

Intro to Asatru

The Gods of Asgard

The Old Norse reckoned that there were three races of Gods: the Aesir, the Vanir, and the Jotunn. The Aesir are those beings most often referred to in the ancient literature simply as "the Gods." They are the Gods of society, representing things such as Kingship, Craft, etc. The Vanir are more closely connected to the earth and represent the fecundity of the land and the natural forces which help mankind. Once there was a great war between the Aesir and the Vanir, but this was eventually settled and Frey, Freya, and Njord came to live with the Aesir to seal the peace. The Jotunn are a third race of Gods and at constant war with the Aesir, but there is and never will be peace in this battle. The Jotunn are never called Gods, but rather referred to as giants. They represent the natural forces of chaos and destruction as the Aesir represent forces of order and society. Just as fire and ice mix to form the world, this creative interaction of chaos and order maintains the balance of the world. In the end the two sides will meet in the great battle of Ragnarok and the world will be destroyed, only to be reborn. The Norse Gods were not held to be all powerful or immortal. Their youth was maintained very precariously by the magickal apples of the Goddess Idunna. More importantly at the end of the world a good number of the Gods will die in battle. The Northern view of the world was a practical one with little assurance for the future and little perfection and the Gods are no exception. The Gods in the Temple: Odin, Thor, and Frey The three most important Gods were held to be Odin, Thor, and Frey. These were the deities whose statutes stood at the altar of the temple at Upsalla. They are considered the most important because of what they represent. Mythologer Georges Dumézil has linked these three deities with the three classes of Indo-European culture: the Kings, the Warriors, and the Farmers. Although the fit is not an exact one, it is probably true that these three deities most concretely symbolized the various aspects of life and culture and most people would have found a God who represented their life-experience in one of these three deities. Odin is the Allfather, remembered today best as a God of war and of the berserk rage of the Vikings. However, he has other aspects which are just as strong or stronger. In the Eddas, he is the King of the Gods, but this is a position which most of the Germanic peoples attributed to Tyr. It's likely that Odin only became King during the Viking Age. Being the Allfather, his original position of leadership was probably familial rather than legislative. Most importantly he is a God of transcendent wisdom and in relation to that a God of magick. He is the God of the Runes, the magical alphabet which holds the mysteries of the universe within it. In most of the non-Viking countries, Odin's warrior aspect was played down. In England, where he is known as Woden, he is a gray cloaked wanderer (the inspiration for Tolkien's Gandalf) who travels the country, usually alone, surveying his land. Here again we see him in the position of a father figure, a warder of the land but not necessarily a King. Odin is also a God of the dead. Half of the slain in battles go to him to prepare for the Ragnarok. (The remaining half go to Freya.) He also has associations with the dead as a practitioner of Seidhr, a form of shamanic magick which he learned from Freya and used on various occasions to travel to Hel and seek the knowledge of those who have passed from this world. It's difficult to classify Odin simply because he was such a popular God during the last stages of Norse Paganism and thus absorbed many traits of other Gods. Thor is probably the best known of the Norse Gods. He is a simple God, the patron of farmers and other folk who are "wise, but not too wise" as the Eddas advise us to be. Thor is best known for wandering the world in search of adventure; usually found in the form of giants or other monsters to kill. He possesses tremendous strength and the hammer Mjolnir, which was made for him by the Dwarfs. Mjolnir is considered to be the Gods greatest treasure because it is sure protection from the forces of chaos. Using Mjolnir, Thor is a warrior figure, but he is less a professional warrior than a common man called upon to defend his

