

# HEIMDALLS HORN

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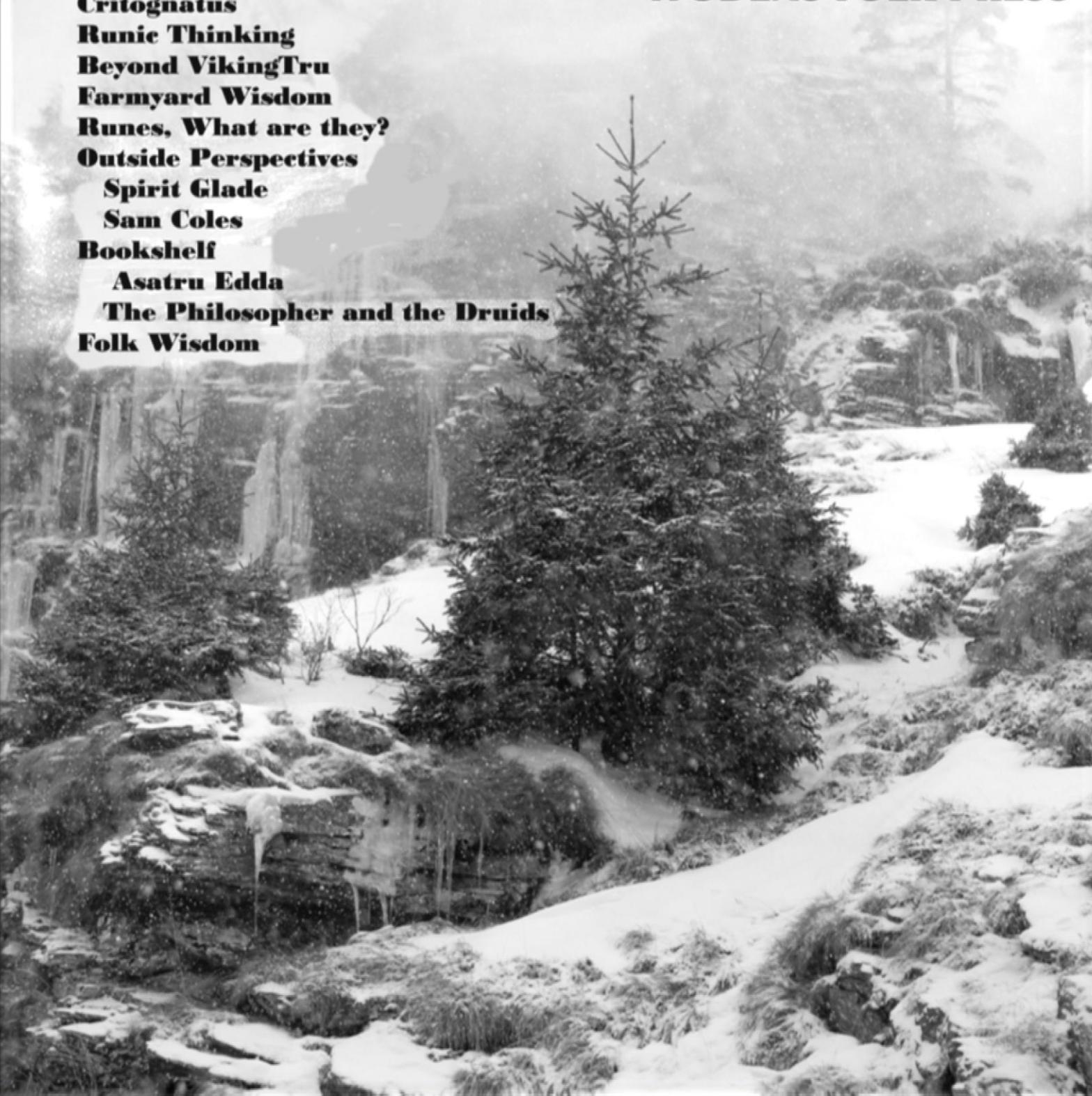
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**Winter 2009, Issue #12**

**WODENS FOLK PRESS**



# Heimdalls Horn

Winter 2009 – Issue #12

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Wodens Folk Press

13992 Taylor Lane

Oregon City, OR 97045



# The Opening Blast

## “Enough is Enough”

I am not precisely sure how or when it became fashionable to belittle the culture of our ancestors in scholarly circles, but I have to say that I am really fed up with it. The commentary I've seen on Odin in several books is a prime example. Several scholars opine that Odin was seen as "untrustworthy" or "fickle" by our ancestors, and while I can offer solid arguments against these points of view, these scholars are not nearly as offensive as the ones that claim Odin was an oathbreaker and participated in homosexuality. It would be different if the

scholars actually made good-faith efforts to put the evidence they use into its context, but they do not. Worse, some Heathens pick up these negative ideas without question and then try to build a view of Odin that eventually becomes too confusing to grasp. I'll use the slanders leveled at Odin as an example of how we as Heathens can look at these inaccuracies, see through them, and come to our own conclusions.

The first, and most common, insult to Odin claims that he is an oathbreaker. To justify

this slander, Odin's critics point both to his conduct during his quest to win the mead and to his alleged "fickle" abandonment of his heroes in battle. Placing this supposed evidence in a Heathen context will immediately clear Odin's name. In winning the mead, Odin spun a web of deception that completely overcame his adversaries. Yes, he swore false oaths to Gunnloth, and yes, he lied to her kinsmen who came in search of "Bolverk", as Odin called himself among the giants. But before we are critical of Odin's behavior, remember that the mead came into the giants' possession through a string of thefts and murders, and one of the murder victims was Kvasir, a kinsmen of the gods. Added to that is the fact that the giants are the enemies of gods and men, and so they are not entitled to honesty and fair-dealing.

Odin won this victory through deceiving his enemies. In our ancestors' world, this held no stigma. They would find the modern ideal of being honest with everyone regardless of the circumstances to be laughable at best. Odin's oaths to Gunnloth and her kin had no validity in the law of the gods because the giants had no place in that law. Our ancestors understood that, and they therefore did not see Odin as an oathbreaker.

The charge that Odin abandons his favorites is also out of context. Odin's concern is Ragnarok; all else is secondary. When it is time for a hero to take his place in Valhalla, then that hero will fall. Odin never promises these men they will live forever. He does promise fame and glory, and on these promises he delivers. What a modern reader might see as "fickle" is really all part of the larger plan. If these heroes are unhappy about leaving Midgard, this is understandable, but we should not criticize Odin for that.

The second slander against Odin is an attempt to paint him as having participated in homosexuality. This charge centers around Odin's use of *seithr* and the description of that magic as "ergi" in Old Norse. The term "ergi" means "shameful" or "unmanly", and while it may fit modern conceptions to conclude that these meanings include homosexuality, our ancestors had a different view. To be "unmanly" was to not live up to the masculine ideals of the day. As a parallel, there are many things in our society that could be called unmanly but are far from being gay. Added to this is the fact that our ancestors had zero tolerance for homosexuality in their society, a reality testified to from the time of Tacitus all the way through the saga age.

Men and women who practiced seithr were persecuted because people feared this magic. It was "shameful" because it could be used against people who could not defend themselves. Burning an enemy in his hall was shameful, too, but no one accuses hall-burners of being sexual deviants. Loki launches this accusation at Odin in Lokasenna, but Loki is full of lies, both in this poem and elsewhere, and we do Odin a disservice to take the Trickster at his word.

