

**AN
ODINIST
ANTHOLOGY**

**SELECTIONS
FROM
THE RUNESTONE**

The Odinist Anthology is published
by
The Asatru Free Assembly

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PREFACE

This anthology represents some of the contents of THE RUNESTONE over a span of more than ten years, from issue number two almost to the present. During this decade-long history of publication, THE RUNESTONE and the organization which it represents underwent a multitude of changes, becoming more sophisticated, broader in perspective, and more polished in presentation with the passage of time. Hopefully the reader will be able to trace this evolution.

This collection is designed to provide the person new to Odinism¹, or Asatru, with something beyond the simple leaflets which may have been his or her introduction to the religion. It is by no means comprehensive, but it will give the student of Asatru a wealth of information which will make it easier to proceed on to other sources of greater depth and complexity. In this respect it fills a gap which has long been an irritant to new asatruarar².

The articles have been edited for grammatical and typographical errors, and in some cases they have been "tightened up" by deletion of irrelevancies, but the flavor of the original has been kept - blemishes and all. Our beginnings were humble, to say the least, and the first fumbling attempts to present our world-view seem a little pitiable from today's standpoint. But every venture has to begin somewhere, and we have come a long, long way from those early attempts to put thoughts to paper. This slim volume is presented in the firm belief that our journey has barely begun, and that THE RUNESTONE and the Asatru Free Assembly will attain heights which today cannot even be seen because of the clouds which obscure the summit of accomplishment.

I would like to thank the authors of these selections for their support, along with Prudence, Maddy, and Ariel. It couldn't have been done without them.

Stephen A. McNallen
Denair, California 1982

PRELUDE

WHY ASATRU?

This is a reworked version of the original flyer we wrote to promote Asatru. It's been around in one form or another since the early 1970s, and still constitutes a good overview of our subject - hence its choice as the first selection in our anthology.

For thousands of years our ancestors surged across land and sea in a wave of conquest, trade, and exploration that has come down in story and in legend to stir our imaginations even today. The Vikings took part in this drama, as did the related Germanic tribes on the European continent. We, their descendants - whether Scandinavian, English, German, Dutch, Frankish, or related peoples, can draw upon these mighty forefathers for our inspiration today.

Courage, vitality, and love of freedom are our spiritual birthright. Let us examine that inheritance, as exemplified in our ancestral religion known as Odinism, or Asatru.

Asatru places an exceptionally high value on human freedom and on individuality. This applies both in worldly and in spiritual matters, and is so strong that we honor our deities, but do not grovel before them. To us, the gods and goddesses are models, inspirations, self-aware personifications of the forces of Nature and even friends, but never are they our masters or we their slaves. We do not bow before them when we call on them, nor do we surrender our human sovereignty to them. We do not beg from them, sacrificing freedom for a handout. It is true that Odin, our high god, is called "All Father", but this does not imply inferiority or submissiveness on our part. Among the Norse peoples³ and in Germanic society generally, defiance and strength of will were considered favorable traits in children, for they indicated a capacity for self-responsibility and independence. So it is between us and our gods.

The family is one of the pillars of Asatru. By tradition our people have always been devoted to their family, clan or extended family, and tribe. These organic social forms are as important as ever. This is not mere sentiment, it is a guarantee of liberty. Where the family and its natural extensions are functioning properly, the power of competing entities, such as the State, will be limited. Where they are nonexistent or crippled, all power gravitates to the State by default, and freedom dies.

We believe in the efficacy of human action. By heroic action you can take your life in your hands and be the master of your soul. You are not the pawn of historical forces, condemned to whine about being born into "a world you never made". Fate, the momentum of past events, is something YOU help shape.

Courage is one of the more conspicuous Northern virtues. We of Ásatrú are taught to train ourselves in courage – the courage to face an enemy in battle, to risk all to do what is right, to defend our beliefs, and to be uncompromising with ourselves. Freedom, family, and tribe would not long exist without courage. It is a part of a stringent code of conduct, of honor, permitting no shirking of one's duties, no oathbreaking, and no ignoble acts.

Needless to say, all these values are under assault today. The economic slave masters, the behaviorists, the genetic engineers who would remove our aggressiveness, the followers of slave gods, all who preach the grey global monoculture – these cannot tolerate the existence of the free man and woman, the unchained ones, because the comparison shows their weakness. There is a concerted effort underway to pull down the free ways of our ancestors and replace them with a combination of the sheep flock and the anthill. Now more than ever, we need a return to our natural faith, the religion of our ancestors.

So much for the social implications of Asatrú. What do Odinists believe about the supernatural, an afterlife, and other usual religious concerns? We are supported by modern physics and by parapsychology when we state that there are other worlds of being than our own, and our gods live, as surely as you, or I.

Our deities are several, each concerned with a different aspect of the universe. Odin is Father of the Gods, god of wisdom and poetry and magic. Thor is the stalwart friend of the farmer, the freeholder, the warrior, and toiler. Frey governs growth, joy, and prosperity. Balder epitomizes courage tempered with goodness.

But a religion without a goddess is halfway to atheism. Frigga is the wife of Odin and mother of the gods. Freya is the beautiful life-giver, the eternal feminine. Nerthus is our beloved Mother Earth, whom we seek to heal of her wounds.

The Germanic concept of an afterlife is fully consistent with our other beliefs. Those who live worthy lives go to the realm of the gods, Asgard, after death. Evildoers and oathbreakers are sent to a place of eternal gloom, cold, and fog. There is also a persistent tradition of reincarnation within the family line in Asatrú.

Tragically, the forced conversion of the Germanic peoples to Christianity resulted in the loss of much of the ancient religious beliefs and practices. What survived, however, was sufficient to ensure that the spiritual essence of Odinism would be available to modern man. For those who possess the necessary courage, devotion, and will, the possibility of achieving direct contact with the spiritual forces inherent in Ásatrú remains viable. For others, a genuine

but lesser degree of contact with these wellsprings of wisdom and power is possible.

Our faith is practiced in numerous ways. We celebrate the solstices⁴ and equinoxes⁵ as part of the endless cycle of the year, and we observe as well the phases of the moon. There are other special days in which we honor the gods and goddesses or remember great personages now gone on to the Other World. Some of us must practice alone, but where possible we organize to carry out our ceremonies and to promote fellowship among our brothers and sisters now restored to their rightful tribe. Our organizational structure consists of a loose hierarchy, with each congregation or "kindred" largely autonomous. The entire system is designed to maximize those values of freedom and self-reliance that we hold so dear.

Basically, though, our religion is a matter of everyday life. We try to incorporate it into everything we do. Every time we display courage, speak out against tyranny and bureaucracy, are hospitable to guests, or help preserve the environment, we are performing a religious act. Our group activities emphasize exploration and adventure, individual expression, and communion with nature and spiritual forces. Loyalty and brotherhood among members is recognized as a supreme virtue. We strive always to mold our characters so as to be worthy of our kin⁶ and our gods.

The preservation of our freedoms, and the continuance of our kind, demands a return to our native religion. We cannot offer you a life of security and ease. We do offer you a chance to grow in courage, self-reliance, and freedom. We do offer an opportunity to grow closer to nature in the practice of the age-old rituals of our ancestors, to celebrate the progress of the seasons, to partake of the essence of our people. We offer you a chance to fight in the eternal struggle between the free and the slave, between those who would preserve life on this planet and those who would destroy it. If this strikes a responsive chord in your soul, if this is more important than having a secure religion as a crutch – join us in the freedom and adventure of Asatrú!

Want to learn more? Subscribe to THE RUNESTONE, a quarterly journal of Odinism. Write to: Asatrú Free Assembly, P.O.Box 1832, Grass Valley, CA 95945.

HOW CHRISTIANITY CAME TO NORTHERN EUROPE

To understand the re-emergence of Ásatrú we should first know how Christianity came to replace our ancestral beliefs. Most people do not realize the bloodshed, politics, and incredible investment of effort that was needed to supplant Ásatrú in the Northlands. Imposing the artificial over the natural is never easy.

This article is an early one, appearing in issue number six of THE RUNESTONE — the manner of the conversion (perversion?) to Christianity has long been a matter of importance to the Odinst movement.

Few myths about Christianity are as all-pervading as the myth that Christianity has spread its Gospel around the world by peaceful conversion and the use of love and reason, and few lies have served the Christian cause more faithfully. Millions of people throughout the earth have been taught from childhood that it was peaceful conquest, not force, that brought Christianity to the pagan peoples of the world.

Christianity, on both its mundane and its mystical levels, is the antithesis of human freedom and of Ásatrú. It has always been the traditional opponent of the Viking ethic, and it was Christianity that set the old religion of the Norsemen into decline. Thus it behooves us to set history straight, and to examine more closely the process by which Northern Europe became converted to the Christian camp.

Official history, in one of many monumental oversights, totally ignores that there were people who died defending their heathen⁷ beliefs — pagan martyrs. In Norway, it was Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf the Holy who gained fame as propagators of the new religion. As one source puts it, "These two waged unceasing battle against the heathen gods, smashing their idols, burning their temples, and either driving out their followers or putting them to a painful death in the name of Christ". In Halogaland, especially, men clung with tenacity to Odin and Thor. One Eyvind Kinnrifi was tortured with red-hot embers until he died — still a heathen. Raud the Powerful, another influential follower of the old ways, was also tortured to death. Tryggvason then had the gall to appropriate Raud's ship for his own use, renamed "Long Serpent". Thorlief the Wise was another man who could not be threatened from his beliefs, and he presented the Christians with something of a special problem; because of his great wisdom and amiable personality, no one could be found to murder him. King Olaf enlisted the aid of Hallfred the Icelander to put him to death or, failing that, to at least blind him. The would-be assassin succeeded in taking one of Thorlief's eyes, but was moved by shame or pity, and could not find it in himself to take the other. Thus was Thorlief, like the god Odin to whom he was true, left with but one eye.

Even in Iceland, where Olaf Tryggvason himself did not lead the conversion and where scholar Lee M. Hollander remarks on the "absence of religious fanaticism" on the part of the Christians, we find the usual hallmarks of Christian missionary activity. The evangelical band led by the priest Thangbrand is described in Njal's Saga as going on "to Flotshlid and preaching the faith. The strongest opposition came from Vertrildi the Poet and his son Ari; so they killed Vertrildi". Despite Thangbrand's considerable successes in making at least nominal Christians out of the Icelanders, he still went to Tryggvason complaining of ill treatment. The great Christian King of Norway ordered all the Icelanders in his country rounded up and cast into the dungeon, and had given the order to have them put to death. The only reason this grisly sentence was not carried out was because two Icelanders, Gizur the White and Hjalti Skeggjason, offered to sail to their homeland and preach Christianity to the inhabitants of the island (Njal's Saga, Chapter 104). It was these two who rode to the Althing, Iceland's great legislative and judicial assembly, and managed to get Christianity accepted as the state religion. The man who made the final decision (which was, as the saga relates, a political one designed to keep widespread civil war from rending the country) was a heathen, one Thorgeir the Priest. Despite his decision which made Iceland a Christian nation he made certain allowances for religious freedom. His words were, "The penalty for carrying on these practices openly shall be outlawry, but they shall not be punishable if they are done in private". Immediately after this sentence Njal's Saga continues parenthetically, "Within a few years all these heathen practices were absolutely forbidden, in private as well as in public". Thus did a large measure of the traditional Icelandic freedom die.

Christian persecution of Ásatrú was not limited to Iceland or even to Scandinavia; other Germanic heathens elsewhere were subject to violent repression. In Hollander's introduction to The Poetic Edda⁸ he remarks that, "Just as fire and sword wrought more conversions in the Merovingian kingdom, in Germany, and England than did peaceful missionary activity, so too in the North; and little would have been heard of sagas, Eddic lays, and skaldic poetry had it not been for the fortunate existence of the political refuge of remote Iceland". Despite the horrible deeds of the Christians in Iceland, the repression throughout the Teutonic world was even more severe. The Church aimed at nothing less than the extinction of heathens and their beliefs.

If murder and the prejudicial exercise of the law were not enough to make men accept the Christian's faith, there were always economic pressures. The

King of Norway had an especially tight stranglehold on the isolated Greenland colony which, because of the severity of its climate and the dangers of its long and hazardous trade routes with the nations of Europe, found itself perpetually fighting for mere survival. Eric the Red and other prominent pagans in this outpost of Norse civilization were threatened with a cessation of trade with Norway unless the Greenlanders adopted Christianity (The Viking Settlements in North America, by Frederick J. Pohl, page 21). In other words, this colony of men, women, and children was threatened with immediate suffering and eventual death.

The story of the extremes to which Christians have typically gone in order to spread their religion is not limited to Norse peoples, or even to Europe. Indians of the American Southwest were killed for entering their ceremonial kivas, and cousins farther south saw their infants' skulls smashed by Spanish soldiers who, having just baptised the babes, fulfilled their bloody duty in the firm belief that the children were being dispatched to heaven.

But surely, you will ask, is not this intolerance a universal thing? Have not non-Christians practiced it as resolutely as the Christians? While intolerance is admittedly no new thing, historical examination shows that the Judeo-Christian religion is one of the few to teach intolerance as an intrinsic and established part of its doctrine. Most heathens have shown themselves remarkably uninterested in forcing their religion on others or condemning them for following other gods, though of course there are exceptions. Herodotus was only one of many prominent pagans who traveled to foreign lands and commented not unfavorably on the gods of the peoples he visited. He was not in the slightest anxious to convert them or to condemn them to eternal torment just because they were not followers of his particular religion. The Judeo-Christian religion, on the other hand, has from the very beginning taught that no other religions are to be tolerated. Consider those heathens who were killed or driven from their ancestral lands because Jehovah had declared that they must belong to his Chosen People – no matter who was there first, or who had settled it, or what means must be used to take it from them, (remember, it wasn't really murder!).

