

HEATHEN GODS

**A Collection of Essays
Concerning the Folkway
of Our People**

by

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Temple of Our Heathen Gods
Kansas City Area**

**Written During 2007-2009
First Edition**



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Mark at Gullfoss, in Iceland



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Without the patience and support of my wife, Jennifer, this book would not exist. She is an amazing woman and we have built quite a life together. You may not be able to picture it, but my three kids are in-between-the-lines of all of these essays. Hidden in the punctuation and among the paragraphs, are all the interruptions, the questions, and the demands that I stop writing and go play with them. Though I can honestly say I finished the book for them, rather than despite them.

I owe much to my tribe, Jotun's Bane Kindred. Rod Landreth, Craig Winkler, and Jamie King have served me well as trusted friends. I am convinced they are the best people you will ever find, and I have the Luck to have them with me on this life's journey. I must thank the knowledgeable Will Burris, who is always there right when you need him. He made our trip to Iceland both possible and successful.

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First among my Ancestors is my father, Glen F. Stinson. This collection of essays would not exist without him. He was not Heathen, but the things he taught me about being a man and how to face this life, were entirely Heathen. He was the best of fathers, and I work hard to pass Orlog to my children that is as good as the Orlog that my father passed to me.



INTRODUCTION

The essays in this collection were written in the years 2007, 2008, and 2009. In their original form, they were written as blog notes, message board posts, and as answers to e-mail questions I received. They were never meant to serve as a unified message about Heathenry, and there has been no attempt here to tie them together into a well-ordered or all-encompassing vision for the future of Heathenry. The essays collected here have a conversational tone, like discussion you might have around a campfire...or over a cold pint of Guinness.



Most of Jotun's Bane Kindred at Midwest Thing 2009

In collecting them, I have attempted to put them in an order that makes sense. To further this effort, I have also grouped them into categories. I have reworked all of these essays, to varying degrees. Some required quite a bit of refining, while others required very little.

What you'll find within this collection is my approach to various topics and issues within our Folkway – the Folkway that is the ancestral way-of-life of the Northern European people. The scope of these essays is far-reaching, but this collection does not provide a comprehensive examination of Heathenry. If that is what you are seeking, you should buy [Our Troth](#), Volumes 1 and 2. This collection does not serve as a complete introduction to Heathenry, either. [Essential Asatru](#), by Diana Paxon, would better serve you as an introduction to our Folkway.

The ways of our Ancestors varied greatly from tribe to tribe, location to location, century to century, and even among various levels of society. The same situation exists today. These essays are not presented as

the only way things should be done within Heathenry. They represent one man's approach – one tribe's approach – to these issues and topics. It is likely that every reader will find things to both agree with and disagree with in the contents of this book. If nothing else, the essays will hopefully get you thinking about these topics and examining, or re-examining, your own approaches and points-of-view.

You will notice that these essays do not have footnotes. This collection of essays is not a research paper. There is nothing within these essays that I would consider contrary to what we find in the Lore, as I read and interpret it. But the content, the purpose, and the tone of these essays does not lend itself to a line by line scholarly justification or notes. If you are seeking that, seek it elsewhere.

Jotun's Bane Kindred draws from Norse, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, and other Northern European sources for its ways and traditions. For this reason, there is a certain mixing of terminology in the following essays. We do not restrict ourselves to using only Norse terminology or only Anglo-Saxon terminology. If a word or concept accurately reflects what we are doing, then we use that word or concept.

This collection is not an anti-Christian manifesto. Instead the tone is one of starting where our Ancestors left off, reclaiming what was taken from our people, and moving our religion forward into our modern world. Our kindred and these essays focus on moving *beyond* Christianity. But this necessitates a few essays on shedding the fear and indoctrination of the foreign religion under which so many of us were raised.

An intelligent and practical man is always re-examining his beliefs and point-of-view. If something works well, he keeps it. If concepts or ideas come along that work better, then the man adjusts. Heathens are always reading, learning, and deepening their understanding of our Folkway, and I am no exception to this rule. So, it is important to understand that these essays represent my opinions at this time. If my opinions change, future books or future editions of this book will reflect those changes.

Jotun's Bane Kindred is an oathed tribal kindred in the Heartland of America. We are a Folkish kindred, at least by our own estimation. These essays reflect a tribal approach to Heathenry. They reflect the importance of kindreds with committed and hard-working leaders and members. Above all, they reflect the importance of preserving, gathering, and advancing our Folk forward.

This book would not exist if not for Jotun's Bane Kindred. We are a

strong and growing tribe. We work to support and advance each other, and I would not be the man I am today, without the incredible individuals of worth that occupy my Innangarth. Their thoughts and ideas run throughout these essays, culled from our discussions together, and the lessons we have learned working together as a tribe.

The goal of this collection of essays is not to make money. The goal is to share information. So feel free to share or distribute this material however you wish, as long as you follow the restrictions described in the Open License on the indicia page.

If you wish to contact me in order to discuss or ask questions about any of these writings, feel free to email me at mark@heathengods.com.

Mark Ludwig Stinson
December 2009



Will Burris and Mark Stinson at Thingvellir, in Iceland





SECTION ONE
ESSAYS FOR
NEW HEATHENS

WHAT IS A HEATHEN?

"What is a Heathen?"

I get that question a lot. We all do. So, here's a very short, simple, generalized answer...

Heathens honor the old Germanic Gods...the Northern European Gods, they honor their Ancestors, and they respect and give gifts to the Vaettir (spirits of the land, water, etc.). It is a reconstruction religion, meaning Heathens attempt to honor the Gods, Ancestors, and Vaettir in the same ways that our Ancestors honored the Gods, their Ancestors, and the Vaettir. In order to do this, Heathens look to the Lore (old Icelandic Poems and Sagas recording myth and tales from pre-Christian times), contemporary historical sources, modern historical writings, folklore, and archeology. The goal is to continue the Way of Life that our Ancestors followed prior to Christianity being moved Northward into Northern Europe by Rome.



Odin

The word "Heathenry" comes from the fact that the country people (those living on the *heath*), honored the old Gods for centuries after those people living in the cities were already converted to Christianity. That is why the word "Heathen" has negative meanings within Christianity. The missionaries and preachers in the cities would rail against the "Heathens" (those living out in the *heath*), that still honored the old Gods. Another word commonly used for Heathenry is Asatru, meaning "loyalty to the Gods." Though, Asatru is normally used to refer to a more Icelandic/Nordic focused form of Heathenry. The word Heathenry itself is a broader term encompassing those focusing on the Icelandic, the Anglo-Saxon, the Frankish, etc.

For an excellent FAQ on Heathenry, go to this website...

<http://heathengods.com/temple/modules/xoopsfaq/>

Sometimes people try to incorrectly lump Heathens in with Wiccans. Here's a link to two essays that compare and contrast Heathenry and Wicca:

http://www.heathengods.com/library/wicca_comparison/

Heathenry is a pagan religion and a way of viewing the world. It is a way of life, sometimes referred to as a Folkway, because it is the native way of life for the People of Northern Europe. It is focused on what a man or woman does in this life. It is focused on DOING.



HOW DOES ONE WORSHIP THE HEATHEN GODS?

Asatru is but one name for our Folkway. You will sometimes hear it called the Northern Tradition, Odinism, Forn Sed, Germanic Pagan Reconstructionism or, simply, Heathenry. The original Heathens were the pre-Christian Northern Europeans who lived a thousand and more years ago in the lands around what is now called the North Sea. These included the peoples of Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia, Germany, Iceland, and Frisia.

The beginnings of our Folkway are lost in prehistory. The origins of Asatru go back thousands of years, though Asatru itself is a modern reconstruction religion. The spirit that Asatru (or Heathenry) expresses, though, is as ancient as the northern European peoples themselves – and strains of it can be seen as far back as 40,000 years ago. As a reconstruction religion, we look at contemporary sources, folklore, and archeology in an attempt to honor our Gods and Ancestors, in a way as close as possible to the old ways.

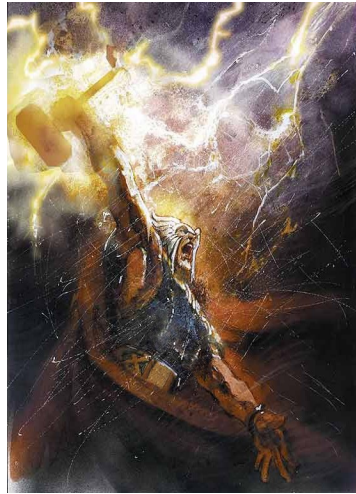
So, how does one worship the Heathen Gods?

This varied greatly throughout history. Heathenry existed for thousands of years, with no written rules or codification. There were temples scattered about, but there was very little central authority dictating rules and methods. So Heathenry varied from region to region, tribe to tribe, and century to century. But there are some common worship techniques and themes from the past that have been

reconstructed, and are used for the most part throughout modern Heathenry.

Understand, that our ancestors did not bow down to their Gods. They honored their Gods, they respected their Gods, they sacrificed to their Gods, and they prayed (communicated) with their Gods. But their Gods were seen as their kin – part of the Folk – or part of their village or tribe. They treated the Gods as mentors, or elders in their tribe. Many saw them and treated the Gods like honored Ancestors. They saw them as walking among them – and a part of their daily lives.

They did not blur their Gods together, but rather saw them as distinct and powerful beings, with likes and dislikes, personalities, and a reality of their own. They did not see them as Jungian Archetypes, man-made Thought-Forms, or quaint personifications of forces of nature. They saw them as individuals – actual beings with their own thoughts and motivations.



Thor

I talk with the Gods. Mainly in my quiet moments. Driving to work. Driving home from work. The other night I was waiting for someone to show up for an appointment, and I took the 15 minutes I was waiting to just converse with the Gods. In the middle of the night while at work – when nothing is going on – I'll speak with the Gods. Their handiwork is all around us and I think they listen.

When I do talk to the Gods, I do not ask them to do little things for me, or ask them to make things happen for me. A small child may ask his mother for the smallest of things, but I am not a small child. A lamb may depend on his shepherd for direction in even the smallest of things, but I am not a lamb. I am an adult human being, and the Gods expect us to make our own decisions, fight our own battles, and make things happen for ourselves. They gave us life, but they aren't going to live it for us. So what do I pray about?

Usually I thank them for what they do. Thor protects the world from destructive forces and evil, and he shows us that we should not treat enemies as our friends – but instead as the enemies they truly are. Odin sacrificed his own eye and went through great trials in order to

obtain wisdom and knowledge, and he showed us how to take whatever honorable action we can to accomplish a goal that is important to us. He also brought artistic inspiration and the runes to our world. Tyr was so courageous that he knowingly sacrificed his own hand so that the Gods could bind a horrible monster called the Fenris Wolf. He placed his hand in the creature's mouth, as part of a trick to bind the beast. Tyr shows us that in order to help and protect our families and community, we should be willing to make great sacrifices, if necessary.

I will tell Odin, "As you sacrificed your eye for wisdom, if I work hard and make every effort to find other Heathens in my area – grant me the wisdom to eventually find them." I do not ask him to find them for me. I often say to Thor, "Give me the strength to protect my family when I am with them, and watch and protect them at times that I am unable to be with them." But there is a concept called "a gift for a gift." The Gods deserve to be treated with respect, and when you ask for a gift or favor, you should offer a gift or favor in return. Perhaps you promise them to take a certain course of action, to conduct a Faining in the near future, or you pledge your loyalty to them.



During a Faining in Honor of the God Frey

Besides talking with the Gods, there is also the more formal Faining. A Faining is a structured celebration in honor of the Gods. A Faining is simply a ritual. Not a magical ritual in the Wiccan sense of the word, but instead a structured method of honoring the Gods, drinking mead with the Gods, and then the Faining usually transitions into a gathering, celebration, party, or festival. Fainings can be loud boisterous, joyful events. But sometimes they are very introspective and quiet. It depends on the circumstances surrounding the celebration. But, to be clear – a Faining is a religious act, and not ceremonial magic.

There is also a religious event called a Symbol. This event consists of the participants taking turns talking and bragging, while making toasts usually with mead or ale. When it is your turn, you brag about the exploits of a God, a hero, an Ancestor of yours, or something you have done and then you drink. Then it is the next person's turn and they follow suit. It can be very structured with the first round of bragging being limited to the Gods, second round to Heroes, the third round to Ancestors, etc...but it can also be very unstructured. Symbols are a way to pass on and remember great deeds and stories, and a way to get to know your friends and kin better. The purpose is never to become drunk. Intoxication, and acting foolish during Symbol is seen as dishonorable.



Alex Raises a Horn in Symbol

But, it is important to remember that Heathenry is not a set of rituals. It is not a magical formula. Heathenry is a way of life. "We are Our Deeds." Heathenry is the time-honored way that our Ancestors approached and honored the Gods. Heathenry teaches us the importance of family, and building the best life in this world that we can, so that our descendants will benefit from our work. Heathenry is a way to connect with our Ancestors and thank them for their efforts and sacrifices. And Heathenry is a way of viewing the world and interacting with the Vaettir and wights – the often unseen spirits of the forests, fields, lakes, rocks and other elements of nature around us.

One of the best ways that a Heathen can honor his Gods and Ancestors, is by living a life of which his Gods and Ancestors can be proud. By reading the Lore – Eddic Poems with origins around the year 800 AD – we can begin to understand the values our Ancestors held as important in a person. The values that should be reflected in

his/her life. In Heathenry, these values are often referred to as the Nine Noble Virtues. There are many versions of this list of virtues, and all of them are of a modern origin. Not all of the lists even have nine items in the list! This is one of my favorite versions, written by Stephen McNallen of the Asatru Folk Assembly, with explanations of each one...

INDUSTRIOUSNESS - Be productively engaged in life. Avoid laziness. Strive to accomplish good things.

JUSTICE - Let equity and fairness be your hallmark. Treat others in accordance with what they deserve, and give each person a chance to show his or her best.

COURAGE - Fear is natural, but it can be overcome. Train yourself to do the things you fear, both physically and morally.

GENEROSITY - An open hand and an open heart bring happiness to you and to others. The miserly are never happy.

HOSPITALITY - In ancient times, travelers were greeted with food, drink, and a warm place by the fire. See that your guests never want.

MODERATION - Enjoy all good things, but do not overindulge. No one admires a glutton or a person who cannot control his or her appetites.

COMMUNITY - Cooperate with kin and friends, do your fair share, and remember your responsibilities to others.

INDIVIDUALITY - Although we belong to a community, we are also individuals with distinct personalities and clearly-defined rights. Respect the individuality of others, and insist on the same in return.

TRUTH - Be honest and straightforward in all your dealings. Avoid deceit and deception.

STEADFASTNESS - Learn to persist, to endure in the face of adversity without discouragement. Do not be blown about by every changing wind.

LOYALTY - Be steadfast in your commitment to others and to yourself. Have a true heart.

WISDOM - Learn from your experiences. Grow in the understanding of the world, and of the human heart. Comprehend as much of the

universe as you can in the years available to you. By leading a life that reflects these values, one honors his Gods, makes his Ancestors proud, and is able to lead a life that will benefit his family and Folk. At the core of Heathenry, it is the sort of life one leads that best honors the Heathen Gods.



REASONS I AM HEATHEN

What called me to the Heathen Gods? What brought me back to our native Folkway?

That is a question I am asked frequently. It is a natural question to ask – and I found myself giving different reasons to different people, because there was really more than one thing that called me to the Heathen Gods. So here's my attempt to provide a more comprehensive answer.

I had been agnostic for a long period of time. Over two decades, actually. I thought my only choices were the various Christian denominations, and possibly Buddhism. I had no attraction whatsoever to becoming Muslim, Jewish, or Hindu, so I just figured I was left with the remaining two "big" religions – neither of which appealed to me. I had no passion for either Christianity or Buddhism, though I studied and read about both. So I remained agnostic for years.

Then I stumbled across the Wiccan community here in Kansas City. I spoke with them, read about their religion, and witnessed one of their rituals. I found I had no passion for Wicca either. But those experiences did open my eyes to the fact that there were other religions that had existed prior to Christianity. Other options. So, in 2006 I became interested in Asatru – the modern reconstruction religion and way of life focused on the Northern Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir. The fact that this was the religion of my Ancestors prior to Christianity had a serious appeal for me. But I still did not take the leap. I wasn't ready yet.

Then, in 2007, through June, July, and August, I began reading and studying, and learning about the Heathen Gods and what they meant to the people that worshiped them. I was definitely caught up in it. It just felt right. So one morning, on the way home from work. I just

started talking to Asa-Thor on the way home. I was looking at the sunrise-lit clouds – this beautiful sky – and I was thinking about what Thor represented. It just sort of clicked for me. It was a very personal experience, so from the outside it might sound strange. But expressing myself to Thor that morning, it was the first time I had ever felt “listened to.” There was this connection...this feeling. It was the first time I had really ever felt that. I had come home.

Here are some other things I like about the Heathen Gods:

- Odin, Frigga, Thor, Freyja, Tyr, and the rest are all “mortal” in a sense. They are not the “perfect” Gods of other religions. They must eat Idunn's apples to remain youthful, and most of them are doomed to die in a final battle with the forces of chaos.



The Goddess Freyja

- The Heathen Gods make mistakes. They get angry, jealous, prideful, and they are not perfect. They deserve to be honored, but they do not demand that we bend our knee to them and beg for forgiveness for our faults. They do not insist that we see ourselves as lower than dirt, undeserving of their attention and love.
- These are the Gods of my Ancestors. These are the Gods that were worshiped for 1000's of years, until Christianity (originating in the Middle-East) pushed its way outward and northward, and destroyed the pagan temples.
- A Christian told me recently that Christianity was the "Correct" religion because it had "won." I know that the horrible things done in

the name of spreading Christianity and gaining Christian converts was done centuries and centuries ago, so I do not blame current Christians for those wrongs. But I do not think the willingness to start religious wars, commit murder, and burn the holy temples of other religions proves the "correctness" of a religion.

- I like the independence of Heathenry. The Gods do not come and save you. The Gods might lend you the strength to save yourself, or a bit of Luck once you've worked hard for something. Through their lives and myths, you might learn some bit of wisdom that helps you make the right choice. But Heathens are expected to take care of themselves and make their own way.

- There is no central authority or codified dogma used to control believers, build religious powerbases, or fill church bank accounts. Heathenry, is a tribal Folk religion, a Folkway, and this appeals to me. It feels right.

- I like the focus away from the afterlife, with more of a focus on living this life to the fullest. There are afterlife possibilities that are suggested or hinted at in Heathenry, but they are not the focus of the culture or the religion. I want to live a good life now, not suppress everything that is enjoyable in this life to earn some big hypothetical reward later. I want to live a life well remembered by those that come after me.



Hugin and Munin

- The connection with Ancestors is appealing to me. We should honor our Ancestors, and look to them for wisdom and perhaps a bit of Luck when we need it and have earned it. We should acknowledge the gifts our Ancestors have given us – first and foremost our very existence.

- I was a history major in college, so the whole scholarship side of our Folkway appeals to me, as well. Rather than being "New-Age" and a completely modern invention, Heathenry is about using historical texts, ancient poems, and archeology to figure out what the ancient Heathens believed, and how they lived and worshiped.

- Finally, Heathenry works for me. It has made me a better man, a better husband, and a better father. It has made my family stronger. I have accomplished things in this life since becoming Heathen that I

did not think possible. It is a way of life that helps me focus on those things I value most – family and loyal friends. You can't argue with success.

There are other reasons. This list is just that – a list. As you explore Heathenry, you may share some of the same reasons I have on my list. But you will likely find some reasons of your own.



RELIGION VS. MAGIC

People are different...their interests, their perceptions, their past experiences – even the way they think. So it stands to reason that everyone will approach Asatru or Heathenry from a different place and in a differing way. For instance, some Heathens focus heavily on the Runes and Norse Magic, while others do not.

Our kindred's Godhi, Rod Landreth, always laughs when I say this, but I see myself as sort of a "blue-collar Heathen." I am sure there is a better term for it, but basically I come to Heathenry with really very little interest in performing or being involved with Norse Magic. I am more focused on the religious and cultural aspects of Heathenry. I honor the Gods, I remember and communicate with my Ancestors, I respect and acknowledge the wights and Vaettir, and I am loyal to my family and my Kindred.

Over time, I am learning more about the Runes, and I see their value – but for now I am not that interested in the magical aspects of the runes, or in learning Seidhr/Spae work. I do not think that my somewhat non-magical approach is superior or inferior to those that are more interested in magical rune-work or Seidhr/Spae work. I think that these more magical aspects of Asatru have their place for some Heathens as "gravy," once they have mastered the core knowledge and beliefs.

Looking back at our Ancestors, it is clear that not all Heathens, nor even a majority of Heathens, used runes for magical work. Similarly, a majority of our Heathen Ancestors weren't involved in Seidhr/Spae work. A small minority were involved in these specialized "magical" areas of our faith, and so as we reconstruct our religion, I just do not find myself all that interested in practicing these forms of magic.

For me there is “magic” enough in making things happen that others might see as improbable or impossible, with good old hard work and determination. It is all about setting your mind to accomplish something, doing your homework, planning your “attack,” working alongside your kindred or tribe, and making something amazing happen with pure blood, sweat, and tears – and perhaps a healthy dose of earned Heathen Luck. That for me is Heathen magic.



FINDING THE OLD GODS

Perhaps you are curious how a modern man or woman could come to know the Old Gods of Northern Europe, and come to honor them? Below, I'll describe three basic things a person can do to come to know the Gods, and to then decide for himself/herself whether they are real or not. Once a person comes to know they are real, then the step towards honoring them is both a natural and an easy one.

1. Read about them. Read mythological stories. Read websites. Read the Voluspa. Read the Havamal. Read H.R. Ellis Davidson. Read about the Gods. The closer you can go to the Lore, the better. Reading the Poetic Edda itself is better than reading a storybook based on the Poetic Edda. But really, read whatever you enjoy the most at first. Immerse yourself in the materials, preferably credible materials, and do your homework.



Heimdall

2. Approach the Gods. Schedule or find quiet times when you can just talk to them. Perhaps you have a 30 minute commute to work. Look at the sky, study the clouds, and thank Thor for protecting our families. Thank him for protecting the world from ill-intentioned giants and monsters. Thank him for showing us how to treat our enemies. Perhaps you feel a connection with another God or Goddess. Then talk to that one. Remember the Gods do not like begging, groveling, or a lack of confidence. Come to them

as a man or woman, and come to them from a position of strength. Come to them as a grandchild would come to his/her grandparents – with honor and respect, but without the need to debase yourself as a proud member of their folk.

3. Contact, communicate or meet with Tru Heathens. This third one is not 100% necessary, but it is immensely beneficial. Heathenry is about more than the individual. It is about your family, your friends, and your tribe. To fully understand Heathenry, one must gather and get to know other Heathens. After all, they already know the Gods. If you are new Heathen, it is likely that they went through the same process you are going through. Find Heathens that are Tru, and honor the Gods in the old ways. If you are interested in Heathenry, steer clear of Wiccans who claim to work with the Norse Gods. They aren't bad people, but they aren't Heathens. They do not approach our Gods in the ways that our Ancestors did.

I think if a new Heathen does these three basic things, and they open themselves up to the Old Gods – the Old Gods will make their presence known. Most likely not in physical form. Most likely not as a booming voice from the clouds. But you will get a feeling, you will receive a message, or something will let you know that they have heard you. You will know they are welcoming you back to your native Folkway, and back into your Ancestral Stream.



An Open Pubmoot Hosted by Jotun's Bane Kindred



BECOMING HEATHEN AND KEEPING OUR ADVICE TRU

How does one become Heathen?

Seriously. How does that happen? Does a Heathen priest (Godhi) have to give you the nod? Must you go through a public "confirmation" or "profession of faith?" Must you be "certified" by a National Heathen organization? Should you open your pocketbook and tithe 10% to some earthbound organization more concerned with power and politics than with your spiritual strength and well-being? How does one become Heathen?

For me, I simply began talking to the Gods. It felt like they were listening, and that is the first time I have experienced that feeling. I was reading the Lore, and it just felt right. It felt like I was coming home to what I already was...or what I should be. So during one of my conversations with Thor, I promised to build a relationship with the Gods. I promised to find and look into joining a kindred in my area, or if I could not find a kindred in my area, I promised to start a Kindred. All of this took place in my car, driving home from work. All by myself. Just me, talking to Thor. I remember the moment very well. That was my "profession," I suppose. Though for me, it was a personal oath between me and the Gods.

Since then I've lived Heathen. I've learned everything I could in the time I've had as a Heathen. I found other Heathens, I gathered with them, and we worked together to start a Kindred. When the Kindred was eventually formed, we took an oath to the Gods, to our Ancestors, to the Vaettir, and to each other. Since the day I made that personal oath to the Gods, I've done everything I could to fulfill and live that oath.

A Godhi did not annoint me a Heathen. A ritual did not make me Heathen. My affiliation with a National Organization did not make me Heathen. I did not pay money to become Heathen. Becoming Heathen was a lot of work, but it was fairly simple. Basically, I found Heathenry. I then personally committed to the Gods, and that I would learn everything I could about them and about the way my Ancestors honored them. From there things naturally developed.

What if a "newbie" transitioning to Heathenry wants a big public ceremony? Perhaps they would feel more comfortable being tested,

and confirmed in some formal fashion as a "Heathen?" Perhaps membership in a national organization would make them feel "more" Heathen? For me, these actions are not Heathen and completely unnecessary. They do not represent my view of Asatru. One is true to the Aesir and communicates directly with our Gods. No one stands between us and our Elder Kin. They are our Gods, and they watch us and listen.

So, I think it is our obligation to explain to new Heathens or the Heathen-curious how we see Heathenry. If they ask about something that we do not personally feel is Heathen or necessary, then we should be honest with them and explain to them what Heathenry is from our perspective. We do not have an obligation to feed into a perspective with which we do not agree. If due to Christian baggage they would feel more comfortable having a "Christian-style" confirmation ceremony, then we should explain to them why this is not Heathen, and guide them toward a personal relationship with the Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir.



Jotun's Bane Kindred's Oath Ring

I do not believe in changing Heathenry to fit the newly-converted person's baggage or Christian-based needs. They are coming to Heathenry, not the other way around. I see it as slowing down their transition and development to a Heathen-mindset, when we provide them with unnecessary crutches or band-aids to "ease the transition." When they ask

a question that seems to reflect a mindset other than Heathenry, guide them. Teach them. Explain to them how a Heathen approaches that situation. We should base those answers on the Lore, and solid reconstructed beliefs as we understand them.

Rod Landreth, Jotun's Bane Kindred's Godhi, once advised someone asking for advice on a public "profession of faith" ritual...

So if you want to publicly profess, go out in your backyard and state what is in your heart, bones, and your balls. Put your hammer on, and start going about

being Heathen in all things.

That is how each of us in Jotun's Bane Kindred did it. I promised my loyalty to Thor and the Aesir in my car, driving home. Craig Winkler, our Thyle, received a rather startling sign from Odin in his house one day – sign that took him down the path of being a Heathen. Jamie King had a powerful dream and felt strongly drawn to our Folkway while reading various books about Heathenry. Rod Landreth described his own process of becoming a Heathen...

For me when I understood that I had "come home" to my folk way, I said to myself, "I am Asatru and now I will do my best to follow it's ways." Then I proceeded to do it. That was back in 1993.

Heathenry is about DOING. A Heathen is Heathen, because they are committed to our Folkway, and their actions reflect this commitment.

Many kindred includes as part of our kindred oath a renunciation of previously held religious beliefs and an oath of loyalty to the kindred, its members, and our Gods. In this essay, I am not talking about this sort of kindred oath. I am talking very specifically about any person, group, or organization standing between a Heathen and his or her Gods. I am talking about people recently converted from Christianity, wishing to have a "Heathen Confirmation" ceremony very similar to what you would see in a Christian church before they will consider themselves to be truly Heathen. I find that way of thinking contrary to how we approach our Gods.



AM I GOING TO A CHRISTIAN HELL?

When I was a Christian-leaning agnostic, I was told innumerable times that I was going to Hell because I was not attending Christian Church each Sunday. I was told I was going to Hell because I was not "born-again." I was going to Hell because I did not have "faith." I was going to Hell because I was not a Jehovah Witness, a Mormon, a Baptist, or a Catholic. I was going to Hell because I did not tithe enough money to the church. I was going to Hell because I watched the wrong movie, tuned into the wrong TV show, or listened to the wrong music.

It seemed like the only way to not go to Hell was to believe the exact same thing as the person who was passing judgment on me. "Believe what I believe or you are going to Hell." This is preached by every Christian denomination in one form or another. So now that I've embraced Heathenry, and have decided to not honor the Christian God, where do the Christians think I will go? Certainly, more than ever...straight to a fiery Hell.

The old pagan religions allowed other people their own Gods. Each culture had its own Gods – its own group of divine powers to honor and respect. When it came to fertility Gods, often each tribe had its own. While these pagans honored and remained loyal to their own Gods, they did not claim that all other Gods did not exist. The Christian God (in the Bible and in practical worship) not only claims that all other Gods do not exist, he threatens you with eternal damnation if you do not fall in line, give up the Gods of your Folk, and follow him.



That is just not very polite, nor generous, nor particularly endearing. The idea that a God would damn his creations to eternal torment, no matter what sort of life they led, or how many people they helped, or what sort of mark they left on the world – just because they did not have faith in him – seems cruel and unfair. If you do not accept Christ as his son – you go to Hell. If you aren't baptized – you go to Hell. If you were not a paying member of a physical church – you go to Hell. It seems to me that this way of thinking has more to do with recruitment and conversion than with actual theology. It has more to do with keeping church-goers coming to church and making their donations, than with love or respect descending from the Deity above.

I mean, why would loving God create a place of eternal torment, and allow conditions and rules to exist where even one of his beloved creations is damned to go there forever? It is so clearly a device to scare people into believing YOUR specific brand of religion, that it is shameful. So if Hell exists, then I do not want to honor the God that would do that to his creations. And if Hell does not exist, then what

other Christian teachings are simply recruitment and conversion tools? 10% of them? 50% of them? 100% of them? I do not know, really – and I do not care.

So if Christians want to condemn me to their Hell for believing in different Gods – Gods my Ancestors worshiped for 1000's of years prior to Christianity – then I am willing to accept that. I will not be bullied into following their God, or their concept of God.

I suspect that after death, I will end up in Hel (one "L"), sitting on a bench in my Ancestors hall. The only fire will be the cook fire for roasting the pork. I am not sure that is exactly what the afterlife will be like, but that would be enough for me. But, I have a life to live...and that is my focus right now. I'll deal with the afterlife when I get there.



BEATING THE CHRISTIAN ADDICTION

I've seen several Heathenry 101 booklets and articles that made a lot of comparisons between Heathenry and Christianity. This brings to mind the question, "Isn't Heathenry rich enough and complete enough that we can describe it without having to compare and contrast it with Christianity?"

I would strongly answer, "Yes." Heathenry is an enormously rich way of life, full of history, and Lore, and poetry, and meaning. Its way of viewing the physical world is practical and life-embracing. Its way of viewing our relationship with the Gods is positive and enriching. Its view of how we are connected with our Ancestors is warm and meaningful. Its recognition of the Vaettir is natural and healthy, and gives us some perspective about the world around us that most people are missing. The various concepts within Heathenry give us plenty to mentally chew on. Wyrð. Orlog. Oaths. Luck. Symbels. Fainings. The Folk Soul. The Nine Worlds. On and on.

So, should someone leaving Christianity for Heathenry need a lot of crutches and transitional mechanisms to make the transition easier? Should we coddle the Christian baggage the new person brings with them, or should we guide them through the process of abandoning

that baggage at the door? Is Christianity so "addictive" that the transition process to Heathenry needs to be difficult or "helped along" with transitional devices that are aimed more at Christian baggage than at actual Heathen beliefs? Let's turn the question in the first paragraph on its head a little bit...

"Isn't Heathenry rich enough and complete enough that we can transition to it without having to borrow beliefs and practices from Christianity?"

To this question I answer strongly, "Yes," as before.

Christianity is something many of us were indoctrinated with from birth. This makes it difficult to shed all of our Christian thought-processes and habits. I do not see Christianity as an addiction, as much as a bad pattern of thought and behavior well worth breaking. Christianity is a crutch or weakness we need to grow beyond.



Yggdrasil

Speaking with a friend, we joked that perhaps Christianity is Nicotine gum, and Heathenry is that big beautiful first cigarette when you have not smoked one in a while. Perhaps Christianity is the aspirin for a caffeine-headache, while Heathenry is that first ice-cold Coca-Cola or rich dark cup of coffee when you've been off the stuff for awhile. Perhaps Christianity is Splenda, and Heathenry is that big moist piece of chocolate cake you eat, and all the wonderful feelings that come afterward. Essentially, once one feels the strong ancestral connection with our Folkway, Christianity takes on an unmistakable hollow, unnatural feeling.

For me personally, it was easy to transition from the mess that is Christianity, with all its dogmatic guilt-mongering and fear-based brain-washing. It was easy to leave behind the abandonment of physical enjoyment, the condemnation of life-affirming action, and all the pathetic hypocrites hiding in every church pew. Honestly, it is hard

for me to see how transitioning from the utterly vacant soul-eating darkness of Christianity to the vital power, and Tru rightness of Heathenry would be that big a burden for anyone.

I will not taint my Heathenry with Christian baggage to aid others in transitioning from that sad foreign religion that has afflicted our Folk for over a 1,000 years. We should spend more time teaching newbies all the amazing things about Heathenry, and less time coddling their Christian baggage. Leave the baggage at the door, and embrace your ancestral stream whole-heartedly. At least that is my way of thinking.



LONG TIME HEATHENS AND NEW HEATHENS

I have a lot of respect for those that have been Heathen longer than me...as long as their deeds, accomplishments, and/or knowledge match the time they've had to work on it. I tend to respect actions and success, and not simply words and the tenure that comes with simply having been Heathen a number of years.

Long-time Heathens will often see new Heathens, with fire-in-their-belly, and feel the need to tell them to "slow down." There is a tendency within Heathenry for long-time Heathens to sort of beat new Heathens over the head with their "newness." I am not sure if they feel threatened, or perhaps they have had some disappointments in their own efforts, and want to warn the new Heathens. I think long-time Heathens would be better served by giving new Heathens constructive advice. Constructive input. Constructive guidance. Heathenry has a lot to gain from both the knowledge and wisdom of experience, but it also has a lot to gain



Valkyries

from the energy and fire within new Heathens.

If you are a new Heathen, listen to the advice you receive from long-time Heathens. They have been there, and done that. They have tried things you have not even thought of yet, and they can give you valuable input on what works and what doesn't work. At the very least, they can inform you of the pitfalls to avoid.

