



THE



RUNESTONE



GLAÐ JÓL

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THE RUNESTONE is a journal of the ancient, yet ever new, religion known as Asatru. It is dedicated to that religion and to the values of courage, freedom, and individuality which are associated with it.

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STAFF FOR THIS ISSUE:

Editor: Stephen A. McNallen; Production: Maddy Hutter;
Calligraphy: Mari Funai; Cover illustration: Bob Stine.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS:

The AFA welcomes contributions from our readers. Material submitted will be considered for publication but returned only if requested and accompanied by sufficient postage to cover costs. For a copy of complete guidelines for submissions, please send a S.A.S.E. to the AFA at the above address.

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Welcome to your new bi-monthly Runestone! Yes, there are always risks in any move such as this, but we felt it better to err on the side of audacity. As a result, you're holding a magazine that we believe is a little more accessible, a bit more participatory, and definitely more frequent. You can help at this crucial juncture by giving us the best possible advertising - word of mouth. The same goes for

Don't forget Hugin! We are now taking advance subscriptions for our new companion journal. Here you'll find longer articles with more emphasis on the theoretical, the theological, and the speculative. It's rich, rewarding, meaty material, and we think you won't want to miss it. At \$4 per year, issued bi-annually, it's a good buy. Why not sign up now and get in on the ground floor?

Incidentally, we're going to be needing good articles for these publications. Writer's guidelines are now available for both The Runestone and for Hugin, for those of you who want to try your hands at authorship!

We're making Asatru history - press onward with us!

@ Stephen A. McNallen



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CHANGES!

Yes, this issue of The Runestone marks a milestone in our history. For the past fifteen years we have been a quarterly, cranking out our four issues annually with a high degree of reliability. No longer! Starting with this Runestone, we'll be appearing in your mail box six times a year, with no cost increase for those of you in the U.S. (Canada and overseas subscriptions will be slightly higher because of the increased postage).

Why are we doing this? Because interacting with our readers four times a year isn't enough. It's harder to stay in touch - to keep involved - to translate Asatru into a living religion when the doses are so far apart. By sending you The Runestone every other month we believe we can do more for the Gods and for those of us who follow them here in the realm of humankind, Midgard.

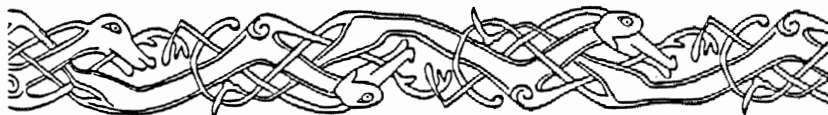
There will be some changes in the issues themselves, too. They'll be four pages shorter, and the content will be a little different - not radically so, but noticeably. You'll find more ideas on how you can practice Asatru, more hints for those of an activist inclination, more on how the Gods are relevant to everyday situations. Above all, we want to offer more articles that will illuminate our religion for the newcomers and encourage them to seek further participation, while still giving insights to those of you who have been around a while.

So what will happen to some of the high-flying articles we've been running - those that are relatively "intellectual" or which assume that the reader already has a good familiarity with Asatru? These can be perplexing, or even intimidating for those who are just beginning to know the Gods. On the other hand, they're often brilliant works that serve a vital purpose in the furtherance of our religion. What happens to them?

Twice a year, we'll be gathering up these blockbusters and publishing them in a new companion journal to The Runestone called Hugin. For those who already have a bit of knowledge regarding our subjects, or who like their Asatru deep and truly thought-provoking, Hugin will be hard to beat. We hope you'll subscribe to it - be sure to see our advertisement.

We've achieved a number of exciting goals in the past year or two, but nothing which exceeds this for potential benefits. Welcome to the adventure of The Runestone - "a BI-MONTHLY journal of Asatru"!

@ Stephen A. McNallen



CELEBRATING YULE

Yule is easy to celebrate, and fun! Honoring the Gods at this time of year is especially simple because so many of the customs associated with Christmas were originally concerned with Yule - all they need is minor modification to make them ours again. The key is to keep in mind the themes behind this holy time - the beginning of the Sun's return from the depth of winter, the renewal of life, the unity and continuance of the family, and the hearty fertility God, Frey.

Some ways of celebrating Yule are fairly obvious. The Christmas tree does a fine job of representing the World Tree, Yggdrasil, in which are found all the realms of Gods and humankind. Decorate it with sunwheels (☉) and runes (ᚱ and ᚷ are two good ones) and boars, the beast identified with Frey. Let the star on top represent the North Star rather than the star of Bethlehem, or better still replace it with an odal rune (ᚫ).

Cards? No problem - send some that don't have a Christian message, or make your own incorporating the sentiments and symbols of Asatru. Likewise, gifts are appropriate as ever but try to make them express our values rather than the commercialized, artificial outlook that unfortunately so often comes to dominate this holiday.

When you decorate the house, you could put an evergreen wreath on the door representing life and the Sun's eternal cycle. Criss-cross ribbons on it, and you've got a sunwheel. If you've got a Scandinavian import store nearby, look for the little straw goat, the jol-bok, which calls to mind Thor's trusty friends. And don't forget the Swedish "dala" horses, an echo of Frey from the country most connected with our virile, life-giving friend.

Asa-folk agree that Yule is a time for families, and for family traditions. Visit or call your kin. Start a family custom, perhaps as low key as leafing through the photo album, or maybe an activity more specifically Asatru oriented. Some of these could be:

*Eating ham instead of the usual turkey. The heroes in Valhall feast on pork, and who better can we emulate? Moreover, a ham takes us back to the idea of Frey because of his association with the boar.

