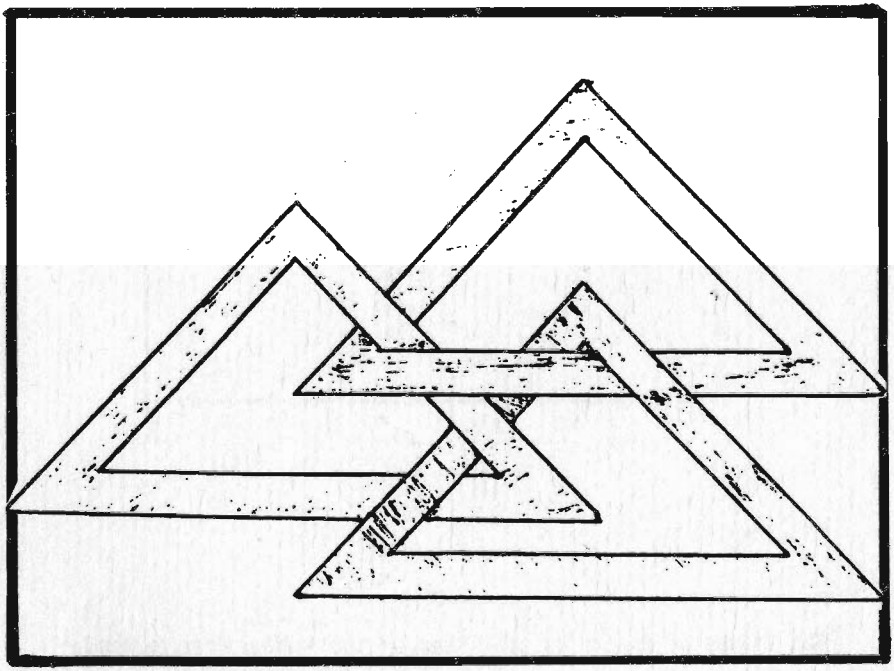
THE VALUES OF ASATRU



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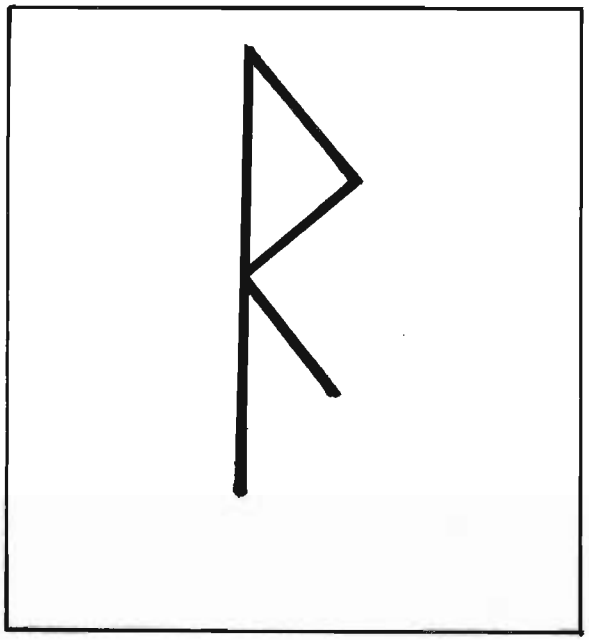

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PREFACE

This booklet is made up of a series of articles which appeared in "The Runestone" over a period of more than two years. These essays were designed to answer frequent questions about what we believe - not in terms of theology, but as expressed in the values by which we live.

We are a people cut off, in many ways, from our ancestral wisdom. Recovering that birthright is a task which can be approached from several angles - not the least of which is daily adherence to the moral traits honored by our forebears, those heroes of old who pleased the gods with their noble conduct. Maybe we cannot all be heroes, but all of us can live better, more elevated, and more fulfilling lives. The Values of Asatru is a tool toward that end.

There is a companion volume to this booklet, The Lessons of Asgard, which studies the stories of the gods and goddesses and offers an analysis of just what they have to tell us about the essential code of Asatru. Together, these volumes give a solid grounding in the principles of our religion.

Stephen A. McNallen
Breckenridge, Texas

STRENGTH

Only in a world as rotten and degenerate as the one in which we live would it be necessary to state the obvious: strength is better than weakness. Yet there are those who say that it is better to be weak than to be strong, even those who say that to be strong is to be evil and that to be weak, somehow is to be virtuous.