The Norsemen were not at first openly hostile to Christian clergymen. It was only when Christian missionaries began abusing customs and using coercion and otherwise making a nuisance of themselves that the anti-Christian backlash occurred. The much publicized raids on churches and monasteries were carried out not with any thought of opposing Christianity, but simply because that was where the loot was to be found. The tolerance of the pagan Scandinavians can be discerned from reading these words from the Journal kept by Archbishop Rimbert, who traveled to the North in the 800s: "With great difficulty they (the

missionaries) continued their journey on foot, travelling whenever possible by boat across the waters that crossed their route, and arrived finally at a harbor town in the land of the Svea⁹, called Birka. Here they were welcomed by the king, whose name was Bjorn. The delegates told the king the purpose of their journey. When he knew it and had discussed it with his faithful followers, he gave them permission to stay – with the former's approval and to preach the gospel of God. He also gave freely in this instruction."

The contrast between Bjorn at Birka and the prohibitions which followed the conquest of Christendom in Iceland is obvious.

Can you imagine what would have happened if a boatload of Vikings had sailed up the Thames into London and asked permission to establish a grove and convert people to Odin? They would have been massacred on the spot – after, I am sure, dispatching a number of Christians to their Heaven or Hell.

Such religious intolerance seems rampant among monotheists. Perhaps it is easier for polytheists to conceive of the existence and the validity of other gods, having as they do a pluralistic conception of deity.

Those who brought Christianity to the Norse peoples were skilled in the use of propaganda and distortion. Two principal ruses were used. One was the depicting of Christ and the apostles as a young warrior and his band of faithful followers, something which any Norseman could understand because it was a concept which entered into his daily living. Needless to say, this is a most inaccurate representation of Christianity, and is in fact diametrically opposed to the basic values and philosophy of the Christian religion, which is non-violent and anti-heroic. This was glossed over to make the religion palatable to the Norsemen, who would never have accepted it had they been aware of what Christianity really was, or to what degree it would enslave their descendants of the far future.

Another trick used by the bearers of the new religion was, after destroying the old pagan temple, to erect the local church on the same ground. The idea was that since people were in the habit of coming to one particular place to conduct their religious ceremonies, they would more readily come to that same place to worship the Christian god. Likewise Christian religious feasts were arranged to be held at the same time of the year as the old Pagan nature festivals. By utilizing such simple behavioral tactics, the Christians hoped to "outflank" the Heathen religion, pouring Christian substance into forms which, if not Pagan, were at least similar in some respects to the forms of the old religion. Instructions in great detail were given to the missionaries telling them exactly how to go about this technique.

Unfortunately, it worked. Due to numerous reasons – the zeal of Christian missionaries, lack of cohesion among the followers of the Pagan religion,

the lack of written literary arts as flexible as the ones used in the lands occupied by the Christians, and the use of bribes, violence, and economic coercion, Christianity became the predominant religion in those lands where Odin and Thor had reigned for so long. As could be expected, Paganism went into decline once the religion attained state power. The world is immeasurably worse off for that fact.

But let there be no more talk of the kind-hearted Christians, holy and loving, who came to steer the savage barbarian from his misguided way. Let there be no more heard of Pagans who rushed into the embrace of the Church. It never happened that way, and the lie that it did occur in this manner is a lie that has served the Christian cause too long. Let the truth be known and we will have struck a blow against tyranny, and for those brothers of ours who long ago died faithful to the old gods, the gods of freedom.



INTRODUCTION

Ásatrú is not a philosophical religion in the sense that someone sat down and logically devised a system of thought based on a couple of axioms, then clothed that intellectual structure with mythology, ritual, and the other things that make up a living belief. Rather, Odinism or Ásatrú emerged from the group soul¹⁰ of our people, and our philosophizing is merely a means of describing what that innate religion is. In other words, we didn't make up Ásatrú out of philosophical materials, because it is a part of us and has existed as long as we have. We can only analyze and discuss Ásatrú in philosophical terms as we perceive more and more of it.

The articles in this section give some notion of the philosophical world-view of Odinism. They cover an assortment of topics in articles published over an eight year span. While they are indicative of Odinist thought they are not meant to be by any means definitive. Some are thought pieces designed to stimulate exploration and speculation on the part of the reader. Ásatrú has not been subjected to the learned philosophical analysis it deserves.

SOME ODINIST VALUES

- STRENGTH IS BETTER THAN WEAKNESS . . .

Let others revel in their vulnerability! We are not ashamed to be strong. The cult of the anti-hero will find no support in us, and the gods we follow are not for the weak.

- COURAGE IS BETTER THAN COWARDICE . . .

By facing life's struggles with courage, we constantly extend our capabilities. Without courage, nothing else can be done!

- JOY IS BETTER THAN GUILT . . .

Let us take pleasure in our humanity, rather than being ashamed of who we are. Misplaced guilt – because of our sexuality, or our strength, or our greatness – has enslaved us long enough!

- HONOR IS BETTER THAN DISHONOR . . .

We must be true to what we are, and we must insist on acting with nobility rather than baseness. Our interior standards must be banners held high in our hearts.

- FREEDOM IS BETTER THAN SLAVERY . . .

We have no master! Those who would enslave us, whatever their excuse, are our enemies. The totalitarian ant nest is repugnant to us who demand the free, bracing wind of the Northlands.

- KINSHIP IS BETTER THAN ALIENATION . . .

The isolation and loneliness of modern life is foreign to us, nor is it a necessary evil. We call our Folk to return to kith and kin, to family, clan, and tribe.

- REALISM IS BETTER THAN DOGMATISM . . .

Blind faith has no place in Odinism. Our ancestors may have been sublimely mystical, but they were at the same time severely practical. No pie in the sky; we must act in this world rather than calmly wait for the next.

- VIGOR IS BETTER THAN LIFELESSNESS . . .

Let us dare to be all that we can be! Let us take risks and taste the richness of life. Passivity is for sheep. We refuse to be mere spectators in life.

- ANCESTRY IS BETTER THAN UNIVERSALISM . . .

Odinism is not for all. It is a product of the soul of the Northern peoples and is suited by its very nature to our needs.

NIETZSCHE AND ODINISM

Of all the modern philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche is perhaps the one closest to the spirit of Ásatrú. Unfortunately, he is also possibly the least understood philosopher of our age. For those interested in such matters, Nietzsche is mentioned in Carl Jung's "Wotan", where the eminent psychologist tells how the young Nietzsche was gripped by the Wotan archetype. This complex and prolific thinker has much to say to those of us who would return to the spirit of our forefathers.

The philosophy of Odinism or Ásatrú as we know it today cannot and must not be identified with the teachings of any one individual. To do so would be more than incorrect, it would be dangerous. Yet, there is much to benefit by a study of the various philosophers who have expressed beliefs which impinge upon Norse thought. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche¹² is surely one such example.

Nietzsche has been exploited by various political ideologies, especially the fascist. But Nietzsche opposed the State rather than glorifying it, referring to it as a "cold monster" and fighting its steadily growing power over the lives of men. The characteristics of Nietzsche, the man, are contrary to the beliefs of any collectivist tyrant.

One chief characteristic of Nietzschean thought is its stress on what the philosopher called the will-to-live, the affirmation of the life force and the total rejection of its opposite. He celebrates the Dionysian¹³ man, whose dynamic, creative, ecstatic frenzy gives him an overpowering and overflowing exuberance and a spirit of vitality. The Dionysian man, Nietzsche writes, is "a formula of highest affirmation (emphasis in the original), born of fullness and overfullness, a yea-saying without reserve to suffering's self, to guilt's self, to all that is questionable and strange in existence itself". He speaks of Dionysian pessimism, a tragic, realistic approach to life. The Dionysian hero is so full of confidence and so strong that he welcomes the challenges and the buffetings of life rather than avoiding them or dreading them as lesser men would do. He is a man who would seek them out, looking for a challenge to his courage and ability, did they not come to him of their own accord in the natural course of life. Nietzsche again and again expounds this idea of a vitality and exuberance which is so strong and so insistent, so very life affirming, that it expresses itself under the most trying and unfavorable circumstances. It forms one of the keystone beliefs in the philosophy of Nietzsche. In fact, the Dionysian man gave Nietzsche an answer to fatalism¹⁴. Nietzsche taught what he called the Eternal Recurrence, by which he meant that all things occur over and

over again, in a vast and unbreakable cycle of repetition. What is happening now has happened before, and will happen many more times. This fatalism, however, does not take into consideration Dionysian man, who by his vitality conquers the circumstances before him, exercising his will. Thus free will is affirmed despite the tendency of the universe to fatalism.

Here we see a parallel to our own Odinist beliefs. Our religion is definitely life affirming; not for us are the meek and the modest in life. We revel in our humanity and in our "naturalness". We believe in indulging all our natural and healthy instincts. Asceticism is foreign to us. Our thirst for life, our energy, our restless desire to experience new things and to accomplish great things takes us out of the morass that is the masses, and has a certain element of the Dionysian to it. The greatest heroes of the Norsemen were definitely Dionysian types such as Nietzsche seems to be referring to in his writings. They were strong, self-confident, self-indulgent, and exercised their will to achieve their desires and to shape their world, in defiance to those who would bow to any inexorable fate.

A second basis of Nietzschean philosophy is the Will to Power. The Will to Power is the basis of Nietzschean morality. Since the "death of God", it is necessary to find a new standard by which to live, a standard founded upon truth. Nietzsche found in Darwin the support he needed for his own concept of Will, since Darwin's theory of evolution saw the struggle to exist, the affirmation of life in its most basic and primeval form, as the process underlying biological evolution. Nietzsche, however, carried Darwin a step further, for he was concerned not merely with the will to exist, but the will to live. Life is vitality, energy, self-assertion - power! The basis of morality, Nietzsche declared, must be this Will to Power. This means, not that "good" may be determined simply by asking what is conducive to the gaining of power, but rather that the man who lives in accordance with the Will to Power, who is strong and self-assertive, will have within him the inherent standards declaring what is noble or what is ignoble.

This morality is a morality of the elite. It is the rare man who can accept these standards or practice them, and such people elevate themselves above the level of the masses. According to Nietzsche, only the Superman (of whom more later) was truly capable of realizing the Will to Power. However, even the weaklings, the common herd, experienced a need for the satisfaction of the Will to Power, though, because of their very weakness, such satisfaction must be accomplished by indirect means. They are unable to truly affirm life,

so they devise a morality which is anti-life, but which still enables them to survive and to gain power. Their morality praises weakness, defeat, humility, and restraint, and preaches the "virtues" of pity and an artificial love of everyone, to include one's enemies. These traits are an attempt to evade conflict and to dodge the real issues of life. They proclaim as evil such things as exalt the exceptional man, and set him apart from the rest of humanity - "voluptuousness, power of passion, and selfishness". The followers of these philosophies of weakness are incapable of these things and, because they cannot compete with the strong and vital persons at whose hands they stand to lose, they seek to pull down this non-conforming and life affirming minority. Democracy promotes the belief that all men are equal, and in the process destroys the distinction between the noble and the base. Socialism would abolish those who had proven their superiority by succeeding. Christianity fosters those principles which would fetter the elite, and breeds egalitarianism.

There is little here with which we can argue. Life is based on struggle, and only through struggle can man find virtue and the development of noble characteristics - independence, individuality, courage, persistence, and strength. There can be no doubt that the philosophies of weakness, such as total democracy, socialism, and Christianity mentioned by Nietzsche, do act as anti-aristocratic and anti-individualist forces designed to emasculate the elite or the nonconformist. Our Norse beliefs require the utmost efforts from us; they demand that we at least attempt to rise above the herd, to make ourselves live in accordance with a heroic creed. Submissiveness, humility, and the avoidance of life's conflicts are the antithesis of our way.

Is a true nobility to be found in the Superman, in those who practice the Will to Power? Does the cultivation of this exuberance, this strength and self-confidence, invariably impart a knowledge of the distinction between the noble and the base? A skeptic will point to the bullies of the world. Surely these seem to be possessed of the Will to Power, and even more surely are they lacking in even the rudiments of nobility. Is Nietzsche therefore in error? Not necessarily. Far from having the strong, dominant ego of the Superman or the Dionysian, these personalities have pitifully undernourished egos which must be constantly sustained by excess. They are, in psychological terms, compensating for unhealthy egos. The healthy person, with a truly secure ego, does not need cruelty, for he is not constantly trying to reassure himself of anything. The man who exercises his Will to Power, who is truly strong and self-confident, will know the base from the noble.

The Nietzschean ideal, as E.L. Allen puts it, is "realized in the man who raises himself above his fellows by his powers of body and mind, making no

apology for his intrinsic superiority but boldly living it out. He will be hard, pitiless, and stern with himself and with others, since these are the health-giving qualities". The Superman "will be the strong, alert, self-confident but self-disciplined individual, self-creating and lifted high above the nameless multitude". Such a concept is in keeping with the Norse tradition - an elite, an aristocracy, based not on birth or social position, but on individual effort and individual attainment. The free individual will make of himself what he can, and no limitations will be placed on those who aspire to succeed or to excel.

Nietzsche's statements on war have earned him great calumny and stand as his most controversial utterances. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra he wrote:

Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars - and short peace better than long Do ye say that a good cause halloweth even war? I say to you, a good war halloweth any cause. War and courage have done greater things than charity.

Some argue that this was meant in a sheerly metaphorical vein, and that Nietzsche was talking about "warriors of knowledge" rather than literal warfare. Though our philosophy on war is deserving of an article to itself, suffice it to say that our beliefs on war are a far cry from the Christian and "humanitarian" beliefs on the subject.

Nietzsche will provide valuable food for thought for anyone interested in the Odinst religion. He offers an alternative to the Christian philosophy that is based on strength and self-assertion rather than the predigested pulp of the collectivist¹⁵ philosophies. He deserves careful - and discriminating - study.

Finding the balance between the individual and the crowd is not a new problem, but the pressures of mass society have made it all the harder for the individual to survive as anything other than an interchangeable, faceless economic unit. We who deplore such dehumanization must find a philosophical basis to uphold our instinctual feeling that the individual does indeed matter.