*Swearing resolutions or oaths on your own sacrificial boar, or son-argaltr. In the heroic age, it was the custom to lead the swine that was to be sacrificed about the hall, letting each retainer put his hand on it and swear an oath. That's not practical for most of us these days, but a loaf of bread could be baked in the shape of this beast and passed around on a platter, with people making oaths if they wish. Afterwards, the "boar" could be "killed" and eaten with the rest of the main meal.

*Leaving food for the ancestors. See Mari's ritual elsewhere in this issue for ideas on how to do this.

*Not so very long ago we still had the tradition of the Yule log. A long-burning log would be ceremoniously carried in and gradually consumed over a period of days - except for a small remainder which protected the house against fire or lightning until next year, when it was used to ignite the succeeding Yule log.

What, no Yule log? No fireplace, even? If you live in a small apartment in a big city and get your heat from an electric furnace, that's a problem. A real log is best, but if you can't have one, have a Yule candle instead. Select a large candle - one of those huge ones that burns slowly. Treat it just as you would the log. Let it burn over the solstice and, if possible, for a day or so on either side. Don't let it burn down completely; save the stub as a good luck piece during the year and use it to light next year's candle. (You can let it finish burning then, too.)

Times may have changed, and technology has certainly changed, but we're still the same Folk, more or less, deep down inside. The Sun is still the same, as well. By observing this special season in our own ancient-yet-new way, we can be one with our Gods and with our people even as we add to our enjoyment of Yuletide!

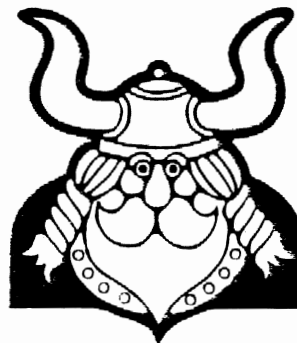
@ Stephen A. McNallen



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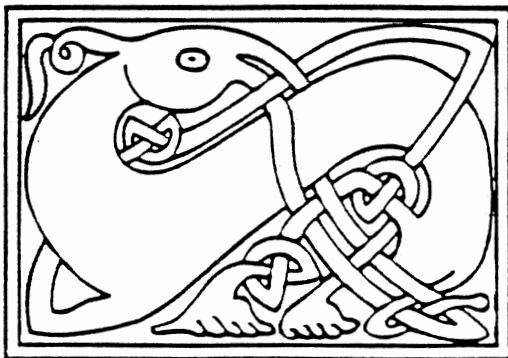
• GUILDS •

Guilds are special interest groups working within the AFA. We invite you to contact directly any guild which interests you.

THE BACK TO BASICS GUILD is pursuing its theme in an active way. Not content to just talk about organic gardening, alternate energy, food preservation and the like, Guildmaster Mike Murray is distributing packets of seeds to his crew of Asafolk in Arizona and doing what he can to push the ideas of self-sufficiency and the spiritual aspects of working with nature. You can find our more about this group by writing to P.O.Box 961, Payson, AZ 85547.

THE SHAMAN/COMPUTER GUILD had some excellent points to make in the most recent issue of Mimir Speaks, their guild publication. The lead article, "Deck Chairs and Lifeboats", faced the fact that our society is collapsing while most of us play the old status/consumer/money games - in effect, fighting for deck chairs on the Titanic! The role of the Teutonic shaman, according to the author, is to show our people how to build lifeboats. Times of transition can be opportunities, for those who are prepared. And what is one of the modern weapons (or tools) that can help Asafolk establish small, independent businesses and otherwise escape the foundering vessel of bigness gone berserk? Why, the personal computer! While you're looking over that article, don't miss Marilyn's very fine summary of Frigg in the same issue.

For subscription information, write to Richard Simmons of the Shaman/Computer Guild, 884 South Lewis St., Lakewood, CO 80226.



THE BREWING GUILD
Jace Crouch, c/o the AFA, P.O. Box 1754, Breckenridge, TX 76024

THE WARRIOR GUILD
Frank Ciampa, 180 Market St., #306 Lynn, MA 01902

THE AEROSPACE TECHNOLOGY GUILD
Stephen McNallen, P.O.Box 1754 Breckenridge, TX 76024

THE WRITERS GUILD
Matt Phipps, 78 Flagg St., West Hartford, CT 06107

THE CONTINUING CLAN
(A parent and child guild)
Cheryl Follette, P.O.Box 1182, New Haven, CT 06515

SKALDIC GUILD/WORDSMITHS
P.O.Box 56374, Harwood Heights, IL 60656

THE SEWING GUILD
Caroline Webber, 3501 Bernard St. #2A, Bakersfield, CA 93306

THE NORSE CULTURE AND SAGA GUILD
Thorsteinn Thorarinnsson, 5411 N. 63rd Drive, Glendale, AZ 85301

THE ARTISTS GUILD
Skjold Skull, c/o S. Bernard, 101 Hyde St., Burlington, VT 05401



Asatru in Iceland

I was going to write a short note on the Asatru community here in Iceland, but during my year-long stay I've found Iceland's Odinists so complex and enigmatic that I hardly know where to begin.

Best to start with Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson, Alsherjargodi. After several fruitless attempts to get in touch with him by mail, I finally rounded up some Icelandic friends of mine and drove to his farm about 60 miles north of Reykjavik. It's an old, somewhat dilapidated farmhouse set in the stark Icelandic landscape of lakes, swamps and gorges. (I can't help of thinking of Heraklitos' response to the chagrined disciples who visited his crude hut: "Yes, gentlemen, philosophy happens here also").

Sveinbjorn greeted us with what seemed like a smile -- his immense white beard conceals his features. Appropriately, since he is a very private man, very shy, especially with foreigners like me who don't speak Icelandic too well. He's a farmer and doesn't pretend to be a charismatic leader (and doesn't want to be one). But it is exactly his simplicity and rootedness that commands respect when he performs his duties as godi.