There is another aspect of contextual analysis that undermines both the insults to Odin. Oathbreakers and sexual deviants were considered "nithings" to our ancestors. A nithing was the lowest form of unrepentant degenerate. They were, at least, expelled from the community. Oftentimes they were killed out of hand. Is it likely that our people saw Odin as a nithing? Would they have fought to the death to retain his cult if they saw him as an untrustworthy pervert? Not likely.

We could argue for days about why some scholars slander our culture. There are many reasons, but often the underlying problem is that many of them do not see our way as a legitimate belief system, whether followed by our ancestors or by us in the present. Because of this, we must be careful in how we accept their conclusions. It is better for us to become confident enough in our knowledge of the lore so that we do not need the advice or opinions of those who have no respect for our way.

This type of confidence will only come from open-minded and diligent study of both the literature and culture of our ancestors, which is something we should be doing anyway. Then we can come to our own conclusions and use the facts to counter the baseless slanders some would level at our culture, our people, and our gods.

**By: Thorstein,  
Woden's Folk Kindred**

# Heathen Heros

## Palinatoki

A wealthy man named Toki lived in eastern Denmark in the mid-tenth century. He had two sons named Aki and Palin by his wife and another son Fjolnir by a servant girl. When Toki died, Fjolnir demanded to inherit like a legitimate son, and when his brothers denied him, he went to the court of King Harald Gormson and became the king's man.

Fjolnir stirred up the king's suspicions against Aki, and so when Aki journeyed to visit his friend Jarl Ottar in Sweden, the king sent men to ambush and kill Aki on his way home. Aki's brother Palin wanted vengeance for the killing but was unsure what to do. One of his friends advised him to seek Jarl Ottar's daughter in marriage, and Palin won her hand. They returned to Palin's land in Denmark where Palin bore a son who was called Palinatoki.

Palinatoki grew up on his father's lands. Palin died when the boy was about fifteen, and Palinatoki took over his father's possessions. He went out raiding in the summer and became known as a cunning and brave commander.



When he was twenty, Palinatoki took his ships to the British Isles. He went to Wales, but when the local chieftain, who was also a Norseman, heard he was near, he invited him to a feast as a friend. Palinatoki went to the feast and married Alof the chieftain's daughter. He was also assured of rulership in Wales when his wife's father died. Palinatoki then returned home to Denmark with his wife.

Not long after Palinatoki returned home, King Harald passed that part of Denmark. The king came to stay with Palinatoki, and while he was there he shared his bed with one of Palinatoki's servant girls. That girl later bore a son named Svein, and though the king did not acknowledge him, everyone agreed that was Harald's son.

Palinatoki raised Svein in his home. When Svein was fifteen, Palinatoki advised him to go to the king and ask for ships because the king would probably be shamed into giving him some. Palinatoki promised to give Svein as many ships as the king provided. The king gave Svein the ships, and with these and the others he gained the following year, Svein harried in his father's kingdom.

Eventually, the king moved against Svein, but Palinatoki had anticipated this and promised Svein his aid. Harald and Svein had an indecisive battle that left Svein penned in aboard the king's ships. That evening, as the king prepared to destroy Svein the following day, Palinatoki arrived with two dozen ships. Palinatoki set out alone in search of where the king would camp on shore, and when he found Harald, he shot him from afar with an arrow. The king fell dead, and Palinatoki, having

finally gotten vengeance for his uncle Aki, fled unseen. His uncle Fjornir was with the king and retrieved Palinatoki's arrow.

That same night, Palinatoki helped Svein break out of the fjord, and the next day, Harald's men surrendered and acclaimed Svein as king. As soon as this was done, Palinatoki took his men to Wales where his father-in-law had died as it was necessary to establish his claim to rule.

Svein still did not know who had shot the arrow that killed his father the king. He invited Palinatoki to come to him for a feast several times, but Palinatoki always found a reason to stay away. As time passed, Svein became offended, and Palinatoki had to come to him. At the feast, Fjornir showed the arrow that killed King Harald and asked if anyone knew whose it was. Palinatoki acknowledged his arrow and the fact that his shot had killed the king. Svein grew angry and ordered his men to seize Palinatoki, but the men were loath to do so. Palinatoki was able to escape, and on his way to the door, he struck Fjornir dead. There was no friendship between Palinatoki and Svein after that.

Shortly after this, Palinatoki's wife Alof died. When he had ensured his kinsmen would oversee his lands in Denmark and Wales, Palinatoki gathered many ships and raided in Scotland and

Ireland for three years. Having won great fame and wealth there, he turned his ships toward the Baltic.

King Burislav of Wendland was afraid to see Palinatoki approach, so he tried the same tactic that had stayed the Viking's hand in Wales—he invited him to a feast and offered gifts and friendship. This time the offer did not include a wife. Instead, Burislav offered a tract of land for Palinatoki and his men to settle on, rule, and defend. Palinatoki accepted and settled with his men in the district of Jom, which is probably the important trading region at the mouth of the Oder River.

Palinatoki and his men built a fortress there and set rules for the warriors who would be accepted into their company so their fame would be greater than any other. They set age limits, were bound to each other as kin, agreed to divide all spoils, and submitted to the justice of Palinatoki in all things. They were called Jomsvikings and were the most famous and feared of men. Many great men joined them, including Palinatoki's kinsman Bui, his grandson Vagn who was an accomplished warrior and leader at age twelve, and the famous brothers Sigvaldi and Thorkel the Tall who were the sons of Jarl Harald of Zealand.

Palinatoki led the Jomsvikings for nearly ten years. In that time he repeatedly showed not only courage but wisdom and justice. When he finally fell ill, King Burislav came to him to ask who should lead the Jomsvikings, and the king accepted Palinatoki's choice of Sigvaldi but agreed when the old viking said, "It seems to me that all of them fall somewhat short of what I have been." Palinatoki died of the sickness, and after his death the Jomsvikings were never as powerful as they had been in his life.

The life of Palinatoki is inspiring in many ways. His heroism, wisdom, and honor hold up everything that is great about our people, and his lifelong quest for fame and adventure are perfect examples of the drive that has propelled our people around the world, to the moon, and beyond.

Palinatoki also offers an excellent illustration of the Heathen concept of *wyrd*. Too often the term *wyrd* is used to mean fate, which implies both predestination and an absence of free will. This is not how our ancestors understood *wyrd*. *Wyrd* is the force of the past as it is active in the present. This past includes our own past actions, past of our family, and the past of our people. All of these pasts are active in our present, and sometimes that force is very strong, but having to deal with consequences of the past is different from being a slave to it.

It is this concept that Palinatoki demonstrates. He was born carrying the weight of a blood feud with the king of Denmark. The sagas makes clear that his father always considered Palinatoki would be the instrument of the family's vengeance, and in our ancestors' world, this was not an obligation that could be lightly cast aside.

Palinatoki's wyrd was a deadly struggle against a dangerous enemy, but it is what he did with that wyrd that is important. He did not take the easy path of reconciliation with an unrepentant king, nor did he take the foolish path of engaging in a hopeless open fight. Instead he patiently laid the foundations for vengeance, all the while feigning friendship with the king. We do not know if he purposely worked to have Svein conceived, but regardless, once he was born, Palinatoki expertly guided him down the path that would make the king vulnerable. Then, when the moment was right, Palinatoki struck and turned what seemed like an impossible obligation into victory.