land. He loves battle not for itself as do the berserkers of Odin, nor does he have a strong code of honor such as that of Tyr, in fact he chronically breaks with honor and kills giants whether they have the protection of "hospitality" or not. Thor is associated with thunder, and is also the God of rain and storms, but it's important to note that he is not the God of destructive storms. Thor is nature as a benefit to man. The Jotunn are held to be the source of the destruction found in nature. Thor was the God of "everyman." He was simple in purpose, strong, and free. He was most beloved of the freemen farmers who populated the Germanic lands. Frey is a God of peace and fertility. If Thor is the God of the farmer, then Frey is the God of the crops themselves. His symbol is the priapus and his blessings were sought at planting and other important agricultural festivals. The word "frey" means "Lord" and it's unsure if this is the Gods name or his title. He is also known as Ing. We do not know a great deal more about Frey as few myths have survived which give us any insight into his character. As much as he is a God of fertility, he is also a God of peace and Ing was said to have brought a Golden Age of peace and prosperity to old Denmark. Horses are held to be sacred to Frey, probably because of fertility connections. Goddesses In general we know much less about how our ancestors worshipped the Goddesses than the Gods. Later Norse culture was very bound up with the vikings and it is likely that the Goddesses were deemphasized at this point. More importantly, virtually all the mythology we have today was recorded during the Christian period and Christian culture had little respect for women, least of all independent and strong women like those of Nordic society. Freya is the most important of the Goddesses or at least that Goddess about which we know the most. She was the sister of Frey and along with him was sent to live with the Aesir in order to seal a peace agreement. Freya is a Goddess with two distinct sides to her. First, she is the Goddess of love and beauty and second a Goddess of war who shares the battle-slain with Odin. Unlike our modern culture, the ancients saw no contradiction in this. She was also a sorceress who practiced the shamanic magick known as Seidhr, which she taught to Odin. Freya is the Goddess most often invoked by independent women. While she is a Goddess of beauty, she is not dependent on men as is the stereotype of so many love Goddesses, but is strong and fiercely independent. She is also known as the Great Dis and probably has connections to the family spirits known as the Disir. In many ways she is like Odin in that she is a Goddess of many functions which are not always obviously related. In modern Asatru, many groups have replaced Frey with Freya to stand with Odin and Thor on the altar.

Frigg is a most misunderstood Goddess. She is the wife of Odin and many people are too willing to let her be known simply as that. However, the old Norse had a much different idea of the place of women and of marriage in general. While marriages for love were certainly known, marriage was also a business and social arrangement and there were important duties for a wife. These were symbolized by a set of keys which hung at the belt of all "goodwives." This symbolized that the home was under the control of the woman of the house, who was equal to her husband. Today we think these duties as very minor, but a thousand years ago they were far from trivial. Up until this century most of Europe lived in extended families. A house, especially a hall of a warrior, was not merely a small building with a nuclear family, but an entire settlement with outbuildings, servants, slaves, and an entire clan. The wife of the house was in charge of stores and trading with other clans. It was she that saw to the upkeep of the farm, the balancing of the books, and even to the farming itself if her husband was away trading or making war. It was as much a job of managing a business as it was being a "wife." For these reasons Frigg is still very important and can easily be invoked beyond the home. She would, for example, be a natural patron for someone who owned a business. Frigg also shares a lot of characteristics with her husband. She is the only other God who is allowed to sit in Odin's seat from which can be seen all that goes on in the nine worlds. It is said that she knows the future, but remains silent,

