



LIVING ASATRU

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Living Asatru

Introduction

There are a number of books available in print that introduce the Asatru religion to the interested reader. Most of those are written by folks who are far better read than I, and who have done much greater research into the history and religion of the Teutonic peoples of antiquity. I have found, however, that a living religion requires something other than just careful research or educated reconstruction of practices. A living religion must include a bridge between knowledge and everyday life – a map from the abstract, esoteric theory to the mundane and the ordinary.

This book is intended to provide some information on how I have adapted the research into ancient Teutonic religious belief and practices that others have made available to my ordinary life. This should not be taken as an authoritative statement on how Asatru should be practiced or adhered to by anybody else – rather, this is my own take on making Asatru a real part of my own everyday life. The intent is to form a single statement, as part of what I would hope will be an ongoing conversation among those interested in reviving the religion of the ancient Teutonic peoples.

Greg Shetler

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What Asatru Isn't.

Most people who discover Asatru come to the religion with a lot of misconceptions. Some come to Asatru from some other Neo-Pagan belief; others come to Asatru through their own explorations of history and mythology. Still others come from other sources. If this is your first book on Asatru, you likely have had at least passing contact with Neo-Pagans, white supremacists, fundamentalist Christians, and others who may have all had something to say about Asatru. Let me lead into this by clearing the air, and sweeping aside some of the misconceptions that you may have acquired during your investigations.

I would hope that anybody can see that those who have little or no contact with a group of people really can't be taken as authorities on the beliefs or practices of those people. It should be fairly obvious, then, that the best folks from whom to learn about Asatru would not be Christians, Jews, religious watchdog groups, college professors, or authors who are not themselves Asatru. The best source is somebody who is a practicing Asatruar.

So, let me first talk about some popular misconceptions regarding Asatru, so we can progress with a clear field.

Not A Branch of Wicca

Go to any gathering of Neo-Pagans, and ask what Asatru is. You'll likely hear a wide variety of answers, but in general most will reduce to something like, "The Norse Path". The uneducated person would very likely consider this answer to mean that Asatru is a "branch" of Wicca. That is, that Asatru is a Wiccan "path", and that Asatruar subscribe to most (if not all) the general beliefs that Wiccans do. One would then expect Asatruar to believe in the "Law of Three", and the "Witch's Rede", or to sign messages with "Blessed Be" or end ceremony with "So Mote It Be". Such a person would be very surprised to attend an Asatru ceremony, or meet an Asatruar in person.

Some Neo-Pagans consider that all religious thought contains some portion of the divine truth, and that therefore they should not limit themselves to a single cultural theology. Without arguing the merits of this approach, it is not hard to see that a person adopting the philosophies of Wicca is not Asatru, even if they worship the same gods and goddesses as do Asatruar. The same statement can be made of Wiccans who worship Yahweh, as compared to Jews.

Thus, one should not consider Norse Wicca to be Asatru. The underlying philosophies are different, and the approaches to treatment of the gods and goddesses are thus different. There are many Wiccan precepts that are directly contradictory to those of Asatru. Others aren't found in Asatru, and Asatru maintains some precepts that aren't found in Wicca. They are fundamentally different, even if a number of Wiccans find themselves able to incorporate worship of Norse deities.

Asatru is not a branch of Wicca.

Not An "Earth-based" Religion

One of the great all-embracing terms that is used repeatedly by Neo-Pagans to differentiate their faiths from the other Pagan faiths

(Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, etc.) is that their religion is "Earth-Based". Frequently (and mistakenly), they state that Asatru is also an "Earth-based" religion. To understand why Asatru is not "Earth-based", we simply have to look at what it means to be "Earth-based".

"Earth-based" religions believe that the Earth is alive and is a spiritual entity. It can take many forms, and many names, but essentially Neo-Pagans in some sense worship, or include as an important part of their worship, Nature. The philosophy of Earth-based religions is centered on this fundamental concept. Worship revolves around recognizing and interacting with spirits present in the world around us, and in recognizing our own place as part of the overall harmony of nature.

Asatru, on the other hand, is about people. We are a part of Nature, but the focus of the religion is not on our role in Nature. We revere land-spirits, barrow-wights, and dwarves who live in the earth, and alfs who live in the forests, and a whole host of Nature spirits. But we don't focus on the fact that these are Natural spirits, whose guidance is therefore holy and wise. Rather, we focus on how we, as people, interact with the world we find around us and the other people we find therein.

The seasons affect us, and a wise man will adapt his farming and hunting to the demands of the season. Even in our modern world, insulated as most of us are from the needs of farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering, we are still affected by the changes in temperature, length of daylight, amount and direction of wind, and changes in diet due to availability of various foods. The wise man will recognize these, and adapt his behavior to them, even if he does not worship the complex of processes that produce these variations.

Thus, while a healthy respect for the needs of the Earth that gives us life is an intelligent thing to maintain, it is not a part of Asatru to worship that earth, or base our worship on its maintenance. We don't revere natural processes as being something holy and separate from

mankind, rather than seeing them as just an essential part of the world in which we live.

Asatru is not "Earth-based".

Not Bigotry

Still more should it be obvious even to a casual observer that Asatru is not an excuse for bigotry. On the contrary, throughout the lore hospitality for strangers is strongly stressed as a fundamental virtue – almost a law – to be observed by all those who would follow the Aesir and the Vanir. The original practitioners of the religion we are now seeking to reconstruct were equal opportunity raiders, traders, husbands, wives, allies, and enemies. While individuals might feel repugnance for those of another tribe, this repugnance was not codified in the religion he or she practiced.

Bigotry should always remain a thing that is a personal choice, and not something codified into the religion. When a personal choice becomes codified into religion, the religion becomes little more than an excuse for that choice. The fact remains that the choice for such people is made first, and the religion adopted and edited to fit that choice. And when a personal prejudice becomes codified into a religion, the religion has become, in part, a worship of the self. We are not gods, to be worshipped for our opinions – and so bigotry of any kind has no place in our religion.

Many Asatruar, however, feel themselves called back to Asatru through their heritage. Moreover, a significant part of Asatru theology has to do with ancestor spirits, the “luck” of family lines, and reincarnation. For many, this leads to the concept of a “Folk Religion”. For them, Asatru is about rediscovering the “Folk Soul” that they share with their ancestors. For these Asatruar, people without a Northern European heritage simply cannot share in the same “Folk Soul”, and so they are not truly Asatruar. This is not dissimilar from the approach taken by Hindus regarding their religion and their heritage.

Still, to borrow a popular term, these “Folkish” Asatruar do not promote bigotry. They feel that all heritages have similar “Folk Religions” to which they have exclusive claim. They make no assertion of which heritage is “better” – they simply claim Asatru is a

part of their Northern European heritage. The important thing to note here is that “Folkish” simply claim Asatru as part of their heritage in the same way they might claim lederhosen or lutefisk – anybody can wear lederhosen or eat lutefisk, but they are still essentially Northern European things. Eating lutefisk doesn’t make the consumer Northern European – nor does it give that person a claim to lederhosen as a part of their heritage. Asatru, for the Folkish, is both cultural and genetic in nature.

Others feel that the gods and the goddesses welcome any and all who are willing to follow them. These Asatruar are called by a number of terms, ranging from “Universalist” to “Non-Folkish”. Some of these Asatruar also believe in a “Folk Soul”, but feel that those who don’t share in the heritage can certainly be true Asatruar and build Asatru as a part of the heritage of their descendants. To return to the lederhosen and lutefisk, these “Non-Folkish” Asatruar feel that a person may adopt the cultural heritage of the Northern Europeans, and pass this on to their children as part of their genetic heritage. Adoption was a common practice of the ancient Teutonic Peoples and of the Aesir and the Vanir – thus Asatru may be adopted as a new culture by those called to it who may not have any Northern European ancestry whatsoever.

But whether one is “Folkish” or “Non-Folkish”, Asatruar do not use their religion as an excuse for bigotry. Any who claim to be Asatru and who then use their professed religion as an excuse for their bigotry are simply pretenders, seeking validation for their own bitter failing as human beings.

Asatru is not bigotry.

Not An Excuse

In fact, the point I made about bigotry not being a part of Asatru can be extended. Those who use religion as an excuse to behave poorly are not Asatruar. This includes those who use “defending their honor” to excuse hitting somebody they don’t like. It includes those who use the

rules of hospitality as a shield to protect them while they are rude in their host's home. It includes those who state that frith is owed only to Kin, and that stealing, oath-breaking, and other reprehensible behavior is alright with regard to non-Kin. In short, anybody who chooses to behave badly, and then adopts or uses their religion to excuse the behavior is not Asatru.

Asatru, and religion in general, provides a framework of constraints on behavior. Asatru, and religion in general, does not give license or remove responsibility for one's actions. Rather, Asatru demands that the Asatruar adhere to strict moral and ethical behavior. The gods make it clear in the lore that they don't much care for those of morally weak character. And it should be obvious that using religion as an excuse to misbehave is very weak moral behavior.

As one Asatruar put it, "Asatru isn't easy, and it's not for the weak." This is because Asatru makes demands of the Asatruar in terms of honorable behavior, and gives him no excuses for failing to behave honorably. Asatruar aren't forgiven for failing to live up to the demands of Asatru simply by asking for forgiveness. Each success and each failure adds to their örlog, which will be passed on to their descendents, as well. Choosing to behave badly, or to act dishonorably, is (of course) far worse than acting in a way that results in unintentional dishonor. Asatru neither forgives dishonorable behavior, nor provides rationalization for behaving dishonorably.

Asatru is not an excuse.

Okay, Then What Is Asatru?

Hopefully, you did not come to this book with any of those misconceptions about the nature of Asatru. If you did, I hope you don't take offense at my assertions, but rather continue to read on and discover for yourself the reasons behind my making them. And if either you came to this book without those preconceptions, or have now set them aside, we can begin now to explore what Asatru is.

Reconstruction

The most important thing to remember while reading this book, or any other book on Asatru, is that it is a reconstructed religion. We have a body of "lore" that provides a glimpse into the beliefs and practices of the ancient Teutonic peoples. In addition, we have a body of archaeological evidence that supports the lore, as well as providing its own tantalizing glimpses into our long-past ancestors' beliefs and practices.

There is no "bible" for Asatru. If you thought this book might provide you with an authoritative guide to Asatru, I'm sorry to disappoint you. Any text that claims to be authoritative loses all credibility with that claim. Any self-proclaimed "expert" who claims to be able to tell you all about Asatru similarly destroys their own credibility with that claim. That statement applies to me and this book as much as it does to anyone – remember that this book is my own statement about living Asatru. An important thing to keep in mind is that any two people who look at the lore and the archaeological evidence will come away with interpretations that differ on at least a few crucial points. More often than not, the differences of opinion are numerous and critical.

This book is only my own interpretation. I strongly urge you to read the original lore, and carefully examine the archaeological evidence. Read others' interpretations and compare. Come to your own conclusions. And if your conclusions disagree with mine, I request that

you engage other Asatruar in a discussion of those conclusions, so your efforts can be added to the general effort of reconstructing our religion.

Invention

Lore and archaeology can only go so far. Between them, we have a rough framework for a religion, but we have huge gaping holes that must be filled if we are to practice the religion we are rediscovering. This can only be accomplished by introduction of new material. That material may come from theologies or esoteric philosophies from other cultures or systems of belief. The material may come from what has come to be termed "Unsubstantiated Personal Gnosis", or UPG. The material may come from careful analysis of the system of thought demonstrated by what is available, and extending that system of thought through inference to cover the holes. In any case, this process amounts to invention, no matter how well grounded that invention may be in fact.

So how can these inventions be tested to see if they are appropriate? For example, could we not "invent" a tenet that demands adhering to a white supremacist philosophy? We can invent anything we choose to invent. To have a coherent religion, however, the invented pieces have to "fit" with the stuff that we do know. Things that obviously just don't fit don't belong. Obviously, Thor did not drive a Harley Davidson around the fjords of Norway in Olaf Tryggvason's time. Such an invention, since it doesn't fit, should be abandoned as soon as it is voiced. However, it is certainly no stretch to consider that he may drive one now, when he roams the earth.

You may find things like invented languages, "runic yoga", tantric practices based on Asatru lore and belief, or other seemingly strange inventions. Some seem to fit very well. Others may seem to be very strange and awkward. What must be remembered is that for those who advocate a given invention, the invention works. And while discussing the relative merits of their invention can be fruitful and valuable,

rejecting them as Asatru simply because they adhere to some belief that you don't agree with is somewhat absurd.

After all, different regions revered different gods, and practiced their religion in different ways, even among the original practitioners. And the ancient Teutonic peoples didn't initiate holy wars based on those differences. We would do well to admit that we are inventing parts of our religion as we go, and accept that others may prefer different inventions to our own.

So how does what I just said fit with my earlier assertions about what Asatru isn't? Remember, this book is my statement, made according to my beliefs. I have reasons for those beliefs, and will relate them later in this book. Read, and decide for yourself.