The idea is often encountered, when reading books on Eastern or occult philosophy, that the concept of individuality is invalid. The opinion is offered that the "I" is ever changing and fluid; that, for example, we have nothing in common with the entity that we were at the age of seven except continuity, more or less, of memory. The very substance of our physical body has cycled in that intervening period due to the death and replacement of individual body cells. We are, by this way of looking at man, serial creatures to whom the label of a permanent individuality cannot be applied.

Completely aside from any idea of a non-material individual spiritual essence, I wish to challenge such an idea. I maintain that the genetic pattern of each individual provides that essence which establishes the uniqueness and individuality of each person. What a person does with that genotype determines how he uses his "destiny". In fact, might we not here have a workable definition of destiny as the genotypic possibility which the individual can either fulfill or not? There is no supernatural punishment for failing to fulfill this destiny, no bad karma. Free will is supreme within the outlines of one's potential. However, one who blatantly goes against his own dispositions (read: fails to fulfill his or her destiny) might turn out a bit neurotic.

This view of man, based on biology rather than abstract philosophical speculation, allows man the individuality that some other systems of thought would deny him. It is a view which should be used to oppose the anti-individualists, for if we can be convinced that we have no individuality, we can be persuaded to embrace slavery.

It is not enough to say with Descartes that, "I think, therefore I am." We must go beyond that to assert that, "I am, therefore I DO – and what I do, matters." This article points up some differences between Asatru and Christianity in this respect.

There was an old superstition among the Norsemen that a person should keep his nails clipped if he wanted to help the Aesir¹⁶ in their struggle at Ragnarok.¹⁷ The reason for this was that the ghastly ship on which Loki¹⁸ and his evil companions were to set forth to attack the realm of the gods was made from the nails of dead men – thus, if one kept his nails well trimmed at all times, he would not be likely to contribute building material to the ship of the traitors.

A silly and primitive superstition? Perhaps so. But it teaches us something very important about the Norse peoples and religion, namely, that they felt that human effort and endeavor mattered. A well-informed and well-meaning man could make decisions and perform actions in the real world which could have real effect – even on a scale of cosmic importance such as Ragnarok. This may seem like a verity which needs no emphasis, but if it seems that way, it is only because we take it for granted in our world-view. In other systems, such as Christianity, it does not exist. While some Christians may not admit to it, their faith denies the efficacy of human action in the world. They cannot save themselves from a fiery eternity in Hell, only Jesus can do it! God's will be done, not theirs! Their fate and destiny is out of their own hands, it rests in the hands of God himself. Thus, they are told to pray and have faith, to submit to the will of God, and to "resist not evil". Since the cosmic scenario has been supposedly worked out in advance, and since they were not assigned any active part but are merely reduced to pawns which are being fought over by two supernatural powers, what need have they of efficacy? Even when they go forth to save souls for Christ, it is not with the idea of contributing to the defeat of Satan, for his defeat is already certain. Rather, the idea is merely to get all those souls into the right camp for comfort's sake. Human will is either denied as an illusion (as the predestination crowd believes), or is totally relegated to relatively minor matters – certainly human will nor human effort have anything to do with the cosmic events of the Universe.

To us pagan Norsemen, though, human will and power are real. We do make a difference in the scheme of things. Even if the end result of events was pre-determined and unalterable, it would still behoove us to fight, to exert our will and effort. Each of us can add our own efforts to those of the mighty gods at Ragnarok, as is implied in the superstition mentioned at the beginning of this article. We are far from being the helpless creature that the Christian pictures himself; we know that evil can and must be resisted. Naturally, we define that evil a bit differently than do the Christians, since we see them as part of the problem!

A logical corollary to all this should be considered thoughtfully by us all. The folk belief described at the beginning of this article implies that we each can and should do what we can (not necessarily trimming our nails!) to aid our gods in the impending struggle. If we believe in human effectiveness, then let's begin exercising some of it against our foes. It is pretty obvious that events of metahistorical dimensions are shaping up, and whether you call it Ragnarok or rabbit ears is irrelevant. What is relevant is that these events can destroy us, our values, our religion forever, unless we win. So, let's begin working for victory now! The hour is much, much later than most of us think. Your efforts don't have to be spectacular or even large (though this is an age requiring such efforts!), but at least make it regular. Write that letter, call that friend, mail that literature. Every day of our lives is a skirmish leading that much closer to Ragnarok.

This is the most important article ever to appear in THE RUNESTONE.

One of the most controversial tenets of Ásatrú is our insistence that ancestry matters – that there are spiritual and metaphysical implications to heredity, and that we are thus a religion not for all of humanity, but rather one that calls only its own. This belief of ours has led to much misunderstanding, and as a result some have attempted to label us as "racist", or have accused us of fronting for totalitarian political forms.

In this article we will discuss, fully and at length, a science for the next century which we have named "metagenetics". For while that science deals with genetics, it also transcends the present boundaries of that discipline and touches on religion, metaphysics, and (among other things) the hereditary nature of Jungian¹⁹ archetypes. The foundations of metagenetics lie not in totalitarian dogma of the 19th and 20th centuries, but rather in intuitive insights as old as our people. It is only in the last decades that experimental evidence has begun to verify these age-old beliefs.

Anyone familiar with Ásatrú knows that the clan or family line holds a special place in our religion. Kinship is prized for both practical and spiritual reasons, and the chain of generations is seen as a time-transcending unity, something not limited by our narrow perceptions of past, present, and future. What findings of modern science make this more than a pious conviction? Is there anything special about the genetic bond from a psychic or spiritual standpoint?

Consider for a moment the curious connection between twins. Identical twins, of course, have identical genetic endowment. Hence it comes as no surprise to find that patterns of brain current activity are remarkably similar in twins, nor is it unexpected that Danish scientist, Dr. N. Jule-Nielsen, has found that twins raised separately have similar aptitudes and personalities. One step beyond these findings we run across the fact that in many cultures twins are credited with extra-sensory perception in regard to each other. In fact, Dr. J. B. Rhine, famous ESP researcher at Duke University, is on record a stating that, "Cases have been reported to us from time to time of what would appear to be exceptional telepathic rapport between identical twins."

A study of ESP cases will show that other family members are likely to have this rapport as well. How many mothers during wartime have known with uncanny accuracy the exact instant that their sons have been injured or killed? Countless other anecdotes can be collected which might be interpreted as having a genetic basis. Such a psychic resonance could be explained by other hypotheses, to be sure – but when placed in the context of other information that we have, they tend to buttress the heredity connection. And a biological (or partly biological) rationale for psychic phenomena should make the subject more palatable to “hard-headed rationalists”.

Going a step further, let's look at reincarnation memories. One does not have to “believe” in reincarnation as it is commonly presented to accept the reality of the phenomenon; there seems to be evidence that people sometimes have memories that don't belong to them – or at least not to the “them” that they normally consider themselves to be. One is free to accept or to reject the literal explanations for reincarnation as it is vulgarly expressed, but there are other explanations for the reports. There is the possibility that these memories, or many of them, are genetic memories. Timothy Leary – who, whether or not one agrees with his drug philosophy, is no small intellect – is only one person who suspects this to be the case. Leary wrote that whether one called it the akashic records²⁰, the collective unconscious, or the “phylogenetic unconscious”, it could all be ascribed to the “neurogenetic circuit”, or what he calls signals from the DNA-RNA dialogue. In other words, these memories are carried in the DNA itself.

It's interesting to note that in many cultures – in our own Norse tradition and in the Tlingit Indian lore, among others – rebirth is seen occurring specifically in the family line. A person did not come back as a bug or a rabbit, or as a person of another race or tribe, but as a member of their own clan. Olaf the Holy, the Norwegian king largely responsible for Christianizing that country, was named after his ancestor Olaf Geirstadaalfr, and was believed to be the ancient king reborn. Naturally the Christian Olaf could not tolerate such a suggestion, and the sagas relate how he harshly discouraged this belief.

The Tlingits, though, have preserved their native religious beliefs into our own time, and thus they are subject to scholarly examination at a much closer range than are our own ancestors. Dr. Ian Stevenson is the alumni professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia Medical School, and he also has an interest in reincarnation phenomena. In fact, he authored a volume titled, Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation, the conservative title of which indicates his scientific approach to the subject. One of the cases he investigated dealt with a modern-day occurrence of apparent rebirth into the clan line in a modern Tlingit family. While the story is too long to be in-

cluded here, suffice to say that the evidence, while circumstantial, is still impressive. It may not be possible to prove, in strictly scientific fashion, that a Tlingit was literally reborn as his own grandson – nor does it matter. The point is simply that there are metaphysical implications to the bond of genetic kinship.

One wonders, as an aside, if rebirth (whether literal rebirth of the individual personality, or the rebirth of some spiritual essence beyond the “merely” biological) might not be some sort of evolutionary bonus for the clan and tribe, whereby the best, wisest, most spiritually “in tune” characteristics are conserved in the family line.

So far we've worked on the idea that there is a link between heredity and the clan concept on one hand, and psychism and rebirth on the other. Let's try a different tack now, and look at Dr. Carl Jung's archetypes.

Jung spoke of the collective unconscious – a level of the psyche not dependent upon personal experience. The collective unconscious is a reservoir of primordial images called archetypes. They are not exactly memories, but are rather predispositions and potentialities. As Jung said, “There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the forms of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content (emphasis in the original), representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action.”

Most modern students of Jung miss a very key fact. Jung stated explicitly that the archetypes were not culturally transmitted but were in fact inherited – that is to say, genetic. He linked them with the physiological urges of instincts and went so far as to say that, “Because the brain is the principal organ of the mind, the collective unconscious depends directly upon the evolution of the brain.” A more precise statement of the mind/body/spirit link, and of the religious implications of biological kinship, would be hard to find.

But Jung was not satisfied to make this connection. He went on to say that because of this biological factor there were differences in the collective unconscious of the races of mankind. Boldly he asserted that, “Thus it is a quite unpardonable mistake to accept the conclusions of a Jewish psychology as generally valid. (This statement must be taken in context. It is not some irrelevant anti-Jewish remark, but instead stems from the growing rift between Jung and his Jewish teacher, Freud.) Nobody would dream of taking Chinese or Indian psychology as binding upon ourselves. The cheap accusation of anti-Semitism that has been levelled at me on the ground of this criticism is about as intelligent as accusing me of an anti-Chinese prejudice. No doubt, on an

earlier and deeper level of psychic development, where it is still impossible to distinguish between an Aryan, Semitic, Hamitic, or Mongolian mentality, all human races have a common collective psyche. But with the beginning of racial differentiation, essential differences are developed in the collective psyche as well. For this reason, we cannot transplant the spirit of a foreign religion 'in globo' into our own mentality without sensible injury to the latter."

Thus the link between religion, which expresses itself in terms of archetypes in the collective unconscious, and biology – and hence race – is complete.

Jung is substantiated by more recent research as well. Perhaps the most important such study was conducted by Dr. Daniel G. Freedman, professor of behavioral sciences at the University of Chicago. His results were published in an article in the January, 1979 issue of Human Nature entitled, "Ethnic Differences in Babies." Freedman and his associates subjected Caucasian, Asian, Black, and Native American newborn infants to identical stimuli, and consistently received different responses from babies of each race. Furthermore, these differences matched the traditionally-ascribed characteristics of each race – the Asian babies were in fact less excitable and more passive, etc. Native American and Mongolian babies behaved similarly, apparently due to their relatively close biological kinship. It is only a small step from inborn temperament to inborn attitudes to inborn religious predispositions, which is only a restating in different words of Dr. Jung's theory.

Let's look again at how the clan mystique, the expression of which in the physical world is a genetic one, relates to the Vanir²¹ in particular, and the ancient beliefs of Ásatrú in general.

The goddess Freya is strongly linked to the clan concept for she is the leader of the female tutelary spirits called the "disir." Of the disir we read, in The Viking Achievement (P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson) that:

"It is sometimes difficult to keep the disir distinct from valkyries²² or harsh Norns²³ on the one hand, and spirits called 'fylgjur,' 'accompaniers,' on the other; and it is probable that the Norsemen themselves had notions about these beings that varied from time to time and place to place. Fylgjur were attached to families or individuals, but had no local habitation or individual name. They appear to have represented the inherent faculty for achievement that existed in a family's offspring. Everyday observation of consonant or discrepant facts of heredity would confirm that it was possible for a fylgja to desert an individual or to be rejected by him."

Ancient wisdom meets modern science.

The idea of metagenetics may be threatening to many who have been taught that there are no differences between the branches of humanity. But in reflecting, it is plain that metagenetics is in keeping with the most modern ways of seeing the world. A holistic view of the human entity requires that mind, matter, and spirit are not separate things but represent a spectrum or continuum. It should not be surprising, then, that genetics is seen as a factor in spiritual or psychic matters. And the ideas put forth by those who see consciousness as a product of chemistry fit into metagenetics, as well – for biochemistry is a function of organic structure which in turn depends upon our biological heritage.

We of Ásatrú are concerned about our ancestral heritage, and we consider our religion to be an expression of the whole of what we are, not something that we arbitrarily assume from without. It also explains why those who do not understand us accuse us of extreme ethnocentrism or even racism – for it is, clear from metagenetics that if we, as a people, cease to exist, then Ásatrú also dies forever. We are intimately tied up with the fate of our whole people, for Ásatrú is an expression of the soul of our race.

This does not mean that we are to behave negatively toward other peoples who have not harmed us. On the contrary, only by understanding who we are, only by coming from our racial "center," can we interact justly and with wisdom with other peoples on this planet. We must know ourselves before we can know others. Our differences are great, but we who love human diversity and variation must learn to see these differences as a blessing to be treasured, not barriers to be dissolved.

"FATE " IN ASATRU

BY EDRED THORSSON

Important thoughts on an often misunderstood subject! Our thanks to one of the truly wise men in the Asatru Free Assembly for this spiritual insight.

