UNCLE THOR'S MAGAZINE

JOURNAL OF PRACTICAL MODERN HEATHENISM SUMMER 2010 CE

We Are Back

It has been a while. During work on other projects, Uncle Thor's Magazine took a vacation. I have been posting articles on my Daily Lessons page. However, it is not the same as having the Magazine. We have a new format and new articles for you. What we do not have right now is a publishing schedule.

Heathenism has changed greatly since we first started publishing in 1991. In almost two decades, the Heathen community has grown and scattered. A key feature of the community is its independence. Individuals and small groups are the prominent things when we look at the community. Large groups and their respective doctrines have yet to attract the larger part of the Heathenry. Independence is the word.

We are seeing much more activity. Some of the smaller groups have been very successful. Several have even hosted sizable gatherings. On the other hand, a few small kindreds are little more than drinking clubs or playtime for re-enactors and gamer-nerds. Perhaps we are like other religions in that our community ranges from the sublime mainstream to a small cluster of ridiculous fringe elements.

I am personally pleased to see Heathenism advance. Equally pleasing is that Heathenism is not forming into a singular doctrine or dogma. Rather, it accommodates a wide variety of approaches. There is no one leader or set of rules. An independent spirit is pervasive.

In this issue of Uncle Thor's Magazine, we will be looking at ways that this scattered community can come together without ceding its individuality. The premise is to offer a variety of ideas rather than promote a set of rules. Think about them and discuss them. Whether ideas prove useful or not, they are a starting point from which the people can turn thought into practical action. As with the Runes, one thing leads to another thing. Eventually it will lead to the thing that works best.

Power of One Idea

One of my old lectures was "The Power of an Idea." I must have given talks on the subject a couple hundred times. The premise is that one good idea can be the catalyst for tremendous good. Many great things began with an idea.

Talk

In our diverse Heathen community, what one idea would bring us all to a level where we would communicate with one another despite differences? Our differences keep many of us apart. There are people who are disdainful of Folkish folks, and Folkish folks who do not like non-Folkish folks. There are folks who won't talk with gays, and others who will not talk with members of certain larger organizations. People are looking at everything that separates us. They should be looking at the one thing that unites us.

We are all Heathen.

The one idea we need is to focus on the one thing that unites us before we countenance a glance at that which divides us. We need to see a Heathen first and everything else second. When differences come up, our thought would be "Heathen first!" Before we see Folkish, non-Folkish, non-White, Straight, Gay, or whatever else, we need to see the Heathen.

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Heathen First!
On that basis, we can communicate.
One idea. One powerful idea summed up in a phrase: Heathen First!
Say it. Believe it. Within it is the key to cooperation.
Heathen First!

MODERN HEATHENISM MEETING MODERN NEEDS

The existing lore is not a Heathen bible. What we have are fragments from various times and places, recorded by people who had an inimical attitude toward the original believers. Many times the fragments were cobbled together to sound like a coherent story. The Eddas, which are the most quoted of the old books, are a collection of old myths and fables recorded by Christians. The same can be said of Saxo Gramamticus.

The Rune poems are neither cultural instruction nor keys to understand Rune magick. They have more in common with modern alphabet books (A is for Apple, B is for Bear, etc.) than with any instructional text. Some of them have been adapted to suit Christian beliefs.

Various Asatru and Odinist groups have tried to superimpose their own ideas. For instance, one group came up with their own calendar days for such contrived holidays as the "Day of the Fallen". (We already have that in America. It is called Memorial Day.) Others have tried their hand at Heathen versions of the Ten Commandments and Eightfold Path. The "Nine Noble Virtues" and similar compilations have no ancient precedent. They are modern inventions.

Any attempt to try to reconstruct Viking religion is going to fail. For one thing, we do not have enough information about those times. Second, humanity has marched on since the Viking era. Despite the attempts by monotheistic religion to stifle free thought and quash scientific discovery, society has evolved. It would have evolved whether the dominant religions were monotheistic, polytheistic or pantheistic. The conditions that existed in the Viking Age are gone forever. Our work should be bringing Heathenism as a relevant religion to these times.

The price of living as an anachronism is to become irrelevant. There are such people. The Amish claim to live according to old technology. (They will use modern technology when it suits them.) They live in their own areas, at best an amusement for tourists. Were they to disappear tomorrow, it would not affect much. The same can be said of most Hasidic sects. These are people who follow a Late Medieval tradition of Judaism that was developed for pre-modern life in Russia and Poland. They set themselves apart from everyone else. The result is a people whose impact is only within their own small communities. They are little more than a curiosity to others. There are other groups who remain apart, anchored to traditions whose relevance ended centuries ago. Such anachronisms are of little importance to the rest of the world.

We do not want to be irrelevant. A reconstructed Viking-style Heathenism would be much like the Amish and Hasidim. Its practice would require insulating, if not isolating, from the everyday world. Overemphasis on the past leaves little accounting of the present and none of the future. We need a Heathenism that supports a successful life in this day and age, as members of the larger society of which we are all a part.

Heathenism has value when it enables its adherents to deal with life successfully. That means life today and tomorrow, not life in a bygone age. We must apply the tools of our religion when confronting the personal, moral and social issues presented by the world in which we live. Granted that there is much we can learn from ancient precedents. Granted also is that many of our modern concerns require new answers. The old ones just do not work in some circumstances. Matters that were easily addressed only two hundred years ago have given way to issues that never existed twenty years ago! Heathenism has to adjust to help its people face these issues.

Here are a few of the issues that Heathenism must confront.

Addiction: today, recreational drug use is pandemic. It has contributed to the growth of criminal organizations which can challenge established governments. We see that today in Mexico where the Mexican Army is fighting drug cartels in the streets. We saw it in Columbia and in the "Golden Triangle" of Burma, Thailand and China.

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The latest twist is the proliferation of impromptu "meth labs" that are a toxic hazard as well as a source of dangerous drugs. Today, the purity of heroin is so extraordinary that it is more potently addictive than any other drug out there.

It is easy to say that Heathenism opposes something that makes monkeys of people and ruins lives and families. We are not new to groups and religions which tell people not to use illicit drugs. Despite the warnings, people are using them. Sure, Heathenism would be against using something that increased crime, empowered criminal organizations and hurt people. What do we do when people choose to abuse drugs, anyway?

Unlike other groups, we do not say "If you do not do what we direct, you are on your own." The drug problem is more complex. People do not start out trying to get addicted. Nobody wants to ruin his health, his home, his family or his life. The Heathen way is to solve problems, not ignore them. A double-pronged approach is what we need. That means that we counsel prevention first. If addiction occurs, then we seek to remedy the problem.

Because drug addiction frequently entails other criminal behavior such as theft, we have to determine when a problem becomes a crime. Once a person knows that his addiction is causing harm to others, he is liable for his actions. Good Heathen thinking would seek help as soon as trouble starts, but then, addiction is the antithesis of any kind of good thinking! This is the kind of thing that Heathenism should and can handle. While we may not be able to cure a majority of cases of addiction at this time, our efforts can certainly help.

AIDS and STDs: Sexually-transmitted diseases have been around a long time. It did not start with AIDS and chlamydia. For instance, syphilis was such a problem in the Civil War that entire divisions were depleted. Once cures were made for the common venereal diseases of their day, everything ran smoothly until herpes was getting around, followed soon after by AIDS and other ailments.

Monotheistic religions tend to offer a single piece of advice for avoiding venereal disease: do not have sex. That sounds so simple and the basic premise would be sound in an idealized world. However, we know that it does not work. People are going to have sex. That is a fact of life. Abstinence does not work because so many people are unable to abstain.

The monotheists tend to have one common response for those who do not follow their advice. The churches do not offer alternatives. Those who ignore their rules are generally stigmatized and abandoned. The churches seem to have forgotten that the urge to have sex is stronger than the urge to abstain.

Once again, Heathenism takes a two-pronged approach. On one hand, we encourage research to find remedies for disease. On the other, we look at the facts of several thousand years of human history. People are going to have sex. The best way to deal with sexually-transmitted diseases is to prevent the disease without trying to prevent sex.

Heathenism stresses personal responsibility. In this case, it would be nice if the diseases were curable. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Therefore, it is up to the adult individual to practice safe sex. We have the means to prevent these diseases and still enjoy sex.

On another note, we have the problem of young people and sex. For years, the government did not allow schools to offer training in safe sex. Why should we wait for the schools to do everything for us? The family ought to be the ones teaching their young about sexual morality and sensible sexual practices. Good parents do all they can to prepare their children for the everyday world. Good Heathen parents will see to it that at the appropriate time, part of the preparation is learning about sex.

Health Care: The heath care issue is in the news, and it has divided lawmakers. Each of us has already contributed to that debate by our votes. Most recently, the people of Massachusetts made their voices known. Their vote was enough to offset the current health care package making its way through Congress.

Perhaps if Heathenism grows and becomes wealthier, we can set up a health care cartel to ensure health insurance for Heathens. Right now, it is a far-off dream. Health insurance and care is beyond our control. We each get what we have, whether it comes from the job or somewhere else.

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There is one area where we have control. Each of us has an opportunity to improve his own health. Our bodies are the mechanism by which we abide in this world. It is up to us to keep them in as good shape as possible. That means eating healthy foods, exercising and doing what is necessary to maintain health, prevent disease and avoid injury.

Once again, it comes to the Heathen principle of responsibility. Part of that is responsible living. We do not sacrifice a thing when we choose to eat healthy food. We gain when we look after our health. The result is that we rely less on health care.

One of the problems of healthy living is breaking bad habits. Three of these are smoking, excessive drinking and over-reliance on junk food. Heathen principles can be applied to eliminate all habits that adversely affect health. We can use our principles and seek available help to overcome those habits and work to improve our physical well-being.

Heathenism offers no substitute for health care. When there is a need, people ought to seek the help of qualified medical professionals.

Communications and Internet Safety: One of Heathenism's methods can be stated simply: do not be stupid. That applies to almost everything. It certainly applies to Internet usage. Twenty years ago, the Internet was unknown to most folks. Now it is there all the time.

Only fifty years ago, the Internet was unimaginable. We had black and white televisions. Large portions of the country still had party lines rather than private telephone lines. Long distance calls were expensive. International calls were expensive and problematic. Most long distance communication was done by mail. Computers were massive things owned by a very few big corporations and universities.

Only fifty years prior to that, the entire telephone "book" of New York City fit on a half page of paper. For many years, few people even had a home telephone. Picture phones were the stuff of science fiction.

Here we are, with the ability to send images and communicate instantly anywhere in the world. We can post messages and even leave our own personal "book" for all to see. As a result, some folks run into trouble. Crimes such as "identity theft" and "credit card fraud"have sprung up. Many feed on the internet.

Heathenism has something to say about all this: act responsibly. The Internet is not some otherworld. Using it is a very public thing. The point is that if you put something on the Internet, others can have access to it more readily than if you posted it on a billboard in the center of town. The billboard will only be seen by local folks, but the Internet is international.