Evolution

Finally, as we live the religion that we are rebuilding, we find that some concepts that we thought were part of the religion and important just don't fit any more. People and societies evolve. The religions that are part of those cultures evolve as well. Asatru, however, is being reconstructed from information that is imbedded in a long-past culture. Some concepts just don't apply any more. As an example, we no longer use the holmgang to settle challenges to our honor, despite numerous references to it in the lore. Similarly, we find ourselves needing to adapt the advice in the Havamal regarding appropriate behavior for a guest and for a host – some of the societal behaviors therein just aren't practiced any more.

However, this evolution needs to be done with care and forethought. We want to evolve our religion, not completely re-invent it. If our desire was to reinvent it, we wouldn't go through the painful process of studying the lore, studying the archaeological record, studying history, and trying to determine the thoughts and beliefs that informed the lives that created the evidence we are studying. Our gods are real – they still exist, and they are calling to us. It is up to us to try to build the bridge that will bring us back to them. We have to build it strong, and we have to build it to last – for we have many generations to follow us home.

Lessons From Lore.

Many intelligent people have gone before you and me. They have spent long years studying, and have derived some lessons from the lore. In the earliest days of rebuilding Asatru, many of these initial lessons were floated like rafts on the ocean of confusion in which those pioneers found themselves. Those rafts provided a stable ground from which to build more.

It is important to understand the role these derivative lessons play, however. They are not the "Ten Commandments" or the "Catechism" of Asatru. These are not the only lessons contained within the lore, nor can they realistically be considered the greatest of lessons contained in the lore. They are, however, important lessons. They provide a starting point for rebuilding a religion from the bits and pieces that are all we have.

Nine Noble Virtues

Among the first published set of lessons from the lore were the "Nine Noble Virtues". These virtues are embodied in the text of the lore, and are descriptive of virtues that an Asatruar should strive to maintain in his or her life. While other qualities are also important for Asatruar who seek to be complete human beings whose behavior makes them a fit companion to the gods, these are a good starting point for Asatruar new to the religion. Different groups now have differing version of these virtues, but all are very similar in meaning, even if the specific word chosen is not the same as in this list:

Courage

Generally, this is considered to refer both to physical and moral courage. An Asatruar should face up to those things that scare him or her, and do the right thing in spite of their fear. Courage should apply both the big things and the little things. It is for this reason that many Asatruar insist that Asatruar should be openly Asatru – hiding one's

religion is seen by them as a sign of moral weakness. Others see hiding their religion as an application of wisdom and practicality to courage – after all, it's not courage to charge an enraged bear with a toothpick, either. Still, each must decide for himself what is courage and what is bravado. The lore makes it clear that the gods don't favor stupid people, yet favor weak people even less.

Truth

Lying is the path of coward. It takes courage to stand up and tell the truth, especially when that may result in unpleasant consequences. Lying is such an easy "way out" – at least it appears so at first. Yet only those lacking in moral fiber and the courage to take responsibility for their actions can consider lying a good thing. In the lore, they are considered wise who can deceive without ever lying, yet they are also considered untrustworthy. For example, it is said of Odin that he made a number of oaths with giants, but made sure that they were killed before he had to fulfill the oaths. It is generally considered by Asatruar to be much better to be honest, than to be technical truthful while being deceptive.

Honor

Honor may be defined in many ways. The simplest, it seems to me, is to say that honor is living up to your obligations and fulfilling your duty. Your promises and oaths are obligations which must be fulfilled. More than this, though, Asatruar have an obligation of frith to their kin. That obligation is strongest for close blood relations, and weakest for those with whom the Asatruar simply shares a community. The degree to which an Asatruar fulfills his obligations, and lives up to the expectations of the gods and his ancestors is the degree to which he may be said to be honorable. Note that this definition of honor is very different from a definition of honor as being "reputation", or "public esteem". Honor of this kind does not need "defending" – it is a virtue that you practice, not a badge that you display.

Fidelity

Supporting one's kin, even if you don't agree with them, could be said to be an honor-obligation. However, fidelity is more than that. Fidelity also requires the Asatruar to consider the impact of his actions on the welfare and security of his kin and his community. Following one's own interests to the detriment of those of your kin, even if you are adhering to all oaths and obligations, is betrayal, and thus shameful. It is not enough simply to live according to the rules and to fulfill your oaths – you must also act with the interest of those to whom you owe fidelity in mind.

Discipline

Asatru is not an easy path to follow. It is not enough to be "mostly honorable" or "usually loyal". The concepts simply don't make sense, really. The Asatruar must hold himself accountable for all his actions, just as the gods do. He must school himself to maintain discipline in his personal life, as well as his public life, or he is nothing more than a hypocrite. Of course, we are human, so we don't always live up the principles to which we try to adhere. Discipline includes the idea that when we fail we recognize it and, when appropriate, make some kind of atonement. We don't just shrug and forgive the lapse as human frailty – forgiving failure like that just encourages further failure.

Hospitality

In a more hostile time, a stranger coming to the door might some day be the hand that saves the family. A traveler caught out of doors in inclement weather was thus owed warmth, food, and shelter to the best of one's ability to provide them. This concept, while no longer applying strictly to simple physical survival, still applies today in a more abstract sense. Hospitality is the mark of the generous host. It builds bridges and encourages a sense of community – a cooperative spirit. The mean-spirited host who will not give freely of what he has to his guests does not inspire trust, does no credit to his honor, and shows himself to be a coward afraid of giving up any of what he has. Generous hospitality, on the other hand, tends to beget generous

hospitality, and demonstrates strength of character that doesn't depend on clutching at material goods for self-esteem.

Industriousness

Hard work is its own reward. It helps maintain and build discipline, brings wealth that can be hospitably shared, builds trust and demonstrates honor and fidelity. Those who are accustomed to working hard can overcome the adversity that stops the weak-willed in their tracks. Those who are unwilling to work hard are little more than parasites, leaching the life from their kin and their community. Industriousness is the best guarantee that future generations of kin will have what they need to survive and grow.

Self-reliance

This extends the concept introduced in Industriousness. Self-reliant people choose their paths to be sure that they don't need help to accomplish their goals. They make sure that their needs don't take precedence over the needs of the community or their kin. Those who always need help are, in a sense, being greedy – they are asking from their community more than their fair share of work. While it is a good thing to help out others, it is incumbent on Asatruar to plan to never need that help. That doesn't mean that all Asatruar must therefore be farmers, hunters, shepherds, spinners, weavers, brewers, carpenters, leatherworkers, mechanics, electronics techs, weaponsmiths, etc. It does mean that Asatruar should seek to make their own way, earning enough money to purchase that which they cannot provide for themselves, without needing ever to beg for money or assistance. Needing help, and asking for it, is not some kind of "sin" for Asatruar, though. Rather, Asatruar seek to minimize how much and how often they need help, and try to repay any help they get.

Perseverance

The ability to overcome adversity is the hallmark of the survivor. The ethics of Asatru, as the astute reader should have recognized by now, are about providing for the survival of one's self, one's kin, and one's

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community. That means that as an adjunct of Discipline and Industriousness, the Asatruar must school himself in persevering in the face of obstacles. Tasks or goals that can be identified as impossible or too costly should be dropped or modified – perseverance does not mean mindlessly slogging on no matter what. It does mean that when a project suddenly takes on new difficulties, or the full scope of effort required to accomplish a project is finally determined, the Asatruar should press on and accomplish what he has set out to do, if it is still possible to do so.

Note that this includes setbacks in living up to the Nine Noble Virtues. When an Asatruar slips a little in adhering to the Nine Noble Virtues, he does not suddenly become some sort of "sinner", failure, or pariah. As long as he perseveres in trying to live up to these ideals, he is still living Tru. When setbacks occur, the Asatruar simply reevaluates his situation, corrects his course, and sails on.

Six-fold Goal

RIGHT

The Asatruar should always look for the “right” path. That means that he should try to be just, honest, and correct in all he does. He should also try to correct any wrongs that he inadvertently causes, regardless of whether he meant to cause the wrong or not.

WISDOM

Asatruar should think about what they are doing, and try to make sure that their actions will produce the consequences they want. Ill-considered action is the source of many of the world’s wrongs, and acting without thought just adds to them. Wisdom is built by looking back on what we’ve done, to learn from our mistakes and apply those lessons to our future actions. It also means being willing to ask for counsel, and accepting criticism.

MIGHT

Without strength, the Asatruar cannot fight against those forces that would harm him, his kin, or his community. One should seek not only physical might – useful for doing work and providing physical defense – but also political, financial, and intellectual might. The quest for might should be tempered by the Nine Noble Virtues, but are necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of one’s self, one’s kin, and one’s community.

HARVEST

Life produces a great abundance of wonderful things. If they are not harvested, they go to waste. Keep your eyes open, and watch for opportunities to harvest the fruits of life that will be beneficial to yourself, your kin, and your community. Keep your eye on what harvest your actions will produce, and abandon actions that are fruitless and wasteful.

FRITH

Literally “peace”, frith is a complex concept. Frith might be described as a combination of loyalty, hospitality, honor, and support. It is an obligation owed to one’s kin and community to consider their welfare in your actions, and not act to harm them. It is owed most strongly to blood relatives, less strongly to friends or guests in your home, still less strongly to those with whom you share your community, and almost not at all to total strangers – provided they are not your guests, of course.

LOVE

Without joy and a zestful appreciation of life, there’s really not much point in living. Look for the good in others, and understand that you are a natural being. Don’t be ashamed of your human drives – while they should not necessarily be indulged indiscriminately, their fulfillment is a large part of what makes life worth living.

Guide to Life

Simply put, then, the Asatruar has a very hard course to follow. At the same time, this course is completely lacking in the concept of “sin”. Rather, the Asatruar seeks to maintain frith, build a reputation for being a good person, and avoid shaming himself and his ancestors. We are not admonished to “love all men as brothers”, nor are we told to “turn the other cheek”. Rather, we see in our lore that the gods tell us that while “man delights in man” we should still “return lies for lies”. We should be strong, and defend our people and our property – which is, after all, the future of our people. We should support each other, but never demand that support. We should work hard, always keeping an eye toward the consequences of our actions, both in terms of incidental impact on others and in terms of what they bring us.

The simplest way to put this is, to my mind, to quote an insightful Asatruar friend of mine: “Seek to be somebody the gods would want to hang out with.”

I think it’s very important to note that nowhere in this section have I said that Asatruar should be stubborn, nor should we stand on principle to the detriment of our ability to function in society. Our ancestors were pragmatic people, who recognized that to survive they must get along with their neighbors. Their laws and customs reflect that mindset. It could even be argued that the reason that the original religion disappeared was that the Norse sought to get along with a people who didn’t care to compromise.

We can learn from that lesson, while still maintaining a place in our modern society.

Asatru, then teaches us to be strong, but not bullies. To defend our people and our property, but not pick fights to prove our willingness to defend them. To love life, but not to overstep the bounds of good taste and honorable action. To always keep in mind that while the rest of the world may be Útlanders in terms of faith, they are nonetheless all kin of

a greater or lesser degree, and thus all owed at least a minimal degree of frith. Our actions today shape the reputation of generations of Asatruar to come – we are creating new örlog for our descendents with our every action. We owe them an örlog that helps them live their lives, not one that hinders them.

It is our task to make our gods proud of our ability to live as people – not to show off our dedication with silly postures and over-bold words. At the same time, our gods don’t want weak-willed pushovers who seek accommodation at the expense of their freedom. It’s a narrow road we travel.

Basic Ethics

So, from all of this – the Nine Noble Virtues, the Six-Fold Goal, and so on, what can we say about our ethics? Does Asatru have sin? Who judges what is right and what is wrong? What are the consequences, if any, of doing wrong? These are all very important questions.

At root, Asatruar are concerned with being the sort of person our gods would approve of. The Nine Noble Virtues describe the kind of person that our gods would probably like to associate with. But the NNV aren't ethics, they are qualities. Similarly, the Six-Fold Goal isn't ethics – it's behavioral goals. Ethics, by their nature, are restraints on behavior designed to make sure that behavior is "correct". We've defined what "correct" behavior looks like. Now, what are the ethics that will constrain us, so that we behave correctly?

The Norse were not proponents of an absolute ethical system. They lived in a rich world of color, rather than one defined by black and white – or even shades of gray. They recognized that for any behavior, there were situations in which the behavior was utterly wrong and other situations in which that behavior was perfectly right. If we are to adopt, or adapt their ethics to our modern world, we must first recognize this.

A look at the legal system of the Norse makes clear that first and foremost, they recognized that what matters is the result of an action – not the intent. If I kill a man accidentally, he is still dead. His family still suffers, regardless of the fact that it was an accident. Intention is purely internal and subjective. Results are external, real, and objective. It is what is real, and who caused it to be real, that determines the moral impact of an action. Intentions should not be completely discounted, as they indicate what people will do in the future – but they aren't as important as the consequences of actions.