We chatted over a cup of sweet, viscous coffee, and only mentioned Asatru in passing. Sveinbjorn doesn't usually discuss his religion unless you ask him directly. But he invited me back for a ritual to Frey in August. I met him before that, however, at a blot to the ancestors in Reykjavik performed by Thure Claus, a Swedish godi. After the ritual, several of us went to a local tavern and lifted a good many horns, in the form of whiskey glasses.

When I returned to Sveinbjorn's farm for the Freysblot, we gathered in the valley before a life-size statue of Thor. The godi who made it said modestly: "Oh, it's not very good." I, and a friend I dragged along (a reluctant Christian and cryptopagan), were sufficiently impressed, however. Sveinbjorn put on his white robes and intoned verses from the Voluspa as we drank a toast of mead from a curled ram's horn in honor of Frey. Afterward, Sveinbjorn treated us to a feast of horsemeat. Here my friend got a little squeamish -- but it was good; a bit like corned beef.

I met Sveinbjorn again at a blot to Freyja in Reykjavik on the heath near the airport. an Asaman named Tryggvi had constructed turf buildings there, including a seidr platform, as part of a celebration of Icelandic culture. Rune-carved ram horns were strewn over the ground. Before the ritual there was a glima demonstration. I even joined in and got thrown into the mud repeatedly (but I protest -- my opponent was a 300 lb. Icelander who looked like Egil Skallagrimsson). We formed a circle around the fire and toasted Freyja and Odin. Sveinbjorn and several priests recited verses. We beat iron gongs with ram horns and invoked the runes of prosperity while in the sky above us the northern lights appeared - Odin's auspicious beard.

I was invited to a seidr ceremony which will take place during the Reagan-Gorbachov summit. I'll be praying the landspirits to send a tempest to sweep the world leaders and their journalistic hordes back to their respective Empires leaving this mysterious island in peace.

As you can see, the Asatru community in Iceland is very lively. For those of you who have tried to get in touch with it, you know that it is also very aloof. A godi explained to me that if they seem stand-offish at times, it isn't because they look down on foreign Asafolk. Rather, they are afraid that, because of their unique position as Icelanders, Odinists elsewhere will take everything they say as inerrant doctrine. It's better, they think, if we all go about reconstructing and developing the religion of our ancestors in our own way, following our own instinct and hamingja. In this way Asatru will grow out of its folk instead of being something dictated to followers as if they were as obedient and blasé as stenographers.

Even so, I've noticed a greater desire on their part to make contacts with foreign Odinists, especially as they see the problems of the West slowly encroaching on this last bastion of Germanic Kultur. I encourage American Odinists to spend their next vacation in Iceland and make personal contact with its mad pagans (but be sure to tell your neighbors how miserable the weather is so no one else comes here and spoils the place)!

@ C. Manes

Kaeri Steve,

It occurs to me that I neglected to mention in my article about Iceland's Asafolk that some Odinists here -- as is probably inevitable -- are merely counter-culturists who don't really worship the Aesir. Some are New-Agers preoccupied with world peace and unifying mankind. It's not that they aren't nice people; they just don't get what Odinism is all about.

Anyway, you might want to add an admonitory note at the end of that article, if you print it. I wouldn't want people thinking the Icelanders are perfect (or that I'm naive enough to think so) while the rest of us have to struggle along. Fact is the stuff in The Runestone matches anything here in the depth of its understanding of Odinism.

Þinn einlaegur,

C.Manes

ADVERTISE IN THE RUNESTONE

Yes, THE RUNESTONE accepts advertising at the following low rates:

1/8 page	-	\$4.00 per issue	4" wide x 2½" high
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1/2 page	-	\$11.00 per issue	8½" x 5"
full page	-	\$20.00 per issue	8½" x 11"

We reserve the right to reject any ad - but if you have something related to Asatru and of interest to our readers you'll find advertising with us is a sound investment. Above rates are for camera ready, black and white copy. Your ad should be drawn to the size listed as we reduce all copy 78%.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

"YULE" have a good time if you join us over the winter solstice weekend (December 20-21) in Breckenridge. We are going to have a rousing Yule in the best Viking tradition and we'd like you to be here. By all means support your local kindred - but if you are in danger of having a boring Yule, come and have a BOARING one instead! Write us at the AFA or call (817) 559-7288 for more information.

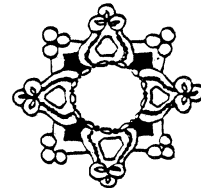
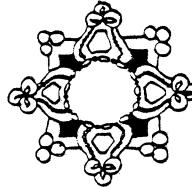
ALTHING EIGHT is almost upon us! Yes, on Ostara (Easter) weekend (April 17-19) Asafolk from all across the country will be meeting in central Texas for the annual gathering of our tribe. Stand by for details, but start making your plans to be here for the event of the year. This is an ideal time to see our new offices and Heritage Center, too!

BOB AND KELLY are leaving us - geographically, that is! They're returning to Ohio where they will be engaged in promoting regional AFA events and stimulating kindred formation. We encourage all of you in Ohio or neighboring states to contact them and find out how to become involved.

They leave us with our deepest thanks, because the Heritage Center couldn't have happened without them. Best wishes in their new surroundings!

PROJECT LEIF ERIKSON looks good, but we're still tabulating the numbers. Since we don't know some of the circulation details, we will have to wait until next issue to fill you in on the final count of people who heard our message about the need to observe Leif Erikson Day. If your letter got printed and you haven't let us know, get the word off to us as soon as possible so we can include your effort in the results.