Heathen ideals apply to the Internet as anywhere else. The same morals and good sense used in other forms of human interaction apply to the Internet. There is one caveat: nothing on the Internet is truly private, so act discreetly. Do not post on the Internet what you do not want some folks to know. The things you post are visible to good folks and bad ones.

Consider the Havamal's advice about looking before entering the hall. Heathenism was ready for Internet interaction long before the first desktop computer rolled off the assembly line.

Sex: Heathenism has one word to say about sexual morality: responsibility. Each and every one of us is responsible for our sexual behavior. The focus is on each of us to do that which is right in any situation. We are not talking of the monotheistic morality that stifles sex. Heathen morality regards sex as natural and healthy. It does not set down a list of "thou shalt nots'. Heathenism expects the person to make responsible choices.

Before all this, however, the first responsibility belongs to parents. Sex is too important to leave to school sex education classes. Heathen parents begin the process by teaching their children about sex and responsibility.

We discussed the responsibility for safe sex previously, as regards diseases. Heathenism encourages <u>sane</u> sex. We get into romantic relationships with both eyes open. How many blunders could have been avoided if people ask themselves if they would want to be waking up with their latest lover six months hence. How much could be resolved if people felt more comfortable deciding between recreational sex and romantic sex. As for pregnancy, the same sense of responsibility applies. If you do not want it, then take the appropriate measures.

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Responsibility also applies to our partners. We are responsible for them, to a degree. For instance, picking up a drunk in a bar just because he or she is an easy lay is a very irresponsible act. Sex is a two-way street, and both parties need to be on board.

When a relationship becomes serious, things change. Heathenism has much to say about commitment. Keeping commitments is a matter of honor among Heathens. That applies to many things, including relationships. Be it a "live in" situation or a marriage, Heathenism supports it.

Marriage is not the only place where Heathen ways apply. Where monotheists only speak of sex within marriages, Heathens know that sex among unmarried persons is normal. There is no stigma of immorality. The only rule is one of taking personal responsibility.

Heathenism is flexible enough to accommodate many of the modern conditions that affect sex. It can address both conventional and unconventional situations. We can do this because we focus on principles rather than hiding behind a set of generic rules.

These are but five of the many modern issues that Heathenism must face. They are only the start of the conversation. They barely scratch the tip of the iceberg. We offer then as small examples of how Modern Heathenism applies to modern situations. It is up to Modern Heathens to take their beliefs into the modern world.

There are so many new conditions that mankind has never faced. Instantaneous communication, high-speed travel, a world-wide financial market, terrorism, world-wide epidemics, global warming, and much more are out there. We need the means to handle them both morally and technically. In Heathenism, anything spiritual must be practical. Our practical spirituality is a resource we can tap to help us adjust to new conditions.

The past is what it is. That we have any old lore at all is a miracle. However, we have to live in the time and place where we find ourselves. Our actions today are the beginnings of the new lore for tomorrow. By our actions and our words, we are writing the Heathen lore for the next age.

Honoring the Other Veterans

Over 140 years ago, our nation was split into warring factions. The issue was one of “states rights.” It was the difference between having Federal law outweigh state law, and state law taking precedence over Federal law. Adding fire was the issue of slavery. To put it in perspective, the abortion issue that raged in this country in recent years had perhaps one hundredth the heat of the slavery dispute.

Our Civil War raged over four tempestuous years. Men fought for various reasons. Most Northerners fought to preserve the Union. Southerners fought to protect the rights of the states. (Few Southerners would have fought for slavery, as few were wealthy enough to own slaves.) There was widespread devastation. In its wake, the war’s end led to a national reconciliation.

In our time, the war is a piece of history. What once divided a nation now brings people together. Just look at all the Civil War re-enactors. In my case, it’s been the military miniature hobby. A lot of horse trading goes on. While many folks favor collecting one side or the other, nobody I know collects either side exclusively. Many collectors are former servicemen, like myself. We have a special respect for the people who had fought in that war.

Many have a favorite side. You can probably guess mine. (What gave it away? The comment from a few weeks ago that the “Holy Trinity” of the 19th Century was Sherman, Grant and Sheridan?) However, we respect the soldiers of both sides.

This is where it gets dicey. Up until a few years ago, a Confederate flag was just a Confederate flag. It was part of U.S. history. Recently, people have been treating that flag as a symbol of racism. They have derided the Confederacy and those who fought for it as a bunch of redneck racists. There are places where the Confederate flag is attacked and even banned. It got so ridiculous that a toymaker who produced miniatures of Civil War soldiers stopped making Confederate flag bearers.

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Let us be blunt. The Confederacy is a part of history. Granted, there were elements within the Confederate government who wanted to prolong slavery. Many in the Confederacy wanted slavery and all other issues decided by the states instead of a federal government. That is what triggered the war. Keep in mind that catalysts for the war had been brewing for years.

When war started, tens of thousands of Southerners stood up for what they saw as an infringement on the integrity and sovereignty of their homes. They felt they were defending their homes against an intrusion. The Confederate army, navy and marine corps fought as valiantly as their Northern adversaries. North and South, they were all American fighting men. The sacrifice of Southern and Northern soldiers is respectable.

I feel that to deride the sacrifice of Confederate soldiers for any reason is to deride all American fighting men. As Americans, we should be proud that such men were part of our martial heritage.

In these times when accusations of racism fly too often and to easily, we need to see truth. People ought not be denied their honor because of fears of being called racist.

The Army and Navy got it right. When the Civil War was over, they accepted the Confederate military heritage as part of their own. They also accepted responsibility for it. In effect, they said that a Confederate soldier is an American soldier. When someone tried to sell the bell from a sunken Confederate ship at auction, the Navy moved in and took it. The Navy did so because it felt that bell was a memorial to the fallen crew of that ship. The Navy did not want to see it become a trinket for collectors.

We can take our lead from the Army and Navy.

As Heathens, we respect those who have given their lives in the service of others. We respect veterans. While the "politically correct" types deride one set of veterans as "racists," we need to honor those veterans as American fighting men. The whining cries of a few who wish to rewrite history must be ignored.

FROM STUPID TO SPLENDID

Sadly, I have been hearing stories of so-called Heathens acting like savages. Many of these reports came from people whose first exposure to Heathenism was through kindreds and individuals whose behavior made “Animal House” look high class. Something is very wrong when folks think Heathenism is a license for abusive behavior, drunken debauchery and puerile buffoonery. There is no precedent for this in any existing lore. The Havamal advises against drunkenness and rowdiness. Much of that book deals with behaving properly in a social setting. So where do we get these booze-sodden individuals who think liquor and nonsense equal devotion?

We are the forward edge of Heathenism. We are the example for the future. The groundwork for the ultimate success and survival of our beliefs is being set today. A big part of our success is how we behave in our modern society. Are we living lives of quality? Most of us are! However, there are some who obviously do not live well at all.

For those who may not have been taught how to behave appropriately, here is a quick course in acceptable behavior. Remember that people’s impression of Heathenism is made by YOUR example.

Change the Bad Behavior

If your behavior involves slapping your spouse, significant other and / or children on a regular basis, seek help for your problem. Abuse is anti-Heathen. The precedent in the old lore is the revulsion Norse folk felt for “tormentors of women” and other abusers. If abusing others is part of your life, then stop. If you cannot stop, then leave Heathenism and convert to Islam.

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If the police are regular visitors at your home due to public disturbances, it is time to clean up your act. "Public nuisance" is not a title befitting a Heathen. Stop doing whatever is causing a disturbance. It does not do Heathenism a bit of good to be represented by the town jerk. Being a J.O. is a no-no.

If you are habitually and publically drunk and / or high, you have a problem. Get help. There are various programs that help people handle alcoholism and addiction. The first thing is to stop drinking and abusing drugs. When the town drunk and neighborhood junkie are the best-known Heathens in the area, it sullies our reputation. Stop using dope and stop drinking, or do us a favor and move on to another religion.

If you are the local bully, village brawler and all around tough guy, put the brakes to the hostility. Heathenism does not benefit by being represented by violent thugs. Might is to be used for the good of the people, not against them. Heathenism gets a black eye and the bully boys get more frequent sojourns at the local pokey. A smile works a lot better than a scowl. Learn to get along, or move along to someone else's religion.

If you are the town sleaze or the village slut, get control of yourself. There is a vast difference between healthy sexuality and sliminess. Stop screwing around in other people's marriages, get yourself a set of standards and leave the low-lifes alone. While it is fine for folks to have all the sex they can handle, it is not alright to behave like a sleaze ball. Sex is not dirty, so stop making it look that way. You certainly do not give Heathenism a good example.

Present Yourself Respectfully

The message you send long before you speak is YOU. Your appearance and body language tell people a story long before they get close enough to talk to you. People decide if they want to speak with you or not before they are within polite speaking distance. Once again, most people already know these things, but there are always a few who need to be told.

Acquaint yourself with soap and water. Introduce your clothing to the laundry. Treat your home to a broom and mop and soapsuds. Acquaint your lawn to a lawnmower, and introduce your backyard to neatness. Nobody likes the slob zone. Nobody wants to be around people and places that stink. Nobody wants to live next door to the messy yard and filthy house. Cleanliness and neatness send a strong message of health. If you need a precedent, remember that in ancient times Saturday was wash day (laugar dag). Our ancestors devoted a whole day to cleanliness.

Maintain a healthy appearance. Clean and neat is what you want. Dress comfortably and neatly. A good appearance sends a strong message to others. People judge by what they see. If you look like you are halfway to being a bum, they will treat you accordingly. If you look like someone who takes care of himself, people will give you respect.

You do not have to be the icon of beauty or the perfect physique to look presentable. It has nothing to do with size and shape, and everything to do with how you present yourself.

Behave in a dignified and courteous manner. Make *please* and *thank you* a normal part of your conversation. Hold a door open for someone else. You do not have to know what all the extra forks and spoons are for at a fancy

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dinner, but you should at least be able to eat with a fork. Courtesy is a sign of dignity. People respect those who know how to behave. The simple little manners you learned in Kindergarten will do you a world of good today.

Be careful to keep your conversation appropriate to the situation. If you are at a dinner, it is fine to discuss the weather or local sports. Nobody wants to hear about your colonoscopy or how a yeast infection is making your pussy itch. The same goes with profanity and vulgar conversation. While it is perfectly acceptable to scream "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" when you are in the living room watching football with the guys, it does not go over so well at your son's little league game. If you are out in public, you can rest assured nobody wants to hear a string of profanity. They also do not want to hear what goes on between your belly button and your knees. Dick, balls, pussy, ass, farts, excrement, poop chute and fistulas are not topics conducive to polite conversation. The key to good conversational skills is having plenty of appropriate things to say. It is a sign of intelligence and maturity, and it is expected of an adult in most States and English-speaking, German speaking and Scandinavian countries.. This even holds true in primordial places such as Arkansas and Tennessee.

Learn to dress appropriately for important events. For men, that means having a suitable jacket, collared shirt and tie. For women, that means an appropriate dress, shoes and purse. You do not have to wear a tuxedo, but you ought to be able to dress formally enough for weddings, funerals, important meetings, etc.