In reading about Germanic mythology and religion, how often have we ásatruárar come across statements concerning the "fatalism" of the heroes, or of the religious world-view of the ancient Norse in general? Many times, no doubt. But just what did "fate" mean to the asatruárar of old? There have grown up many misconceptions surrounding this word and concept, so central to our faith. An analysis of this idea from the perspective of Ásatru may shed considerable light on this sacred subject.

In English, the word "fate" is loaded with a semantic quality of predestination, i.e., a transcendental force has already pre-determined that such and such will happen to a person, folk, etc. The two Germanic words most often translated by "fate" are the Old Norse "ørlög" and the Old English "wyrd." A close study of these two words is quite revealing. Ørlög is a compound of the prefix ør-: "primal, oldest, outermost, etc.," and the root lög, which is a plural construction meaning "law(s)" but originally, and literally "layers." Ørlög is the primal-law, or primal-layers which a person "lays down" by his or her past action. This is also true of cosmic processes, but that is another saga. The word wyrd contains a similar quality. Wyrd is a feminine noun developed from the past tense of the Old English verb "weordan": "to become," or more basically "to turn." Thus, wyrd is that which has become (those layers already laid) which affect the present and the future. In Old Norse this word is "urdr," the name of the first Norn.

This is the metaphysic behind the Germanic system of law, such as English Common Law, based upon precedent (past layers of action) which determine what should be done present and future. This is in sharp contrast to the Judeo-Roman form of law based upon decree from a transcendental source (e.g. god or king) - a situation in which we increasingly find ourselves today.

So far it is obvious that the Germanic concept of "fate" is closely connected with concepts of time and causality. That which has become (the past) conditions the present and the future. This, as so much else in Ásatru, is a common sense approach to the matter. The mystery of the Three Norns provides further keys to the understanding of wyrd. The names of the Norns are Urdr (wyrd), Verdandi ("that which is becoming," from the same root as urdr), and Skuld ("that which should become"). The first two condition, but do not deter-

mine the third. These conditions are produced by the deeds of the person who receives the fruits of those deeds. The Norns are not causal agents, but rather the numinous²⁴ organisms through which the energies of actions are received, transformed, and redirected back to their source.

Within the psychosomatic complex of the individual this functions through the "fylgja," or "fetch." This psychic organism, which is attached to an individual, and receives the energies of individual and environmental actions, formulates them into a reprojectable form, and then projects them back into the life of the individual where they have their effect. This is a totally amoral process, and purely organic in structure. This fylgja is passed from one life to the next along family lines, or sometimes it is transferred free from clanic limitations, thus, in either case, passing the accumulated past action (ørlög) from one life to another. It seems clear that the old Germanic concept of "fate" is in no way similar to the Christian concept of predestination, but rather quite akin to the Sanskrit concept of karma, a term which has also suffered at the hands of Christian misinterpretation. The ancient asatruárar knew that they shaped their own destinies as a result of their own past actions.

It is a heroic virtue to struggle against ørlög, always knowing that the greatness of its power will overcome the force of the personal will. There is, however, another path - that of the "vitki" (the "wise one, magician"). Many great heroes, such as Sigurdr and Starkadr, are also vitkar. A vitki is one who first knows his or her ørlög, and then intentionally and willfully chooses to follow it, or in rare cases to alter it through magical means. Often, the vitki will investigate ørlög to find out how better to follow its inner guidance.

The vitki-hero may investigate ørlög in three realms of past action: personal, clanic, and metapersonal. The first is past action contained within the perimeters of the present life time, while the latter two may be roughly considered as "past lives," one geneologically determined, and the other extra-clanic. The first realm can be investigated through personal retrospective of past deeds in one's life. The clanic realm is investigated through geneological history, which in olden times was an important type of numinous knowledge. The metapersonal, which is drawn from the collective unconscious, and which probably should not be understood as a "reincarnation" of the individuality, may be investigated through self-regression techniques²⁵. This latter should only be undertaken under self-guidance, or with the aid of fellow asatruárar - this technique is rampant among the storefront occultists, and is often dressed in the most shoddy of cosmologies. A similar technique may also be used for geneological research. In all these forms of wyrd investigation, the practice of runic divination can become an invaluable aid.

The concept of *ǫrlög*, and the knowledge of it, played a central role in the religious world of the ancient Germanic tribesman, and it should again occupy an important place in the hearts of modern *ásatruarar*. *ǫrlög* must, however, be approached in the old way of the North, free from the Judeo-Christian concepts of predestination and transcendental fatalism. The *ásatruari* is not manipulated by "fate," but rather is responsible for his or her own *ǫrlög*.

ASATRU: ONE MAN'S REASON

BY A.J. DILLON-DAVIS

Mr. Dillon-Davis' article has won more acclaim than any other single piece we have ever printed. I will let it speak for itself.

It gets downright disconcerting. Whenever I tell anyone I am a follower of *Ásatrú*, I get one of two responses: disbelief, then laughter and a shaking of the head; or, "but that's all myth, it's untrue." And then I have to go through the business of explaining myself.

Disconcerting it is indeed, but valuable. For in the process of explaining, I rediscover why I have always been a follower of *Ásatrú*, since first reading of the religion of the Northmen.

Why me? Why do I believe?

The simplest reason is that the monotheism of my upbringing is philosophically and morally bankrupt. "The problem of evil" remains a problem. No theologian has adequately explained why the one god who created all this, knows all, is all-powerful, etc. so devised the universe so that a portion of all sentient beings is condemned to damnation after death, and error and agony before.

The whole monotheist world-view makes the universe into a giant game of solitaire played by a capricious entity who changes the rules at whim and condemns not only those who cannot accept the changes, but those who never heard of them. An odd and vengeful being he is, this God, and I feel that, given my perception of his malice, I could not submit to Him, even if I believed in Him. It would be so undignified.

I stand dumbfounded as I hear his followers tell me he created the universe out of nothing. They are astonished when I suggest that then, really, the universe is made of nothing. They cannot comprehend that the "meaning" they blather about is much more a myth, by their description of things, than anything they may see as "myth" in what I believe. How can that which is made of nothing, that which is essentially just a dream of a deity, have "meaning"?

I, on the other hand, know that it was not the gods who made the universe of nothing, but the interaction of the universe's primeval elements which created the gods, who then went on to shape the world in their image.

The universe, to a follower of *Ásatrú*, is a work of art and life. The gods stand for life, in eternal struggle against the forces of chaos and death. When man stands for life, he stands with the gods. When he creates anything, he is one with them.

But the follower of *Ásatrú* knows tragedy. He knows that the order of the universe, and the gods themselves, shall fall, shall die in glorious and bitter defeat. A new world may rise, but the dragon's shadow will fall over it as well.

There are no Sunday school/kindergarten happy endings. Odin, Thor, Frey, all our brave heroes and comrades among the Aesir and Vanir will face that which we face, death. And in this, our gods become heroic, as no other gods are. No other gods face doom.

At which point my monotheist friend gapes.

Yes, I say, my gods face death, and you ask "why follow them"? Because death and life are intermixed. Because my gods are close enough to my own nature for me to admire them in their ceaseless joy, courage, fertility, and creativity in their life. And, of course, to try to emulate them in their facing of their own doom. Because, to die well, as they shall, will give the next world a clean start.

No, I do not beg anything of my gods. They gave me, in the very creation of man and woman, all I need . . . life, mind, will, emotion. What else could I want? When I address them it is in admiration, it is to acknowledge my part in what they have made, it is to call upon that which is of them in me. After all, the gods did not make man to worship them, they have no need of that. They made man as a work of art, as a reflection of them, in Midgard²⁶.

Reflection is the key. I follow Ásatrú because it reflects the world. The "mythos"²⁷ of the Northmen, at once joyful and bitter, cosmic and homey, comic and tragic, unbelievable and full of truth, is I think a genuine paradigm of Reality . . . impersonal, personal, and transpersonal . . . it does not tell me what to do, but it shows me how to live.

Lastly, Ásatrú does not claim to be the only truth, but a truth, discovered by a people. For others, there are other truths.

So Ásatrú, like all "pagan" religions is tolerant – disrespectful at times perhaps, but tolerant. It does not, therefore, try to press people into molds. That particular horror is the pastime of the monotheists, each of whom believes that his is the only way.

Hitler did not learn his techniques of oppression from Ásatrú, but from more than one thousand years of Christianity and its ferocious churchmen.

Here I stand. Pagan. Follower of Ásatrú. Mistrustful of churches and structures in general. The gods made me a free man, not the servant of a dogma, or a nation, or a god. They made me of the substance of the universe, of ultimately, their substance. So if I wish to care for myself, I must tend this Midgard as best I can, and guard it.

Hail Odin! Hail Thor! Hail Frey and lovely Freya, my love and everyone's, if they but knew it; hail to all my friends among the Aesir and Vanir!



INTRODUCTION

In this section we deal with gods and goddesses, with mythological landscapes and cosmologies far removed from our everyday existence. What are we, as children of the Age of Science, to make of these fantastic reports? For those of us who have cast Jehovah from his throne and spurned the faith of our childhood, it is difficult to entertain hopes of any other deity; easier by far to slip comfortably into atheism or, a vague, ill-defined agnosticism. Then along comes a belief system like Ásatrú which says so much that we admire – if only it wasn't for these awkward supernatural ideas of gods, goddesses, and myths!

So what is a myth, anyway? A century or so ago it was fashionable to believe that myths were tall tales invented by ignorant, superstitious savages to explain natural phenomena like lightning and earthquakes. This rather snobbish theory forgot, or refused to note, that our ancestors were men and women of keen intelligence and an acutely pragmatic bent. Once the experts realized that everyone born before 1800 wasn't a gullible simpleton, other explanations had to be found. The Freudians had their chance, of course, but couldn't carry the day. Among other things, goddesses don't fit Freud's categorical statement that the origin of the God image is the projected father figure!

Then along came Carl Jung, who told us that gods and goddesses are powerful symbols in our unconscious minds and can behave very much like gods and goddesses are supposed to do. Most Odinists seem to think that Jung comes closest to the mark, and his essay titled Wotan is highly discussed in some circles.

Myths are "true," but not in the most literal sense. Myths are a language by which that part of our mind that is connected to the racial mind attempts to speak to us. It is an attempt to communicate spiritual truths that cannot be expressed in mere words: it is a translating of non-linear, non-logical, instinctual reality into a form that the human consciousness can at least try to capture. Myths express what we are on a deep, invisible level.

And the gods and goddesses? "Mere" symbols? I can only state, with many others who have first-hand experience, that there are forces in the universe which possess the attributes ascribed to these powerful deities of Ásatrú, and that when one calls upon them in the right way, things happen. So while I can not tell you that there is a one-eyed being in a blue mantle who calls himself Odin – this precise knowledge being beyond my ken, and possibly irrelevant in any case – I can say that some force/being/entity responds when I call upon him. At the very least, the universe behaves as though Odin exists!

Come to think of it, that's all I can really say about my wife, the place where I work, or the paper on which these words are written . . .

ODIN: A GOD IN CRISIS

Odin – known as Wotan or Woden to other branches of the Germanic peoples – is father of the gods in the mythology of Ásatrú. Of all the Northern deities he is the most complex and multifaceted. His domain includes many and varied functions, from war and magic to poetry and inspiration in all its forms.

Odin is a god for the warrior and the poet and the mystic – all of whom attain ecstasy or frenzy in their own way, some in the clamor of battle and others in the shaman's²⁸ trance. The common denominator is the alteration of consciousness which gives knowledge and wisdom, or unleashes the powers demanded by one's circumstance. His name appears to mean "master of the divine inspiration," or Od.

As lord of Valhöll, he sits on his seat Hlidskjalf, from which he can look out over all the worlds in the multiverse. At his feet lie two wolves, Geri and Freki. On his shoulders perch his two ravens named Hugin and Munin. Odin rides between the worlds on his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, on missions related to his role as commander-in-chief of the gods and men at the coming clash of Ragnarok.

It is a grim aspect he presents – somber, distant, aloof, one eye missing because he plucked it out to drink of wisdom at Mimir's²⁹ well. No light-hearted deity this, no soft-hearted comforter of men, but rather a purposeful figure given to cunning, and the preparation of an army of heroes to stand by his side at the day of testing.

Father of Victory, Stirrer of Strife, Spear Thruster, Helmed God, High One, are a few of the many names he uses as he wanders, disguised, on his errands in defense of the gods and of mankind. For no small responsibility is his, and often he must adopt an amoral stance to win – but he seeks to win for the good, and for us. Which brings us to the beginning of the next selection . . .

Our chief deity, the one-eyed Odin, has come under severe criticism from many sources outside our religion for his apparent fickleness, lawlessness, and deeds of evil. It is time that we, who follow Odin and the other Aesir and Vanir, examined these charges and effectively refuted them, for we can little hope to convert the Western world to our side while such objections, ill-founded as they may be, exist.

Perhaps the chief charge brought against Odin is that he abandons his champions at moments of crisis on the battlefield, causing their deaths and resulting in the victory of lesser men who did not deserve to win, and who would not have triumphed without the intervention of Odin. Here the Valkyries, the Choosers of the Slain, traditionally play their vital role, and it was for violating the order of Odin in this regard that the valkyrie Brynhild brought upon herself the god's wrath. The apparent cruelty of a violent death at an early age, especially when the slain one was a hero showing so much promise, and who had so many reasons to live, must have weighed heavily on our ancestors, and it is for this reason that the high god obtained a reputation for fickle behavior. What answer do we have?

The answer exists, and it is perhaps best expressed in "The Lay of Erik," a skaldic poem written at the request of Gunnhild, the wife of Erik Blood-Axe,

after his death at the battle of Stainmore in the year 954 C.E. In this poem, the gods are preparing Valhalla, Odin's hall, to receive the fallen heroes from the battle, including Erik, and the god Bragi asks of Odin the eternal question: Why rob of victory so valiant a man? The wise god replies -

Who knows what awaits us? Even now he peers,
The Gray Wolf, into the gods' dwelling.