But new Heathens, remember that Heathens judge a man's worth on what he has DONE. What are his deeds? Advice from a long-time Heathen with no kindred, no tribe, no accomplishments...should be looked at closely. Is the advice really something worth following? Sometimes it is – but sometimes their advice represents the exact path that led the long-time heathen to have no kindred, no tribe, and no real accomplishments. That may sound harsh to the modern person, but it is the reality of the world.



DIFFERING VIEWS WITHIN HEATHENRY

Our Ancestors held varied beliefs. Widely different beliefs. These beliefs differed over time, from region to region, and even village to village. These beliefs differed from social class to social class. We know there were core values, and core beliefs that we can pull from that great diversity – similarities and parallels that can be subjectively identified. But there was no central authority, no all-encompassing "Holy Book with all the answers," and no unifying dogma to follow. At least, not to the degree we see today with most modern religions.

Today, as we learn and study our Ancestors, and attempt to live as Heathens...we face the same circumstances. We hold differing beliefs. There are regional differences. There are differences in what historical time period or what region we look to for our primary influences – differences in how we interpret the archeology and the Lore. For modern Heathenry there is no central authority, no all-encompassing "Holy Book with all the answers," and no unifying dogma to follow.

Now, I am not one of those "Why can't we all just get along," type of people. I am pretty direct and do not mind a spirited exchange of ideas. But as I've made contact with the other Heathens from around

the country on-line, some of them seem to have a need for all Heathens to believe the same things – and view Heathenry in the same way. Frequently, when two Heathens do not believe the same things, their on-line conversations seem to descend into what appears to be disgust with each other...anger and disgust. Now I know this is fairly typical for how humans interact on the internet, but it is entirely counterproductive.

I do not see this approach to religion as Heathen in its nature at all. I see it as something left over from the Middle-Eastern religions (Christians, Jews, Muslims), in that these religions condemn those that believe differently, and put much of their efforts into religious conversion – either peacefully or by force. If we know that our Ancestors believed in many varied ways, then why would we not accept other modern Heathens believing in ways that vary from our own?

You will see this issue come up in several forms. People will declare that other people are “not Heathen” because they do not believe exactly as they do. People will sometimes call for a movement to make all of our beliefs and approaches to our Folkway “more consistent.” What is usually not mentioned, is that when they say “more consistent,” they usually mean more consistent with how they do things. The person pushing for consistency usually has no real interest in changing how they do things...only in changing how you do things. It would be my advice to mistrust those that declare others “not Heathen” based on minutia and religious details, and to mistrust efforts to unify, consolidate, or make our belief system more consistent.

I go back to the first paragraph of this essay. Our Ancestors held widely differing beliefs, when it came to the details. Modern Heathens need to learn how to be comfortable with the fact that the strength of our way of life will not come from universal, nation-wide or world-wide consistency – but instead from strong tribes establishing local tribal beliefs, traditions, and practices that work well for their own people.

While Heathenry can benefit from some regional and even national unity-of-purpose...there is no real benefit to suppressing local tribal beliefs, traditions, and practices in favor of an over-arching unifying dogma.



FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Let's be clear. You will not find "real Heathenry" on-line. Heathenry is about community, gathering as a people, shaking a man or woman's hand, looking them in the eye, hearing their voice, telling stories, and getting to know each other. It is letting your kids play together. Letting your spouses get to know each other. It is about laughing at dumb jokes, and telling stories from your life. It is about mingling Wyrd – and taking the measure of another person and finding them of worth.



But due to our few numbers...and due to the "ease" of using the internet, many are forced (or choose) to fall back on "on-line Heathenry." On-line Heathenry consists of e-lists, message boards, social-networking sites, etc. On-line, other people are just pixels on the screen. They are toneless, context-absent words on a screen. No eye-contact. No knowledge of the person's real life...only their on-line persona. On-line Heathenry is not

Heathenry. It is rife with trolls. Rife with fakes and deceivers. It does not directly advance our Folk. It only serves to increase the number of people sitting in front of computers staring at a screen.

Yes, the internet is an amazing communication tool. It makes sharing information and finding people easier. It is not bad for staying in touch, generally. But the internet should be used in support of face to face relationships between Heathens, not replace those face to face relationships.

So, this seems like common sense...but there is an order of priority for the sorts of communication you should seek with other Heathens:

1. FACE TO FACE - For all of the reasons listed above, you should seek out face to face contact with other Heathens. Find a Kindred or Heathen group with which to meet. If there isn't a group in your area – start one. Travel to meet Heathens in neighboring communities, or contact them and offer them hospitality at your home. Do everything you can to communicate directly with other Heathens both locally and regionally.

Face to face communication makes people communicate more honestly. More directly. And there is none of the "internet-bravery" that seems to occur when you put a person in front of a keyboard. People consider their words and the impact of those words more fully when communicating face to face. Plus, the bonds that tie people together really only form properly when you communicate face to face.

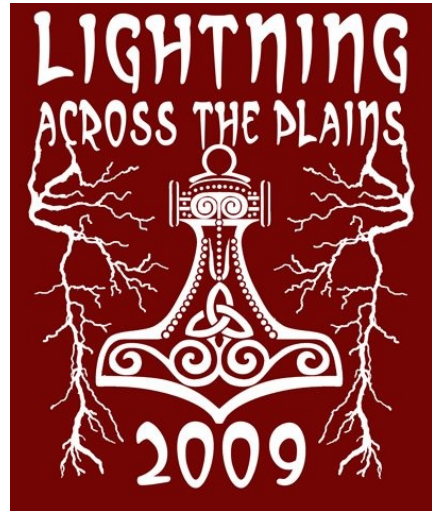
If someone does something to anger you or concern you, talking to them face to face about it increases the chances that the disagreement will not escalate or grow into an over-inflated problem.

2. ON-THE-PHONE - If you can't talk to someone face to face, pick up your phone and call them. On the phone, at least there is an immediate back-and-forth to the communication. Most of the "internet-bravery" that makes people type mean stupid things is gone (though I suppose there is something called "telephone-bravery.") You get to hear the tone of their voice. You know when they are serious, and you know when they are just "busting your balls."

If someone does something to anger or concern you, picking up the phone is not as good as a face to face meeting. But a phone call is a 100 times better than trying to resolve the problem using these next two forms of communication...

3. E-MAIL - An e-mail is quick and easy. You type it up and fire it off. But there is no back-and-forth to the communication – at least not in an immediate way. The only back-and-forth is in huge blocks of information (the text of the the entire e-mail), not a back-and-forth about individual comments or pieces of information.

E-mails are blind. There is no face to look at. No voice to listen to. No tone, no laughter ("LOL" does not count, because this can sometimes denote sarcasm.) E-mails are great for "business-oriented" communication. They are great for inviting people to something, asking an informational question, or helping organize or plan an event.



But they work poorly for making actual connections between people.

If someone does something to anger or concern you, an e-mail is not the proper way to address it. But, at least a direct e-mail is private. At least you are not "flaming" the person publicly (unless you CC or BCC a bunch of people). For these reasons, e-mail is better – just barely – than our last form of communication....

4. MESSAGE BOARDS & E-LISTS - Message boards are public, but they are far-removed from face to face communication. You can't identify sarcasm on a message board. There are no visual or auditory clues as to what a person really means or the tone of their post. People can be anything they want on the internet. They can be a 14-year-old pimply-faced teenager sitting in his parents basement, but attempting to come across as a 40-year-old scholar with a successful job and a family. "Broken" people can appear "whole" on the internet...at least for a little while.

If someone does something to anger or concern you, posting to them or about them on a message board or an e-list is the worst form of communication to use. You are "flaming" them in public. They usually feel forced to "flame" you right back. The smallest problem can inflate into a huge mess. You can be assured that other people will view this drama from the outside, and shake their heads in disgust. Other folks will jump in, have their say, and take their shots – and the conflict will grow.

"On-line Heathenry" is not Heathenry. The best way to resolve problems, and to get to know and form connections with another person is face to face communication.

So what about our website, heathengods.com?

We have worked hard to keep heathengods.com a positive resource for new Heathens to come and learn about Heathenry. It is a place we hope experienced Heathens will come, and discuss the Lore, our Gods, their Ancestors, and Vaettir, and their own local Heathen beliefs. But we also espouse a very action-oriented way of life.

We tell people to find, join, or start Kindreds or Heathen groups. We encourage people to start their own groups, and use the website as a resource in these real-life efforts.

Heathengods.com is not Heathenry. It is not a substitute for face to face local and regional gathering. I would be very disappointed to hear that because someone regularly visited and posted on our

website, that they felt they did not need to be involved in strengthening, or starting, their own local community.

Heathengods.com is simply a resource to help people find their way "home"...and a resource for those attempting to start and grow their own local communities. We want to be clear about the fact that even our own website is not Heathenry.



Some of the Heathens at Midwest Thing in 2009

HINO'S... HEATHENS IN NAME ONLY

There is a term for a Republican politician, who holds very few Conservative points-of-view. They are sometimes called RINO's for "Republican in Name Only." Almost always, they are called this as an insult.

On several occasions, I have used the term HINO on message boards...referring to Heathens who are "Heathen in Name Only." This essay will attempt to define the term.

First, let me say that I do not see the term as having anything to do with Folkish or Universalist positions. I am Folkish, but I am not one of those Heathens that says that Heathens that hold different points-of-view than I do are somehow "not Heathen." Our Ancestors held

many different points-of-view about life and how to honor the Gods, their Ancestors, and the Vaettir. It is not up to me to declare someone loyal to our Gods and their Ancestors, as "not Heathen." Unless they are doing something truly against Heathen values or ways, it is just not my role to say that about someone.

A Heathen in Name Only, does very little but call himself/herself a "Heathen." They seem to like the sound of the label, or the "idea" of being Heathen. But when it comes to practicing our way of life, learning more about it, or gathering with other Heathens – they do nothing. They literally do nothing that is Heathen, except for call themselves "Heathen."



PRACTICING OUR WAY OF LIFE

A HINO does not live by the Nine Noble Virtues, or by other Heathen values. They forget that we are our deeds, and their Heathenry takes the form of words only. They forget that when you injure or hurt someone else, you must fix it or pay for it – and instead they are constantly apologizing for bad behavior (often repeating the bad behavior a short time later). They do not understand the Heathen concept of Wyrd and carefully considering those you associate with. They do not understand the Heathen idea of a Gift for a Gift, and all that entails.

A HINO says they are loyal to our Gods, but they rarely honor them or gift them. They say they respect and honor their Ancestors, but they never take actions to show that respect. They think very infrequently, if at all, about the Vaettir, and do nothing to connect with them and form relationships with them. They do not symbol. They do not hold blots or fainings. They do not gift their Gods, Ancestors, or the Vaettir.

A HINO expresses worry that teaching Heathenry to their children might not be a positive thing to do. They are all over the

internet calling themselves "Heathen," but almost no one that knows them in real life knows they are Heathen – regardless of how long they have claimed to be "Heathen."

LEARNING AND READING

A HINO says he/she is "Heathen," but many of them have never read the Poetic and Prose Eddas. Even if they have, they read very little beyond it. Some HINO's read nothing about Heathenry, and know very little about Heathenry, but they've read many Rune books...and that seems to be the only part of our religion or way of life that they actively pursue.

When a HINO is confronted with a Heathen topic they have not learned about yet, they fake their way through it or change the subject. They cling to their ignorance and misconceptions, because it is easier than reaching out and making the effort to learn more.

GATHERING WITH OTHER HEATHENS

There are people, living mostly in rural areas of our country, with no Heathens within hours and hours of them. I understand why these Heathens do not or cannot gather regularly with other Heathens. But I know good Heathens who live in rural areas who have reached out through national organizations or e-lists, and found Heathens within 3 or 4 hours of them. They then travel to visit them and get to know them. A HINO would never do that.

A HINO will have a Kindred within 15 minutes of him/her, but the HINO never goes to Open Events. They never make an effort to get off their couch and take a chance at meeting other Heathens. They gather with Heathens on-line only, and never make the effort to make face to face connections and experience Heathenry away from their computer.

EXAMPLES IN MIND

I have had some frustrating experiences with people I think qualify as HINO's. Over the first year of our Kindred-efforts in Kansas City, I had at least five different people e-mail me, saying basically, "I am so thrilled to find other Heathens in Kansas City...this is a fulfillment of a dream for me. I cannot wait to meet you all, and become involved. This has changed my life finding that there is a Kindred in my area! I wish I had found you sooner!"

I am not exaggerating the tone of their messages to me. Then I never got to meet them. I never heard from them again. I emailed them

back, and they either made excuses for not showing up or did not email me back! They just disappeared off the face of the earth, without ever having wandered outside of their house.

Beyond these five, there have been at least twenty more "Heathens" in our area, who joined our Meetup or our message board, expressing their great interest in committing themselves more fully to Heathenry, and then they never made a move. They never showed up. They also just faded into the background without ever having shown up.



Hand-Carved Thor's Hammer...from Tiger Wood

Now, I know life is busy – that is a common excuse. But my life is busy as well. I have a full-time job, a 2nd off-duty job for extra money, a wife, three-kids, and I am very active in activities and hobbies away from Heathenry. Coming to one event – one 2 or 3 hour event – is not going to crush anyone's schedule. It's just not. That excuse does not work with me.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Now, if you read this essay, and you recognize yourself in some of these words...know that I was not speaking about YOU specifically. But, if you do recognize yourself in some of these words, you have a choice:

- 1.** You can get really mad and defensive that I would write such a post. "How dare he say this!" You can justify why you are partially or completely in HINO mode, and decide that I am a mean jerk who doesn't know what he's talking about...or that "he doesn't understand my situation." Or..

2. You can start practicing what you preach. Honor and gift your Gods, your Ancestors, and the Vaettir. Read and learn as much as you can about your chosen way of life. Look for Heathens in your area (even if it is only one other Heathen...or even if you have to drive a few hours), and gather with them now and again.

What you do, is up to you. If you choose to get mad and defensive at what is said in this essay, then that says much more about you than it does about me. I have big shoulders...I am sure I'll survive your anger. If you choose to more seriously pursue Heathenry in a dedicated fashion, then, really – it is you that will benefit the most.



MOVING FROM THE "NEW" TO THE "LASTING"

New Heathens (hereafter referred to as "Newbies") often come to Heathenry with a large amount of enthusiasm and passion. Asatru is new to them. They feel the incredible emotion of "coming home," and feeling like they have finally found something they can believe in whole-heartedly. They have found a way of life that finally makes all the pieces fall into place. They join e-lists, they get involved on message boards, they seek out or help start Kindreds. They are filled with overwhelming energy for honoring their Gods, Ancestors, and the Vaettir.

But over time, many of these Newbies lose that initial spark. Their enthusiasm and passion begin to wane. The incredible emotions involved in "coming home" seem to fade. They can become disillusioned, disappointed, frustrated, and many fall away from Asatru. Some of them return to the faith of their upbringing while others move on to another Pagan religion, for which they show the

same initial enthusiasm they showed for Asatru.

Why does this happen?

I would liken it to romantic relationships. Early in a relationship, there is a freshness to it - a newness - that lends itself to intense emotion, enthusiasm, and passion. In a new relationship, everything is exciting. There is a honeymoon period where you can't get enough of the other person. You want to spend every minute with them, learn all about them, and impress them. You focus all of your attention and time on pleasing them.

But over time, love matures, and there are two paths to go down:

The first path is the path of abandonment, in an unending chase for that early passion. As the newness and excitement fades, rather than becoming comfortable and building something meaningful and lasting, you walk away. You seek fresh relationships over and over with different people, in an attempt to prolong or maintain a level of brilliant but shallow excitement - that feeling of newness. This is the selfish and immature way to approach romantic relationships.

The second path is the path to a lasting relationship. As the newness fades, a comfort and security should develop. You truly know the other person, and you work at keeping and maintaining your bonds with them. You see value in the other person and your connection with them, and instead of being driven by excitement and passion, the relationship becomes more complex. You work at growing together, rather than growing apart. This is the mature way to approach romantic relationships.



Frigga

Newbies to Heathenry, have two paths to choose from when their initial enthusiasm and passion begin to fade. They can either walk away, in an unending chase for that early passion somewhere else, or they can mature into a level of comfort, building something meaningful and lasting. They can seek to prolong or maintain a level of brilliant but shallow excitement, by skipping from religion to religion, or they

can work at it, and develop depth and complexity in their faith. They can selfishly and childishly keep chasing the next new thing, or they can mature and grow within Heathenry.

We live in a disposable society. Our popular culture has the attention span of a 15-second sound bite, or a 30-second commercial. Friends come and go. Commitments come and go. Marriages come and go. Jobs and careers come and go. I think we see this same attitude and approach with those Newbies to Heathenry that come onto the scene with the energy of a burning sun, and just a year or two later – they are gone.

I am a relative Newbie at the time I am writing this, having first heard about Asatru in June of 2006 and fully committing to Asatru in June of 2007. But I know the path I am going to take regarding my involvement in Asatru and Jotun's Bane Kindred. It is the same path I took with my marriage and the same path I took with my career. I will mature in my faith. I will grow in depth and knowledge. As the excitement and freshness of "coming home" fades, I will work to replace it with motivations based on something meaningful, deep, and lasting.

If you are a Newbie and reading this, which path will you take?



Brody, Mark, Gunnar, and Sarah





SECTION TWO
**BUILDING A
KINDRED OR TRIBE**

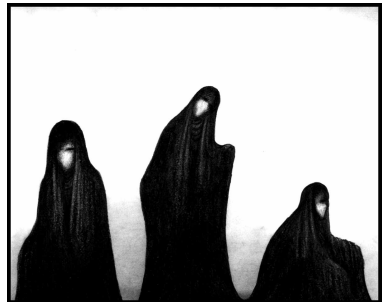
WHY START A KINDRED?

Perhaps you are new to Heathenry, and you have not gathered with other Heathens before. Or you are a long-time Heathen, and you've experienced failed Kindred-Building efforts in the past. In order to build a new Kindred, one has to have a clear understanding of why you are doing it. Building a Kindred is extremely rewarding, but it takes a lot of work and there will be challenges. If you are confident in why you are starting the Kindred, your confidence will carry you through. Confidence and determination are contagious. Other Heathens you contact and encounter during your Kindred-Building process will be drawn to your vision and purpose. So, let's examine the value of the Heathen Kindred.

ASATRU IS ABOUT COMMUNITY

Heathenry is clearly focused on our Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir. But it is also about Family, Community, and our Folk.

When I say community, I do not mean the strangers that live in accidental proximity to us. I mean the "Heathen Communities," including loosely the individual Heathens, Hearths, Kindreds, and Tribes that surround us in our local area. By pulling your local Heathen community together, and working to grow and strengthen it, every Heathen in that community will benefit. When you are a group rather than an individual, your Luck and talents become more than the sum of



The Norns

your individual efforts. The group mingles Wyrd and develops collective Luck and Gefrain. The group becomes an "engine" of moving parts all working together to accomplish something greater than what any individual part could accomplish on its own. It is just a simple fact that you get better results from your personal efforts and the practice of your Folkway when you have a group assisting and supporting you.

ON-LINE HEATHENRY IS NOT HEATHENRY

There are solitary Heathens that spend more time on e-lists, message boards, and the internet than they do on trying to meet with other Heathens face to face. The problem with is that you will not find "real

Heathenry" on-line. Heathenry is about community, gathering as a people, shaking a man or woman's hand, looking them in the eye, hearing their voice, telling stories, getting to know each other. It is letting your kids play together. Letting your spouses get to know each other. It is about laughing at dumb jokes, and telling stories from your life. It is about learning together, comparing notes, and collective effort. It is about mingling Wyrd...and taking the measure of another person, and finding them of worth.

Due to our few numbers and also to the "ease" of using the internet, many are forced – or choose – to fall back on so-called "on-line Heathenry," on the various e-lists and message boards. But on-line, other people are just pixels on the screen. The conversations are made up of toneless, context-absent words on a screen. No eye-contact. No knowledge of the person's real-life, only their on-line persona. On-line Heathenry is simply not Heathenry. It is rife with trolls. Rife with fakes and deceivers. Rife with meaningless electronic conflict. On-line Heathenry does little to grow a healthy vibrant Heathen Folk. It does however increase the number of people sitting in front of computers, staring at a screen.

Other than networking and sharing information, what does on-line Heathenry accomplish? What do long debates and arguments on an e-list actually create? The internet is an amazing way to exchange information and find other Heathens. But it is not, in and of itself, a way to honor our Gods. It is not a way to grow and advance Heathenry. It is not a method by which we can practice or sustain our way of life.

SOLITARY, BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO BE

Now, it is true that some people are extremely introverted, and are uncomfortable in a group setting. But this is an inclination that should be dealt with, and potentially overcome. It is extremely limiting to "go it alone" in this world. A solitary Heathen, to some degree, is unable to grow and advance the cause of Heathenry.

It is completely understandable for a Heathen to be solitary, as long as they have tried – and are continuing to try – to meet other Heathens of worth in their area. But settling for or choosing to be a solitary Heathen has a negative impact on both the individual and the greater Heathen community. The benefits of being an active part of a Heathen group, kindred, tribe, or community are so powerful and compelling, that the idea of settling for being solitary, or even deciding proactively to remain solitary, is almost incomprehensible.

The individual and community benefits of learning and growing within Heathenry are enormous and compelling. Associating, meeting with, studying with, faining/bloting with, and holding symbol with other Heathens facilitates faster learning and growth. You can compare ideas, have face to face conversations, socially interact with other Heathens, all in a Heathen-fashion. The tribal aspects of getting along, helping each other, and developing local tradition are very rewarding and instructive. What sounds good on paper, in a book, or on a message board can be altogether different from what works in practice.

The collective Luck of a group of Tru Heathens is much more than the sum of their individual Luck. That Luck can accomplish almost anything when they are interacting among themselves and with the outside world in a Tru manner. When they are working hard towards their goals individually and as a group, almost nothing is out of reach. The things a small group of Heathens can accomplish is astounding.

Nothing beats...

...knowing that the members of your Kindred have your back.

...watching your children play with other Heathen children.

...gathering at a Kindred member's home, and making mead or working on other crafts with a group of like-minded people.

...getting together regularly to read from the Havamal or Voluspa...and discussing the meaning of the Lore together.

...having friends that know what a gift means. Or the value of hospitality.

...gathering with these friends and loved ones, and honoring the Gods together as a group.

...gathering with other Heathens for Symbol, and mingling Wyrd. Raising a horn to your Gods, heroes, and Ancestors. Boasting of your accomplishments and making Oaths regarding what you are going to work hard to accomplish.



Ullr

...having your children know and see for themselves that there are others that believe as you do, and that you are not alone in your loyalty to our Elder Kin.

...being contacted by a new Heathen, and helping them find their way back to our ancestral ways.

...comparing notes on some of the crafts you are involved in, or learning new crafts (metal working, knitting, wood carving, weaving, wood burning, etc.) from another Kindred member.

...gathering together to plan something big. Something that will mean a lot for Heathenry in your region. Planning and working to make that happen, together.

As you read this, there are solitary Heathens that are working hard to gather Heathens in their area. They have not given up, and will never give up on the idea of establishing and growing a Heathen community in their area, even if it is a community made up of only two Heathens. There are solitary Heathens that have not been able to find local Heathens, so they travel to regional gatherings and moots, and this is how they experience that face to face contact with other Heathens. Even with this regional contact, they continue to work at forming a local community.

So, if you are a solitary Heathen and reading this, think of the possibilities. Let the seeds be planted in your mind regarding the clear benefits of being an active part of forming or improving a local Heathen community. If you will not do it, who will?



BREAKING INERTIA INTERALLY & EXTERNALLY

The hardest part of forming any group is overcoming INERTIA – and for those of us that did not pay enough attention in high school science class – the definition:

Inertia: A property of matter that causes it to resist changes in speed or direction (velocity).

People have Inertia too. They have habits, patterns of activity, people they are used to being around, places they are comfortable going, and topics they are willing to talk about. It is hard to change a person's "speed and direction." Just like matter, people "resist" changes to what they are doing and where they are headed.

So, let's estimate that there are about 20 people in Kansas City that consider themselves to be "Heathen" or followers of the Asatru religion. And let's estimate that there are at least 150 more people that are curious about the Northern European Gods and might be interested in Heathenry. Of all these people, there is a very small minority that will actually take steps in a new direction. And going to meetings, gathering with new people, and beginning to build a Heathen group or kindred qualifies as a "new direction."

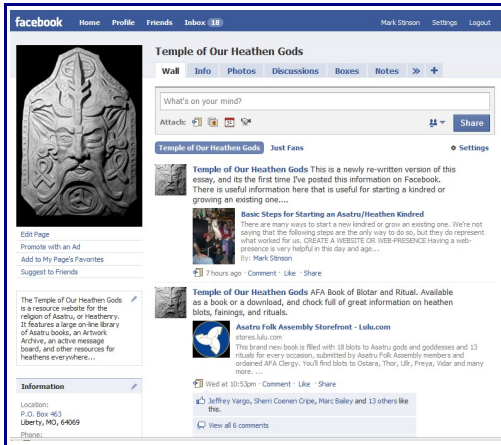
Getting up off of your couch to go to a meeting is hard work. Meeting and getting to know new people is not comfortable for many people. Forming new friendships takes more trust than most people are willing to tentatively offer. And truly committing to a belief system or way of life, even if you feel it is right for you, is a big deal.

So the hardest part of forming, growing, and maintaining a kindred is overcoming Inertia. It is sad, but many people have personal Inertia that keeps them isolated, at home, in front of the boob tube, and not fully committed to their Gods, their Ancestors, and their Folk. But, we started with a small group of people that had overcome that Inertia, and who were willing to commit to each other within the bonds of a Kindred. We hope that serves as a beacon to those who are looking for a way to commit to their Heathen beliefs and are willing to accept a "change in speed or direction" within their own life.



STEPS TOWARDS FORMING A KINDRED

There are many ways to start a new kindred or grow an existing one. We are not saying that the following steps are the only way to do so, but they do represent what worked for us.



Facebook Page

CREATE A WEBSITE OR WEB-PRESENCE

Having a web-presence is very helpful in this day and age. It allows people to find you. You can share the purpose and details of your effort on the internet and make event announcements to visitors. With e-lists, forums, message boards, and social-networking sites you can generate conversations and interest in what you are trying to accomplish. A website does not, and

cannot, replace in-person interaction between real people. But it is a key step in starting a group, kindred, or tribe.

Our initial web-presence was a Meetup.com page. It is a little expensive at about \$20 a month, but it is easy and convenient for those that aren't very web-savvy. It allows you to set up events, add an "About" page, and it sends out automated reminders for events. It also ranks very high on Google and Yahoo searches. So if a solitary Heathen searches online for a group in their area, they are very likely to find your Meetup.com page. An additional benefit is the fact that there are usually Heathens in your area (or driving distance) waiting for someone to start a Meetup.com site. When I started ours, there were 18 Heathens waiting for a Meetup.com site here in Kansas City. Did they all show up at our first event? Definitely not. But of the five initial members of our Kindred, three of them found us through the Meetup.com site. Once our group was established, I pulled the Meetup.com page down, to save money. But it served us well in the beginning.

If we were starting our group today, I would likely make a “group” on Facebook. Facebook (at the time of this writing) has become the predominant social networking website. Forming a group on Facebook costs nothing and takes about 10 minutes. Using the various search tools on Facebook, and elsewhere you can build up the number of members of your Facebook group, and send them reminders about upcoming events, etc. You can also share photos, video, and links with the members of your “group.”

SET UP A FIRST MEETING

When I decided to form a kindred in Kansas City, I did not know any Heathens in my area and there was not an existing Kindred in my area. It took a lot of work on my part just to find one Heathen in my area and get in touch with him by email. We set our first meeting at an Applebee's, and I met with the one Heathen I had found a few weeks beforehand to discuss what we wanted to build and how we wanted to build it. We made sure that first meeting was positive, energetic, and organized. We figured no one would come back if the first meeting was boring or disorganized.

Choosing the day, time, and location of the first meeting is important. We set ours on a Sunday evening since this seemed to be time of the week when not much was going on. We chose a location with room for everyone, and one that was quiet enough that conversation could take place easily. If you choose a place that doesn't serve food, then provide some food if possible. Eating a meal (or snacks) together helps break the ice.

PROMOTE THE MEETING

You have to do more than just set a meeting. You need to promote it. To do this, set the meeting at least a month in advance. If it is your first meeting, there's nothing wrong with setting it up to 2 months in advance. Put up signs at book stores and coffee shops, post about it on e-lists, forums, message boards, and social networking sites where you might find interested parties. Do everything you can to let everyone know. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain, from getting creative with how you get the word out about your first meeting.

Make it clear in your announcements and promotions exactly what you are looking for and what the meeting is about. In all of our initial promotional materials we made it clear we were looking for “Tru Heathens,” and that this was not Wicca or Wicca-tru. We made it clear we wanted to honor the Northern European Gods, our Ancestors, and

the Vaettir in the ways our Ancestors honored them. By letting everyone know who you are attempting to gather at the meeting, you have a better chance of avoiding conflicts and problems.

AT THE MEETING

You know what they say about first impressions. The first meeting will be a first impression situation for everyone. So, communicate clearly and get everything across that you want to get across. Encourage a tone at the meeting that will set the tone for the creation of your group, kindred, or tribe. Make it clear where the group is headed, and how determined you are to get there. Provide some useful information and handouts about Asatru, in case people show up who are not exactly "seasoned" Heathens. A good thing to hand out is a list of books about Asatru that are good to read. Gather contact information from everyone, including their name, phone number and address. Before the night is up, set or announce the date for the next meeting. Work hard to make sure everyone has fun, and has engaging conversations about Asatru and the Gods.



Our First Symbol - Prior to Forming JBK

A SEPARATE WEBSITE

While Meetup.com or a Facebook Group are great tools, we wanted our own website. This is something you might also want to consider as things progress in your kindred-building efforts. You want a website that sets a tone for what you are working to build. You want a means to communicate and share resources. Look at other Asatru websites, and write down some of the things you like. Then over time you can build (or have built) a website that is professional and informative in nature. In the case of Meetup.com, when you move to a conventional website you'll be saving some money making that switch.

EVENTS...LOTS OF EVENTS

Scheduled events allow people to gather together, get to know each other, and form bonds. If you are building an oathed or committed kindred, then it is enormously important that you get to know each other well. You have to talk to each other on the phone, e-mail each other, visit each other's homes, etc. Regularly scheduled events are another good way to make sure the potential Kindred is getting together fairly often. We had Havamal study groups. A Symbel at a park. A Faining at one of our member's home. And we gathered together for dinners and holidays. Honoring the Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir are major parts of being a practicing Heathen. So we did this frequently, and still do.

As an established kindred, Jotun's Bane Kindred puts together its schedule of events a year in advance. Every November we gather together, and plan the next year's events. Doing this allows us to approach the next year in an organized fashion. We include all of our out-of-town trips to visit other kindreds in our region. We include our open events (both pubmoots and Fainings), our study group sessions, our Heathen movie nights, and our closed events as well. If planing a year in advance is too much for you, then consider planning out 6 months in advance.

OFFER CLASSES AND/OR WORKSHOPS

Many people have not heard of Asatru or Heathenry, or they have a mistaken or distorted view of what it is. By offering classes and workshops on Asatru 101, the Gods, the Ancestors, the Vaettir, and the Runes, you can educate people about Asatru and raise interest in Asatru in your area. This can be done before the formation of the Kindred to lay the groundwork and find potential Kindred members, and it can also be done once the Kindred is formed in order to grow your Kindred and educate the public. These classes can be offered at local coffeeshops, new-age book stores, and even community colleges in your area. Anywhere you can gather people together to listen and learn.

INVOLVE YOURSELF IN EACH OTHER'S LIVES

We also involved ourselves in each others interests, families, and lives. This is a key step toward growing closer as a group and forming strong bonds. Let's say one of your members likes to hunt. Some or all of the potential kindred members should go hunting or target shooting with him or her. If one of your members is the member of a band, then potential members of your kindred should go to his/her shows, to

show support. The concept is simple. If you like these people enough to form a "family" with them, then you should be willing to make the time to hang out with them, and learn about what interests them. They will in turn, learn about what interests you. Over time you'll find you have a lot of common interests, or develop a lot of common interests.



Our First Faining - Prior to Forming JBK

ELIMINATE THOSE YOU CAN'T CALL FRIEND

To form a Kindred...take Oaths, Symbol together, and mingle your Wyrd...you have to see the other people that are involved as interesting, talented people of worth. If they are "broken" people, with bad character, then have the fortitude to eventually eliminate them from the picture. This sounds harsh, but you are forming a "family." A "broken" person may be the very thing that destroys your efforts. This isn't about choosing people that are exactly like you...or people that always agree with you. It is about choosing to ally yourself with Heathens that are worthy, dependable, and Tru.

TALK ABOUT WHERE YOU STAND

Talk about where you stand on your beliefs. Explore each other's points-of-view on various topics, including controversial topics. What topics are you unwilling to compromise about? What topics bring about disagreement within your potential Kindred? What will the Kindred stand for, and can everyone that is involved support those views, or at least tolerate them? What are you going to just agree to disagree about, and is everyone willing to accept that and make it work? All of

these questions are important to ask, because you do not want something unspoken popping up six months later and tearing a big hole in your group.

DO NOT RUSH IT

There will be a temptation to rush into forming the Kindred. If Heathen newbies are involved, they are likely to be the ones that want to move too fast. Slow it down. Get to know each other. Make sure it feels and works right. We waited six months to form our Kindred. We thought that was about the right amount of time for us. But make up your own mind based on your situation, and the people involved. Building a kindred is important work, so make sure you are doing it right.

READ THE LORE

As a Kindred we all read the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda during the time we were forming the Kindred. We were all focused on the Lore. This was a good goal for the newbies...and encouraged them to get a good foundation set by reading the Lore. Most everyone read a lot more than just the Lore...but that was the minimum.

We have continued this tradition. Our study group sessions focus on the Lore. Regular study group sessions are a great idea for both a beginning or an established kindred. We also require our new members to read the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda during their application process.

COME UP WITH A STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

Write some things down. Some basic rules. Will decisions be made by a leader, by a majority vote, or by a consensus vote? How will new members be considered, mentored, and eventually accepted into the Kindred? Will there be positions of responsibility within the Kindred, and what will these positions do? Some would call these sorts of written rules or guidelines a set of By-Laws. I like calling these written guidelines a Statement of Understanding. Whatever you call it, writing one and then coming to an agreement on its contents can avoid problems and conflicts later.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

From day one, we said, "We are going to do this, and nothing will stand in our way." That served us well. When roadblocks popped up, we worked around them or drove right through them. We were not

willing to accept failure, and this was important to our success.

I am sure there are other things you could try, and additional issues to keep in mind. But the steps above hit the highlights of what worked for us.