Örlog

The Norse considered people to carry with them a component of their soul that was partly inherited, partly developed by themselves over the course of their life, and which strongly influenced their fate. This soul component was the örlog, or "primal law", if you will. The örlog was determined independent of man's laws, and is based entirely on the results of one's actions.

This may sound like karma, but it is really quite different. While karma is distinguished by "good" and "bad" karma, with "good" and "bad" being determined by a complex mix of intention and conformance with man's laws, örlog is independent of these things. Basically, the kinds of actions you take determine the sort of things that will tend to happen to you. Spirituality aside, this statement should be pretty obvious. If you tend to row out to sea in a boat, you will tend to be at sea. If you tend to ride inland on a horse, you'll tend to be on horseback.

The same simple, mechanistic cause-effect relationship applies to the örlog, too. If you tend to be honorable, you will generally find yourself surrounded by honorable people, who treat you honorably. If you tend to be dishonorable, the honorable folks will tend to leave you alone and you'll be surrounded by dishonorable people. Moreover, nobody will trust you to be honorable.

Örlog is a concept that moves this from simple behavior to the spiritual realm. Your örlog can be considered to be something akin to moral momentum. It defines the direction of your *wyrd*, or fate. This momentum can be altered, but it is very hard to do. Atoning for past "wrongs" doesn't make them go away – but sufficient atonement can finally produce such a weight of "right" that the "wrongs" of the past are finally overwhelmed. Similarly, a massive weight of "right" behavior can survive a momentary "glitch" or failing, without immediately pitching you down the slippery slope of moral decay.

Okay, so we have örlog. So who determine what is "right" and what is "wrong"? Simple: there are no such things. What there are, instead,

are behaviors that make you a desirable companion, kinsman, leader, partner, or compatriot, and those that make you undesirable? Somebody who kills people is a danger to society, and is highly undesirable. In fact, he may be so undesirable that he needs to be killed. Somebody who steals, or lies, is similarly undesirable, and may be driven out or have all their possessions taken from them as punishment or recompense.

At the same time, these behaviors when enacted against your tribe's or nation's enemies are laudable. Taking these actions on behalf of those to whom you have professed loyalty build an örlog that is filled with the likelihood that they will similarly defend you if called on to do so. Moreover, it makes you a desirable part of the society to which you belong, which helps guarantee a good wyrd within that society.

Of course, since we are all related to some degree, and we live in what has become a global society, many things that the Norse would have considered normal and okay are now no longer such good things to do. Raiding the next valley over used to have as a consequence an increase in the wealth of your valley and the possibility of them raiding your valley in return at some future time, and little else. Getting together a raiding party composed of folks from your valley helped guarantee that the örlog you gained would be all "good" – your actions benefited your society, so you would likely benefit from them as well.

Now, such behavior is likely to get the whole valley (perhaps your whole nation) in lots of trouble. Our horizons are much wider, and the scope of what we consider to be our society is much greater. In essence, we need to treat everybody in our nation in much the same way that a Norseman would treat others living on the same hof. We need to treat other nations in much the same way that a Norseman would treat another Norseman from another nearby tribe – like distant relations who can appeal to a common legal body for redress of wrongs.

As a practical example of the functioning of örlog, we can consider what happens if Joe asks me to help him in a business deal. If I agree, but refuse to accept payment, then I am a full partner in the deal – even if Joe is doing something shady and underhanded to defraud those we're dealing with. If, however, I demand some token payment for my action, then I am acting as a tool of Joe's will – if he defrauds those we're dealing with, the will behind the action was his, so his örlog will take the brunt of the impact. Of course, mine will take some of the impact, as it was by my own will that I acted on Joe's behalf. And of course, if I get payment and the deal is all good, then Joe gets the most of the benefit from it, while I get only a little.

This sort of thing is well illustrated by the Norse view of their leaders. It was the leader's "luck" that primarily influenced the success of a mission, and it was the leader's luck that reaped the greatest benefit or loss from the mission. This "luck" is, really, just the leader's örlog in action.

So, with no "right" or "wrong", how can we say we even **have** an ethical system? Simple: by constraining ourselves to act in a manner that makes us desirable members of society, desirable companions to our kin and to our gods, we constrain ourselves to always act "correctly". Our örlog is a continuous, objective punishment for wrong behavior and reward for correct behavior. There is no forgiveness – though there can be atonement. Our gods will choose, when we die, what happens to us based on our örlog at the time. We may go to Hel, and share her table. We may go to Valhalla, to join our noble peers in preparing for Ragnarok. Or we may find all halls closed to us, and wander as unhappy ghosts for all time, our foul örlog prevented from re-entering the world with us when we reincarnate.

Note that örlog is partly inherited – you get some of your örlog from your parents, a little less from your grandparents, and still less from their parents. Even if you are shunned, or cast into the River Fear following your death, you will have a negative impact on your descendants if you fill your life with "bad" örlog. They will inherit

your örlog, and will have to deal with the consequences of what you give them. Your living family, as well, shares to some degree in your örlog, just as you share in theirs. Doing deeds that bring them undesirable örlog essentially causes them harm and brings undesirable consequences to their lives.

It is this that constrains us, then – the desire for good lives, both for us and our families, in this life and those that follow. Our ethical constraint derives from a recognition that örlog will **automatically** be affected by our actions, based on the consequences of those actions and not just our intentions. It behooves us, then, to very carefully consider our actions so as to avoid making bad decisions based on good intentions. There is no “temporary insanity” plea in the court of the gods – nor do they care if you intended the harm you did or not. Just as the consequences of your actions occur regardless of your intention, just so is your örlog affected regardless of your intention.

Frith

I mentioned before that Frith was a rather complex concept. Literally, it means “peace” – but it incorporates many concepts that we might consider to be supportive of peace, rather than a part of peace itself.

Frith is an obligation to consider the welfare of others in our actions. It includes not hurting them, and treating them courteously – as might be expected from the definition as “peace”. But it includes more than just not actively hurting or being mean to others. Frith means acting in a way that will keep your actions from hindering or negatively affecting the welfare of those to whom you owe frith. That makes frith a thing that applies to nearly everything you do.

Consider – every action has consequences. Frith demands that you consider those consequences before you act, and that you make sure they don’t have negative impact – and that negative impact to those to whom you owe frith will garner “bad” örlog. That is, breaking frith

will build moral inertia that increases your likelihood of others breaking frith with you, or not trusting you.

We all owe frith to varying degrees to all living things around us. Our blood-kin are owed the greatest frith of all. After all, in very real sense we can be considered to share a sense of identity – our blood kin are ourselves to some degree. Note that the ancient Teutonic peoples considered the gods to be our ancestors, and so they too are blood kin.

A somewhat lesser degree of frith is owed to our relatives who are less closely related – cousins, second cousins, relatives by marriage, adoptees, and so forth. This is not because they are less worthy as people, but because their örlog is less closely related to our own and we don’t share as great a sense of identity with them.

Still less frith is owed to members of our “tribes” who are not direct members of our family. In modern society, we each tend to live in a number of tribes all at once – our schools, clubs, employers, sports teams, and circles of friends are all examples of tribes to which we belong. Different tribes have different levels of “bonding” – different degrees to which they could be considered “close-knit”. Of course, those that are more closely knit are owed greater frith out of recognition that those tribes have agreed to share greater frith with you.

As we continue to move outwards in terms of closeness of relationship, we owe less and less frith. At the extreme end is the frith we owe animals, plants and natural spirits on the other side of the world. We share a common ancestry with them (whether you consider that ancestry to be defined by evolution or by creation from Ymir’s flesh), and share the world with them – so we owe a bit of frith to them, as well.

The thing about frith is this: a greater obligation of frith takes precedent over lesser obligations. Thus, though I owe my cow some frith, my frith to my descendants and my kin takes precedence. So, there is no violation of the concept of frith in slaughtering the cow and eating it.

Similarly, while I owe all men frith to some degree, I owe a burglar much less than I owe my family and descendants – and so don't violate frith by killing the burglar.

Consider that last example. In some places, killing a burglar would be considered a heinous crime. The reasoning is that property should never be considered as valuable as or more valuable than a human life. That reasoning, though fails to consider that the burglar has violated frith with me by breaking into my home, and that this makes him a danger to others as well. Moreover, property is in a very real sense a provision for the future of myself and my descendants. By breaking in to my home to steal that property, he is directly damaging me, my tribe, and my descendants. Protecting myself, my tribe, my descendants, and my tribe by killing the burglar is adherence to frith on my part.

It is important to note here: while life is precious, the future of those to whom we owe frith is still more precious. The lives of those to whom I owe less frith are less precious than those to whom I owe greater frith. And the lives of those who actively oppose the welfare of those to whom I owe frith aren't worth much at all, as frith demands that I defend my kin. Thus, while war is a horrible thing, it is entirely justified by the concept of frith. Compare this to the hypocrisy of a legal system that says shooting a burglar in defense of your family is a criminal offense, even while supporting warfare as an acceptable means of defending a nation's economic interests.

Ethics Examples

As with everything else in this book, these examples are not so much "how you must behave in order to be Asatru", but are rather "how I see Asatru ethics in action." In other words, these are just examples of my interpretation of what our gods want to see in us, put into practical application. That doesn't change the fact that as a strongly opinionated person, I feel very strongly that these examples really **are** good examples of how our gods want us to behave. The behaviors in this section are drawn from real life, and are based very solidly on

behaviors demonstrated in the sagas and spoken of in Havamál. They are direct applications of considerations of frith and örlog in action.

Oaths

"Your word is your bond". "You're only as good as your word." These are sayings that are common, in one form or another, in many ethical systems. But at the same time, there are many stories where "bad guys" are lied to by the hero(s), and their word is broken for some greater good. Asatru is no exception.

Odin lied to giants in order to secure their help; the Aesir lied to the Fenris wolf about their intentions in order to secure him. Yet still Asatru places a huge emphasis on the sanctity of oaths. How is this sort of conundrum to be resolved?

As with other ethical considerations, the solution in Asatru lies in determining the relative costs and impacts to frith and örlog – or in other words to impacts to your own integrity and the benefits or costs to your kin, your tribe, your community, your nation, and all mankind. This doesn't mean that the means justifies the end – that is a solution that might satisfy frith, but which shatters your own integrity. Some examples are in order to illustrate this.

A casual statement

Bob and Alice are having a conversation about their plans for next week. They are cousins, and haven't seen each other in a while. Bob tells Alice that he'll pick her up at 7:00 on Wednesday night, and they'll go see a movie that they both want to see. Wednesday rolls around, and Bob picks up Alice. They get to the theater, and the only way they can see the movie in question is to see the 10:45 showing – which is not convenient to either of them. None of the other movies is really appealing to them, so they opt to go to the putt-putt golf course down the street, instead.

Why is this an ethical question? There are actually a number of ethical questions to ask here – though fortunately most of the answers are “no brainers”.

- 1) Since Bob promised to take Alice to a movie, does he still owe her the movie at a later time? No, because both agreed to an alternate plan for the night. In other words, Alice relieved Bob of his obligation. His statement **did** incur a debt, but Alice is the owner of that obligation and so can relieve him of it.
- 2) Since Alice agreed to go to a movie with Bob, does she still owe him her company at a movie? Really, this is the same answer as #1 – Bob has relieved her of this obligation.
- 3) Each has given the other a gift (time and company) – do these gift-debts cancel each other out, or do they each now owe each other more time and company in response to what they received. If so, can they negotiate a cancellation of these gift-debts? Yes and no. As with any people who routinely do nice things for each other and spend time together, continuing to do so both discharges gift-debts and creates new ones – while building a stronger frith-bond between them and making any accounting of the gift-debts grower fuzzier and more tangled with time. At the same time, negotiating a cancellation (as in, “Thanks, I had fun, but I’m not sure when we could do this again – I hope you had as much fun as I did”) can leave both of them with feelings that their frith-bond has grown weaker.
- 4) Since they are cousins, and so already have frith ties that are probably pretty strong, shouldn’t all these considerations be thrown out the window? Shouldn’t they *owe* each time whenever it’s asked for, by virtue of their kinship? No. Their kinship demands frith, and concern for each other’s welfare in greater degree than that owed to others in their community, or others in their tribe who are less closely related. But that doesn’t mean that considerations of gift-debt or of building and maintaining a sense of kinship and frith-bond should be thrown out the window. Even with kin closer than cousins,

gift-debt is an obligation that must be kept in mind – or the bonds of frith will unravel, and you’ll find yourself owing frith to somebody to whom you’ve grown estranged.

This example, simple as it is, has a surprising number of things to demonstrate. It’s important to keep in mind that at root level, all decisions regarding interactions with other human beings are ethical decisions; not because actions are either harmful or beneficial, or sinful or virtuous – but because our actions impact other peoples’ worlds, so we should consider the nature of that impact in making our decisions.

A Promise

Karl goes to work for a company, and they ask him to swear that if he ever leaves the company, he won’t work for any other company in that business, in that area, for 2 years. This is a pretty standard “non-compete” clause. However, while working there he decides that he cannot abide some of the company’s unethical activities and demands, so he quits the company. Now, he has job offers from companies in a similar business, in the same area. What should he do?