This is exactly how we should view our wyrd and how it effects us. We cannot change the past. This includes where we were born, who our family is, or any of the things we have already done in this world. What we can do is

use our minds and our wills to work with our wyrd to build the best possible future for ourselves, our kin, and our people. While we cannot change what is already done, both by us and others, we decide how we move forward, and so while we acknowledge the power of the past, we must never forget that we create our future.

For those who might be skeptical of what can be accomplished under the weight of a wyrd that threatens to crush us, look at Palinatoki, a man whose will, courage, and wisdom swung the fate of nations and worked vengeance on a king. If he can do that, we can do anything.

Hail Palinatoki!

By: Thorstein,

Woden's Folk Kindred

# Critognatus

## Nine noble virtues of a Celtic Warrior

In the first century before the Common Era, the power of the Roman Empire was expanding all across the known world. Rome's legions subdued people after people, nation after nation, and they forced the conquered to Romanize their culture. The fiercely independent Celts of Gaul fought valiantly to retain their freedom, but they were finally defeated by Julius Caesar at the famous battle of Alesia.



Alesia was a desperate struggle for both sides, and it highlighted the courage and tenacity of both the Romans and the Celts. Caesar's legions had the Celtic army confined to the fortified city of Alesia, but the Celtic tribes were massing a huge last-ditch relief force. To counter this force, Caesar's men built another wall to keep the relief force at bay.

The Celts inside Alesia soon ran out of food, and no word was had from the relief force. In this most desperate hour, with the whole of Gaul at stake, the defenders of Alesia called for a council of war. One of the Celtic leaders, Critognatus of the Arverni, gave wise but stark counsel to his people. His words have been preserved for us, and we can learn from them still. "Of their opinion, who call a most disgraceful slavery by the name of surrender, I propose to say nothing; I hold that they should not be treated as citizens nor invited to the council. Let my business be with those who approved a sortie; and in their design, by your general agreement, there seems to remain a memory of ancient courage. This is faint-heartedness of yours, not courage, to be unable to endure want for a short space. It is easier to find men to fling themselves recklessly on death than to find men to endure pain patiently. And yet I might now have approved of this view (so much weight with me has the authority of those who hold it) if I saw therein the

loss of nothing but our lives. But in making our decision we should have regard to the whole of Gaul, which we have aroused to our assistance. What, think ye, will be the spirits of our friends and kinsmen, when eighty thousand men have been slain in one spot, if they are forced to fight out the issue almost over our very bodies? Refuse to rob of your support the men who for your deliverance have disregarded their own peril; forbear by folly, recklessness, or weak-mindedness of yours to lay prostrate and subject to everlasting slavery the whole of Gaul. Or do you doubt their faithfulness, their resolution, because they are not arrived to the day? What then? Do ye think that the Romans are daily engaged in those outer trenches for mere amusement? If it may not be that your resolve should be strengthened by messages from your friends, since every approach is blocked, yet take the Romans here as your witnesses that their coming draws nigh; and it is in fear thereof that they are busy in their works day and night. What then, is my counsel? To do what our forefathers did in the war, in no wise equal to this, with the Cimbri and Teutones. They shut themselves into the towns, and under stress of a like scarcity sustained life on the bodies of those whose age showed them useless for war, and delivered not themselves to the enemy. And if we had not a precedent for this, I should still have judged it a most glorious thing for the sake

of liberty to set such a one and hand it down to posterity. For wherein was that war like this? The Cimbri devastated Gaul, they brought great disaster upon us, yet they departed at length from our borders and sought other countries, leaving us our rights, laws, lands, liberty. But the Romans-what else do they seek or desire than to follow where envy leads, to settle in the lands and states of men whose noble report and marital strength they have learnt, and to bind upon them a perpetual slavery? 'Tis in no other fashion they have waged wars. And if you know not what is afoot among distant nations, look now on Gaul close at hand, which has been reduced to a province, with utter change of rights and laws, and crushed beneath the axes in everlasting slavery."

Critognatus' counsel was hard but wise. By the sacrifice of their elderly, who had lived a full life and would surely perish before the Romans in any event, the Gauls would be able to maintain the strength of their warriors and put off the fight until their countrymen could come to their aid. His counsel laid bare the facts and exposed that what most men thought was the height or courage was actually the height of foolishness. He pointed out that in their circumstances the true courage was in the discipline of being able to submit daily to the privations of war. The Gauls had martial bravery in plenty, but it was their lack of discipline and perseverance which undid them.

In the end, they lacked the resolve to carry out the measures their grandfathers had used against the Cimbri and Teutones. Instead, they sent all the extra mouths into the no-man's-land to vainly beg for the mercy of the Romans. When their kinsmen came to relieve them, they were but a shadow of their former strength and neither they nor the relief force could break the Romans. The courage, discipline, and perseverance of the Roman legions carried the day.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, Julius Caesar's victory over the Gauls at Alesia, the counsels of Critognatus have come down to us today. The wise words of this Celtic warrior still have something to offer us two thousand years later. His words give us cause to question what we call courage and to examine virtue in general. Thomas Jefferson wisely said that the judgment of virtue lies in its utility. It is in this light that Critognatus rightly counseled his countrymen that a rush of the Roman lines would be folly and the cowardly option. He does not mean that those men are not brave, but that the situation calls for a greater, more disciplined courage. He also rightly calls attention to their duty and responsibility to their countrymen.

Today, few of us are likely to find ourselves in such perils as the ancient Gauls. Nonetheless, the counsels of Critognatus should help us to better understand the power of the Nine Noble virtues to help us in our own lives. If the fate of nations may not hang on our actions, a look to this proud Celt's words should show us that our actions impact all those around us and that we have a duty to family and friend, kith and kin, to live as virtuous men.

Hail to our glorious ancestors! Hail to the counsel of Critognatus!

Berk Harbin,  
Woden's Folk Kindred

**Note:**

This is the beginning of a several part series on the Nine Noble Virtues. Each part will discuss in detail a virtue or virtues, its importance to our people, and examples in the lore. There have been many writings on the virtues and there will be many more. They are bedrock principles that can never be over emphasized. I will be discussing such things as how the virtues came about and what the consequences were for those that failed to live these standards.

In the beginning of creation, there was no order, only the chaos embodied in the thurs Ymir,

and from him are all the giants descended. It was only through the sons of Bur; Odin, Vili, and Ve that order came to the cosmos. With order came consequence. It is because of consequence that we have come up with our morals and standards of behavior. If we act outside these standards, negative consequences usually follow.

Our ancestors lived by a strict set of standards, and they expected the people of their family and community to live by them as well. Those that refused to live by these standards were usually shunned and often times killed. There was no place in the community for someone who would not respect others or who could not be trusted. In the war like times of our ancestors a coward was the worst kind of person. This person could not be counted on to defend the community or to cover his neighbors' flank in a shield wall. There are many virtues that our Heathen ancestors lived, and today we call them the Nine Noble Virtues.

To be virtuous is to possess a commendable quality or qualities. It is a person who maintains a moral excellence. This person is not perfect by any means but they strive everyday to maintain a virtuous state. To be noble is to be proud or of a superior state. You walk with your head held high, never ashamed,

and proud of who you are.