STARTING A HEATHEN STUDY GROUP

Let's say you are a solitary Heathen, in an area with one or two other solitary Heathens. Or perhaps you are a solitary Heathen in a larger town – with a bunch of Heathens that rarely gather together. Let's say you want something more.

Our way of life is tribal. We are better people...and can get more done, when we know and work together with other Heathens of worth in our area. But starting a kindred sounds like an overwhelming task. Or perhaps, the people in your area are reluctant to be involved in a kindred-building process.

One solution to all of these situations is to start a Heathen Study Group.



At a Study Group Session

You set a date, a month or more in the future. You offer to host. You talk with all the Heathens in your area, and invite them. Speak to them of the hospitality you wish to offer. Tell them you want to at least know them better, and you'd like to learn along side them. Explain why coming to the Study Group would be fun and educational.

You can even start a Meetup Group, or a Group on Facebook, or a Yahoo e-list. You can hand out or hang up notices at the local pagan book store. Honestly, you can promote it as much or as little as you like, depending on who you want there...and what you want out of it. Promoting a Heathen Study Group is very similar to the promotional work you should do if you are attempting to start a kindred.

As far as the Heathen Study Group itself, it is very easy to organize. I would start with the Havamal. It is very straight-forward, focuses on how to "be Heathen," and inspires great discussions.

Acquire multiple translations of the Havamal. If there are only two of you that will be participating in the study group, I would recommend as many as four different translations. If there will more of you, use more translations. You really can't have too many of them to read and compare. You can find 7 translations of the Havamal on-line at this link:

<http://heathengods.com/temple/modules/articles>

I would recommend Bellows, Hollander, Chisholm, and maybe Auden & Taylor's. If you have Larrington in book format, that is another good one, but isn't available on-line.

Have the translations printed out for the first Study Group. Let everyone attending know that they should read the first 10 or 15 stanzas prior to the Study Group. Since you are organizing the event, make sure you read over them too...and put some thought into what they mean to you.

On the day of the Heathen Study Group, make sure you have a place where all of you can sit comfortably. A place with enough light to read from the translations. Have some sodas or other drinks available, and also some snacks. Hospitality is very important to Heathens, and important to forming connections between friends.

Greet everyone as they arrive. If you do not know their names, learn them. Introduce those attending, if they do not know each other. Offer them food and drink upon their arrival, and make sure they know where the restroom is in your home. Be a good host.

Once everyone has arrived, hand out the translations. Then go stanza by stanza, taking turns reading each translation of the stanza you are focusing on. For instance, take turns reading out loud the various translations of the first stanza. Once all the translations of the first stanza have been read, discuss what is different about them...both in language and in meaning. Discuss what each of you think the stanza means. Discuss your individual takes on each stanza, and also what the group generally thinks.



The God Freyr

Remember, there are no "right" answers...and do not get in arguments! Make sure everyone is allowed to share their opinion. If one participant is being a little quiet, ask them their opinion. Make sure everyone feels welcome and valued. After all, you are the host.

Once the first stanza has been fully discussed, move on to the second stanza, and so on.

In Jotun's Bane Kindred's study groups on the Havamal, we tried to get through 15 stanzas in a night. But do not rush. If you only get through 10, that is fine. You're not trying to set a speed record.

You are attempting to learn, and think, and come to some shared conclusions about what you agree on...and perhaps what you do not agree on.

As the host, make sure the study groups are fun. Have snacks, laugh a lot between stanzas, and enjoy it. Offer smoke breaks if you have smokers among you. do not make it into homework, or something you dread. Make it something that people look forward to...

Now, as the Heathen Study Group continues, you can begin rotating where it is held, if someone else in the group seems interested in hosting as well. Perhaps have a small faining (blot) before the study group sessions, just so you are also practicing your religion, and not just learning about it. Or perhaps have a small Folk Symbol afterwards.

If over time, you find additional Heathens that you think have worth, then you can invite them to a study group, and see how it goes. If someone involved in the Study Group is always disrupting it, has no worth, or makes the other members consistently uneasy, talk with

them about it. If they will not change their behavior, tell them they are no longer welcome. do not let one bad guest ruin it for everyone, and possibly break up your Study Group.

Over time, the members of the Study Group will come to know each other better; who they are, how they think, and how dependable they are. Friendships will form. Over time, the subject of forming a kindred or tribe may be brought up, either by you or another participant.

This Study Group method would also work for an already established kindred that wanted to do more collaborative study. It would also work for kindreds that include families with teenagers, in order to get them more involved.



HOLDING OPEN EVENTS

Part of what we do to "reach out" to the public is to hold Public or Open Events. Open Pubmoots. Open Fainings. Would it be easier for us to just shut the door, and completely insulate ourselves from outsiders and those we do not know? Yes...I guess in a sense it would be easier. More predictable. Less work. But would we be living up to our obligations to our Gods and our Ancestors? No...not in my opinion.

Usually, about 300 to a 1000 people hear about any one of our Open Events, through our various postings and promotions of the event. Of that large group of people, maybe 3 to 10 new people decide to make the time and effort to show up. And of those 3 to 10 people who come, 1 to 3 return to learn more. But if our efforts help bring one Tru Heathen home to his/her ancestral Gods, then our efforts have been worth it.

If over time, our efforts lead to 5...then 10...then 20...then scores of people reawakening to the Gods of their Ancestors, then our efforts should be pleasing to our Elder Kin. So we will continue to "reach out" to those that will hear the call of their Gods...



A HEATHEN CLUB OR A HEATHEN TRIBE?

Many local Heathen groups are basically clubs. Our code phrase for this phenomenon is "5 guys meeting in somebody's basement." They gather once or twice a month at one of their homes. They like the Gods, and honor them. They mention their Ancestors. And that is about the extent of it.

In the "club" model, they gather for awhile. They really get nowhere. Their families aren't really involved. The guys sort of like each other, but really, Heathenry is the thing they most have in common. Their friends and coworkers may not even know they are Heathen. After awhile, some of them wander off or get pissed off about something, and the club stops meeting.



Will, Mark, Joshua, and Nathan at Our Tribe's Ve

The "club" model is not the future of Heathenry. Or better put, the "club" model does not provide Heathenry with a future.

A Kindred should be a tribe. It should be families gathering together. Spouses, children, men, and women...coming together as an extended family. Caring for each other, looking out for each other's interests, coming to each other's aid. Deep friendship/kinship should develop

between the members. The children should see each other so often that they come to see each as brothers and sisters.

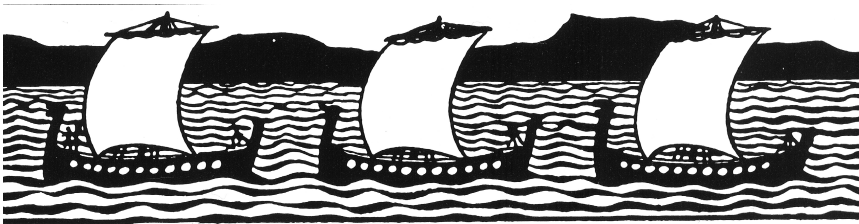
When someone moves, everyone shows up and helps. If a deck needs building, everyone shows up and helps. When a parent is sick, another family should offer to take the kids for a bit. If someone needs a job, everyone keeps their eye out for one and actively helps them find one. Members of the kindred should be talking almost every day. They should know what is going on in each other's lives. They should be the people we turn to when we want to laugh, or cry, or we have exciting news to tell.

A Kindred should have goals. They should be actively working to grow a Heathen community, both within the tribe, and around the tribe. They should be pooling money, with a goal to buy land and establish a Hof. They should be getting to know the Heathens in neighboring communities, through modern communications...and by visiting them face to face. The Kindred should be working to leave their children with a more stable and developed Heathenry than we currently have.

A Kindred should be a tribe, not a club. We should see and treat it as a "chosen family." Given a choice between "5 guys meeting in a basement," and a growing, family-involved, intensely dedicated, goal-oriented tribe...there really is no choice. I'll take the tribal model.

Now some will say, "I do not have a tribe in my area." Or they'll say, "There just aren't enough interested Heathens in my area." Well, there's really no excuse for accepting that condition as the status quo. One should work for it, and never give up. Look for other Heathens in every way possible. Offer Heathen workshops. Talk to your friends and family about your beliefs. Accept nothing less than working towards forming and growing a Heathen tribe, and establishing a Hof in your area.

It will not happen overnight. It might take many years. But nothing worthwhile happens overnight.



JUMP-STARTING A STAGNANT HEATHEN COMMUNITY

Let's say you live in a city or town where there are a fair number of Heathens (15 to 25, or more). But let's say there has been some bad history or bad blood among some of the Heathens, and the community rarely meets. And when it does meet, very few people show up. Let's say you wanted to jump-start that community.

This was not the situation in Kansas City when we started, and it is certainly not the situation now. But I was asked for some advice regarding another city in our region, and I thought this advice would probably be helpful anywhere a stagnant Heathen community needed to be jump-started. Here's what I would do in that situation.

I would set up an easy-to-get-to, easy-to-participate in event at a central location. I would not ask people what sort of event they wanted, or ask for input. I would just go ahead and hold a Blot/Faining with a pot-luck dinner afterwards or a Symbel with a pot-luck dinner beforehand. This brings everyone together to do something Heathen and meaningful. If it was the middle of winter, I would have it at someone's house to which most of the members of the community have already been. If it was summer, I would have it in a big park.

I would set the date and time in a way that I knew the most people would be able to attend it. I would not ask publicly when to hold the event. I would just choose the date and time based on what I already know about the people in the community. Usually weekends are best, and personally, I prefer Sunday afternoons or evenings. I would hold off on announcing the event, the date, and the time until I had contacted each member of the community personally.

I would call each and every person to invite them. If I did not know their phone numbers, I would get them from someone who did, or I would personally email each person for which I did not have a phone number. I would tell them specifically what I enjoyed about them, and why I would like to see them at the gathering. If they wanted to talk to me about difficulties in the community, or anything negative, I would steer them away from it. I would tell them that I understood there were difficulties, but "I am not really focused on that now. I am focused on putting together a great gathering for our community."

Then, after I had contacted everyone personally, I would announce the Blot or Symbel in as many ways and as many venues as possible. The Meetup site if there is one. E-lists. Myspace. Facebook. Tribe.net. AFA message board. The Troth message board. You name it. My message about the blot or symbel would be positive, up-beat, and it would call to that Heathen spirit within every person who reads it.

If our first event was a Blot/Faining, I would hold a Symbel for our next event. If the Symbel was first, I would hold the Blot/Faining next. I would continue to focus the first several events on something Heathen with plenty of time before or afterwards for eating and talking.

Once we were all together, I would have some positive things to bring up to the group. Positive plans for moving ahead. I would not dwell on the negative. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't even bring up the negative. If someone else brought it up, I would say, "Let's just enjoy this gathering, and if people have things to work out...then they should work them out without dragging everyone else into them. Our community should be our focus."

Is doing this guaranteed to bring 15 to 25 Heathens together in fellowship? No. Is doing this guaranteed to bring together a number of Heathens for what will likely be a very meaningful and positive event? Well, nothing is guaranteed. But there's a good chance it will work. Over time...a series of meaningful and positive events will bring some of the stand-offish people along.



BAD KINDRED EXPERIENCES HOLDING YOU BACK?

I've lost track of how many Heathens have told me that they are dissuaded from starting a new kindred or trying to jump-start a stagnant Heathen community, based on bad experiences they have had with kindreds in the past. They have been part of a kindred-building experience that failed. Or they were part of a kindred that imploded. Or personal attacks were made against them within a Heathen community.

Everyone's situation is different. The bad experiences you may have in this area may have been enormously stressful, unjustified, and you may still carry the scars. However you can't let past bad experiences stop you from doing what is right and Tru. Our Gods and Ancestors watch us...and they would expect you to move forward, learn from bad experiences, and get back on the horse.

Ours is not a weak and pathetic way of life. The blood that runs through our veins is the blood of hearty Northern Europeans. They struggled against the cold and won. They struggled against starvation and won. They struggled against the sea and won. Our Ancestors were a strong and mighty people, and we carry their blood and their Orlog. So, you may have suffered political and emotional defeats within a kindred or group-building efforts in the past, but honestly, "BUTCH UP!"

Yes, you are going to run into some worthless people. Shit-stirrers, trolls, keyboard cowboys, naysayers, and those who thrive on drama. Resisting those that would disrupt your efforts is not easy. Doing the right thing is not easy. Life is not easy. Life is a struggle to be relished, not something we should run from.

So, be passionate based on your own confidence and your own sense of what is Tru. Quit letting the reactions, judgments, and attitudes of others divert your course from right action. Quit allowing the emotional pain or disappointment you may feel from past experiences divert your course from right action.

My view of things, is that we get one life. One shot at this. What you make of your life is what will be remembered of you. Sure there are people that will attempt to disrupt what you are trying to build. This

problem has existed among mankind from the moment humans gathered together for mutual protection and collective effort, and it occurs within every human endeavor.

Confront problems. Fix them, or circumvent them on the way to your goal. But you shouldn't give up and pull away from any effort to build communities just because it is difficult and sometimes problematic. Again, that is my personal view. We each make our own choices based on our own circumstances. But when our children and their children write sagas of our lives, give them a story and a life worth writing about.



Storytelling at Lightning Across the Plains



BE THE SPARK

Most Heathens that seek to interact and worship with other Heathens, form a Kindred with other like-minded Heathens. This brings to mind the question, "What is a Kindred?"

kin-dred, n. 1. A group of related persons, as a clan or tribe. 2. (used with a pl. verb) A person's relatives; kinfolk.

In Heathen terms, a Kindred is most often a group of individuals and/or families that have come together to express their religion in a group setting. To learn together, worship together, play together, and stand together. In many ways it is a family, and you are loyal to your

Kindred and bound to them. I am a fairly social person, so imagine my disappointment in 2007 when I found out there were no Kindreds in Kansas City.

During a very simple faining to Asa-Thor, I was telling the Gods of my lack of progress in finding a local Kindred. As I said the words a realization hit me. If I wanted to be a part of a Kindred, I would have to start one. Rather than disappointment or despair, I felt resolve. Rather than asking the Gods to do it for me, I made an oath there and then to work on starting a kindred in Kansas City. After all, a city the size of Kansas City should have a Kindred. It just should. So I made that oath.

At the time I made that oath, did I know everything there is to know about Asatru? No. Was I a complete and utter Newbie at the time? Definitely. But, it only takes a spark to start a fire. Even as a beginning Heathen, I knew that if you want something you have to make it happen yourself. And the first step toward making something happen, is resolving that absolutely nothing will stand in your way.

It is also important to keep in mind that starting and building a kindred sounds like an overwhelming task at times. But it is not a one person job. Often one-person acts as the spark, giving the kindred-building effort its initial push. Once other people are drawn to the effort – even just one other person – the effort becomes a group effort. A collective struggle. And the task of kindred-building is now something shared.

So, you do not know any Heathens near you? There are no kindreds in your area? Or maybe there are Heathens near you, but they do not gather together anymore? Well, if you aren't the spark, then who will be?



FOCUS ON SIMILARITIES

One of the most difficult parts in all of this is finding "like-minded" Heathens. Heathenry is not a centralized religion. It is a reconstruction of the pre-Christian religion of our Ancestors. But keep in mind the beliefs of these Ancestors varied by region, village, and even socio-economic status. These beliefs also varied depending on the time-period, century, or even by generation. As it was for our Ancestors, modern Heathenry also has many differences of opinion regarding "What is a Tru Heathen?"

Does our ethnic heritage play a role or not? Do we have an identity as a People, or Folk? Should we focus on lore and historical fact, or should we "move forward" with the religion and create modern developments? Are you Folkish or Universalist? Are you purely reconstruction oriented or more progressive? It goes on and on...because individuality is an important part of Heathenry. Heathens are not sheep. Heathens do not get down on their knees to their Gods, let alone to a central authority here on Midgard.



The Jotun Goddess Skadi

Well, this independent nature, this individualistic spirit, can seriously affect the dynamics of a group. Choosing to be a part of a group, and to share a horn with someone is an important decision for Heathens. One must protect one's Wyrð, and one must be true to his/her relationship with our Gods.

At the same time, it is important for Heathens to remember, that even with all their differences, they are more similar to each other than to anyone else. You will never find two people, let alone two Heathens, that 100% agree on everything. So it is important for Heathens to maintain their hard-won beliefs and knowledge, while still remaining open to the fact that other Heathens should, and will, disagree with them. Sometimes these disagreements are about what seem like some pretty big issues.

But members of the Aesir tribe married and had children with Jotuns. The Vanir made peace with the Aesir. Thor, and Loki, and Odin associated with each other regularly, at least for a long while.

Heathens should be careful not to close themselves off too quickly to fellow Heathens, despite their differences of opinion.

What is truly more important? Good strong Heathens gathering their families together into tribes – or some difference of opinion on an issue or topic that many disagree on? Your children playing with and bonding with other Heathen children – or you avoiding anyone who doesn't believe exactly what you believe? The benefits you and your family would get from gathering with other Heathens – or the benefits of insisting you are right and everyone else is wrong?



TYPES OF KINDREDS

For starters, I feel that anyone thinking about starting a kindred has to determine exactly what type of kindred they want to create. This can be decided by the one person that begins (or sparks) the kindred-building process or by the group as it eventually gathers together. It is a decision that may have to change or shift as the kindred-building process continues, depending on the dynamics of the group.

There are basically two categories into which most kindreds fit – Social Kindreds and Committed Kindreds.

SOCIAL KINDRED – A loose group of people who honor the same Gods and enjoy each other's company. This group has no formal bonds and no formal definition of who belongs to the group and who does not. In some of my essays, I refer to this as the “club model” of kindred structure.

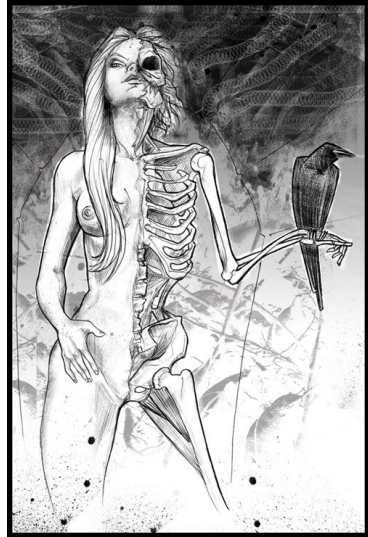
COMMITTED KINDRED – A defined group of people who honor the same Gods and operate more as a family. This group often formalizes its bonds with oaths and has a clear definition of who belongs to the group and who does not.

A Social Kindred is something that is easier to build and maintain in the short term. People come and go. The membership shifts as people's interest shifts. The tone and collective beliefs of this sort of kindred shift frequently, as people come and go. Since this is basically a social arrangement, it can go away or disband quickly.

A Committed Kindred must be extremely careful with their selection of members, and those members should be invited only after the relationship between new and existing members has already reached a point where they feel like family. This should create a stable and continuous group of members, leading to the development of Thew, collective Wyrd and Luck. Members are normally very committed to working through problems to help their kindred remain healthy and strong.

A Social Kindred can see members leave the kindred without too much pain. Membership is so loosely defined, that it is possible for some "members" to leave without it having any real impact on the group at all.

A Committed Kindred feels great pain when a member leaves – pain similar to the pain you would feel losing a brother or sister of your own blood. The fact that everyone in the group closely mingles Wyrd with the other members means that everyone feels the full impact of a member leaving.



The Goddess Hel

A Social Kindred can be a wonderful, fun experience to be involved with. It is possible for a Social Kindred to transition into a Committed Kindred over time, and many Committed Kindred do begin as Social Kindreds.

A Committed Kindred can be a wonderful, fulfilling experience to be involved with. It takes a lot of work and effort to maintain a Committed Kindred, but it has a Tru feeling to it that you never want to lose once you've experienced it. Until you have experienced the collective Wyrd and Luck of a strong Committed Kindred, you have no idea what you are missing.

It is impossible to imagine a Committed Kindred transitioning into a Social Kindred. Once you have been closely bonded to another person, and your families brought together formally with oaths, it is very difficult to think you could return to being just "five guys in a basement."



ORGANIC VERSUS METHODICAL

There are efforts to form Kindreds and Tribes in cities around the United States. Often these efforts meet with discouraging comments from long-time Heathens. Those trying to form Kindreds are told, "Why are you rushing things?" They are told they are "showing too much energy." They are told to quit trying to "push things."

So, this post will address this question: Should Heathen leaders work at forming Kindreds in a methodical organized way, or just let it happen naturally and organically?

When we formed Jotun's Bane Kindred in Kansas City, we took the methodical organized path. But, it is important to understand a few details about what we did...

First, what was the situation before? There had been Kindreds in Kansas City, several of them. But they had not lasted. So, at the time the Heathens here started meeting in 2007, there was no Kindred...and no Heathen community here. Nothing. Not a thing. It took me a couple of months just to find one other Heathen in my area!

When we began the Meetup, our goal was to bring together as many local Heathens as we could find...with the intention of discussing the formation of a Kindred. I had promised the Gods that I would build the heathengods.com website and that I would never stop trying to gather Heathens in my area together. I wanted to form a Kindred, because I knew it was possible, and I knew the benefits to everyone that would eventually be involved, including me and my family. I felt it would assist Greater Heathenry to have a strong Kindred in our area of the Midwest.

After meeting several times, we had gathered together five Tru people that all wanted to work toward forming a Kindred. We set a six-month timeframe with the following goals:

1. We would all meet regularly, call each other, and become involved in each other's lives. We would essentially learn everything we could about each other, and learn each others strengths and flaws.
2. We would all read the Poetic and Prose Edda over those six months, so that we would all have that foundation to work from.

3. We would learn about Heathenry together. We would have study groups, fainings, and symbels...and honor our Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir in a group setting.

Then, at the end of the six-months, we would decide if we were ready to oath as a kindred. It wasn't like setting a wedding date, where come hell or high water we were going to oath. At the end of six-months, we would talk and decide as a group (by 100% consensus) if we wanted to form the Kindred or not.

At the end of the six months, it was clear to all involved that we wanted to oath, and that it was the right time to oath. We all just seemed to fit together well, and by the end of the six months it was clear what we should do.

So what does that mean for other efforts to form a Kindred. Here's a few thoughts....

MARRIAGE COMPARED TO KINDRED FORMING

As a boy, as a teen, and as a young adult, I knew I wanted to be married. I knew I would meet lots of girls, date at least a few, and hopefully I would find one that would make a wonderful wife and build a life with me. I did not wring my hands about all the difficulties of that – and steer clear of it because it was difficult to make sure I had found the right person. I knew I wanted to be married, and that was my goal. So, I worked at finding the right person, courting them, and marrying them. I ran into all sorts of pitfalls, but I never lost sight of what I wanted.

I certainly did not discourage others from marrying, just because the right person is hard to find! I did not tell others to steer clear of dating, because lots of potential partners are unworthy or bad matches. I saw marriage as something positive, and so I encouraged my friends who sought marriage to work at it and make wise choices. But if that is what they wanted, then they should seek it.

I see Kindred forming in the same way. You can't wring your hands about it, counting all the pitfalls and pointing to how difficult it might be. Being the member of a good Kindred is a powerful and positive



Odin Statue

thing. If I hear someone saying they want to be in a Kindred, I advise them to work at it. Gather Heathens. Get to know them. Set some timelines for progress...and make it happen.

Why just "wait for it to happen?" Why leave it to chance, or just hope for it to happen? MAKE it happen. Be wise about it. Learn everything you can about the Heathens you meet that are of a like-mind, and MAKE it happen. If you do not like someone...do not oath to them. If you do not trust someone...do not oath to them. If someone isn't Tru...do not oath to them. If someone isn't willing to contribute to the effort or are too solitary to work within a group...do not oath to them.

But if you see or hear someone else saying, "I want to form a Kindred" or "I want to belong to a Kindred," for goodness sake – do not discourage them!

MARRIAGES FAIL...AND KINDREDS HAVE FAILED

I do not talk about it much, but I was married once before, when I was younger. I married a woman who was younger than me...she was 23 when we married. It seemed like the right choice at the time, but in hindsight, it was a horrible decision to marry her. She was not ready for marriage, and the marriage ended horribly and suddenly. It was one of the worst experiences of my life. I had no control over the mess that marriage became.

I was a mess. My dad and a family friend independently gave me the same advice. They both told me that I absolutely could not and should not let that "broken person," and her actions ruin my life. That I should brush myself off, get my head straight, and seek the life I wanted again. If I wanted to be married and have kids, and build a wonderful family...it was well within my reach. I could not let someone else's flaws derail my entire life. I had to move on and eventually try again. I had to learn from the failed marriage, and not make the same mistakes again. It was good advice.

There may have been failed kindred in your area. You may have been involved in the failed kindred. It may have been a real mess. There were failed Kindreds here in Kansas City. There have been failed Kindreds almost everywhere at some point. But we can't let the failures completely destroy our efforts towards our end goal. If we want Kindreds and tribes, and for Heathenry to grow in a vibrant and powerful way, then we have to brush ourselves off, and seek the life we want. We have to move on and try again. We have to make things happen...not become lost in the past. Let's learn from our past failures, and not make the same mistakes again.

If I let the experience of my first marriage destroy me or discourage me from trying again, I wouldn't have been married to Jennifer since 1998, and I wouldn't have three wonderful children.



Our Daughter Elizabeth

THE WARBAND COMPARED TO KINDRED FORMING

We are in a fight for our lives. It is a spiritual fight, but it is a fight all the same. There are Christian churches everywhere. Muslims are on the move. Hindu communities are growing. Wicca, with its "do whatever you like" philosophy is growing as well. But Heathenry is a relatively new "way of life" or "religion." Its roots are deep...but our modern reconstruction is new. It is fledgling. Its future is in our hands.

So do we sit back, and hope that Heathenry grows? Do we hope that we form bonds with some Heathens around us over time? OR DO WE WORK AT IT? My answer is that we need to work at it harder than the desert faiths. We need to work at it harder than anyone else. How do we do that?

We form Kindreds. We work at it. We grow those Kindred families into local Tribes. We work at that too. We make connections between Tribes, share ideas, and grow our strength. You got it – more work. Individuals whose Heathenry consists of posting on message boards and arguing on e-lists will not grow Heathenry. Only face to face bonds...strong oathed bonds...will give us the strength to build our Luck and grow Heathenry.

So a Kindred is like a warband in this spiritual fight. Did Vikings and Germanic Chieftains let their warbands form "naturally" and "organically," or did they MAKE it happen? They made it happen. They recruited and chose the strongest among them. They chose those that could contribute to the warband, and they chose those they could trust. If they did not know someone...they worked at getting to know them. They did what they could to size them up, and they formed a bond with those they felt were worthy.

They did not wait for the warband to form on it is own. They made it happen.

Modern Heathenry needs leaders. It needs people willing to light a spark, and make things happen. It needs people that will not be discouraged by the difficulty of the task. It needs those that will work at getting to know other Heathens, and those that are willing to make a plan, execute the plan, and shape the possibilities of our future.

GOALS AND TIME-FRAMES DO NOT EQUAL "RUSHING"

Why does having a time-frame equal rushing in some people's minds? I have heard this everywhere lately. Without goals and time-frames, how does anyone expect to make anything happen? We set time-frames in every other part of our lives. When we get married, we'll often decide as a couple to wait two years to have a child. Or engaged couples will decide to wait until after college to marry. Or people in debt set time-frames for paying off their debts. Writers set time-frames for completing a novel. Artists set time-frames for completing enough work to fill a gallery for a show. In our business lives and our personal lives, we set time-frames. Why is our spiritual life different?

In 2008, an AFA member was trying to form a Kindred in a city within driving distance of Kansas City. He stated publicly that his goal was to form a Kindred, but he wanted to make sure that everyone involved got to know each other very well first. He wanted them to begin meeting, getting to know each other, studying together, and for them to eventually decide whether to oath or not as a kindred. But the Heathen community in his area discouraged this AFA member. The Heathens there were making it sound like he wanted to oath tomorrow, just because he wanted to actively work towards the goal of forming a Kindred.

I do not get it. I just don't. I advised this AFA member to find like-minded people that would someday like to form a Kindred with him, and to begin meeting with those people independently from those in his community that did not wish to form a Kindred. I advised him not

to separate the potential Kindred members completely from the greater community in his city, but to instead continue to meet with the greater community, and get to know them. However his main efforts should be focused on those that wanted a Kindred. He should get to know them, study with them, and talk with them about what the Kindred might look like in the future. I advised him to form, guide, and shape that inner circle – and not let them get discouraged. I still believe in this advice.

So, if you decide to start a kindred, I would give you the same advice. Decide what it is that you want. Plan how to get there. And make it happen in a methodical fashion. Even if the eventual Kindred formed is only two, four, or six Tru Heathens – if they work at it, and make it happen...they will have a powerful Kindred. They will form a mighty collective Orlog and the entire Kindred will benefit from the Luck that is built. If they maintain and work at what they have built, they will grow into an unstoppable tribe.



Jotun's Bane Kindred's Banner





SECTION THREE
MAINTAINING A
KINDRED OR TRIBE

PROTECT WHAT YOU ARE BUILDING

There is an inclination in our mainstream culture to "include everyone, and exclude no one." This inclination is NOT a Heathen mindset. When community-building in Heathenry, one should be discerning. One should measure the worth of a person, based on the condition of their life, their accomplishments, and their deeds.

There are "broken people," and people who are troll-like, that prey upon others. These people tend to be all about words, and never about deeds. They do bad things, and then apologize, expecting second chances, third chances, etc...until you lose track of the "fresh starts" they expect others to grant them.

In every subset of people, there will be a small minority that attempt to drag down and destroy everything positive and constructive among the group of people. Some of them do it unintentionally and some intentionally. Their behavior is often driven by mental, emotional, or personality problems...and they are what we sometimes refer to as "broken people." They can't seem to do anything without causing chaos and drama in their wake, and it seems like they always make exactly the wrong choice, or take exactly the wrong action.



Asa-Thor

It is important to remain vigilant for these "broken people." They will not always appear broken at first, but there will be red flags eventually. If you watch for these red flags carefully when meeting and getting to know new people, you will see the tell-tale signs.

- ◆ They can't keep a job or switches jobs frequently without reason.
- ◆ They neglect or skip out on rent, utilities, or other bills.
- ◆ Despite bill-problems, they are always spending money unwisely.
- ◆ Their past is filled with stories of friends "betraying" them.
- ◆ Their marriage is in jeopardy, or have had multiple marriages.

- ◆ They miss meetings or events they said they would attend.
- ◆ They are always the victim.
- ◆ You catch them working friends against each other, or gossiping.
- ◆ They want to be the center of attention, even when inappropriate.
- ◆ You catch them undermining the leadership of the kindred.
- ◆ They speak of being mentally ill, with a certain degree of pride.

It is the job of the entire community to look for these disruptive people, and then ensure that they are never allowed to damage the kindred you have built. But the leadership of the kindred has a special role in defending the Wyrd of the Kindred, and its collective Luck. It falls to the leader, more than any other person in a group, kindred, or tribe, to protect their Innangarth from these disruptive influences.

Let's think about this responsibility during the process of starting and growing a kindred. This is the time the "broken-people" most like to insert themselves into this situation, in order to get in on the "ground floor," so to speak. Well-known shit-stirrers, drama-kings, and selfish liars enjoy approaching Heathen-newbies, because they get a fresh start with new people. All the old-timers know exactly who these troll-like people are. Just one of these "broken-people" can disrupt an entire group if allowed to do what they normally do. So, for a kindred to be growing and healthy, it often falls to the good strong Heathens involved in that effort to drive away the "broken-people." But some of them are persistent.

Occasionally, you will hear out-spoken "broken-people" calling for tolerance and understanding for people like them. They will write about "forgiveness," as though this is a Heathen trait. They will write about "tolerance," as though this is a Heathen trait. They will rail against those that would choose carefully who to let into their Innangarth, though we know that protecting one's Innangarth is an important matter in our way of life. What these out-spoken trolls are really doing is attempting to convince Heathens that they should act more "Christian" towards them, and accept and forgive them, regardless of their disruptive actions.

So, if you are involved in community-building or Kindred formation, gather as many of the folk as you can. But as you identify the "broken-people," be discerning and firm, and separate them from your efforts. Following a politically-correct and inherently weak inclination to be all-inclusive, will destroy what you are working to build over time.



OUTREACH... GIVING PEOPLE A CHOICE

I was given no choice. My parents knew nothing of Heathenry when I was born and raised. I knew nothing of Heathenry until June of 2006. I knew of all the various types of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, the many Native American beliefs, etc. I saw books on these religions on the shelves at the bookstore. I knew actual people that held each of these beliefs. I learned about these beliefs in my College theology and philosophy classes. I saw them portrayed in movies, saw their believers on the news, and the more I saw of all of them...the less they all appealed to me.



Faced with a 100 choices that I did not like, I settled into an agnostic view of the world. I acknowledged some sort of greater power(s), but decided that man could never truly know or understand these powers. This was a direct result of never feeling any sort of attachment or inspiration from any of the listed religions. They just did not appeal to me.

Heathenry was different. It made sense to me. It sounded right, felt right, and made me feel like I had "come home" to what I was meant to believe. It took me 37 years to find Heathenry...but once I found it, it immediately appealed to me. For the first time I had faith in a specific divine answer. Not the sort of faith where I felt I was correct, and everyone else was wrong. No...I mean the sort of faith where I knew I had found something that was correct for me...and my family. Something meant for me, as one of the Northern European Folk.

So, once I had Heathenry as a choice...I chose it. But what of all the

people out there that have no knowledge of Heathery? All the people like me who know nothing of our ancestral religion? All the people who have never had a choice to "come home?" Do we allow them to just wander aimlessly through their lives, never having been exposed to the religion of their Ancestors?

So while Heathery is not an evangelical belief system, and we will not be spending any of our time attempt to "convert" people to Heathery...one of our missions will be to educate people about Heathery. Our website will serve that purpose. Our Open Pubmoots. Our public appearances and workshops. And eventually our media coverage and publications. The purpose of these efforts at outreach will be two-fold. (1.) To introduce people to who we are and what we believe. (2.) By introducing our beliefs to people, we may find others that wish to "come home" to their ancestral stream.

What will you do to make sure Heathery is a choice people know about...a choice people have?



REACHING OUT TO HEATHENS COMING HOME

In 2007 I was looking for other Heathens. I was interested in Asatru, and I wanted to meet other Heathens or possibly an existing Kindred in my area. One of the reasons I was on this search for other Heathens, was to confirm that what I was thinking and feeling was normal. Was I was making the right choices, reading the right books, and shaping my religious beliefs in a Tru manner.