which is entirely in keeping with the way women of the time exercised their power: namely indirectly. While in a better world this might not be necessary, it is still an important tool for women who must exist in a world where men are sometimes threatened by them. While Freya is a Goddess who acts independent of "traditional" roles, Frigg is a Goddess who works within those roles, but still maintains her power and independence. Other Gods There are of course many other Gods and Goddesses. Some of these have important places in the myths, while some others are mentioned only once along with their function. Loki The most perplexing God of Asgard is Loki. He was probably originally a fire God, but he is best known as the troublemaker of Asgard. In various minor scrapes Loki arranges to get the Gods into trouble, usually by giving away their treasures and then arranging to return them. This is very much in the traditional role of a trickster, who keeps things interesting by causing trouble. However, it's sometimes difficult to see Loki merely as a trickster because his actions are sometimes simply too evil to be ignored. Balder was the most beautiful and beloved of the Gods and a pledge was extracted from all the things in the world that they would not harm him. The sole exception to this was the mistletoe which was deemed too tiny to be a threat. Amused by his invulnerability, the Gods took turns throwing objects at Balder, which of course had no effect on him. Loki took the blind God Hod and put a spring of mistletoe in his hands and guided him to throw it. The dart pierced Balder's breast and he died. Later a deal was arranged wherein Balder would be allowed to return to life if all the creatures of the world would weep for him. Only one refused, an ogress who said she cared not a whit for Balder when he was alive and thought him just as well off dead. The ogress is believed to have been Loki in disguise. For these actions Loki was chained beneath the earth and it was arranged that venom would drip upon him in punishment that would last until the end of the world. With the death of Balder, Loki goes beyond the level of trickster and becomes a truly evil figure. It is known that when Ragnarok comes, Loki will lead the legions of chaos against the Aesir and bring about the end of the world. Indeed Loki's actions certainly do seem harsh, but they are entirely in keeping with the Norse way of looking at things. One of the functions of a trickster God is to keep things going. The trickster causes trouble so that people may evolve, for nothing brings about ingenuity like need. The Norse did not believe anything was eternal. The Gods were mortal and only maintained their youth through the magick of Idunna's apples. In the end they would die in the battle of Ragnarok which would destroy the world. Balder's invulnerability was not natural. As the Edda says "Cattle die, and men die, and you too shall die..." It was deemed much more wise and valiant by the Norse to live up to one's fate than to try to avoid it. Likewise to return from the dead would be equally wrong. It's against nature for something to be impervious to harm or for the dead to return to life. Loki was merely acting as the agent of nature to return things to their normal and correct course. It was not an act of evil, but an intervention to stop an evil against the natural order. Likewise Ragnarok must come. It is in the nature of the world to be destroyed and then be reborn. Loki is merely acting as an agent of fate: exactly the function which a trickster is supposed to perform. On the other hand, as far as we know Loki was not worshipped, at least not in the same way as the other Gods were. Recognition of his action and his place in the universe is essential, but Gods of this type are seldom welcome. It is "fashionable" today to laugh at trickster Gods and see them as a sort of jester figure, but we must not forget that their nature is much darker than this even when it does serve a purpose. Change is important, but nothing changes the world faster and more thoroughly than war. Tyr While seldom reckoned today among the most popular of the Gods, Tyr is extremely important. He is the God of battle, of justice, and (secondary to Odin) of Kingship. The most important myth concerning Tyr shows both his bravery and honor. He gave his hand as surety to the Fenris Wolf that no trickery was involved in the Gods binding of him. When the fetter in fact did bind the wolf, Tyr lost his hand. The honor and reliance on ones word is often overlooked in this myth in favor of an interpretation of self sacrifice. However, throughout the myths

various deals are made and the Aesir easily get out of them. It's likely that Tyr could have escaped his fate as well, but one's word is one's word and thus Tyr lost his hand. Tyr was held to be the God of the Thing or assembly. While the ancient Norse were not truly democratic and in fact held slaves, within the noble class all were reckoned to be roughly equal. The Thing was a place where the landholders would meet for trade and to iron out disputes among them, in the hope of avoiding feuds. Tyr was originally the chieftain of the Aesir and the God of Kingship, but he has been gradually supplanted by Odin, especially during the Viking Age. It is likely this was because of Tyr's strong sense of honor and justice. For raiding and pillaging, Odin, the God of the berserker rage, was a much better patron than Tyr, the God of honorable battle. This is an important thing to note about Northern religion: it is extremely adaptable. There are not hard and fast rules about who is what and while the nature of the Gods cannot be changed they are more than happy to have the aspects most important to their worshippers emphasized. Just as a person uses different skills and "becomes a different person" when they move or change jobs, so the Gods too have adapted to new climates and needs. Baldr While we only know the myth of Balder's death, it is clear that he was a God of some importance. Unfortunately, modern writers, coming from a Christian background, have tried to turn Balder into a Christ figure. Balder was a God of beauty and goodness, but his name also translates as "warrior." It is a mistake to turn him into a "Norse Jesus." The mere fact that he died and will return after Ragnarok is not enough for this equation. Another interpretation of Balder is that of the dying and resurrected God of the Sun. This also seems a mistake, as Balder does not return from the land of death. It makes a poor symbol to honor Balder on solar holidays, lest the sun not return! The remaining major interpretation of Balder is as a God of mystic initiation. While this fits to some extent, we unfortunately no longer know. The equation with Christ has wiped out a great deal of lore about Balder and we are left to rediscover his place in our modern practice. Minor Gods Of the other important Gods, Heimdall is the guardian of Asgard. He, as Rig, is also one of the Gods who fathered mankind. Njord is the God of sailing and sailors. Unless one travels on the sea, he is probably of little importance to you, but if one does sail, he is your natural patron. If Njord is the God of sailing and of man's use of the sea, then Aegir is the God of the sea itself. He is married to Ran who takes drowned sailors to her home after their death. Aegir is considered to be the greatest of brewers, and our kindred honors him in a special holiday due to the importance of mead in our modern religion. Bragi is a much overlooked God who is the patron of tale-tellers and bards. Other Gods more or less overlooked in the myths include Forseti, who renders the best judgments, Ull, a God of hunting who is the male counter to Skadi, Vithar, the son of Thor who is as strong as his father, Vali, Odin's son who will avenge his father's death at Ragnarok, and Hod, the blind God who was led to slay Balder. While we might say that certain Gods are more important than others, this is in many ways not accurate. We would be better served to say that some are more popular. The Norse concept of the relationship between men and Gods was one of friendship. A man would honor all the Gods as worthy and existent, but would usually find one