Whether formal or not, make sure your attire is right for the situation. You make a great impression when you dress for success. It shows respect and it gains respect, in turn.

Avoid racial and ethnic slurs in public. No matter how you may feel about any ethnic or racial group, those attitudes do not go over well in polite company, even if several of the folks there agree with you. Talking about your genitals and bodily functions tops the list of no-nos, and ethnic slurs comes in a close second.

Getting a Life

Some of our fellow Heathens are in a world of their own. We have gamer nerds who are so caught up in their games that they are lost discussing anything outside of dragon and dungeon games. We have re-enactors and wannabe Vikings who are so entranced with the make-believe Viking Age that they have lost touch with the real world. Then there are those who are so busy trying to be Heathen that they do not have an everyday life. These folks persist despite the fact that Heathenism is the kind of thing that encourages us to live our everyday lives more effectively. The Havamal counsels that a wise man is able to converse intelligently.

In current vernacular, these people need to get a life.

Get a life: step 1: be conversant on current events. You do not have to be expert. You can find many news sources on the internet or on your TV. The nightly television news can give you a run-down on notable national, local and world events and weather. You might want to look a little more into important issues such as the economy, national issues, local concerns and various conflicts affecting your country. This way, if you are at an event and people are discussing current events, you do not have to sit there like a clueless slab of pickled pork. The ability to discuss news is expected of an intelligent adult.

Get a life: step 2: Heathenism is a part of life, not a substitute for a life. If your entire life is singularly focused on Heathenism, you have missed the point. The true essence of our belief is not in how you study or worship, but in how you live outside the front door. Get a life. Get some interests.

A well-rounded individual will have some interests outside of Heathenism. Here are some suggestions:

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Find a sport, whether you play or just watch. If possible, find a team that you like. A day out at the ball game is a lot of fun. These days, with so many minor league teams, you do not have to go far. Baseball, football, hockey, basketball (tree hockey), and golf are a few of the sports you might find interesting. I find it good to be able to discuss at least one of the ball sports. There are other activities that qualify as sports. Bowling, archery, hunting, fishing, darts, and billiards come to mind.

Gaming and "Dungeons and Dragons" are not sports. They are games which have the unenviable reputation of attracting nerds. Unfortunately, nerds spoil Gaming for the normal people who enjoy games.

Find a hobby: you can collect or make things. Hobbies range from woodworking to collecting stamps. You can find something you like to do. A hobby helps you develop skill and knowledge, and it can put you in touch with many people. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." An adult who does not have a hobby is lacking.

You can have more than one hobby. If you hobby is gaming or Viking history, you might want to supplement it with something else.

Find an interest: Acquaint yourself with a subject that interests you, and develop above-average knowledge of it. What interests you? There are many subjects, and thanks to the variety of science and "discovery" shows on cable, it is all very accessible. There are myriad topics: military history, astronomy, archeology, geology, oceanography, railroading, automobiles, etc,. etc. Find something you like and read more about it. Many topics have so many enthusiasts that they have their own magazines. It is a real charge to be able to discuss these things with people and answer their questions. You make the impression of being a person with "substance".

Develop a social skill: people who have a special talent are always welcome. The "social skills" I mean are those that are handy and make you the "go to guy." Little talents go a long way. Among the best is skill at cooking. A fellow who is good at barbecue can always get the favor of the crowd. Likewise for a good cook or a good baker. If you show up at a social event with a couple of home made pies, it makes one heck on an impression. Other talents also serve as social skills. The ability to design a good, quick flyer goes well if you are involved in a club or organization like the local PTA. Playing a musical instrument and singing are admirable skills, too. These little skills are ways of sharing with others. They make you a participant rather than a spectator.

Think about a large party. You remember the fellow whose barbecued ribs were "out of this world." You remember the woman who brought her guitar and had everyone singing along. You do not remember the fellow who sat at the corner table and said nothing all day. Which one do you think gets the most invitations to events? Which one is viewed most favorably by others?

The damnable shame of all this is that these subjects should have to be mentioned at all. Most people in the English-speaking, German-speaking and Scandinavian world know these things through everyday experience. Again, it is sad that we have a few elements who either were not taught to live as dignified individuals, or who lost touch with any sense of personal dignity.

Heathenism does not have a public relations office. Each of us is his and her own public relations officer. We are the way people get their impressions about Heathenism. Those of us who want to live effective lives will naturally choose to live within society. We do well when we can do so in a way that gains respect, makes a great impression and sends a strong and positive message about Heathenism.

Let us remember that these things are not just for contact with the wider non-Heathen world. It is also for the benefit of our fellow Heathens. A presentable and sociable person is a far more welcome friend than a stinkpot with rude manners and social skills suited for the pig pen. Good habits make for better guests. It is a lot easier to treat a fellow Heathen as a good guest when he behaves as such.

Each and every Heathen is a public example of what Heathenism is. Live accordingly.

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Fe: Henpecked Runecraft

(excerpted from an upcoming book on the Runes)

The symbol of the Fe Rune is cattle. It represents wealth. Assets. And it can represent money. The Norwegians made a joke of it. In the Norwegian Rune poem, Fe is described as bringing strife among kinsmen. Some folks think it was a message of Fe's esoteric nature, but that is wrong. The Rune Poems are commentaries along the lines of "A is for Apple...." You might ask, "What causes Norwegians to fight their relatives?" There is one answer: money. Many a house is divided over a few krone.

Fe is a Rune of assets. There are assets that must be tended carefully, and assets that produce assets. Cattle is an example. In ancient times, a cow's milk was an asset. The milk could be used or traded. Milk was a commodity which was used for barter, either in its plain form or as cheese and butter. The cow was the asset that produced milk. A look at the modern dairy industry goes to show that milk is a commodity now as it was then, and has a value equal to money.

Over forty years ago, my grandfather raised chickens. He had them for their eggs, which we used as food. Is the chicken a good analogy for Fe? Let us find out.

For one thing, chickens have to be controlled like cattle. That means coops and fences. That stuff known as "chicken wire" was designed for fencing the chicken coops and yards where they roamed. Like cattle, chickens could get away. With no fence to contain them, they would wander and scatter across the countryside. Many another asset also has to be contained and controlled. Chickens need coops and yards, cows need fences and barns, and money needs banks and investments. Otherwise, they all scatter and dissipate.

Chickens also need to be maintained. They need a coop that is airy yet warm in winter. They need feed, water and grout. Chickens need to be protected from diseases and predators. Believe me, I know that predator part. A fox or racoon made a dinner of one of my grandfather's hens, and all that was left were a few bones and feathers. No chicken, no more eggs. We had to wait for the pullets to mature and take her place. Again, replacing a cow means waiting for a calf to mature, and replacing lost financial assets requires investments to mature. It takes time.

You may have heard the term "nest egg" refer to family finances. The real nest egg is an egg that is left in the nest after the others are gathered. It encourages the hen to keep nesting and to lay more eggs. The nest egg is like an investment to keep the dividends coming. (For very young hens, glass nest eggs were used. Today they use plastic ones.) If you remove the egg, the dividends stop, just as removing the nest egg may cause the hen to stop laying eggs.

Eggs have always been an asset in themselves. Since ancient times, they have been traded like any other commodity. We can see that an egg has a value. Using the barter system, a quart of milk may have been worth the same as a dozen eggs. Long before money was invented, eggs were a trade item that could represent an amount of value.

I remember 40 years ago that there were people who were egg wholesalers. They bought eggs from farmers, and then shipped them to the city. The local egg wholesaler near my grandfather's farm was a bald man named Phil. His head looked like an egg.

Today, the value of eggs is assessed in several ways. First, there is color. People may pay a little more for brown eggs than white ones. Second is size. The common egg sizes today are small, medium, large, extra large and jumbo. The larger the egg, the more it costs. A dozen jumbo eggs are more profitable than a dozen small ones, for instance. If numbers matter more than size, then two dozen small eggs are generally worth more than a dozen jumbos.

Eggs are shipped to distributors who supply grocery stores and supermarkets. They also supply other companies who use eggs in different ways. Eggs can be separated, and the yolks sold separately from the whites. This is useful for large baking operations. Eggs can be frozen or powdered. The commodity can be adapted to fit the customer's need.

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If we buy eggs whole, then the chain of profit goes from farmer to wholesaler to distributor to market. For egg products, it goes from farmer to wholesaler to food processing company to market. It might bypass the distributor here. On one hand, the asset is good as it is, and needs only be kept fresh. On the other, the asset needs to be altered to make it profitable.

Chickens themselves are assets. By keeping them healthy, they will continue to produce.

What of the chickens that we eat? They are also assets. They must be raised in a safe and healthy environment so that they grow to right size. After all, if disease or predators strike, there is no chicken to sell.

For a large chicken operation, there will be chickens who produce hatchlings and chickens which are sold as meat. Both sets of chickens need to be contained, controlled and maintained. They need to be fed. When they reach the right size, the chickens are slaughtered. Very little goes to waste. The gizzard, heart, kidneys and neck are used in making soups. The feathers can be used for making quilted jackets and pillows.. The rest of the chicken can be sold whole. Like eggs, chickens are graded by size and one other criteria. Are they good for baking or frying, or to be cut up and sold as parts? All of these factors determine the eventual value of the chicken as a commodity.

Some chickens and chicken parts are sold fresh and go right to market. Some are frozen. There are chickens that are sold live to small markets which butcher their own. On the production side, chicken products are sold to companies that make prepared foods. The chicken fat is a commodity. Chicken parts are also sold, to be incorporated into soups, frozen dinners, gravy, broth, etc. Once again, assets can be valuable "as is," partially prepared, or converted into other foods.

The back side of production is the hen house that produces baby chicks. Just as the egg farmer depends on egg production, so does the chicken meat farmer. The latter is not selling the eggs, but letting them become chickens. His product takes more time and materials, but his also brings in more money per unit.

The chicken is Fe and it illustrates various things about the essence that is "value." Like all Fe, the chicken is useless unless it is controlled, maintained and applied. The value itself depends on many things. It increases or decreases due to size, shape, and various other factors. Just as chickens and eggs can be frozen, canned, dried or otherwise handled, so we can adjust the value and the demand for an asset by altering its form. A mirror of this is the dairy industry, where milk can be adapted to make it valuable to a wider range of people: cheeses, butter, cream, buttermilk, ice cream, etc.

There is one more lesson to be learned. A key element in using Fe is patience. Things need time to mature. Haste can do a lot of damage. The fable of the goose with the golden egg applies to all assets, especially chickens, eggs, cows and milk. In the fairy tale, the goose laid a golden egg every day. The family was greedy and impatient ,so they killed the goose to get the eggs inside. There were none. The goose was like any other fowl. She did not come "pre-loaded." So it is that patience is necessary to give hens time to lay eggs, calves to mature, hatchlings to grow into chickens and cows to give more milk.

Perdra: Eggsactly.

Perdra is a Rune of Wyrd, pregnancy, of things to come and things yet to be born. It is the cup, the bowl, the entrance to the cave, the womb, and the egg. Perdra is the place of gestation and the ongoing creation. In that role, it is the cornucopia, the harvest cone, the Horn of Plenty.