But, as I searched for other Heathens...I encountered the websites of dead Kindreds, a few inactive Yahoo Groups, and when I went to the Troth Steward Finder Map, there was no one listed for Kansas or Missouri. Just a big blank spot in the Heart of America. That blank spot and all the dead websites I found, led me to believe that Asatru did not really exist in Kansas and Missouri. It lead me to falsely believe that Asatru and the Troth have no presence what-so-ever in our two states.

Well, it turned out there really was no active Kindred in the Kansas City Area. Eventually I learned that if I wanted a Kindred to interact

with, I was going to have to find some like-minded Heathens and work with them to build our own Kindred. Eventually I found Rod Landreth, and he was willing to give me advice on what to do, and what not to do, when forming a Kindred. Eventually I was persistent enough that I found those like-minded Heathens, and we fought our way to where we are now as a tribe. Jotun's Bane Kindred.



Some of Jotun's Bane Kindred at a Gathering

But how many of our Folk, with the spark of Asatru forming in their hearts run into roadblocks, locked doors, and website graveyards on their way back to their ancestral religion. How many of them become convinced that Asatru has no presence in their area? How many of them are dissuaded from returning home by this lack of information, support, and contact with other Heathens in their area?

Why does it have to be so difficult for them to find Heathens? It is the 21st Century! Finding other Heathens should be easy...and we should do everything we can to make it as simple as possible. There are Heathens in Kansas City. Heathens in Topeka. Heathens in Wichita. Heathens in southern Missouri. Heathens in St. Louis. There are Heathens in Kansas and in Missouri. If we want Heathenry to grow, we need to knock down the road blocks and welcome our Folk properly as they return home.

So, Jotun's Bane Kindred is dedicated to making that happen in our area and in our region. I joined the AFA and eventually became the AFA Folkbuilder for Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Arkansas, and Southern Illinois. If someone is looking for Heathens in these states and they go to the AFA website and contact me from there – I will help

them find Heathens in their area. If a Heathen anywhere in the world contacts us at the heathengods.com website, we give them links and tips to help them find nearby Heathens.

At a time when alternative religions are growing, and Christianity is losing its stranglehold on our culture, I would think we would all want Asatru to be positioned to find those new Heathens as they come home to Heathenry, and make sure they get the support they need to shake off centuries of social conditioning and indoctrination towards a Christian way of viewing the world.

So, what some of us encountered when we became Heathen – that blank spot on the map here in the Heartland – drives much of what we do. What I encountered when I went looking for Heathens shouldn't happen anymore, to anyone. It is something we are driven to change, because it shouldn't be that way, and it doesn't have to be that way, and it not going to be that way anymore in our region.

Whether you are currently part of a kindred or not, it is worth considering what you can do for those recently returned to our ancestral ways. How can new Heathens in your area find you? What can you do to make it easier for them to do so?



Our Son Joshua Helping with a Big Thor Statue



LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING BY CONSENSUS

There are whole books on group dynamics, how to structure a group, decision-making, etc. But I wanted to address a particular style of decision-making and leadership in a Heathen context.

LOYALTY, COLLECTIVE LUCK, AND TRIBES

We have discussed in the past, how much one determined Heathen can accomplish, if he or she is willing to stay focused, work hard, and make things happen. One Heathen can spark the formation of a kindred or gather together a Heathen community. One Heathen can teach a class, write a book, or set an example. One Heathen can shape the world, essentially.

And that is just one determined Heathen.

If you have two Heathens who like each other, trust each other, and are completely willing to work together and show absolute loyalty to one another, then the situation becomes more than the sum of the parts of the equation. Two Heathens willing to face anything together can accomplish almost anything. They drive each other forward. They inspire each other. They offer each other support in all things, and it multiplies the effect of them imposing their individual Will's upon the world.

Two loyal Heathens mingle and share Wyrd. They begin to build collective Orlog and collective Luck. This is the "engine" that allows them to accomplish so much together. This collective Orlog and collective Luck also spills over into their individual lives as well, having a positive effect even on what they work on individually.

Imagine the power of having three Heathens...four Heathens...eight Heathens...bound together by heartfelt oaths. Completely loyal to one another. Combining and multiplying their Luck, through working together and supporting each other in all things. Willing to brainstorm together, work together, and work towards a collective goal or goals. Imagine what that sort of "engine" can accomplish.

This is why Jotun's Bane Kindred believes that local kindreds and tribes are the future of Heathenry.

Not Heathen "clubs," meeting in basements once a month, where the people never really know full loyalty or bonds to one another.

Not Heathen e-lists, where the people know each other as "pixels on a screen," and they constantly bicker over small details and never truly know each other.

Not National Organizations, where people pay \$25 a year for a membership card, and there are only occasional gatherings attended by a small percentage of the membership. National Organizations have their place, and their value, but they are not the future of Heathenry.

The future of Heathenry rests on the success of small oathed tribes and communities – essentially chosen extended families – where the best interests of family and community come before all else.



Sleipnir

DECISION-MAKING WITHIN A TRIBE

There are various forms of decision-making within a group, or in our case a tribe:

OPTION 1 - A group could have one or two strong members that make most of the decisions, and then the rest of the tribe is meant to follow the course of action set by the one or two assertive members. This form of decision-making has its strengths. It can be fairly focused, organized, and the decision-making process is normally very quick. After all, there is not much discussion needed in this form of decision-making. One or two people make a decision, let the other members of the group know about it, and the decision-making is done.

But there are great flaws to this form of decision-making. Since there is very little discussion or input, you do not draw on the knowledge, ideas, and intelligence of all the members of the group. The largest problem with this form of decision-making is that those not in on the decision-making (everyone except the one or two strong decision-

makers) have no investment in the decisions being made. They may or may not agree with those decisions. This leads to members of the group not fully agreeing with or supporting the direction of the group, and this can lead to rebellion or dissatisfaction. At the very least, it diminishes the impact of having a group of Heathens working together towards something in which they all believe.

OPTION 2 - Another form of decision-making is compromise and majority rule. Essentially, this form of decision-making involves discussion of decisions to be made, and when there are disagreements, members of the group attempt to reach a compromise position that a majority of the group will support. This form of decision-making does, at least, involve every member of the group in discussions of the decisions to be made. It is not quite as fast as Option #1, because of this. And at least this form of decision making does result in a course of action that a majority of the group will support.

But there are flaws here as well. At times, in order to build majority support for a decision, compromise is used as a tool. If there are 3 minority positions, 2 of those positions may join their ideas in order to impose a majority over the remaining minority. This can lead to a decision that literally NO ONE in the group fully supports. The fact is that there is almost always a minority of people in the group that end up having little or no input in the course of action decided upon. This can also lead to rebellion or dissatisfaction within the group and can diminish the impact of having a group of Heathens working together towards something in which they all believe.

OPTION 3 - A third form of decision-making, and one that Jotun's Bane Kindred follows, is decision-making by consensus. Before a decision is made on an important matter, everyone in the group must support that decision. Every single member of the group.

This can take time. It can take a lot of patience and long discussions. But the benefit of this form of decision-making is that once a decision has been made, every single member of the group has had input into the decision, and every single member of the group supports the course of action that has been decided upon. In addition, the decisions are naturally better because they include the vision, ideas, knowledge, and intelligence of all of the group's members. The act of reaching consensus within a group forces everyone to examine and test their own ideas...and to reconsider them in light of what other group members are bringing to the table.

This is an incredibly strong form of decision-making, and it fully

supports the impact of having a group of Heathens working together towards something in which they all believe.

LEADERSHIP BY CONSENSUS

There are different kinds of leaders, and there are many tools that leaders can use to exercise their leadership. But I believe the most successful leaders lead by consensus. A successful leader is a consensus-builder among his people.

A leader could dictate decisions (Option #1), but this has all the flaws mentioned above for this form of decision-making. A leader could push for compromise and build majorities (Option #2), but this has all the flaws mentioned above for this form of decision-making. But if a leader knows his group well, is able to listen to them, and help them combine their collective ideas, knowledge, insights, and intelligence into a consensus that all within the group can support – then that leader will have a very successful group.



Making Repairs After a Thurse Passed Over Our House

Some see leadership as exercising "power," or in commanding men to do their bidding. But this can only take a leader and his group so far. At some point, he is likely to face dissatisfaction and rebellion among portions of this group. Leadership by command and through the use of "power" should be reserved for times of dire need, when a decision is needed immediately. There is a place and a time for this sort of leadership. But even in such cases, the leader should know his group well enough to make a decision that is both in the best interests of his group, and that will be supported by his people after-the-fact.

Over time, the relationship between a leader and his people develops into a relationship of mutual trust. The leader knows the consensus of the group without necessarily even needing to consult with them. This is especially true of day-to-day decisions or decisions that are similar to decisions the group has made in the past.

But on important issues...ones with a long-lasting impact on the direction of the group, the group's resources, or what the group will be working towards in the future...consensus building is the strongest form of leadership.

Again, some may see leadership by consensus as a kind of weakness, or a lack of leadership. But those that feel this way fail to understand that there is absolutely no lack of leadership in this model. If decisions need to be made on the spot, the leader will make those decisions, and make them well. But whenever possible, a good leader-by-consensus anticipates problems and upcoming decisions, and builds consensus on these problems and decisions prior to them becoming "emergency" decisions.

Leadership by consensus-building, also reflects the reciprocal relationship between a leader and his people. A leader without people is not a leader. People without a leader consistently accomplish very little. They are both important parts of any successful group.

EGIL'S SAGA

When I read *Egil's Saga*, I was surprised by the number of times that very strong leaders were described as going to their men and building a consensus among them for a certain course of action. Prior to raids or before supporting someone in a war, leaders within *Egil's Saga* are described going to their men, proposing a course of action, explaining the hardships, promising the rewards, and then moving forward after they had built a consensus among their men.

The idea of leadership by consensus-building is not some new-age, psychobabble method of leadership. When consensus-building is possible, it is an age-old form of leadership that works. By building that consensus, the Heathen leader is able to accomplish extraordinary things with the full support of his men.

THINKING IN A TRIBAL FASHION

I think we still have a lot to learn and discover about existing as a tribe. We are working hard on this, and our knowledge will evolve

over time. A loose group of individuals, with their own selfish interests in mind, will have difficulty working within a consensus model of decision-making or leadership. When egos rule, and people are looking out mainly for themselves, rather than the tribe, they fail to see the value of reaching consensus. They want to "win the argument," rather than find a consensus answer that is better than any one individual's approach to the problem or decision.

If we are to build successful tribes, and benefit from the incredible power of collective Orlog and combined Luck, then we need to work at rediscovering our tribal ways and put them to work in our modern world.



KINDRED GROWING PAINS ARE INEVITABLE

When you are starting, growing, and maintaining a kindred or tribe, it is inevitable that there will be growing pains. Problems to deal with. Situations you did not anticipate. People who end up disappointing you. It is absolutely inevitable, because that is the way of the world. Life is a challenge. Anything worth doing is a challenge.

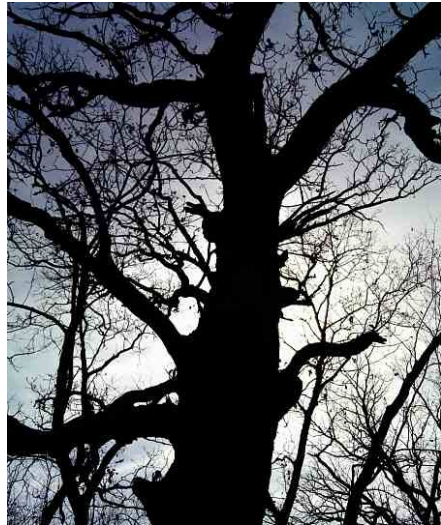
It is not healthy to panic every time something goes wrong. It is not an effective strategy for facing down challenges. So prepare yourself and the people involved with you in your kindred-building effort for some growing pains, some problems, and that some of the people involved in your effort may fall short of expectations. These

challenges are part of the process, and as you face them and come through them successfully, ultimately they make your group stronger.

In Jotun's Bane Kindred, we look to the massive oak tree that we take our oaths beneath – the “Old Man,” Forn Halr – as our example. He is a thick and powerful oak, and it is impossible to stand beneath his outstretched limbs without respecting and acknowledging his strength and endurance. He has outlasted all the old trees around him. He has survived a 1000 storms. But this was not without some pain and loss on his part. He wears the scars of his battles. In places he is gnarled – limbs have been lost – and he bears the evidence of his years of living and surviving.

GROWING PAINS

First, when you are starting or building something new...there will be growing pains. I would define these circumstances as situations that you, another individual in your group, or the group as a whole has never encountered before. When building a kindred, you are breaking new ground. Never mind that there are other kindreds or tribes already in existence. Each tribe is different, with different challenges, different personalities, and different traditions to develop. So of course there will be growing pains.



Forn Halr - "The Old Man"

Learn to look at growing pains as opportunities. Each one that you overcome represents growth. Talk about it within your group in this way. When a problem develops within the group, the measure of that group and its leadership is not the fact there is a problem. The measure of that group and its leadership is how it deals with the problem. The strategy it uses. The answer it comes up with to the problem. How well it faces and solves the problem.

Did you identify the problem quickly or let it languish? Did you face the problem head-on and fix it, or try to dodge it in some passive-aggressive fashion? Did the group come together and solve the problem as a group – or was there constant bickering or politics

involved? Was the solution to the problem effective and lasting, or just a band-aid irresponsibly slapped over a festering wound? Is the solution to the problem something the group as a whole is happy with? All of these questions are important to consider and much more important than fretting over the fact there was a problem in the first place. Of course there was a problem – there will always be problems. The real question is always, how was the problem addressed?

THE ONLY OATH YOU CAN KEEP IS YOUR OWN

Besides growing pains, you will have people within the group that will disappoint you and the group. I am not talking about the small disappointments (i.e. late paying their dues, missed an event, not able to contribute work for a few weeks, etc.) that people bring to a group. Address and deal with the small disappointments directly. Talk about them, work on them, and strive for solutions that cause these small disappointments to happen less frequently, if at all. What I am actually talking about here are the big disappointments, like the failure to maintain or fulfill a kindred oath.

When we start an oathed kindred, or a kindred with a clearly defined membership, we make commitments to one another. These oaths and commitments are at the heart of what makes a kindred strong and viable as a group. You can count on the other members to stick together, work hard together, and accomplish collective goals as a tribe. These oaths also represent a commitment to advance each other individually, and to advance the group forward. In a perfect world, no oath will be broken. We'd like to think that everyone we oath to will keep their oath to us with the same determination that we keep our own oaths to them.

But this isn't a perfect world, and you can't control whether another person keeps his/her oaths. You can't force them to keep their oaths. You can't make them be someone they aren't. No matter how hard you work to get to know someone and make sure they are a person willing and able to faithfully keep their kindred oath – it is impossible to really know. Look at the divorce rate if you need an example of how hard it is to know if another person will keep their oath to you.

The only thing we truly control is our own oath. We make our oath, we mean our oath, and we live up to that oath. That is what we control, and that is what is important to focus on. The world is not perfect, and people will disappoint us. When they do, react in a wise and prudent way, and protect yourself and your group from their inability to keep and fulfill their oath.

RECIPROCITY OF OATHS

A kindred oath is a reciprocal oath. Those taking the oath are committing to the group, and to the individual members of that group. It is important to understand that this establishes a web of oaths. These oaths are not one-sided affairs. They are reciprocal in nature.

So, if an oathed member of a kindred is acting in a way that hurts the kindred, and all efforts have been made to address this behavior and correct it...and the oathed member continues to hurt the group...then steps must be taken to protect the group. Cut your losses. Either release the kindred oath, wiping it away as something that was not being kept in a reciprocal fashion or, if appropriate to the situation, declare the oathed member an oath-breaker. But the group itself...the kindred...the tribe...it must be protected from those that would hurt it through their own selfish actions.



Releasing an oath in this manner is a last resort, and every effort should be made to maintain the oath...reinforce the oath...and make it clear to the oathed member exactly what they are doing to jeopardize their kindred oath. But it is important for the leadership of a tribe, to compartmentalize this problem-member as the situation develops.

For instance, if a member of a kindred is not showing up for things, failing in many of their obligations, and they are making risky decisions that are threatening their marriage, and about to bring a full-blown divorce into the midst of a kindred...this is clearly a problem. You do not entrust important duties within the kindred to this problem-member. You do not assign them important responsibilities at a big event your kindred is hosting. You do not expose the soft-underbelly of the kindred to this problem-member. You do what you need in order to compartmentalize the potential damage this problem-member might do to the kindred, until such time as that problem has been resolved or until they have behaved so badly that their oath must be released.

This is a complex issue, and we all hope to not go through it at all, or at the very least, not very often. But it happens. Though you are

oathed to someone, if someone is not being reciprocal in their oath...and are not holding up their end of the bargain...there comes a time when the tribe is no longer obligated to maintain their end of the bargain. When that time comes, release the oath and cut ties. Remove tribal obligations owed to the member who will not fulfill their own obligations to the tribe and its members.

WHY WRITE THIS ESSAY?

One of Jotun's Bane Kindred's growing pains was working through what you should do when a member breaks their oath to the kindred. We had to work through what to do when someone cannot or will not fulfill their obligation to our tribe. It was difficult trying to balance holding to our own oaths while protecting our kindred from the problem-member's actions and decisions. When we first encountered this, we weren't sure how the whole situation reflected on us as a group. So this was an essay written specifically for this collection.

The bottom line is this. All kindreds and tribes will face growing pains, disappointments, and perhaps drama now and again. The measure of a strong and stable kindred is not the complete lack of these problems. I believe that to be impossible. The measure of a strong and stable kindred is how they deal with these inevitable problems. How they solve them. How they protect their tribe. How they learn from the problems. How they continue to grow and advance. That is the measure of a tribe.



BROKEN PEOPLE

I hadn't really heard the term "Broken People," until I heard Rod Landreth use it. But, I was talking to him early on in our kindred's development about someone that just gave me a bad feeling. Their life was chaos. Their relationships were in disarray and had been for years. Their job situation was in disarray and had been for years. Their housing situation, debt situation, and legal situation all were in disarray, and had been for years. When you talked to the person you just got this negative gut feeling.

I used the term Broken People in an earlier essay and discussed what it meant briefly. But understanding there are Broken People in the world, who they are, and why they will harm your kindred-building

efforts is important.

Everyone sometimes has chaos in their lives. Everyone at some point has relationship problems, job problems, housing problems, debt problems, legal problems. That is just life. Life gets a little crazy at times...and no one makes their way through life without problems.

But a Broken Person is someone who seems to never be able to escape these problems.

A Broken Person always seems to make exactly the wrong choices.

A Broken Person never addresses the problems in a way that will solve them...only in ways that delays them for later, or makes them eventually worse.

A Broken Person will unload their problems on you within the first five minutes you've met them.

A Broken Person is often searching for new friends or new groups of allies to support them through their problems, because they've used up all their old friends or never had any in the first place.

A Broken Person often feels all of their problems are someone else's fault, and never seems to own them.

A Broken Person is, well...broken.

So what does this mean from a Heathen point of view? Wyrð is a powerful thing. If you mingle Wyrð with a Broken Person, some of that brokenness is going to rub off on you. You will be left picking up the pieces of their latest crisis. You will be put in the role of rescuer, time and again. Whatever chaos they have in their lives will eventually influence your life. "You lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas," is one of the most Heathen sayings ever. It strikes at the heart of what it means to mingle Wyrð with the wrong people.

So what does this mean for either a new, growing Kindred or an established Kindred? If a Broken Person is allowed into a Kindred, their problems become the Kindred's problems. When they are getting evicted, the Kindred ends up chipping in on the rent or giving the Broken Person a couch to sleep on. When the Broken Person needs to be bonded out, the Kindred is there. When the Broken Person gets in fights with family or friends, the kindred's time and energy are spent constantly consoling the Broken Person or playing referee. This is a drain on time, energy, and treasure that will never end.

A Kindred has collective Luck. A Broken Person has no Luck. They contribute no Luck to the collective effort. They become a "black hole," as the Kindred spends time and energy tending to the Broken Person's constant need for help and attention from the group. A Broken Person does not build Luck – they tear it down.

Being a Broken Person is in "the now." There are people that have all sorts of bad events and bad decisions in their past, that are living their lives well and Tru in the present. They may have been Broken once, but they have turned that around. It is rare, but with age and maturity, some people do escape the self-destructive cycle. But others have been Broken People for so long that they will never change or improve.

As I meet new people, and as the Kindred attracts people who are interested in Heathenry and possibly becoming a part of the Kindred, we look to their lives and how they live them. Are they responsible, functioning, adults who know how to keep their relationships, keep a job, pay their bills, and stay away from destructive behavior? Or are they Broken? This measure of their worth is a huge deciding factor on whether I am willing to mingle Wyrd with them, and whether the Kindred is interested in having them around.



Baldr's Funeral



ACHIEVERS, WORKERS, AND TROLLS

At the police department, we say that 10% of the employees are self-motivated, high-achieving, stellar employees. There are about 80% that just come to work, do what they are told, and get by. The remaining 10% are completely worthless, do not do their work, and are essentially problem employees. Something close to this 10/80/10 breakdown probably holds true for any sub-set of the population.

For Heathenry, that means there are likely 10% (or less) that are going to truly make things happen. These are the 10% that will work at gathering the Folk, holding open events, organizing groups, Kindreds, tribes, and living the Heathen ideal. There are 80% that if properly motivated, will come along and do what they can. The remaining 10% will serve as disruptors, trolls, and the people that tear down anyone who is trying to achieve something positive.

I am guessing that among our Ancestors, things were not much different. We attempt to live Tru, and according to Heathen values. But during the Viking Age and before, not everyone was a leader. Not everyone made things happen. Not everyone organized men, acquired and expanded their land holdings, etc. It is likely there was a 10/80/10 split, or some variation, even then.

So, I would challenge each of you to ask yourself these questions:

Do you want to be among the 10% that make things happen? The 10% that actively shapes the world? The 10% that will grow the Folk, and make it possible for Heathenry to last and grow?

Or are you the 80% that will work hard when told? The 80% that will join Kindreds, and work at keeping them healthy and alive? The 80% that support and push forward the cause, and those leading the cause?

Or are you the 10% that will tear down everything good and positive? The 10% that causes strife with everyone and everything you touch? The 10% that is the example of "what not to do?"

If you ask yourself these questions, and do not like the answers, then take steps to fix the problem. We are our deeds.



LEAVING A KINDRED GRACEFULLY

This seems like an odd topic for an essay about Heathenry. But life is complex. People are called up for active-duty by the military. People are offered better jobs that are in other cities and states. Marriages break-up, and sometimes one must move to stay close to one's children. The circumstances of one's life can change, and this can make staying with a kindred difficult, if not impossible.

Let me first say that I would not leave my kindred. I was one of the founding members of Jotun's Bane Kindred, and the formation of our kindred was based on an oath I made directly to Thor and our Gods, prior to me personally knowing even one other Heathen. The formation of JBK was something that I had to do. It is difficult to imagine a situation that could pull me away from my tribe. It means too much to me.

But there are times when you will have to pull away from a group of people for circumstances beyond your control. If you care at all about your honor, your reputation (Gefrain), and your established friendships within that group, there are things you should do that will make your exit from that group more graceful and less damaging.



Small Carved Odin

First, you should face the group in person and explain to them the circumstances of why you must leave. This should happen at an existing meeting or, if need be, a special meeting of the group. An email to the group or the group's leadership will not suffice. Actually, an email to the group or its leadership completely lacks the directness, the honesty, or the courage that we expect to see from Tru Heathens. Breaking such news in an email will cause anger and disgust by the group towards you. But a face to face explanation to the group allows them to all hear the facts at once, allows them to see your emotions and attitude about leaving, and allows them to ask questions and have

a conversation with you about it.

If you must leave immediately, and a face to face meeting is impossible with the group...then it is your obligation to call every member of that group, starting with the leadership, to explain to each of them that you are leaving, and why you have to leave. You begin with the leadership of the group out of respect, and so they can begin making the adjustments that need to be made to limit the damage to the group done by your departure.

If your reasons for leaving are good, and any reasonable person can see why you must leave, telling the group that you are leaving will likely be emotional but not confrontational.

If your reasons for leaving are sort of sketchy, then expect to be asked some fairly serious questions about your reasoning and your motivations. There is no obligation on the members of the group you are leaving to "automatically" accept your reasons for leaving "without question." After all, you are leaving the group – a group that you committed to. While you control whether you leave or not, the group itself (and its members) are in control of how they react to your leaving. You have no control over their reaction.

Now, what I've explained above does not seem to be what most people leaving a group seem to want to do. I tell you this from the standpoint of having seen it in various types of groups during my lifetime, including our Heathen tribe. Many people seem incapable of facing the group face to face and simply explaining why they must leave. For some reason, they can't just come and say:

"This isn't working out for me, I'd like to leave the group but I'd like to remain friends with this kindred."

"This isn't working out for me, I'd like to start my own kindred, but I want to stay on friendly terms with this kindred."

"I have to move away for (insert reason), but I want to stay in touch and on friendly terms with this kindred."

Instead, what most people do is come up with justifications for their leaving that involve being angry with the group. They fear the reaction of the group to their leaving, so they build up anger and emotion towards the group. They begin looking at the group as their enemy, based on the negative reaction they "believe" they will get, even though this reaction is probably farthest from the truth. So, this frustration and anger builds, until they lash out at the group.

Essentially, it is easier for them to start some kind of fight with the group, so that they can blame their leaving the group on the group itself.

That sounds a little odd, but I've seen it over and over again. Rather than just face the group, explain their reasons, and then pull away with friendships and their honor intact, people will often take the coward's way out, cause a fight, and then run off. Somewhere in their head, they feel this has shifted the blame and responsibility from their shoulders, but it actually makes things worse. They actually cause more damage to the group and to themselves by leaving in this manner.

To limit this sort of damage to your group, kindred, or tribe, it is not a bad idea to address the subject of "how to leave the group" in your group's by-laws. Talk about it with new members, so that they know what is expected of them should they ever have to leave. This will not completely prevent people from leaving in the worst of ways, but it is better than not addressing the topic at all.



Odin Riding Sleipnir



KINDREDS BECOMING TRIBES

I had a realization during the formation of our kindred about kindreds becoming tribes. I made a quick note about the realization in the following paragraph, and then the rest of this essay expands on the idea.

Over time, as my family and other families become more integrated into the Kindred, in many ways it will have become a "Tribe" and not a Kindred. A Kindred is of course a family...and as our Kindred becomes a gathering of four or five families and some additional individuals...it will be more of a tribe than a Kindred. That is something growing Kindreds need to consider, talk about, and plan for.

When we first began building Jotun's Bane Kindred, I saw the Kindred as just five individuals oathed to each other as a "family." A tight-knit group of Heathens, honoring the Gods together, studying together, and looking out for each other as family should. I will not speak for the others in Jotun's Bane Kindred, but that is how I had envisioned it.

It never even occurred to me that our families would become such a big part of what we do. As I evaluated and sized up those making the effort with me early on, I thought to myself, "Would I trust this person with my children?" That was sort of a litmus test for me – a benchmark of whether they were of worth or not. But, at the time I thought Kindred events would entail all of us leaving our families for a few hours a week, coming together, and doing "kindred stuff" as a group of individuals.

I am willing to admit, this was somewhat short-sighted...and completely missed the point of what Heathen Kindreds should work towards building.



Joshua and Mark

Now that our Kindred has formed, and existed over time, we do not just gather as a small group of individuals. We gather together as Mark, my wife Jennifer, and my three kids...Jamie...Rod and his partner, Jason...Will...Craig and his wife Paula, and his two kids...Glen and Susan...and Johnny and his wife Kimberly, and their three kids. When we gather for fainings or celebrations, sýmbel, study groups, Heathen movie nights, etc, it is families that gather, not just individual Kindred members.

I hadn't thought of this at the beginning, but seeing how things have progressed, I would encourage all Kindred's to work towards including their families in everything they possibly can. Rather than building Kindreds of individuals, we should be working to build Tribes of Heathen families. Families ensure the future of our traditions, our culture, and our ways in a way that individuals cannot.



ROLES WITHIN OUR MODERN TRIBES

Some should be craftsmen.

Some should be scholars.

Some should be godmen.

Some should be warriors.

Some should be leaders.

Some should be workers.

Some should be skalds.

And most will play several shifting roles at once.

But we can't expect every single Heathen to be a warrior. Or every single Heathen to be a scholar. Or every single Heathen to be a runester. Or every single Heathen to be interested in Spae.

The villages and tribes of our Ancestors were filled with people who

played various roles within that community. I am sure there was never a village filled with 100 scholars, and nothing else. Or 100 craftsmen, and nothing else. There existed within each village a wide spectrum of skill-sets, interests, specialties, and roles.

So, as we bring our Folk back to our ancestral ways and build modern tribes we can't expect to build a tribe of 20 scholars. Or 20 skalds. Or 20 godmen. Or 20 runesters. Or 20 warriors.

For instance, if one member of Jotun's Bane Kindred decided to take on the challenge of learning Old Norse, I would encourage them, help them, and support them. But, if someone suggested that every member of Jotun's Bane Kindred should learn Old Norse, I would say, "Um...no." I would also say "no" to a suggestion that every member of our kindred must become a "runester." Or every member of JBK must enter a clergy program.

I've seen kindreds become focused on one role, or one skill-set so intensely, that they are essentially dysfunctional in every other area, leaving them dysfunctional overall. The whole kindred does one or two things very well, and everything else is left undone.

As we build modern kindreds and tribes, we should accept and encourage members to take on a variety of roles and skill-sets within our tribes. Diversity among these various roles makes for a stronger tribe, with more possibility of success across a wider array of activities – and this is truer to the way our Ancestors lived within their tribes.



A Cedar Hammer that I Carved



THE CORE OF THE KINDRED AND ITS FRIENDS

It is very difficult to grow a “kindred” beyond around twenty people without things beginning to fracture and separate. There is almost a critical mass point that is reached within a traditional kindred structure that limits its size. But there is a way to possibly grow beyond this size limit without having to split into two, three, or four kindreds in one area.

Think of it as the oathed kindred or tribe at the core of a larger community, with the rest of the community in orbit around that core.

Jotun's Bane Kindred in Kansas City, at the time of this writing, is 5 oathed Kindred Members and 3 Applicant Members. We heavily involve our families, so with spouses and children we have about 21 people at the core. We have private Kindred events and planning meetings, talk to each other all the time, spend time at each other's homes, etc. We are very involved in each other's lives and closely mingle our Wyrð.

But we have Open Pubmoots every two months. We have a very active public message board that involves people outside of our Kindred. We have Open Fainings in our area. So there are quite a few Heathens about that are not in the Kindred, but who are close Friends of the Kindred. These people are in a sense, in orbit around us...but not directly a part of us.

It is not two different groups, exactly – as much as a core and an outer circle around the core. Over time, some of the members of the Heathen community outside our kindred have joined the “inner circle.” Some of the members of this Heathen community are closer to the kindred than others. Over time, as the Heathen community around our kindred grows, we do expect that at least one additional kindred will grow out of this community.

As we get further into the effort to buy hof-land, and building a hof and hall, it makes sense that the hof-land would be serving more than just the oathed kindred. A hof and hall would hold open events for Heathens in our area and region. So this concept of balancing the oathed kindred with the Heathen community that surrounds it plays a role down the road as well.



OUR PLANS FOR A HOF, A HALL, AND TRIBAL LAND

Jotun's Bane Kindred has been forming plans to build a Hof since about the middle of 2008. But we kept our thoughts and plans on the matter private for nearly a year. We wanted to be more sure of our plans before we began discussing them publicly.

Some people take the "Hof=Church" idea too far, in my mind. They want their own Heathen church building, somewhere on a street corner or in the suburbs. They want a "congregation" of Heathens to come to the Hof, "tithe" to the church, and treat the Hof as if it were simply a different kind of church. Put very simply, Jotun's Bane Kindred's Hof will not be a Christian Church with a big hammer on the front of it.



Will in Front of a Hall in Iceland

Our Hof will have land. Land to grow food and land to eventually keep livestock. Land that kindred members will have the opportunity to move onto in order to live in closer proximity to each other. This will support and reinforce our current tribal structure, and take it further along the road we wish to travel.

Our Hof building will have a Hall for feasting, symbols, and large gatherings, as well as the formal Hof itself. It will also serve as a cultural center, where we will offer classes on Heathenry, traditional

crafts, etc. We will also likely run a small business (i.e. bookstore, coffee shop, craft store) out of our Hof-building, though that has not been fully discussed.

We are following a tribal model, and we wish to live more like a tribe. We will not be withdrawing from the world, abandoning all technology, or living in some sort of commune. Our goal is to establish a place where our Kindred can live. A place that Heathens in our area and in the region can gather. A place that fulfills the goals of our kindred.

Making this happen is going to be a lot of work. But when it comes to fruition, it will have been worth the work.

This is work that needs to be done. Thirty years of Asatru in the United States, and where are we at? Kansas City is 2,000,000 people when you include the entire metro area. In June 2007 when I dedicated myself to our Gods, I could not find one other Heathen in Kansas City, despite much effort on my part. It took me two months to eventually find Rod Landreth, and from there we grew. Thirty years of Heathenry, and where are our tribes? Where are our Hofes?

A California AFA member was telling me that a Sufi cultural center was built in his city. The Sufi's picked a spot, they all moved to homes within blocks of that spot, they all worked their butts off, saved and pooled their money, and within five years they had built a large Sufi cultural center, a place of worship, and a school for their children. And that is with California land and building prices!

Thirty years of Heathenry, and where are our Hofes? If Sufi's can move into a neighborhood and make this happen...then what stands in our way? The answer is simple. We stand in our own way.

Jotun's Bane Kindred seeks to create something long lasting, sustainable, useful, and something that meets our needs and goals as a tribe. This essay is meant to shine some light on why we are willing to dedicate so much of our time, energy, and money towards this goal. We hope that sharing this goal inspires other tribes to grow and establish tribal land, Hofes, and Halls of their own.

We will certainly share what we learn from this process, as we learn it.



TRIBES AND KINDREDS AS LEGAL ENTITIES

For a kindred or tribe to own property as a tribe, or to build a Hof as a tribe, they must be a legal entity. In the State of Missouri, this normally requires four main steps, each consisting of many smaller tasks. In other States the steps, and the tasks embedded within each step, will vary somewhat.

1. The tribe must acquire an EIN number from the Federal Government to open a bank account, file taxes, etc. This step takes about 10 minutes, can be done on-line, and it is free.

2. The tribe must incorporate as a legal entity in its home state. In most states this is a one or two page form, and costs around \$25. If you take the form and the money directly to one of the Secretary of State's offices, you can hand it directly to them, and ten minutes later they hand you a Certificate of Incorporation as a Heathen "church" or religious organization (depending on the the direction you take when filling out the form).

Being Incorporated as a "church," allows you to ordain Heathen clergy. We'll share more information on that in a future essay.