Asatruarar are not counted among that number!

The prophets of weakness are not always forthright in proclaiming their message. It may be hidden beneath banners of pacifism or in the curbing of even normal childhood agressions or in the smirking pride that some few actually take in their lack of physical capability. In its muted form the worship of weakness finds its purest expression in personalities who seek to pull down all greatness, all strength, all the exceptional elite who would rise above the herd. The sickness does not discriminate on the basis of sex; "traditional" women who, unlike their sisters in the sagas, are told that they are weak and incapable, carry it in their breasts. Likewise men who use the "It's okay to cry" cop-out and who eschew anything remotely related to classical male strengths are also badly contaminated by the virus. The philosophy of weakness naturally thrives in a decaying social body; after all, it's easy to be weak - until you have to compete with the strong.

Where did all this start? There have always been the weak. But weakness as a virtue seems to be strongly linked with the coming of Christianity. Obviously, not all who profess Christianity are, or were weak. Christ may or may not have been the pallid peacemonger modern liberals worship, but he does seem to have a touch of masochism. Anyone who could make the famous statement about turning the other cheek is - far from being some enlightened guru - a person badly out of touch with his own instincts and hence cut off from wisdom. Many modern Christians seem to suffer from the same lack of wholeness. The spiritually lifeless wights who forgive monsters who have murdered their own sons and daughters, and who do so in the name of Jesus, are an extreme example. More common are stalwarts in their daily lives, but who excuse their lack of action at times of crisis by appealing to Christian love, or Christian charity, or Christian tolerance.

Noted Christian writer Malcolm Muggeridge was expressing a many-leveled opinion when he said that "We are henceforth [since the cru-

cifixion] to worship defeat, not victory; failure, not success; surrender, not defiance; deprivation, not satiety; weakness, not strength."

More to our liking were the fiery Crusaders who, for all their faults and follies, were still untamed. The primal instincts of the Northern European soul lived in them, despite, not because of, their Christianity. They were still Nietzsche's "blond beasts"; their lips called out to Jesus but Odin had their hearts.

But why settle for such a compromise? Asatruarar can admire a long line of heroes and warriors who were proud of their strength, not ashamed of it. Feats of physical strength abound in the old sagas - the fantastic was the ideal which the common man sought to emulate in real life. Spiritual strength was honored every bit as much as might of limb. Perseverance, power of will, total control and coolness in the face of danger and death - all of these virtues were praised, and all exemplify a kind of strength.

Look at the very gods of Asatru! Not one is a weakling. Mighty Thor is especially a god of strength. His sheer physical prowess is an inspiration to all who would reject weakness. Odin epitomizes another kind of strength, that of the will and the spirit.

Likewise, modern followers of Asatru know that strength is never outdated. Most people accept the illusion, though, that there is something out there called "civilization" - that the police will protect us from all harm - that physical strength and the spiritual might to wield it are no longer necessary. But ask anyone who has been mugged or raped. Some victims can't reply; they're dead.

We of Asatru know that strength is better than weakness. Furthermore, we know it doesn't mean arrogance or crudity. In fact, only the strong can truly afford to be gentle. Strength means life and health. It means fulfillment of our potential, individually and collectively. To be strong is to be vibrant, wholly alive, on the very cutting edge of life. Why settle for less?

Let the Malcolm Muggeridges of the world worship weakness and hate all that is healthy and life-giving. We, true to ourselves, our ancestors, and our own instincts, will respond to life's challenges and wax from strength to strength. We know that, in truth, the strong will inherit the Earth - we, and our descendents, will be strong!

COURAGE

If most people had to state the single trait most valued by the Norsemen, the majority might unhesitatingly name "courage". And rightly so - for once, our stereotype does us justice. Courage was a thing of inestimable value not only to the Norse, but indeed to all the Germanic tribes and the peoples of ancient Europe generally. We are compelled to rank it very highly, or even first, among the values of our faith, Asatru.

Today we live in a world where the anti-hero has won (or rather has been given) a niche of prominence. The hard virtues have softened, and the stern code of courage and its fraternal twin, honor, are out of fashion. In modern society at large, people are simply not perpared for the trials soon to be thrust upon us by history. All the more reason that we who follow the ways of our noble ancestors should be infused with these powerful traits. Let us begin acquiring courage first by understanding it.