Does Perdra have a special relationship with Fe?

The chicken is like Perdra, producing egg after egg. We can stop there, or look at the Egg. It is also Perdra, being a place of gestation. The egg becomes a chick. Whether we stop at the egg or the chick, we have an ongoing creation. The chicken can produce eggs time and again.

The same may be said of the cow, which can produce calves and milk. Like the cornucopia, every milking time is an ongoing production.

Is Perdra that which takes the formless essence, and makes it an asset by giving it form? Is Perdra the furnace: the crucible which turns the raw and useless into the refined and usable? Could it be the cauldron where

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raw elements become something greater than the sum of all its parts? What of the place of growth from the initial spark to the thing itself?

Does Perdra produce Fe or form it into specific assets?

We are not going to give you answers...yet. These questions are an exercise for you. It is not about having the right answers, but asking the right questions.

The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg

A well-known fairy tale is the story of the Goose that laid the Gold Egg. In the story, a poor family comes into possession of a fabulous goose. Each day, this goose lays one golden egg. It enriches the poor family. Eventually, the family members become impatient and greedy. They decide to butcher the goose and get all of the eggs inside it. The goose is killed and cut open. Inside, it is just like any other goose. There is no hoard of eggs. Of course, this act of impatience and greed ends the daily gift of golden eggs

The story is a moral about patience. It cautions against letting greed and stupidity cause oneself to lose his source of good.

Could the Goose be Perdra, and the Egg be Fe? While I doubt the author had that image in mind, it certainly fits!

Greed, impatience and other stupid acts are often the catalyst that destroys a productive situation. Allegorically, the Goose must me cared for and maintained. It cannot be rushed. It produces on its own time. We must be patient.

In the everyday world, real geese and other fowl lay eggs on their schedule. Looking at another symbol of Fe, cows give milk at their schedule, not ours. So it is that patience is a necessary quality for prosperity. We see by these examples that haste does indeed lead to waste and to need (Naud).

Golden goose egg!

Ideas Toward Cooperation Among Heathens

Creating an Atmosphere of Mutual Support

Heathenism is not a religion of dogma, creeds and codes. We are a people who do not like rules. It would be the height of arrogance to propose a Heathen Code of Conduct. Such a thing would be impossible, merely because of all the variations in belief and temperament among us. The Heathen community will not abide a "Ten Commandments" mentality.

For most of the Heathens with whom I have had contact, such codes of behavior are unnecessary. Honest people with common sense and the best intentions are already above the kind of behavior that warrants a set of rules. Everyone over the age of eight knows right from wrong. That is just the way things are.

On a wider level, we have had problems in the past. Back in the 1990s, there was no shortage of feuds, spats and every kind of dispute. Infighting within the Heathen community was widespread. While time and maturity have blunted most of the bad feelings, there are a few things that can never be fixed. I know from my own experience that there remain a few individuals with whom I will never be on friendly terms. Likewise, there are some folks out there who will never offer me their friendship.

The plain fact is that some of us had a lot of fun fussing and feuding. We made one big mistake there. We were not thinking of the future, nor of the wider ramifications of our actions. Most of the disputes were needless.

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Had we been thinking seriously of the future of Heathenism rather than our egos, we would have used much more discretion.

For several years, I have sought a way to promote cohesion and at the same time deter conflict. The best I can do is a set of suggestions that we each might consider. They are simple things we can do to enhance a spirit of goodwill among Heathens. These ideas might even help us to cooperate with one another despite our many differences.

Please note: I am not offering these as a set of rules. They are merely presented as ideas for Heathens to examine. To paraphrase Rod Serling's 'Twilight Zone' : "For your consideration...." I believe they may be a step toward going from a scattered people to one that can maintain its independence while cooperating for a common goal.

Never speak ill of another Heathen in public.

We have to thank Ronald Reagan for this one. His version applied to Republicans. Whatever your political stripe or lack thereof, there is no evading the fact that Reagan was a shrewd and skillful political player. His advice can do wonders for us in three key areas:

1) It cuts down on public infighting. Nothing looks worse than a spite fight within the Heathen community. Bickering always makes the participants look like idiots, no matter who is right or wrong. By keeping our harshest words a private matter, we reduce friction. It also serves to make our fellow Heathens less wary of one another.

When a dispute goes public, people feel that they have to respond.

"Public" includes newsletters, blogs, press, television, radio, email lists and websites. Consider anything on the Internet public.

2) It gives our detractors and our allies the image of a united community. Those who oppose us find fewer ways to divide us. Those who support us can see that despite our many differences, we are united in promoting our collective well-being. This is a powerful message.

3) It promotes more cooperation and trust among ourselves.

Granted, there will be times when we must voice disagreement over some policy or activity. We can do this without being nasty. It is perfectly alright to state one's disagreement. It is not alright to attack the other person. We can disagree without being disagreeable.

If we must be disagreeable, then let us keep it private and out of the view of the public.

Treat your fellow Heathen with integrity and respect for his dignity. Never slight another Heathen because of his tradition, age, sex, beliefs or ethnicity. Extend the same good will to all Heathens.

Once again, whether we agree or disagree with a fellow Heathen, he is still our fellow Heathen. No matter what issues divide us, the salient issue is Heathenism itself. We do well when we treat fellow Heathens with respect regardless of our opinions. This does not mean we have to agree with him or want to hang around with him. All it means is that we give him the same respect we would like to receive for ourselves and our views.

Were more of us to apply this idea, it would go far in promoting a collective feeling of goodwill. Respect promotes trust. In this instance, it will also gain us greater comfortability with each other. The result is that Heathenism's ability to create goodwill among Heathens is greater than any individual differences we may have.

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Respect another Heathen's right to his well being as you would respect your own. Never jeopardize another Heathen's livelihood, home, family, property, legal status, freedom or his reputation in the community.

Again, this is pretty obvious. Do not do something that might jeopardize your fellow Heathen's job or business. Do not interfere with his family. Do not try to get romantically involved with another Heathen's spouse or "significant other", whether they are married or not. Do not do something to get him in trouble with the law or the community. He has a right to live in dignity. Respect it.

This idea might seem so obvious that it might not need mention. However, there are always a few in any community who need to be reminded how to behave. Some folks are so selfish they have no consideration for the results of their actions on others.

Never ask another Heathen to put himself in jeopardy. Never ask him to do anything illegal.

If you are doing something that is illegal or otherwise unsavory, do not involve your fellow Heathen. Never do anything that could get him in trouble. There are a few cases where people got fellow Heathens involved in some kind of shenanigans, with disastrous results. If you insist on criminal behavior, the least you can do is keep Heathens out of it.

We have to mention this because it has happened in the past. Unscrupulous individuals have preyed on the good nature of others, with awful consequences.

Assist your fellow Heathen when possible

If a fellow Heathen has a need and you can help, then offer your assistance. (It is always best to make the offer before you take any action.) For instance, if a Heathen in another state is trying to find a college for her daughter, and you work in a registrar's office in a university, you can be of great assistance. Contact her and offer your help. If you know a Heathen who is in good standing, and he needs a reference, offer one. You can lend camping gear to the Heathen group in the next town who is going to a large Pagan festival, for example. Any and all assistance is good. We can be a network of help to one another. All each of us need do is offer a hand when he is aware of a need.

Accept the truth that no one person, teaching or organization owns all of Heathenism.

No one person or organization speaks for all of Heathenism. It is important that groups and individuals respect the rights of others to express their Heathenism how and with whom they choose.

Had this idea been applied from the beginning, many a feud could have been prevented.

Look at any religion more than twenty years old. Each has a variety of different sects and denominations. The reason for them is simply that people are not in full agreement, even within the same denomination. We can see that despite these differences, most of the sects and denominations are not inimical towards one another. They get along. We are no different. We have issues that divide us, but they need not make us hostile toward one another. Our Heathenness ought to be of greater weight than our differences. We can agree to disagree, and we can disagree without being disagreeable.

This goes for organizations, as well. It is important for organizations to remember that they only speak for their own members. If they had the authority to speak for all of us, we would all have joined them already. Such authority does not now nor ever will exist.

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Always be honest and forthright in dealing with fellow Heathens.

It is simple. If you buy from a fellow Heathen, pay the price. If you sell or offer services to a fellow Heathen, then give him what you promised. When selling or performing a service for a fellow Heathen, always make it your best shot. Give him the best quality. Do not cheat, connive or steal from a fellow Heathen. It is important that we establish a tradition of honesty within the Heathen community.

Support Heathen enterprises and businesses.

There are many Heathens who are engaged in businesses or other activities. As Heathens ,we ought to support them when possible. On the other side of the coin, Heathen businesses can support the community by providing good service. If possible, buy from Heathens. Give Heathens a preference when hiring.

For example, before you go to the New Age catalog, check with Heathen sellers to see if they have the same thing you seek. If a Heathen business comes through for you, tell people. You offer support when you spread the word

On the other hand, do not attack or otherwise undermine the reputation of a Heathen business. When a Heathen is doing something, cooperate or get out of his way. Do not jam him up.

Never refuse to shake hands with a fellow Heathen in public, regardless of whatever has passed between you before.

Our public image benefits when we show that we are united. People notice how we meet and greet each other. A hint of a snub is enough to send the wrong message. A handshake in public is a sign to others that even with differences, there is an underlying unity. It presents the impression of cohesion as opposed to division.

The ideas here is to show that whatever our differences, we are united by being Heathen,. Our dedication to Heathenism outweighs any personal differences. What we do in private is another matter. Publicly, we make a show of being united.

No inspired leader is going to emerge and unite Heathens. No bolt of thunder is going to issue from the sky and bring us all together. Heathen solidarity is all up to each of us. There are vast differences among us. Part of it is damage from past disputes, but most of them have diminished over time. The real factor facing us is that we are so independent and different. Nobody has yet found a way to encompass our differences without ceding independence. Instead of looking elsewhere for a solution, we do best if we become the solution.

The idea presented here are not complete. They are not absolute rules. Discussions of these suggestions among individuals, kindreds and organizations can lead to a better plan of action. What we have here is a starting point. Take the ball and run with it.

The Campaign of Excellence

There was a time when the future of Heathenism was relatively short-sighted. The furthest most of us looked was one or two generations forward. We were still planning for a small religion far outside the mainstream. There was no consideration for the very long term.

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Where will Heathenism be in 200 years? Will it be a thriving religion, a small sect, a scattered and disorganized handful of followers, or a defunct religion whose only remnant is a tiny footnote in a few comparative religion texts?

Our future depends entirely on what we do today! We are at the forefront,. We are the ones whose actions will determine if Heathenism becomes a thriving religion or a footnote. Everything depends upon us. Our actions will determine if our people will say 200 years from now: "We can thank those people back in the 20th and 21st century for making this happen!"

If we want Heathenism to thrive for future generations, we need a commitment to excellence. We also need to instill that commitment in the second and third and future generations. While those of use "over 40" can continue setting a good example for the young folks, we need to pass on our enthusiasm and our faith in them. Given the right impetus, they can excel and take us all into a new era of accomplishment.