A VISITOR FROM NORWAY spent some time with us recently. His name was Torbjorn Roeborg, and he's active with an Asatru group in Oslo. He briefed us on progress made in his country, and we did what we could to help by giving him a crash course in newsletter publishing. The AFA has been making a number of contacts with Asafolk in Scandinavia of late, and we want to do everything we can to encourage their efforts.



WHAT DOES THE WORD "ASATRU" MEAN?

It means "belief in the Gods" in old Norse, the language of ancient Scandinavia in which so much of our source material was written.

WHEN DID ASATRU START?

Asatru is thousands of years old. Its beginnings are lost in prehistory, but as an organized system, it is older than Christianity. Strictly speaking, since Asatru is the religion which springs from the specific spiritual beliefs of the Northern European, it is as old as this branch of the human race which came into being some 40,000 years ago.

The questions and answers reprinted here are taken from What is Asatru? available from the AFA.

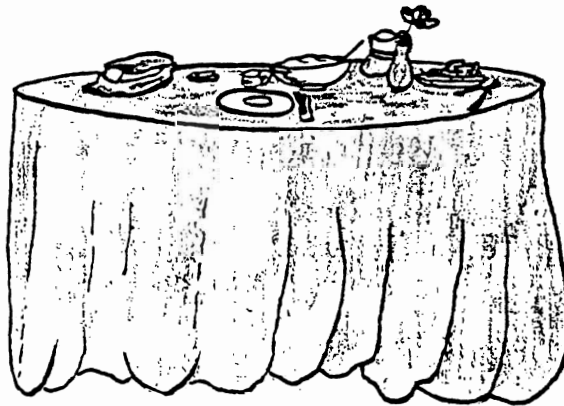
Honoring our Ancestors

This is a ritual to recognize and to honor our own personal ancestors. It is, I hope, easily adaptable for many times and purposes. I have not included any ritual phrases because I feel that these are best in the words of the person performing the ritual.

In Preparation:

1. Set in mind those ancestors who you know by name, maternal and paternal, and recognize the many who are unfortunately unknown. You might want to make a list, but it isn't necessary. If you are adopted, recognize your blood family (if known) and your adopted family, since you were drawn to them.
2. Recognize cultural differences. For instance, my mother's family is Swedish but my father's is French, English and Scottish. Keep this in mind for food, decoration, language used, and other factors.
3. Gather any artifacts or appropriate decorations for the season, the culture, or any family traditions. (Examples: roses for midsummer, a Swedish Dala horse, a family heirloom.)
4. Decide on food that your ancestors liked personally if you know it, or choose ethnic foods. You will be preparing a "feast". The menu can be simple but use the best of everything.

Since I am dealing with some rather divergent types, I felt joy and tranquility could best be attained by inviting my ancestors to a "high tea", a custom as popular in Sweden (where coffee is used) as it is in England and Scotland. Choose the type of entertainment most suitable to your family.



rs

* A Ritual *

The Ritual:

1. Clean and decorate your altar or ritual space.
2. Prepare the chosen food. (This is part of the ritual.) Remember to use your best dishes.

This does not have to be set out for 400 people! One place setting is sufficient (You may have to use two if ancestors are very different. For instance, set out both coffee and tea.) It is the essence of the food that is important.

3. Carry the food to your ritual space and set it before the altar. Bring something for yourself, too: coffee, tea, some food etc.
4. Call on the quarters (directions) or set out your space as you usually do for a ritual.
5. Call on the appropriate God or Goddess, or your favorite one.
6. Welcome your ancestors, both known and unknown, and invite them to share in this feast as guests in your home.

If you have some completely unacceptable ancestor this would be the place to tell them that they are not wanted. Do not do this lightly or for trivial reasons.

Sit and eat or drink what you have brought for yourself. This is a good time to meditate on your people and the qualities you admire in them.

Let the ancestors know any family business (new babies, jobs, and the like). They may already know, but it is nice to be told! If you have family problems or need help you can mention it now.

7. Thank your ancestors for their company and aid.
8. Thank the God or Goddess.
9. Thank the quarters and open your space.
10. Leave the food before the altar overnight. (You may want to put it where the cats and kids can't get at it.)
11. The next day dispose of the food. Don't eat it! If possible, put it in the garden or the compost so that it returns to the earth. Thank Mother Earth.

These "feasts" can be large or small, for a specific purpose or individual. I would recommend that, at least, the first should be for all your ancestors and be fairly general.

Don't be the kind of relative that only calls when you need something - or who snubs family members!

@ Mari Funai

Getting along with family

"Kinsmen were a man's natural allies [in Viking society] . . . the laws, for example, do not consider the possibility of kinsmen in dispute with each other. . . the most tragic of heroic stories are those involving a clash of loyalties."

The Viking Achievement, P.G.Foote and D.M.Wilson

We've heard a lot lately about families wracked by catastrophe - illegitimacy, alcoholism, child abuse and other evils. All these problems are serious matters deserving of attention, of course. But what about the not-so-obvious difficulties that disrupt families - the parents and grown children who never see each other, the adolescent isolated by a real or imagined generation gap, the hurts and betrayals and disloyalties that split brothers and sisters? What about families where differences of religion, politics, or interests stifle any meaningful exchange of ideas and warmth?

Surely these deserve our attention - and just as surely, Asatru can help us find remedies. In fact, the Gods demand we seek such solutions!

Our religion considers the family bonds to be of tremendous importance. Kin have first claim to loyalty and assistance. They are our "in-group"; outsiders simply have to be content with a lesser priority. Blood ties matter in Asatru.

"For seldom are runestones placed by the road
If not for a kinsman by kin."