Quite correctly, it is often pointed out that there is a difference between courage and fearlessness. The person who does not feel fear may be able to do great deeds, but only because he or she is insensitive or unimaginative. While this may be useful, it is not especially virtuous. The real accomplishment is to fully experience fear, yet to master it. We who opt for the well-rounded enhancement of all our powers in the desire to transcendence so common to our Folk must choose the latter, for we seek awareness and fullness of perception in addition to force and mastery. There is no shame in feeling fear. To know fear is human, and to thoroughly overcome it raises one to the realm of the gods.

Another truism is that courage comes not only in the physical variety, but manifests also as spiritual bravery. Again, some things are truisms because they're true, and the code of Asatru would agree with this statement. We would take this somewhat superficial analysis a step further, however, and say that there is a substratum which underlies both kinds of courage, and that bedrock is the heroic will. Facing an enemy bayonet charge and facing the threat of losing one's job because of a belief in Asatru have little in common - except that both instances test the individual's mastery of self through a deliberate and unwavering will to take the honorable course.

In reading the sagas, we see such a willful adherence to this high standard of courage. Revenge for a wrongdoing was an absolute

necessity, because appearing soft or defenseless meant that one's family and one's self became targets for others who sensed an easy prey. However, retribution was not exacted instantly, in the heat of passion. Rather, the emotional fury had to subside, so that the avenger could demonstrate self control and so that the deed could stand forth as an imperative of duty, not as an act of rashness. Courageous feats (Whether of vengeance or not) were best if done deliberately and with calmness, not impulsively. It is worth noting that among the greatest of heroes were men like Beowulf and the semi-legendary Ragnar Lodbrok. Neither died in the brashness of youthful impetuosity, but in the coolness of mature, tempered courage under the mastery of will.

All very well for those of such celestial stature, you may say - but what about those of us who lead ordinary lives yet wish to honor our gods and our ancestors?

A two-fold approach presents itself. First, since a powerful will underlies courage in all its forms, develop that will in not just one but in several, or many, aspects of your life. Self mastery will bring with it courage. Secondly and more specifically, do the thing that you fear. One man's successful use of this method is described in the book titled (of course) Will by G. Gordon Liddy.

Courage, out of fashion or not, is one of the cornerstones of personal behavior for those who follow our gods. We may not all be courageous - or, more likely, we have some measure of courage, but not all we'd like. Whatever our failings or our strengths, it is our duty to try - courageously! - to develop this value so prized by our forebears.

Joy

We live in an age which is, in many ways, overly introspective. Where our axe-swinging ancestors wrought results through bold action, we often find ourselves paralyzed by excessive analysis, and fail to define and to do the deeds required of us. Many things can produce this spiritual sickness, but one of the surest will-wasters is that old enemy, guilt.

Our forebears before the Christian imposition do not seem to have been contaminated with this virus. While they might have regretted something they had done, they simply tried to put things right and resolved not to place themselves in that situation again. The gnawing, esteem-devouring feeling we call guilt, on the other hand, they would have considered not only masochistic but just plain silly. Take action! Solve your problems or try to, and get on with life! Leave the mental moaning and the breast beating for those who have nothing else to do!

Guilt, however, has its uses - not to the guilt-ridden party, certainly, but to the church and state and the special interest groups who have power in our present society. It is a very effective way to control people. By making us feel bad about ourselves, by making us believe that we are evil or fallen or sinful, the various powers-that-be can manipulate our behavior in accordance with their wills.

What are some of the things for which we are made to feel guilty? Television actresses make us feel guilty for our wealth so we will give that wealth away for the benefit of people on the other side of the globe. "Docudrama" producers and writers of a particular ilk do all they can to make us feel guilty because of our Northern European heritage. All our natural drives and instincts come under assault. Anger? Bad, because we're all supposed to be "mellow". Ambition? Dangerous, because it makes the inadequate aware of their failings. Sexuality? Nasty; God's gonna get ya for that! Prosperity, ancestry, and instincts are all to be forbidden us by the guilt-mongers. What can be more disastrous in the long term than breeding these qualities out of a formerly free Folk? Our present thralldom has turned values on their heads. Instead of condemning that which is strong and good, we should shun that which our inner selves know to be bad - cowardice, dishonor, and the favoring of strangers over kin.

