterilizing everything rinse the bleach in hot water until you can't smell it, and then rinse it a bit more for good measure. The reason for sterilizing is that yeasts naturally present in air can contaminate your mead, and unlike the helpful yeasts mentioned above, most airborne yeast excrete vinegar rather than alcohol.

Dissolve the honey in water, and bring it to a boil, adding the acid mix and yeast energizer. If your pot will fit all 5 gallons of water, that's great. Otherwise just put in enough water to dissolve the honey. Bring the mix to the boiling point, and skim off the "scum" that floats to the surface. If you wish to add fruit, like a handful of berries or apple slices, do this now and cook until they are soft and/or dissolved and then strain them out. If you don't want to go through this, jelly makes an easily dissolved additive. If you do decide to add fruit, make allowances for the qualities of the fruit. If you are adding something tart or acidic like strawberries or raspberries, reduce the amount of acid mix you add to the brew.

Once you've brought the mix to a boil or boiled down the fruit, pour the mixture into your large vat--which you have sterilized with bleach mix and rinsed while you were waiting for the mead to heat up. (Most books recommend siphoning it into the primary fermenter (the large plastic vat), so I suppose I should as well, but to be honest I've always poured it. At the boiling point, there's only so much that can contaminate the mixture.) If the pot you boiled the honey and water mixture wouldn't hold enough water, add the remainder to the fermenter now. If you aren't going to be able to boil all the water, which will cause most of the trapped gasses to escape, you will probably want to use bottled water.

Put on the cover and let the mixture cool to room temperature. If it is hot, it will kill the yeast. Once it's cool, mix the yeast with a cup of water in a small bowl and let it get rehydrated for 10P20 minutes, then open the primary fermenter, and add the yeast. This is called "pitching" the yeast. Close the fermenter, and put on the airlock.

The airlock is a nifty little piece of hard plastic tubing, bent into an "S" shape--looking and acting a lot like the drainpipe under the sink. You put some water in it (about 1/2 an inch on each side of the "S", and the escaping gasses from the fermentation will push their way through the

water in the airlock. This allows the pressure to escape, but leaves the fermenter sealed so nothing can get in from the outside. (You'll understand it when you see one.) In anytime from a day to a week from when you put the cover and airlock on, gasses will begin to bubble out of the airlock showing you that the mead is fermenting. All the books tell you this will start within a day, but sometimes it takes a little longer. If it doesn't start in a week, consider throwing in another packet of yeast and a teaspoon of yeast energizer. You might also see if the room you have placed your fermenter in is too cold. (Cement floors in basements radiate a lot of cold and will slow your fermentation to a crawl, even if the room is heated.) I've had best results with the fermenter between 65P75!. You might also take some care not to put the fermenter on a carpet. Sometimes the fermentation will go berserk and foam will ooze out of the airlock during the first week. Usually this only happens with beer, but it can be a mess, so the fermenter should probably stay in the kitchen.

In one to three months, you will see the fermentation slow to a stop or near stop. This happens either because the yeast has converted all the sugar to alcohol, or, more likely, there is a sufficient amount of alcohol to kill the yeast (how did this stuff ever evolve?). This is another reason for using champagne yeast--it is tolerant of higher levels of alcohol, so you will get a much stronger brew. You then need to bottle your mead. Soak the corks in water for at least an hour if not a day before you bottle, to get them soft and pliable. Sterilize the bottles, and the racking cane and tubing. The racking cane is a siphon device with the intake about a 1/2 inch above the bottom level, so you don't get any of the yeast sludge into the bottles. The sludge is pretty disgusting looking and tastes twice as bad. You want to make sure not to disturb it. This means not swishing around the racking cane. It's also helpful to put the primary fermenter up on the table a few hours before you are going to bottle, so any sludge disturbed will have time to settle. One more thing--always siphon, never pour the mead, and sterilize the siphon and racking cane.

Finally, you need to cork the bottles. Most kits come with one of two types of corking devices. Both push the cork through a narrowing passage that compresses it, so it will fit into the bottle neck and then expand, forming a seal. The first is a plunger style device, with a hole in the side. You put the cork in, and place the whole device over the bottle, and then push down on the plunger and the cork slides into the bottle. The second type of corker (and the one I prefer) consists of two pieces of plastic. One is hollow, and you place the cork inside of it. You then fit the second piece, over the first. It has a stopper inside which pushes the cork down through the hollow piece, into the neck of the bottle. I find this latter type a bit more stable. I was always tipping over bottles with the plunger type, this doesn't seem to happen with the two piece one. Very occasionally you'll get corks that simply won't go in. This is usually due to a knot hidden in the middle of the cork. It usually means chipping the cork out of the corker with a knife or pushing it back the way it came.

We've found the bottling works best in teams of three, one holding the top of the racking cane in the fermenter (and avoiding the yeast sludge), a second at the bottom of the siphon filling the bottles, and a third person corking the full bottles. When we get down to the part with the sludge, we usually put that in a separate bottle and drink it as soon as its marginally clear to



"test" the mead. It will probably taste horrid, but this will change with age. If it's vinegar, start buying salad oil because there's not a lot more you can do other than make dressing.