There is no ancient text like the Eddas that contain a list of these virtues, but it is from the Havamal, sagas, and the stories of the gods and goddesses that we have come to learn these virtues. Modern Heathens, after studying the lore, recognized certain virtues that are prevalent amongst the gods and heroes of the sagas, and they made a list of these virtues. A reason for doing this was to help establish a path or set of guidelines that modern Heathens should strive to live by. Our faith is not dogmatic, but because our lore is spread throughout so many different sources, simple things like creating a list of virtues helps bring it all together.

Why nine? Nine was an important number to our ancestors signifying completion. The nine virtues that will be discussed here are: industriousness, perseverance, self-reliance, fidelity, hospitality, discipline, courage, truth, and honor. This is not the universal list. This particular list of virtues is the one I prefer, but if there are other virtues you would like to add or use in the place of these, then that is your choice.

# Runic Thinking

## The Rune-Shield

Svalin is the name of a shield which stands before the sun, before the shining god; mountain and sea I know would burn up if it fell away from in front.<sup>1</sup>

Shields have played an important role among the Indo-European peoples for thousands of years. Tacitus, writing in the first century BCE, said the Germanic tribes would not conduct business without being armed with



<sup>1</sup> Larrington, 57.

shield and spear, and received these same weapons upon their rite of passage into adulthood.<sup>2</sup> The shield represented a man's honor and pride. To throw it away in battle was to throw away his place in the community. He could no longer participate in sacrifice (blot) or assembly (thing), and a shamed warrior would often hang himself to end his disgrace.<sup>3</sup>

In "Skaldskaparmal", Snorri mentions that ancient shields were usually decorated around the border or "circle" area.<sup>4</sup> Earl Hakon gave Einar Skalaglam a shield "adorned with legends, and between the carving it was overlaid with gold and embossed with jewels."<sup>5</sup> Such a gift, aside from carrying great value, was a mark of honor on both giver and receiver as well as a symbol of their relationship to one another. Ragnar Lodbrok was said to have given a shield to Bragi Boddason, the first skaldic poet, that depicted mythical themes such as Thor fighting the World Serpent and the plough Gefjun used to carve out Zealand. Because our northern European ancestors placed such a high value on poetry, it was not unusual for kings or jarls to present a shield to a poet, and for the skald to gift some verses about the shield in return. Thjodolf of Hvin's "Haustlong" is one example of a shield-poem. In it, he describes Thor's showdown

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus, 112.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 106-107

<sup>4</sup> Sturluson, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Thorsson, 167.

with Hrungrir and the kidnapping of Idunn.<sup>6</sup>

Portraying events involving heroes on shields was not an art limited to northern Indo-Europeans. In ancient Greece, Homer spoke of the divine smith Hephaistos carving on Achilles' shield:

The Earth and the Sky, and the Sea, the untiring Sun and the full Moon, and all the stars that encircle the sky-Peiiades and Hyades, Orion the mighty hunter and the Bear (which men also call the Wain) which revolves in its place and watches Orion, and alone of them all never takes a bath in the ocean.<sup>7</sup>

This shield displayed the constellations as they were known in the classical world. Unfortunately, we do not know about the naming of constellations in the North to say with certain that the mythic scenes on Teutonic shields are based on the stars, although it seems a likely possibility. Orion, with his belt of three bright stars, may very well have been Thor in the Scandinavian sky, wearing his belt of power. The frequency with which Thor appears on decorated shields and the ease of spotting Orion in the night sky may be another indication of this constellation's northern identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Turville-Petre, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Homer, 225.

The stanza from Grimnismal (38) that opens this article speaks "of a shield that stands before the sun", without which the earth "would burn up;" that is, without the protection of the sky, and particularly the night sky, the sun would cause all the water to evaporate and the the land to become desolate. Svalin, as this "shield" is called, appears again in Sigdrifumal (st.15) at the head of a list of places where runestaves should be carved. The two stanzas preceding this can be interpreted as the creation or "discovery" of the futhark, whereby Mimir tells the "true letters" to Odin (Hropt), who "cuts them" (gives them physical form or shape). These stanzas suggest that Mimir points out (not literally, as he's just a head) the runes in the stars to Odin, who, drunk on the mead of inspiration, translates these symbols in the sky into earthly letters.

All were scraped off, those which were carved on, and scattered with the sacred mead and sent on wandering ways they are among the Aesir, they are among the elves, some are with the wise Vanir, some with humankind.<sup>8</sup>

This stanza immediately follows the list of places to cut runestaves. The reference to "shaving off" what was "carved on" has parallels in

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<sup>8</sup> Larrington, 169.

Skirnismal (st. 36) and in both of which speak of wiping away magic spells like one would erase a chalkboard.<sup>9</sup>

For those runes which are written on the shield only the light of day would erase them. But with the new dawn, the runes are not destroyed-rather they are mixed into the mead of inspiration to await being drawn again another night. It is up to each of us, just as it was to Odin, to drink deeply of Odroerir, study the shield Svalin, and discover the runes once more.

Jayson Hawkins  
Woden's Folk Kindred

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<sup>9</sup> Thorson, 141.

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# Beyond VikingTru

The anomie of the modern world for ethnic Europeans, stripped of any sense of personal rootedness or ancestry, has left us starved for true connections to our past. Many of us came to Asatru as part of a broader Awakening to the roots of our being and the broader culture that we belong to as a Folk. Unfortunately, Asatru has become a revivalist playground for some in our community, a Society For Creative Anachronism or renaissance fair touched with religious overtones.

This is an unfortunate byproduct of these first steps back into the cultural flow of our people. However, it must not be our future if we are to develop a healthy and full spirituality connected with the life of our Gods and ancestors of our people. What then is the way ahead?



Most importantly, we must come to understand that we are not Vikings. The Vikings are only one expression of who we have been. We must each live in our own time, while respecting those who came before us and our cultural foundations. It seems that many people are unable to find our Gods in the present moment, and they therefore seek back in time for them. Our Gods do not remain in the past. They are with us today, and have both pride in our accomplishments and hope for our future. We must reach for them in the present moment if we are to have a real relationship with them today.

I am not saying that we must remove elements that we feel are traditional to our ancestors from our worship. There are accents that can add an interesting flavor to the special times we set apart for our Gods. However, when we attempt to "recreate" previous ages, or say that our Gods would be more comfortable in settings from the time of the vikings, we fall into the fallacy of believing our Gods are not with us in the present moment or that they have not moved time with us.

Our Gods were not born in the 800s. They lived long before we counted time, and will live with our people always. Just as our ancestors met them in the terms of their age, so must we develop a true relationship in our own time. A real

relationship goes beyond the outer form to an inner essence of trust and care for one another. We must find our Gods in our hearts and minds today, and then we can move from there into expressions of that relationship if it is to be more than a carnival or ecotourism event devoid of spirituality.

Obviously the Viking image is a big draw to our Folk community. Their daring exploits, heroic lifestyles and even their aesthetic expressions are in clear opposition to the drab, lifeless uniformity of the modern world. They are like heroes that walked out of the pages of modern adventure tales.