It's easy to claim all this in theory, but most of us have trouble when it comes to the application. What do we do about the unaffectionate parent, or the brother who cheated us on a business deal, or the teen-age child who thinks we're not nearly so important as Madonna or Iron Maiden and would rather not talk to us? Some of us have close relatives we can't get along with and quite honestly don't even like. How can we make this consistent with our religious principles? More pragmatically, how can we make this part of our lives go right?

The first thing to do is realize that, at least to a certain extent, you're in charge. You have the ability to try to change things, and you must be willing to take the initiative. When family problems freeze in a particular pattern, it becomes harder for anyone to make the first move to remedy them. Realize that you can and should have the courage and concern to do something.

Secondly, though, you'll need to have realistic expectations of just what can and can't be done. Real life isn't a Norman Rockwell print. Don't feel you've failed if your family life doesn't reflect the sort of sentimental picture that we Americans tend to idealize - you're trying to make things better, not necessarily idyllic!

Perhaps the greatest surprise of all is realizing that you don't have to LIKE everyone in your family! It's better if you do, of course, but real life being what it is, it just won't always be possible. Can you really like someone who has severely mistreated you, whose intelligence is nil, and whose interests are completely different from your own? If you don't like a parent or child or cousin or whoever, don't feel guilty about it. Make the best of the situation. Remember, they don't need you to like them. What they need from you, and what you're duty bound to give them, is support, loyalty, and aid in crisis. Liking is nice, but it's an extra.

Once you understand that you don't have to like all those people in your clan, you can get on with the important task of carrying out your obligations to them with a clear conscience!

So what can you do to keep family ties alive, or to fix kinship bonds that have fallen into disrepair?

First, examine the relationship and be sure that you're meeting your responsibilities in regard to the alienated or aggrieved party. Have you done your part - at least? Have you kept your agreements and honored your word? If not, you need to put things right. Note: There's a tendency here to say "Oh, I can't do that --- this all started months, even years ago. It's too late for anything to be done." Generally, this isn't true. Even long after the fact, a gesture of reconciliation will do much to repair things. At the very least, you will have done your duty!

Whether you are repairing relationships that have been sundered or maintaining those that still function, don't overlook the importance of the little rituals that lubricate life and help us all rub along together smoothly. Remember birthdays - make that phone call just to keep in touch - send a card - drop by for a chat on a Saturday afternoon.

"If you have found a faithful friend,
then fare to find him often;
The trail trod by no one
Is soon overgrown with weeds."

Don't just depend on these things to happen by themselves; family ties take work, like anything else that's worthwhile.

In summary: Realize you're in charge - have realistic expectations - fulfill your obligations, even if tardily - take the trouble to do the little extras that keep people in touch. You can start today. This Yule season is a good time to review your connections with kin, since the continuity of the clan is such a central theme to this festival. As you honor Frey and the returning of the Sun, do something to make this part of your life work better. Then extend your efforts to cover the whole year. You'll be glad you did!

"We shall help our kinsmen as foot helps foot . . .
If one foot stumbles then shall the other restore balance."
-The Edda

@ Stephen A. McNallen



KINDREDS

Kindreds are local groups or congregations made up of AFA members working together as a part of the AFA. (For those who want to go beyond reading The Runestone, information is available on how to actually become a member of the Asatru Free Assembly.)

ARIZONA KINDRED, P.O.Box 961, Payson AZ - The kindred has made great progress in erecting their ho^g, or temple to the Gods. By Yule, it will be completed except for shake shingles and a cement floor. The Arizona folks have many weekends of work invested in this project, and they deserve a hearty "Hail" from all of us for this very significant accomplishment.

LAGUGIBA KINDRED, c/o Vidar and Lycia, P.O.Box 256, North Highlands, CA 95660 - Up in the Sierra foothills stands an open-air place of worship, in the form of a V-shaped stone alignment (or v^e as they would have called it in the old days) and an altar or h^ong. Our Sacramento-area crew can claim credit for this structure which they use for their regular ritual observances and kindred meetings.

WULFING KINDRED covers Northern Illinois, and is accepting applications for membership from any AFA member in the area. Contact them at Wulfing Kindred, Asatru Free Assembly, P.O.Box 56374, Harwood Heights, IL 60656.

THORR'S HAMMER KINDRED, located in Southern California, is our newest addition. They've had a couple of productive meetings, formulated a set of by-laws, and have managed to print their newsletter, The Southwestern Folksblaed, twice. The goal is to use Thorr's Hammer Kindred as a "seed-ing kindred" which will encourage the formation of more localized groups throughout the region. From what we see they're off to a good start! Reach them through the AFA.

ANCIENT TRIBE, residing in a truly Nordic climate, has members who specialize in leatherwork. Write to them c/o Vic Jackson, P.O.Box 8529, Anchorage, AK 99508.

HOME KINDRED, P.O.Box 1754, Breckenridge, TX 76024 At Winter Finding (Autumn Equinox) Home Kindred hosted a gathering that drew about 25 people from all over Texas, with a couple of visitors from California. The event included a "VIP tour" of the Northern European Heritage Center and AFA offices, and an evening of feasting and conversation. A rune ritual was done to help each person present find the inner wisdom to survive and thrive in hard times.

On November 1, representatives of the Kindred visited Asafolk in Wichita Falls for a Samhain bonfire and feast. Mark Rippetoe hosted the event which gave new force to the old festival.

On December 20-21, the Kindred will hold a Yule celebration, Viking style. An attempt will be made to thoroughly capture the rousing spirit of our ancestors. Asafolk from any part of the country are invited. Write or call for details.