The meaning of this cryptic statement is simply that Ragnarok approaches, the final battle in which the gods struggle against the evil giants. In time, the gods and heroes will be fighting for their very survival against horrible odds, and they will need at their side all the brave heroes who can be mustered. It is for this reason, to fill the benches of Valhalla in preparation for the coming cataclysms, that Odin must fell the hero who deserves rather to have victory.

A study of the Edda³⁰ reveals more and more that Odin is a god operating under a perpetual and extreme crisis, that of the impending Ragnarok. His is the responsibility, as the father of the gods, of preparing for that awful event. All of Odin's actions must be seen in that context.

Besides the taking of brave warriors to fill his ranks in Valhalla, Odin has come under criticism for his seduction of the giantess Gunnlod in order to win the skaldic mead, and for his use of necromancy and the black arts. Critics often forget that the mead of the skalds, so intimately associated with wisdom and inspiration, was a powerful weapon in the hands of the gods, a weapon which could be used in their struggle with the forces of evil. Likewise, Odin's use of necromancy (as in "Voluspa"³¹) was done for the purpose of gaining vitally needed knowledge concerning the fate of the world, of the gods, and of men, that the gods might be better prepared to deal with these events as they occurred.

It would be foolish to say, as the Christian Ignatius Loyola put it, that the end justifies the means. More accurately, some ends justify some means. Surely no one will believe that the fate of the cosmos should be decided against the forces of good and in favor of the forces of evil just because the victory of the good forces may require seduction of maidens and use of necromancy! The argument that in using such means the good guys become "less good" does not seem pertinent. Odin may appear less perfect because of these deeds, but several points are apparent:

- the amount of evil contained in these acts is infinitesimal compared to the perfidity of the evil giants,
- these acts may bring victory, or at least aid in the struggle of the gods,

- these acts were not done selfishly, or for small purpose, but rather the opposite, and
- we have never demanded of our gods that they be perfect (else we could not identify with them), but only that they, like us, strive mightily.

Odin sets a great example for us in this regard. He assesses the situation and does what needs to be done, even at great sacrifice. Finally, he does not let the evil which he must touch corrupt him.

So ends our defense of our High God, so maligned by those who know no better. Let us emulate him.

THE HAMMER OF THOR

If Odin is aloof and unapproachable, his son Thor is the very opposite. Red bearded, blustery, and fiery, he is a figure of raw strength and sheer physical prowess. Strongest of the gods is he, and quick of temper. Luckily he is a friendly god, favorably disposed to humanity; he is the average viking warrior/farmer writ large.

Thor rides surrounded by the thunder created by his chariot wheels as he rolls through the heavens. Thus his connection with the rains and with growing things, and with fertility in a more generalized sense. But, mainly, he is a god of strength and action, where both these attributes are used in the defense of the gods in Asgard³² and humankind in Midgard.

Bear in mind that this is a being mighty in thews, not a mystic or an intellectual. Odin might scheme to work his will, Thor will simply grasp his hammer, Mjollnir, and set to work bashing foemen. Odin may incite battles to raise his host of heroes, but his son will give strength to the average warrior who does the hard work of fighting the enemy.

Thor seems to have been the most popular god during the days before Asatru was eclipsed by Christianity, and indeed, the strong hammer-wielder was seen as the adversary of the foreign faith. As a sign of loyalty to Thor and to the old ways generally, many people wore the emblem to which our next selection is devoted – the Thor's Hammer.

The Thor's Hammer has become one of the symbols of the resurgent Viking religion. Various designs of the thunder god's weapon came to be worn all over Scandinavia during the tenth century, perhaps in response to the crosses worn by Christians. This would be consistent with the role of Thor as the adversary of Christ, and would symbolize resistance to Christianity and adherence to the Pagan gods.

The amulet made in the likeness of the hammer could be quite simple in design or it could incorporate various other characteristics ascribed to Thor. For example, it might have a pair of staring eyes, the gaze of which typified lightning, or a beard, or the beaked head of an eagle. Sometimes there were represented dragons or serpent heads calling to mind Thor's chief antagonist, the Midgard Serpent³². The ring on which the hammer is usually attached is not a mere accessory; it, too, was a symbol of the thunder god. A large ring was kept in his shrine and oaths were sworn on it. At times the Pagan priest would wear it on his arm. Mjollnir (the name given the hammer of Thor) was evidently pictured as a throwing weapon, with a cord attached to the ring; thus it is pictured on the old memorial stones.

The handle of the hammer is somewhat short in proportion to the head. Two explanations for this are given in the old legends. According to Saxo, the handle was broken in a great battle. On the other hand, the chronicler Snorri gives another account. According to him, Loki had cut off the hair of Sif, Thor's wife, and Thor would have killed him, but Loki arranged to have two dwarves make hair for Sif out of real gold. But at the same time Loki found two other dwarf smithies and set them in competition with the other two. This

second team of dwarves forged a golden boar for Frey, and the magic golden ring Draupnir for Odin, despite Loki's attempts to hinder them by changing into a fly and stinging them as they worked. The third item made by the dwarves was Thor's hammer. Loki stung one of the dwarves on the eyelid as he was operating the bellows, and the handle was a little short as a result.

Evidently the hammer amulet came to be rather popular as more than forty of them have been recovered by archeologists. Most date from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. It seems that they were popular among the poor and the rich as well, as those discovered have been of metals as diverse as iron, bronze, and silver.

The power of the hammer was considered very real and very great. Full-sized ones were used to bless a bride, a newborn child, or a funeral pyre. They are often found on the sites of homes or buried with hoards of treasure, perhaps as a magical defense against thieves.

We of the nascent Nordic movement have chosen the hammer of Thor as one of the symbols of our faith, of our belief in the old gods, and in the Viking Way. Thor, both as warrior and as antagonist of the White Krist³⁴, holds a place of high honor and esteem in our hearts.

THE VANIR - A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A lot of people know something about Odin and Thor and the other deities we call the Aesir. Less well known are the Vanir, a whole other family of gods. It took the AFA a while to really give these gods and goddesses their due, and our doing so was an important broadening of our scope.

The gods and goddesses of ancient Scandinavia consisted of two distinct families or tribes of deities, the Aesir and the Vanir. The Aesir included Odin, Thor, and other mighty beings, and it is they who usually come to mind when the ancient faith of the Northlands is mentioned. They tend to be forceful and even violent entities - gods appropriate for the warrior, the aristocrat, and the movers and shakers. On the other hand, the Vanir are the deities of growth, love, fertility, and prosperity. This neat division into two different groups is by no means absolute, though, for Thor of the Aesir has a secondary fertility role, and the symbol of Frey of the Vanir has frequently been found on weapons and armor dating from the heathen period. So there was considerable overlapping of functions. Still, this general division into two broad categories is useful and essentially correct.

Scholars at one time thought that these two families of gods belonged to different peoples. The theory was that the fertility religion of the Vanir was the faith of the earliest settlers of what is now Scandinavia, and that the Aesir-faith was brought into the area by Indo-European³⁵ invaders only a few thousand years ago. This would explain the very different emphasis in the two cults, and the myths of conflict between the Aesir and Vanir in dim prehistory. More recent study, particularly that of the renowned comparatist Georges Dumézil, indicates otherwise. It now seems that both Aesir and Vanir have deep roots in Indo-European religion, and that other traces of this dual pantheon can be found in ancient Rome and India, and indeed throughout the Indo-European world. These facts are important because they stress what many of us have long felt - that, although the ways of the gods of frenzy and force on one hand and the gods of increase and love on the other seem to be contradictory and antagonistic, this is only an illusion. In actuality they are complementary aspects balancing a greater whole. The old myths recognized this truth, for they made the Aesir and the Vanir compatible allies with many ties and shared functions to bind them into a harmonious unity.

Even though there is no real hostility between the two great families of gods and goddesses, people in the old days found that often they would be more

strongly attracted to the worship of one group or the other, due to personal temperament and inclination. This is so even today, among those who follow the old faith. One purpose in writing this article was to provide a basic and definitive source of information for those who feel an affinity for the Vanir, and who wish to pursue further the study of the old Vanir-faith.

The religion of old Scandinavia - called Asatru, and including both the Aesir and the Vanir cults - was thriving throughout the early Pagan period and into the Viking Age (about 793 C.E. to 1066 C.E.). But then the Northlands were converted to Christianity, despite the stalwart struggle of many who wished to keep the faith of their forefathers. Followers of the old gods and goddesses who would not convert were killed, maimed, or exiled. The repression was tremendous, and partly successful - our knowledge of pre-Christian religion is forever impaired because so much was destroyed. But all vestiges of the old religion, and the impulses which had made that religion relevant to the people, could not be crushed.

Devotion to the Vanir proved to be more enduring than that of the Aesir. Odin was the god of the rulers, and the rulers were highly visible - they were the first to be converted or killed. Thor was the god most frequently placed in opposition to Christ, so his devotees, too, were visible, and thus vulnerable. The Vanir, though, were more deeply rooted in the psychic world of the farmer who lived by the cycle of the seasons and the rhythms of Nature. The religious revolution took time to reach the peasant's level, and open Vanir worship continued for quite a while after the temples of the Aesir had been desecrated and destroyed. Just as guerrilla fighters make use of isolated and remote areas for their operations against distant authority, so Frey and Freya survived via a sort of spiritual guerilla warfare in the places where the power of the Church could not easily reach. When the religious Establishment extended its control to even these remote areas, the old beliefs simply went underground in the form of folk traditions. The old gods and goddesses were largely crushed from the people's conscious awareness, but they were always just below the surface in what Jungian psychologists would call the collective unconscious, waiting for release. Tyrants may kill any form of open religious expression, but they can not kill the impulses which were responsible for that expression unless they change the very nature of the people themselves. So, remains of the old Vanir worship have persisted right down to the present - often incorporated into official Christianity. The pagan lustrations of the fields now became the "blessing" of the fields, but the essence behind the labels remained the same. Even now we speak of Mother Earth - a decidedly non-Christian term, yet one so embedded in our collective unconscious that a thousand years of Christianity

have not been able to erase it from common usage.

But things are changing. At last the time has come for the return of the Vanir from their long exile. The alien belief of Christianity has proven itself unable to meet the desires and needs of the Northern European soul, and we stand on the verge of a spiritual rebirth. Our instincts and emotions, so long repressed by a moral code not in harmony with our innermost selves, are ready for freedom and rebalancing. Nature, bruised and beaten by those who had no reverence for her, needs the succoring of us, her children, if we are to avoid Terra-cide. The world calls out in travail, and our people who have slumbered so long will awaken to the rediscovery of the old gods and goddesses who will teach us joy, love, fulfillment, and awareness of ourselves and Nature of which we are a part.



Frey, whose name means "Lord," is the principal masculine Vane (singular of Vanir). He was the chief god of the ancient Swedes, and the early kings of Sweden considered him their divine ancestor.

Frey has several symbols of his power and influence. One of these is his golden boar Gullinbursti, or "Golden Bristles," who can outrace the swiftest of steeds and who lights up the land and sea as he flies over it. Gullinbursti, on one level, seems to be a symbol connected both with the Sun and with the stark masculinity of the rampant boar. This boar motif is found again and again in the literature and in the archeology of Northern Europe. Boar-crested helmets are described in the epic Beowulf, and one such helmet was recovered from a grave mound at Bentley Grange in East Anglia. Pictures of similar helmets can be seen on the helmet plates which have been unearthed. A sword from the Pagan period has three small boars stamped on its blade. It would seem that the powers of fertility, too, could extend their aid and protection to a warrior just as could the warlike Odin and Thor.

The ship is another fertility symbol, dating back in another cultural context to ancient Egypt. Frey is described in the Norse myths as having a wondrous ship named Skidbladnir, said to be large enough to transport all the gods and their baggage, yet made in such a way that it could be folded into a package capable of being carried in one's pocket. It appears that miniature boats were carried about the fields at certain times of the year in solemn procession, so that the god of fertility could bestow his blessings on the crops. In fact, model ships were kept in Danish churches for a Christianized version of the same ritual down into modern times - another proof of the durability of the old Vanir religion.

Many of the ship burials of the Viking Age seem to be related to Frey specifically or to the Vanir in general. There is evidence that in Iceland, priests of Frey were interred in boat graves, and the ship from the Oseburg burial in Norway, now on display in the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo, also seems to be connected with Frey or his sister Freya. The ship may appear in these and other graves for two reasons - it symbolizes the journey to the land of the dead, and also is a reminder of the motif of fertility and rebirth.

Lastly, the ship in connection with the Vanir makes us mindful of the fact that the people of ancient Scandinavia were dependent upon two harvests, the usual one from the earth and a second one from the sea in the form of fishing.

Another symbol associated with Frey is the stallion – highly appropriate for a god of virility and strength! There are mentions in the sagas of horses sacrificed to Frey, and the horse fights depicted in old Icelandic sources may have been connected with his worship. We know that the eating of horse flesh was a part of some of the old ritual feasts, and that the Church forbade the consumption of horse meat for that reason, which accounts for much of our psychological aversion to such a delicacy today. In at least two cases that have survived in literature, horses were specifically dedicated to Frey, and no human was allowed to ride them – in both instances the horses were named Freyfaxi, or “Frey’s Mane.”

Of course, besides these established symbols of Frey there was yet another one, the erect penis. The statue of the god which stood in the ancient temple at Uppsala is described as featuring a huge phallus, and a small but powerful bronze figurine from Sweden is similarly well-endowed. It seems that the old heathen religion was a little more honest and a little less inhibited than present-day cults – and healthier for it.

The one surviving myth dealing with Frey is found in both Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda and in the Elder Edda. It tells how Frey fell in love with Gerd, and how he sent his emissary Skirnir to woo her for him. After both promises and threats, Skirnir persuades the maiden to meet Frey nine days later, and the story closes with the god exclaiming impatiently what an interminable time that would be. Mythologists interpret this story as being an account of the divine marriage of winter with spring to produce the fruitfulness of summer, though it also has elements which go far beyond this simple explanation.