This one is a little tougher. The glib answer is “stick to his promise and turn them down – look for another kind of work.” However, there are other considerations at work here.

The company broke their contract with him by demanding unethical actions of him, and by behaving in an unethical manner. Does he even owe them any loyalty to his promise to not compete? Yes and no. Because they broke frith, he is free to ignore any promises he made to them. However, he may still have frith obligations with his coworkers – and competing against them could harm them. Still, if he needs the jobs being offered to him in order to secure his and his family’s survival, those frith obligations to his coworkers take second-seat.

Is he in a position where he can get revenge by exposing the company to law enforcement or some other “watch dog” organization? Is he in a position where he is ethically obligated to do so? Again, yes and no, to

both questions. He can certainly get revenge, but that revenge may hurt others in the company to whom he still owes frith – in which case he definitely should **not** seek revenge. On the other hand, it may be the best thing for those to whom he owes frith to expose the company and force them to get rid of the unethical folks whose demands drove him out. As to being ethically obligated to seek revenge – ethics should really be considered a set of constraints on behavior, not a set of drivers for behavior. To say he is ethically obligated to seek revenge would mean to say that he has a clear picture that choosing to not seek revenge is behavior that results in definite ethical damage. Only then could he be said to be ethically compelled to seek revenge. It's rare that situations arise in which ethics provide a clear, compelling course – rather than offering guidelines for figuring out what is best for frith, örlog, integrity, and reputation with our community and our gods.

Home Defense

Asatru stresses generosity, yet it also stresses strength and the ability and willingness to defend kin. Property is a tangible form of investment in the future. Moreover, control of property can be easily seen as a demonstrable measure of a person's power, luck, and örlog. That is, a person with power controls their property as they see fit – keeping or giving it by his own choice. Luck in the Asatru sense is the tendency for events to fall in line with a person's needs and desires. If property is being taken without your consent, you don't have much luck. Finally, a person with property has örlog that is likely to be beneficial to those around him – while somebody without property is likely to have örlog that has already proven to be unlikely to keep them well supplied with goods.

With all that in mind, the ethics behind home defense are really clear, right? Not really. As with all ethical questions, even that of home defense can be more complex than might be apparent at first glance. Consider: while sleeping, you hear a noise. Somebody is clearly sneaking through the kitchen window. You get your gun, and go to the kitchen. Sure enough, there's somebody climbing through the window.

You shoot and kill the intruder – and later find that this was a friend who needed shelter, and who hadn't been able to rouse the house by knocking and ringing your doorbell.

The example seems contrived, but this exact scenario has happened, and is sometimes quoted by gun control proponents as an example of how dangerous gun ownership can be. The point is that unless all the consequences and circumstances of a given situation are known, there is no way to be absolutely certain that any chosen action is perfectly ethical. So what **are** the ethical considerations behind something like defending your home?

First and foremost, the brief description of how control of property is a measure (and thus, also, contributes to) örlog and luck should give a good indication of how to think of defending your property. The point is that controlling your property is what is important – not the property itself or your possession of it. In defending your home, somebody who breaks in has preempted your choice of whether to offer them hospitality. They are also likely to have broken something in getting in, so they've also damaged your property without your consent. They are engaged in behavior that makes it clear that they intend to ignore your authority over your property still more. They are already damaging your örlog, and intend to damage it further.

But how to respond? In times past, killing the intruder was the obvious answer. Science was unequal to the task of determining the identity of a wrongdoer after the fact. Now, we have science that allows us to track down thieves and bring them to trial. Should Asatruar take the view that unless their lives are threatened, they should not use deadly force? Some states in the US have decided exactly that, and have written the laws relevant to use of force in exactly that way. Others consider the violation of a person's sovereignty to be a good indication that the perpetrator intends harm, and thus deadly force is allowed to defend property.

In general, Asatru ethics support the latter view. That is, defending your property defends your örlog (and thus that of your kin, and tribe), and thus you are justified in using force. What is important in determining the level of force to use is not the rights of the person who is breaking in, or vandalizing your property, or stealing it. They have already lost all rights by violating yours. What is important is keeping in mind the likely consequences of your actions with regards to your welfare, that of your kin, your community, and so forth. That is, look at the situation in terms of what it does to your örlog, rather than just whether your property remains intact and in your control, or whether you got instant revenge for wrongdoing.

Killing somebody who is flattening your car's tires, even if allowed by law, harms that person's family and friends – not to mention them. The harm you inflict is way out of line with the harm they sought to inflict on you. That makes you a dangerous person, and harms your interactions with other people – they fear you and don't know when you will respond in such a disproportionate manner again. Their trust in your judgment is lessened. Moreover, you encourage other people in the community who may have urges to violence to indulge in those urges. Violence begets violence, through no more complex a mechanism than just creating an atmosphere in which violence is accepted. The dead man's friends and family may also seek vengeance on you or yours, and that possibility must be taken into account.

On the other hand, killing somebody who is coming through your window has different considerations. If they are coming through your window at night, they are indicating that they are willing to confront you in order to get your property. They are threatening your life by coming through the window – provided they are actually intent on stealing your property or harming you or your family. Finding out who they are before you shoot is a good idea in any situation, and especially so in defending your home. Moreover, sometimes driving a potential thief away by making it clear that you are vigilant and ready to defend your home will protect your property even better than killing a thief in the act.

Even in home defense, then, you need to consider the costs in terms of impact to your own örlog, the welfare of your family, your tribe, your community. Those costs need to be weighed against the costs of not acting. There may be times when it is better to allow somebody to steal something of yours than to defend it. That is not weakness – it's prudent, ethical action when you choose to allow it to happen because it's the right thing to do at the time.

Cheating

Regardless of the specific situation, cheating is taking actions that are against the rules in order to get some benefit or advantage. This is different from just breaking the rules – cheating implies intention to break rules that have already been agreed to. On the surface, cheating is always wrong. To cheat, you have to break a promise (implied or stated) that you will follow the rules. But is it always?

The only time that I can see cheating as being something beneficial would be in a situation where you are dealing with somebody hostile to your survival (or that of your kin, tribe, community, etc.). In such a situation, you may be required to conform to rules that impair your ability to survive or to protect the welfare of those to whom you owe frith. In those situations, cheating to either lessen the impact on your survival or to improve your future ability to protect yourself and others is certainly not a bad thing.

Again, the ethical considerations boil down to the costs and impacts to örlog of your actions, as well as your ability to live up to obligations of frith. A prisoner who is required to hurt another prisoner is certainly doing right to "pull the punch" or somehow lessen the hurt, even if he has agreed to follow the rules in order to get fed. Somebody who works for a company wherein their supervisor asks them to pass all correspondence with management through them is not wrong to "blow the whistle" and alert management to problems the supervisor is not passing on. These are forms of acceptable cheating.

On the other hand, cheating in a classroom, even if it improves your odds of passing the class and thus improving your ability to bring in money for yourself and your family is not acceptable. Cheating means you don't get the learning the class is intended to provide. It robs your future self of true capability, and may even set you up for failure when you or somebody else relies on you having the knowledge the class was intended to impart.

Cheating at sports is directly lying in order to improve your chances of winning. Even if you are a professional athlete, and feel that your career is on the line if you don't win – this situation is not one where the rules impair your ability to survive or protect those to whom you owe frith. On the contrary, the rules of sports are intended to guarantee that all are playing with the same limitations and empowerments, so they actually protect you just as they protect the other athletes. Getting ahead at the cost of your integrity hurts your örlog now, and hurts your reputation and that of your family and team if you are caught. And that is putting your frithmates at risk, rather than protecting their welfare!

Killing

Given that killing in defense of home, kin, and so forth is already demonstrated to be acceptable, what can be said about killing in general? When is it okay to take the life of another human being, and when is it not? Most religions make a flat statement that killing is wrong, even though their history is full of examples when their clergy instigated or supported killing. United States law contains statutes against killing, but then proceeds to grant many exemptions to punishment under the laws proscribing murder. This muddle is, of course confusing. If the absolute statement that killing is wrong is accepted, then how can exceptions be granted based on predetermined circumstances?

Asatru ethics are, as stated before, a guide to behavior that will enhance örlog and our reputations with the gods. In that, they are not absolute

statements, so we don't get into the tangle of trying to decide ahead of time all the possible exceptions to an absolute law of right and wrong. As a friend once said, "Trying to plan for all contingencies in policy is just a good way to go wrong with confidence." There is no way to know in advance all of the factors that must go into a decision regarding whether killing is appropriate in a given situation, and no way to know all the likely consequences sufficiently in advance to define an absolute ethic that is appropriate to all situations. Instead, Asatru ethics provide a guide by which to determine at the time of decision whether killing is good or bad.

As with the other ethical questions presented in this section, the Asatruar must determine the impacts to his own örlog, as well as the costs to his kin, his tribe, his community, and so forth. And it is not only the loss of a member of the community that must be considered – emotional impact must also be taken into account. The ancient Norse understood that sometimes violence is the only way to resolve a conflict between human beings. Violence rarely achieves the best possible resolution for all participants in a situation, but sometimes it is the only means by which to resolve the conflict for the simple reason that one or more participants simply won't accept any peaceful situation. A bully who refuses to listen to arguments about why he should stop being a bully must be stood up to if the bullying is to stop. A rapist with a knife to a woman's throat is not going to listen to words or pleas – only violence or the credible threat of violence is going to stop him.

Given that violence is sometimes the only method for resolving a problem between people, there are times that the violence will result in killing. The ancient Teutonic peoples understood that all killing causes some harm to somebody in the community besides the one who was killed. The family and/or household of the person killed loses a contributing member, a friend, a husband, a brother – whatever he was to them. Even if the killing is justified, it causes harm. For that reason, they employed *were gild* as a means to compensate those harmed by a killing when the killing was justified. We no longer use that

mechanism for righting the scales, and our law gives us policies by which "... to go wrong with confidence."

Ethically, though, it should be clear that Asatru ethics constrain us not to kill others unless it is necessary to inflict the great harm of killing another person in order to prevent greater harm to ourselves, or to those to whom we owe frith. In breaking frith with the person we kill, and those who depend on him in some fashion, we not only harm that person and his kin – we damage our own örlog significantly. People who go around killing other people will before too long find themselves surrounded by killers, or at least by people who are not repulsed by killers. In the simplest example, a soldier ends up surrounded by soldiers and they all kill together. In peacetime, though, a killer will generally end up surrounded by folks of rather flimsy moral fiber, who may get them into all sorts of additional trouble.

The only way to avoid that is to only kill when it bolsters your örlog by an amount greater than the damage done. That only happens when you prevent greater harm by doing the killing. A policeman who kills a hostage-taker prevents harm to his örlog because he is living up to his oath to protect the community, saving the hostage's life, and preventing future harm to the community by the criminal. A soldier killing in the line of duty is fulfilling an oath to serve his nation's interest by putting himself in harm's way and doing his part to force a hostile nation to stop damaging his nation's interests. Moreover, the soldier is protecting his frithmates – his fellow soldiers – by keeping the enemy soldiers from hurting or killing them.

As a simple guide, then, we can say that in general it is acceptable to kill in self-defense, to defend another, to defend your community, or to serve your nation. Also, in general, we can say that it is **not** acceptable to kill in order to take another's property, to vent your anger, or to create an opportunity for yourself or others to get material gain.

Moreover, if you are forced to kill, it is strongly suggested that you find some way to compensate those who are harmed by your killing, to

mitigate the effects on your örlog. Nowadays, folks won't accept payment of *were gild* generally, but other forms of mitigation can be found. Compensation can come in many forms though – contributing to charity organizations that help train people in marketable skills so they don't feel compelled to burglarize homes like your own, or contributing to organizations that seek to help sex offenders grapple with their problems are examples. This kind of compensation is great, because it not only helps to mitigate the harm to your örlog that may be caused directly by the killing, it also helps prevent future need for yourself or somebody else to have to kill in the same circumstances. In this way, you can still pay *were gild* to the entire community, even though the concept no longer applies as directly as it once did.

Leadership and Politics

Politicians are the butt of many jokes regarding integrity. The old joke that you can tell a politician is lying because his lips are moving is a great example. Politicians make speeches about holding to principles, and acting for the welfare of their constituents, yet many of them do things that appear to be solely for their own benefit. They also make all sorts of deals that have nothing to do with their constituents' benefit in order to increase their power. It seems as though this is absolutely necessary for a politician to be successful, as otherwise they would be powerless people of integrity but no influence and no office. How do Asatru ethics apply to politicians, and more broadly to leadership in general?

A great example of the ethics expected of leaders can be found in Odin's behavior in the Edda. He is the chieftain of the gods – leadership decisions fall to him to make. His örlog is shared with all the gods, and their welfare is his to protect. Yet he makes deals with giants and then finds a way to renege on payment. This is classical political behavior – the sort that leads cynics to be so critical of politicians as a class. How does this fit with ethics that are so demanding of integrity?