THE ASATRU FREE ASSEMBLY

The Asatru Free Assembly is a non-profit, tax-exempt religious corporation. As such it is directed by an executive council and voting members. It has a statement of purpose and operating by-laws. Although the AFA functions primarily through the mail, it has local kindreds who meet regularly and an annual gathering of members and others at its Summer Althing. As part of its overall aim of developing and promoting the religious tenets of Asatru, the Assembly produces various books, pamphlets and tapes in addition to a bi-monthly journal, The Runestone and a bi-annual magazine, Huain. These items are available to the general public. The two levels of association are thus: subscriber to or purchaser of printed materials, and Assembly member. The step from subscriber to member is simply one of application to the AFA for membership status. Membership is granted to those who adhere to the organization's stated goals and beliefs and who pay minimal yearly dues.





Nowadays libraries are pinched for funding; moreover, the costs of books and other materials are skyrocketing. Because of this, there is a strong movement in the library profession to shape collections according to "use". Some even tend toward using formulas for this purpose - "Any book that hasn't been checked out in the past two years goes."

Because of this, and because of the current apathy most people have toward Northern European matters, many of the books on Norse and European mythology and culture wind up getting discarded. That's great for those of us who like to pick up good deals at book sales, but it also means that all the people who might have found the books in the library and become interested in these things will never get the chance. It's hard enough to find these books when you're looking for specific titles; if you don't know what you're doing it becomes impossible. Therefore, I would like to suggest that Asatruarar make an effort to check out these works from time to time - even if you've read them or have them at home - just to show the librarian that there is an interest in these volumes. Children's books of myths and fairy stories, etc., should especially be kept on the shelves for new generations to discover.

If you do see a book you want to have "for keeps" in the library, don't check it out and "lose" it - sure, you pay for it, but chances are the institution won't reorder that title again, and no one else will ever have the chance to find it. Copy it, if you want it that badly - or make the effort to get it from the publisher - odds are it would be cheaper than paying the library, which must tack on the price of their overhead as well as the book price. Libraries pay almost as much to process a title as they do simply to purchase it, and they think twice before ordering a book that they don't believe will circulate.

And just how do many career information specialists feel about the impending literary demise of our history? A professor at a library school, discussing "collection management" with an academic librarian, was told, "Why should we (i.e. taxpayers) pay to preserve your (Northern European) culture?"

This same college library, by the way, had a separate Asian collection and Black Studies section. Sorry about that, First Worlders.

If we want people to have access to books on our theme we have to make an effort to disseminate them ourselves. No one else will do it. Moreover, we must avoid putting the personal desire for a particular book ahead of our responsibility to our culture as a whole. Don't "lose" that book - check it out!

@ Alice Rhoades

Fascinating Frey & Freya

Just when you think you've got a pretty good understanding of a God or Goddess - along comes something new! One of the many attractive things about Asatru is the way we're continually discovering information on, and getting new insights into, the holy powers that we've worshipped of old.

Take Frey and Freya, for example. Twins, male and female respectively, associated with fertility, love, joy, and prosperity, right? If you've been around Asatru a while you've absorbed a lot of that common lore and learned the relevant myths. Hopefully you have also found some way to make them a part of your personal religious life. Many people don't go beyond that, however, because details relating to specific, traditional religious practices are found only in some of the more obscure books on the subject. Because of this scarcity, I'd like to pass on to you some of the things that have come to light about Frey and Freya. (Most of the following is from The Origin of the Icelanders by Barthi Guthmundsson).

For example, it appears likely that Frey worshippers in Iceland were in the habit of carrying figurines of the God with them in a pocket or pouch. Several references are made to such statues in various sagas, and two images of this kind have actually been recovered in that country. The custom appears to be strongly connected with individuals and families known to be followers of the fertility God, although miniature figures of Thor found in Sweden suggest the possibility of a parallel custom there. For that matter, there's nothing to prevent us, today, from carrying about such Frey figurines as part of our own devotion.

Another practice related to the worship of Frey may have been the ritual anointing of statues. An image of a God named "Faxi" was discovered at Saetersdale in southern Norway in 1854, where it had been recently revered by a local woman. Her custom had been to rub it with hog lard each Yule. We can assume that Faxi is none other than Frey because of the connection with the boar, the winter solstice, and the very name Faxi (It means "mane"; horses named Freyfaxi in the sagas were dedicated to the God of the Vanir). Whether this is a survival of an ancient custom or a modern revival, it can give us ideas to enrich our ritual activities today.

In Iceland, beaches where whales or trees washed ashore were sacred to Frey. Vatnsness, at the mouth of the Mithfjord, is one such place. All sorts of associations spring to mind when we read of this; the Vanir (the family of Gods of which Frey is a member) are often associated with water. The founder of the Danish royal line, Scyld, arrived as a child on a treasure-laden ship that sailed mysteriously across the sea, and his connection with Frey is strong. Indeed, he may be Frey under another name. Various gifts of the sea, then, whether wood (especially valuable in treeless Iceland) or whale, could be seen as reenactments or restatements of this divine event. (See Gods and Myths of Northern Europe by H.R. Ellis-Davidson for more on the Scyld legend). If you live on or near a shore, you may be able to incorporate this theme into your own religious observances. Perhaps a ritual fire for Frey could be built using driftwood, or an image of the God carved from it, or a ceremonial site located near a suitable beach?