However, we need neither viking dress nor armaments to live up to those ideals found in the Havamal or to live heroic lives. Today we can live in such a way that our descendants will one day raise a cup to our memory as well, just as we do those heroes of our past. The will to accomplish these things does not come from ancient clothing; it comes from within. To idolize the past without creating the best parts of it in the present is just a dodge of personal responsibility and action. Looking like a person who lived a noble life will not make you noble. Nobility comes from the choices we make, not the swords we wear. We are not our clothes; we are our deeds.

Today, as the first shoot of new life springs forth after the disastrous wildfire that has consumed our people recently, it is good to look back and as said in the Voluspa "call the mighty past to mind." We, the great and mighty seed of Yggdrasil, must grow up straight and strong, firmly rooted in our ancient heritage as we rise back toward the Sun. We must remain vigilant that we do not become still-born, entwined around our roots, but instead lift our hearts and minds toward the future for our Folk and our children. We hear the call of our Gods today, and live up to the noble example of heroes of the past in our present and future. The struggle is not done, it is barely beginning, and we need you in the present to live out the promise of our people.

Mark Walls  
Woden's Folk Kindred



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# Farmyard Wisdom

In this article my endeavor is to show the relationship between both boars and pigs and the Aryan peoples and how these animals played a major role in our ancestors' lives. This relationship was both physical, as a source of food, and spiritual as a symbol of the fertile nature of the Vanic Gods Frey and Freya. Since the rise of Christianity there has been a constant war against the pig because it was seen as "unclean" by the Jews. They are the villains of George Orwell's anti-utopian novel *Animal Farm*, and their name is reserved for the most despicable of people. Happily, none of the rumors are true. We Heathens have a much different relationship with this animal, and our history goes back many years.

## Heathen History

For modern Heathens, this symbol and worthy animal should be brought back to the forefront of our lives. It was a custom among our Folk at Yule to lay hands on a boar while swearing oaths, and then to sacrifice it for good harvests<sup>10</sup>. This is not possible for everyone among our Folk yet, but there is a custom in

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<sup>10</sup> The "Sonarblot" is depicted in *Helgakvitha Hjovarthssonar* 4 and *Hervarar Saga* 10 where the sacrificial boar (Sonargoltr) was sacrificed in this manner.

Sweden and Denmark at Yule to bake a loaf in the form of a boar, and that is open to everyone. This boar was called the Yule-Boar, and was usually made with the last sheaves of corn to come in out of the fields<sup>11</sup>. The Yule-boar stood on the table throughout Yule, and sometimes even up until the first Spring sowing when parts were sown with the seed corn of the new crop and other parts were given to the ploughmen and plow-horses in expectation of a harvest. I will describe the sacrifice of pigs later in this article for those of you that would like to return to the full way of our ancestors in this.



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Cleanliness and Cost-effectiveness given the chance (that is, not being confined to a pen the size of a linen closet), pigs may be the cleanest of all farm animals. More importantly, they are among

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<sup>11</sup> Frazer, J *The Golden Bough*, 462-463

best converters of feed to meat and can make use of pasturing, table scraps, and garden surpluses to reduce feed costs. In only five or six months, they will provide an average of 150 pounds of products. They also require relatively little space and care and are the smartest of farm animals. Beware, they are also very easy to make into pets, a very negative factor if you plan to eat a sacrifice them.

### **Breeds**

With pigs, as with most farm animals, there is no one outstanding breed. Your choice will be based on personal preference. Rather than trying to choose anyone breed, you should concentrate on finding outstanding specimens within a given breed. Pigs are categorized in two broad groups: lean (meat) and fat. Years ago when such "fatty" products as salt pork and lard were in demand, the lard type of pig was more common. In recent years through selective breeding pigs have lost the excess fat and most of them are now of the leaner meat type. These meat types are cheaper to raise, because less food goes into the production of fat. The most common breeds are: American, Berkshire, Chester White, Duroc, Hampshire, and Yorkshire.

### **Starting Out**

Pigs are usually farrowed in the Spring

and early Fall. To start, I would suggest buying a Spring shoat (weaned piglet). This pig will be raised over the Summer and butchered in Fall, so there will be no need for winter housing. In addition, more table scraps and garden surplus are available in Summer, and it is easier to learn about the care of an animal during the Summer. It is also best to raise more than one piglet at a time. Pigs are social animals, and two will grow faster and more economically than one. If your family wants only one, get your kindred or like-minded Heathens to go in with you on it. It is a great way of bringing your community together. Never when there are two pigs around will only one of them be eating. Keep an eye out for bullying by one of the pigs. If one of the pigs is getting short-changed because of another's "pigishness", feed them at different locations.

A feeder pig (one raised for meat) should be fed as much food as it will clean up between feedings. If there is a lot of feed left over from the previous feeding, cut down to avoid waste. I feed our pigs three times a day for the first three months, and twice a day from then on. This, however, is not critical, and if three times a day is inconvenient, then don't worry about it.

It is not economical to raise a pig beyond 200-225 pounds. A simple and accurate formula for estimating weight is:  $\text{Weight} = \text{girth} \times \text{girth} \times \text{length}$

divided by 400. (All measurements are in inches.) The girth is the measurement around the body of the pig just to the rear of the front legs. The length is from the base of the tail to a point between the ears. If the weight is less than 150 pounds, then add 7 pounds to the total. For example, if a pig measures 40 inches in girth and 43 inches in length, it weighs 172 pounds.  $(40 \times 40 \times 43 = 68,800 / 400 = 172)$  <sup>12</sup>

Pig housing can be as elaborate as you want or as your pocketbook will tolerate, but you can get by with a small area and minimal expense. Unless you live in a warm climate, buy a pig for Fall slaughter and forget about Winter housing. Three fence materials that can be used are wood, wiremesh, and electric fencing. Each of them have their strengths based on your location, needs, and budget. For flooring, the three main ones are small dirt floor pens, wood or concrete lined pens, and long pasture pens. Depending on what land you have available, and your initiative, some of these systems might offer you substantial savings. If your pigs get out, they are very difficult to catch, so build with that in mind.

Another option to keeping your pig in a

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<sup>12</sup> This and other pieces of valuable farmyard wisdom can be found in Stephen Tomas' **Backyard Livestock**, ISBN-10: 0-88150-760-1, The Countryman Press, PO Box 748, Woodstock, VT 05091.

tight cage is to pasture feed it. If given pasture, a pig will graze like horses or sheep, and a pig may get up to half of its intake of nutrients this way. I use reinforcement rod posts to build large movable pasture pens to keep my pigs managed but able to find the best areas. Pigs will act like a roto-tiller on hard, compacted earth as root in the ground. Once the grass gets eaten down it is important that they be moved to better pasture. They will find a way to food other miss, which will leave you with a lot of trouble.

Shade and water must be provided in these grazing areas, especially in hot climates. Water is the cheapest of the essential nutrients in any animal's diet, and the lack of a steady supply of clean and cool water is a sure way to hurt your animals and their ability to grow.

It is also good to let a pasture rest for a few years after keeping pigs or any other animal on it. Just as with mono-cropping vegetables, pests can quickly multiply and hurt your pigs.

### **Purchase**

When you purchase your pigs, be sure it is from a reputable dealer. A cheap pig may not be a good deal, and a reputable dealer will be able to give you a history of their raising. Definitely ask if any vaccinations have been given or if the piglets have been wormed. Pigs are weaned at about four

weeks of age and sold at six to eight weeks. Piglets at six weeks of age have been weaned from their mothers and are eating dry food on their own. All male pigs destined for the table should be castrated at about this age, unless are destined for the sacrificial offering.