Anybody who would take a leadership role must remember the simple truth that they are assuming a position where their own örlog becomes less important than the welfare of those he is leading. If he is taking a leadership role for his own aggrandizement, he is in a sense stealing from those he leads – enhancing his own position at the expense of his followers. A leader, then, has to take the leadership position as a servant to his followers. In this way, he adheres to his obligations of frith as a leader. In fact, great leaders frequently say that this is their viewpoint of leadership – that they serve their followers, rather than vice versa.

So does that mean that as long as you are serving your followers, you can set aside ethics that would apply if you were acting for your own benefit? Strangely, the answer is not a resounding “No!” Rather, the answer fits the pattern that is surely becoming very apparent: “It depends.” It depends on the costs and impacts of the action in question. The difference is that now the primary consideration is not your own örlog and that of your kin, your tribe(s), your community, and so on in descending levels of importance. Instead, the primary consideration is the welfare and örlog of the organization you lead – your own örlog and welfare are considered only as a single member of the organization.

So what happens if you do something as a leader that would be unethical for an individual? Perhaps as mayor you have to lie to protect your city’s access to highway funds that are threatened by another politician’s accusations. Is that ethical? It can be, provided all of the costs and impacts of the lie are taken into consideration, with the welfare of your city being considered more important than personal considerations. What is critically important, though, is that as mayor you recognize that the welfare of your city may require that you sacrifice your political career on its behalf. Thus, if you choose to lie, and the lie is made public, you must be ready to resign if necessary so that the city’s welfare can be supported by another who has not been tarnished by being caught out in a lie. It is this self-sacrifice that partially redeems the leader who has done questionable things in service to his constituents.

That would appear to say that any action at all is okay, as long as it serves the organization. In fact, it does not. Remember, the costs and impacts of the action upon the organization must be considered in full. Part of the impact of an unethical action, whether it is made public or not, is a decline in the integrity of the organization as a whole – and that damages the örlog not only of the leader who chooses the action, but also that of the organization as a whole and of everybody who makes it up. Odin reneging on his agreement for payment for Asgard’s wall severely sabotaged the trust that giants are willing to afford to any of the Aesir – he damaged the integrity of his entire tribe of gods. Clearly, he considered that cost to be acceptable in return for the defense the walls would provide. But one of the things given to a leader to protect is the örlog and reputation of his organization – and if the benefit doesn’t clearly greatly outweigh the cost to the organization’s integrity, he is breaking frith by spending it unwisely.

Ethics and the Law

If cheating is usually wrong, but is sometimes right, what about breaking the law? That is a form of cheating, since living in a land is essentially tacit agreement to live according to its laws. Generally, Asatru ethics indicate that the law should be followed. However, there are situations where ethics and the law disagree. When the law demands actions that will hurt those to whom you owe frith, your frith obligations require that you break those laws. It is important to remember, though, that frith refers to supporting and protecting welfare – not necessarily with supporting and protecting desires.

So, for example, if a member of your family has had their life threatened, you might be right to carry a weapon in violation of the laws against concealed weapons in order to be ready to defend your relative’s life. Or if you had a relative who shows up on your doorstep in possession of drugs, asking for help to get clean, you might flush the drugs and check your relative into a clinic rather than turning in the drugs as required by law. On the other hand, if your brother breaks into

somebody's home and steals their TV, you are not obligated to be his accomplice by helping him fence the TV. Frith would require that you try to get him to stop his behavior (which damages the *örlog* of the whole family) before he gets caught. It may also require you to turn your brother in, if he simply won't stop – especially if he has other means for supporting himself or his family.

It is important to note here that some would say that the example of the Vikings demonstrates that Asatru does not consider theft unethical. In point of fact, the raids of the Vikings were on *other peoples*, not neighbors who are part of the same nation. The acts that correspond to Viking raids are wars between nations. Should somebody in America put together a raid on North Korean wealth, Asatru would have no ethical problem with it at all, right? No, even then Asatru ethics say this is a wrong thing to do. Not because of any harm caused to North Korea in this raid, but because the consequences for America in world politics are likely to be harmful to all of America. Thus, the raid is harmful to those to whom the hypothetical raiders owe frith – and it is thus unethical. Things have changed in the world since the days when Vikings supplemented their income by raiding other people – the world is closely interconnected now, and so no clearly congruent analog to Viking raids really exists now.

Modern vs. Ancient Ethics

That last point is very important, in fact. Determining modern ethics cannot be done by simply looking at the ancient stories of how people behaved and choosing to emulate those behaviors. The world is changed, and this requires changed behavior. Looking at those ancient stories is valuable in determining the principles that inform them. But ethics must come from an adaptation of those principles to the current situation, or they fail to serve as a guide for living a good life. Rather, they become a set of constraints that simply cannot be lived within – and as life demands violation of those failed ethics they are paid less and less attention. We can generate very rough analogs for some behaviors in the Eddas and the Sagas, and use them as guides for

ethical behavior – but this process must be approached with caution to avoid letting ethics move from a set of constraints to a set of empowerments to excuse bad behavior.

Thus, we can take from stories of feuds fought in Thing and duel and battlefield the ethical principles of frith obligation, self-sacrifice on behalf of those to whom frith is owed, and adherence to law and social custom in protecting one's property and kin. We can take from stories of Viking raids ethical principles regarding leadership and followership, as well as demonstration that ethics are situational, rather than absolute. Feuds and Viking raids are not behaviors that would be acceptable today – but the underlying ethics that inform the behaviors of the participants are still applicable.

Introduction to Gods

So, if you're going to try to be somebody the gods want in their halls, you'll need to know something about each of them. This is not an exhaustive guide, nor is it authoritative. To really get to know them, you should read both the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda, as well as all the sagas you can get your hands on. Then, talk to them. Offer them mead, and other gifts. Don't worry – they'll respond and they'll tell you all you need to know about them. On the way, you'll learn something about the cosmology of Asatru, and read many stories about the gods, the giants, dwarves, elves, and trolls, and many other beings that share the world with us.

Odin

Often described as the chief of the gods, Odin is the one-eyed god who made the world from Ymir's body with his brothers Villi and Ve. Odin sacrificed his eye and hanged himself on Yggdrasil for nine days and nights in order to learn the secret of the runes. He stole the mead of poetry from the giant Suttung. He is usually considered the god of kings and rulers, and is known by kennings ranging from Valfather (father of the slain) and Ganglare (Wanderer) to Bolverk (Evil doer). He is a hard god to follow, as he seeks to build the army he will need at Ragnarok and thus often tests his followers to destruction. He figures very prominently in most of the Eddas, and that is the best place to learn more of him.

Frigga

Often described as the wife of Odin, Frigga knows as much about the future as the One-Eyed himself, though she doesn't speak of what she knows. Frigga frequently takes the role of the female head of household in Asgard, leading many to consider her the patroness of the hearth and home.

Frey

One of the Vanir, Frey was given to the Aesir as a hostage to end the war between Aesir and Vanir. His name means "Lord", and he is described as the "Lord of the Alfar". He is usually depicted with an erect phallus, and is generally thus considered the patron of wealth, fertility, and prosperity.

Freya

Frey's sister, she is described as being very full of life, and the lust for life. In Loki's flying, he describes her as the harlot of the gods, indicating that a good part of her lust was carnal. She gets half the slain (Odin gets the other half). Many consider her to be the patroness of female fertility, sexuality, and prosperity.

Thor

Thor is described as the defender of Asgard and men. He wields his hammer, Mjolnir, in conflict with the giants. In Viking times, he was perhaps the most popular god – many wore a stylized hammer amulet to invoke the protection he offered to mankind. With his girdle of strength and his hammer, Thor was often considered to be even stronger than most giants.

Heimdall

Also known as Rig, Heimdall is the ever-watchful sentry at Asgard's gates. It is said that he can hear the grass grow and watch the progress of ants throughout Midgard. When the giants storm the gates of Asgard at Ragnarok, he will blow the Gjallar Horn to warn the Aesir.

Tyr

His name means simply "god". It was Tyr who placed his hand in the Fenris wolf's mouth as a security for the good behavior of the gods when they sought to bind him. He lost the hand when the gods proved that they were not acting in Fenris's best interests. Since he had to

have known he would lose the hand, but did the deed anyway, he is often considered the patron of honor, courage, and justice.

Ull

Some believe Ull to be a kenning for Odin. Others consider him a separate being in his own right. He appears to prefer winter, and taught mankind to ski. Some believe that he rules Asgard while Odin is out leading the Wild Hunt during Yule.

Loki

The trickster god, Loki was always playing tricks. As long as he made up for the harm he caused, the gods tolerated him in their midst. When he got carried away and insulted them too much, saying truths they didn't want to hear, they bound him under a serpent that drips venom on his face. His wife, Sygni, holds a bowl to catch the venom, but when it is full she has to take it away to empty it. Loki will remain bound until Ragnarok, when he will lead the dead from Niflhel against the Aesir.

Bragi

The poet of the gods. Bragi is always full of song and poetry, and inspires bards and artisans of all types in the crafts.

Baldur

The "Bright One", Baldur was slain by Hodur in an accident promulgated by Loki. He now rests in Hel, waiting until after Ragnarok, when he will return and rule the earth.

Hodur

The blind god who struck down Baldur with a dart made of mistletoe. As the mistletoe was too young to make an oath not to harm Baldur, it alone of all things had not been asked to make such an oath. Hodur was slain in vengeance by Vali.

Skadhi

A giantess whose father, Thjalfi, was killed by the Aesir. She came to Asgard to avenge her father, but was offered a husband as recompense. She ended up choosing Njord, and married him.

Njord

One of the Vanir, Njord was given to the Aesir as a hostage following the war between the Aesir and the Vanir. Frey and Freya are his son and daughter, respectively.

Mimir

A giant, who owned and tended the well of wisdom at the base of Yggdrasil. It was this well into which Odin cast his eye when he sought the runes. Mimir was given as a hostage to the Vanir following the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, but the Vanir didn't trust him and so cut off his head. Odin preserved the head, and keeps it for the wisdom and advice it gives him.

Customs

Antiquity

There is not a lot of information regarding customs of the ancient Teutonic peoples. What we have comes to us from the Eddas and the Sagas, inference based on folklore and modern folk customs, and deduction based on archaeological evidence. Of interest to the Asatruar are those customs that derive from the religious beliefs of those peoples, and it is often difficult to tell if a custom is religious, social, or a combination of the two. Considering those customs, though, can provide considerable insight into the natures of our ancestors, and thus insight into their beliefs regarding the world, its operation, and their place within it.

Yule

Yule was a time for retreating into the Hof, and working on things indoors. The night was considered to be alive with wights, draugr, and trolls – nobody went outside at night alone. Yule logs were laid in the hearth, and the yule flame was kept lit during the entirety of Yule to ward off the evil that might otherwise find a way into the Hof. Wreaths of evergreen boughs would be hung on the door, to provide resting places for friendly wights, in hopes that they would thus ward off unfriendly ones. Evergreen trees were decorated in similar hopes of attracting friendly wights in order to ward off unfriendly forces – and to give unfriendly beings a target other than the Hof on which to spend their hostility. Groups of people would trek from Hof to Hof, singing loudly and boldly, to demonstrate frith between Hofs and to frighten away trolls and such with a display of courage.

Ostara and Other Fertility Practices

Ostara was an Anglo Saxon goddess of fertility, from which the modern “Easter” derives. What little we know is that youths would write their wishes on raw eggs, and then try to throw them as high as possible and catch them. It was presumed that the wishes of the youth who demonstrated both the greatest agility and athleticism in catching the eggs, and the greatest boldness in throwing the eggs really high would get their wishes. Eggs were also rolled through the fields, in hopes of guaranteeing a fruitful harvest.

Midsummer

Midsummer, at least in Iceland, was the time for gathering in Thing, to hear cases, shop, sell wares, network, make deals, and arrange weddings.

Winter Nights

This is when summer is transitioning to winter. Generally, Winternights is when the first round of slaughtering in preparation for winter was done, and when the planning for weathering winter would

be finalized. The Norse had to make sure they had enough wood, food, and fodder to make it through the winter. Any shortage of fodder meant that an animal had to be slaughtered. Shortages of wood meant either a trip to cut wood in the snow, or going cold before spring arrived. Details of this celebration are lacking, though it may be presumed that it was quite a feast.

Common Customs

Hammer Sign. It may be argued that the sign of the hammer was routinely used as a blessing, and that this signing must be similar to the sign of the cross used by Christians today. In one of the sagas, a king is questioned regarding his signing over the cup at sumbel, and his retainer’s response is that he is signing the hammer over the cup. It is not certain, however, that this is an accurate interpretation of what occurred then. Still, the hammer sign is possibly a common practice for blessing food, drink, and perhaps a general blessing as well.

Wight Offerings. Even today, many in Northern Europe and the United Kingdom leave food for the “little people”. These offerings may be for spirits of the land, wights inhabiting the home, or ancestral spirits that watch over the family. There are many references to this practice in both history and folklore, indicating it was common.