Imagine the impact on us and on the communities in which we live, when we have a Heathen police chief, Heathen congressman, Heathen astronaut, Heathen surgeon and Heathen professor. Now imaging these people are more motivated and better prepared than others. Think of it: the Heathen police chief who reduces crime 25% , the Heathen congressman who passes landmark legislation, the Heathen astronaut who develops great innovations in space exploration, the Heathen surgeon who heads the surgical department for an entire system of hospitals, and the Heathen professor who is dean of a prestigious Ivy League university. Not only do the young people get their place, but they also transcend all expectations.

Think of the massive impact that such examples will have. They will influence both the Heathen community and the larger society in which they live. Consider the ramifications of having hundreds of such individuals actively working in society. All the outreach programs and public relations work in the world cannot match the appeal of hundreds of great achievers. People are drawn to success. When we show the world that Heathens are successful, we send a powerful message.

It can be done, but it will take time. Those of us over 40 have already made our place. The greater successes will come from the next two generations. Their success depends on our encouragement, guidance and the example we set. Now is the time that we need to think of Heathenism's future in 25, 50, 100 and 200 years. We must instill in future generations the need to excel, and give them the means to do it.

Call it Heathenism, Thorism, Odinism, Asatru, Forn Sed, or whatever you want, but today we are a small movement composed of scattered individual sects. Being smaller, the key to our survival into the future is that we must be better, smarter, stronger and more determined. For us, good is not good enough. Through setting a standard of excellence, we assure Heathenism's survival and its growth and future stability.

We are the smaller religion , so we have to be better

Steps to the Future

Education: We must avail ourselves of educational resources. The future is going to be increasingly technical. Specialized knowledge and skills will be the means to success. Unskilled and semi-skilled positions will shrink in numbers and in importance. Strong finances, social standing and influence will be the province of the educated. Just look at our present times. Many occupations which required only basic education a few decades ago now demand schooling beyond the twelfth grade. Occupations such as law enforcement and the military have a higher educational requirement than a generation ago.

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Obviously, an important key to success for future generations of Heathens is education. We might put it colloquially: "Dum" is not cool. We need to be looking for the means to give our young access to the best formal education possible. Our goal has to include the higher professions: medicine, law, architecture, engineering, science, etc. Our ability to thrive depends on our having a larger percentage of our people in the better occupations. It does not stop at graduation day. We need to encourage further success. Having Heathen doctors is good, but it is better if our doctors become chiefs of surgery, top neurosurgeons, medical leaders and highly-sought specialists. Heathen lawyers are good, and better if our lawyers become superior court judges, top prosecutors and highly-respected defense attorneys. Heathen policemen are fine, but better to have chiefs of detective, police chiefs and police commissioners. We like the idea of Heathen soldiers, but how about Heathen Generals, Heathen Admirals and a Heathen or two on the Join Chiefs of Staff?

Education has to include the encouragement for excellence. We are the little guys, so we have to be better.

Leadership: Part of our striving to excellence is the need to create leaders. These are not leaders of the Heathen community, but leaders in society. As stated in the preceding section, just achieving a diploma is not enough. We need to work together to help our young people become leaders of society. An important component to achieving acceptance is attaining a higher degree of success. When many of the visible leaders in society and in various professions are Heathen, outsiders will have to deal with us in a manner more to our liking.

The one thing that will assure leadership is in making ourselves better. We have to make ourselves more capable, more knowledgeable and more responsible than those we hope to lead. In order to do that, we have to set higher standards for ourselves. Leadership requires character. If we instill the foundation of character in the young, and encourage them in becoming smarter, stronger and more capable, we prime them to lead. A guarantor of successful leadership is having leaders who are in all ways more capable than those they lead. We have to be better. "Average" is not good enough. Average might be fine for most folks, but for us it is a hair away from failure.

Participation: We have to participate in the society in which we live. Exclusivity, isolation and insulation from society are the actions of a silly cult, not a thriving religion. We are not a pack of weirdos following some kookaburra theology. We are adherents of a serious, vital and practical religion. As such, we should not seek to separate ourselves from society. We should participate. For instance,. Heathen parents ought to be involved in their local PTA. Heathens with a political interest should get involved in the politics of their choice. (There is not a preferred Heathen political stance. Each chooses his own politics.) Veterans can get involved with the various veterans' organizations. Parents of baseball-playing children can get involved in Little League. These are but a few examples of ways in which we can get involved in our society.

We live in the society in which we find ourselves. We are part of it, and ought to participate where we see fit. Involvement has many benefits for us. In these early days of our resurgence, it helps to establish in the minds of others that we are normal people. When people see we are regular folks, it helps us gain acceptance. For the future, it is an expression of our sense of responsibility to our respective communities.

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Stability: We need to seek stability in our world. That means that we take charge of our finances, social obligations and our status in our society. We look to own a home, have a steady income and enjoy a high degree of stability. This is one of the goals of families in this time and place. It ought to be one of our goals.

Each of us is a member of our society, as much as any Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist. Stability is a sign of it. We seek to live as members of society, as much as anyone else.

Reputation: We need to establish a solid reputation as people who deserve respect. We gain this respect by living according to higher standards. That covers everything from the shape of your front yard to the way you keep promises. The easiest part of reputation is being a responsible neighbor. It begins with something as simple as making sure your property looks good. A well-kept home and yard makes a much better reputation than owning the neighborhood eyesore.

Again, we come to the even-tempered person with good judgement. We are neither doormats not bullies. We do the right thing, treat others fairly, and do our best to keep our word. A reputation for fairness is wonderful, and a reputation for honesty is priceless. The man whose word is better than a notarized contract is going to enjoy a considerable reputation.

Everything we do affects our reputation. By striving to do better, our reputation grows better. This is important. Imagine situation where non-Heathens can say, "I don't know how I feel about their beliefs, but I am impressed with the way those Heathens behave. Everyone can see they are good parents, good neighbors, and they always keep their word."

A good reputation comes of everything we do.

Help each other: We Heathens are a diverse lot. Regardless of our differences, we need to work to help each other. This will be one of our greatest strengths. Use what you can to help your fellow Heathens get ahead. For instance,. if you are a Heathen who works closely with a university registrar, you might be able to help a fellow Heathen who is trying to get his son into college. If you own a hardware store, you can offer a special discount to Heathen customers. Were you a postal clerk and the Heathen group in the next town was trying to do a mailings, you might use your knowledge to help them get a special postage rate. The point is to assist where we can, when we can.

Mutual assistance gets our people a few more steps up the ladder. It is something we all should be doing.

For the future: Building Institutions: Just as people of other religions build institutions, there will come a time when we can do the same. We will have the ability to extend our generosity to the world around us. Think of it: building a Heathen hospital. Having a Heathen outreach center to help folks secure employment. Starting a Heathen food bank. These are things for the future. They will go far to establish our place in the communities in which we thrive.

A campaign of excellence is the way to thriving. Society can easily marginalize us if we are an offbeat bunch whose most visible elements are heavy drinkers and rowdies. The same society will bend over backwards to accommodate us, even if grudgingly, should we be the people whose accomplishments stand

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above the rest. They can laugh at a bunch of lunks guzzling beer at a pub moot, but they cannot speak ill of a people who produce great minds and natural leaders.

We need to be that people. The time to begin is now. The future of Heathenism is dependent on what we do today.

EMBARRASSING BROTHER

(Reprinted from *Uncle Thor's Lessons, Anecdotes and Humor*)

I was looking at an old Sears "wish book" catalog from the early 1960s. Seeing the pink cardboard kitchenette brought up a memory from my childhood.

I have never spoken of this publicly because it is still embarrassing

One of the most embarrassing things for a child is to be the brother of a conspicuous sissy. My so-called brother was a big sissy. We were adopted. I am of German / Nordic stock from Northeast Pennsylvania. My so-called younger brother and sister were 'imported' from Ireland.

My so-called mother thought that my "brother" was wonderful. She wanted a "nice" boy to show off to the people at her church and to her relatives. Her definition of nice did not leave room for normal. She preferred a sissy. My brother was about as sissified as a boy could get. It was his natural state.

One Yule, my brother wanted a pink cardboard kitchenette set, an EZ Bake oven and a make believe iron and ironing board. He got it, too. I remember his reaction to it. Think of Martha Stewart getting a new kitchen. My so-called mother thought he was a treasure. I wanted a G.I. Joe, a toy bulldozer and a toy tommy gun. To "mother," I was no good. Being relatively normal evoked her unkindness.

Worst of all, I had to play with him. If I did not, my so-called mother would give me a lot of grief. I could not even complain that my so-called "brother" was a very embarrassing sissy. That would be enough to get the belt. Whatever the game, "brother " had to be included or I risked a beating.

For instance, we were playing secret agent one day. My "brother" insisted on playing a female agent. He was running down the block waving a cap pistol while half singing / half shouting lines from a Dianna Ross song. "Brother" ran like a chubby little girl.

My so-called parents bought him the Marx tin-litho dollhouse. One day, my friends and I got hold of it and put it to better use. We used it for army men. We had snipers in the windows and the barrel of an M41 protruding through the front door. "Brother" came home and saw this. He shrieked! That got the attention of my so-called mother, who ranted at us as if we were the worst creatures on earth. That's right. We caught it just for being normal kids.

When it came to toy cars, my "brother" had his own ideas. He wanted – and got – the Dale Evans jeep with a striped canopy and a fringe. He called it his "surrey with a fringe on top." I kid you not: by age seven, the boy was into show tunes. And my so-called mother was more than happy to buy him all the Barbara Streisand, Dianna Ross and show tune albums he wanted. She let him hog the record player, too.

There was the time several of my friends and I were sitting at the picnic table in the backyard. My so-called brother suggested we play a game. He wanted to have a make-believe talk show. He wanted to call his make-

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believe show "Ladies." At that point, we ran for my friend's house. Life is swell with Lionel, and we preferred running electric trains to playing some sissy game.

I can tell you for a fact that when your brother is a flamboyant sissy, you get embarrassed many, many times. Even worse, my "brother" was also a rat. He loved ratting me out to my so-called mother.

I have no contact with any of that family for some years now, and I rarely think of them. Life has always been better without them. At their best, they were unloving and bizarre. At their worst, well, imagine that you are twelve years old and your so-called father is trying to smash your head into a concrete step with all his might. Sometimes something happens to remind me of the craziness of those days. It is distant enough in the past that I can get a good laugh out of it.

You might wonder how this can happen in an orderly Universe? How did I end up in a wacky family like that? Just as Wyrd has a forward motion, so it has a crossweave. The sideways motion is what makes for random and unusual events. In my case, it slammed me. Hopefully the sideway action has been kind to you.

Look at your own experiences and you may find some events which are explained by Wyrd's cross weave. This is not a matter of some kind of divine justice. It is actually more of a random factor. There is no other way to account for it. The crossweave is as much part of life and the forward motion of Wyrd.