Once corked, set aside to age until the mead clears. It's best to age it from four to six months, but at least give it time to clear. During this time you can get occasional problems. Primarily, if fermentation hasn't entirely stopped, it will continue in the bottle. This is how you get the pressure in champagne and sparkling wines and it can make a wonderful sparkling mead. The problem is that champagne bottles are designed to hold high pressure, and the cork is a special type "locked" on with a metal cage. If you get too much pressure, the corks will pop out of the bottles usually spraying mead all over the place (this happened to us when a heat wave started the fermentation again and increased the pressure). There's no real remedy for this, it's part of the fun and actually quite rare. If the bottles you open seem to be sparkling, then beware of this and store your mead someplace cool and uncarpeted. If they aren't sparkling I wouldn't worry about it. Look on the bright side, the crown caps on beer bottles don't pop off, so when the pressure gets too high, the bottle explodes.

Drink and enjoy.

#### Basic mead recipe:

12 pounds of honey  
10 t acid mixture  
5 t yeast energizer  
1 package champagne yeast

Dissolve honey in water. Bring to a boil. Add acid mix and yeast energizer. Pour into fermenter. Allow to cool. Pitch and add yeast.

## SOURCES AND RESOURCES FOR ASATRU

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### ORGANIZATIONS:

The Ring of Troth P.O. Box 25637; Tempe, AZ 85285-5637 The Ring is an international organization for Norse Pagans of any type. It is governed by an appointed High Rede of 9 persons who guide the national affairs of the Ring. They offer a number of programs including an Elder training program for prospective clergy, and recognition for local Kindreds. Dues are \$24 and include a subscription to Idunna. If one does not wish to join, Friends of the Troth may receive Idunna for \$24 as well. Family memberships are \$33 and include 1 copy of Idunna.

The Raven Kindred Association 11160 Veirs Mill Rd L15-175; Wheaton MD 20902 The Raven Kindred Association offers correspondence connections, help with setting up Kindreds, regional coordination, booklets and pamphlets as well as sponsoring a New Year's/Yule Thing. Membership is available to Kindreds or individuals who agree with the RKA Declaration of Principles. The RKA strongly encourages its members to join other affiliations in addition to the RKA.

Skergard 9155 Dyer (#B-80-158); El Paso, TX 79924 Skergard is a small alliance in the South West with three Kindreds and a journal. They are governed by a High Rede and Asst. High Rede, in conjunction with a council of Gothar, representing each God or Goddess.

### Kindreds:

Asatru Fellowship of Illinois; 858 W. Armitage (Suite 139); Chicago, IL 60614

Asatru Fellowship of Ohio; PO Box 271; Carrollton, OH 44615

Barnstokker Garth; PO Box 1972; Seattle, WA 98111

Chimney Rock Kindred; PO Box 448; Bayard, NE 69334

Dragon's Hearth; 1015 Rutledge Ave; Phoenixville, PA 19460

Erntefreude Hearth; 322 Cedar Ave; Highland Park, NJ 08904

Eyvindr Hearth; 210 Alamo; Las Vegas, NM 87701

Fire and Ice Kindred; PO Box 10036; Cranston, RI 02910

First Iowa Church of Asatru; 1600 Buterfield (Suite #211); Dubuque, IO 52001

Freya's Folk Hearth; 537 Jones St #165; San Francisco, CA 94102

Fridrik Kindred; PO Box 1245; Frederick, MD 21702

Garrison Hearth; RD3 Box 298; Averill Park, NY 12018

Gring Thod; PO Box 8062; Watertown, NY 13601

Glen Vdis Hearth; 19710 63rd Lane NE; Seattle WA 98155

Gray Wolf Kindred; PO Box 441308; Indianapolis IN 46244

Hamilton Hearth; 15558 Spangler Rd; Dillsboro, IN 47018

Hamm Hearth; PO Box 8152; Bridgeport, CT 06605-0996

Hammer Oak Kindred; 1517 San Francisco (Suite #4); Berkeley, CA 94703

Hammer of Thor Kindred; PO Box 222514; Carmel, CA 93922

Hammerstead Kindred; PO Box 22379; Lexington, KY 40522

Heidentor Hearth; 1314 1/2 Lindsley St; Sandusky, OH 44870

Herig Hearn; PO Box 7055; Bryan OH 43506

Hrafnaheimr Garth; 7954 West Third St; Los Angeles, CA 90048

Hrafnar Garth; PO Box 5521; Berkeley, CA 94705

Irminsul Garth; PO Box 18812; Austin, TX 78760

Margivegr Group; 1550 Larimer (Suite #170); Denver, CO 80202

Moonstar Hearth; 1264-L Sheridan Dr.; Lancaster, OH 43130

Mountain Moot Kindred; PO Box 328; Elizabeth, CO 80107

Nund Bara Garth; PO Box 4371; Sunland, CA 91041

Nordland Hearth; PO Box 596; Marshall, MN 56258

Ratakosk Kindred; PO Box 216; Sherwood, OR 97140

Raven Kindred North; PO Box 1137; Sturbridge, MA 01566

Raven Kindred South; 11160 Veirs Mill Rd L15-175; Wheaton, MD 20902

Ravenswood Kindred; PO Box 212; Sheridan, IN 46069

Ravenwood Sibja; PO Box 1012; Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