Modern

Yule

In modern times, many of the Germanic practices have been suborned by Christians as part of the celebration of Christmas. Trees are decorated, wreaths are hung on doors, and carolers go from door to door singing. The practice of hanging mistletoe on doorjamb, and kissing those who pause under it, may have derived from the story of Balder's slaying. The kiss would presumably indicate that the person under the mistletoe was well enough loved to be spared by the mistletoe, unlike Balder. The yule log is still sometimes burned over the course of Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve, though "yule log" is more often used nowadays as the name of a confection.

Modern German folk practices include leaving shoes outside the door or hanging stockings before the hearth, in hopes of getting some small present from Santa Claus, Saint Nick, Sinter Claus, Saint Niklaus, or any of the many other names by which he is known. It is not a far stretch to presume that this "Jolly Elf" is really Frey or Njord, distributing gifts and windfalls to those worthy of them.

Ostara and Other Fertility Practices

Modern Asatruar emulate their ancestors with egg-throwing feats. Given that we are not such an agrarian society any more, the practice of rolling the eggs through the fields is not so much practiced any more. However, other practices, such as giving chocolate bunnies and egg-shaped candies, are still prevalent.

Midsummer

Midsummer celebrations for modern Asatruar take many forms. Generally, a Kindred somewhere will sponsor a celebration including games, story-telling, wrestling, and other entertainments. This is a time

for Kindreds to try to come together and network with one another. Some Kindreds sponsor National-level gatherings or moots, while others sponsor more local events. This is also a time when the solitary Asatruar will come out and rub elbows with their co-religionists, even if they are not seen at any other time of the year.

Winter Nights

This is no longer the time when the animals have to be slaughtered to guarantee survival through the winter, nor is it a time when many of us are celebrating our first harvest. Contemporary celebrations of Winter Nights include getting fully prepared for the upcoming Yule season, winterizing the home and cars, and celebrating cooler weather. The modern Halloween appears to derive from a practice of children pretending to be spooks and nasties released as the walls between worlds weaken, as summer turns toward winter.

This is a good time to give gifts to the land-wights and home-wights, in hopes of making sure that they help fend off any ill that may come during winter.

Common Customs

Hammer Sign. Many make the sign of Thor's hammer as a general blessing. This sign is very similar to the Christian sign of the cross. It starts at the brow, then touches the center of the chest, then moves to one side then the other. Variants of the sign include holding the fist upright, moving it downward and then side to side, and holding the fist out, then moving it toward yourself and then side to side.

Valknut sign. This is a tracing of the "unitary" valknut in the air, either upright or horizontal, to invoke Odin's blessings or attention.

Wight Offerings. In keeping with the traditions of our ancestors, many Asatruar leave out small offerings for their house-wights, the

landsvaettir, alfar that live nearby and ancestral spirits. These offerings may be anything from incense or candy to small bowls of beer.

Magic, Rituals, and Runes

Ancient Attitudes Towards Magic

Given that there are none of our ancient Teutonic ancestors around to ask, there is no way to truly know what the ancient attitude towards magic was. What we do have is evidence contained in the Eddas and Sagas, and that evidence is fairly skimpy. On the one hand, we have heroes and kings going to wise women, volvas, spae-women, and so on in order to get advice. On the other hand, we have men and women who have a sealskin bag pulled over their heads and who are then hanged or drowned for doing magic.

It would appear that our ancestors viewed magic much as they viewed any other tool – a thing that could be used for either good or ill. The thing to keep in mind is that those who used magic for ill provoked a very strong negative reaction. Those who used magic for weal were still looked on with some suspicion. It seems that our ancestors considered use of magic to be similar to walking through a dry field of grass with a torch in one's hand – useful for light in the dark, but very dangerous to everyone in reach of the wielder.

It is important to keep in mind that the Eddas and Sagas make very clear that not everyone engaged in magic. While some might consider day-to-day things like wearing a Thor's Hammer to be minor magic, it seems that our ancestors did not see it as such. "Magic" was a word reserved for the esoteric things like use of runes, calling up or putting down draugr, faring forth, or seeing the future. Esoteric magic was a part of the background of our ancestors' lives, but it was not a part of those lives. Magic may be practiced by Asatruar, but it is very important to make clear that magic is not what Asatru is about. Rather, magic is an adjunct to our religion – one which attracts some, and is meaningless to others.

Types of Magic

Our ancestors had a number of different words for magic, and each seemed to refer to a different sort of magical working. Any given person could practice more than one kind of magic, or might restrict themselves to a single kind. Some kinds of magic were considered to be restricted to one type of person, while others seemed to be open to all. There is some controversy over just what magic was, and how it operated. Unfortunately, our lore and folktales aren't very clear on a lot of things. What follows is my own take, based on the research of others.

Galdr

This was magic that was ritual in nature, which might or might not involve incidental use of runes, but which generally included singing or chanting to bring the magic into being. Galdr seems to have been largely concerned with tapping into the power within the individual, either to coerce another being to do one's bidding, or to force some change in the environment. Those who did galdr were usually termed vitki. The generally practiced alone, and were usually male.

Seidhr

This magic was much more shamanic in nature, and almost never involved the use of runes. This magic seems to have been mostly concerned with communication with the spiritual side of reality. It could be used to gain advice, tell the future, or harm one's foes. In general, only women practiced seidhr, and seidhr was often practiced in groups or publicly. Those who practiced seidhr were termed seidhkona (or seidhmadhr, if male). A volva was a female who focused on the oracular side of seidhr.

Spae-craft

Spae-crafters were wise folks who knew things like the rhythms of the seasons, healing herbs, how to birth and care for animals, and so forth. While today we might not consider their ways to be magic, it is

important to recognize that their wise insight **was** magical to their neighbors. Spae-crafters were sought both for their esoteric knowledge and for their advice on mundane matters. Spae-crafters were generally women, and were usually also midwives.

Faring Forth

Many consider this practice to be a subset of seidhr. However, there is evidence that vitkar also fared forth, which would make this practice not just a part of seidhr. Simply put, faring forth is the process of leaving the body behind and wandering the world either in another form or invisibly. Note that those who fared forth generally did **not** visit other worlds, but just went places in Midgard. Those who fare to other worlds are more correctly considered to be engaging in seidhr.

Rune Inscriptions

Knowledge of the runes was considered the mark of an erudite man. The presence of many marker stones carved with runes used as letters makes it clear that runes were used for purposes other than magic. Their use as magic is also fairly well documented, however. Unfortunately, the esoteric meanings of the runes appear to be conveyed only in the Rune Poems, and those meanings are not all that clear. Contemporary scholars and authors have unraveled those Rune Poems to the best of their ability, but will be the first to tell you that the meanings they ascribe to each rune are not definitive. The precise meanings of the runes still provoke intense debate among modern runic scholars.

Runic Divination

Runic divination appears to have been relatively commonplace, if some interpretations of historical documents are correct. Runes were carved on "rune staves" – short sticks with runes carved in them and reddened with blood. The rune staves were "cast" and then "read" – processes which are mentioned but not detailed in lore. Presumably, the rune staves were gathered in a bundle, and then tossed onto the ground (according to Tacitus, onto a skin). Reading may have involved

observing the runic shapes formed by the bodies of the staves, or may have involved reading the relationships between the positions of the runes marked on the staves – or perhaps was a combination of the two.

Preparation and Setting

If there is little in the lore regarding magic, there is even less regarding the preparation for magic, or the settings in which magic was done. What little there is indicates a strong sense of ritual symbolism surrounding all types of magic, though the density of symbolism is still less than that of the medieval high ritual magicians. Still, we see volvas dressing in special clothing, vitkar and seidhkona “going under the skin”, oracles sighting on the “high seat” raised on outdoor platforms, seidhmadhr (including Odin) dressing as women in order to do their seidh, and lore suggesting that the method of preparation of runes is extremely important in making them effective.

Detail on the various methods of preparation for magic mentioned in the lore is beyond the scope of this book. However, the following generalizations may be made:

Hallowing

While specific methods of hallowing clothing, ritual space, participants, tools, and so on are not given in the lore, human beings respond well to the use of some form of hallowing to evoke the “magical mood”. Whether you consider a hallowing to be crucial to the safe operation of magic, or consider it little more than “warming up” for the magic to be performed, hallowing serves to prepare us for what we are about to do. It focuses our minds on the task at hand, strips away extraneous thoughts and distractions, and serves to give notice to those spiritual beings with whom we wish to work that we are about to begin.

Hallowing may be as simple as sitting quietly, calming the mind and clearing it of all but the knowledge of the task at hand. It may be as complex as a week-long ritual of fasting, bathing, burning incense, wearing clothing washed in “thunder-water”, cutting fresh gands from a specially-blessed tree, washing the altar in fire, and then conducting an elaborate ritual to set aside the ritual space. What is important is only

that the form of hallowing feels "correct" to the participants. It is that "correct" entry into magical working that is important, not the careful enactment of a set of arbitrary actions devoid of meaning.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice means, literally, to make sacred. Sacrifice is what one does when making gifts of food, mead, money, and so on to the gods or other spiritual beings. Frequently, this is done as part of ritual in order to demonstrate good will, or as a token of esteem.

Sacrifice also means to give something up that is important to you. That is, to pay a price for the magic that you are working. While some may say that a price need not be paid, that the help you ask for will be given or not at the whim of the being you are asking it of, I strongly oppose that viewpoint. Just as with people, a gift demands a gift. If you ask a god to do a thing for you, expect the god to ask for something in return. Much better to choose a gift up front, a sacrifice, and offer it in exchange for the help being requested.

Choice of symbols

We work in symbols, from our language (sounds symbolic of meaning) through traffic signs (shapes symbolic of meaning) to body language (postures symbolic of meaning). We read meaning into all manner of things, and it is through symbols that we experience our world and communicate that experience. Symbols are fundamental to human communication. It is thus also fundamental to our communication with the spiritual world. There is not enough lore surviving to know all of the symbols that were used in ancient times. However, even if we had them, it would not necessarily be a good thing to keep on using them. The meaning attached to symbols changes with time.

An example of this would be the swastika. Originally a sign of life, luck, and energy, it has been perverted by relatively recent history into a symbol of hate. Even for those who know its earlier meaning, there is still an echo of the perversion imposed by those who took it as their

banner in hate. Some seek to "clear" its meaning by using it as it once was used, while others simply avoid it.

Ideally, the symbols used should be known to all participants in a ritual. If there is ever a symbol being used that has multiple meanings, or whose meaning is unclear, you should announce the meaning of the symbol to ensure it is understood. For example, a "blessing bowl" is often used to receive the portion of mead or other sacrifice that is intended for the gods or other spiritual beings. It is wise to announce why you are pouring mead into the blessing bowl as you do it, so that the gods, other participants, and any witnesses understand the meaning of your act and the meaning of the bowl.

Some symbols that have come down to us include:

| Symbol | Association |
|---------------|---|
| Drinking horn | Frith, Odhroerir, Wyrð, wealth, reward, and welcome |
| Blessing bowl | Container for sacrifice |
| Tree branch | Yggdrasil, Wyrð, life energy, healing |
| Runewheel | The gods, Odin, Wheel of Life, the Universe |
| Ale, beer | Vanir and landsvaettir |
| Mead | Aesir and Disir |
| Fire | Loki, Etins, knowledge, sorcery |
| Water | Ran, Aegir, sorcery |
| Door | Hospitality, law, decision-making |
| Distaff | Domesticity |
| Key | The home, land ownership |
| Rings | Oaths |

| Symbol | Association |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Pigs, boars | Strength, virility, Frey or Freya |
| Ravens | Intelligence, cunning |
| Wolves | Predation, wildness, outlawry |
| Bears | Strength and deadliness |

In addition, there are symbols that are associated with specific gods, goddesses, and other beings from the lore. In general, any object that is mentioned in the lore can be associated with the Edda or Saga in which it is mentioned. Common associations include:

| Item | Association |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Sword | Frey, Odin, or Tyr |
| Horn | Heimdall, Odin |
| Spear | Tyr, Odin |
| Hammer | Thor, dwarves, Volund Smith |
| Tongs | Volund Smith |
| Wheat sheaf | Sif |
| Distaff | Frigga |
| Mistletoe | Baldur |
| Ship, boar | Frey |
| Hawk | Freya |
| Cats | Sif or Freya |
| Skis | Ullr or Skadhi |
| Yew bow | Ullr |

Some folks try to correspond colors, planets, plants, stones, and so forth with the gods and goddesses. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that the ancient Teutons saw such associations – this conception appears to have been imported from non-Teutonic magical philosophical systems such as Qabbalism, or Aristotelianism. Nonetheless, if you feel those associations have meaning, then there is no reason not to include them for your workings.