as his special patron. It is not surprising, considering this, that Thor is the most popular of Gods. If the average person was searching for a God very much like himself, Thor would be the obvious choice. Likewise, a God such as Njord would have been extremely important to sailors and fishermen, but would have been almost completely unimportant as a patron to inlanders. The less well known Gods are just as powerful as their more well known contemporaries, they merely have power over a less well known aspect of life.

There are also many Goddesses other than Frigg and Freya, but we know very little of them. Eir was said to be the greatest of healers, and is for this reason very important. There is no healer God as the ancients held that medicine was a craft for women and not for men, but modern male healers should certainly invoke her.

While Skadi has a very small part in the myths, many modern Asafolk find her a compelling figure. She is the snow-shoe Goddess, who travels in the isolated mountains hunting with her bow. She is married to Njord, but they are separated as Njord can't abide the mountains, and Skadi can't sleep in Njord's hall where she is kept awake by the pounding of the sea. She is an excellent role model for women who work alone and who are independently minded. Oaths are sworn to the Goddess Var, but little else is known of her. Lofn might some day be of importance to you, she is known to bring together lovers who are kept apart by circumstance.

Elves & Other Spirits The world of ancient Paganism was hardly limited to the worship of the Gods. There are various other beings who were honored, and "Elf worship" was often the hardest part of Paganism for Christians to destroy. It was easy enough to substitute one God for another, but it was quite another to tell the common people that the elves which brought fertility to the land were not real! In the various folktales and sagas we find very little which would lead us to a concrete system of what spirit was responsible for exactly what. We are sure of the place of the Valkyries, who were responsible for bringing the slain to Valhalla, and also for choosing who in battle would die. They seem, judging by their actions, to be supernatural beings of some type. However, Valkyries appear in various places as very human figures and their exact nature is difficult to determine. Sigrdrifa was a Valkyrie who was cursed by Odin because she refused to bring victory in battle to those whom he had chosen. Her punishment was to be married to a mortal, and the implication is clear that this would end her days as a Valkyrie. It's equally clear that she has great knowledge of the runes as she tutors Sigurd after he awakens her. In most respects she seems to be a normal human woman, although a very wise and independent one with great powers. Elsewhere, Voland and his brothers are said to have found three Valkyries sunning themselves without their swan-coats. When the brothers steal their feather-coats and hide them, the Valkyries again appear as otherwise normal women. This does not seem entirely in keeping with a supernatural origin, and it's possible that some kind of magickal order of Priestesses has become confused over time with the supernatural beings we know as Valkyries. The swan-coat seems very similar in description to Freya's falcon-coat and the entire issue may be something related to the practice of seidhr. As far as we know, the Valkyrie were not worshipped as such, but were considered more the messengers of Odin. They also serve the mead at Valhalla, and because of this whoever pours the mead into the Horn at Blot or Sumbel is today known as "the Valkyrie." The other spirits whose place seems fairly clear are the Disir. These are spirits who are intimately linked with a family. There is also some indication that they are linked with the land, but this would be in keeping with the old ways. We forget sometimes that many landowners in Europe have been living in the same place since before this continent was discovered. The land becomes an intimate part of the family and its identity, so it is natural that family spirits would also oversee the family land. Disir inevitably are seen as women who appear at times of great trouble or change. They are somehow linked to the family bloodline, and seem most closely linked to the clanchief. There is one scene in one saga where a spirit, apparently a Dis, is passed on from one person to another who are not blood relations. However, these two friends are closer than brothers, so while the link is apparently not genetic, it is definitely familial. We know the family Disir were honored with blots at the Winter Nights and that they have great power to aid their family. As far as their origin, it's possible that they are ancestral in origin. They may be ancestors whose power was so great that they were able to continue to see to their clan. Or it's possible that the Disir are the collective spirit of the family ancestors. Freya is called the great Dis and there may be some linkage here to her position as a seidhrwoman. We know from the sagas that Seidhr was involved with talking to various spirits (including the dead) and it's possible that this is the source of Freya's name. It is also possible that she performed much the same function as a Dis to her tribe the Vanir. Closely linked to the idea of the Disir is the Fylgia. These spirits are attached to an individual person in much the same way that the Disir are