Choose the largest and most active piglet the dealer has available. Look for qualities like a long, lean body with large hips and shoulders. Arrange for your pig early in the season, and pick them up early. You should refuse any animal that appears listless, or sickly, coughs, or shows other signs of disease. A purchase is the foundation for a experience with your pig.

### **Extended information**

If you are interested in going beyond just raising seasonal pigs, I would suggest you get several years of experience under your belt first. If you keep a sow and breed her, after a year you will break even and perhaps even show a profit while keeping your family and friends in meat raised in a healthy manner. Unless you plan on a large operation, I would not suggest buying a boar. They are more difficult and expensive to keep, and in general are not worth the trouble unless you have a real need for them. A gilt (female piglet) will reach puberty at five months, but should weigh 200-250 pounds before she is bred. While you can breed a sow

on her first heat, larger litters usually result when gilts are bred on their third or fourth heat period.

Sows that are in heat may mount other sows, which is a sign for the observant breeder. The vulva will become red and swollen with an often white discharge. The heat period lasts from one to three days, and will return about every 16 24 days until she is pregnant. The gestation period for a litter is 114 days, and you can be relatively sure she is bred if she doesn't go back into heat. About three weeks before faring (birth), when viewed from the side, her teats will appear enlarged and her stomach will sag a bit. When milk can be stripped from the teats, farrowing will occur in twenty-four hours. On the day of farrowing, some people do not feed their pigs. Once labor begins, it should take an hour or two. To ensure healthy pigs and sows during farrowing:

1. Keep the pens clean with lye and scalding water;
2. Clean the sow, particularly her udders, just before farrowing.
3. After farrowing, take the sow and her litter to a clean pasture.

Young pigs are particularly susceptible to roundworm infestations. These are worms of considerable size, and during part of their life-cycle, migrate through both the liver and lungs. Several good wormers are available to eliminate

these parasites. In addition to roundworms, there are several other types of worms that live in the intestinal tract, but most are effectively controlled with a combination of worming and good sanitation. One disease that I would strongly recommend vaccinating against is diamond skin disease, which can cause a lot of trouble on your farm with your pigs.

### Slaughter or Sacrifice

Slaughtering a pig is not a small operation that can be taken care of between halves of a football game. The pig must be shot or stuck and bled, dipped in hot water, and have its hair scraped off. Then it must be gutted, split and set to chill in a freezer until totally chilled before the carcass can be cut up.

If you intend for your hog to be used in a blot, I would suggest sticking and bleeding the pig. I think the sound of a gun going off would be a buzzkill for any blot. Sticking is easily done. Simply calm the pig by talking soothingly to it until you can get it to lie on its side. Once there, if you work calmly you can tie its front and back legs together after which you straddle the pig and insert a sharp knife just below the curve of its jawbone, and quickly push down through the neck. If you intend to keep the blood for you blot, you should have a ceremonial bowl ready to receive it. Never

forget to thank the animal for its life. If you remain calm and work swiftly, the blot should go well and be an uplifting experience for everyone involved. It is best though to have some experience slaughtering animals outside of a ritual setting before enacting it before our Gods and Folk. You will know when you are ready.

Pigs are one of the best farm animals, though greatly maligned in American culture by the Jewish religious laws forbidding their consumption. To our ancestors, great heed was paid to the worth of pigs, and as we again return to the land and the life-flow of our people, it would do us good to once again join in a relationship with these fantastic farm animals. When grown well they are a healthy and productive food choice for our people.

Jim Schweizer



# What Are the Runes? One Odinists Perspective

What exactly are the runes? Are they something material? Are they something spiritual? Are they something in our individual minds? Or are they all these things and more? I would like to discuss some of these questions because I feel the subject of runes in our religion is a troubling topic since so many of us view them differently.

At their most basic level, runes are used as a form of writing. I will stay away from calling them an “alphabet” because they are actually a “futhark”. The name alphabet is used when describing a group of letters that start with “A,B, etc”; In other words, Alpha -Beta, which is where the name alphabet comes from. So, when I say futhark, I am speaking of our runic script.

What does the word rune mean? Runes are far more than mere letters designed for information exchange. The word rune has connotations of mystery. The word originally came from the Indo-European root “ru”, which meant “a mysterious or secret thing.” In Old High German, the word “runa” meant a whisperer, which refers to “one who knows,” a

“wise woman,” or a “cunning man.” In the Anglo-Saxon poem “Beowulf”, the king's counselor is called a “runwita”, which is a wise man who knows secrets. We should all know the stanzas in the Havamal where Odin sacrifices himself to himself. It tells us:

I know that I hung on the windswept tree  
For nine days and nine nights.  
Stuck with a spear,  
Bloodied for Odin,  
Myself an offering to myself,  
Bound to that tree  
Whose roots no one knows where they go.  
No one gave me bread,  
No one gave me drink.  
Down into the depths I looked  
To take up the runes.  
Screaming, I fell back from that place.

Here is one view I would like to present: Odin fasted and fell into a trance, and he then had a vision or “flash of insight.” At this time both sides of his brain, analytical and intuitive, were linked by a united response, which is a very rare occurrence in humans.

Odin's vision has scientific backing. In Nigel Pennick's book *Complete Illustrated Guide to the Runes*, he states that “neurophysiologists have discovered what they call 'phospheres', geometrical shapes and images in the brain's visual cortex and neural system. Phospheres are present in everyone. We can see them with shut eyes. They also appear to us when our consciousness is altered, such as in

a trance or during meditation, when geometric shapes resembling alphabetic letters often appear in the early stages of the trance state.”

This is what I was suggesting when talking about Odin's sacrifice. He entered a state of mind that allowed him to gain access to his whole brain. This is something all of us aspire to do to gain the insight of the runes that Odin achieved. We have been given of what Odin received, but until we have our own insight or vision, that is all we will have.

With that said, I believe that the runes are something inside each of us waiting to be awakened. This is just my opinion, but I always say “gather enough information on a topic or belief, then form your opinion ...” Because I believe that the runes are within us, I do not have a problem with individuals that are new to our faith using the runes. Some say until you learn them in detail you should not use them for fear of using them “wrong”. I say that sounds too “Wiccan” to me. If you use the runes, then technically speaking you are doing nothing more than using yourself. I do not know of a wrong way of using them, except maybe by using them for wrong (negative) reasons. You may not interpret them correctly, but that's not wrong.

I also think that every Odinist should learn to read and write the runes so that you will be able to use the runes phonetically like our ancestors did. But again, there are those that are against using the runes in such a manner. They believe runes should be used for nothing more than “magic” or “divination”. This also sounds Wiccan to me.

I think you should use the runes in any manner that feels good to you. If you feel need to only use them in divination, then all means do so. If you feel they are something that is above your understanding then leave them for someone who does understand. Not all of us are called to learn the runes, nor do we all have the understanding needed to obtain that particular insight.

With that said, I believe the runes are everything we imagine them to be. Please, enjoy your journey to gain the insight of the runes.

People will not look forward  
To the future,  
Who never look backward  
To their ancestors.  
*Edmund Burke*

by Alfgar Thorsson,  
Woden's Folk Kindred

Pennick, Nigel. *The Runes*. Element Books Limited. 2002.