Make no mistake, guilt is a necessary tool for forging the brave new world, a globe-spanning society where we are all to be androgenous, docile, and interchangeable economic units designed only to produce and consume and serve. No room there for joy in sexuality or passion of any kind or pride in our identity as a people.

So how do we fight back? With all the usual ways of devotion to our gods and our Folk - but animated with a joy that consumes guilt and frees the spirit for action just as the severing of the "peace strings" allows the sleek sword to fly to its owner's hand! The best warrior is the joyous one who clasps his fate to his heart, whose merriment in the battle's strife confuses the foe and strikes panic in their ranks. Let that joy flow into all the parts of your life, so that it suffuses work and battle and play and makes all these diverse things one. Joy IS better than guilt, and a sure antidote to its manipulative pangs!

Hard words to heed, easy ones to write. Holding onto joy isn't easy because we seem to have so little to celebrate. But is it the things outside ourselves which ought to give us joy or grief, or is it the things within us? If nothing else, we can revel in our freedom from guilt, in our will-to-act, and in our adherence to the troth of our heroic ancestors. These are no small reasons for joy!

We have the gods to inspire us. Odin, pragmatically breaking the rules to safeguard the worlds of gods and men; Thor, indulging his appetites without shame or fear; Frey and Freya, reveling in healthy sexuality; these are powerful, liberating models casting off the chains of restraint. By invoking them into our lives we can experience the joy of existence in a world where strength, ambition, competence, and pleasures are not fettered with alien, life-denying bonds.

HONOR

Honor is one of those words we don't see used much anymore. It's a bit out of date, and to invoke it in conversation may bring cynical smiles and even a snicker or two. In recapturing the spiritual essence of Asatru, however, few concepts could be more important.

The Oxford Dictionary uses phrases like "nobleness of mind...allegiance to what is right...reputation" in defining honor. Let us look deeper.

In thinking about honor it soon becomes apparent that this is a virtue which sums up other virtues. It is honorable to be loyal. It is honorable to be truthful. All the character traits held in high esteem by our ancestors, when lumped together, constitute honorable behavior. When we do these things we are being honorable. From this it follows that there are many different roads we can and must travel to lead an honorable life, and that we have daily opportunities to train ourselves along these lines. Such molding of the personality is not easy because honor so frequently means placing spiritual considerations over money, personal advantage, and convenience. My dictionary tell me that honor is "allegiance...to conventional standards of conduct" which is only partially correct; in all too many instances the conventional standard of conduct involves lying, cheating, and betrayal of kin. A life of honor often places us in direct opposition to the major trends in our society.

Among our ancestors, honor was given an importance which would seem almost fanatical to the cynical, jaded minds of our day. To impugn a person's honor during the Viking Age might have meant a battle to the death. Honor was worth life itself, and lasted after the body was a corpse in the tomb -

> Cattle die, kinsmen die,
> Every man is mortal:
> But the good name never dies
> Of one who has done well

says the poet in the old Norse literature.

Honor is something we acquire by strict self-examination. Look at your actions at the end of the day - can you hold your conduct up to the light and say that your deeds have been honorable ones? If not, why not - and what can you do about it?

We can, bit by bit, strive for perfection in all matters of honor. When honor concerns mundane things easily within our control, this is hard enough but not impossible. Doing one's duty in the daily course of things, speaking truly and forthrightly - these are important for us all and they add to the spiritual stature of ourselves and those groups of which we are a part. In some matters, though, the price of honor in our society becomes desperately high.

Suppose your mother is robbed and beaten. You see the attack and chase the assailant down the street, throw him into an alley, and begin smashing his face against the sidewalk. Since you have just used "unreasonable force" beyond that needed to restrain the criminal you will face assault charges. If you honorably resist arrest, you will be forcibly subdued or even shot by the arresting officers. Dishonorable laws made by dishonorable men forbid the exercise of honor. All of us who live in the modern nation-state make compromises because we don't want to go to prison or die in a police shootout; to that extent we are all tainted by the corrupt system around us. Honor is no longer the simple thing it was a thousand years ago. That mugger, despicable as he is, is less a threat to your honor than is the very structure of law and order that is allegedly on your side. Honor is no longer person on person or family on family; it is person or family against a system that most obviously includes the police and courts but actually includes the very fabric of modern life, from television and advertising to Christianity. So what do we so about such a dreadful dilemma?