Thor Going Fishing

3. Tax exempt status in your home state is a little bit more involved. It is free, but it involves a longer form, your Incorporation paperwork (see step 2), your bylaws, and other documents showing that you are entitled to be tax-exempt. This will allow you to buy things for the kindred/tribe without paying sales tax.

4. Finally, there's the issue of achieving 501c3 status with the Federal Government. If you are Incorporated as a "church," technically 501c3 status is not required for people to be able to donate money to you and get a tax deduction. But, most churches go ahead and get their

501c3 status to avoid problems and to provide assurances to those who donate to them that the Federal Government will not question their tax deductions.

501c3 status is a \$300 fee...and a lot of paperwork. But if you do it yourself, it will only cost you \$300. If you hire an attorney to do it for you, it can cost as much as \$2000, or even more. I know several pagan covens and organizations in the Kansas City area that have done this paperwork on their own successfully, so that is the course we are going to take as well.

BOTTOM LINE: A kindred/tribe can Incorporate as a Heathen "church," become tax-exempt in your state, acquire 501c3 status from the Federal Government, have its own kindred bank account, ordain your own Heathen clergy, and exist as a legally recognized entity for a grand total of \$325 in Missouri.

In other states, the only thing that will possibly vary is the \$25 incorporation fee or the amount of paperwork. The \$300 fee for 501c3 status applications is standard across the 50 states.

In 2009, Jotun's Bane Kindred incorporated as a Heathen "church" in the State of Missouri. We have a few more legal steps to take, but that was a big one toward the Kindred owning tribal land...and a Hof and Hall of our own.

We'll provide more details on this as we move through the process...including examples of how we filled out our paperwork, etc. Many thanks are owed to Aurora...a wonderful pagan lady here in Kansas City that took the time to explain all of this to us, and share examples with us. She is a generous woman of worth.



Rod Landreth and Mark Stinson



REGIONAL GROWTH... A HEARTLAND THING

It is clear to me that the growth of Heathenry is something that must happen at the grassroots level, and move upward.

KINDREDS GROWING

It starts with one or two Heathens. They find each other. Perhaps they start a local study-group. They Blot or Symbel at the study groups. Then a kindred naturally forms from the bonds made over time. The kindred grows and matures into a tribe of families. And the collective Wyrd, Luck, and Gefrain of that tribe allows them to accomplish great things. They sponsor Asatru classes and workshops, hold open events, and over time form a community around them. Local traditions and understanding of their way of life develops...and tribal Thew. They begin to travel, and meet other Heathens in nearby cities and at regional gatherings....

REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

As various tribes begin to visit and communicate with each other face to face, this develops relationships and connections between tribes. They begin sharing with each other what works and doesn't work. Trust develops between them. This allows tribes to collectively react to threats to Heathenry, from within and without. If a tribe is hit hard (tornado damage, flooding, earthquake, etc.), other tribes help that tribe deal with their local threat.

REGIONAL THING

Over time, the trust between tribes and tribal leaders becomes such, that a more formal structure of Thing is put in place. Those included in the Thing all have connections and some level of trust between them. All the tribes represented are stable and of quality. The Thing is a meeting of equals. The location of the Thing rotates. The role of appointing a Lawspeaker falls to the host tribe. The Thing rarely addresses matters that are internal to any tribe, as those are matters best left at the tribal level. The Thing addresses external matters, communication, coordination. and those things that make Heathenry in the region better – and stronger.

There is no "bureaucracy" or administration of the Thing. The strength of the Thing is in the sovereignty and strength of the individual tribes involved. The Thing needs no website. The Thing needs no email address, P.O. Box, budget, staff, board, or anything else representing a modern organization. It is simply a way for strong, Tru tribes to come together, communicate, coordinate, and address regional concerns.

HOW WOULD A THING WORK?

If Kindred A is working on a book on Kindred-Building, they would bring the idea to Thing...inform everyone what they are doing, and elicit support, suggestions, etc. The Thing would not put out the book. Kindred A would...with the support of the other kindreds.



A Marker at the Law Rock at Thingvellir

If Kindred B wanted to organize a summer camp for Heathen kids, they would bring the idea to Thing...inform everyone what they are doing, and find out how many kids might come from each kindred. They would ask if anyone would be able to attend and perhaps help with it. The Thing would not put on the summer camp. Kindred B would...with the support of the other kindreds.

If Kindred C and Kindred D had problems with some scumbag claiming to be Heathen...and they felt this scumbag might try something similar with other kindreds, Kindred C or Kindred D would bring this up in Thing, and inform the other kindreds. It would be talked about, and if some action needed to be taken...then that would be agreed upon.

If Kindred E had achieved 501c3 status, they would come to Thing and explain how it was achieved. Share advice and paperwork, in order to assist those kindreds who would also like 501c3 status in getting it on their own.

If Kindred F had worked hard and gathered together enough money to buy tribal land and were working on building a Hof...they would bring this to Thing. Explain how they had achieved this. Encourage other kindreds to do the same. Share the pitfalls they ran into, and how they avoided them. They would not ask the Thing to build them a Hof...but instead describe how they planned to achieve it, and ask for advice on the matter.

If Kindred G was in a town that was leveled by a tornado, and many of its members were now homeless, and this was a problem the kindred needed help with, they would turn to the kindreds involved in the Thing, and ask for assistance. Those that could, would help in whatever way they could.

The Thing would be a place for coordination, communication, and facilitation of support for deeds of worth that kindreds are already doing. The Thing would not be an organization to which people belonged. Nor would it be an organization that does things on its own, apart from what the involved kindreds/tribes were doing.

The Thing would also work to encourage and assist people with forming kindreds in areas where none exist. They would help by providing advice, suggestions, and whatever support they could. If a kindred wanted to become a 501c3, or buy tribal land, those kindreds that already had 501c3 status or tribal land would help with advice and paperwork examples.

WHY NOT A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION?

There are currently a handful of National Organizations. Some have individual memberships and some have kindred memberships. They serve a purpose – and I am not saying they are without value. I belong to one, and work for one as a Folkbuilder. Other members of my kindred belong to National Organizations. So, let me be clear that I am not saying National Organizations are without purpose.

But, they are top-down. They tend to have their own identity. Websites. A post office box. Membership fees. Newsletters. Forums or e-lists. A leader or leaders. A centralized purpose and goals, decided upon by that leadership.

National Organizations are National, by their very nature. They are not regional...they are not grassroots. What we need is regional communication and coordination, allowing strong kindreds to work together to support one another here in the Midwest.

We do not need yet another National Organization. That just divides us further. We do not need another administrative leader, setting the goals and purposes of an organization, and making day to day decisions about its operations. We do not need another bureaucracy. We do not need any of these things. We need strong kindreds in the Midwest to communicate and coordinate with each other, regarding the amazing things they are currently accomplishing, and the things they plan to accomplish.

Norse Heathens left Norway and went to Iceland to escape a King. A central authority. They established a Thing...a way for chieftains to gather together, and decide regional issues. It was a gathering of strong equals. It was unique – and successful – because there was no king. Let us emulate that model, and modernize it to our needs.

SO WHAT IS NEXT IN THE HEARTLAND?

We are farther along in this process than one would think. We have strong kindreds here in the Heartland. We have new, growing kindreds here in the Heartland. Many of us have talked, or are talking. In September of 2009 at Lightning Across the Plains, 120 Heathens gathered together in Frith to honor our Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir of the land. Our families ate, and played, and got to know each other.

September of 2010 will be the 2nd year for Lightning Across the Plains – and there are other gatherings around the Heartland that Jotun's Bane Kindred will be attending throughout the year. Around the fires, issues are discussed. Future plans. Things each kindred hopes to accomplish...and what we can accomplish as a Region. And from this a Thing will form. Will all kindreds in the Heartland be involved? Only those that want to and those who have made those connections and built trust with the other kindreds involved. Our first regional Thing will be held at Lightning Across the Plains 2010, and from there it will grow steadily.





SECTION FOUR

**LIVING A
HEATHEN LIFE**

LIVE A FULL LIFE

Most people are only partially alive. They get up in the morning. Check the weather or the news...eat a few bites...and head off for work. They work a job they do not love. Actually, they have come to hate it in a sense. It is not an art. It is not a passion. It is not a craft. It just pays the bills. They have work friends, but they aren't real friends. They are people they say good morning too and forward stupid e-mail jokes to.

They drive home, plop down, turn on the television. They enjoy an evening of reality shows, processed snacks, and a form of living death. They are so used to their spouse and the predictability of each of their lives that there is nothing new to say. A few work stories...perhaps they discuss the latest drama on one of their television shows. The kids have their own televisions, their own video games, their own phones. Oh, yes...there's the evening news...with its weather report,



Fenris

the sports highlights, and a few gruesome deaths. Can't forget those. Then off to bed. Sleep. Wake up. Repeat steps above.

Politics? They barely pay attention to those. What attention they do pay is surface level. Perhaps they follow the politics they were taught by their parents. Perhaps they have a favorite commentator, blog site, or someone else that forms most of their political thought.

Religion? They are comfortable in their church. It is a big place. The people do not cause them much trouble, and they have a few friends there they talk to on Sunday. Or perhaps they just stay home. Religion takes a little too much thought and effort to really bother with. One thing is certain, they've never read the Bible...not even large chunks of it. They believe it is the word of their God, but why read it? That is just pointless. The preacher tells them all about God, or they learned all they were going to learn as a kid.

Dreams? Just bothersome things that interrupt their sleep – and if they do not get good sleep, they'll be nodding off at their boring-ass job. So, no time to bother with remembering their dreams or thinking

about what their dreams might tell them. Dreams are something they had when they were a kid.

Hopes and goals? Oh, they had those once. But they found a spouse. Got into a house. They have a stable job that pays the bills...just barely. And reality television takes up a lot of time. It is sort of hard to find the energy or the time to work toward any real goals. To make anything real happen in this world. Plus, hopes and goals are a luxury of youth. They have a life now. It is not like the hopes and dreams could become reality anyway. So what is the point?

These are the living dead. The drones. They lead their small lives. They do not try too hard at work. They do not try too hard at home. When they die, they are burned or buried, and within a decade or two – they are forgotten. They have left no mark. They have not lived.

We get one shot at this life. Whatever religion you are...this is the here and now. This is the world we have, the life we lead. Make it count.

Don't like your job? Bored out of your mind with it? Move within your company. Work your ass off to advance and challenge yourself. If that is not going to work, actively seek a new job. Something you dream of doing. Maybe once you get it, it will not live up to those dreams – but at least you will have done it and tried it.

Television? Turn that shit off. Sure, watch a movie. Learn something on the history channel. Or use television as background noise when you are doing something that actually counts. But do not sit there for four or five hours a night watching other people accomplish things. What does that do for you? It "occupies your time" and little else. It is mental masturbation that numbs your mind to how incredibly bored you really are with your life.

Feel disconnected from your spouse or your family? Well then, it is time to work your ass off again. Be honest. Communicate with your spouse or loved ones what you want. What you expect. What you'd like your life to be. Include them in that plan and ask for their help. Tell them you love them, and you do not want your life to pass you by without joy, and passion, and energy, and dynamic action. Finally, tell them you want them right there with you, living life to its fullest.

Hopes and Dreams? Listen to your dreams. Work towards your hopes. You want to start a small business? Educate yourself on how to do it. You want to write a novel? It will not write itself. Buy a book on novel writing. Buy 4 of them. Read them, and start writing. Set time aside

every day to write. Want to be an artist? Then take classes. Work on your craft. Meet with other artists. Talk, watch, and learn. Involve yourself in artistic circles. Bored to death with religion, or have not found one that sings to your soul? Then you have not bothered looking around. Read. Read. Read. Explore all the varied approaches to the divine question, and find the one that sings to you. No followers of that religion around you? Then start a church, build a website, and start gathering like-minded people.

No one is going to live your life for you. Everyone around you will sit and watch you fritter away your life...without saying a word. No one is going to make you chase your dreams. As a matter of fact, most people will quietly, secretly discourage you. Break free. Make something happen. Live your life so that when you are burned or buried, you will have made something special in this world.

SO HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO HEATHENRY?

There's no Kindred in your area? Start one.

Can't find Heathens in your area? Start a website. Start a Facebook group. Go to the Asatru Alliance, Asatru Folk Assembly, the Troth, or do some google searches. Search MySpace. Find them.



Ran

Still can't find any Heathens? Make some. Teach Asatru 101 classes at the local bookstore. Talk to your friends and family about the impact it has had on your life. Live a life that makes others want to be Heathen.

What if after all that you still can't find Heathens? Travel. Get in your car and visit a nearby kindred. Or travel to one of the several large regional or national gatherings held each year.

There are Kindreds in your area, but you do not like how they do things? Start your own Kindred. Or speak with them openly and honestly about your differences, and see if they are as big as you think they are.

Don't have time to read the Lore? Make some time. What is more important than rejoining your ancestral stream and honoring your Folk,

your Ancestors, and your Gods.

You're failing at one of your oaths? Then work harder. Or pay your shyld.

Your Kindred is small, and your wish it was bigger? Work at it. Hold open meet-and-greets. Promote them. Tell friends and family. Post them on e-lists, message boards, and hang fliers at coffee shops and bookstores.

There are no regional Heathen gatherings in your area? Then plan and organize one. Reach out to other Heathens and kindreds in your region and ask them what sort of gathering they would like. Ask if they would like to partner with you in making it happen. Then make it happen.

Your Kindred wishes it had a Hof? Then start planning one. Find out how much land costs. Find out how much a modest building will cost. Start raising money. Have everyone in your Kindred set aside \$5 or \$10 or more a month. The Gods and this world will not just hand you a Hof. You must make it happen. Do not just wish for it.

Essentially, anything you can imagine...you can work towards. If you work hard enough, long enough, you can attain it. That is a Heathen mind-set. That is a Heathen way to live this life. We make our own Luck. We shape our world through decisiveness and action. As Heathens, we should know this better than anyone...



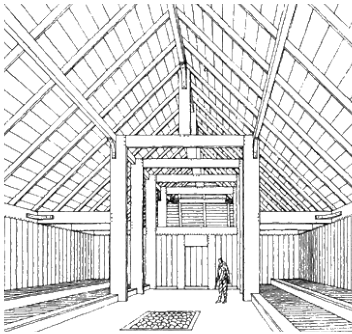
LEAVING DEEP RUTS IN THE ROAD

Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, and many other world religions are life-denying. Heathenry, and many Folk or tribal religions are life-affirming. This distinction between life-denying and life-affirming creates drastic differences in how one lives their life.

I was raised Christian and went to Rockhurst College, a Catholic School. Christianity teaches us there are physical temptations in this world that need to be avoided. Man is tainted with Original Sin...and it is only through turning to Christ that one can rise above the world and

enter heaven. Sex, alcohol, dancing, wealth, success, worldly accomplishment, etc...all of these things at one time or another have been targeted by Christianity as evil corrupting influences in the world. Christians are told to focus on the next world, and their reward there...and to avoid the temptations of this world.

There was a point of time in my life where I read quite a bit about Buddhism, and I found its point of view interesting. If one can view the world as illusion...our individuality as illusion...wants and desires as illusion...then you can achieve happiness. Viewing the world in this way allows you to see all the pain, disappointment, and unfulfilled desires of this world as illusion. Through denying these things, one escapes them.



But, this philosophy is a lot like covering your head with a blanket, and hoping all the ills in the world pass away...or pass over you. It feels like more of a parlor trick than a real solution to the pain of this world.

As a Heathen, I see the world as real. I see my individuality as a gift from the sons of Bur. I see my wants and desires as motivational tools, and part of that gift of Soul, Sense, and Being from the Gods. So I want to embrace the world. Embrace my individuality. Embrace my wants and desires. Instead of pulling that blanket over my head, I want to throw it off and come out swinging.

When I am 70, and my body's failing, and I look back over my life – I want to see struggle and toil. I want to see the great and difficult things I accomplished, along with the rubble of the great things I tried, but was denied. I want my kids and grandkids to look at me as an example of someone who took care of his own, kept his word, and took life for everything it had to offer. I want to leave deep ruts in the road, so people know exactly where I traveled. I will do this myself, without asking a God or Gods to do it for me. These will be my victories and my defeats, and hopefully the Gods and Ancestors will be proud of my efforts here on Midgard.

And after this life is over, I'll go drink a big frothy beer with my dad in Hel...and he'll tell me again all his bad jokes that I am beginning to forget as the years go by since he died.



MEN: PRIORITIZE YOUR HEATHEN LIFE

I wrote this essay after seeing an article talking about how men should prioritize their life. We have all see the articles and lists purporting to tell us what should be most important in our lives.

Many of these lists put "God" or a Higher Power first on the list – and some put the "Self" very high on the list. But from a Heathen perspective I would prioritize it differently. The Abrahamic religions teach us to put "Higher Power" before everything, but that is because the desert God is a jealous needy God. Our extremely selfish mainstream culture would, of course, recommend putting the Self second, before Family. So, here's my attempt to cast this topic in a Heathen-light...

FAMILY FIRST - I would put your spouse and children first. As a unit. You are obligated by oath and responsibility to do everything you can to protect and support your spouse and children, and to keep your immediate family and the relationships within it healthy and vital. This should be a Heathen's first priority, bar none. Raising a family within Heathenry, with Heathen values, is for me a part of having a healthy family. Part of that obligation is to safeguard your own health and strength so that you maintain your ability to support your family. This leads to our second priority...

SELF SECOND - Learning, evolving, improving, and keeping yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually growing and stable helps you to protect and support your family, and stay focused on what you need to do for them. Living Tru, taking right action, safeguarding your Wyrd, and making your own Luck all play into this.

CAREER/JOB THIRD - If you can't pay the bills, this can be one of the most stressful factors in breaking up families and marriages. The house or apartment needs to be paid for, the food needs to be in the fridge, and the family needs to be clothed. It is not that your career defines you, it is the fact that your career is necessary to support your first priority...your family. This doesn't mean one particular career direction, or one particular job. It means your own ability to provide for your family.

With the family supported, and kept healthy...a Heathen man and husband can turn to those outside his immediate family...

INNANGARTH FOURTH - Those friends and family you fully trust. The ones you know have your back, and you have theirs. For me, this involves my oathed Kindred, and one or two of my extended family...and maybe one or two friends. In a sense, the support you give to your innangarth comes back to you as support from your innangarth. Gift for a gift, and the bonds that tie this tight inner circle together allow for a collective Orlog to develop and Luck to be shared.

For me, growth of my local Heathen community fits within this category. It is from that local Heathen community that I will form new ties, and accept new members into my innangarth over time. The growth of my local Heathen community is the best way I know of to have a direct impact on the growth of our Folk.

UTANGARTH FIFTH - This is everyone outside of your tight inner circle. "Work Friends," friendly neighbors, or acquaintances, and all those that we enjoy being around and have fun with in social settings (backyard neighborhood BBQ's, double-dates with a neighbor couple, softball leagues, social hobbies), but do not fully trust as part of your inner circle.

For me, the growth of greater Heathenry fits into this category. While I want to see more of our lost Folk come home to the ways of their Ancestors, this has a lower priority for me than my local community. As it should.

GREATER NON-HEATHEN COMMUNITY SIXTH - Charity work for those you do not know is a good thing, but the priority level for dedicating time to those you do not know would be lower than what has already been listed before.

HONORING OUR GODS, ANCESORS, AND THE VAETTIR - I did not place our Gods and Ancestors on the priority list, because I do not see our religion as something that can be put before or after other parts of our lives. They are a part of us, and a part of our lives. Heathenry is a way of life, and our loyalty to the Gods and Ancestors is exhibited and reflected in our loyalty to our family, our own personal growth, our hard vocational work, and our focus on our innangarth. In addition, the way we lead our lives is quickly evident to those in our Utangarth and the greater non-Heathen community. We live Tru in all the parts of our life, as our very way of living.



THE NEXT GENERATION OF ASATRU

I feel the next generation of Heathens will be our children, who we have raised to know our Gods and our Ancestors. But what about the non-Heathen youth that feel drawn back to our Folkway?

We need strong local groups and communities, so when the non-Heathen young people in our communities are drawn back to our ways, by Heathen music, and books, and exposure to Heathenry on the internet...they have Tru Heathens in their local area to turn to for learning and guidance.



As our youth turn away from Christianity, we are losing many of them to foreign religions and neo-religions (i.e., Wicca). Why? One reason, sadly, is that it is easier to find a Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Wiccan group in our local communities than a Heathen one. We need beacons in the darkness...strong local Heathen communities, to help these young people find their way home to their Elder Kin and their native Folkway.

For several years prior to 2008, if a youth became interested in Heathenry in Kansas City, there was no local group to turn to for information or support. Many communities here in the United States are still in that condition. How can we expect the youth to find their way back to their native Folkway, when no Heathen groups are located near them? Depending on "internet-Heathenry" for this task is not going to work. We need real people...real Heathens...building kindreds and tribes in every medium to large sized community here in the Heartland.

Does your community have a local Heathen group that young people, 18-25 years of age, can turn to for support, information, and fellowship? Why not?



OUR HEATHEN CHILDREN

The welfare of our children is one of many reasons I am Heathen. What is more important than our children? Yet, you have these children out there that are completely ignored by their parents. The kids grow up alienated, alone, and with no guidance. Some of them become frustrated and self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. Some build bombs and stockpile guns in their own homes without their parents even noticing – a school shooting or murder spree just on the horizon.

It is a sign of our decaying culture that parents have abandoned their own children. Yes, they clothe them and feed them, but emotionally they withhold time and attention to pursue their own selfish goals or entertainment.

We should share what is important to us with our children. We should go to parent- teacher conferences, ask our children how school went everyday, help with school parties if we can, or volunteer in their classroom. We should take them to museums, historic locations, sporting events, fairs, festivals, and learning opportunities. We should share our faith with them, and teach them Heathen beliefs and Heathen values. We should hug them, and kiss them, and cuddle up with them to watch television now and again. We should take them to Heathen events and Heathen gatherings.

The most important thing in our lives should be our children. A house can burn down. We can lose our job. People can betray us. We can wreck a car, or suffer an injury. We can survive all that pretty well if forced to do so. But children hold a special place in our lives. They are our legacy. They are the future of our Folk. Heathenry is the answer to the widespread emotional abandonment of children within our failing culture, and our children are the future of our native Folkway.



Mark, Nathan, and Jennifer



RACE AND ETHNICITY WITHIN HEATHENRY

There are a lot of misconceptions and a lot of misinformation regarding the topic of race, ethnicity, and culture within Asatru. Many Asatru/Heathen websites feel the need to state outright, "We are not racist, nor do we tolerate racist beliefs."

There are racists within every religion. Most KKK members for instance, were traditionally Protestant southerners who, besides being violently racists, also held a deep hatred for those of the Catholic and Jewish faiths. Does this mean that all Protestant Christians are KKK members or racist? Of course not. No one would even ask that question.

One excellent way to examine how race and ethnic heritage play a role in Asatru beliefs is the Jarnsaxa Scale. Go to this website to read an article on the Jarnsaxa Scale.

<http://heathengods.com/temple/modules/articles>

When I read through the Scale, I am somewhere between a 3 and a 4. In order to state exactly what it is that I believe, I wrote the following statement.

"I believe that our ties to the Aesir and the Vanir are through our Ancestors...and that it would be unusual, and extremely rare, for someone of non-Northern European heritage to be Ásatrú. I hesitate to say it is impossible, only because I believe the Gods and Goddesses have the ability to call to whomever they choose. It is not my job, nor place, to tell someone that they have no right to be Heathen based on their ethnicity or ancestry. But I do feel it is of the greatest value to follow the path of your own cultural and ethnic background, as these forces have had a great impact on who you are."

Every Folk...every People...has its own history, culture, and innate connection with its own Gods. Asatru/Heathenry is the native Folkway of the Northern European people. While I am clearly loyal to my own Folkway, I acknowledge and respect the validity of the Folkways of other ethnicities and cultures. For that reason, I would be willing to worship with those who respect our Gods but are not of our ethnic group, and I will certainly worship with any Tru man or woman.

As a Heathen, I am much more focused on a man or woman's deeds. What is their worth? What are they doing? Do they live their life in a responsible, constructive, and stable fashion. This is much more important to me than the cultural background of their Ancestors...though the cultural background of their Ancestors still means something to me.

Do not misinterpret what I have said to mean that those with Northern European backgrounds are better or superior to others. I just believe there are differences between various groups of people, and each person is better off seeking out the native Gods of their own People.



DOES SKIN COLOR MATTER?

I received a question from a Heathen that had a mother with Northern European Ancestors and a father from Mexico, with Spanish and Indian Ancestors. The question focused on the fact that this Heathen looked "Mexican," but felt drawn to Asatru. The Heathen was asking me what I thought of that situation, as someone who identifies himself as "Folkish."

I have never, and will never, suggest that the color or tone of one's skin has anything to do with one's connection with the Northern European Gods (Odin, Thor, Frey, Freya, Frigg, Idunn, etc.) or the Heathen way of life. Skin color is a matter of pigment and an individual's recent exposure to the sun. Skin color, eye color, and hair color are all a function of genetic markers causing a person to look a certain way. My Heathenry is not based in science or genetics.

My folkish viewpoint is expressed thusly: The Northern European Gods are the Gods of our Folk. They are our Elder Kin. The Northern European people share a Folk Soul, that connects them to these Gods through their Ancestors. Parents pass Orlog to their children – it is part of the Heathen soul complex – and those children pass Orlog to their children. It is all about our Blood and Ancestors. Through this connection, someone of Northern European blood is more likely to feel a connection with the Northern European Gods, and forming that connection is easier – due to these Gods being our Elder Kin.

I do not pin this on skin color. I do not pin this on science or genetics.

I base this way of thinking on the fact that Ancestors matter, and this is our native Folkway.

But as I have stated in previous essays, I also hold to the idea that our Gods are individuals. Who am I to tell them who to form a connection with? Who am I to tell someone else they are not Asatru or Heathen just because I've decided they do not have enough native ancestry. If Odin wants to form a connection with a man or woman with 0% Northern European ancestry, then who am I to tell that person they are not Asatru?

I judge men and women on their deeds. What is their worth? What are they DOING? What sort of life do they lead? I feel the Gods judge men and women based on this same measure.

So a Heathen's ancestry is only a problem, in my opinion, if they make it a problem. It is not my position to tell anyone that their skin-color is too dark or that their mixed ancestry is a problem.

There are varying degrees of Folkish belief. It is a complex issue, often forced into a false dichotomy of "Folkish" versus "Universalist." Honestly, I think the whole discussion of race and ethnicity has become distracting and counter-productive within Heathenry...mainly due to this false dichotomy.



Large Wooden Statue of Odin I Carved



THE PURPOSE OF A HEATHEN LIFE

First off, remember that the belief system of these Germanic/Northern Gods spanned thousands of years, never had a central authority or structure, was never put into writing (until Christians wrote it down), and varied from village to village, person to person, and even year to year. There was no pope, no dogma, no codified belief system. It was different for each person, in many ways. Even more so than centralized religions. So, there is not just one way of looking at our native way of life...our native Folkway.



The God Tyr

A Heathen lives this life because it is his or hers to live, and leaves whatever may come in the next life to the Gods. We have heard of Odin's Valhalla for the warriors after death, and Bilskirnir was Thor's feasting hall for the workers and thralls after their death. Frigga had a palace for married lovers that had been especially dedicated to each other, so that they could live together forever. But many of these myths came later, were influenced to some degree by Christianity, and were not the central purpose of the religion. Our Heathen Ancestors did not live or make choices in this life based on a particular afterlife they were working toward. Our Heathen Ancestors focused on this life and what they could make of it.

So our Ancestors focused on living their life with honor, with strength, and with independence...dependent on no one except their closest family and friends. They respected and honored their Folk and their Ancestors. And they lived their life in a way that they would be honored and respected as an Ancestor by their descendants. There was a culture of oral communication, and to be remembered and live forever, you had to live a life that people would remember and tell stories about. This sort of afterlife was much more their focus than a supernatural one.

If you took an oath, you kept it. If offered hospitality, it was a great insult not to accept it. When you were in a position to offer hospitality,

you offered it. Hospitality, and knowing how to be a good host and a good guest, was a very important skill. Feasting and toasting brought people together, and served both religious and social purposes. Your family, your kin, and your village were very important, as well.

So, a Heathen's purpose in life was to live their life well. Work hard, fight hard, be direct and honest, eat well, drink well, keep their oaths, and take care of guests – and by doing these things you would live an independent honorable life that was full and worth remembering. In a culture with very little written word, being remembered and continuing your family were your only guarantees of any sort of immortality.

Is it much different for modern Heathens? It need not be. I work hard to live my life with this same purpose, and to teach my children to do the same.



LIFE EMBRACING HEATHENRY

The fact that Heathenry is life-embracing differentiates it from many other religions of the world, many of which are life-denying.

Christianity, in its many forms and denominations, focuses on the afterlife. What is the afterlife? How do we get there? What do we have to believe in order to make it into Heaven? What sort of people have it easier getting into Heaven? We are told that if we follow Christianity's rules and turn to the White Christ for forgiveness, then we earn a big reward in the end. We earn an ever-lasting, "everything you ever wanted but couldn't have" sort of reward. But if you do not follow the rules, then you are excluded from Heaven – and in almost all forms of Christianity – condemned to some sort of eternal punishment.

What are Christianity's rules? Well, the physical life is base, and full of temptations to be avoided. The poor are blessed, and it is a bit harder for the rich and successful to make it to Heaven. For some denominations, there's no drinking, no dancing, no cussing. For almost all the denominations, there can only be physical love within the bonds of marriage. The Christian ideal is to live Christ-like – to live simply and to deny pleasures of the flesh. Taken to its extreme, we have priests and nuns who can't marry and monks living austere

lives of solitude. Exactly why are we asked to deny ourselves success, drinking, dancing, and living life to its fullest? Christianity tells us we deny ourselves these things to earn a reward after our death.

Fundamentalist Islam is, of course, even more life-denying than Christianity. Everything is done for what will come after life. Taken to its extreme, this can lead to almost a belief system of death. It leads to people willing to blow themselves up in order to earn the favor of their God, and their glorious life in the afterworld.



The First Fire in Our Fire Pit on My 40th Birthday

Even Eastern Religions tend towards denying the reality of this world, in favor of the reality and realization of the better life...the perfect joining with life...after death. Buddhism teaches that the physical world is illusion, and only by denying the pleasures and wants of this world – as well as the hurts and pains – can we find ourselves ready to enter Nirvana. Taken to its extreme, this leads to a denial of this life in favor of the next. And they believe they must come back in life, over and over again, until they learn this lesson.

Other religions tend to reject this physical earthly life in order to prepare for the next life – a better life after this one.

But what of Heathenry? Heathenry embraces life – THIS life. The life we are living now. The life we know. Heathenry throughout history had various beliefs about the afterlife. The wide variety of afterlife beliefs likely existed because it was not the core of the religion. It was not the focus. Heathenry is a way of life. A method for dealing with

family, friends, and enemies. A way of interacting with the house wights and Landvaettir (spirits). A way of honoring the Gods as Elder Kin. A way of remembering our Ancestors and giving them their due.

Heathens boast of their successes. They seek success in this life for themselves, for their family, and for their tribe. Heathens seek to learn what they can learn. They master skills that will help them in this life. They focus on their relationships in this life. They work on their connection with their Ancestors, and all of this is meant to make their life on Midgard a better life. The afterlife is, in many ways, an after-thought for Heathens. You will sometimes hear Heathens say, "Where I go after I die I'll leave to the Gods. They are the only ones that truly know."

We have general ideas and concepts about the afterlife, but it is not the focus of what we do.

It is not a "carrot-and-stick" system to control us in return for a big reward after death. At the same time, Heathenry does have very strict rules about treating your family and close friends in the correct and proper ways. Keeping your oaths. Preserving your family. Living life as a strong, direct, honorable man or woman. But you do these things to make THIS life better. To make your relationships in THIS life stronger. To improve the lives of your children, and their children.

Heathens see THIS life as difficult, but not evil. They see THIS life as a great challenge, but never as a trap, a test, nor a series of temptations. Heathens see THIS life as the one thing we can be sure of, and therefore we should do our best to live right and live well while we are here to enjoy it. These beliefs are at the core of Heathenry's life-embracing nature...



Asa-Thor



A HEATHEN QUESTION OF WORTH

Who decides if a man has worth? What if a man has done good things and bad things in his life?

First, the important thing to remember is that the past is the past. This does not mean the past is unimportant. Quite the contrary. It has already happened...and cannot be changed or erased. It is already "in the well," or already "part of the tapestry." This is called Orlog.

It seems oversimplified to have to point out that the past is the past...but it is an important point, because the Germanic mindset is to focus on the now, with an eye to the past. What are you now? What are you doing now with your life? What is your Worth right now? Your past (Orlog) plays a role in determining your Worth, but when a man has addressed past deficiencies and ill-deeds...and has changed his life for the better...this change in direction becomes important in measuring his Worth.

For instance, a man leads a bad life for years. He uses drugs, abandons his family, commits crimes, hurts people needlessly, spends time in prison, etc. This man is of little worth. He is a complete mess, and his Orlog is a tangled, ugly mess. The man can't change that past. But let's say 10 years ago, the man gets out of prison, and decides to change. He joins a support group or gets counseling for his drug abuse. He gets a job. He works hard to form stable relationships. He rebuilds his family. For 10 years, he has been clean, crime-free, working hard, and building a life for his family. Well, let's look at this "changed" man from a Heathen perspective.

When he was a criminal drug-addict, his deeds showed him to have little or no worth.

When he was just getting out of prison and had decided to get clean and turn his life around, he still had little or no worth. Even though his intentions are good...he has not put it into action yet.

When he was about two months into his new life, he was starting to build worth...but who in their right mind would bet that it would last? It is too recent...and there is too much damaged Orlog for just two worthy months to wipe clean.

But 3 years, 5 years, 10 years into his new life, we can see the life he has built and maintained...and the man clearly has worth, despite the mess in his distant past.

You can't change the past, but you can change the present. You can fix the things you have broken. You can make right the things you have done wrong. You can avoid making those same mistakes again. Everyone has a chance to start over, and build a better life starting right now. But it takes a lot of work to fix damaged Orlog.

The past does not go away because you ask forgiveness. The past does not go away because you kneel down to the Jewish-Zombie-on-a-Stick. The past does not go away because of newly-made promises, good intentions, or wishful thinking. It takes work...and it takes years of right action and deeds of worth. That is how one repairs one's Orlog, and becomes a man of Worth.

Now, who decides Worth? Heathenry is very community oriented. We do not get to decide our own individual worth. Those around us watch us, know us, and decide our worth. Based on our deeds, they judge our worth.



Heimdall

The people we interact with at work...they measure our worth at work. They know whether they can count on us. They know whether we are dependable...whether we will be there for the long haul...whether we fix problems or cause problems.