# My Goddess

Being asked to write about my favorite Goddess, I immediately thought, “How can I have a favorite?” Being a follower of the Druid way, I was encouraged to see the Goddess through my own mind. This is how I perceive her in her many aspects. I tend to see Her as One, but call upon Her in the way that meets my needs at a particular time.

I would have to say that Brigid is mainly the vision of Goddess that I use in my everyday life. She is the Goddess of Druids, especially the Bard, Her being the Triple Goddess of Poetry, Healing, and Blacksmiths.

To describe how I see my Goddess, She is the ethereal myst that illuminates the cobwebs in the early light of dawn. The dew, that kisses the petals of the flowers as they raise their heads. The silence deep within the forest, the song upon the breeze, and the tinkling laughter of a brook. She is a gentle, healing Goddess, dressed in a white gossamer gown, with long golden tresses. To myself she is the envisionment of love, peace, and inspiration. She inspires creation, the words of poetry. She is the Goddess of healing, cleansing, pure and embracing. When in this aspect, I think of Her as the Spirit of the Sacred Apple Trees, with the

mysts of Avalon encircling her feet.

Brigid being the Goddess of Blacksmiths makes Her very special to myself, as my ancestors followed this trade. I see Her wielding a hammer, beating a song onto the burning hot steel, forming a new blade; The alchemical transformation, from raw ore to a piece of finely honed steel. Full of passion and purpose, with the elements of fire and water brought in to play a dance of creation. Brigid is a very special lady to me. She lives in me daily. She flows within the rivers of my veins, and my heart beats with Hers. The Goddess that lives in my heart and soul sings to me.

I also see the One Goddess in Her other aspects. She is the Cailleach, who strips the leaves from the trees in winter with Her icy, cold fingers. She is the Bone Mother, who embraces the body when returning to the earth with the passing of the soul to the Summerland. She is the Morrighan with her flock of ravens who carries away the souls of those fallen in battle.

The Goddess is the giver of wisdom. She knows the past, the present, and glimpses of the future. She is a mother, a nurturer, and the warm, comforting embrace. She can be seen as Cassiopia, the Grandmother, who was tossed up into the heavens to sit upon her rocking chair amongst the constellations. She is the Great Goddess Anu, the

Mother of all Gods, the Mother of all Beings.

I reached out and found my Goddess. I found the feminine aspect of deity that lies within my soul, the aspects that speak to me. I put aside my alphabetical index of names and correspondences, and then drew upon the power of the Goddess. She took my hand and led me to where She resides within my being. In Her many forms we walk together, and I have been blessed because I found her within and our hearts beat as one. Like the metal beneath the Blacksmith's hammer, I was transformed within Her embrace.

May the Goddess walk within you.

By: Mokita Spirit Glade

ANU: (sometimes linked with Dana or Danu) A Welsh and Breton Mother Goddess, Mother Earth, also a Moon Goddess and mother of the rivers and streams.

BRIGHID: one of the most popular Druidess icons. Irish Patroness of Fire and the Sun, Smithcraft, the family hearth, healing, and inspiration.

CAILLEACH: Irish and Scottish Crone Goddess of Winter.

# Goddess

She is the mist, and the early morning dew.  
She is the stirring that brings forth life anew,  
She is the smile of the Mother's Face  
She is the arm, of nature's warm embrace.

She is a delicate blade of grass,  
She is the fast, running stream,  
She is the blowing of the wind,  
She is the Moon's bright beam.

She is the warmth of Winter's hearth,  
She is the snowdrops in the Spring,  
She is the laughter of our joy,  
She is the music when we sing.

She is our compassion,  
She is our sadness and our tears,  
She is the light of friendship,  
She is protection from our fears.

She is the Summer's scent,  
She is the harvest that we eat,  
She is the love within us,  
She is the pulse of our heartbeat.

By: Mokita Spirit Glade

# Odinism and Failure

I have failed my HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle i.e.truck) test three times now, which I have been told is quite rare. Yet I am taking something from this repeated failure that many who fail do not seek to look for, and those that pass first time may not get the chance to even consider: that is the reason for failure and why it is good for us. So, apart from beginning to feel like Maureen from Driving School and costing me a small fortune, I have had a few thoughts about life and its struggles.

Failure, if approached with the right attitude, can stimulate reflection, which itself can lead to insight and wisdom on why disappointment and failure exist, and how we can deal with them and even use their existence for constructive purposes.

Everything has a purpose, including failure - it is essential that we remember that. It is also essential that we remember the following advice (who originally said it I cannot remember): "It is not the trials a man faces in life on which he will be judged; rather, how he overcomes them. "

Condition yourself to face and accept

disappointment. I think it is good for me to realize that life can be very tiresome and difficult. I passed my bike and car test first-time both times, so I had it easy there, and I know that my personal ambitions for self-sufficiency are going to take a battering over the course. Things are rarely how we want them to be, but to believe that things are this way or that is to harbor illusion about our purpose on Midgarth. Do not think that things should be, think rather that they simply are, and then work to overcome them.

Failure teaches perseverance. Perseverance is a virtue therefore we should not fear failure. When our efforts are thwarted, when our work is undone or we face a great challenge, and especially if these obstacles repeat themselves again and again, we persevere. We are Odinists, and this is all we know.

In the greater struggle for evolution, it is the trying, and the continued perseverance in the face of adversity and multiple failures that is important - this is the real challenge and purpose of life. To test your inner strength, to test your character in the face of adversity, and to strengthen your resolve in the process; in this regard it is a means to achieve a greater end. To remain steadfast and virtuous, to hold your integrity and to your principles, no matter what happens, is a true path to spiritual evolution and one of the reasons for our incarnation

on Midgarth. My particular trial of today (HGV license) is not an eternal one -it can be conquered in time, be it days, weeks, or months; it can be conquered in this life. Some have much greater trials, trials that cannot be easily overcome in such a short space of time: the loss of a limb, false imprisonment, missed 'one-off' opportunities, the premature passing on of family or someone integral to the Odinic movement. Those are just examples that come to mind immediately. So I tell myself to keep things in perspective. Man up, take it on the chin, and then try again. What is it but a triviality in the great cosmic adventure?

By: Sam Coles



## BOOKSHELF

**Puryear, Mark. *The Asatru Edda*. iUniverse: 2009.**

*The Nature of Asatru*. iUniverse: 2006.

The number of books about the culture and mythology of our ancestors is dizzying. Only a small portion of these books are written by people sympathetic to our ancestors, and a tiny fraction of this second group are composed by Heathens. Because of this, it is always exciting to see well-written and well-researched books about Heathenry written by Heathens. Two books published in the last few years definitely fit this description. Mark Puryear's *The Nature of Asatru* and *The Asatru Edda* are among the finest works ever produced within our faith.

*The Nature of Asatru* is mainly an idea book, that is, it focuses on the idea of Asatru and the philosophies that are the foundation of our way. There are excellent discussions on the ethics and worldview of Asatru, as well as one of the best arguments for folkishness that I have ever seen in print.

One of the better aspects of this book is that it talks about us and defines our way on our terms. There is far too much Heathen literature out there that defines our way by stating what we are not.

Being hostile to the desert faiths is not the path to advance our way, and Puryear does not fall into that trap. He presents us as we are and on our own merits.