Saga and epic show us that great men - stronger and bolder than most any of us - have used deception and guile against foe who outnumbered them greatly. The Havamal, purported to be words of Odin himself, advises us that the use of trickery is acceptable. Do we say that the soldier who uses raid and ambush is a coward because he does not meet his enemy in orderly phalanx? Should Herman the Cherusci have fought Rome's legions on flat terrain, forsaking the forested hills of Teutoberger Wald?

No, the only disgrace lies in not fighting, in surrendering while life is left. We live in a debased society where perfect honor is impossible. Let us fight then - openly where we can, stealthily where we must - to replace this system, top to bottom, with one where honor can live.

FREEDOM

The idea that freedom is better than slavery is so commonly accepted that there would seem to be little more we can say. Why restate the obvious? At this point in Odinist literature, most articles about freedom resort to the staple technique of praising the liberty-loving ways of our ancestors, surveying our history for appropriate documentation, and affirming our own determination to maintain that freedom. While that approach is laudable and necessary, let us try to get beyond that stage and really look at freedom in our society.

For the fact is, we are not free. The stark liberty of our forebears is - for almost all of us - dead. We have the illusion of living in a free society because we continually confuse the fact of control with the means by which control is maintained. To see things as they are, we must learn to make that distinction.

First, let us consider control itself. We of Asatru believe that there is an inherent human nature, an inborn set of tendencies which shape our values, motives, and actions. Left to develop organically, in accordance with our nature as a people, we would evolve a social system that would tend not to make us act contrary to our natures or impell us to do things we would not do if left to ourselves. In short, we would be free members of the Folk. A controlled, "unfree" society is one where people are made to do things which are contrary to their nature. This condition constitutes the kind of slavery referred to in the title of this article, and is antithetical to freedom as we define it. Slavery, or non-freedom, is an evil in itself, regardless of the conditions which bring it about or the means used to enforce it.

Those means are traditionally secret police, rigged elections, and slave labor camps. Such methods are crude and ugly, but they are not the essence of totalitarianism; they are simply the instruments which sustain it. Slavery maintained by any other means is still slavery. The most pleasant tools of social control do not change the essential nature of the totalitarian system, nor do they make it more morally justified.

Today, in the so-called "Free World", we are continually manipulated in violation of our own natures, to ends not consistent with our innate tendencies or our ultimate best interests. This control permeates our society and is in many ways as absolute as that in any form of dictatorship. The means of control, however, are subtle and even sweet. While openly totalitarian systems use harsh and obvious devices such as torture and labor camps to influence behavior, the

trick in the industrialized West is to shape the values, attitudes, desires, and tastes from which behavior springs - thus forming invisible bonds which control humans as surely as the cruder ones, but with less chance of revolt, for the chains are comfortable. Our "needs" are shaped by media and advertising. When the system meets these contrived needs we feel grateful, and thus remain loyal to the whole setup. We are effectively drugged by superfluous consumer goods and pacifying, bovine philosophy. Real choice - that in accordance with our healthy, life-and Folk-affirming instincts - is strongly suppressed. True freedom of choice becomes an illusion that the consumerist/universalist state fosters to hide the fact that we are wearing chains. It is all-important to remember that the fact of totalitarianism is not changed by the superficially humane means of control. By our earlier definition, we are slaves.

This doesn't mean I'd just as soon live in China or Soviet Russia. To trot the love-it-or-leave-it argument is to miss the point. Life is better here, and few of us would trade places with anyone in the Gulag. But that doesn't mean we are really free here, or that we live in a healthy society; it just means the methods of control are more bearable.

With each TV commercial urging us to eat junk food or to purchase gadgets for which an artificial appetite has been created, we are being exploited. With each news story slated to bolster a suicidal foreign policy, our slavery is made manifest. Every time we walk into a store where Musak makes us more receptive to buying, we are being brainwashed. Every magazine article, every governmental decree that lessens the will of our people to resist their continuing dispossession, is a totalitarian act. In each case, a life-affirming instinct of our Folk is being purposefully and deliberately denied - not by physical force, though that option is used when other methods fail - but by the pressure of conformity, or the reassurance of buzz words, or by clever subliminal techniques.