Crossweave or not, one thing I can salvage from those days is a laugh. I hope my telling of my so-called brother's antics gave you a laugh, too. It is funny now. Back when I was eight years old, it was embarrassing.

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Despite my so-called brother, I do not have anything against gay people. I do not have anything against people born in Ireland. I feel sorry for gay people and Irish people because my so-called brother might count himself as one of them. That is an embarrassment too awful to bear. They do not deserve to be burdened with that kind of humiliation.

Maybe some day I will tell how Willi got me out of that "accidental family" mess. That is a funny story all its own.

Dealing with Events

Christian Funerals, Weddings and Family Holidays

I believe that within 200 years, Heathenism and its offshoots will have become a significant religious entity in North America. While I doubt we will be as large as Catholicism or the collected Protestant sects, I feel that we will be much larger than a minor sect. We will have the size and visibility to rank as a major force in the field of religion. This can be done if we lay the groundwork today.

One of our problems will be our evolving relationship with other religions. There is a big difference in how we relate today as a minor sect and how we will relate as an influential one. The only certain thing is that we will have to relate, and so will they. Neither they nor we live in a vacuum.

Presently, relations vary. Heathens are a small, fragmented assortment of individuals and sects who do not have much collective power. We are fewer in number than the Wiccans or other conventional Pagan denominations. There are no prominent mainstream personalities among us, such as celebrities, high-ranking political officials or sports figures. There is nobody who can use celebrity or influence on our behalf.

We stand alone.

It is very important for us to take a good look at the religious landscape and our place within it.

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Christianity has dominated the Western world for over 1,000 years. Its lore and doctrines have become part of the language. Things like Noah's Ark, "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and "thirty pieces of silver" are part of our colloquial lexicon. Its major holidays are among the public festivals of our society. Likewise, most of our relatives, neighbors, and co-workers are members of Christian sects.

Like it or not, but we have to deal with all of it. We have to reckon with Christmas and to a lesser degree, Easter. If we have a good social life, we also have to deal with Christian, baptisms (Christenings), weddings and funerals. Our relatives might be offended if we avoid the baptism of their child, even if the ceremony is meaningless to us. We might do real damage if we do not attend the wake of a relative or the wedding of a friend. And then there are the family dinners held at Christmas and Easter. Do we snub relatives out of a religious conflict?

How do we maintain our Heathen sensibilities when life demands that we deal with Christian occasions?

Funerals and Wakes

One of the reasons I recommend that every Heathen man have a jacket and tie, and every Heathen woman an appropriate dress and purse, is for attending weddings, funerals and other traditional events. Unless a person is a total recluse, these events are inevitable. Funerals and wakes are unavoidable.

Funerals and wakes have two purposes. First is to honor the departed. Second is to comfort his family. These are not appropriate places to voice grudges, promote religion or anything else, cause discord or behave inappropriately. You may win a heated argument on religious differences, but in the process you will likely upset the family and distract people from the purpose of honoring the fallen.

Wakes are simple enough. You go in, offer condolences to the family, stand beside the coffin a moment (if it is open-casket) and then take a seat. Condolences first or coffin first? That depends on the wake. Just do it.

Your main reason to go to a wake may vary. If the departed were a friend or relative, your first task is the honor the dead. If the departed was a relative of a friend, you are going to the wake out of respect for your friend. In other words, you are showing your face. Either way, respectful behavior is expected.

I have seen bad behavior at wakes. The offending parties were not Heathen and it had nothing to do with religion. Frankly, it looked awful. Rather than respect the departed, the offensive ones called attention to themselves. People noticed and comments were made on these affronts to common respect. Odin forbid that any Heathen should behave in such a way! We have a tradition of respect for the departed and we must put it foremost when at a wake or funeral. No matter what the provocation, nothing would make us look so bad as to cause an incident. If others want to fight, feud or just behave badly, make sure you do not join them. You can always settle accounts at a later date.

Should you send a floral arrangement, be tasteful. Heathen motifs would be inappropriate if the departed were not Heathen. Generic arrangements are available. Some of the Christian ones are really ghastly. One ostentatious fellow had sent a massive arrangement shaped like a Catholic chalice and their communion disks. At the ***Tennessee*** funeral of a Heathen's father, five arrangements had a plastic phone on them and the words "Jesus Called." And if you want to see the worst shows of floral ostentation, an Italian wake beats them all. (I do not care if you are Italian: NO tacky floral arrangements)

Many times, the family of the departed will arrange for a clergyman to give a prayer service at the wake. If you can leave the room discreetly, do so. If not, then just sit and behave. This is all about honoring the deceased, not showing the world how Heathen you are. Heathens are expected to show a lot of class at these events. You do not show class by calling attention to yourself. Instead, ask yourself, "What would honor the deceased?"

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I had an incident at my so-called mother's wake. She was a Poper, and someone arranged for her church to send a priest for a prayer service. The man they sent was an Asian fellow. My so-called brother and sister made a dash for the parking lot when they saw the priest. They are also Popers. That left me to deal with the situation. I introduced myself to the priest and let him start his service. Afterwards, I shook hands and thanked him on behalf of the family. Soon after, my so-called siblings came back. Their reason for running was arrogance. They did not know the priest whom their mother's church had sent, so they would not attend the service..

You have to show class in a situation like this. It has everything to do with honoring the dead. Courteous behavior is expected.

We have to respect the wishes of the departed. We are a non-proselytizing religion and there is no reason for us to push our beliefs. If the departed was Christian, then we ought to allow him to have the kind of wake, funeral and burial he would have wanted. Tyr wants us to honor the departed as he would have wanted to be honored.

I run across this more often than most. Our American Legion post does a small service at the wakes of departed members. They often ask me to do the invocation. (I am good at invocations). There is no conflict with my Heathen beliefs by reading the invocation and the prayer. This is all to honor the departed and comfort his family. If they want a prayer that fits their denomination, all well and good. My role is not as Heathen leader but as a Legionnaire honoring the departed as he would have wanted. Doing that is part of Tyr's work.

When at the funeral service, behave. You do not have to recite the prayers or do anything else. You might want to stand and sit with the rest of the folks there. Again, it is about honoring the dead rather than calling attention to yourself. A man who is seated while everyone else stands will attract attention.

Weddings

As with wakes and funerals, weddings are a matter of honor. The bride and groom are the ones being honored. Everything is done to make their day great. Everyone else pales in significance.

The same basic rules go for weddings: respect the wishes of the bride and groom. Do not call attention to yourself. Weddings are not places to promote religion or politics. If the wedding is held in a religious setting, behave in a way respectful of the occasion.

Once again, we as Heathens need to show class. Having seen some of the shenanigans at wedding receptions, I heartily advise that we do not make fools of ourselves.

At Jewish weddings, male guests are issued a yarmulke. (It is a little beanie without the propellor.) Be respectful of the couple and wear it at the appropriate time. Be a good guest.

If asked to perform a wedding, respect the wishes of the bride and groom. Adjust your invocation to accommodate both. For example, I did a wedding where the bride was Pagan and the groom was Christian. The invocation had to be "generic." Focus on the oaths first, and then come up with an invocation that mentions aspects of the Gods rather than a specific deity. That works for generic.

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Christmas and Easter dinner

If you have family, chances are that you will get invited to dinner on either of these holidays. It is not a religious occasion so much as it is a family gathering on one of their major holidays. The worst that usually happens is when they say "grace. Christians do this because they think their god is not sure they are grateful for the chow. .Just smile and go along with them for a moment. It makes them happy and the little show of piety amuses the Gods.

Things get dicey when the Santa Claus issue comes up. It is not just us. Some parents think that it is wrong to let kids think Santa Claus is real. For us, Santa is an aberration of the old Yule Visitor. He has become the Giver of Stuff. Deal with him as you think necessary. Is he a character of modern secular culture? A new version fo the old Yule Visitor? Or an old fairy tale? You must talk this over with your spouse and decide how to deal with Santa Claus in your household.

There is a secular side to Christmas. Santa and his Elves are part of it. We can enjoy the secular aspects as much as we want, since this is our society's annual Winter festival. It is the religious side of things we best avoid. Christmas is not Yule. We do well to keep our holidays separate.

Easter has less of a secular side. There is the Easter bunny and the eggs, which are both Heathen motifs. Kids have fun coloring eggs, and Loki would rather we throw eggs. The main event for Easter is wearing suits and going to church. Heathens have no business in a church on Easter. For Christians, Easter is all about Jerusalem Slim slipping the tomb. We ought to have no part of that fairy tale.

Christenings.

It is wise to avoid the ceremony. It is okay to show up at the party afterward, if it is for a relative or close friend's baby. You do not have to participate in any religious folderol.

Afterthoughts

Many of our rites of passage are conducted within a religious setting. A religious theme sanctifies the event. Heathens like to have a spiritual component at gatherings, feasts, weddings, funerals, etc. Other religions do this, too. The same events have comparable religious rites in Wicca, Hinduism, Taoism, Shinto, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. For Christians, the church is where they conduct their spiritual business. People will sanctify important rites with the religion of their choice.

Getting invited to these events is fine, and it is good to go to them. We ought not get our backs up if the event is Christian, nor should we take umbrage at the rites and prayers. It behooves us to be good guests and to show class. We are not selling out our Heathenism if we are good guests. These events have a purpose and we ought to respect it. Arguments over religion can wait for a more opportune occasion.

We do more for the Heathen cause by being respectful, dignified and honorable than we do by igniting a religious debate. Here are occasions where our actions send a stronger message than our words.

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Raido Rail

A Lesson in Speed, Economy and Motion.

The Runes can be understood in their best practical manifestations. Within each Rune is a set of operating principles. We can see them in action in the everyday world.

Raido is a Rune that is very evident in the world of experience. One of the best applications of its principles is in the railroad industry. Railroading makes maximum effective use of three crucial aspects of Raido: speed, economy and motion. It is truly said that the most economical and efficient way to move cargo is over steel wheels on steel rails.

Most of us experience trains as a hobby more than anything else. Though some may commute by railroad, the opportunities for average folks to touch railroads directly have diminished. Trains as a hobby is just that. Hobbies are very different from industries. The railroad equipment may be represented in plastic and diecast metal, but the industry is a whole other thing.

Railroads are transportation companies. Except for a few commuter lines run by local government and the national passenger railroad Amtrak, a railroad is a business that expects to make a profit. As such, its goal is to maximize effort and minimize costs so as to realize a greater return on its investment in trains, facilities and railways. The business of railroading is the movement of cargo, be it freight or passengers.

Let us take a brief look at several aspects of railroading that we may better know the Rune behind them.

Different Speeds

Railroads would love to be able to move all of their trains at maximum speed. Rarely is this possible. The train itself is a major factor in railroading. Curves, slopes, climate, safety issues and a variety of other natural and man-made factors inhibit speed. For instance, trains going through cities have to slow down due to safety laws. Uphill grades slow a train, and downhill grades present a problem of maintaining a safe speed.