At home, our families measure our worth. Are we providing for the family emotionally and financially? Our families know if we are a rock...if we are nurturing...if we are dependable.

Our friends measure our worth. Do we keep our word? Are we there for them when they need us? Do we have their backs or not?

Within larger communities this is true as well. Over time, as one becomes a known quantity in the greater Heathen community or regionally...other Heathens see one's deeds, and decide one's Worth.

That brings us to the topic of Gefrain. One's reputation. As more and more people measure a man's worth...and learn of his deeds, his Gefrain grows. Gefrain is essentially how many people know of you...and how worthy they judge you to be. Having good Gefrain can affect one's Wyrð, Luck, and other aspects of your life.

Christianity is a very Guilt based culture. Heathenry is a Shame based culture. If one's deeds do not measure up...and people know of this, they do not want to mingle Wyrð with you. They see you as an example of "what not to be," and do not want to associate with you.

So, how does this all work within a Heathen kindred or tribe?

Let's say a new person approaches the kindred and we get to know them. They have a job and work hard at it. They have a family, and care about them greatly and provide well for them. They read about Heathenry, learn, and become knowledgeable. They come to kindred events, and when they commit to something they always follow through. They are good to be around, and act with Right Good Will. They gift their friends, show hospitality as a host, and know how to be a good guest. They are stable, and are working to improve their family's lot in life. If all these best-case-scenarios are in place...then, over time, we come to see they have great Worth. They are a person we would want to closely mingle Wyrð with. Adding their Orlog and their Luck to the tribe's collective Orlog and Luck would assist and grow the tribe in both numbers and strength. This person is the best-case-scenario to oath into the kindred.

But, let's look at a different sort of new person approaching our kindred. They can't seem to keep a job. They have constant drama in their life. They will not read the Lore and expect to be spoon-fed. They attend kindred events infrequently, and often they fall short on their commitments. They are problematic to be around, and seem very political and divisive. They are selfish and fail to show hospitality, and are an example of a bad guest. Their life is chaos, and they seem to almost wallow in it. This is the worst-case scenario...and, over time, we would conclude this person has very little Worth. They are a person we would not want to mingle Wyrð with at all, and we would push them away. Adding their Orlog and their Luck to the tribe's collective Orlog and Luck would hurt and burden the tribe. This is the last person on earth we would oath into the kindred.

In between the best-case-scenario and the worst-case-scenario person is where all others fall. To some degree it is a calculation. No one is perfect. But our tribe needs to be stable and strong. We require

quality over quantity. We protect our Orlog and Luck, and do not want to see it damaged or lessened. So, we carefully weigh things when we are getting to know new people. Sometimes we conclude that someone makes a good friend – but would not be a very good oathed member of our kindred. Sometimes we tell people to come to open events to get to know us better. Work on your problems, get your life together, and we'll talk about this in the future.

I bring this up because our modern mainstream culture pushes us to accept everyone, faults and all. Often apologies are allowed to wipe clean years of misdeeds. Good intentions are judged more important than the actual consequences of our actions. But that is a modern culture that is upside down from our Germanic heritage.

Growing Heathen kindreds and tribes must look for people of Worth to add to their ranks. They will be stronger for it. They will endure better. They will get more done. Quality over Quantity. Just one person of little worth allowed into the inner circle (Innangarth) of a kindred can cause great damage to their collective Orlog and Luck, stifle their growth, and distract them from their goals.



"Theodish Gift"

WYRD AND WORTH

Do the people one chooses to associate with have an impact on the quality and condition of one's life? Is this an important thing to pay attention to and focus on in one's life? Is it something a group should pay attention to when considering adding new members? For those who are Heathen the answers to these questions are yes, yes, and yes.

Heathens believe that all people have something called Wyrd. Think of this as the circumstances and events that happen in our life, and our choices and reactions toward them. Our deeds and actions interact

with the circumstances of our life, and once performed, these deeds and actions cannot be erased. They are deposited in the Well of Wyrd as layers...and these layers in the Well are collectively called our Orlog.

For the purposes of explaining this better, think of our lives as a tapestry we are constantly weaving. Strands of yarn come our way...and we can't always predict what color, or texture, or condition this yarn will be. All we can do is react to these strands, and make choices, in an attempt to make the best, most attractive tapestry that we can. We can think of bad choices as knots or flaws in the tapestry. Once you've put a knot in the tapestry, you just have to keep weaving. You can't go back and remove the knot. It is there. You can try to make up for what you have done, but simply apologizing for your bad choice does not magically make the knot go away.



The Norns Weaving

As we associate with people and groups, we “mingle Wyrd” with them. Our tapestries blend together, to varying degrees. If you associate with people with messy tapestries (lives), then the tapestry you collectively are working on is going to have flaws and knots. That is going to affect your tapestry (life). No matter how well you weave, if you are mingling Wyrd with those that make bad choices and perform misdeeds, then your tapestry is going to be affected.

In very concrete terms, if I associate with someone who constantly cheats on their wife, then this will eventually affect my life as well. The cheater, living his life in his messy way, will bring problems into my life. My wife might see what he is doing and begin to suspect me as well. Or if I go out for a guys-night with the cheater, he will very likely put me in a compromising position. Or the cheater might get caught, and end up living on my couch for a few months. Regardless of the specifics, if I am trying to live life as a loyal husband, it is a bad idea for me to associate with or befriend someone who cheats on their wife.

Even if I never do drugs, if I associate with a drug-user, then it will eventually affect my life. I may get stopped by the police with the drug-user in my car, and get caught up in his criminal troubles. The drug-user may accidentally leave drugs at my house, and my kids might find them. The drug-user may step out back to use drugs, and my kids might see him using them. Regardless of the specifics, if I am trying to live a clean life and teach my kids to lead one, it is a bad idea for me to associate with or befriend someone who uses drugs.

If someone I meet represents the opposite of what I hope for myself in life, then it makes sense not to mingle Wyrð with them. Their tapestry, with its messy knots and flaws will corrupt my own. Eventually, my tapestry will be as messy as theirs. My life will be affected negatively by theirs. One of the most important choices a Heathen can make is who we allow into our inner-circle (Innangarth). We must safeguard our Wyrð, and ensure that those we closely associate have stable lives, with goals and values that are consistent with our own. When choosing whom to associate with, we look for people of Worth.

Is it alright to judge other people? Who decides if a person has worth, and how is that determined?

Human beings have a responsibility to themselves and their families to build the most productive, stable, healthy life possible. A major part of doing so, is choosing who you let into your life. Who you allow into your inner-circle (Innangarth). Who I associate with and who I allow to have an impact on my family are some of the most important decisions I will make. These decisions have a huge impact. So, yes...of course I judge people. The idea that we cannot judge other people is entirely Christian. Our Heathen Ancestors took it for granted that any man worth his salt would be good at judging other people, and discerning in choosing whom to associate with closely.



THE FAMILIES WE BUILD, THE OATHS WE MAKE

On the internet – in "on-line" Heathenry, you'll occasionally hear the call for a move away from monogamy, calling monogamy some sort of unnatural morality, or something "the Christians inflicted on us," as if monogamy represents Christian slave chains that we should throw off.

This bothers me. For me, personally, Heathenry is about family and kin. It is about the oaths we make. It is about our Ancestors and about our children. The only "afterlife" I am certain of, are the memories that my children and their children will carry of me. These descendants will carry on my memory and, more importantly, they will carry on my legacy by the choices and actions they make in their own lives.

I made an oath to my wife to be faithful to her. My children benefit from the stability of one household, one set of parents, one set of rules, and knowing that the two of us (my wife and I) will be here for them no matter what. In the modern world we can shelter our children from hunger and horrible weather, but the only shelter our children have from an upside-down, corrupt human world, is the family we build and maintain for them. Every sociological study suggests that a stable two-parent family produces, on average, more well-adjusted, successful, and happy children.

Our Ancestors married. I am married. Must we turn everything completely on its head to move away from what we see as Christianity? Turning Christianity on its head, and everything Christianity stands for, is reactionary. It has nothing to do with reconstruction and being true to our Ancestors.

I do not care what these "on-line" Heathens do in their life. I do not really know any of them. None of them are my kin or kindred, and frankly they can do what they want with their lives, their families, and their children. But I do not enjoy the idea of anyone using Heathenry as an excuse for infidelity...or a way out of an oath that they have already made to a spouse or to their family.

If they break their marriage oaths...their Luck will wane...and they will likely bring unnecessary and disruptive complexity and chaos into their Wyrð. They can live out the consequences...but I want no part of it.



PROTECTING HEATHEN CHILDREN FROM DIVORCE

We can all agree that our children are our most important treasure. We would protect them at all costs. We would destroy anyone that would threaten them. They are our future. And we wish to pass good Orlog to them...so their lives can be Lucky and of Worth.

Our choices about marriage and relationships can either benefit our children or threaten them with dire consequences. Sadly, if we do not work hard at our marriages, we as parents can become one of the most destructive forces in our children's lives. We are the only ones that can protect our children from this threat.

Children of broken homes statistically do worse in school, are more likely to drop out of school, have more mental problems, are less physically healthy, are more anxious and insecure, are more likely to commit suicide, more likely to end up in prison, more likely to have problems in their future relationships, more likely to be molested or the victim of a violent crime, and more likely to have a serious addiction when they grow up, among other things.



Frigga

So, when things get a little rough in a marriage, and your mind wanders to the idea of "escaping" from it through divorce, think about who is threatening your kids' welfare now? Who's going to protect your kids from your decision-making?

Also consider the Oath that you took when you chose your spouse. You took an oath to that person, and many times you took that oath in front of family and friends. Is this oath any less important than the oaths we take on our oath rings? Is this oath, if broken, any less

damaging to our own Luck and Wyrð? Is this oath, if broken, any less damaging to our Heathen communities, our kindreds, and our tribes? No, clearly it is one of the most important oaths that we take.

But some will say that a "bad marriage" will damage children. In the case of child or spousal abuse, severe drug and alcohol addiction, I would agree with you. But these are extreme situations, and the vast majority of marital problems are NOT this severe.

So, honor your Oaths. Protect your Wyrð. Preserve your Luck. Pass good Orlog onto your children. If you find yourself having marital problems, tackle the challenge like Heathens tackle any challenge...intelligently, fearlessly, generously, honorably, and with lots of hard work.

Doing so will benefit you, your family, and your tribe.



MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS: HAVAMAL ADVICE

Making new friends. Bringing new people into your life. Choosing who will be there alongside you through thick and thin. Just like marriage, friendship takes a certain amount of work. Some friendships are easier than others to form and maintain. But all friendships require a certain amount of reciprocal sacrifice and work in order to keep them healthy.

In the Havamal, an Icelandic poem containing what is said to be the wisdom of Odin, there is some fairly clear advice on how to form and maintain friendships. This wisdom is both age-old and completely relevant today..

**34. Crooked and far is the road to a foe,
Though his house on the highway be;
But wide and straight is the way to a friend,
Though far away he fare.**

**41. Friends shall gladden each other with arms and
garments,
As each for himself can see;
Gift-givers' friendships are longest found,
If fair their fates may be.**

**44. If a friend thou hast whom thou fully wilt trust,
And good from him wouldst get,
Thy thoughts with his mingle, and gifts shalt thou make,
And fare to find him oft.**

**52. No great thing needs a man to give,
Oft little will purchase praise;
With half a loaf and a half-filled cup
A friend full fast I made.**

**119. I rede thee, Loddafnir! and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If a friend thou hast whom thou fully wilt trust,
Then fare to find him oft;
For brambles grow and waving grass
On the rarely trodden road.**

Really, the advice is simple. Visit your friends. Seek them out often. Be generous with your friends and accept their generosity in return. Share your thoughts and opinions, and listen to your friend's thoughts and opinions as well. Sometimes it is the small things that make the difference...and sometimes it is the thought that counts. If you do not seek out and visit a friend often, this can hurt the friendship.

Be generous. Gift-giving forms bonds, regardless the size of the gift. It is not about spending money. It is about showing someone you have thought of them enough to give them a gift. "Gifts" are not always physical objects or things you have bought. Some particularly well thought out advice can be a gift. Checking in on them when you know they are in a stressful situation can be a gift. etc.

Odin's advice also tells us that "making a friend" can be a very proactive process. Forming friendships does not have to be an accidental process. If you meet a person of worth and see potential in forming a friendship with them, there is a clear formula for making that happen. Why leave something as important as who your friends are purely to chance? There is nothing wrong with purposely working hard to make a new friend, and to form bonds with that person, as long as you are honest and committed to maintaining the friendship.

If you follow this advice and your friend reciprocates with visits, attention, gifting, generosity, conversation, thought-sharing...then the friendship grows and the bonds are formed. I know this all sounds like common sense, but in today's modern world many people either have no common sense, or are so caught up in themselves, that they throw away friendships like used tissue. They think the world revolves around them, and they fail to understand that along with the benefits of friendship come work and obligation.



Jamie King and Jennifer Stinson

INNANGARTH VS. UTANGARTH

Heathenry draws a clear line between those that are within your trust and those that are outside your trust. Within Heathenry, everyone is outside your trust until you have accepted them into that circle of trust. And you only accept a person into your circle of trust when they have proven themselves worthy of your trust.

This is something we run into a lot in our places of work. Co-workers work around us and with us, and there can be a false sense of friendship, or intimacy with the people that we see everyday at work.

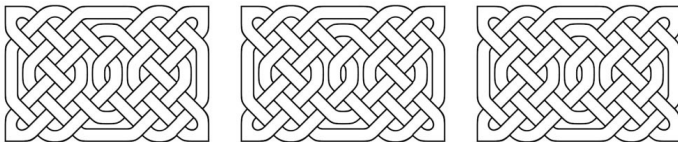
But not all of these "work friends" are truly our friends or worthy of our trust, and this can get us into trouble.

Let's say we share our religious beliefs. Or perhaps our opinions of another religion. Or we speak freely about how we see the world or how we see other people that we work with. If you are talking in this way with someone outside your trust (which is everyone who has not earned your trust), then it is likely that you will see your words, views, and beliefs used against you in some fashion. This fact is the whole reason for withholding trust until it is earned.

When we share inner thoughts and our intimate beliefs with those that have not earned our trust, then we should not be surprised when those "outside our trust" betray us or act badly against us with the information we have shared. Though it is a free country, and we have the freedom to choose our religion...we all have an adult's understanding of "how most people really are." We have all experienced the negative side of human interaction at some point or another.

I have friends at work that have earned my trust, and I do talk with about my religion with them. The other 99% have no reason to know my inner beliefs or thoughts...and I would not trust them to know my inner beliefs or thoughts. They are outside my trust. When they have earned their way in – then we'll talk about these things. If they learned my beliefs through some other means (the internet, for instance, where I am very open about my beliefs) I still have no obligation to discuss them with anyone unless they are within my circle of trust. It is my choice who I share with and who I do not. It is none of their business, unless I choose it to be.

This post represents how I see the Heathen approach to giving trust, and recognizing who is within my trust and who is outside my trust. I realize that other religions focus on being very trusting, very open, sharing with others, and seeing no one as your enemy. This is simply a false view of the world. We do have enemies and those that are beneath our trust. A failure to recognize that can be self-harming.



SHAME CULTURE VS. GUILT CULTURE

Christianity is Guilt Culture. A Christian can do horrible things, but once they ask forgiveness...other Christians are taught to forgive them and not to judge them. That sin is between them and their desert God. They have but to ask forgiveness and have good intentions, and they start with a clean slate in the eyes of their God. Their God sees all, and no matter what you do that is bad, whether you are caught or not...whether it really hurt anyone or not, you are to feel the guilt of those actions until you ask forgiveness.

Heathenry is Shame Culture. A man is his deeds. The past does matter. What a man does is woven into his Wyrd. His reputation is affected, and the reputation of those that associate with him. Right action is not a matter that is only between an individual and his Gods. Right action is seen by fellow Heathens, and renown and reputation are built and earned. Asking forgiveness or having good intentions does not wipe away the past.

If you had a best friend who you respected and liked. And you found out he had molested four little girls ten years before...a few years before you met him. The girls were all under the age of 10. That is a part of that man. That is a part of his Wyrd. By your friendship, you have made him and his wrongs a part of your Wyrd as well. How you might ask? Your friendship will change forever, and if it was important to you – then that is a loss. Knowing what you now know will clearly affect whether you let him near your own children. It would make you worry about the time he has already spent with your children. Perhaps he has touched and harmed your children in ways you did not know about. If he were arrested for the crime it would impact your own reputation as well, depending on how well you were known to be his friend. What he had done would impact your marriage, if your wife felt that you brought this harmful man into your family's home. It would make you question your own ability to judge a person's character and worth. His past would damage your Luck.

If you had a wife who you found out was a hooker some years before, and she had not told you...her past would be a big deal...it would affect your Wyrd. You would worry about her attitudes about sex and loyalty within your marriage. The fact she had not told you about her past would affect your trust of her. You would worry what diseases had been brought into your home and into your own body. If her past became public it would affect the reputation of your family and

yourself. If your children come to know of it, it will undermine their respect for their mother...and perhaps affect their own ideas and attitudes about the dignity of their own bodies. Her past would damage your Luck. If this past as a hooker was a long time ago, and she had lived a stable, healthy life for years since then...it could mitigate these negative affects to some degree. But it is unlikely it would mitigate them completely.

If you formed a Kindred, and four months into its existence one of the members of your Kindred cheated on his wife, and their marriage dissolved. this would affect your Wyrd, and the Wyrd of the collective group. The man's life would be chaos and turmoil, and the Kindred would be affected by this distraction. The man has broken a serious oath that he had taken to his wife. The man has destroyed his own family. The man has done something that will possibly scar his own children's ability to form and maintain long-term relationships. The man will be turning to the Kindred for help...and depending on the strength of the Kindred, this could damage or destroy the Kindred. His inability to maintain his oath, his family, and his self-control would affect the Luck of the Kindred.

So, past actions matter. One can seek to change and improve. One can seek to be a better person. But escaping your past actions is not as easy as turning over a new leaf. Not in a Shame Culture...a Heathen Culture.

If a man or woman has great misdeeds in their past, there Wyrd and Luck are likely damaged. Their reputation is likely damaged as well, because others usually know of these misdeeds.

It is important that people who are considering whether or not to mingle their Wyrd with that person – considering whether to share a horn with that person or whether to Fain with that person – should know of both that person's past misdeeds AND their commitment to do better. They should know the whole of a person (both positive and negative) prior to weaving that person into their Wyrd.

In the six months Jotun's Bane Kindred was forming, when we were getting to know each other, we explored both positive and negative things about each other. I learned of the flaws of the other members and they learned of mine. We were an open book. But none of those flaws were so serious that they made us apprehensive about mingling our Wyrd...and forming a collective Wyrd through the formation of our Kindred. Were we all perfect? No. Did we have great shame in our past? Definitely not.

Not everyone has a laundry list of bad behavior that needs to be hidden or kept secret. Only some do. A large part of getting a fresh start for someone with past misdeeds and a damaged reputation, would be not trying to hide those past mistakes from people you hope to build relationships with.

What do you think reputation is? What do you think it is made of? Basically, it is what people think of you. It is what people say about you. It is the tales that are told of you. It is the memories you leave with others. So, if among certain people, your reputation is not very positive...they will certainly talk. Do not apologize for your past misdeeds. Pay Shyld...correct what you have done. If possible, fix what you have broken. Do not focus on people "talking crap about you." Of course they are talking crap about you – that is the bad reputation you have likely earned. Gossip is not gossip when it is true and is being passed onto to a friend as a warning. It is completely natural that people would want to warn their friends of the past misdeeds of someone they are getting to know.



HOUSE AND LAND WIGHTS

Probably for as long as man has walked the planet, man has been aware of...or believed in...unseen beings, creatures, and forces that can affect our lives for good or for ill. Human Ghosts. Spirits of our Ancestors. Land Spirits. Spirits within Trees, Fields, and Forests. And Gods. All of these are unseen, and yet...all cultures have at some point developed a religion or philosophy that acknowledges their existence, or at least their inclination to believe in that existence.

In our spiritually-decaying modern world, with its religion of science, its mathematical materialistic philosophy, those that believe in unseen beings not on the approved list of unseen beings (i.e., all-powerful God, a sacrificial man-God and his virgin mother, man-made saints, angels, devils and demons, etc.) are relegated to the fringe as delusional, wishful, or possibly crazy. So it is natural, that having grown up in that culture, cut off from nature in almost every way, that we would have no knowledge of spirits and unseen creatures off the approved list. Having grown up in that culture, it is natural that we would have a fear or bias against attempting to interact with such creatures. Even when we do make our first attempts, we feel a bit silly and self-conscious about the whole thing.

But the proof is in the pudding. Set up a shrine or little home for your House Wight. Give the wight shiny things...give it items of importance to you...share ale and beer with it...some milk, some cheese...and maybe some oats and honey. Talk to the House Wight. Ask it to help keep things happy and orderly in your house. Ask the House Wight to watch over your children. Make your House Wight feel welcome, and let it know that you want to form a relationship with him/her. If you feel a little silly doing it, work through it. Walk the walk, talk the talk, and watch what happens.

My daughter came to me and told me that she had asked our House Wight to help her find 2 hairclips she had lost. Later that day the 2 hairclips were lying out in the open in a place that she had looked for them before. She lost them again (she was 5-years-old at the time), and she wanted to pay the House Wight coins for the help he had already given, and to pay the House Wight for helping her to find the hairclips a second time. We gave the House Wight the coins she had collected, and later that night one of the hairclips was lying in the middle of the floor in a room we had been in all day. She asked why the House Wight had only found one of her hairclips, and I told her it was probably to teach her a lesson for losing them twice.

One day I was in a huge rush, and I needed a rubber band. I was in a panic. I was looking everywhere. We do not have a big bag of rubber bands lying around, so I was looking everywhere for a stray rubber band...our desk, the kitchen counter, and my shelves in the bedroom. I was rushing around, and I really needed that rubber band. I came back down the upstairs hallway, and there was a rubber band lying on the floor right beneath the House Wight's house. I picked it up, and I thanked the House Wight for finding me one so quickly. There was extra ale and some Berenjaeger for the House Wight for a week after that.

There have been other small moments of help. Little things that should be lost, that are found at just the right moment - keys, a phone, or a book that has been missing. Now the fully skeptical among us will chalk all this up to coincidence. That is how we are taught to think. The cynic would say we just overlooked the hairclips, and managed to spot them later. It is just coincidence that the only rubber band in the house showed up on the floor beneath the House Wight's home at the very moment I needed a rubber band.

But what value do we get from being cynical in this case? What is the benefit of chalking every strange event up to coincidence? What is the harm in rolling with it, and considering for a moment that there is an

unseen spirit in my house that looks after my children and lends a helping hand now and again? It costs me no money to believe this. It does no psychological harm to believe this. It does not negatively impact me or my family to believe these things.

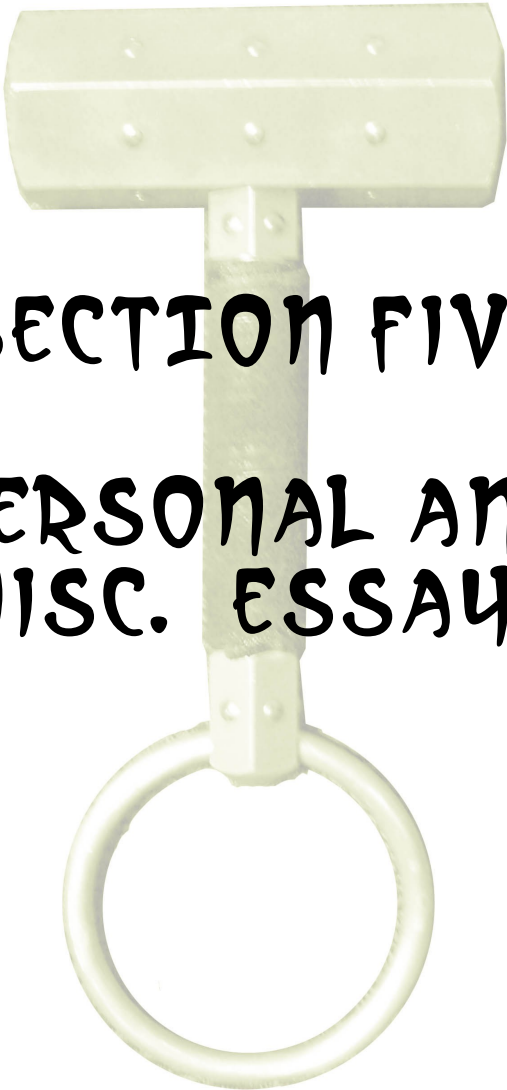
If anything, honoring my House Wight as my Ancestors did brings wonder to my life. It connects me with those Heathens that came before me. It connects me with the unseen world that science and Christian dogma have done their best to cut me off from. It provides comfort to my children. If house wights do exist...it connects me with a wealful spirit, and deepens my connection with my faith.

House wights are very important to attempt to interact with and respect. Most new Heathens tend to focus first on the Gods. Then a few months later, we tend to discover our connection with our Ancestors. These two steps are fairly easy. Reconnecting with the wights and the Vaettir of the land usually comes last...and it can be a difficult step due to our upbringing. It felt a bit silly at first. Now, I do not feel silly at all about it. Once you know your House Wight, focus on getting to know the land wights, or Vaettir, on the land where you live.

The best method for coming to know the wights is to dive in head first. Even though it may feel a bit strange or awkward at first, make a place in your home to focus on the House Wight. Give him or her gifts. Speak with the House Wight and make it feel welcome. Form that relationship, and then keep your eyes open for the small things that will start happening. Once a collection of odd but helpful events has taken place, it becomes hard to ignore the positive impact the House Wight has had on your home and family.



Our House Wight shrine. There's a hat given to me by my Godhi, a gnome, one of Elizabeth's dolls, coins, hammers, a home, a small viking ship given to me, and a Skullsplitter beer.



SECTION FIVE
PERSONAL AND
MISC. ESSAYS

THE HOUSE WIGHT AND MY DAUGHTER

My 5 year-old-daughter came to me and said that she had lost her bunny hair clips again. She informed me that she had lost them a few days before, but had asked the House Wight to help her find them. She told me that the bunny hair clips were out in plain view the day after she asked for help...but now they were lost AGAIN!

So, my daughter told me she wanted to give the House Wight coins for helping her the day before, and then give the House Wight additional coins for some additional help finding the bunny hair clips again.

So she went and found some quarters. We gifted the House Wight for its prior help and then gifted it more coins for some additional help. My daughter kept bringing this topic up with me for the rest of the day, and she kept asking if the House Wight was going to come through for her. I told her to wait and see.

Anyway, the next day she found one of the bunny hair clips out in the open, and she was pretty sure the House Wight found it for her. When she asked me why the House Wight only found one of the bunny hair clips, I told her the House Wight probably found them both, but decided to keep one of them to teach her a lesson for losing them a second time. She appeared to accept this as a reasonable answer.



Elizabeth



MY FATHER GLEN F. STINSON

My dad, Glen Stinson, was one of six kids in a single-parent (mom) household prior to World War II, during the depression. They canned food from a garden – just to be able to eat. All the kids worked as soon as someone was willing to give them some shit job – just to be able to eat. A huge treat was when their mom would bring home a single candy bar, and they would cut it into 6 pieces – one for each kid. That was something to celebrate. The few toys they had would disappear in November, and would reappear as Christmas presents with a fresh coat of paint. Dad lived in an attic room without insulation...when the wind blew, snow would blow in under the shingles and dust his bed. Dad said he would lure the big dog into bed with him to try to stay warm under numerous quilts and blankets!



USS Entemedor

Then Dad went off to World War II...at the age of 17. He served aboard a submarine. A third of our Nation's submariners were killed in the war...but luckily Dad was part of the two-thirds that came home. He had lots of funny stories about their exploits when on leave or away from combat. But he never once told me a combat story – even when I asked.



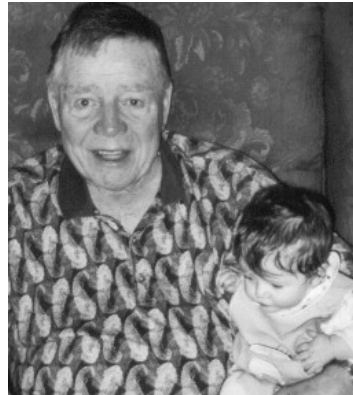
Dad and I in the Year 1999

After the war, he married. His first apartment with his wife had no refrigerator, no oven, and it was one room. They put food out on the ledge in the winter to keep it fresh, until he could save up for a small fridge. Well, you get the idea. Even a generation or two ago, our Ancestors had to really fight for their survival. We seem to have it so easy compared to them. This is exactly what they wanted. They fought to survive, but they also consciously fought to give us a better world and better lives. My dad gave me a great childhood, a great upbringing, and a great start in life. He's dead now, but his efforts are clearly evident in my life and the life of my children.

Thinking about my dad, forces me to wonder how our descendants will remember us. Will they look back on our efforts, our fights, and judge us lacking? Or will they look back with thanks and pride? The answer to that question is up to us.



Dad and Baby Nathan Back in the Year 2001



Dad and Elizabeth Shortly Before he Died



FEARING A STRAW DEATH

Our Ancestors feared dying a "straw death." The idea of living to old age, and being sick, weak, and a burden on your family and your tribe was something to avoid. From the Havamal...

**The unwise man thinks that he will live,
If from fighting he flees;
But the ails and aches of old age dog him
Though spears have spared him.**

My dad, Glen Stinson, fought in WWII. He was a successful business executive and later a successful entrepreneur. He was active his whole life, and loved to build things, work in the yard, and physically work hard. So as he got older, and was plagued by a bad heart and poor health, he was understandably upset by it.

He lived to be 77. When we were alone, he would say to me, "I hate getting old." "I am weak...I don't feel good...I can't do the things I used to be able to do." About a month before he died, he had my wife and I over for a cookout with my mom and him. He was at the old grill cooking steaks, and he started to tip over backwards. I put my hand on his back and steadied him. He thanked me, and said, "I hate this."

About a week before he died, he was passing the torch of leadership in a group that he had helped start...a group in which he was the leader. There was a big ceremony to pass the torch, and a big dinner afterwards. He and I walked to the restroom, and on the way back he had to stop every few steps and catch his breath. I walked with him holding his arm. He apologized for being so weak, and I told him he did not need to apologize, and stayed with him back to his seat. He looked at me with appreciation and love.

Two nights before he died, he and I went to pick up pizzas for a family gathering. We were waiting for the pizzas, and we ordered a couple of beers. As we drank, he told me that he felt the doctors had finally gotten his medicines right. He was feeling better than he had felt for months...maybe years. He was in great spirits, and just wanted me to know how good he felt. Little did either of us know, this was just the calm before the end.

On the day he died, he was driving somewhere with my mom and his best friend. A hubcap came off the car, and they stopped. Dad got out to go get the hubcap, my mom calling out to him that she would get it. Dad ignored her, and jogged across the road to retrieve the

hubcap, and he dropped dead. On the spot. The police came, then the ambulance people, and they were all trying CPR. He went to one hospital, and then another as they tried to revive him. But he was gone.

Dad feared being a burden. He feared being bed-ridden, or incapacitated. He feared that he would linger...sick, tired, and a shadow of the man he had been. He felt weak as it was, and he feared a straw death. He was not a man that feared anything else, but he feared this one thing.

I am absolutely certain he's glad he died without becoming a burden on anyone.



Dad with Nathan



GREAT-GRANDPA LUDWIG

Ludwig Schweiger was my Great Grandfather's name. He was German and he was a furniture-maker, in an era when they made furniture by hand. He came to the United States from Hungary prior to World War I...so he was not in Europe during either of the two World Wars.

His wife was Rose, and he had two daughters, Elizabeth and Kaye. Elizabeth was my mother's mother. My Uncle Rick's middle name was "Lewis," an Americanized version of the name "Ludwig." But my mom wanted to give me Ludwig's real name for my middle name. So I was named Mark Ludwig Stinson.

Ludwig died before I was born, so I did not know him in life...and he did not know me. But I did hear stories about him. As Ludwig got older, he went bald on top...and he kept his hair very short. When I started to lose my hair, I chose to cut my hair very short just like Ludwig appears in all of the photos I have of him. In the photos, he appears to have a big barrel chest, and while he was not very tall, he appears to be a strong man.

He tended to spell everything in English exactly as it sounded and he seemed to enjoy saying everything as it was spelled. So when he said the word "sword" for instance, he pronounced it with the "sw" sound. People would point his mispronunciations out to him, and he would point out with a smile that he was simply saying the words as they were spelled.

When he first got to the United States and took a job in a furniture factory, he knew absolutely no English at all. So an American co-worker told him that the proper way to address you boss was to say, "Good Morning, you Son of a Bitch." So he did as he was advised, and the boss of course went off the handle. Luckily the boss quickly figured out that my Great Grandfather had no idea what he had said, and all was fine.

I have Ludwig's upholstery hammer, and I keep it in with some of my family heirlooms. I did not know Ludwig in life, but I carry his name and I continue his family. I named my youngest son, Joshua Ludwig Stinson after his Great Great Grandfather...and I hope that at least one of my children carries on this tradition when they name their children.

Hail Ludwig!



WHEN I WAS A STREET COP

A close friend of mine asked me the following question, and answering the question brought up some memories for me.

Why is it that many police officers are attracted to the religion, or way-of-life, of Heathenry?

I think police officers are attracted to Heathenry for some of the same reasons as people in prison are attracted to Heathenry. Being a police officer involves having a warrior mentality at times. There are people who would like to kill you, people who try to kill you, and you must fight them. I have had assignments at the police department where I was in about 3 to 8 fights every work week. Often at least one fight or physical struggle a night.

Police officers wear bullet-proof vests, carry guns, and there is the constant threat of getting shot, hit by cars, or getting in deadly car wrecks. There is a wall at every police station with photos of the fallen heroes. Men that have given their lives – and cut short their time on earth with their wife and children – to serve their community. Not every police officer is a warrior, or has a warrior mentality. But when you are young, and working an inner-city station...you tend to think that way.

When I was working the inner-city, back before I was promoted, I would load up my patrol car with gear and then stop for a moment in the parking lot. I would take a deep breath. I would think of my life, my loved ones, the place where I lived, my parents, and I would say goodbye to all these things. I would say to myself, "I may not see any of those people or those things again...but I will sell my life dearly." I would think about protecting the good people living in our patrol area. Especially children. Those people needed protecting, and if I died protecting them and arresting bad guys, then I was O.K. with that. This whole thought process would make me completely calm, and then I would pull out of the parking lot and begin work without fear.

I used to look at the wall of fallen police officers down at the police academy, and I would read the small narratives under each picture. There would be included there a special note about whether the dead officer had been able to return fire on his assailants or not. Also a special note about whether he had killed or injured any of his assailants or not.