Practices associated with Freya, sister of Frey and the Goddess most connected with love and fertility, can also be found in the old literature. In the Eddic Lay "Hyndluljoth" we have the story of one Ottar who honored her. Freya herself describes his actions:

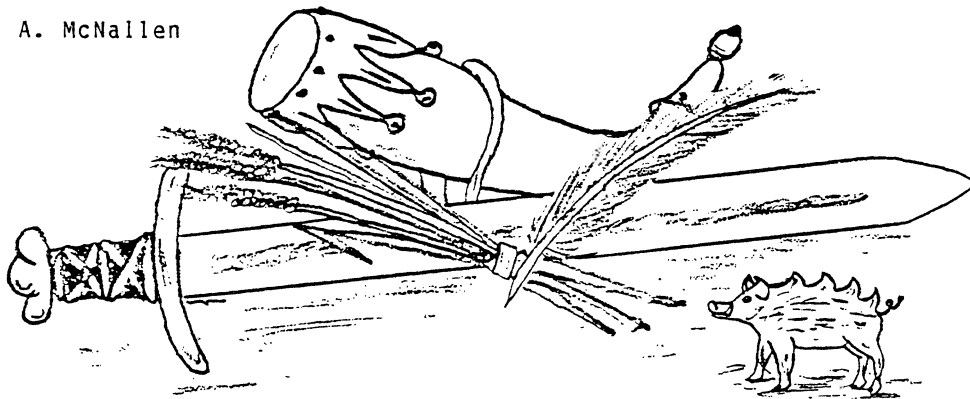
"He had a high altar made me of heaped stones -
all glarey have grown the gathered rocks -
and reddened anew them with oxen's fresh blood;
for aye Ottar trusted the asynjur [Goddesses]."

This custom of reddening an altar with sacrificial blood probably was used in rites to many deities; here we have it affirmed in connection with Freya. Today we don't generally offer animals to the Gods and Goddesses because we don't live in an agricultural society, and we aren't forced to annually slaughter animals in order to make it through the winter. We could, however, substitute another fluid consecrated to Freya, perhaps mead, and use it to hallow a home altar.

Interestingly, both the words "dis" and "gythja" can mean either "Goddess" or "priestess". Vanadis, for example, is a name for Freya, and also for a priestess of Freya in saga-age Iceland. Personal names ending in -dis (Thordis, Vigdis, Anndis, Freydis, and others) seem to run in certain families and may indicate that public rites in those families were the responsibility of a priestess who inherited her position from others that had gone before her. Many of these are found on, or near, farms which seem to have been originally founded by women acting in their own names, a sign of high status in those particular groups. Further close relationships exist between these farms and families on one hand, and saga tales about swine on the other. Now, what do pigs have to do with all this? Simply that both Frey and Freya are strongly associated with boar and sow in mythology and in folk practice. To top it off, an extremely high proportion of the skalds, or poets, in Iceland come from regions where we find the combination of swine stories, priestesses, land settled by women, and other cultural characteristics. It may be that all these are connected with Frey and Freya in a special way. We can take advantage of this complex situation in our personal (and group) religious activity by, for example, composing poetry with boar/swine/sow images, in honor of Freya.

Scholars have done us a great favor by compiling immense volumes of information that can be put to good use by those of us who follow Asatru. We have focused on Frey and Freya here, but the principle can be used in regard to any of our Gods and Goddesses. By combing through this academic treasure trove, we can devise new ways of enriching the experience of our religion. Ultimately, we must put our belief into action and we hope this small essay will promote such practice. Hail Frey! Hail Freya!

@ Stephen A. McNallen





MOOT POINT



"Moot Point" is our letters column. We reserve the right to edit submissions. Please address your letters specifically to "Moot Point", and sign your name or initials just as you want them to appear in print. Let us hear from you!

Hejsan!

Iceland is very beautiful and very cold. The people are hearty, warm, and very hospitable - especially to Americans. I've made some good Asatru contacts in Reykjavik including Thorsteinn Guthjonsson and his family. I stayed with him both visits. They want to get more contacts going with America and Scandinavia as they are "in between" the two (as Reagan and Gorbachev would agree). They want to build a pagan temple near the city and are making plans for it. They can't use Sveinbjorn's farm because he doesn't own it (only lives there). He is a nice old (60's) gentleman farmer who lives in a stone-and turf-surrounded cabin with a metal roof, up in the foothills above the fjord. He has no electricity but he does have water and a telephone. A grand road goes up to his farm, and a river flows alongside it. The mountains are behind with a large statue of Thor part way up. He understood my Swedish and showed me around. He gave me cakes and coffee and also a copy of his record of old Icelandic chants.

In a month or so I'll send you some more articles from sagas I picked up in Iceland (rare to find here).

Jeffrey Redmond

Thanks for giving us a little more of that Icelandic atmosphere, Jeff. Reports like yours - and Mr. Manes', elsewhere in this Runestone - really make us all want to go. Keep tantalizing us!

Greetings to the staff of The Runestone and all Asafolk;

I have a few observations to make about Asatru and proselytizing. We have few firm historical observations about the way our ancestors conducted their religion prior to the Viking Era (800 A.D.), and our information for much of the later pagan practices has been interpolated from various sources, and often filtered through romanticism and Christian ideals. However, one thing that DOES stand out in the literature was the easy-going attitude of the Scandinavians regarding their own religion. They were among the first to believe that a person's religion was their own business, and while they apparently welcomed fellow believers to their faith, they did not proselytize. Odin set a clear precedent on this point in his own search for wisdom. There is no such thing as a free lunch: if your knowledge and insights into the workings of the universe are to have meaning, they must be purchased through effort and struggle.

This does not mean we cannot make our religion known to others, by our example. We may not have the answers to everything, but if our beliefs and way of life are valid, by their own merits they should attract others to our creed. Moreover, the very notion of a "membership drive" is foreign to what we are doing. Informing our communities of our ideals and goals is wonderful, but we should be wary of doing this solely for the sake of increasing our population. If the information presented sparks interest or belief that is good, but we should be wary of actively seeking out new bodies to wear Asatru beliefs. A quick look at how most Americans regard the membership programs of such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses (who after all are much more "conventional" than we, being a Christian creed) should warn us how most people are going to view us and our activities.