Jul – better known to most of us as “Yule” or “Christmas” – is the festival especially dedicated to Frey and to the concepts associated with him, such as the return of the Sun and the continuity of the clan. Chieftains of old would have a boar, sacred to Frey, led through the mead hall at Jul while his retainers placed their hands on the animal and swore the great deeds they would accomplish in the year to come, thus anticipating the modern custom of New Year’s resolutions.

Freya is Frey’s twin sister, and her attributes are comparable to those of her brother, from a feminine perspective. Where Frey is the priapic, penetrating principle of male potency, Freya is the personification of voluptuous female fecundity. If Frey is Pan, Freya is Venus or Aphrodite. The common theme is one of growth, love and pleasure.

Likewise, while Frey’s animal is the boar, the sow is that of Freya, carrying the male/female complementarity one step further. Another creature associated with the goddess is the cat – indeed, she drives a chariot pulled by two of these pets. Can it be memories of her cult that helped create the early medieval stereotype of the witch as a woman accompanied by a cat? Certainly we today generally think of cats as being “feminine” animals, while others, such as dogs (or Odin’s wolves?) tend to be thought of as “masculine.”

Freya’s most famed possession is no doubt her necklace, the Brisingamen. This piece of jewelry was made by dwarves, and legend has it that she paid for it by sleeping one night with each of the four dwarves who fashioned it. Shocking though this may be to some of us today, it is not so inappropriate for a goddess of love and fertility – and it must have imbued the Brisingamen itself with mighty magical powers by virtue of the tremendous energies involved.

If the items enclosed in burials are any indication, and we have every reason to believe that they are, then nuts and apples were also signs of the goddess. Both are common fertility symbols from classical sources and both were found in large quantities in the Oseburg ship burial which many scholars think may have been the interment of a Vanir priestess – probably a devotee of Freya. Corn may have also been associated with Freya, as it was with Demeter and other fertility goddesses further south.

While there is little evidence of an overt Freya cult during the Viking Age, such an important goddess must have inspired worship in many circles, particularly among women. It was she who taught the gods and humankind that form of magic called seiðr, which has ever since been linked with her name. The best account we have of seiðr is from the Saga of Erik the Red, where a wandering wise-woman performs this classically shamanic ritual to foretell the future. Seiðr could be used for good or evil, but it was considered shameful and perverse if practiced by males. This was evidently because of some sexual aspects of this form of magic, although sex is not involved in any of the accounts that have come down to us.

One of the more remarkable things about Freya is that she receives half of the warriors who fall in battle and takes them to her hall in Asgard, Sesrumnir, while Odin takes the other half to his abode, Valhalla.

Njord is the father of Frey and Freya, and the Vikings knew him as a god of the sea – one who controlled winds and voyages, and bestowed riches and bounty upon those who called on him. The concept here is still one of fertility and plenty, as in the case of Frey and Freya, but of the sea rather than of the land and its creatures. Life in early Scandinavia revolved largely around the sea and the "harvest" of fish – just as it does today. This should not be taken to mean that Njord was the god of the sea as such, however; the god Aegir and his wife Ran shared that responsibility. But insofar as the sea meant life, sustenance, and wealth to man, whether by fishing or by sea-journeys of trade or raid, Njord was the deity to be invoked.

The goddess Nerthus was practically forgotten by the Viking Age, her glory was that of an earlier day. Still, she is most important when it comes to any discussion of Njord or the Vanir.

The Roman chronicler Tacitus tells us of Nerthus and her worship in his Germania, where he describes how this goddess, whose name means "Mother Earth", was drawn about in a wagon so that she might bestow her blessings on the people. This was shortly after the birth of Christ, or about eight hundred years before the beginning of the era of the Vikings. It seems that Nerthus, the goddess, became Njord, the god, in the intervening time. The names are virtually identical. Both are deities of fertility. Both featured cults in which the god/dess was carried among the people in a cart. What happened?

Scholars will probably always be disputing this question. Some of the favorite theories are:

- Tacitus, who was only familiar with the female fertility deities of the Mediterranean, judged Nerthus by the same standards and thus confused the gender of the god.
- Nerthus was a goddess in an early matriarchal society. When the society became patriarchal, they changed the sex of the deity to fit the new social system.
- It seems that marriage between brother and sister was common among the Vanir, and so the 13th century historian and writer Snorri Sturlusson tells us. Frey and Freya might be one such pair, and Njord and Nerthus another. Thus both Nerthus and Njord may have been separate and distinct deities from the beginning, with Nerthus

gradually dropping from prominence.

Although the second explanation is one usually mentioned in most accounts of Ásatrú, the latter hypothesis is also attractive and eminently logical (and my "gut feelings" prefer this one, too).

SCANDINAVIA'S RUNES

Let your mind's eye picture a scene for you, one of fantasy molded from the basic archetypes of your mind's depths. See it now – preternatural lightning, the discharge of cosmic forces of terrible magnitude, flashes about the gaunt figure of Odin as he hangs outside of Time and Space, suspended on the World Tree.³⁶ Nine days he has been there, without food or drink or the familiar surroundings of men and gods. Nine days of pain, nine days of quest. And now...

Now there appears below him, glowing with a life of their own, the powerful mantic symbols he has sought here, outside the Worlds. They form one after another out of the eternal night, and await him who in turn has awaited them. So he reaches out his hand and bends down his pain-wracked body, focusing his one remaining eye on his prey. Somewhere he summons the horrible shamanic power needed and grasps them, makes them his. A cry escapes his lips, born of triumph and of the ultimate agony of his effort, and Odin falls back into the world of matter, grasping the mysterious runes.

Thus, according to the Edda, did Odin win the runes. The origin of these mighty symbols which the early Scandinavians and Germans used in writing and in magic is lost in prehistory, but whether one believes the Eddic account or a more mundane explanation of the runes does not alter their great significance in the heritage of the Dane and Swede, Norwegian and Icelander, German and Anglo-Saxon. No other facet of Northern prehistory has stirred greater interest among people of this century, and perhaps no other symbols relate so directly to the collective unconscious of the peoples of Northern Europe wherever they may be living today.

No one knows exactly where the runes were developed, though several theories have been put forward by scholars determined to wrest the secret from the past. One school of thought says that they are derived from the Greek alphabet; another that they are of Roman origin. Yet another theory, and one which is winning more and more support among runologists, is that the runes were first developed in the Alps of northern Italy by a Germanic tribe known simply and conveniently as the *Alpengermanen*. We know little about these people, other than that they often hired out as mercenaries to the Romans or the Celts. The time hypothesized for the creation of the runic alphabet is placed between 250 and 150 years Before Common Era, and, interestingly enough in the light of the old myths, its creation is considered to be the work of one brilliant individual rather than a gradual evolution of several centuries. Some of the individual symbols are probably adaptations from the Roman, while others are of genuine Germanic origin and

bear strong resemblance to symbols found in rock carvings of great antiquity. This collection of symbols was perhaps picked up by the tribe known to history as the *Cimbri* in the second century B.C.E. on their passage through *Noricum*. At any rate, the runes began their long trek northward to the part of the world where they would eventually win their greatest fame – Scandinavia. Scholars think that the runes travelled so well partly because of a rather unusual (to us) use to which they were put, a use which gives us a clue as to how the Germanic peoples thought of the runes and their significance.

It was not the use of the runes as a written script which made them popular and spread their usage, it was their use in the occult science of divination—that is, fortune telling. Whereas the Babylonians studied animal entrails and the youth of today read tarot cards, the Germans cast runes to determine the will of the gods and the proper course of action in a given situation. Julius Caesar and Plutarch both mention this procedure, but the best description is from Tacitus, who writes that:

"Their method of casting lots is a simple one; they cut a bough from a fruit-bearing tree and divide it into small pieces; these they mark with certain distinguishing signs and scatter at random and without order over a white cloth. Then, after invoking the gods and with eyes lifted up to the heaven, the priest of the community, if the lots are consulted publicly, or if privately, the father of the family, takes up three pieces one at a time and interprets them according to the signs previously marked on them."

We see here that the runes, beyond and above any decorative or narrowly utilitarian uses, were intimately linked to the old pagan religion and to magic in its various forms. From the Eddas, we know that the runes were associated with the high god Odin and the heroic suffering by which he won them, and other Eddic verses describe in considerable detail the many uses to which the runes could be put. The very word "rune" reveals the depth of its religious and mystical connotation, for in every Germanic language its cognates have overtones of secrecy and whisperings and mystery.

To understand how the runes were used in magic and in charms, in prayers and amulets,³⁷ we must understand that each runic character stood both for a particular phonetic sound and also for a certain word which began with that sound. The rune **ᚢ**, for instance, represented the sound of the modern letter "b" but it also meant the word "berkana" or birch-twig, in the Germanic tongue. This was not a matter of randomly matching words that happened to have a certain initial letter with the corresponding runes, for the words chosen to be represented by runic symbols are all words of profound religious meaning. The birch twigs in our example, for instance, were intimately tied to the concepts of fertility and

fecundity. Though space prohibits a study of the meaning of each rune name here, a table listing these names has been included as part of this article to allow the reader to study for himself what must have been the primeval significance of these mystic signs.

It is, of course, the Viking Age with which the runes have most commonly been associated in the public mind, and the sagas give us numerous instances of runes used for healing, to bring misfortune on an enemy, to set the dead to rest, or to ease childbirth. The saga of Egil Skallagrimsson relates an episode in which the hero foils an attempt to poison him by scratching certain runes on the suspect drinking horn of mead, dying the runes with his blood, and uttering certain charms – the result being that the horn containing the mead burst into fragments and the offending liquid splashed to the floor. But the Viking Age was not only an age for drinking mead, it was also a warrior's age, and the warriors knew well and practiced the art of rune-making. Archaeologists and historians alike are familiar with the Norse custom of graving runes on a sword blade or on the head of a favorite spear, to grant victory to him who bore it into battle. Probably the most popular rune for this purpose was \uparrow , the rune of the old war god Tyr. The ever-original Vikings, however, were not the sort to fall into a rut; one ninth century sword recovered from the river Thames has the entire futhark, or runic alphabet, engraved on its blade. Other runic inscriptions tell the name of the weapon's owner, or the name of the weapon itself. The custom of giving a name to a prized possession, of course, is still with us today, and was not new in the days of the Vikings. A third century spearhead, hundreds of years earlier, bore the runic name "tester" and other examples abound to illustrate this persistent custom of the fighting man of all eras.

But the runes were also put to more ordinary uses. Throughout their long history runes retained their dual character, religious and mundane, but the latter gradually became more and more prominent to the point that runes were frequently used for messages during the adventures of the Viking Age. In the excavation of the Viking town which stands where modern Dublin now arises, archaeologists have unearthed messages in runes that date from the long Norse occupation of the Emerald Isle. Scratched into wooden staves, they speak to us of the drama of daily life in a now-gone era – an admonition to a tardy Viking lingering over a horn of mead to hurry on home, or the brag of a young lover that he had won the favor of a certain maiden.

The most famous runic inscriptions are not those scratched into wood, for wood may rot or be burned or be consumed by an acidic soil, but those marked more permanently in rock. Anyone who has ever tried the laborious process of rune-making in either medium knows why runes are composed of straight lines rather than curves, for the latter would be more difficult to form against the resis-

tance of the material. Is it any wonder that those men who carved the runes boasted of their names and set them down for posterity? Several thousands of runestones have been unearthed (sometimes literally) in Scandinavia, with Sweden leading her sister countries with between two and three thousand stones compared to only three or four hundred each in Denmark and Norway. Some of these inscriptions are of a religious nature but the larger portion are memorial stones set up to honor the memory of one's beloved kin, or that of a comrade fallen in battle on one of the many far-flung battle grounds of the tempestuous Viking Age. These stones trace the life of the period, giving us powerful, yet poignant, insight into the minds of those who inscribed them. We can see the love of a man for his dead wife – "King Gorm erected this memorial in honor of his wife, Thyri, restorer of Denmark" – or a comrade honoring his fallen companions – "Askil raised this stone in memory of Toki Gormsson, his true lord, who fled not at Uppsala. In memory of their comrade, the champions set up this stone, standing firm with runes."

From Istanbul to Greenland, the runes accompanied restless men of Scandinavia as they traded and colonized, raided and explored. To dismiss them as romanticism better left behind in the infancy of mankind, or as an anachronism fit only for scholarly tomes or dusty museum exhibits, is to ignore the reality of the human psyche and the depths of what, for lack of a more precise term, we can only call the soul of a people. Scientific rationalism, in the Victorian sense of the term, has given way to a renewed realization of the reality of the intangible. Carl Jung has shown us the vitality of ancient archetypes that once were dismissed as superstition. The study of the mind of man, of myth and of magic, is still in its infancy, but it has at last achieved respectability. In an age when the peoples of mankind are each rediscovering their ancient roots and revivifying their ancestral traditions, in a day when the I Ching³⁸ is the subject of scholarly discussion and dissection, the runes are as relevant to us today as they were to our forefathers so long ago. Runology is no simple science, despite the elementary presentation given of it here, but those who wish to comprehend their roots, who wish to become a little closer to the mystery that is below the threshold in each of us, will be rewarded in their study.

RUNE TABLE

RUNECAST

BY JEFFREY R. REDMOND

RUNES	ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS	RUNE NAME
ƒ	f	cattle
u	u	aurochs
th	th	giant
g	a	god
r	r	riding
k	k	torch
h	h	hall
n	n	need
l	l	ice
a	a	year
s	s	sun
t	t	Tyr
b	b	birch-twigg
m	m	man
l	l	water
R	R	protection

A runic alphabet of the Viking Age, complete with English equivalents of the letters and the names of the runes. The old Germanic forms of the rune names have been retained where this differs from those the runes acquired later in history, so as to better convey their original religious meaning.

To the ancient Germanic peoples of Northern Europe, the runic inscriptions of their Futhark alphabet had great magical powers and significance. Sacred rituals and religious activities were observed every day, and were very much common occurrences throughout everyone's lives. Man was ruled by the little-understood, all-powerful forces of nature, and constant awareness of this necessitated continuous religious practice.