I would hope that if my photo was on that wall someday, it would say

that I had killed or injured those that had taken my life. You did not want to die with your gun in your holster or without fighting back with everything you had. I know I was not unique in thinking that way, for we would all talk about it.

It is important to understand, police officers are taught to think differently than regular people, and their job continues to shape their thinking to be different than regular people. In many ways, that way of thinking is much more geared towards Heathenry than towards the "forgiveness," "love thine enemy," and "turn the other cheek" mentality of Christianity. That is just my opinion – but the New Testament is really not focused on getting in brawls, "selling your life dearly," and making sure you kill the people who intend to kill you.



Valfather Odin



ELIZABETH GETTING TO KNOW HER GRANDFATHER

When my daughter Elizabeth was six-year-old, she came to me and said she wanted to see photographs of my father, Glen Stinson. She knew that he died when she was not-yet-two-years-old, and she did not remember him. I have talked about him a lot, and she's seen many photos of him, but she wanted to see them again – and more of them.

So we got out the photo albums, and I showed her more pictures of Dad. She really enjoyed seeing him, and I pointed out how he and I look alike, and how we do not look alike. And I pointed out to her that she has his (and my) smile and his (and my) nose, to some degree. We talked about Dad's sense of humor, and how strong and kind to me he was.

She wanted to see a photo of my Dad holding her. She had seen lots of photos of Dad holding our oldest son, Nathan...and she was insistent that I find a photo of Dad holding her. So we looked and looked. It took awhile but we found several. One of him holding her as a new-born, one of him holding her and looking right into her face, and one of her crying in his lap and him making the same face as her pretending to be crying as well. She loved the photos.

I did not tell her, but the photo of him pretending to be crying just like her was taken just two days before he died.

Elizabeth had tears in her eyes, and she said, "Nathan was lucky...because he remembers your Dad. I don't remember him and he's gone." So I assured her that while he was dead, he was absolutely not gone. I told her that he watches her all the time...and that I know he is very proud of her. She said, "Oh yeah, he's up in heaven and can watch us."

I said, "No...he's right here with us. He's in this room right now watching us look at these photos. He's here right now seeing the tears in your eyes. He was at your big dance recital. He watches you play with your little brother and teach your little brother things. He watches over you at night, to ensure you are safe. Dad absolutely adored you and Nathan, and I am sure that he is around you almost all the time. He did not get to meet Joshua when he was alive, but I am sure he watches Joshua just as much as he watches you guys."

Elizabeth asked where he was in the room. I said, "He's probably right next to you...right there on the couch looking over your shoulder at the photos. Or he's sitting over in that chair, watching the two of us talk about him. But he's right here...and he's not going away ever."

I told her that Dad visits me in dreams, and that when she goes to bed that night, she should think of him and ask him to visit her. I also told her that she could talk to him whenever she wanted to and that he would listen, and maybe someday when she really needed it, he might just answer.

I went to work that night, and Jennifer told me later that Elizabeth was sitting in a nearby chair an hour or two after I left, and that she also told Jennifer that Nathan was lucky, because he remembered dad. She had tears in her eyes again.

Well the next day, Elizabeth came to me and told me that she had done what I said, and that she had had a dream about Dad. I had been in the dream as well. She couldn't remember what happened in the dream, but she was very excited that she had dreamed of him. She came to me the next day was well, and said that she had dreamed of him a second time.

I think of my three children, Elizabeth is the one that most connects most with the unseen. She seems to have a real connection with our House Wight, one that has developed independently of me. She does things with the House Wight that I do not even hear about until weeks later and she seems to be developing a strong connection with my father. I could not be prouder of her..



A CONVERSATION WITH FRIGGA

I think male Asatruers tend to talk a lot to Odin, Thor, Tyr, Freyr, and the other male Gods. They are warlike, wise, and perhaps they appeal to us because they are strong, well defined, and they are the focus of many of the stories in the Lore. We tend to honor them more, and not pay enough attention to the Asyniur.

But, those of you with families, wives, and children...I would

encourage you to begin talking with Frigga...and offering her gifts. Here is a Goddess who shares Hlidskjalf, Odin's high seat with her husband. She has the gift of prophecy, and yet carefully protects this knowledge. In a battle of wits, she can go toe-to-toe with Odin, and in at least one story from the Lore she comes out on top.

In this day and age of "disposable marriages" and "temporary families," a Heathen husband should turn to Frigga for guidance. Gift Frigga, and ask her to watch over your family. Promise Frigga you will do everything in your power to maintain the health of your marriage, and even to improve it. Then follow through on this commitment.

Tell Frigg why your family and your marriage are important to you. Tell her that you will sacrifice much to maintain this treasured relationship in your life, and then personally sacrifice whatever it takes to make that marriage and family work. If you are serious, and you are working hard to be a good husband and father, Frigg will see that you are Tru...



Frigga



HOW CAN WE BE 100% SURE HEATHENRY IS REAL?

This essay is for those of you that are or were agnostic or atheist at some point. Or for those of you that sometimes struggle with the questions, "How REAL is all of this?" "How REAL are the Gods?" "How do we know that Heathenry isn't just worn-out mythology?" "How can I be 100% I am not fooling myself?"

I was agnostic for probably 25 or 26 years before finding Heathenry. I thought there might be a God or Gods, but that it was impossible for anyone to KNOW if God or Gods were really there? How would I know what religion was "right?" How could I, as a fleshy organism on a big ball of dirt in space, ever be confident that how I viewed the divine, would be the correct way to view the divine?

I think everyone struggles with these sorts of doubts at some point. Just how literally are we to take the myths? Is Thor really some guy with a big red beard and a hammer battling giants? Is Odin really a one-eyed God with many names who walks the earth and interacts with mortal men? How literally are we supposed to take the Gods and the stories of the Gods? How REAL is Heathenry and the Heathen world-view?

Science has its appeal. We are taught science from an early age. Science is a cold, hard attempt to factually explain the world, and how things work and interact. It is based on observations, experiments, and things we have proven...or at least gone a long way towards proving. But science is soulless. It is math, and measurements, and charts and tables. We see the factual truth in science, but for most of us it does not sing to our souls or inspire us to live our lives boldly.

Here's a few thoughts on these doubts, and some of my own views on the reality of the Gods and Goddesses, and Heathenry in general.

1. Heathenry is multi-faceted and complex. It is about culture and a way of life, as much as it is about the myths and Gods. I am not suggesting it is the best route to go, but there is such a thing as "atheist Heathens." They love and follow the culture and traditions, out of a connection and loyalty to their Ancestors, but they do not view the Gods as necessarily "real." Some of these "atheist Heathens" view the Gods as clever stories. Some of them view the Gods as Jungian Archetypes...more of a psychological approach. The point of

what I am saying, is that there are many ways of viewing and envisioning the Gods, and taking them in a completely literal sense is not required to live as a Heathen.

2. I think the Gods are a complex issue...and beyond our comprehension, in a sense. They are many things, not just one thing. At times they are literal. At times they are reflected or manifested in nature, weather, and the world around us. Sometimes they are something within our soul. Trying to pin them down to one thing, one view, and one perspective will make you nuts. The best way to look at them is with an unfocused eye, and realize that to truly understand the Gods, one has to admit that perhaps it is impossible to fully understand them.

3. I see the Gods as our Elder Kin. For me, they are directly tied to our Folk Soul. Our Folk Soul originated from them and at the same time, they were born from our Folk Soul. We are reflections of them, and they are reflected in us.

4. At the same time, there are times I do see them in a very literal sense. I believe the Gods are real and distinct beings, with personalities, and likes and dislikes, and they do truly exist. I think at times they interact with us, and possibly assist us. I think there is a connection made with them when we honor them and gift them. I feel Thor did intercede and fought the thurse (manifested as a tornado) that attempted to destroy my neighborhood in 2008.



Asa-Thor

There was a realization that broke my 25 years of agnostic world-view a little over a year ago. I realized that I may never KNOW that my specific beliefs or view of the divine is "correct" or Truth (with a capital "T"). But when I found Heathenry it spoke to me. It felt right. It allowed a lot of pieces in my life to fall into place. I spoke to Thor, and it felt to me like someone was listening. So here's the realization:

Since we can never KNOW Truth, or be sure of which version of reality is the correct version, there is great value in choosing a reality that feels right and then rolling with it.

If you find that Heathenry is the reality that works for you, and sings to your soul. If it is where you feel right, and where you feel comfortable, then there is no harm in just letting go and rolling with it.

I feel Heathenry is Truth. I have come to see it as the explanation of how to live and what life should mean that works best for me. So I roll with it. I have reaped the benefits of honoring my Gods and Ancestors, respecting the Vaettir, tending to my Wyrð, and making my Luck.

If it ends up I am somehow "wrong" in the cosmic sense, and the whole thing is actually nonsense-mumbo-jumbo, it will not really matter. I will have followed my heart and followed my soul, and I will have lived a rich and meaningful life. I will have followed the ways of my Ancestors, and passed on a way of life to my descendants that will sing to their souls as well.



Forn Halr - "The Old Man"





SECTION SIX
ICELAND TRIP
JOURNAL

THE APRIL 2009 JOURNEY TO ICELAND

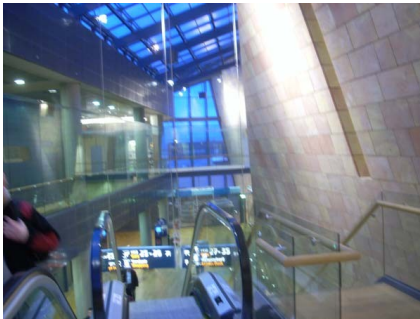
OK, I brought a European power-adaptor with me to Iceland, so that I could use my laptop, and share photos from Iceland everyday that I was in Iceland. But, it basically melted down, and so I had no juice! I ended up typing my first journal entries on this highly restricted web-only computer at our hotel. The computer allowed me to type all that I wanted, but I still couldn't share photos. I eventually found and bought a new adapter and we were in business.



I wrote the entire journal in bullet-points, due to time constraints, but I think this format works well for what I wanted to convey.



DAY ZERO



► Thursday, April 2nd, my wife Jennifer dropped us off at the airport in Kansas City. We were supposed to fly to Milwaukee, then Boston, then Iceland...but the flight was delayed. They told us that we might not make it to our connecting flight, or our luggage might not make it to Iceland. But we trusted our Luck, and in Milwaukee the airline switched our plane...and we made

it to Iceland with our luggage right on time. (6:20 AM)



DAY ONE IN ICELAND

► At the airport we bought some coffee and a snack, and got into a long conversation with some bored cab-drivers waiting for their next customer. They told us great places to go, restaurants to check out, and told us all about the geography of Iceland. It turned out the North is covered in snow and frozen this week, so they advised us to stay away from there. Very nice guys.



► We rented a car, and drove to Reykjavik...and walked around downtown. All the shops were still closed, because we were there so early. We went to the Visitor's Center, found out where all the best museums were, and found out where the restaurants were that the cab drivers had recommended. A couple of shops opened, and we shopped a bit.

► We went to a restaurant right on the ocean called the Sea Baron. We bought the only hot food they were offering, Lobster Soup, with lots of bread and wonderful Icelandic butter. We also tried dried seaweed, haddock chips (dried chips made from Haddock), and we tried dried fish with butter spread on it. The lady said it was dried 'Cat Fish,' but we think maybe this was an error in translation. The dried fish was really tough, but with butter on it, it was amazingly good. I'd say better than beef jerky.

► We stayed in a suburb of Reykjavik, in the Viking Hotel. The room had a big bed and a day bed, but the room was very very small. The bathwater was geothermal, so it smelled of sulphur, but you never run out of hot water.

► Next we went to "the Pearl," which is a huge dome complex build on top of 6 hot water tanks that help provide hot geothermal water to Reykjavik. They have a wax museum there that tells the



story of the settlement of Iceland, the conversion to Christianity, and more. It was very informative, and the wax figures were very realistic.

► There is an observation tower on the Pearl, that overlooks all of Reykjavik, and the wind was blowing 40 to 50 mph up there. Beautiful view, but hard to take pictures, because the wind kept knocking us over!



► Next we went grocery shopping. Bought some of that Icelandic butter and some German bread. We also bought skyr, both in drink form and congealed. It is very similar to yogurt, except its cultured with the same stuff they culture sour-dough bread with. It is flavored, and very good. We also bought candy. They have some weird candies over here, and they love to combine chocolate and black liquorice. It is not bad combined, I just never thought of it.

► We ate back at the hotel, and fell asleep.



DAY TWO IN ICELAND



► We woke up, got ready, and ate breakfast here at the hotel. Breakfast was bread, cheese, meat, eggs, Icelandic butter, skyr, and other stuff. Pretty good.

► Next, we went shopping. We went to several book stores, a store that sells Icelandic wool and other stuff. We ate Pizza for lunch, and then...

► We went to the Asatru meeting in downtown Reykjavik. The Asatru Society has its own temporary headquarters (while they wait to build their Hof down by the ocean), and we met 5 Asatruar at the

meeting. The leader for the day appeared to be a Godhi named Johanna Hardardottir, who was a very nice lady. She invited us to her home on Sunday, showing great Heathen hospitality.



► The meeting was 2 hours long, and it was basically a long discussion of Asatru in our two countries, some of our practices, plans, and the status of our respective groups. It was very interesting, and a very valuable experience. Very enjoyable as well.

► We gave their group 5 English-language books they had not seen before. A book on Frey, one on Freyja, Days in Midgard, Elves, Wights, and Trolls, and the Runestone #1 (the AFA Journal), as gifts from Jotun's Bane Kindred for their library. They wrote our kindred's name in the front cover of each book, and two of them immediately borrowed books to take home with them and read. They had not seen any of the 5 books we gave them.

► We also passed onto them gifts from American Kari Tauring...both a music CD and a book on runes Kari had co-written. They immediately popped the CD in and began playing the music. They really liked it, and said they would play it before a future blot.



► At the end of the meeting, one of the members, Valdimar Melrakki Arnason, offered to drive us to see their Heathen cemetery. We took him up on this wonderful offer of hospitality, and I have to admit, he drove like a madman! The Heathen

cemetery was next to a Christian cemetery, and had only a few graves in it. There was a tree at its center, with rocks surrounding it, making the large shape of a ship.

► After the cemetery, Valdimar took us to try some of the traditional food...a cooked sheep's head. We bought it at a restaurant in a large bus station. It was actually the right side of the sheep's head...with the ear, eye, skin, teeth, tongue, and everything. We ate the tongue first. It was very good actually.



Then Valdimar cut out the eye, and everything around it, and I ate that. The thought of it was pretty hard to deal with, but it tasted great. Really great. Sort of very rich, and very creamy at the same time. We then ate some of the skin from the face, including the nostril. The skin was very fatty tasting, but good. Will ate the meat off the back of the sheep's head, which he reported to be pretty good. I then ate the ear, which was crunchy, but good. Will and I agree, that the strangest thing about eating the sheep's head was that every part you ate had a different flavor. I would eat another one, to tell you the truth.



► After the sheep's head, Valdimar offered to drive us to see Geysir and Strokkur...two Geysers out in the country. He said they were about an hour away, and he was glad to drive us. We drove through snow and ice, rain and dry spots...all in about an hour-and-a-half. Strokkur erupted for us several times in the 15 minutes or so we were there. Geysir no longer erupts on its own, due to tampering by mankind years and years ago. We were able to stand amazing close to Strokkur as it went off, and it was amazing.



► After the Geysers, Valdimar offered to drive us to nearby Gullfoss Falls. His hospitality was unending, and we really appreciated it. 'Gullfoss' means 'Gold Falls.' We had to walk on a trail to get to Gullfoss, but it was well worth it. It is not a very high waterfall, it is actually several falls in short order. The first drops about 50 feet, and the next about 20, and the next we could not tell, because it drops into a huge crevice. A HUGE amount of water is coursing over these falls, and we were able to stand right next to, and over the falls in several places. Mist was everywhere in the air, and the roar of the Falls was deafening.



► Valdimar drove us back from these sightseeing excursions, and we were able to talk a lot about where he grew up (as far North in Iceland as you can go), and about his family, his Asatru beliefs, and what Icelandic Asatru is all about. Great conversations, and I can't think of a better way to spend the evening.



► Back at Reykyavic, Valdimar dropped us off, and offered to help me learn Icelandic, if I was interested. We gifted Valdimar a book by H.R. Ellis Davidson, and a round wooden plaque I had wood-burned with a Valknut, and stained.

► Will and I found a 24-hour grocery store, which I think was called Hauerbuak...or something like that. We bought some food, and headed back for the hotel in the dark, and in the rain.

► Back at the hotel, Will and I ate, and then took turns on the hotel computer. I am going to write some postcards before I go to bed...



DAY 3 IN ICELAND

► We woke up, and got an early start towards Johanna's home...a godhi we had met at the Asatru Society meeting on Saturday, and who had invited us to her home. We checked out of the Viking Hotel and headed north out of Reykjavik in our Stroda Fabia. The scenery was amazing, and we took a lot of photos of mountains...etc.



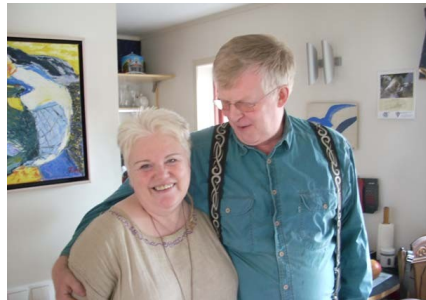
► To get to Johanna's home, we had to travel through a 6 km tunnel under the fjord. The tunnel was blasted, rather than drilled...giving it a unique craggy look on the inside. The tunnel descended steeply, and then ascended steeply to the other side. It was full of car fumes! You could see and smell the smog in the tunnel.

► We had trouble finding Johanna's home, because it is out in the country...and so we ended up at the wrong house. A very elderly lady who spoke no English shoo'ed us politely away, and we kept looking.

► We found Johanna's house, and we knew it was hers immediately. There were black raven cutout on the roof of her garage, and a special breed of Icelandic chickens running about. The house was beautiful, and it sat about 150 meters from the shore of the fjord. There were mountains on the other side of the water, and the view was amazing.

► Johanna invited us in, and we met her husband. First, she showed us some of the horns that she decorates. She also carves beautiful wooden statues of the Gods. We were able to compare oath rings with her. She was very gracious, and friendly.

► Will and I sat down with Johanna and her husband in their dining area, and ate Lummurs (little sweet pancakes sprinkled with sugar) she had made for us, drank coffee and tea, and snacked on crackers, Icelandic butter, and tuna salad she had made. The Lummurs were addictive, and Johanna's tuna salad had eggs in it...and it was amazing.





► At the dining table we discussed Asatru in Iceland, Asatru in the United States, our kindred, and a wide variety of topics. Johanna speaks English nearly flawlessly, and she is joyful and laughs a lot. We really enjoyed this time with her and her husband.

► Johanna is a free-lance writer, raises the special Icelandic chickens, and breeds sheepdogs. Several times the sheepdogs came into the home, and they were a joy. They were usually damp from playing in the fjord, but that just made the whole encounter more entertaining.



► Johanna walked us down by the fjord to where she has built a Hof. It consists of a ring of earth, with four gaps for entering, and a large central space for gathering. There is a metal fire bowl in the center of the space, sitting atop stones. The ring of earth is covered in sod...and the whole structure is very impressive and peaceful once you enter it. In the United States we would likely call this a "Ve," since it is outdoors, but the time and effort that went into the construction of this area was amazing.



► Johanna quietly prayed to Thor and the old Gods when we entered the Hof, and told us of the weddings that have been held there...and the many gatherings of Heathens. Once they fit 70 Heathens within the confines of the Hof.



► I gave to Johanna a large carved wooden hammer on a necklace, with the handle wrapped in leather. It is a hammer necklace I made for myself, and had joked I would never give away. But, the moment was right...and I knew that Johanna was meant to have that hammer. The gift was very well received, and Johanna said it was the best gift she had ever received within her Hof.



► Will gave Johanna a huge bag of cashews, which she loved. Johanna gave us wood, that was wood-burned with Icelandic symbols by her. They were beautiful, and I picked one that had the Helm of Awe on it. I kept that in my pocket the rest of the trip.

► Johanna told us we needed to try rotten shark. On their back porch, hanging from the light there, was a large chunk of fermented shark meat, with a sheet of plastic covering it to protect it from the rain and snow. Johanna retrieved a knife, and sliced Will and I off some chunks of the meat. It smelled horrible...like ammonia...and it looked a little like a huge piece of raw chicken...with a yellow rind on it. The taste is indescribable...so I will not even try. It was very strong, and I asked for 2nds and then 3rds. I actually sort of enjoyed the strong taste. Will did not like it. I am fairly sure most people would not like it.



► The shark meat is rotten, because you can't eat it fresh. There are poisons in the meat that will kill you if you eat it fresh. So the shark meat is soaked in special solutions, and left to sit for months. Then it is hung in an open shed for months. After this process, the poisons are gone...and you can eat it...but it is a unique flavor to say the least.

► Johanna offered to take us to the Settlement Center in Borgarnes...and we followed her the 20 minutes to get there. There are two 30-minute exhibits at the center...one on the settlement of Iceland and the other all about Egil's Saga. Both have amazing visual displays, and you wear headphones and it is an audio tour. We learned a lot at the Settlement center.

► Johanna had coffee with us between exhibits, and we talked some more about Iceland...and future plans for bringing more kindred members and our families over to visit. We talked about individual kindred members, and our loved ones with Johanna as well. She was an amazingly generous woman – and an excellent host. We hope we get to meet her again.



► After Johanna had returned home, and we were done with the exhibits (including a harsh but humorous lesson by the lady at the Settlement Center about how "Egil" is actually pronounced, Will and I headed north from Borgarnes...through the town of Bifrost, towards the hotel Johanna had suggested to us.

► It was getting late, but prior to reaching the hotel, Will and I spotted a huge volcanic cone near the road. So we stopped and decided to climb it. It was called Grabrok. We climbed up the side of it, and into the cone. I ran down into the center and picked up a rock from down there. Then Will and I climbed to the very top of the cone edge, so we could get a view of the surrounding countryside...and down into the cone from above. It was beautiful.



► On the climb down, we spotted some old stone walls, and

investigated them. Later we found out that the stone walls were used to sort the sheep. In the summer sheep are allowed to wander and graze. In the Fall, the sheep are all gathered up...and sorted by special cuts and marks on their ears...and each owner takes their own sheep home.

► We arrived at the hotel at around 9:30 PM. It was in the middle of nowhere, but it appeared to be newly built or remodeled. The young lady at the hotel showed us to our rooms, and offered to bring sandwiches and french fries up to us. We ate, and then we went to the outdoor hottub at the hotel. It was probably 40 degrees out...so it was a bit odd being in a hottub outside.

► By the time we went to sleep on Day 3, we were exhausted...

DAY 4 IN ICELAND

► Will and I slept late, and then went downstairs for breakfast at the hotel. We were the only guests at the hotel...so it was just us in the dining room. It was the typical Icelandic Hotel breakfast of breads, meats, cheese, cereals, Icelandic butter, orange juice, apple juice, etc...

► We then headed out for Thingvellir. We decided to take a short-cut, and take a smaller road to get there the back-way. Highway 52 on the map. Single digit highways in Iceland are the best, and well maintained. Two digit highways are a little rougher, and not as well maintained. Highways with an "F" are very rough, and not maintained hardly at all. We were instructed by the car rental company to not drive on "F" highways at all...as insurance will not cover us on "F" highways. So, Highway 52 was a little bit of a risk, but well within our limitations.



► We saw an orange sign when we turned onto Highway 52, but it went by so fast that we couldn't read it. It said something about "25

kilometers," but we did not realize that it said that Highway 52 was "Impassible in 25 kilometers."

► Highway 52 was horrible. It went from paved, to tar, to volcanic gravel over about 10 kilometers...and was volcanic gravel the rest of the way. There were little farms and "summer houses" along the way...many one-lane bridges and blind hills on the single-lane gravel road. After about 24 kilometers, we came across another "Impassible" sign, but this time we actually read it.



We stopped, and then we decided to drive forward and see if it was REALLY "impassible" or just SORT OF "impassible." Stupid Americans.

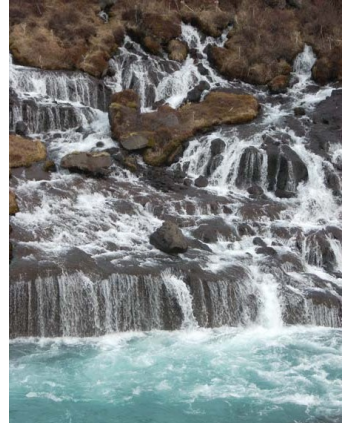
► The road got worse, but we were still making good headway. We were slowing climbing up a steep valley between mountains. There was snow on the ground in many places. The wind was whipping, and the scenery was like nothing I've ever seen. And that is when we came to the "Impassible" spot. LOL. When we came to the top of the ridge, and reached the place where we would begin to descend, we found that the east side of the mountain was completely covered in snow and ice. The road was just gone. Our Stroda Fabia was going no further.



► We climbed out of the car, and explored the top of the ridge a little bit, taking photos...and taking in the view of the valleys beyond the ridge. It was beautiful, and the wind was just howling past us. After a bit, we headed back down Highway 52, the way we had come...and we realized we would not be making it to Thingvellir that day.

► We changed our plans for the day, and decided to go to Hraunfossar and Barnafoss...a waterfall area that Johanna had recommended we must visit. This area is past Reykholt...where Snorri Sturluson lived and where he was killed. We arrived at Hraunfossar, and were the only ones there. It is good to visit Iceland outside the "tourist season."

► Hraunfossar is in the valley above Reykholt, and is caused by a huge lava flow field that covers the whole valley floor. The water seeps into the volcanic rock, and then comes out at Hraunfossar, causing dozens of waterfalls to pour into the river there. It is loud, and beautiful.



► We crossed a bridge and climbed up on the rocks, and got a bird's eye view on the falls. We heard and saw Barnafoss – a raging gorge – with a powerful coursing series of connected waterfalls shooting through the rocks. It was simply amazing.

► We climbed down a cliff, onto the huge rocks along the course of Barnafoss...and had to climb from boulder to boulder...and up and down several rocky cliffs. But in doing so, we were able to really experience the power of Barnafoss. If you fell into the river, at any point...Barnafoss would completely smash you and tear you apart. It is immensely powerful.



► At one point, I crawled down a cliff, and stood on some rocks above part of Barnafoss. The mist from the water was falling on

me...and it was so loud, I could not hear. If ever I encountered a water Vaettir face to face, it was at that moment. You could just feel the power and spirit of Barnafoss raging through the rocks. I spoke to the Vaettir and paid my respects – and gave respect from our kindred.

► Will and I climbed down to another location near Barnafoss, and watched it blasting by us. Mist was everywhere in the air, and occasionally, the water would rush up onto the rocks and splash us there. I really did not want to leave Barnafoss...



► On the way out, we read that Barnafoss takes its name from two children's lives folklore tells us it took. The folklore says that there was once a stone bridge over Barnafoss, and that two children were crossing the bridge and disappeared into the falls. The mother of the children was so distraught, that she had the stone bridge destroyed so that Barnafoss could take no more lives. "Barn" means child and "foss" means waterfall, and thus the name of the falls.

► Next we headed back to Reykholt, to see Snorri's pool and the museum dedicated to Snori Sturluson, the author of the Prose Edda. We parked near a small "forest" of trees. Iceland has very few trees, so this cluster of trees really did look like a Forest. The stand of trees was a gift from the King of Norway a couple of decades ago.



► We found a tall statue of Snorri, standing in front of a center dedicated to the study of medieval texts. We took photos of the statue, and then went behind the center to Snorri's Pool. Snorri's Pool is a round pool of water, lined with stone...the pool is fed from a nearby hot spring. The Pool has been there (in various states of repair) since Snorri's time. Snorri used to sit in this pool. It was amazing standing next to the pool, where Snorri once relaxed.



► There is a tunnel entrance near the pool, that once led to the basement of one of the buildings on Snorri's farm. The tunnel is covered with a small wooden building to protect it for further archeological work. But at one time, you could leave the pool, enter the tunnel, and walk up stairs into one of Snorri's buildings.

► Over the history of the location, many buildings have been built there. So, much of the archeological information has been lost...or destroyed over time. But they do know where Snorri's farm was located, and where some of the buildings were located. Snorri was killed by soldiers sent to kill him by the King of Norway. It is said he heard the coming in the night and ran to the basement of one of his buildings. It was there that the soldiers found him and cut him down.



► We then explored the old cemetery there in Reykholt. They believe that Snorri was buried there...but they do not know where. There was a huge hole in the ground, where an archeological dig was going on regarding an ancient church that stood on the grounds. We then made our way over to the Snorrastofa Cultural Center, to view the exhibitions regarding

Snorri, medieval texts, life in medieval times, etc.

► There were three exhibits at Snorrstofa. One on the archeology at the site, one on Snorri's life and how people lived during Snorri's time, and another on the lives of women at the time of Snorri. We learned a lot at the exhibits...too much to recount here.

► The lady running the center asked us if we wanted to see the new church, that was attached to the cultural center. Both Will and I did not want to visit the Christian Church, but when we politely said no, she said, "You simply must see the church." We said no again, but she basically dragged us upstairs to see the new church. She was a nice lady, and she was very proud of the new church. LOL.



► The lady at the cultural center let us use the phone to call Jonina, the Godhi of West Iceland. We arranged to meet her at Borgarnes, so that we could follow her to her nearby home.

► Jonina led us to her house by the Fjord. It was a beautiful house, that Jonina and her husband are still finishing the inside of. It is very close to the Fjord, and surrounded by low birch trees. It has these large windows on three sides of the living room/dining area...giving this 270 degree view of the shore of the Fjord.

► Jonina made us tea from Icelandic plants she had gathered herself by hand, and the tea was great. I drank it first with honey, and then without...and it was great both ways.

► We talked with Jonina about our kindred, Heathenry in the United States, Asatru in Iceland, and the details of our religious practice. Jonina's husband arrived home, and joined in on the conversation. He had a dry wit, and I enjoyed his humor quite a bit. Jonina was incredibly smart and knowledgeable...and a joy to speak with.



► Jonina and her husband made us dinner, which was something we were not expecting at all. It was a cream-based soup, two kinds of bread with Icelandic butter or "brown cheese spread" to put on it, and smoked Trout.



► After dinner we talked with Jonina and her husband about Thingvellir, the structure of Asatru in Iceland, and we looked over the Asatru Society's website, which Jonina's husband built...with Jonina's help. We looked at photos on their site. We then showed them the

heathengods.com website, and spoke with them about each member of our kindred...showing them photos from an oathing at Gaea Retreat.

► This whole time it was raining sideways, and then snowing. Jonina told us, "If you don't like the weather in Iceland, just wait 5 minutes it will change." We found this funny, because that is a something we say in Kansas City as well.

► I gave Jonina a triangle-shaped wooden box, that I had wood-burnt a Valknut and runes on, and stained. She was very appreciative of the gift. She gave us a CD of the Eddas by Sequentia and two "norse-themed" decks of cards. We



listened to that CD the rest of the trip in our car, and the decks of cards were beautiful. We will share these gifts with the kindred when we return to the United States.

▶ Jonina spent time writing down three places we might be able to find "turtle broaches" here in Iceland. Something we greatly appreciated.

▶ At the end of the evening, Jonina and her husband suggested we stay at a hotel just down the road from them...and we said our goodbyes.



▶ We checked into the hotel around 9:00 PM, and asked if they were still serving food. The gentleman running the place, cooked us up two hamburgers and fries (even though I suspect the kitchen was supposed to be closed). After that...we went to the room, and were asleep in a very short amount of time.

DAY 5 IN ICELAND

▶ We woke up late again (its hard to get up at 8 AM, because back in Kansas City...that is actually 3 AM), and ate breakfast at the hotel near Borgarnes. It was the same breakfast all the hotels in Iceland seem to server....bread, meat, cheese, cereal, skyr, etc...

▶ We drove south from Borgarnes, and back through the 6 km tunnel under the Fjord. We stopped at a large home, that was an earth contact home...and trespassed a bit...taking photos. It was a very unique home...and worth the stop.

▶ We set our sites on finding a voltage converter, so that we could use my laptop to talk to family and friends...and begin writing down what we have been seeing and doing. We found this electronics store that put Radio Shack to shame. My computer was back in business!

▶ We stopped at the famous "Sun Voyager" sculpture, and took photos of it. It really is an amazing scupture. Wedged in the rocks below the sculpture platform, Will found a piece of wood that he kept.



► We went to a post office in downtown Reykjavik, and mailed our postcards home. I mailed a postcard to Jen and each of my three kids, Nathan, Elizabeth, and Joshua.

► Next we went to the National Museum of Iceland. It was pretty incredible. We were there for hours. There were artifacts from the Settlement era, the Commonwealth era, and beyond. We saw swords, jewelry (turtle broaches), carved horns, axes, tafl pieces, etc. There was also a lot of "Christian" stuff there, and Will and I actually entered a mock-church in the museum without bursting into flames. LOL. There was a whole room dedicated to child-labor in Iceland. It was a very complex exhibit on the subject, and took both sides of the issue. Child-labor as exploitive and child-labor as a father sharing with his son his work and his trade – and passing on traditions. We probably would have stayed at the museum longer, but they closed the place on us!



► Next, we went to the Visitor's Center in Reykjavik (a great resource if you ever come here), and they helped us find a hotel with Wi-Fi that was reasonably priced. That was not the first time the Visitor's Center helped us out...but it is the first time I've mentioned it in these notes.

► On the way to our car, we saw a hot dog stand with a huge line out in front. We had noticed that everytime we went by this place, there was a line of people waiting for a hot dog. So we figured these must be the best hot dogs in the world. So we ordered a couple. They were NOT the best hotdogs in the world. While we were at the stand, a little girl came up to me, and was looking at the fact I was wearing shorts...and she asked me something in Icelandic. Her father told me that she asked, "Aren't you cold?"



► We drove to the hotel that we had arranged in Mosfellbaer...and checked in. It is a brand-new hotel, with wi-fi in every room, and it was the cheapest hotel we had stayed in so far. We checked out a local handicrafts store, but it was closed...as was a knifemaker's store. We then got some ice cream, and drove around Mosfellbaer, checking out the sites.

► Back at the hotel, we finally had a computer with access to the internet...so we spent most of the evening talking with family and friends back home, using Skype. We moved all of our photos to the computer. At that time, we had over 1000 photos, and over 30 videos. I then began catching up on these logs of our days in Iceland.



DAY 6 IN ICELAND

► Will and I went to a wonderful bakery in Mosfellbaer, near our hotel. I had donuts and a small sandwich on some great bread. Will had a sugary peanut cake and a chocolate muffin. It was a great bakery, and we resolved to return there for breakfast on Day 7 as well.