Another warning for Asafolk: remember that the early Christian Church was a reasonable organization until they acquired land and developed fixed churches, which required a full-time priesthood and bureaucracy to maintain. Let's by all means build our temples, and establish our priests, but let's also be sure to leave the bureaucracy to others!

Gunnora

I think I agree completely with the spirit of what you're saying. You're quite right in stating that we shouldn't be out there haranguing, bothering, and generally harassing people into "converting" to Asatru. For one thing, people don't like it. For another, it goes against our grain. For a third - it doesn't work, in any meaningful way.

On the other hand, we do have some problems the Vikings didn't. They lived in a homogeneous society with strong clan ties, and Asatru was constantly reinforced and transmitted by the entire culture. Religion was taken for granted because (and maybe only because) it could be taken for granted. If our ancestors had known what we know now - that Asatru was vulnerable, and that it would be replaced by an alien creed with such profoundly sad consequences, they might not have had such an easy-going attitude. Maybe we can learn from their experience.

So where does that leave us? Seems to me we have a responsibility to promote Asatru if we believe it's a better way for our people. But how do we do this in a way consistent with our values? We should calmly affirm our beliefs by example explain them enthusiastically and clearly to interested others, and let even the disinterested know we exist - they can't make a choice if they don't know about us. Likely prospects who have been around long enough to know what we're all about and who may desire actual AFA membership, should know of its availability and be encouraged to pursue it if they feel it's right for them. This way, we are attracting people by our virtues rather than pushing or pulling them around, and the initiative to accept or reject is still in the hands of the people we'd like to draw to us.

Dear Runestone:

This is just a little letter in which I hope to let out my exasperations to our media establishment. As most Asatruar would agree, America's modern T.V. and movie industry have done much to tear down or misrepresent many of the ideals and virtues we hold dear. Most of this maligning, however, is done on their own time. What really gets me is when they bring their wrong-headed attitudes to our very special art and entertainment forms. By this I mean casting Blacks in many of the recent showings of Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen.

In the latest version we have Black bass-baritone Simon Estes cast as Wotan (Odin!). I'm not criticizing his ability, although an article in TIME magazine said that he "lacks the raw power and seductive sheen that the part requires." Blacks have shown that they are extremely adept in the fields of entertainment and media, and display abilities which perhaps many Whites may lack. Nonetheless, having one of my Nordic Gods portrayed by anyone other than a Nordic is as tacky as Whites doing blackface routine. Would major producers ask that James Garner or Clint Eastwood try to play Malcolm X or Martin Luther King?

Please understand I try to keep an open mind, but there are obvious limits, and this latest example of the Ring is repugnant.

Sincerely for our Folk and Gods,

Matt Anger

I agree. Portraying Wotan as a Black man is as ridiculous as presenting, for example, the African deity Shango as a White. We all need to develop an awareness of these things, and of the prevailing double standard that's often used to victimize us. Only then can we resist psychologically or culturally.



The LAND FUND is our investment in the future - an expression of our determination that someday soon there will be a sanctuary for Asatru rooted in the soil, and eventually a full-fledged community living our religion in a natural and largely self-sufficient lifestyle.

Donations toward this goal are gratefully accepted (Unless you indicate otherwise, we will thank you for your contribution by listing your name in The Runestone.)

We want to thank the following for their recent contributions.

Herby Felgate
Lycia Andrewson
Bruce Anderson
Sam Harvey

Dan West
Richard Paratore
Hardy Felgate
Willie Klaber

Joyce Fisher
Larry White
Frank Ciampa
Norman Anspach

We are grateful also to all those who donated to the fund but who wished to remain anonymous...



ASATRU - AN OVERVIEW

Are you new to Asatru, or is this your first copy of The Runestone? If so, you might like a little background on what this is all about, so you can better understand the contents of our magazine.

Asatru is the original, pre-Christian religion of the peoples of northwestern Europe. It was followed by the various tribes that became today's Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, Dutch, and related groups. A similar religion and way of life was practiced by the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh. Because of this overlap and the movement of peoples in ancient and modern times, it's fair to make a general statement that Asatru is a religion that expresses the heritage of people of Northern European descent as a whole. In short, this is the faith of your ancestors! Because it's our native belief, we feel it best expresses our way of looking at the world.

Our forebears believed in a number of Gods and Goddesses. Some of us think of them as real in the most literal sense, and others of us view them as symbols that help us understand the divine aspects of the universe. However you consider them, it is useful to know the names and functions of some of the main ones.

ODIN - father of the Gods, associated with wisdom, magic, ecstasy
THOR - a God of strength and might, defender of the Gods and men
FRIGGA - mother of the Gods, wise, involved with family, children
TYR - one-handed God renowned for sacrifice, valor, and war prowess
BALDER - most beautiful of the Gods, softspoken, bold and good
SKADI - mountain-dwelling Goddess who hunts on skis
HEIMDAL - watchman who guards the Rainbow Bridge leading to the realm of the Gods
IDUN - Goddess who keeps the magic apples that renew the Gods' youth
LOKI - mischievous trickster of the Gods who often works against their aims
FREYA - Goddess of love, associated with fertility and procreation, but with a warrior aspect also
FREY - a virile fertility God whose domain includes love, joy, and prosperity
NJORD - God connected with the sea as a source of food and of prosperity through trade

Most of these Gods and Goddesses belong to the family or tribe we call the Aesir, but the last three are of another line, the Vanir.

From time to time you will see words in Old Norse used in our pages. This was the language of the Vikings, to whom we owe much of what we know about Asatru. You'll find frequent references to the Old Viking or Nordic culture and history, too.

What does our religion value? We preach and practice courage, honor, the importance of family and ancestral bonds, strength, freedom, the preservation of our kind, and joyful, vigorous life.