It was good common sense to invoke the gods of the natural forces, and gain their good will by sacrifices and magical rites in their honor. These rites if properly done, could bring good fortune, prevent illness and hardship, and guarantee fertility to the land, livestock and people. For every facet of life, a special rune (with its magic) was applied, being carved on weapons, utensils, jewelry, stones, trees, and many other practical items.

There were separate runes for fertility, births, health, love, hate, battle victory or defeat, the weather, curing or causing sickness, wealth, fame, poverty, and even death. Anyone and everyone could obtain the use of the magic of the runes, by having someone who knew what they meant make an inscription for them. These were usually pagan priests, priestesses, or special rune masters.

Runes were carved on stones, which were set on top of burial mounds of famous kings, warriors and priests. The runic symbols could stand for the powers associated with them by themselves, or could be used to spell even more powerful words - such as the deceased's name or deeds, to aid him in his journey to the afterlife. However, runic aids for the dead had to be carved only at night, and never with an iron tool. Only stone or bronze could be used, as iron was the metal that could harm the spirits and fairies of the dead.

The Norse Vikings and Anglo-Saxons believed in fate, (as did all Germanic peoples), which they called Wyrd, and three goddesses/spirits called Norns were the "spinners" of everyone's fate. A person's destiny was determined even before he or she was born, and little could be done to change it although evil spirits could be warded off by using and wearing certain charms, and with runes.

The two most sacred objects to the pagan Germanics were trees and stones, in which sacred spirits dwelt. If runes were carved on these, the greatest runepower could be obtained. Runes could even be used to predict the future. Tree bark was stripped, cut into pieces, and each inscribed with a separate runic letter. They were scattered over a white cloth, and after a small animal was sacrificed to the gods, pieces were picked at random, and read as answers to

each question asked. Runic-inscribed stones were also put in a leather bag, and scattered on the ground. Whichever ones showed upright were interpreted as the answer. The most magical of the trees were the yew and hazel, and were associated with the chief god Othinn (Odin) himself. A staff of either of these woods, covered with runes, was the most powerful of all possessions.

Runes carved on weapons and shields could bring victory, and worn on jewelry could bring desire, love, respect, health, etc. Rune-shaped scars could even be inflicted upon one's flesh, if the necessity were deemed great enough. However, runic magic was not a simple matter, and rune power was not all that predictable. One had to be extremely cautious in its use. The all-knowing Othinn in his words of wisdom, the Havamal, told all there was to be known of the runes:

"Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows
For nine long nights,
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odin,
Offered, myself to myself.
The wisest know not from where come
the roots of that ancient tree."

"They gave me no bread, they gave me no drink,
I looked down. With a loud cry
I took up runes. From that tree I fell."

"Nine lays of power I learned from the famous
Bolthor, Bestla's father,
He poured me a draught of precious mead,
Mixed with magic of Odrerir."

"Learned I became then, lorewise,
Grown and prospered well.
Word from word gave words to me,
Deed from deed gave deeds to me."

"Runes you will find, and readable verses,
Very strong verses,
Very stout verses,
Verses that Bolthor stained,
Made by mighty powers,
Carved by the inspired god."

"For the gods, by Odin, for the elves by Dainn,
By Dvalinn too, for the dwarves,
By Asvithr for the hateful giants,

And some I carved myself.

Thundr, before man was made, scratched them,
Who rose first, fell thereafter."

"Know how to cut them, know how to read them,
Know how to stain them, know how to prove them,
Know how to evoke them, know how to regard them,
Know how to send them, know how to send them."

"Better not to ask than to overpledge
As a gift that demands a gift,
Better not to send than to slay too many."

"To learn to sing them, Loddafnir,
Will take you a long time,
Though helpful they are if you understand them,
Useful if you use them,
Needful if you need them."

"The Wise One has spoken words in the Hall,
Needful for men to know,
Unneedful for trolls to know,
Hail to the Speaker, hail to the Knower,
Joy to him who has understood,
Delight to those who have listened."

HAIL ODINI! THE ALL POWERFUL! THE ALL WISE!



It is all too easy to confuse Ásatrú, the living religion, with a romantic attachment to the history and culture of the Viking Age. To do this is to pin Ásatrú to the past and make it largely irrelevant to life in the present. We need to remember that a religion changes over time, and that Ásatrú, had it been allowed to develop without outside intervention, would have changed as the understanding and the needs of our people changed. This doesn't mean that the essence changes, but it does mean that the soul of our faith must manifest differently as we, the bearers of Ásatrú, find ourselves living in a different day. Just as no one expects the local Catholic priest to lead an expedition to free Jerusalem from the infidel, so the Odinist today should not be dependent upon the practices of a by-gone era. We needn't sack Paris, nor do we redden our altars with the blood of a sacrificed ox (but we do still stress deeds of daring, and we have evolved ritual counterparts to the altar-reddening).

We must live in the twentieth century, and if we are to do so we must successfully respond to the unique challenges and problems of our day. This means we must be aware of the issues which affect our faith, our culture, and our people. In this anthology we can mention only a few of these social issues, but at least we can illustrate the principle involved and point the way for those who will have to deal with matters of significance in our future.

THE NEW NOOSE

In ancient days the knotted noose was the instrument of the sacrifice to the high god Odin, and many a scoundrel was it who had the life wrenched from him by this somber means of capital punishment. Today, though, the noose is not the cleansing symbol which purged society of wrong-doers. The noose about our necks in this age is a noose of thralldom, threatening to choke us if we strive for freedom, threatening to strangle our liberty in our very throats, and suffocating us with constraints.

Let us count a few of the coils of this slave-collar. They extend beyond our sight and their numbering from memory would be a feat worthy of the greatest of saga-tellers³⁹ yet let us pick out a few of the nearer ones....

You may have trouble focusing on them, because we are supposed to believe we are still free, that we still have a choice in these matters. All too often, though, the only freedom we have is to either go along, or go along to jail.

The remarkable thing about the surrender/go to jail "choice" (which has got to be the secular equivalent of the "You have free will to obey God or burn for eternity" argument) is that it applies to so many of the other coils in the slave's rope. Social Security is an example. The chance of the system being solvent when (if) I reach retirement age is on the order of the probability that Billy Graham will announce next week that he's a Thor's-man. But I still have to pay that chunk out of my check, or face prosecution (although of course there are ways...!)

Want to tug on the rope a little? Try hiring or firing whomever you want. Maybe you can't stand people with brown eyes (Don't ask me why! Query a Freudian.), but don't let the Equal Opportunity people find out; they'll institute a brown-eyes quota. Which by definition discriminates against all those blue- and green-eyed people out there. And yes, I am in a position to denounce this part of the thrall-fetter for what it is; I've been discriminated against because I wear a beard - and I acknowledge a person's right to so discriminate.

Suppose you decide to start your own mail service. Never mind that you can do it less expensively and more efficiently than Uncle Sam, it's still against the law. Have you ever noticed that monopolies are a violation of the statutes unless they're government monopolies?

Of all the ways in which freedom is being forfeited, the greatest may be in the matter of taxes. What the worker earns by his labor and ingenuity is forcibly taken away from him and used for many other purposes, some of which touch his life only peripherally, or not at all. When taxation exceeds that

necessary to provide for certain basic government functions, for services which the citizen desires to receive in exchange for his money, it is literal robbery. The government of the United States has no moral right to confiscate my money and give it to Mozambique or to use it to aid special interest groups - but it happens every day. To call such confiscation taxation is to avoid the truth. When you're mugged at gunpoint your assailant doesn't introduce himself as a tax collector (although I understand one such Socially Deprived Individual is having business cards printed to read "freelance socialist").

A few month ago the slavers tried to add a coil, and it was actually thrown off! That's the good news. The bad news is that our society is degenerate enough that the measure could be proposed in the first place. The plan was to issue all Americans a national identification card. A reasonable assumption would be that it would then be mandatory to carry it on your person at all times, just as you now carry a driver's license when operating a motor vehicle. You don't have to carry your driver's license with you, for instance, if you decide to jog around the park. But a national identification card applies to the simple fact of your existence, not something you do. Imagine - having to have a document to operate your own body!

Should such a card be issued, I announce in advance my decision to publicly burn mine. I hope you will join me.

Freedom is what Asatru is about. I was a freedom fanatic for years before I became an Odinist, and it was the Odinist emphasis on a vital scintillating freedom that made that religion so appealing. This devotion to liberty is found woven throughout Asatru to an extent that I've never seen in another faith. Where else do you find people so independent that they will not even submit to their gods? Our demand for freedom prompted the defiant reply from the Vikings of Hrolf Ganger⁴⁰ to the emissary of the Franks - when asked if they would bend the knee to King Charles and accept his favor, they responded, "We shall never submit to anyone at all, nor ever cleave to any servitude, nor accept favors from anyone. That favor pleases us best which we win for ourselves with arms and the toil of battles." Egil Skallagrimsson's⁴¹ dispute with his ruler was another expression of this refusal to be awed by authority. This is our heritage!

A WOMAN'S PLACE

BY ALICE RHOADES

Women today are seeking to free themselves from the straight-jacket that they have been forced into by patriarchal religions that cast woman as a second-class citizen. Though women may strive and achieve in the political and social arenas, they will never be truly free until they go beyond these externals to discover their own spirituality. And there are few religions in the world today which offer women full participation in spiritual life as co-equal partners in divinity.

The great monotheistic religions, and especially those based on the Old Testament - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam - have a rather poor record in regard to women. While to be fair, they have not been entirely anti-female, there is a strong tendency in these religions to regard women as inferior to men, as blemished creatures which are somehow less true expressions of the godhead than their male companions. As late as the sixth century, serious doubt existed as to whether women had souls - after all, God had breathed a soul into Adam in the Genesis account of the creation, but not into Eve. Similarly, Paul refers to the Genesis account when he wrote that: "Man did not come from woman, no, woman came from man; and man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man." The skeptic can try to dismiss this as primitive mythologizing, but even the confirmed agnostic must admit that myths offer insight into the psychology of any people. And it is very hard for a woman to put her heart and soul into a religion that sees her as a chattel, as less than truly human.

But the most important problem lies in the fact that these religions do not have a Goddess. Since the concept of the deity is solely masculine, women are by implication not like God. They are unable to identify with or emulate the deity; the purest spark of divinity is forever denied them. And, as occultist Dion Fortune once remarked, a religion without a Goddess is halfway to atheism.

Contrast all this with the attitude toward women found in many Pagan religions, and specifically in the pre-Christian religion of Scandinavia. Just as man was a reflection of the male deity, so woman was a reflection of the great and holy Goddess. Women and men were equally expressions of divinity. The Norse myth about the creation of human life shows man and woman being created together out of two different trees, a complementary pair, neither one subservient or inferior to the other. The religious system was much more balanced, much more holistic.

Today we have taken the old myths and all the old beliefs and distilled them to obtain the essence of the religion of the Norse people, which we call Ásatrú. The reconstruction is still imperfect, because so much has been lost, but it is still growing as we learn and discover more and more about our spiritual heritage. Among other things, we are rediscovering the role of women in our religion.

Some women are turned off by Ásatrú because they find it too "male-oriented." And it is somewhat, as it stands today. Most Ásatrú groups have a pantheon chock-full of robust, manly Gods, but only a smattering of ill-defined Goddesses. This is not, as some women seem to think, because Norse folk are inherently more chauvenistic or macho-mad than other groups. Rather, there is simply a decided dearth of material on Norse Goddesses. Of many, only the names remain.

If one is an archaeologist or medieval historian, the matter would have to die there. But Ásatrú is more than history - it is a religion. No living religion practices today in exactly the same form as three hundred years ago. Religion, to be viable, must grow and expand. Besides, much of the old Norse lore was passed on orally, and many of the old Norsemen passed on prematurely when the Christians moved in. So just because we can't find much material on the Norse Goddesses does not mean they weren't worshipped.

To the contrary, assuming that a religion reflects the culture it grew from, it makes sense that the Goddesses played a strong role in Ásatrú. The lot of women in Norse society was far different from the over-worked stereotypes crammed into our heads in movies and popular fiction, where Vikings are crude, inconsiderate barbarians and their women are rather dumb but statuesque sex objects. In reality the Viking woman enjoyed legal rights similar to those of her male counterparts. She could divorce her husband, own property, and receive an inheritance. The household was her private domain and she ruled it absolutely; the keys she wore at her waist were the symbol of her domestic authority. Priestesses, or *gythjas*, officiated at religious functions as well as priests; indeed, some rites and magical techniques were the exclusive province of women. If the strong and forceful heroines found in the sagas show how Norse society viewed women, it only makes sense that their Goddesses were equally potent. As Snorri Sturlusson had Odin say in the Prose Edda, "Not less holy are the *Asynjur*, the Goddesses, and they are of no less authority (than the Gods)."

So how can we go about finding these mighty Goddesses of whom we have so little left? Thorough study of the Eddas and old sagas can turn up some facts, but as worshippers we need not be bound by these. Religion is a child of the heart and the soul as well as the mind. We have meditation and ritual, initiation and dreams, the great archetypes that lurk in all great works of art. These and many paths will lead us to our lost Goddesses.

And it is women who need to do this work. Of course Ásatrú will continue to be male-oriented if only men take an active part in it. The men do not hinder us; indeed, they themselves seem eager to discover more about the feminine side of their religion. But they cannot create something female-oriented for us. We are the ones who are the reflections of the Goddess, who know what women are and can be. The only way for women to rediscover their religious heritage is for women themselves to join together to seek and explore these forgotten paths. We have here the chance to rediscover what has been lost, to help mold our religion as it grows and make it our own.

TOTALITARIANISM

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

Totalitarianism certainly is not a new phenomenon. The dictatorship of Caligula, the oppression of Harold Finehair, the bestiality of the French Committee of Public Safety, all are examples of long ago. Our concerns, however, must be directed to the affairs of this age and the Odinist impact in the drama of the last phase of Western Civilization.