Symbols should be chosen with care, and equal care should be taken to clearly identify the meaning of the symbol during ritual. Not everyone there (physically or otherwise) will understand your choice of symbol. A poorly chosen symbol could completely change the meaning of your ritual for the participants and any witnesses. Imaging calling out, “We offer you our sacrifice, and ask for help in the hunt!” while setting fire

to a giant wooden swastika. This could be an offering of labor and expensive yew wood, asking for help from Ullr in hunting in the wild. Or, it could be Neo-Nazis about to set off on a hunt for whatever human prey they currently hate. How much better to say, "Ullr, we offer you this yew wood, formed into the fylfot as a symbol of life. We have worked to make you a pleasing gift. We ask that in return, you help us in our hunt on this land for deer or boar with which to feed our families."

Choice of time

The time at which a ritual is performed can be as important as all other factors. A ritual intended to communicate a plea to Sunna would not be well done at midnight. Similarly, beseeching help from Frey for the coming year is not best done at midwinter. Finding a time that is appropriate to the intent of the ritual helps bring additional meaning to the ritual, as well.

I'm not advocating the creation of a "correspondence" chart, coupling gods and goddesses with certain times of day or times of the year. Our gods are not so constrained – anymore than you are. I am advocating consideration of the best time for your ritual, based on the ritual's intent and the participants.

For example, dusk is the best time for starting some new project, as each day starts at dusk. That's when you start preparing for the next daytime – eat, rest, sleep, mend clothing, clean weapons, and so forth. Similarly, dawn would be the best time to bring that project into active life – dawn is when the world wakes up and starts stirring. It's when you start the tasks of the day. Noon would be a good time to reflect on what has been accomplished – to pause and offer thanks, or to enlist additional help for projects that are running behind. Midnight is best for cleansing and planning – it's when all the preparation for the coming daytime is complete and all that's left is to sleep. It's the quiet time of the soul, when we can steel ourselves for the work ahead or seek guidance about what we may have missed.

The times of day reflect on the time of year, as well. Dawn is much like spring, noon is much like midsummer, dusk is much like fall, and midnight is much like midwinter. For the ancient Teutonic peoples, there were really only two seasons – summer and winter. Fall and spring were just the transitions between these two seasons. Just so, we have day and night, with dawn and dusk being just the transitions between dark and light.

Choice of place

Finally, a place conducive to a ritual can really enhance the experience, while a place that is counterproductive can completely destroy a ritual. One wouldn't want to celebrate a fertility ritual, for example, in the middle of a steel plant. Consider the whole meaning of the ritual, of the beings you intend to invoke, and the symbols you intend to use. Select a place where you aren't likely to be disrupted, and whose setting is conducive to your ritual. Your environment, after all, is another symbol, and should be considered in that light.

Rune Meanings

As I indicated before, the meanings of the runes are nowhere definitely laid out. The following rune meanings are my own, derived from the works of others and my own studies of the Rune Poems, Eddas, and Sagas. Take them with the grain of salt with which they are intended to be taken.

Fehu

"Fee". Fehu means money, debt, payments, cash, transportable wealth. It means both earned money and windfalls or gifts. It thus represents not only the money or wealth itself, but also any obligations that may go along with the money.

Uruz

"Aurochs". Uruz represents primal strength and virility. It can mean both the capability to accomplish a difficult task, and the tendency to bulldoze obstacles rather than finding a way around them.

Thurisaz

"Giant". Thurisaz means simply power. It is notable, I think, that the Anglo-Saxons called this rune "Thorn". Power can be harnessed, but the kind of power represented by Thurisaz is the sort of power found in lightning, hurricanes, or tornadoes – or in a giant's thews or Thor's Hammer.

Ansuz

"Asa". Ansuz represents the divine principle. It can mean the gods and their actions, or the divine within each of us. It can also represent the drive to achieve, to know, and to be the best we can be.

Raido

"Ride". Raido means simply travel. I use a Raido run on much of my mail to make sure it arrives at its destination. Note that not all travels are physical.

Kenaz

"Torch". I consider it noteworthy that the root word of this rune's name means "to know". I view Kenaz as a torch shedding light on the world so that it may be discovered, but capable of burning the unwary at the same time.

Gebo

"Gift". Gebo represents both the gift and the obligation to return the gift with a gift. Not all gifts are desired by the recipient, though it may be presumed that gifts have value and are likely useful, or at least beneficial.

Wunjo

"Joy". Wunjo is the emotion of joy, the achievement of a state of perfection (however brief), in which there is nothing that one wants. Wunjo can mean the accomplishment of one's desires, or a wonderful discovery. Anything that leads one to joy is appropriate to Wunjo.

Hagalaz

"Hail". Hagalaz is disruption and destruction. Keep in mind that hail has it's time and purpose, along with everything else. Destruction is necessary for rebirth and growth. Disruption tests resolve, and weathering it builds strength.

Nauthiz

"Need". This does not represent want, but true need. You need air to breath, but you don't need clothes. Nauthiz usually represents the fulfillment of a need, but it can also serve as a warning to take care of

needs before it's too late. Nauthiz can also be used to indicate a need, in hopes of getting the gods or wights to help. Such use should be very sparingly.

Isa

"Ice". Stagnation, immobility, and inflexibility. Just as ice is hard, cold, and unpleasant, so Isa means being bound by hard, cold, and unpleasant constraints.

Jera

"Harvest". Jera is the fruition of plans, the harvest that follows growing a crop. A poorly planted and poorly tended field will yield little or nothing, but well-tended fields yield bounty. In a sense, Jera indicates justice – though not of a moral sort. Jera can also mean time on the scale of years.

Eiwaz

"Yew". Eiwaz represents the sort of strength embodied by the Yew tree – powerful and strong, but resilient and enduring. Yew bends far without breaking, rather than resisting unyieldingly and then being broken. Eiwaz indicates that sort of enduring, resilient strength.

Perthro

"Dice Cup". There is a lot of controversy about the meaning of this rune. I prefer to see it as indicating the crux between the possible future and the tangible now. In this sense, it is the dice cup in which the rolling dice change from tumbling possibilities to a fixed result. It is the operation of chance and uncertainty in our lives. As such, this meaning might also bridge the controversy, so that it means both "dice cup" and "birth hall" (the two main opposing arguments for its meaning).

Algiz

"Elk". Algiz means protection. Along with Raido, I put Algiz on much of my mail, in order to protect it through its travels to its destination.

Sowulo

"Sun". Sowulo represents the essential life force fueled by the Sun. It means light, and warmth, and growth, as well as nurture of life. It is noteworthy that this rune is also called Sig ("Victory"). I consider this to be more an indication of the results of Sowulo's influence, rather than the true meaning of the rune.

Tehwaz

"Tyr". This rune represents justice and victory, Tyr's primary concerns. It means both being bound by the forces of justice and having them operate in your favor. Care must be taken when using the Tyr rune, or having it come up in divination, to ensure that one is acting correctly and honorably – or Tyr will mean the operation of justice to punish your own transgressions.

Berkana

"Birch". Berkana means healing and spae-craft. Berkana is a rune for Frigga, as well, indicating her profound esoteric knowledge.

Ehwaz

"Horse". Ehwaz means trust – the sort of trust that exists between a horse and a rider. It also means frith, in that frith can only be maintained by trust. Ehwaz can also mean the violation of trust, as well, though. Care should be taken when using Ehwaz, or when it comes up in divination, to make sure that you are not violating any trusts yourself.

Mannaz

“Man”. Mannaz means human beings, and their relationships. At its extreme, it means marriage. In general, it indicates relationships between two people, or between two concepts that might not necessarily seem to go together otherwise.

Laguz

“Lake”. Laguz means water, sorcery, or emotions. These are all slippery things that one can never actually hold or control. Laguz indicates that which is hidden beneath the surface, or invisible factors that influence a given situation. It generally serves as an indicator to look much more deeply into a situation, as there are things being overlooked. It can also serve to help empower workings, though not in an entirely controllable manner.

Ingaz

“Fro Yng”. Ingaz represents fertility and vitality. One could say it represents the fundamental life principle. Involving Ingaz in a working or finding it in divination just about guarantees growth and increase of some sort.

Dagaz

“Day”. Dagaz indicates cycles of time. It can also mean duration on the scale of days. It can represent things that occur cyclically, or which are currently in one phase of a cycle and which are about to change.

Othalla

“Inheritance”. Othalla means property that was inherited, rather than earned or bought. It is property that one has an ancestral right to, though it was not attained by dint of your own efforts. In that sense, Othalla means your entire örlog, as well. Many use this rune to represent Odin, though I consider that use to be not entirely fitting with the meaning of the rune.

Things to Consider

Ceremonies

Ceremonies are social events, when you get down to it. Honoring the gods, revering the landsvaettir, Disir, house-wights, alfs, dwarves, and ancestors can all be done in private, with no ceremony at all. Ceremony, however, provides a social framework for communal action, and imbues those actions with additional meaning. Whether you prefer “High Ritual” or “Plain Speech”, ceremony is public behavior that demonstrates your beliefs. It thus affirms them, while creating bonds with those who share in the ceremony. Mankind is a ceremonial animal – just look at the number of ceremonies we make a part of our daily lives if you need confirmation of that.

General Ceremony Design

At one extreme, ceremony can be done as “High Ritual”, in archaic or poetic language, with sacred clothing, in sacred spaces, with sanctified accoutrements, and with a lot of structure. At the other extreme, ceremony can be done in plain speech, in ordinary street clothes, wherever is convenient, with few or no accoutrements, and with no more structure than you would find in ordinary conversation. However you do it, however, there are common elements to ceremonies, just as there are to any form of public speaking.

In simplest terms, a ceremony is composed of an opening, a body, and a closing. In the opening of a ceremony, you essentially “set the stage” for what is to follow. In the body, you do the actual work of the ceremony. Finally, in the closing, you wrap up any loose ends, affirm that the work has been done, and thank the participants. In both “High Ritual” ceremonies and “Plain Speech” ceremonies, the same elements are present – the difference lies primarily in the degree of “otherworldliness” brought to the ceremony by the participants.

Some prefer the "High Ritual" style of ceremony, as the perception of bringing spiritual reality to physical existence is very fulfilling for them. The ritual symbolism of "High Ritual" refreshes and reaffirms the esoteric knowledge that underlies the religion, reaffirming their beliefs in a way that "Plain Speech" simply cannot do. These folks usually feel that "High Ritual" is more powerful and evocative. Others feel that "Plain Speech"-style ceremonies are more meaningful, as their religion is just another part of their daily existence. These folks often feel that "High Ritual" is a little silly, and derive little value from the hard-to-understand ritualistic symbolism therein. As with everything else in Asatru belief, you should stick with whatever you prefer.

Opening

In the opening of a ceremony, you "set" the stage for what you are about to do. The opening for a ritual is when you invite the participants into the ceremony, outline what the ceremony is and why it is important, and perform any initial rituals that may be important to you or to the ceremony – blessings, wardings, banishments, invocations, and so on.

In "High Ritual" ceremony, generally the Gothi or Gythja calls the participants to assemble, and describes what ceremony is about to be conducted. The space is then made sacred in some fashion (walking a circle around the assembly with fire or incense while chanting, hallowing the space with a hammer, lighting candles or torches around the space, or whatever you prefer). Part of the operation of making a space sacred is to protect it from harmful influences, and to move those within from being imbedded in purely "secular" space into space that is equal parts physical and spiritual. Once the space is made sacred, the spiritual participants should be called on, and invited to participate. This invocation can include offerings to the gods or other spirits in order to entice them to join the Folk in ceremony.

In "Plain Speech" ceremonies, generally the Gothi or Gythja calls the participants together, and describes what ceremony is about to be

conducted. Often, the space is not made sacred at this point, though some form of blessing of the participants is often included in the opening. The invocation to any spiritual participants is also done simply and directly, and in ordinary speech.

Body

The body of a ceremony is where the "work" is done. Whether you are performing "High Ritual" or "Plain Speech" or something in between, ceremony is about doing something publicly. That may be celebrating a season, marrying a couple, naming a child, or whatever. In the body is where the portions of a ceremony specific to that particular ceremony actually take place.

In "High Ritual" ceremony, the body is generally composed of a number of symbolic acts, invocations, and ritualized activities. "High Ritual" ceremonies focus on bringing the spiritual into the physical world. This can be accomplished by symbolic acts, having participants roleplay the parts of spiritual entities or abstractions, and altering the state of consciousness of the participants.

In "Plain Speech" ceremony, the body is generally composed of symbolic acts, invocations, and ritualized activities that are simpler and plainer than those you would typically find in "High Ritual". The symbolism tends to be more direct, and doesn't rely on esoteric knowledge for understanding. Generally, "Plain Speech" ceremonies do not incorporate role-playing.

Closing

The closing of a ritual affirms to all the participants that the work has been done. Frequently, it includes some form of thanks for the participants, both physical and spiritual. It often also includes some form of blessing for the physical participants, and an offering for the spiritual participants. If space has been made sacred, it is usually "desanctified" at this time.

For "High Ritual" ceremonies, there is usually some formalized, ritual thanks given to the spiritual entities involved, followed by a blessing of the physical participants and an offering to the spirits and/or gods involved in the ceremony. The sacred space is "opened" (by ritually dousing flames, walking the circle backward with fire or incense while chanting, "cutting" the circle, or whatever), and the participants are invited to leave.