So how do we get free?

First, we have to realize we are unfree. Once that fact sinks in, we see through the social mirage and perceive the mechanisms which keep us enthralled. We see television commercials and TV programming for what they are, and pull the plug. We realize that Macy's and the automobile companies and countless other establishments are artificially creating needs so they can sell their stuff, and we quit buying it. We analyze the newspapers enough to know how the media masters want us to react, and we fail to respond as they'd like. But all of this represents only the first tottering steps towards personal freedom. Ultimately, we must fashion a new and better society, one in keeping with the inborn aspirations and truest instincts of our Folk.

KINSHIP

It is quite acceptable these days to point out that we live in an alienated society. It is also standard to offer the idea of kinship in one form or another as an antidote to the loneliness and separation so many of us experience in our lives. Since kinship is often praised among us who follow Asatru, let's remind ourselves of the reasons we consider it important, and, while we are at it, let us ask ourselves why alienation seems to have triumphed in the first place.

First, what's so great about identifying with our kin, and working harmoniously with them?

Kinship is efficient. Imagine the effects on the average taxpayer if people turned to family and tribe in hardship, rather than to the government! Welfare, make-work jobs designed solely to redistribute the wealth, food stamps - all could be slashed until almost out of existence if there was a supporting network of kin ready to help their own. The clumsy bureaucracy which eats up our resources and hems us in with ever more regulation could be largely dismissed, and we would all benefit by better use of funds and by freedom from the petty bureaucrats who currently oppress us.

Kinship is natural. A need for it is programmed into our genes. Humans evolved under conditions that required an "in group" receiving the loyalty of the individuals comprising it. Nature wired us in such a way that we are happiest and most effective when we have a kin bond with the people around us. Anything less, and we are not likely to find real satisfaction.

Finally, kinship is an integral part of Asatru. We believe that we are linked to our ancestors and our descendants in a special way that takes priority over lesser relationships, and our traditions tell us that mighty spiritual properties are transmitted down the family line from one generation to the next. These intangible properties are a priceless treasure carrying with them weighty duties, and many of the ethics of Asatru revolve around these obligations.

If kinship is such a fine thing, why do we live in alienated society? Why don't we <u>have</u> kinship instead of writing articles about it?

We have been seduced by a universalist ethic that insists we call everyone kin, that we love anything that walks, crawls, or slithers. Nevertheless, we have less genuine experience of natural kinship than

at any time in our history as a people. If all are special, none are special. "Universal brotherhood" paradoxically destroys the meaning of kinship by indiscriminately bestowing it on every passer-by. Again, we must ask why we ended up with such an unnatural ideology prevailing over our instinctive needs. The answer lies in one word - CONTROL.

Strong special bonds create social units which are harder to control, harder to coerce into conformity with the produce-and-consume system. Alienation, on the other hand, makes us powerless to change it, and encourages us to consume material goods. Any hint of tribal feeling, any stirring of a real alternative, must be quietly side-tracked into avenues of expression that will not threaten the official ideology or its servants. Much of the counterculture (a very mixed bag indeed) functions as a sort of safety valve or even as a "deep freeze" where challenging ideas, good and bad alike, can be rendered harmless. Things have to be kept under control. People must not turn off their televisions or start talking to each other, for goodness sake. The whole artificial mess might come crashing down! While a restoration of kinship sounds fine to us who follow the gods, it's pretty threatening to some who like the current state of alienation. We, however, must resolutely press forward to make a better world for our people, one in which we can be free to experience both the duties and the great benefits of kinship in Asatru.

REALISM

Our ancestors were practical people in every aspect of their lives, including their religion. A glance at the "Words of the High One" attributed to Odin himself, shows at once that it is concerned not with pious platitudes or otherworldly lore, but with practical advice for living, for besting one's enemies, and for acquiring wisdom. This realistic approach to life was one of the greatest strengths of the Vikings and our other Germanic ancestors, and it is a trait we would do well to cultivate today.

Contrast this, if you will, to the eminently unrealistic and impractical advice given to us by the Middle Eastern religion known as Christianity. What could be more suicidal than a faith that advises us to turn the other cheek to our enemies, and resist not evil? What could be more disastrous than a creed that says we should not worry about what we'll eat or drink or wear, but only trust that we will be provided for, like the birds and the beasts? Such advice is a prescription for disaster because it ignores the nature of the real world. It just does not fit and anyone who takes it literally is leaving himself or herself open to murder or rape or death by starvation and exposure. What a far cry from our practical and worldly-wise ancestors!