*The Asatru Edda* is an amazing compilation of our mythology into one place. This book draws heavily on the work of Viktor Rydberg, as does Puryear's other work. From the basic premises put forth in Rydberg's *Our Father's Godsaga*, Puryear creates a unified tale that covers the lore of our ancestors from Ginnungagap to the aftermath of Ragnarok. The combination of all this information into one place is a treasure in itself, but Puryear's writing style and obvious reverence for the gods makes the book read like poetry.

There are two points about this book that might be hard for some Heathen readers. The first is the above mentioned reliance on Rydberg. Someone unfamiliar with Rydberg's work is going to wonder where the majority of the ideas come from, but for a reader familiar with that work, everything settles in just fine. I would advise those who have questions to read Rydberg's *Teutonic Mythology* before jumping to conclusions. I admit that I have questions about Puryear's heavy use of the *Oer Linda Book*, but in the balance, those kinds of questions can be put aside. Another facet of *The*

*Asatru Edda* that may raise some objections is Puryear's extensive use of Old Norse. His argument that this language preserves the primal or even holy core of our culture is convincing, but that does not make reading the book any easier for those who have not studied Old Norse. This potential stumbling block is overcome by the exceptional quality of the book as a whole and a complete glossary of the Old Norse terms used, but it is something that everyone who writes about our way should be aware of.

One of the best points Puryear makes is that it is time for Heathens to start filling in the blank spots in our lore and culture instead of relying on Christian scholars to do it for us. Puryear steps up and fills in several blanks himself, and he does so in a reasonable and compelling fashion. This book will hopefully serve as an example to others who are capable of fleshing out our lore to fit our needs and our times.

Both of these books are available from **Amazon.com** and World Tree Publications. They will make excellent additions to any Heathen library.

By: Thorstein, Woden's Folk Kindred

# BOOKSHELF

Freeman, Philip - The Philosopher and the  
Druids: A Journey

Simon and Schuster. New York: 2006.

Somewhere in the world there is a giant mill that produces countless carbon-copy books on the Celts. If you have read one of them, you have read them all. Thankfully, Phillip Freeman not only avoided that mill, he produced a very interesting and useful work.

Accessing all the available sources and sincere research, *The Philosopher and the Druids*, paints a clear and vivid picture of a journey from Syria into the heart of Gaul. Thorough referencing of a variety of sources draws a detailed account of Celtic life and religion, some of which brings out several little known facts. For example, the book details a historical account of the Celtic god Ogmios' temple sanctuary and an encounter with a Druid priest there. There are also descriptions of obscure archaeological finds such as a first century CE lead tablet with spells carved on it a group of women working magic and the macabre find at the Ribemont sanctuary north of Paris where the headless bodies of warriors stood as part of the sanctuary's wall.

Dr. Freeman's book is a refreshing and honest book on the Celts and will be an essential element to the library of students and scholars alike.

By: Bryan Page

## the IRMINSUL ÆTTIR

The Irminsul Ættir is an Ásatrú church organization, a voluntary association of Ásatrúar to practice the religion, facilitate networking, sharing of resources, developing educational material and programs, fostering cooperation and the promotion of Ásatrú. We recognize the strength of Ásatrú to be in its diversity and connections to the past and consider the individual and his or her family to be the most important unit of Ásatrú followed by extended family type organizations and associations such as kindreds. We believe that organizations should exist to support the growth of individuals in their faith and that leadership positions on any level should be a matter of responsibility, not privilege. inter-organizational

As well as providing support and educational opportunities to the Ásatrú community we sponsor a mailing list, the Irminsul Ættir webpages, and other resources, as well as promoting and holding mootings, meetings and Things. A primary commitment to the Asatru and heathen community began with sponsoring a yearly Althing that is open to anyone to attend in frith.

The Irminsul Ættir  
P.O. Box 43  
Renton, WA 98057



## FOLK WISDOM

"I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity." -Goethe

The above quote from Goethe can be taken many ways, but one of the more obvious meanings points to the value of the practical. Heathens should have a deep reverence for the practical. The solid advice of the Havamal is firmly echoed in the useful wisdom found throughout the sagas, and everywhere in our faith there is the idea that our way is about living a wholesome and honorable life. Our love for the practical should not, however, lead us to be content only with the simple.

It is easy for many of us to shake our heads at some of the things our people find fascinating. For a long time, I openly scoffed at

the study of all things "esoteric" and "mystical". "How does that pay the bills?" I asked. Better to focus on straight-forward and concrete things whose immediate value could be easily seen. Anything else is a waste of time and energy.

As time passed, I came to see that I was wrong. Aside from gaining a broader appreciation of the value of the spiritual, both in myself and in others, I have also learned that what inspires me to action may not have any effect on the next person. A good kinsman and wonderful friend showed me that the value of the esoteric or mystical does not necessarily lie in the mystery itself, but might instead be found in the progress it inspires in the student.

An example will perhaps serve to illustrate my point. I was never that interested in the study of the runes. After all, I can read and write in English

just fine, so what good would runes do me? When others in my community wanted to engage in group study of the runes, I resisted. I saw it as a waste of time and energy that could best be used elsewhere. Eventually, I relented, and a half-dozen or so of us began to regularly study runelore.

I was amazed at what followed. Heathens I had never been able to interest in a detailed study of our culture were suddenly fascinated with that same culture as it related to the runes. The more they learned, the more they wanted to learn. It was truly incredible to watch.

All of which brings us back to the above quote and our ideas about what knowledge is worth our time to pursue. At the risk of sounding a bit flaky, I have come to the conclusion that delving into the mysteries of not only the runes but also other more abstract areas in our way can yield concrete, observable benefits. I have seen it with my own eyes.

If, however, we are to truly understand why the study of things that do not on the surface seem useful can bring such benefits, we have to ask how these good results come to pass. The answer is two-fold. The first aspect is the obvious fact that different people are interested in different things, so what sets one

person on fire can leave the next person cold. To get everyone interested, we have to approach our way from all angles. In the above example, it was the runes that got the ball rolling, but it is likely that many other subjects can have the same effect.

The second part of our answer is more complex. Jungian psychology teaches that we grow, emotionally and intellectually, because something in our life stimulates unconscious urges to improve ourselves. These urges can be brought on by a wide range of experiences, but the key here is that once the urge comes, it propels us forward. For some of my friends, the urge came when they began to study the runes, but a whole host of other topics that, on the surface, have no apparent practical use could also stimulate the desire to grow. I have learned to be open to a wide variety of pursuits for this very reason.

Our ancestors preserved a huge range of subject matter in the lore, and this is a reflection of the depth of their culture. What carries one of us forward may not speak to another, but that does not belittle the value of any part of our heritage. So hesitate before you scoff at the road another Heathen treads, because you never know where that road might lead our people.

By: Thorstein,  
Woden's Folk Kindred



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# *Blood Prayer*

**Behold... the blood runs true  
Our people walk again in the Troth of our Ancestors.  
We raise our voices to the Gods of our Folk,  
And we hear their answer in the depths of our soul  
We hold out our hands to the wights of this land,  
And we feel kinship with the living Earth.  
In the struggles of this life we are never alone.  
We find valor and strength in our Gods,  
Love and wisdom in our Goddesses,  
Hope and pride in our Ancestors,  
Faith and frith in our Folk.  
We will carry our way forward, and we shall not fail.  
Bound by blood, guided by honor, united in purpose,  
We are one people.**

**Hail the Folk!**