► Next we went to a big grocery store...very similar to one of our grocery stores in the United States. We went to the bank, and converted a few more dollars to kronas.

► We went to a liquor store. We were headed to Thingvellir, and we

needed some mead or ale for our horns...when we raised horns at Thingvellir. We found an organic English Ale called Honey Dew. We did not have a cooler, so I scooped up some snow from the ground and put it in the plastic bag with the bottles of beer.

► Then we headed for a shopping area nearby. First, we went to a handicraft store, with a lot of wool, hand-knitted products, and Icelandic souvenirs. Both Will and I bought a few gifts for family and friends back home. I bought a new hat (at this point I realized I had lost my "Ghost Vigil" baseball hat somewhere in Iceland.)

► Next we went to a knifemaker's store. We stood at the door of the store, and looked in...and it looked like a large workshop...and there was no one around. It was very industrial looking, with sawdust everywhere, etc. I called out, and a man come up from downstairs and told us to come in using fairly rough English. He was a tall man, who looked like he was used to working very hard. We descended the steps into his showroom area...

► The knifemaker walked over to a drawer in the wall, and pulled it out. It had about 15 knives laying in it. They ranged from \$200 to \$500. They had beautiful hand-forged blades...and the handles were made of every variety of wood, whale bone, whale tooth, reindeer antler, buffalo horn, and other beautiful materials. Will purchased about the most beautiful knife I have ever seen. The handle is an actual whale tooth. A whole whale tooth, with the blade set into it. I would put it up against any knife I have ever seen. It was quite a find, and handmade by the knifemaker himself.

► I found a Thor's hammer at the knifemaker's shop carved from a whale tooth. It is a beautiful pearly white, with the different layers of the tooth visible in its shape. I had to have it...and it will be my personal souvenir from Iceland.

► It was about a 45 minute drive to Thingvellir. When we arrived, we first went to the Visitors and Information Center on the plain above the cliffs. There we watched some multi-media presentations on Thingvellir, and the importance of that area in the history of Iceland. Next we went out on a walkway that overlooks the Thingvellir area from up on the cliffs.

► Thingvellir is not like I pictured it at all. It is actually a flat river plain, at the foot of a large stone cliff that extends for miles. There are small streams and rivers criss-crossing the plain, until they reach a large lake to the south. Gatherings were held at Thingvellir from 970 CE until the 18th century...and 6 large festivals have been held there

in the 20th and 21st Centuries. But, there is little known about exactly where everything was located during the Althings prior to 1000 AD.

► Will and I took a road down to the floor of the Valley, and we walked toward the location where they believe the Law Speaker would stand...the Law Rock. But prior to arriving at the Law Rock, we came to the Drowning Pool. Prior to the conversion to Christianity punishments at the Althing usually amounted to 3-year-banishments at their worst. Capital Punishment was very rare. But after the conversion, punishments became harsher. 18 women were tied up in sacks for crimes they had committed and drowned in the pool of water near the Law Rock. That is why they call it the drowning pool. At the 1000th anniversary of the conversion to Christianity, a wreath was layed by the drowning pool in respect for the 18 drowned women. As Will said, "A lot of good putting that wreath there hundreds of years later actually does."



► We moved on to the location where the Law Speaker used to stand. This was called the Law Rock, and it was up on a large hill/cliff overlooking a large flat area in the valley. They have placed a flagpole in the location where they believe the Law Speaker stood...and by jumping a wooden fence, you can stand in that spot. It goes without saying that we jumped that fence and stood in that spot.



► From the Law Rock, I looked out over the valley below. You could almost picture Viking tents standing for as far as the eye could see, as the chieftains and their men had gathered for the Althing. 100's of men would stand gathered below, and the Law Speaker would recite the Laws for all to hear. New laws would be discussed, and some disputes handled. We were standing in the best estimation of where that took place over a 1000 years ago. It was an amazing feeling.

► There was also a legislative body at the Althing, that would meet in a

ring in the valley below. They have really no idea where this was located in the Valley below prior to the year 1000. Many disputes, new laws, etc. were decided by this legislative body...and not at the Law Rock. The Althing was much more complex than I had imagined, and it varied extremely widely over the years...as to how it was structured, where things were set up, and how it worked.

► Will and I had come to Thingvellir with a number of things we wanted to accomplish. There is a sheltered area between two sets of cliffs that exists directly behind the Law Rock. It is a place people do not often go, as it is off the beaten trail. I am not sure you are even supposed to go back there. Will lost his footing, and his leg fell into a crevice in the ground up to his knee...and he fell backwards. I had to scramble over and help him out.



► Once we found a place on the rocks where we could sit, we filled our drinking horns with the Ale we had brought with us. We also pulled out small gifts we wished to bring back to our Kindred and friends...so that these small gifts would be present with us at Thingvellir. We raised our horns, and in a loud voice I said (paraphrasing)...

"I raise this horn to the old Gods. Thor. Odin. Frey. Frigg. Freya. Tyr. Heimdal. And all of the Aesir and Vanir. You are our Gods, and we honor you this day. You are remembered and loved as our Elder Kin. We have come from Vinland...from a city at the center of that great land, to this place...to pay our respect to you. We are members of Jotun's Bane Kindred...and we ask that you watch what we accomplish. That you watch what we build. We follow the old ways. We honor you. We work to make our Ancestors proud of us, and we

respect the Vaettirs of land, water, and air. We are working to grow a strong Heathen tribe and we work to remind our Folk of their ancestral ways. Hail the Gods!"

► Will and I drank from our horns, and then we were quiet for a bit. It was an important moment. Everything was as we had pictured it really.

► Next we looked for a place to leave our Kindred hammer. One of the formal brass hammers that Craig makes for us. He had given us one to leave at Thingvellir...so that this object representing us would be present forever at this ancient place that was so important to our Heathen Ancestors. I will not say much publicly about where we left it – but it will remain very near the law rock forever. It took much effort, and some pain to hide it, and it will never be found.



► We raised our horns once again, and I said (paraphrasing)...

"Vaettir of this land, we have left a part of our Kindred here in your care. Our hammer represents the respect Jotun's Bane Kindred has for your strength and power, and we wish you to know of us and our efforts. Please protect our gift to you...keep it safe...and keep it hidden. So some part of us can remain here near the Law Rock at Thingvellir. Our tribe is made of many good Heathens. Mark. Will. Rod. Craig. Jamie. Adam. Tracy. Alex. And Sarah has traveled with us. We have many loved ones. Jennifer. Jason. Nathan. Elizabeth. Joshua. Bodhi. Lance. Zane. Chien. Paula. Know our kindred and tribe, and know that we work to remind our folk of the old ways...and the old Gods. Hail and Gods! Hail our Ancestors! Hail the Vaettir!"



► Will and I drank from our horns. There was this sense of quiet...and peace. We sat there for quite awhile. Enjoying the feeling of having accomplished what we came there to do. That

peace stayed with us the rest of the day and evening.

► We packed up our stuff, and walked down the hill into the valley below. There are walkways down there, and we walked across the small islands between the streams that criss-cross the valley. We talked about imagining viking tents as far as the eye can see...spread out across the valley. What it must have been like to come to Althing, and stand in the Valley...listening to the Law Speaker recite the laws from atop the Law Rock.



► Next we both gathered up some rocks to give as gifts. I reached into a hole under a big rock, and started pulling out small rocks. I then pulled out 2 bones. Fairly big bones. I put them in my bag, along with the rocks. We looked at them later, and I think the bones are from sheep. The bones appear to be cut, so they are probably from a sheep that was eaten.



► Will and I left Thingvellir, and headed east in our car. We came across a huge rift in the ground. It stretched away from us in both directions as far as you could see...and was about 10 feet wide, and as much as 40 feet deep in places. I threw a rock down into the darkness, and there is water at the bottom of it.

► We stopped by the large lake to the south of Thingvellir, and ate bread and Icelandic butter by the shore of the lake. I skipped some stones, and we looked around for a little while. We were in the middle of nowhere, sitting on an old lava flow, with mountains all around. Beautiful scenery.



► Then we were driving by an

Icelandic Horse farm, and decided to stop. When we got out of the car, the horses all began walking over towards us. Probably thinking we had some treats for them (I wish we had some). We petted the horses, and they would lick our coats and occasionally nip or bite at us. As if they wondered how we tasted. They were smaller than our horses, but stout – and covered with thick wooly hair. Their manes and tails are extremely long, and thick. Getting to stop there, and actually pet so many horses was one of many highlights of the trip.



► Next we stopped at a hydro-electric plant along the river, just to look at the water coursing by it. Basically all of the electricity in Iceland is generated by geo-thermal power or hydro-electric plants. You stumble across quite a few of them driving around on the back-highways.

► Next we stopped at Kerid...a volcanic crater with a lake of water at its bottom. It is very deep, and its walls are very steep. It was caused by a collapsing magma chamber, at the end of a volcanic eruption. There were two other crater nearby, and Will and I walked to them and looked down inside them. I walked down the inside walls of one, and down to its bottom. This crater was not filled with water...but instead had thick grass growing on its walls. Being down in that crater was an amazing feeling...and I took a



large rock from there so that I may remember that moment.

► On the way back to Mosfellbaer, we stopped at a coffee shop/banquet hall that was built like Viking long-house. But it was closed. We approached an elderly gentleman that was working on his car out back, and found that he spoke no English at all. But we were able to figure out that an earthquake had damaged the long-house severely, and it would be closed until May. How we figured this out, considering he spoke no English...I am not even sure!

► The elderly gentleman was clearly very proud of his long-house, because he offered to show us around. He took us inside. The concrete floor was buckled. Some of the beams were cracked and split. There was a lot of repairs to be made. He was a charming guy, and even though we do not know Icelandic, and he did not know English, I think we got along fairly well. We saw one large wooden beam carved with Odin's face, and another carved with Frigga's face.



► We ran into quite a bit of snow on the way back to Reykyavik, and then to Mosfellbaer. When we got back to the hotel, we were exhausted from a very long day. We spent the rest of the evening talking with family and friends on Skype, transferring photos to my computer, and writing these daily logs of our trip...

Well, I am pretty much caught up. I have not written about today yet...but I am probably going to go to bed, and do that on the plane tomorrow...tomorrow is our last day, and we are spending it in Reykyavik...



DAY SEVEN IN ICELAND

We had set aside Day Seven in Iceland to visit and hopefully see Mount Helka, a huge volcano in Iceland. This was something Will was really excited to see, and we had planned out our trip that day so that

we could see Mount Hekla, and a lot of other sites along the way.

► Will and I went back to the wonderful bakery in Mosfellbaer, near our hotel. We had eaten there on Day 6, and had resolved to return there again. We each had big sandwiches, and Will had a brownie as well.

► We then filled up the rental car with gasoline, and at the convenience store I asked if they sold tobacco. They had some snuff tobacco...a large container of it, and I purchased it. Many snuff tobacco's have fragrance or "flavors" added to them, so that when you sniff them up your nose...there is a special scent to them (i.e. Raspberry, etc.) The snuff I bought in Iceland was not ground as fine as most snuff's I've seen, and it had no flavor or scent added to it.



► We headed east across the southern portion of Iceland. Along the way there was a spur to the road that climbed upwards behind a huge hill. There was a picnic table up there...and an amazing view of the landscape below from up there. The wind was whipping, and we took some photos there. I was tempted to climb up a nearby hill...a long climb up rock and dirt, to get an even better view. But I knew we had a long day ahead of us, and decided to wait.

► On the way to see Mount Hekla, we were stopping along the way to check out some of the smaller sites. We stopped at Hjalparfoss, a double waterfall that pours into a large basin surrounded by tall black basalt columns. We had to drive off-road on a gravel and mud road to reach it, and then climb down a huge set of washed out stairs. Once we were near the basin, I couldn't resist climbing one of the tall stone columns. It was difficult going with my Achilles tendon severed, but I climbed all the way to the top.





► We had not seen many sheep in Iceland, which seemed strange to us, because we had read that there were a lot of sheep. Leaving the waterfall at Hjalparfoss, we saw some sheep finally...and went to great lengths to try to get photographs of them. The sheep were having none of it...and kept running away from us.

► We then moved on to a modern reconstruction of a Viking longhouse, at Thjodveldisbaer. It was a beautiful place, and its construction and design was based on an historical longhouse, the ruins of which were found several miles away. Unfortunately the longhouse was closed, so we couldn't see the inside of it. But we walked all around the outside of it and took a lot of photos.



► We then attempted to visit the ruins of the ancient longhouse nearby, but the road to it was too rough and too muddy to travel in our rent-a-car. We actually made it about a ¼ mile down the road, and then realized we needed to turn back.

► Next we traveled across vast lava flows, in order to reach Mount Hekla. We were not prepared to hike or climb Mount Hekla, but we wanted to see her. The landscape around the volcano was moon-like in many ways. The various lava flows over the years had made the land fairly barren for miles and miles. The clouds around Mount Hekla made it impossible for us to see the top of the volcano...and throughout our travels that day, all we ever saw was her base. We drove across those lava flows for what seemed like hours and hours.

► We came to a Mount Hekla museum eventually, and decided to visit it. The museum had displays regarding volcanoes, and a lot of specific information about Mount Hekla. The type of volcano she was, the history of the volcano, and lots of photographs and video of past eruptions. Will had really wanted to see Mount Hekla for himself, and I am pretty sure the museum did not 100% make-up for him not getting to see the volcano with his own eyes.



► After the museum and a long day of driving, Will and I were pretty hungry. So we stopped at the town of Hella on the way back to our hotel, and we decided to eat at the Árhús Cafe. "Árhús" means, "River-House." I was thrilled to see that they had horse meat on their menu. This was something I had wanted to try while in Iceland, and here it

was on the menu! The horse steak was seared on both sides, so that it had this amazing tasting crispy outside...perfectly spiced and flavored. The meat inside was red and juicy, and had a sweetness to it that beef just doesn't have. It was an amazing steak, and I savored every small bite of it.

► On the way out of Sudurland, and headed back to Mosfellbaer, we drove through a snow-storm. It covered the road and the land in a soft blanket of white, and blotted out the already setting sun. But...we drove out the other side of the storm as we left Sudurland.



DAY EIGHT IN ICELAND

► Will and I woke up to our last day in Iceland feeling like we had accomplished everything that we came to do. We had seen the locations we wanted to see, met the people we wanted to meet, and done the things we wanted to do. But it was still sad knowing that this was our last day.

► We packed our suitcases, attempting to fit in all the new stuff we had acquired during our trip; statues, books, jewelry, knives, clothes, rocks (lots of rocks), and a wide-range of souvenirs that had to fit in our luggage along with everything we had brought with us in the first place. It was hard work getting everything to fit, and yet we knew we had some more souvenirs to buy yet!

► We headed to the downtown business district in Reykjavik to buy some of the souvenirs we still needed to get. We picked up items in several shops, and ate some Pizza at "Pizza Pronto." Some of the shops were closed, and in order to get a few of the items we needed to get for people back home, it was a mad scramble.

► In a central square downtown, there was an automated Water Closet, the kind you have to pay for. After every use, it closes down and completely self-cleans itself. I had heard of these sorts of



public toilets, but never actually seen one. I waited in line to use it...but there were several older people in front of me in line, and about 15 minutes later I gave up and sought out a less glamorous restroom.



► We left Reykjavik and headed south towards the International Airport. We had some time before we had to catch our flight, so we followed the habit we had followed throughout the trip, and stopped anywhere that looked interesting along the way.

► We pulled off the main highway, and

drove through a small community along the coast. We saw a house with two wight-houses in the yard. The wight-houses were very well-made and attractive, and any land-wight would be glad to have one as a home.

► We stopped and examined one of the many deep cracks in the land. This one was about 5 to 10 feet across, and at least 40 feet deep in places. Standing on the edge of one of these cracks is a little worrisome, because if you did fall into it, you're not confident at all as to when or if someone would be able to pull you out of it. Having a severed Achilles tendon did not help at all, because it left me fairly unstable and off-balance.

► Our last stop prior to the airport, was at the Blue Lagoon. The Blue Lagoon is the most-visited tourist location in all of Iceland. It is a spa and hot lagoon for swimming and soaking in the unique mineral waters. Will and I did not pay to go swimming, or for any of the spa activities. We just wanted to see the place. The mineral waters leave a hard white coating on the volcanic rock of the lagoon. This has a very strange look to it. The water has a milky blue coloring to it, and steam rises off of it. The air was very chilly that afternoon, but there were at least a 100 people there swimming in the waters.



► Will and I arrived at the airport, returned the rental car, and made the long walk to the airport terminal. My suitcase was a little bit over the weight limit, but the clerk behind the counter was a very nice lady...and let me slide without having to pay extra.

► After checking in and checking our luggage, we headed for the duty-free store. They had everything you can imagine in the duty-free store, but I focused on candy. I wanted to take Icelandic candy back to my family, so they could try it. We then traded in much of our remaining Icelandic money for US currency. Then we turned in all of our qualified receipts for tax refunds. Iceland gives tourists refunds on sales-tax on certain items you buy while you are in Iceland. Then we got some coffee and made our way to the plane.

► On the trip home, I wrote a poem called "The Ísland Journey," and read from Egil's Saga. I may have slept a bit as well. Will and I were

glad to be home when we arrived back in Kansas City, and happy to see our loved ones again. But I look forward to a day when I can return to Iceland, and take my wife and children with me.





SECTION SEVEN

**POETRY BY
MARK LUDWIG
STINSON**

CALL TO THE FOLK

At the beginning of blot or faining, there is usually a call to the Folk, asking them to gather. It can be a simple, "OK, everybody, let's get started," for a small casual faining. Or it can be a phrase or poem that let's everyone know it is time to start.

I wrote this call to the Folk, borrowing the first two lines from the first two lines of Hollander's translation of the Voluspa. In writing the third and fourth lines, I attempted to work in alliteration...and make the entire stanza consistent.

**Hear me now, ye hallowed beings,
Both high and low of Heimdall's children.
Gather the Folk in friendship and frith,
So we may honor our holy Gods...**

This next Call to the Folk was written at Lightning Across the Plains 2009, for the beginning of the Saturday Night Faining. I wanted the Call to recognize that Heathens had come great distances to gather together...

**Call now the Folk from far and wide.
Fierce Heathen tribes and growing families.
Friendships are formed, and Frith maintained,
We gather together to honor our Gods.**



THE ÍSLAND JOURNEY

This is another poem that is meant to be read aloud. In April of 2009, Will Burris and I traveled to Iceland to visit sites held dear by Heathens, and to meet with Icelandic Heathens there. I wrote this poem on the plane back from Iceland...

**Of a fearless family - two faithful men
To Ísland traveled - for tribute and trial.
Over Warder's Mothers - they made their way
On wind from Vinland - to the western shore.
Gefrain to grow - and gifts to give.**

**Gathered with Heathens - and greeted proud Godhar.
Good tidings they gave - of their great tribe.
Healthy bonds forged - with generous hosts.
Frith was woven - and friendship won.
Dear gifts were shared - as Chieftains should.**

**These sons of Vinland - to Thingvellir went
With a Hammer of Thor - their Thyle had made.
Horns they raised - to their Holy Gods.
Their Folk they named - their frithful tribe.
Honor was given - and great oaths made.**

**These men could see - spirits of land.
Respect was paid - to raging falls.
Wide rough earth - warmed their way.
Sharp rocks made safe - courageous climbs.
Known as Heathen - by heartless wind.**

**With knowledge gained - and greedy for home,
With tribute earned - and treasure in hand,
Weary and worn - though Luck-rich and Trú,
To family and friends - their frithful tribe,
Two faithful men - toward hearth wind-rode.**

Hail Jotun's Bane Kindred!
Hail the Our Folk in the Heartland!



DOOM-EAGER HEATHEN

In early 2009, a friend of our kindred had been called up by the military, and was soon to be headed for desert lands. I composed this poetry for my friend...

**Over wide white sands - lay the warrior's way.
Fed ravens and wolves - results of his labor.
Breathes fire and lead - no weapon can bite him.
Great honor and fame - among family and friends.**

**Swarthy weak men - trade in waste and fear,
Doom-eager Heathen - desires their deaths.
Broken dark mounds - run rivers of blood.
Great jumbled gore - their Jihad repaid.**

**Great hammers strike - spear flies over host.
A smile he wears - and trods reddened sand.
Bravely and boldly - he climbs battle piles,
Rune-giver he values - but Valhalla shall wait.**



NEVER FORGOTTEN

The Old Norse poems in the Poetic Edda were written with alliteration. I wrote this poem for a friend of our kindred who is over in Iraq. Do not read this poem silently. Read it out loud...

**Far from his home, on far-stretched sand.
The burning sun doth scorch and shine.
The horror of empty hours humbles him.
Oh to fight, to kill, and feed one's rage!**

**But diligently, he drones away at his duties.
To fight for fame, is not every man's fate.
He reads, and writes, and kinfolk remembers,
Oh to hug, to hold, his family at home!**

**His wife and children miss him and mourn.
They're aware always of his long absence,
And await his return with unreserved hope.
Longing for the man and father they love.**

**Alone in the desert, a land dry and dead,
His Gods and Ancestors, his unseen guards.
The Heathen's heart remains strong and hale.
He is never forgotten by his faithful friends.**



BRAVEST IN BATTLE

This poem was written for Gary, a friend of Jotun's Bane Kindred. Another friend of our kindred was in Iraq at the time this poem was written, so it really hit home for us. Do not read this poem silently. Read it out loud...

**Bravest in battle - gambling his blood.
Time tempered arms - his mettle tested.
Raven's friend and - Fenris-Kin feeder.
He never wearies - of waging just war.**

**Fighting for family - he never forgets,
Those he kills - would kill his kin.
His Chieftain's commands - he commits to deeds,
Neither desiring death - nor dreading it much.**

**When men first fell - some fled in fear.
Others faltered and froze - as if fettered fast.
But Herjan's man - made right for the melee,
His sword seeking - its rightful sheath.**

**The old man watches - with one eye wide,
His maidens riding over - reddened battlefields.
His chosen few taken - at a time of his choosing,
Swelling the ranks - as Ragnarok nears.**

**Great are the gifts - of the warrior's grave.
Sing songs of the - battle brave's sacrifice.
Fell for their family - for you and for me.
Live they in our hearts - and in Valhalla height!**

HAIL!

I wrote and learned the poem, and recited it aloud at our Kindred's Midsummer Faining in 2009. I think we need to work on reclaiming this part of our heritage. The oral-storytelling and skaldic tradition...



BRINGING BACK THE ORAL STORY-TELLING TRADITION

I read on the AFA message board a call for a return to an oral tradition. A call for some select Heathens to learn the lore, and be able to recite it. Not reading from the page out loud, but instead orally presenting the Lore from memory. This would represent a return to the oral tradition of our Ancestors.

Rod Landreth wrote about this idea:

To memorize an entire Eddic poem would be a great and worthy task. One would gain quite a bit of gefrain and honour for doing so, especially if it was part of an oath. I know a few musicians that have done it using the music to help them along. I would go with Chisolm or even Hollander because of the poetic-ness of his translation.

I felt it would be amazing to be able to speak the Voluspa around a campfire at night. To be able to dramatically present it in that setting. Or to tell it to my children at night, as they lay in bed. Simply having that poem within you – within your mind and not just on the written page – would be an amazing thing.

So, I looked over the Hollander translation, and it sounded beautiful. I began memorizing the poem at little at a time, and a year later I recited the entire Voluspa from memory at both Midwest Thing and during High Symbol at Lightning Across the Plains in September of 2009.

If anyone reading this would like to try learning to recite one of the poems from the Lore, here are a few methods that helped me:

1. I created (in my computer), a small booklet of the poem...with all the stanzas in it, and printed it out so I could carry it around in my wallet and have the poem with me always. If I am waiting for an hour for my oil to be changed, I can pull out the poem and work on it.
2. I printed the booklet, so that there were 5 full stanzas on each page. Then, I basically learned the poem 5 stanzas (a

page) at a time. This helped group things together, and break the poem down into smaller pieces.

3. I would read a stanza while looking at it. Then a line at a time, I would try saying it without looking at it. I would allow myself to peek, but over time, I would peek less and less, until I wasn't peeking at all. Then move onto the next stanza.

4. After completing each 5 stanza grouping I learned, I would practice saying the whole poem (well, as much as I knew at that particular point), over and over again. Just to cement the 5 stanza groupings together, and help me remember how they fit together.

5. I would say the stanza out loud (if possible). I would sometimes whisper them, sometime scream them, sometimes say them in a funny voice. Whatever it took for me to remember them better. I found if I played with the stanzas a little...saying them in an over-dramatic voice (after all, I am practicing alone, so no need to be embarrassed) it helped me remember them.

6. If you forget something, go back. There were times that I would get busy, and not practice for a month. I would forget things. But, going back and relearning things I forgot was very easy...and the words came back to me very quickly.



7. Recite what you know so far for friends. At Symbol...or at an event, recite what you know so far. Saying it alone and saying it in front of people are two completely different things, so practicing saying it in front of people is important...and will give you motivation to learn it more quickly.

That is about it really. Other than that, it just takes a commitment of time.





LIGHTNING ACROSS
THE PLAINS

HEATHEN
GATHERING



THE LIGHTNING ACROSS THE PLAINS HEATHEN GATHERING

Heathenry is about community, gathering as a people, shaking a man or woman's hand, looking them in the eye, hearing their voice, telling stories, getting to know each other. It is letting your kids play together. Letting your spouses get to know each other. It is about laughing at dumb jokes, and telling stories from your life. It is about mingling Wyrd...and taking the measure of another person, and finding them of worth.

Every September, Heathens from across the Heartland and beyond gather for 3 days and 2 nights camping at [Gaea Retreat](#), a campground 40 minutes outside of Kansas City.

- ◆ Dinners Provided on Friday & Saturday
- ◆ Symbols Friday and Saturday Night
- ◆ A Blot/Faining on Saturday Evening
- ◆ Asatru & Craft Workshops all Weekend
- ◆ Viking Games Saturday Afternoon
- ◆ Children's Games and Activities
- ◆ A Heathen Auction on Sunday Morning



REGISTRATION FEES & METHODS

Registration fees include all camping fees and dinner on Friday and Saturday night. We keep these fees as reasonable as possible, and with a focus on keeping the gathering affordable for both individuals and families to attend. In 2010 **individual registration was \$40, while family registration was \$60.** Family registration includes a maximum of 2 adults and 3 children. You can learn more about the event and register for this year's Lightning Across the Plains at:

<http://www.lightningacrosstheplains.com>



ACTIVITIES AT LATP

Every Lightning Across the Plains is packed with activities in which you can participate and enjoy.

- ◆ Workshops on heathen topics, traditional crafts, historical information about our ancestors, modern kindred building, tribal structure and thew, etc.
- ◆ Religious activities, including several Fainings, two Symbols, visiting our outdoor Ve, and at every Lightning Across the Plains, a small Hof is established.
- ◆ There are children's game and activities throughout the event...with children activities scheduled at the same time as all adult workshops and many of adult activities. Hikes, sword-fighting lessons, a large foam-sword battle, storytelling, a class on the runes, heathen craft projects, etc.
- ◆ A heathen auction, where everyone bids on objects donated by those attending Lightning Across the Plains. There are always amazing heathen objects





in the auction, and the money collected goes to support the LAMP event and to the Heartland Hof and Hall fund.

- ◆ Viking games, including hammer-toss, kindred tug-of-war, and a little game we like to call, "Steal the Wench." The hammer-toss involves throwing a large hammer made by Craig Winkler called "Skull-Splitter." The kindred who wins the kindred tug-of-war gets to take home the hammer-trophy for that year, and then come back the next year and defend their title.



TENTING INCLUDED, BUT CABINS AVAILABLE

The registration fees for Lightning Across the Plains cover the tent camping fees at Gaea Retreat for both nights of the gathering. Cabins are also available for a small fee, and can be reserved directly with the staff of Gaea Retreat. Details on how to do this can be found in the registration packet at the LAMP website.



A REGIONAL THING IN THE HEARTLAND

We feel the growth of Heathenry is something that must happen...can only happen...at the grassroots level. Heathens find each other in their local area. Kindreds form, and grow. Regionally, kindreds begin to gather together and face to face connections and relationships form. Over time, the trust between tribes and tribal leaders becomes such, that the formal structure of a Regional Thing is put into place. Here in the Heartland, we're reached that point.

Strong kindreds from across the Heartland gather at Lightning Across the Plains to hold our annual Regional Thing. Kindred Chieftains, leaders, and representatives meet together to discuss regional issues and goals. Those attending Lightning Across the Plains can bring matters before the Thing for consideration and advice. This is a process that is developing, and will continue to develop for some time.



ATTENDING LIGHTNING ACROSS THE PLAINS

If you are a long-time Heathen, a new Heathen, or someone curious about Heathenry...you are welcome at Lightning Across the Plains. If you are part of a strong Heathen tribe, or a small hearth, or you are a solitary Heathen wanting more...you are welcome at Lightning Across the Plains. If you have been to dozens of gatherings, or never been to even one...you are welcome at Lightning Across the Plains. While this is a Heathen gathering focused on the those living here in the Heartland, all Heathens are welcome. Come and gather with your Folk. Honor our Gods, our Ancestors, and the Vaettir of the land with other tribes and other Heathens of our region. You can learn more about the event and register for this year's Lightning Across the Plains at:

<http://www.lightningacrosstheplains.com>



TEMPLE OF OUR HEATHEN GODS WEBSITE

Please visit the Temple of Our Heathen Gods resource website for Heathens. It features an extensive on-line library of books related to Heathenry, an Asatru artwork archive, Heathen related articles, Mark Stinson's blog, and a message board active with interesting discussions. heathengods.com



MARK LUDWIG STINSON

Mark Stinson lives with his wife and three kids in Kansas City, Missouri. Mark earned Bachelor of Arts Degrees in History, Political Science, and Philosophy from Rockhurst, a Jesuit University in Kansas City. He has worked as a police officer since 1993 and has been a Sergeant for the Kansas City Missouri Police Department since 2001.



At Thingvellir

Mark discovered Heathenry in June of 2006. A year later, in June of 2007 Mark committed himself to Heathenry and to practicing the Asatru religion. Seeking to honor the Heathen Gods in the old ways, Mark began looking for an existing Kindred in the Kansas City Area. When he discovered that there were no Kindreds in his area, he dedicated himself to finding like-minded Heathens in order to form a new Kindred.

Mark enjoys researching the history of the Asatru religion, and traditional Heathenry. Mark honors all of the Northern Gods, but has a special affinity for Asa-Thor, because Thor protects us from the monsters of this world, sets an example for how we should confront evil, and was a god for the "working class" and the thralls. But Mark has great respect for Odin...and his sacrifices and wisdom as well as Tyr's courage.

Mark serves as the Chieftain of Jotun's Bane Kindred. The title of "Chieftain" denotes the leader of a tribe. Jotun's Bane is an egalitarian

organization, and important decisions are based on a consensus of its members. But the title of Chieftain reflects Mark's role as an organizer, consensus-builder, and leader, and the fact that his Luck has had a positive impact on the success of the Kindred.



Mark's middle name is Ludwig, a family name that descended to him from his Great Grandfather, a furniture-maker who immigrated to the United States from Austria. Mark's Father was Glen F. Stinson, a World War II submarine veteran. While Glen Stinson was not Heathen, he taught Mark values and a way of approaching the world that made Mark's transition to Heathenry much simpler than it could have been otherwise.

Mark is very focused on his Family, and building a solid Heathen Kindred that will stand through time and adversity.

Mark serves as a Folkbuilder for the Asatru Folk Assembly for Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Arkansas, and Southern Illinois, encouraging the creation and growth of local Heathen communities in the Midwest.

To contact Mark, email him at mark@heathengods.com.



FURTHER READING

Heathenry is sometimes called “the religion with homework.” There is a process of enculturation that must take place when a person returns to their Folkway. To return to the world-view and way-of-life of our ancestors, one must read and study, and begin putting what they learning into practice. The problem of course, is making sure that you are accessing the right resources. Much of the information about heathenry you find on the internet or in books is misleading or just wrong.

Most heathens will recommend going to your primary sources first. These consist of the Poetic Edda, the Prose Edda, the Icelandic Sagas, Beowulf, and other contemporary source material. Then there are well-researched secondary sources that can be valuable in fleshing out your understanding. And there are tertiary sources, such as story-books retelling the stories in the Lore, books of modern heathen poetry, etc. Below is a list of books worth reading.

Some of the following books can be read and downloaded for free from the Temple Library at heathengods.com. Many of the others can be ordered on-line or at your local bookstore. Over time, some of these books will be available from the Temple Library Collection. Some of these will be a challenge to find, but well worth it.

The Poetic Edda – This is available in various translations.

Larrington's is the easiest to understand, but one of the least poetic. Hollander's is one of the most poetic, but sometime difficult to understand. Bellow's translation is a pretty fair balance of clarity and a poetic sense. Larrington and Hollander's translations come in one volume, while Bellow's translation is split into two volumes.

The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson – This is also available in various translations. The Byock, Faulkes, and Young translations are all fairly good.

Essential Asatru by Diana Paxon

Our Troth: History and Lore (Volume 1) by Kveldulf Gundarsson
Our Troth: Living the Troth (Volume 2) by Kveldulf Gundarsson

Elves, Wights, and Trolls by Kveldulf Gundarsson

Beowulf trans. by Seamus Heaney (I strongly suggested this trans.)

The Sagas of Icelanders (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)
The Saga Hoard, Volumes 1-3 (Temple Library Collection)

Egil's Saga and **Njal's Saga**

The Saga of the Volsungs translated by Jesse Byock

The Sagas of Ragnar Lodbrok translated by Ben Waggoner

The Sagas of Fridthjof the Bold translated by Ben Waggoner

The Nibelungenlied

The Agricola and Germania by Tacitus (available in various trans.)

Heimskringla by Snorri Sturluson (available in various trans.)

The History of the Danes, Books I-IX by Saxo Grammaticus

Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation by the Venerable Bede

The Culture of the Teutons (Volumes 1 and 2) by Vilhelm Grönbech
Collected into one book from the Temple Library Collection.

Gods and Myths of the Viking Age by H.R. Ellis Davidson

The Road to Hel by H.R. Ellis Davidson

Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe by H.R. Ellis Davidson

The Well and the Tree by Paul C. Bauschatz (hard to find)

The Mead Hall by Stephen Pollington (hard to find)

The Norse Myths: Gods of the Vikings by Kevin Crossley-Holland

The Children of Odin by by Padraic Colum

D'Aulaire's Book of Norse Myths by Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire

True Hearth by James Allen Chisholm

Way of the Heathen by Garman Lord

AFA Book of Blotnar and Ritual

The Book of Troth by Edred Thorsson

The Rune Primer by Sweyn Plowright

On Being a Pagan by Alain de Benoist