"But wait a moment", some will cry, "After all, religion is not supposed to deal with the things of this world, but must concern itself with the world to come." We of Asatru disagree! We say instead that a religion which works in the real world is preferable to one that does not. Why should we believe, as some would have us do, that there is any moral superiority in failure and impracticality? Why should a creed that fails the test in this world do any better in the next?

Asatruarar do not try to refute the existence of other realms of being, but we are aware that reports of these worlds are highly subjective and open to a variety of interpretations. The supernormal is important, but the focus of our day to day life must be here in this world. We can draw inspiration and strength from the realm of the gods, but our struggle is here and the lessons of our lives are here. A religion that does not work on this plane just does not work at all. In this respect, we who follow the old gods are both realists and idealists. We are less "otherworldly" than Christians in that we will settle for victory, success and health in this world rather than pie-in-the-sky promises of heaven after we die. What comes in the afterlife will come. Meanwhile, we do the best we can in the world in which we have to live.

What are the results of this way of thinking? Well, religion becomes a matter of living fully and loving life instead of dealing wholly with non-physical realms in a promised future. Again, it is not a denial of the non-material aspects of our ancestral religion, but simply an acknowledgement that religion has to relate, and relate successfully, with the here and now. Seen in this light, all sorts of things become infused with meaning. A walk in a leafy forest becomes a religious act. So does making love, or working on your garden, or the countless other little actions that make up the tapestry of our lives. Throw out the musty, muddled creeds that preach otherworldly rewards while denying life and happiness here! Life is to be lived, and lived fully!

Besides this affirmation of life, there is another result of the Asatru pragmatic approach - a remarkable scarcity of dogma. A religion that gives due importance to this world deals largely in matters that can be proven and tested. Things which can be demonstrated need no blind faith to enforce them. Perhaps as a result of our pragmatism, even the supernormal aspects of our religion are not encrusted with dogma. There are certain supernormal beliefs in Asatru which are essential, but discussion and debate on these tenets is encouraged within fairly wide boundaries. After all, our religion is not a revealed one handed to us as a complete kit on some holy mountain, but is natural and organic, springing from the soul of our people. It is eternally becoming. It is a tree, not a rock.

We see Asatru as a religion that makes sense in Midgard. Asatru does not ask you to accept its worth on the basis of blind faith; its value is plainly visible in the "real" world. It is a belief that can be lived by practical, proud people too free to accept unquestioning dogma.

VIGOR

It has become almost a truism to say that our ancestors were an energetic and vigorous people. The sagas and the history books give us pictures of a race full of life and eager to express that. Our heroes and gods have always valued this particular virtue. And what about us, their descendents? How have we lived up to these stringent standards?.

One still meets energetic people, but they have become more and more a rarity. Modern society, which takes such pride in its openness and freedom, is actually very restricted in some respects. We live in a closed system - a sort of spiritual feudalism - that promotes inertia and the status quo. For example, we lack vigor so we watch television. Watching TV makes us flabby and tells us through commercials, to eat junk food. Because this makes us operate at a fraction of our mental potential, we accept as true the propagandistic pseudo-world we see on the tube, and incidentally, become still more lethargic. The cycle continues. How do we break the chains?

We are afflicted with two sorts of inertia, the physical and the mental. As you might expect, they are related. Physical sluggishness can be overcome by exercise and diet, but mental sloth is harder to combat because it is not as easy to observe. We must be mentally active, thinking beings if we are to live up to our whole potential.

Much of our inactivity, both of body and brain, is a result of the convenience ethic which permeates modern life. Fast food is more convenient than a home-cooked meal. Driving is more convenient than walking. Believing the news commentary is more convenient than digging out the facts on current issues. Not thinking is more convenient than thinking. It is true, there is an attractiveness to taking the easy way. But what a price we pay! Because we are willing to eat less nutritious food, our health suffers. The automobile has coated our lungs with pollutants, made our lives nerve-wracking, and littered our landscapes with junk yards. Television has washed our brains to a smooth, shiny finish. As bad as these effects are, the price of taking the sanitized and standardized mouthings of our mass media as truth is even steeper - World War III, for example.