For "Plain Speech" ceremonies, the closing is frequently shortened to a simple blessing of the participants (perhaps sprinkling them with mead or water from a blessing bowl), followed by a briefly worded offering to the spirits involved in the ceremony.

Sample Ceremonies

I'm only going to give one sample of each kind of ceremony to give the idea. The reader should look at the many websites available, and read widely, and then either adopt a ceremony they like or create their own. This book isn't about laying down how ceremonies are to be done, but rather about providing some ideas to spark your own creativity.

A "High Ritual" marriage

Preparation: Prior to the ceremony, an altar should be set up with a hammer, a horn, a blessing bowl, some mead (enough to fill the horn), a tall wax candle, two short beeswax candles, a ribbon or cord, a knife, some bread or small cake. The groom should bring a sword, and the bride should bring a sword or axe. Each should also bring their rings to give to each other. A wedding agreement between the families should also have been negotiated the night before, spelling out what each family is giving each other in the marriage, and signed by the head of each family.

(The Gothi enters, and performs a Hammer Hallowing. He then lights the two beeswax candles.)

GOTHI: Good folk, friends and kin to (groom) and (bride), we are gathered at this time to witness the bonding of two families through the marriage of (groom) and (bride). This is a special moment for them, as well as for all of us – for as we are witness to this marriage, it falls on us to help the newlyweds fulfill their vows.

(Gothi turns and faces North)

GOTHI: Oh, High Gods and Goddesses, hear us! We will this day make mighty oaths as your Folk! We call you to come witness the marriage of (groom) and (bride), the bonding of (groom's family) and (bride's family)! Frigga, Freya, Frey, Odin, Thor, Sif, Ull, Njord, Skadhi, and Forseti, come witness these oaths and help your children live up to them! Be with us now as we, your Folk witness their betrothal in bond of marriage!

GOTHI: Who will stand to support the groom?
 GROOMSMEN: We will. (Groomsmen enter and stand to Gothi's left)
 GOTHI: Who will stand to support the bride?
 BRIDESMAIDS: We will. (Bridesmaids enter and stand to Gothi's right)
 GOTHI: Where is the groom?
 GROOM: Here. (Groom enters, escorted by parents, and stands just to Gothi's left, with parents behind him.)
 GOTHI: And where the bride?
 BRIDE: Here. (Bride enters, escorted by parents, and stands just to Gothi's right, with parents behind her.)
 GOTHI: Are the families agreed that this marriage is good, right, and proper, and are both prepared to support and defend the married couple?
 PARENTS (together): We are.
 GOTHI: What is the nature of the wedding agreement between your two families?
 GROOM'S FATHER: We have agreed to provide, as bride-price, the following: (reads from agreement)
 BRIDE'S FATHER: And we have agreed to provide, as dowry, the following: (reads from agreement)
 GOTHI: Forseti, Ull, and Odin, take note – the families have agreed to the bride-price and the dowry, and have sworn to defend the married couple. All have witnessed this, and none may deny it.
 (Parents take seats)
 GOTHI: (Groom), are you here of your own choosing, to pledge your troth to (bride), without coercion or doubt, and with no intent to deceive?
 GROOM: I am.
 GOTHI: (Bride), are you here of your own choosing, to pledge your troth to (groom), without coercion or doubt, and with no intent to deceive?
 BRIDE: I am.
 GOTHI: (Groom), do you bring with you a token of your lineage, to give into the safekeeping of your wife?

GROOM: I do. (Offers sword to bride, who places her hands on the sword). I give you, wholly and with without qualification, my reputation and that of my line, my life and that of my line, and bid you keep them safe and whole.
 BRIDE: I accept your reputation, your troth, and your life, and will keep them safe and whole. (Bride takes sword).
 GOTHI: (Bride), do you bring with you a token of your lineage, to give to your husband in return?
 BRIDE: I do. (Offers sword or axe to groom, who places his hands on it). I give you this weapon of my line, with which to defend yourself, our name, our home, and our children.
 GROOM: I accept this weapon, and will wield it always for our weal. (Groom takes axe or sword).
 GOTHI: As husband and wife, your marriage depends on the unselfish giving of each to the other. Just as man needs food to survive, so do your souls need the love of each other to survive. As token of your love for one another, take this bread and feed each other. Just so will your souls feed each other and keep your marriage alive. (Gothi breaks break or cake in half, and gives half to each to feed each other.)
 GOTHI: As husband and wife, your marriage depends on the solace you give each other when you are hurt. Just as man needs drink to survive, so do your souls need the solace of each other to survive. As token of your love for one another, take this drink and offer it to each other. Just so will your souls seek each other's hurts and heal them, and keep your marriage alive. (Gothi pours mead into horn, filling it, and offers it to groom. Groom holds it for bride to drink, and then bride holds it for groom to drink. They return horn to Gothi.)
 GOTHI: As husband and wife, your marriage depends on the support and love of your friends and families. Let now these, your friends and family, speak on your behalf over the horn, and drink in token of their support. Just so will their willingness to partake of your lives keep your marriage alive.
 (Gothi passes horn to assembly. Each in turn may say something, then drinks from the horn, then passes it on until all have had a chance to speak and drink.)
 (Gothi pours the last bit into blessing bowl).

GOTHI: For the gods and goddesses all, and for the Disir of these two lines, here to be joined.

GOTHI: (Groom), do you have your ring, on which to pledge your wedding vow?

GROOM: I do. (Groom gives ring to Gothi).

GOTHI: (Bride), do you have your ring, on which to pledge your wedding vow?

BRIDE: I do. (Bride gives ring to Gothi)

GOTHI: From time immemorial have we sworn oaths on rings. A ring is without beginning and without end – thus should an oath pledged on a ring be eternal. These rings, on which you shall pledge your wedding vows, shall serve as a continuing reminder of that which you swear today, and of the love that has brought you to unite your lives. Let both your vows and your love be without end. (Gives rings back to Bride and Groom).

(Groom makes his wedding vow while holding ring up between himself and Bride. Groom then puts ring on Bride's finger.)

(Bride makes her wedding vow while holding ring up between herself and Groom. Bride then puts ring on Groom's finger.)

GOTHI: So you have sworn oaths before your gods and goddesses, and before your folk and your Disir. Forsetti, Ull, and Odin take note: they have sworn themselves, each to the other, before you and before these witnesses, and none may deny it. Thor, and Sif, see this bride and groom, and protect their marriage as you protect all our folk.

(Gothi gives Bride and Groom each a short beeswax candle).

GOTHI: You have each burned brightly, yet singly before this day. Now let your first act as a married couple be the lighting of this single candle from your separate flames, in a manner like unto the joining of the fires of your hearts into a single bright flame.

(Bride and Groom jointly light tall wax candle. Gothi takes beeswax candles from Bride and Groom, and without ceremony blows them out and lays them on the altar).

(Gothi takes ribbon or cord from altar.)

GOTHI: This ribbon is only a physical representation of the ties that now bind you together.

(Bride and Groom join hands – the Groom's left and the Bride's right hand)

GOTHI: (Looping ribbon over hands and tying in a loose knot). As such, it is easily cut or broken. The true ties that now bind you can only be severed by the failure of your love and respect for each other. They are thus stronger than any physical bond, and are forged of the same mighty stuff that ties us to the gods and them to us. Properly nurtured, this bond will outlast Ragnarok.

(Gothi turns Bride and Groom to face folk).

GOTHI: I present to you (Groom) and (Bride), husband and wife!

(Gothi dips branch into blessing bowl, and sprinkles the couple)

GOTHI: Go forward in the footsteps of Thor and Sif, of Frigga and Odin, of Njord and Skadhi, and of Frey and Gerd. Mimir guide you, and Heimdall be your sentry and the mentor of your children.

(Gothi sprinkles assembled folk)

GOTHI: In frith, and in faith, know your gods are with you today – and help this couple from this day forward as their true kinfolk.

(Gothi takes blessing bowl and precedes couple out of the circle, sprinkling their way with mead from the blessing bowl).

(Following ceremony, Gothi presents blessing bowl and contents to the landsvaettir, Disir, Aesir, and Vanir, with thanks for their participation and with his own requests for the married couple's future.

A "Plain Speech" marriage

Preparation: Prior to the ceremony, a horn, a blessing bowl, a freshly cut branch from a tree, and mead to fill the horn should be made available. In addition, you may want a consecrated hammer with which to do your hallowing.

(Gothi performs a Hammer Hallowing, or similar hallowing ritual, if such is desired)

GOTHI: Good people, we are gathered today in the presence of our gods, goddess, and Disir to witness the marriage of (Bride) and (Groom), who stand here before you today. Let me remind you that a marriage is not something that can survive on its own, nor does all the

responsibility for making a marriage work rest on the shoulders of the married couple. As witnesses to this wedding, you are also agreeing to help this couple to nurture their marriage and make it good. Anybody who does not want to commit to this responsibility should leave now, free of stigma or shame.

(Gothi waits a moment. Then, Gothi fills horn with mead).

GOTHI: Let us hear, then, from each of you who wishes to speak, of the merits of this man and woman, and why they should be allowed to marry.

(Gothi hands horn to Best Man, or to nearest guest. Guests pass horn around, speaking and then drinking from the horn. If need be, refill horn before it is entirely empty. When the horn finally passes back to Gothi, Gothi pours remainder into blessing bowl.)

GOTHI: We all see that these are two worthy people, and that they deserve to join their lives in marriage. Do you have the rings?

(Bride and Groom present their rings to Gothi).

GOTHI: A ring is an object without a beginning and without an end. That's why we swear oaths on them – to make our oaths last without ending, as well. These rings will serve as a physical reminder of the oaths you make today, and of the love that brought you to get married. (Gothi gives rings back to Bride and Groom).

(Groom makes his oath, holding ring up between himself and Bride then puts the ring on her finger).

(Bride makes her oath, holding ring up between herself and Groom, and then puts the ring on his finger).

GOTHI: By the power vested in me by our gods and goddesses, and by the assent of the folk gathered here, I now pronounce you husband and wife!

(Following ceremony, Gothi privately offers blessing bowl contents to landsvaettir, Disir, Aesir, and Vanir, with thanks for their participation and with private requests for the couple's future.)

The Wheel of the Year

The year of the ancient Teutonic peoples had only two seasons – summer and winter. Of course, there were transitions between the

seasons, and there were times when the seasons were waxing and waning. This gives a total of eight seasonal celebrations to mark the passage of time. The year began with the transition from summer to winter, at Winternights – just as the day began with sunset.

Some insist that the celebrations must be done on the precise day of the calendar on which they fall, if you divide the year into eight equal parts. Others insist that the celebrations should be done based on weather phenomena (first frost, etc). There is some evidence that different areas used different methods for determining when to hold blots, so it is probably best to find a method that satisfies you, and hold to it.

In general terms, the celebrations of life and abundance may be considered "Vanic" ceremonies, and generally celebrate the Vanir. The celebrations of death and regeneration may be considered "Aesic" ceremonies, and generally celebrate the Aesir. In the following table, I've indicated the gods to whom a blot would likely be dedicated. Your blots may be dedicated to any or all of those gods, or perhaps to another who is especially appropriate for you that year. The blots, and the time of year they celebrate, are:

| Date | Blot | Comments |
|------------------|--------------|---|
| Autumnal Equinox | Winternights | The beginning of the year. Dedicated to Frey, Thor, Sif, Odin, Ullr, Skadhi, Njord, or Tyr |

| Date | Blot | Comments |
|---|------------------|---|
| Mid November | Harvest Festival | This is a celebration of the last harvest, and slaughtering of animals for winter. Dedicated to Ullr, Skadhi, Njord, Odin, Frey, Freya, Sif, or Thor. |
| Twelve nights following Winter Solstice | Yule | Multiple celebrations may be held, but at least celebrate Mother Night (dedicated to the Disir, mothers, and mothers-to-be) and Twelfth Night (dedicated to Sunna, Odin, Tyr, and Ullr) |
| Mid February | Disting | Celebration of the Disir, and request for their help in upcoming season. Dedicated to the Disir, Freya, Frigga, Sif, Skadhi, Gerd |
| Vernal Equinox | Ostara | Celebration of fertility and quickening life. Dedicated to Ostara, Freya, Idunna, Sunna |

| Date | Blot | Comments |
|-----------------|-----------|--|
| May 1 | Walpurgis | A time to clean out the old. Dedicated to Walpurgis, Holda, Fulla, Frigga. |
| Summer Solstice | Midsummer | Celebration of abundant life. Dedicated to Frey, Freya, Njord, Sunna. |
| Mid – August | Loaf-fest | Celebration of the first harvest. Dedicated to Frey, Freya, Sif, Thor. |

Contacts

For those interested in Asatru, here are a number of organizations that may be contacted for more information.

Irminsul Aettir www.irminsul.org
 Irmin's Way www.irminsway.org
 Asatru Folk Assembly www.runestone.org
 Asatru Alliance alliance.eagleut.com
 Asgard Troth www.asgardtroth.org

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