The railroads do what they can to make their right-of-way efficient. Track roadbed is graded and its curves banked to allow higher speeds and the pulling of longer trains. Tunnels, cuts, bridges and aqueducts are made for trains to overcome terrain obstacles. In some cases, extra locomotives are stationed at difficult slopes to give passing trains additional power to make the grade. Speed varies along the route. As the railroad owns the route, ti can take additional measures to enhance speed when possible.

Trains themselves are scheduled at different speeds, This is frequently a matter of necessity. A refrigerated train hauling perishable goods has to get to its destination before the cargo spoils. A trainload of scrap metal is not going to be affected by time. The railroad will schedule a quick run for perishable and express goods while allowing less critical cargo to take a slower trip. In fact, the train with non-perishable cargo might have to stop in order to let the other train speed its goods to market.

Granted that the routing of trains and cargoes is much more complex in actual practice. It all goes to balancing variable speeds so that all cargoes get to their destinations in good order.

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When railroads ran the commuter and long-distance passenger lines, speed was a factor. The way they handled speed was very efficient. Imagine a long rail line that had fifty stations for passengers, There would be many minor stops. Major stops would be at cities, and therefore fewer. An express train would serve only the terminals and the major stops. Because it only made four or five stops and bypassed small stations, it could go faster. The locals served all stops. A local train might run between two larger stations, making all stops. It would be slower.

There might be ten stops on a local's route between two major stations. If one took a local the whole route, it would take three or four times as long as an express.

If going to a minor station way down the line, the trick would be to take the express to the major station nearest to the destination. A passenger would then transfer to a local train for the remainder of the ride. This little trick of Raido allowed the railroad maximum efficiency and reliable service for passengers.

The application of various techniques to accommodate different speeds is an example of Raido in action. Raido can coordinate the efficient movement of things which move at different rates. Much can be understood by looking at the methods of railroading.

Drop and Pick

Very few trains go directly from one destination to a distant one. While trains carrying fresh fruit and vegetables go directly, others have stops along the way. It is efficient for a long-distance train to drop cargo and pick up cargo at stops along the route. These are usually at major junctions rather than every minor stop.

Trains are put together to make it easier to offload some cars and pick up others along the route. This is more efficient and faster than sending one train to each stop Instead of dispatching ten trains, only one is needed.

This is like the commuter we mentioned earlier. If he is headed to a minor station, he takes the express to the major station nearest to it. From there, he takes a local to his stop. Freight is dropped at a major location by one train that continues onward. The dropped-off cars are handed to a small local train known as a "drill." The drill drops each car at its specific destination. Both the local passenger train and the freight drill do the slower work of railroading.

Raido is at work maximizing speed and efficiency. It allows the faster long distance train to move quickly by having drills handle the local delivery. Once again, two different speeds are coordinated.

Car-Go!

Railroads use a variety of different cars and locomotives to accomplish the mission of moving cargo. Here is a case of the Raido principle of getting a cargo to its destination in good order. To be efficient, cargo must arrive in good shape. It cannot be broken, stained or contaminated. The railroads have developed a variety of cargo-carrying cars for this purpose. Each is tailored to a specific type of freight.

Boxcar: the boxcar is just that: a box on wheels. Actually, it is more like a rolling shed. It protects the cargo from rain, snow and hail. Anything you can store in a shed can pretty much be put in a boxcar. Barrels, boxes, lumber and car parts are some of the many cargoes hauled by boxcars.

Boxcars cannot haul loose goods like sand or gravel. They cannot haul loose fluids. Though boxcars protect against rain and snow, they do not protect against cold and heat. The only exception is the insulated boxcar. These insulated cars offer some protction from temperature. Most boxcars are not insulated.

Refrigerated car: for hauling perishable goods such as vegetables, fruit and meat, refrigerated cars are like rolling walk-in freezers. They are insulated and they have a cooling source. Years ago, railroads maintained icing facilities along their routes to fill ice bunkers within refrigerated cars. They might have had to be refilled several times on a long trip. Modern refrigerated cars carry a small cooling unit instead of the old ice bunkers. Refrigerated trains get priority movement, which means they get to their destinations faster.

Hoppers: the hopper is a car made to haul granular cargoes, from sand to coal. If the cargo is not affected by the climate, the hopper will have an open top. Granular cargo that is vulnerable, such as grain and salt, goes into a covered hopper. Hoppers are loaded from the top and unloaded from the bottom. At their destination, they are placed on a ramp over the place where their goods are stored. The bottom is opened and in seconds the cargo goes between the track. Unloading is quick and efficient.

Gondola: the gondola is a low-sided car used to haul all kinds of cargo, from small granular stuff to lumber, steel coils and lumber. It is used for cargo that will not be harmed by climate. The gondola is a sort of "catch-all "for cargo that is too loose for a flat car and unfit for a boxcar.

Tank Car: for hauling liquids of all kinds, the tank car is literally a tank on wheels. There are different types of tank cars for different loads. Special insulated tank cars haul liquid propane, for example. Other cars haul petroleum products. There are cars for hauling edible liquids such as cooking oil.

Flat Car: the flat car is a moving flatbed, intended to carry items that will not fit in a boxcar. They normally carry things made to withstand the climate.

Well car: for containers, railroads use cars that are like a huge tub. Two containers can be stacked in them. They are one of several methods used to make the best of containerized shipping.

Caboose: The caboose is a small car that rode at the end of a train. It was used by the train crew as an office, lunch room and lounge. In the past two decades, cabooses have been fading out, replaced by a simple flashing light placed on the last car of a train. This reflects the smaller crew, all of whom can ride in the locomotive.

These are the more common cars used on railroads. There are many others, from auto-carriers to lumber cars. The specialized cars are a way to assure that cargo is handled properly. Railroads want the goods to arrive at their destination in the same good shape they had when packed at the beginning of the journey. This is a manifestation of another principle of the Raido Rune. It is the goal of Raido to move its passenger without altering it. Be it an item, a person or a message, the ideal is to get it there without any changes or damage.

Non-revenue MOW

Railroads run on privately-owned roads. The roadbed, track and everything else is owned by the railroad, who is also responsible to maintain it. In effect, they are both the route and its rider. Railroads like to keep their routes in

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good shape to maximize efficiency and speed.

Anything that enhances speed and efficient travel is of Raido. There is also a crossover with the Fe Rune. The roadway, trains and all equipment are a railroad's assets. They are its Fe. Maintenance of assets is important to proper operation of the railroad.

The railroad refers to cars not used to haul cargo as 'non-revenue' cars. In other words, they do not earn money. Heading the list of non-revenue cars are those used to maintain the track. These include such oddly-named vehicles as rail-grinders, ballast-tampers, tie cars and such. One might also included cars intended to keep the route open, such as snow plows.

Another type of non -revenue car is the business car, used by company officials when they go into the field. A business car serves as an office and a lounge for executives on the road.

The wreck train is also a non-revenue car. It is used in cases of derailment and accidents. Wreck trains have large cranes for moving cars and locomotives. Most of the wreck train cars can also be used for railroad construction projects.

Sales and the Human Power Plant

The Fe side of railroading is most conspicuously evident in making a profit. Railroads do not haul cargo just for the sake of hauling it. They expect to be paid. All of the work to maximize speed and efficiency, especially cost efficiency, is done to lower costs and increase profits.

Railroads have salesmen and support staff to serve customers. It is a big part of the operation. They also have advertizing and promotional materials. The colorful logos and liveries of railroads are there for a reason. They are the trademarks of their respective railroads. From their inception, railroads have used traditional marketing tools. Attractive logos are part of it.

The people of the railroad are a big part of its Fe. Along with locomotive engineers and other trainmen are a host of maintenance workers, switch operators, freight specialists, warehousemen and locomotive mechanics. Railroads do not use as many people as they did a few decades ago, but they still need plenty of workers. Many jobs are me specialized today. A few, such as track laying, are little different from a generation ago. The railroad depends on having a skilled and dedicated work force.

At the end of the track...

The Raido Rune is evident in railroad work:

- The ability to work with items having variable speeds so they contribute to efficiency rather than impede it.
- The means to assure that cargo arrives in good order in a reasonable amount of time.
- The ability to prioritize cargos when it comes to speed of delivery.
- Making maximum use of roadways and equipment for maximum speed, safety and efficiency.
- Safeguarding of cargo.

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Fe comes into the picture:

- Increasing profits by maximizing efficiency, thereby cutting costs, saving time and offering better service.
- Maintaining assets to assure uninterrupted service.
- Having a professional workforce committed to the railroad's mission.

Tyr and the Principle of Unity

The most important lesson of Tyr is Unity. That one word encompasses singularity of purpose, cooperation, cohesion, coordination, teamwork and a single vision. Unity is a good word, as "uni" means ONE. A united group giving a united effort to a shared goal is Unity.

You can see Unity at work in sports. The football team most likely to win the Super Bowl is the one that works together best. The players know their own jobs and they know what their fellows will do. No player need look to left or right because he knows his teammates will be in place doing their utmost to win. The quarterback need not scan the field. He knows where his receivers will be. For their part, receivers will know just when to turn and be ready to catch the ball because they know the quarterback.

The same goes for baseball. The team that works together best is the team that wins. When team victory takes precedence over personal glory, players rack up victories. You can see it in teams where each player need not glance about for team mates. He know where they will be when he needs to throw the ball. The outfielder knows where to turn and throw because he knows where the cut-off man will be. Everyone else moves to be at the best advantage, whether it be a play at the plate or the chance for a double play. On the other hand, when a baseball team loses that cohesion, it is sure to lose.

A good police department is a team. When officers arrive at the scene, they come to support the officers who are already there. A criminal does not face a lone individual, but a team who are there for each other.

A fire department is another great team. Each man knows his job and does it. Each man supports his fellow fireman completely. These brave men can charge into burning buildings because they know that each member of the team is supporting them.

Team sports, police work and fire fighting are all activities attributable to Tyr, and with good reason. All of their success hinges on unity.

An object lesson in unity came from a job I had worked briefly. The company supplied bakeries. It was a small outfit that had a couple of office workers and two crews to make deliveries. There were two owners. One was a middle-aged man who had bought his share of the company; the other, a younger man who inherited his part. The owners did not like each other, and spent much of their time arguing. The younger owner forced many issues just to spite his partner. Although the older owner had the business sense to guide the company, he fed the feud rather than try to work around it. Much time and effort was wasted on those silly spats, and there was at least one a day. Had the partners spent more time on the company and less on fighting, they would have been much more profitable. Disunity of leadership is often excused as a clash of personalities. In fact, it is caused by a loss of

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vision. When something else is allowed to interfere and take precedence over the enterprise's real purpose, unity of vision is lost.

The disunity of that small company degenerated into petty feuds. The owners let their bickering get between them and the goal. Had they regained their focus, things might have been different. There are many cases where partners do not get along, but they are able to put the business first. In those situations, the desire to succeed takes precedence over personal differences.