Skergard Garth; PO Box 1755 (Suite #250); Nederland, CO 80466

Skergard's Fjallagard Hearth; PO Box 233; Rollinsville, CO 80474

Skergard's Fjallaheim Hearth; 10621 Birthstone; El Paso, TX 79925

Skergard's Naglfar Hearth; 6856 Amster Rd; Richmond, VA 23225

Torwald Kindred; PO Box 417; Rollinsville, CO 80474

Ullrshavn Hearth; PO Box 84396; Fairbanks, AK 99708

Ullsbekk Kindred; PO Box 1156; Denver, CO 80201

Vlissinger Garth; 4019 164th St (Suite #586); Flushing, NY 11358

Vrilhof Hearth; PO Box 472; Cambridge, MA 02139

Wednesbury Thod; Route 1, Box 120; Huntsville, MO 65259

Wolfraven Steading; PO Box 1349; Browns Mills, NJ 08015

Yggdrasil Kindred; PO Box 23940; Tucson, AZ 85734

Zakharias Steading; 984 East 900 South; Salt Lake City, UT 84105

Hlidhskjalf Garth; 1513 Thurlow St; Orleans Ontario K4A-2K9 CANADA

Northern Light Hearth; PO Box 8427; Victoria, BC V8W-3S1 CANADA

Wolf's-Joint Hearth; PO Box 36097; Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J-3S9 CANADA

### Recommended Magazines:

Idunna -- \$24/year. The journal of the Ring of Troth. Idunna concentrates on fairly heavy academic subjects, runelore, translations etc. within a religious framework.

Asatru Today -- \$15/year, 11160 Veirs Mill Rd L15-175; Wheaton, MD 20902. Independent Asatru journal. Concentrates on modern religious Asatru with community news and announcements.

Fjallabok -- \$24/year, P.O. Box 233; Rollinsville, CO 80474. Monthly magazine which also acts as newsletter for Skergard. General Asatru articles and some controversial opinions.

Theod -- \$15/year. P.O. Box 8062, Watertown, NY 13601. Journal of Theodish Belief, the ancient Anglo-Saxon religion very closely related to Asatru. Digest sized with nice layout.

The Runestone -- \$10/year; P.O. Box 445; Nevada City CA 95959. Published by Stephen McNallen & Maddy Hutter, this is the reincarnation of the AFA's seminal journal on Asatru. Interesting commentary, interested in heroic Viking past.

### Recommended Books:

A Book of Troth by Edred Thorsson (Not a book without imperfections, but presents the basic rituals of Asatru).

Myth and Religion of the North, E.O.G. Turville-Petre (Excellent academic introduction to Norse mythology.)

The Norse Myths, Kevin Crossley Holland (basic mythology in modern language and retelling, excellent for readings or meditation)

Our Troth by The Ring of Troth & Friends of the Troth. (A huge volume of Norse rituals and belief compiled by The Ring of Troth from its members and associates. Highly Recommended. \$17 postpaid for Ring of Troth members, \$25 for non-members.)

The Poetic Edda, Lee Hollander translation (basic mythology in an excellently translated poetic version.)

The Prose Edda, Jean Young translation (basic mythology)

Rhinegold, Stephan Grundy. (Novel retelling the Volsung Saga, written from a modern Asatru Viewpoint. Gives an excellent picture of ancient Germanic life and religion.)

The Raven Kindred Ritual Book (basic text on Asatru ritual and beliefs, \$8 from Asatru Today. Available for free download from online services or Moonrise BBS at (301)J593-9609 or e-mail to lstead@access.digex.net.

The Road To Hel, and any other works by H.R. Ellis-Davison (All her works are excellent introductions to Norse myth and worldview)

Teutonic Religion, Kveldulfr Gundarsson (basic text on modern Germanic Paganism.)

### **Computer Network Resources:**

There is a Runes & Asatru conference on the Pagan/Occult Distribution System (PODSnet).

The following are long term stable boards:

The Mountain Oracle, Colorado: 719-380-7886,

Mysteria, California: 818-353-8891,

Sacred Grove, Washington State: 1-206-322-5450,

Moonrise, Maryland/DC: 301-593-9609,

Baphonet, New Jersey: 1-201-434-5026,

Pandora's Box, Ottawa Canada: 613-829-1209,

PODS, Sydney Australia: 61-2-833-1848,

PODS Melbourne Australia: 61-3-796-2180.

The Troth Line is an internet mailing list for Asatru. To subscribe, send a message to majordomo@io.com consisting of the following message: "subscribe troth ". The list itself is at troth@indial1.io.com. The list operates by echoing messages to your e-mail account and is accessible through America Online, CompuServe, Delphi, and tens of thousands of other locations.

An excellent FTP archive of Pagan material can be found at <ftp.lysator.liu.se> and includes a section dedicated to Asatru and Norse Paganism.