In examining our position as we see it, we must answer two questions. Granted that the Decline of the West as theorized by Spengler may be inevitable, the issue still remains (until the last of us go down to defeat): Can we succeed? If we can, then the next question is necessary - how will this occur? What form will the Western resurgence take?

To many, victory is the prime necessity. After two fratricidal World Wars and the collapse of Western political and cultural hegemony our position is hardly enviable. Our political process and energy supplies are both in the hands of cultural aliens. We have been systematically stripped of our sense of worth as aliens and racial antagonists are permitted to revel in their "heritage." Our children, instead of being taught to take pride in their past, feel guilt as they are conditioned to see their forefathers as consummate plunderers, rapists, slave-traders and madmen instead of the heroes they were. The media and educational systems are of no help and are used to further our destruction. It is small wonder then that the primary expression of Western cultural and political vitalism tends toward the monolithic, the totalitarian. Forced from conventional political forms, they find the refuge of closed organization their only solace. Others, compounding their error, emphasize fundamental Christianity in a desperate effort to be on a winning side. In their hearts they can feel the tide of events but they put their faith in a future reckoning by the Hebrew Jesus, thus placating their better judgement. Make no mistake, if the West goes down, we shall never again mark its rise. It will be a defeat so utter, so final as to be beyond our comprehension. New, more savage forms will succeed it, and they will be hard conquerers, beyond humanitarianism. In light of all this we cannot forswear victory. We have two choices, victory or defeat. In this war, there will be no truce, no settlements, only an end result.

Should there be a resurgence - what will be the place of Odinism? Ásatrú should act as a catalyst, the motivation for the translation of the Norse-Western ethic into political reality. It must also stand as a bulwark of liberty in our darkest hour. We may salvage our outward forms, our political framework, but it will be a barren victory indeed if we see it come to pass as robots in an inhuman monolithic State. What use to stave off annihilation to become Byzantines?

We must beware of those who promise us victory as long as we abandon our common sense. There have been many movements founded on the above assumption - none have been noted for positive accomplishments. Our ancestors evolved a religion, a world outlook and a code of behavior which was the antithesis of regimentation. If we are to survive and be free, we would do well to follow their example. Our faith must stand above ordinary political action, for to do otherwise would invite its use by the unscrupulous. To follow our surest instincts and yet avoid the absorption of totalitarian behavior forms is a challenge worthy of us.

Political action has been tried over and over again - its failures litter the pages of history. When part of the free political process, these attempts have been side-tracked, discredited and destroyed from within. Ideas of cosmopolitanism and Christianity have doomed them from the inception. Likewise the monolithic organizations have suffered. Exiled from politics, branded as anathema and denied any but paid publicity, they eventually wither. Often they become even more susceptible to manipulation as infiltration or assassination are used as a form of political judo aimed at their weakest points. Both organizational types soon become embroiled in the form and structure of their groups and energy is diverted with concern for money, rent and office space. By the time this point has been reached, organizational survival is their sole activity.

We can do better. Before political action can hope to succeed, the hearts of our people must be open. If they follow Asatru then we can be assured they will reject dictatorship. Our temples are the forests, our god! accept no pay for their work. Our Gods provide guidance and we can be sure they do not desire slaves for followers. No one on their knees can fight well, and followers of a warriors' faith will not surrender.

We have this opportunity to revive our people. Whether we win or lose we can at least be glad we can fight with the Gods of our forefathers with us. Odin has bequeathed to us a sword of battle - there are no guarantees attached. If we use it well then we have earned the spoils of victory. If we blunder, then at least we have tried. We will not have tried if we allow ourselves to be enthralled with authoritarianism. We cannot awaken our people and exclude any Odinists from our effort. We cannot remain effective if we permit ourselves to accept the Judeo-Christian morality or any of its parts. We cannot expect the allegiance of any followers of the Aesir if we participate in the establishment of an Odinist Papacy or dogmatic Church. Our religion is wild and free and it must remain free to sweep through the souls of our people like the avenging roar of Thor's Hammer.

Once begun, the onslaught will become a tidal wave. Our cultural opponents will find us as difficult as quicksilver to attack and the more frantic they become, the more adherents Asatru will have. Those who long ago gave up the

fight will again take up the sword. As the drama unfolds, Christianity will begin to loosen its stranglehold on the West, and we shall begin to see clearly the results of our labors. From the redwood forests to the mountains of Appalachia we shall sacrifice to our Gods. Once Asatru has become a force to be reckoned with, success may be obtained in the lands that gave birth to our people. A measure of our victory could well be the celebration of the triumph of Odin at Thingvellir (Parliament Plains), Iceland, in the year 2,000 C.E. Such a monumental, epochal date would be highly appropriate; one thousand years from the date the conversion of Iceland took place. An event such as this would indeed bring great joy in Asgard!



The Ásatrú Free Assembly is a body of men and women formed to practice, promote, and continue the natural evolution of the religion of Ásatrú. As such it is a fully recognized religious organization – a church.

Its roots can be traced to the winter of 1971-72 when Stephen McNallen formed the Viking Brotherhood in Wichita Falls, Texas, in response to a particularly enthusiastic wave of Christian fundamentalism. The first issue of The Runestone appeared at that time, in an attempt to rally others who professed the ancient belief of the Northlands. This revival, though, was soon interrupted by four years in the Army. After serving this hitch McNallen moved to California where he could better promote resurgence of Odinism. As the perspective and understanding of McNallen and his associates expanded, the name of the group was changed to the Ásatrú Free Assembly, or AFA.

The AFA has continued to publish The Runestone, and has sponsored a multitude of meetings, festivals, and rituals in Northern California. In particular the organization has become known for its annual gatherings or Althings, which have been held for the last three years as of this writing.

However, the Ásatrú Free Assembly is not content to rest on its past accomplishments. More ambitious projects are being prepared, and the history of the AFA is just beginning. The months and years to come will see dramatic growth and expansion far beyond the present size and scope of the organization.

Membership inquiries are invited.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR ODINISTS

The list below, while far from comprehensive, is a good basic reading list for people interested in Odinism, or Ásatrú. The books are listed in a logical but by no means inflexible order.

Mythology by Edith Hamilton - This volume has two chapters giving a broad overview of our religion, useful for the newcomer.

Hammer of the North by Magnus Magnusson - A logical "next step" for those who would understand Odinist mythology, cosmology, and religious practices.

Beowulf (any of several translations) - An early epic of our people depicting the values of the Germanic hero.

The Vikings by Howard LaFay - Graphically describes the history and culture of the Vikings.

Everyday Life in the Viking Age by Jacqueline Simpson - Another excellent book describing Viking culture.

Gods and Myths of the Vikings by H. R. Ellis Davidson - Formerly published as Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, this is a meaty volume packed with detailed information about Ásatrú as it was practiced in ancient times.

The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson - An early work which serves as the original source of much of our knowledge about the gods of our religion.

The Elder Edda - also known as the Poetic Edda, this volume is available in several translations. It is another original source book concerning our faith, written in verse.

The Religion of Odin by Irv Slauson - A compilation of Odinist material from many sources, including information from several Odinist groups in the modern era.

Sigurd the Volþung by William Morris, or any translation of the Saga of the Volþungs - An epic which captures the essence of the Northern value system.

Religious Attitudes of the Indo-Europeans by Hans Gunther - Hard to find, but a superb exposition of the values that we, as a race, profess.

Runes by R. W. V. Elliot - Printed originally in England, this is an introduction to the history and symbolism of the runes.

G L O S S A R Y

1. ODINISM, strictly speaking, would be the worship of the god Odin. However, it is usually used to mean the ancient religion of the Germanic peoples in general, whether or not Odin was the chief deity involved. Asatru, an Old Norse word meaning "faith of the Aesir," is a more accurate name for the old Germanic religion. However, in common practice it is used interchangeably with "Odinism."
2. An ASATRUARAR is a person who follows the religion of Asatru.
3. By NORSE PEOPLES we mean that branch of the Germanics who settled in what are today the Scandinavian countries.
4. At the winter SOLSTICE, the Sun is at the southernmost point of its cycle. This is the longest night of the year. At the summer solstice the Sun is at its most northern position, which corresponds to the longest day of the year.
5. The EQUINOXES are the two times of the year - in spring and in autumn - midway between the two solstices. The length of day and night are equal on these two dates.
6. KIN here refers to both our actual relatives by marriage or by blood, and more generally to all people of Northern European descent.
7. HEATHEN comes from a word meaning "of the heath" - that is to say, out in the rural back country. These are the areas where the older religion survived longest, because their isolation protected them from close regulation by the authorities. Often, pagan and heathen are used interchangeably. Both may be used to refer to any indigenous folk religion.
8. THE POETIC EDDA, also called the ELDER EDDA, is an important compilation of the ancient mythological and heroic literature in verse form. It is one of the key sources of our knowledge concerning Asatru.
9. The SVEA were a tribe in what is now Sweden.
10. The GROUP SOUL of the Northern European peoples is that common body of knowledge, wisdom, and power accumulated by all our ancestors. We can plug into that group soul because, on our deepest levels, we are connected to it. The group soul is very similar to C.G. Jung's racial unconscious.

11. "PEOPLE OF THE NORTH" is a phrase coined by David James, an influential Asatruarar, to denote that branch of humanity typified by the Celtic, Germanic, and Scandinavian peoples.
12. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE was the German philosopher whose controversial writings have caused some historians to accuse him - rather unfairly - of having inspired the National Socialist ideology. He is perhaps best known for his much quoted (out of context) statement that "God is dead."
13. DIONYSIAN, after the Greek god Dionysus. "Dionysian," in the sense of creative, intuitive, and ecstatic, is often contrasted with the logical, linear, rational, "Apollonian."
14. FATALISM is the belief that all events are determined by fortune or destiny, and are thus inevitable.
15. COLLECTIVISM is a broad label. Most Odinists will consider coerced collectivism or governmental collectivism to be evils because they unduly restrict individual freedom. However, these same Odinists might be very much in favor of voluntary, small-scale collectivist efforts such as, for example, a food co-op.
16. The AESIR, strictly speaking, are that family of Norse deities including Odin, Thor, Frigga, and others as contrasted to the Vanir, which number Frey and Freya among others. More loosely (as in the context of this article), the word Aesir refers to all the gods and goddesses.
17. RAGNAROK, in Norse mythology, is the cataclysmic battle between the gods and humankind on one hand, and the giants on the other. This conflict is the end of one cosmic cycle and the beginning of another.
18. LOKI is a complex Norse god whose role varies from friend of the other gods to trickster to, at times, their foe.
19. Dr. C. G. JUNG was one of the greatest psychologists of the twentieth century. His work on the meaning of symbols stands as among the greatest contributions to psychological and religious knowledge in modern times, and his theories concerning archetypes and the collective unconscious are described elsewhere in this article. His essay "Wotan" is highly recommended to asatruarar.
20. In occult lore, the AKASHIC RECORDS are repositories on another plane of existence of all events that have happened in the universe.

21. The VANIR are the Norse deities chiefly concerned with fertility, joy, and prosperity. The two principal Vanes are the god Frey and his sister Freya.
22. VALKYRIES are Odin's maidens who ride to battles and choose the heroic slain to accompany them to Odin's hall, Valhall.
23. NORNS are the three female entities named Past, Present, and Future who allot fates to all beings.
24. NUMINOUS is a word meaning awesome, sacred, god-like, or supernatural. The term is often encountered in Jungian writings.
25. SELF REGRESSION TECHNIQUES are means by which one can induce a deep hypnotic trance in oneself and then "go back" earlier in time, or even to earlier incarnations.
26. MIDGARD is the realm of humankind. It is one of the nine worlds in the great World Tree which composes and gives structure to the cosmos. Different beings inhabit the various worlds - gods in Asgard, giants in Jotunheim, and so forth.
27. A MYTHOS, as used here, is an animating world-view, a way of perceiving reality and giving meaning to it.
28. A SHAMAN is a person - usually a tribal priest/ess or a healer in many cultures - who uses the trance state to travel between the different worlds of consciousness.
29. MIMIR is a wise being associated with the World Tree, and guardian of the Well of Urd. A drink from this magic source gives great wisdom.
30. There are two Eddas: the PROSE EDDA written by Snorri Sturluson and the ELDER EDDA (also known as the Poetic Edda). Both are valuable collections of heroic and mythological stories, though the Elder Edda is less influenced by Christian concepts.
31. VOLUSPA, which means "Prophecy of the Seeress," is one of the important poems in the Elder Edda. In it, Odin has conjured a dead sibyl by magic in order to learn her lore concerning the fate of the worlds.
32. ASGARD is the world where the gods and goddesses dwell. Each deity has a hall there - Odin's is Valhall, for example.
33. The MIDGARD SERPENT is a world-circling snake lying beneath the oceans. This monster is due to break loose at Ragnarok, and Thor will once again meet his great foe.
34. Jesus was called the WHITE KRIST in early medieval Scandinavia, probably because the missionaries tried to identify him with the white-browed god Balder as a means of making the alien belief more acceptable.
35. INDO-EUROPEAN is a term we use to designate the general stock of which the Germanics are a branch, along with the Celts, the early rulers of India, and other Caucasian peoples.
36. The WORLD TREE is the great ash which supports the cosmos and gives it form. In it are nine worlds, the homes of nine different orders of beings - including humans.
37. An AMULET is a magical object worn to protect the wearer.
38. The I CHING, or "Book of Changes," is an ancient Chinese fortune-telling system. Carl Jung, among others, analyzed it at great length.
39. The SAGAS were a combination of oral history and historical novel which were popular in Scandinavia (and, one suspects, in the other Germanic lands) for many centuries.
40. HROLF GANGER was the Viking chieftain who settled what is now the province of Normandy, in France. It was from this area, some years later, that his descendant invaded and conquered England after winning the Battle of Hastings.
41. EGIL SKALLAGRIMSSON was a famous poet, or skald, of the Viking Age. An excellent saga exists telling his life's story, and it is recommended reading for those who would understand this era.

THE RUNESTONE

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