An odd case of unity involved two burglars. They had been offered the opportunity to give up crime, and were sent for counseling. One of them waxed eloquent on his various criminal adventures. He spoke of how he and his partner had accomplished several difficult heists. I remarked that the man must have had great trust in his partner. He replied with a guffaw. The burglar then explained to me that he did not trust his partner at all. In fact, he trusted his partner least of anybody. I was surprised. The man then explained that the only way the two could work together is because they mistrusted each other. When I spoke with the other burglar later, he said pretty much the same.

The burglars were united in their desire to profit. They had found a way to work together despite their mistrust. Trust was a tall order, since both men had been such inveterate thieves that they would likely cheat each other. Of course, burglary is a fool's errand and both were caught in spite of their cooperation. However, any success they had was a result of unity for a single goal.

All of these example illustrate the keystone of Tyr's influence: Unity. The salient point of Tyr's work depends on it. teamwork examples are the clearest for our appreciation of it. We need keep in mind that these examples show the most visible form of Unity. Along with the unified effort of individual as a team, Unity is essential in both the most visible and the most abstract realms. It works in the individual and the group, the personal effort and the team work. Unity begins with an idea and extends to the coordinated action of the many.

LEADERS AND AMBASSADORS

Every Heathen is a Leader and an Ambassador.

Every Heathen leads by his example. New Heathens and young Heathens are influenced by our words and actions. They see what we do as examples fo what a Heathen should be. This is how we lead. Our power of example is greater than most of us appreciate.

Every Heathen is an ambassador of Heathenism. People draw their conclusions of Heathenism based on us. Most of their perceptions of Heathenism comes from their perceptions of us: our words, actions, behavior and how we live. They have little else on which to draw their conclusions about our beliefs. Especially since we are such a small religion, everything we do might be taken as an example of what a Heathen is.

Each of us is a representative and ambassador of Heathenism. Each of us is the only example that others may have of a Heathen.

Consider the importance of your example in leading Heathens and representing Heathenism to the world.

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Carrying the Message

Explaining Heathenism to Others

What impression do you think you would be making on someone who is seriously asking about your beliefs?

If a person were to ask you about Heathenism, what would you tell him? Would you talk about old Gods and old myths? Would you speak of Vikings and heroic sagas? Would you describe rituals and fests and pub moots?

What impression would that give him? Would he get a positive impression? Or would he think of comic book Gods, Renaissance fair type re-enactors, fantasy game nerds and a bunch of wannabe bikers having a beer bust? All too often, that is exactly the impression that people take. The problem is that Heathens do not consider how their explanations might sound to those unused to unconventional religion. Likewise, they do not know how to address a person who is seriously seeking alternatives to conventional beliefs.

People do not arbitrarily step outside the mainstream of society. Be it politics, religion, lifestyle or social contacts, people who make the change usually do so for a reason. The most common of these is that something has happened to make a person question the accepted norms of his society. It may be a bad run of circumstances, tragedy, personal problem, perceived injustice or other life-changing event that convinces a person to question the status quo. When conventional institutions fail to provide answers, the odd event is the catalyst that leads him to seek comfort elsewhere.

Obviously, many come to unconventional beliefs out of weakness rather then strength. This is why there are as many peculiar individuals as there are serious ones. We can say for certain that most of the people attracted to Heathenism did not come here because their lives were free of trouble. Most come because trouble made them rethink their reality.

One of the consequences of stepping outside the mainstream is that conventional folks tend to think it weird. They cannot understand why anyone would want to adopt an unconventional religion, or unconventional politics, lifestyle or social circles. Most of them have never had to face a soul-wrenching problem or deal with a bizarre tragedy. Even if they have, they were never driven to seek outside of the societal norms. As far as those people are concerned, unconventional equates with strange.

Heathens are adherents of an unconventional religion. It is very different from the conventional religions of modern Western society, namely Judaism and Christianity. To the average person, our beliefs seem bizarre. He likely cannot understand how or why we could accept such an unusual religion. His pre-conceived notions would be an obstacle to our explaining Heathenism to him. The problem for us is a matter of how we address his inquiries. Our explanations can inform the inquirer or perpetuate the notion of weirdness.

We need to consider the inquirer and his perceptions. Otherwise, the message we wish to send might not be the message he receives.

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The first thing we need to consider is that we know Heathenism from the inside. We are familiar with the theology, philosophy and nuances of the Heathen way of life. For many of us, they have become second nature. Our non-Heathen friends know very little of us. Most of their experience with Heathenism is from school, Marvel comic books and popular media. They know a little of the myths, some of the Viking history and the comic book story line. It seems bizarre to those people that intelligent modern folks would believe such stories. Their initial perception of us is drawn from their experience and education.

Discussing Heathenism with non-Heathens is going to be easier with folks who know and like you than with casual acquaintances and strangers. Based on their knowing you personally, friends are going to give you the benefit of the doubt. Others might not be so accepting. Here is where tact and a special kind of empathy work wonders for us.

Put yourself in the shoes of the other fellow. He cannot understand why a rational person would take up a religion that is fraught with superstition, unbelievable myths and comic book characters. If he is a friend or good acquaintance, he is curious but skeptical. If a casual acquaintance or stranger, he might not be so congenial. He might be understand, or he might make a joke out of anything that sounds bizarre. Part of it is his unease about something that he cannot fathom.

Naturally, we want to discuss those aspects of our beliefs that we enjoy. Our explanations might be filled with talk of Gods and rites and Vikings. That sounds good to us. To a non-Heathen, how might it sound? Would it appeal or would it sound bizarre? As he is going to compare your statements with his own religious experiences, how will yours match his Sunday school lessons, church worship and general beliefs about Divinity? Would he see a connection with his idea of religion, or would he make a correlation to Halloween?

Obviously, explaining Heathenism to non-Heathens can be likened to tap-dancing across a mine-infested no-man's-land.

We are not alone in this. Wiccans, Buddhists and other non-Christians face the same problem. Like us, they are more prone to start the discussion with the more visible aspects of their religions. Focusing on the aspects which sound good to us is human nature. We merely forgot to think of what might sound good to the other fellow.

In all negotiations, be they for international treaties, business transactions or creating alliances, the best start is to find common ground among all parties. Negotiators like to start on similarities rather than differences. They look for things that are shared by all parties involved. For instance, business' most obvious starting point is profit. A military alliance's parties all share the desire to defeat a common enemy. Peace treaties are based on all parties wishing to avoid hostility.

Our deities and forms of worship are not common ground with conventional religions. Father, Son and Holy Ghost are light years away from Odin, Loki and Asa-Thor. Some Heathen groups' blots are about as different from a church service as a motorcross rally is from a drive to the grocery store. There is nothing common about that.

If we get into our differences, all that happens is an argument. It becomes a game of "my Gods are better than your God." We do not want that!

A shift in focus gives us common ground. Rather than discuss theology first, look at things

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everyone shares. We need to focus on why rather than how. Why do we believe in Heathenism? What has it done for us?

As they used to say in the bad old days, 'What are you bringing to the table?"

How has Heathenism benefitted any of us? Can we show results in our own lives? Have our lives improved materially or socially? Have we ourselves improved as a result of Heathenism?

Let's face it; a guy can argue with believing in a hammer-wielding thunder God, but he cannot refute solid results. There is the kind of common ground that makes a difference!

What benefits have you had?

Is your family life better? Are you and your spouse happier? How are your children benefitting?

Do you feel more confident and capable? Has your willingness to take responsibility made a notable difference in your life?

Have your Heathen beliefs contributed to your getting a better job? Have they helped you financially? Have they made you handle money and other things more responsibly?

Does your home look better? Do you feel better?

Can you tell him how Heathenism can make a positive difference in his life?

Can you give him examples of how Heathenism brings real results that he can appreciate?

Using you own life as an example, can you show him instances where Heathenism has made a positive improvement?

Before you even think of bringing the message of Heathenism to others, you need to be clear on its advantages in your own life. After all, anyone can read books and discuss Gods and lore and Vikings. How many can point to improvements in their everyday lives?

Are you living better?

Are you earning more?

Do you enjoy better relationships with others?

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If your life was a shambles before Heathenism, can you show changes? Perhaps these are things such as the police not coming to your house any more, or no more visits to the local courthouse. Maybe you can show that you are no longer suffering from a gambling compulsion, alcoholism, addiction or some other compulsion.

What are you bringing to the table?

The best thing you can give is solid proof that Heathenism has benefitted you. Talk about Vikings and Rune all you want, but all that talk is nothing compared to tangible evidence of improvement. However an inquirer may pose his question, what he really wants you to do is show him something he can see. A person cannot see the favor of the Gods, but he can certainly see better living conditions, better relationships and a more respectable way of living. Talk is just so many words. Actions and items are proof.

I am sure that you can come up with more questions as to how Heathenism has helped you. The ones mentioned above are but the tip of the iceberg. They provide a starting point for conversation because they bring something real to the table. Skeptic or not, a person cannot ignore tangible results.

The next step is to explain how Heathenism helped you gain these benefits. What is it about Heathenism that helped you go back to school, get a pay raise or create a happier family atmosphere? What role did Heathenism play in making the results of which you speak? When you begin discussing Heathenism, it certainly advances the conversation when you can say, "This is what I have, and here is how I got it."

Granted that it may be more of a thrill to tell folks you are worshipping the same Gods the Vikings did. All that does is convinces them you're living a fantasy. It is not as much of a thrill to say that because of your beliefs, you have real benefits that improve your life. However, nothing succeeds like success. People will be a lot more likely to take you seriously if you have something to show them.

For further help in passing the message, here is a downloadable PDF booklet that can help: ***What is Heathenism?*** Download from here:
http://www.thortrains.com/UncleThors/What%20is%20Heathenism.pdf

Books and Publications by The Trollwise Press

A Partial List

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Recovery for Magickal People The program of Recovery is explained in magickal terms, with clear examination of the process and the facts that lead to freedom from compulsion and obsession. Insightbful, sage advice on many things from someone who has been there.

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A leader is doing nothing good if everyone is dependent on him. A leader who excels is one who instills independence and ability in others.

Epilogue

So ends this issue of Uncle Thor's Magazine. Our goal this time has been to address concerns of the wider Heathen community in terms of cohesion. That in itself is a daunting subject. It revolves around the problem of how one might promote cooperation without ceding independence. I believe we have given some credible ideas which might lead to solutions.

I believe that the types of Heathenism we have today might very well evolve into very different forms within the next two centuries. As Heathenism becomes more and more a part of the modern world, changes will be made that many of us today might not even recognize. We have not set forth a doctrine and creed, but a living thing that grows and moves with the times. Core ideals will remain unchanged, but their application will evolve to best meet the needs of the times.

Heathenism works when it improves our lives. Life itself provides the testing grounds of our ideals. We have a practical spirituality which addresses our current needs directly. It can be a powerful force for bringing forth the best in us and in our world. People have had success applying Heathen principles to their own individual situations with great results.

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Articles in this issue were written by Thor Sheil.

We have a Yahoo group to discuss the magazine http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unclethors/

It's not a toy

It's not a model

It is art!

It is art that you can play with

Art to display with your other cool stuff!

Toy soldier art!

The best part comes when you take it out of the box.

And the box is art, too

(signed by the artist, no less!)

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