We have to be willing to inconvenience ourselves, to make an effort, to regain control of our lives. Shattering manacles is work which has to be done if we are going to be a free, vigorous people again. At every step of the way we will hear the seductions of those

who have a financial or political interest in keeping us lethargic. Slothful voters are easier to control, and sheep-like consumers buy more merchandise. Social pressures operate continually to keep us in line.

To fight this tendency to inertia, let us remember the positive benefits of leading an energetic, vigorous life. Exercise is not just duty performed - it makes you feel better. A home-cooked meal tastes different from a fast food burger. Having original thoughts is more satisfying than accepting the Establishment's canned opinions. By living this way, we can be happier, more fulfilled individuals, even as we live up to the high standards of our forebears. The choice, as always, is ours. Remember that not making a choice - ignoring the problem - is just another way of choosing lethargy. You are in charge! What will you choose?

ANCESTRY

Anyone who has spent much time reading about Asatru knows that we place a great deal of emphasis on the idea of ancestry. Indeed our religion is largely based upon this concept. Is this mere sentiment and nostalgia on our part - or are there deeper reasons why we are continually referring to our forebears?

The ancient lore of Asatru makes it plain that this is no modern notion. Continuity of the clan has always been important to our people, and the god Frey seems to have been specially associated with this principle. The sagas include plentiful geneologies which are much more than literary devices - after all, Icelanders were known for their ability to recite their entire lineage back to the settlement of their ice-threatened island. Clearly, these were folk to whom ancestry mattered.

From a common-sense viewpoint it's not hard to see why we should have an affinity for those of our own line. Heredity influences not only obvious things like hair color and shape of ear lobe, it also helps determine more subtle physical factors - our personal chemistry and neurology - which shape our tastes, feelings, attitudes and needs. We are quite simply going to resemble our ancestors in these ways more than we are likely to resembie people who are not our ancestors. Something of this sort is what Dr. Carl Jung meant when he said that the archetypes, or symbolic content of the unconscious mind, were hereditary rather than cultural. It's only natural that we should most identify with that which is most like us.

To those who follow Asatru, however, our links to our ancestors encompass and go beyond this. A part of our native belief tells us of certain components of the soul which are transmitted down the family line from generation to generation, hopefully growing in quality and strength as they pass from one clan member to the next. One such soul component is the fylgja, a sort of mobile magical force. Each individual has a fylgja - a "mannsfylgja" - but a group of people like a tribe or family could have one, as well - a "kynsfylgja".

Another element of the soul is the hamingja. It receives the actions of the individual and combines them with the accumulated actions of the person's forebears to produce a resultant "fate" or "orlog" (meaning "primal layers" and referring to the layers of deeds done by the ancestors of the individual). Thus, a person is directly connected to those who have gone before them in their line of descent because

they inherit these very special soul components.

These esoteric-sounding theories are strange to our twentieth-century ways of looking at things, but, unfamiliar or not, they are being confirmed by theories on the leading edge of our scientific knowledge. New ways of thinking about human memory indicate that we are influenced not only by our personal memories, but also by those belonging to our ancestors - all stored in some extra-material realm called "transform space". Beyond this are studies which seem to show that genetically similar beings can interact with each other at a distance, as if their DNA molecules served as antenna responding to the same frequency, or, alternatively, as though their individual memories and deeds were poured into a common pool. This particular phenomenon - called the "hundredth monkey effect" - does not require direct lineal descent but nonetheless does deal with specific sets of genetically similar beings. Our religious conviction that there are special bonds between kin are magnificently confirmed by these theories.

Ancestry, then, is special. We are connected to our ancestors, and to all others descended from those ancestors, in a special way. Common sense, the metaphysics of Asatru, and modern science confirm this. These holy ties give us special duties in regard to our kin, and justify the loyalties that we extend to them in preference to the rest of humanity. This way of looking at things is contrary to the dogma of this day. Nevertheless, we know in our hearts - as it was known to our forebears in the distant past, and as our growing knowledge of nature confirms - ancestry is better than schemes which would deny these truths and propose a formless, alienated, and unnatural universalism.

SUMMARY

. 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 WEAKNESS. . .
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 high 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. We 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 Asatru. 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 LETHARGY. . .
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. . .
Asatru 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.