associated with a family. Fylgia usually appear either as animals or as beautiful women. They correspond to the "fetch," "totem," or "power-animal" in other cultures. Most of the time the fylgia remains hidden and absent, it is only with truly great or powerful persons that the fylgia becomes known. They may have something to do with Seidhr as well, because many sagas offer evidence of spirit travel in the shape of animals. This corresponds exactly to notions of shamanism found in other cultures. The remaining spirits include Alvar or elves, Dokkalvar or dark elves or Dwarfs, kobolds, and landvaettir. While some have defined one being as doing one thing and another serving a different function, I'm not inclined to draw very sharp distinctions between these various creatures. They all seem "elfish" in origin, and there seems to me to be no pattern of associating one name with a specific function. We know that various landvaettir or land spirits were honored with blots. We also know that Frey is the lord of Alfheim, one of the nine worlds where the alvar are said to live. Of all the remaining spirits, the dwarfs are the most consistent in description. We know that the dwarfs are cunning and misanthropic in character and incredible smiths, capable of creating magickal objects so valuable they are considered the greatest treasures of Asgard. Thor's hammer Mjolnir, Freya's necklace Brisingamen, and Sif's golden hair are all creations of the dwarfs. They live beneath the earth and have little to do with mankind or the Gods unless one seeks them out. What place they had in the religion we no longer know. It would seem wise to invoke them as spirits of the forge, but I can think of little other reason to disturb them.

Elves are the most difficult magickal race to pin down. Mythological sources tell us that the Alvar or light elves live in Alfheim where Frey is their Lord. However, we also have the enduring belief in folklore of the elves as faery-folk: beings associated with the natural world. These two conceptions of elves might still be linked, however, as Alfheim is known to be a place of incredible natural beauty, and Frey, their leader, is an agricultural deity. To further confuse this issue, Norse folklore has a strong belief in the Landvaettir, or land spirits who may fit into either or both of these categories. I'm inclined to lump them all together as similar beings that we simply don't know enough about to tell apart. What is important is that Asatru, like all Pagan religions, honors the natural world and the earth very deeply. Whether one calls the spirits of the land as the elves, the faeries, or the landvaettir, or uses all of these terms interchangeably, respect is all important. Asatru is known for being one of the most politically ♦conservative♦ of the modern Pagan religions, but you'll find few of us who aren't staunch environmentalists. One of the most important spirits to honor is the house-spirit. Folklore is also filled with stories of various spirits variously called faeries, elves, kobolds, brownies, tom-tin, etc who inhabit a house and see to its proper conduct. In the usual form of the tale, they offer to perform some housekeeping functions, but eventually turn on the owners of the house when they are insulted by overpayment. We don't have any concrete evidence for how our ancestors honored these beings, but this is not surprising because such a thing would not be a public observance and it's unlikely it would be recorded in the sagas or Eddas. Folklore indicates that such beings should be honored with a simple bowl of milk or perhaps beer, but no more. In general folklore does not paint the various elves and spirits as particularly benevolent figures. With the exception of house spirits, who as spirits of a manmade object are bound to us on some level, they seem most interested in staying out of the dealings of mankind. There are numerous stories of people who spy upon elf women and force them to become their brides. Inevitably the women are unhappy and eventually escape, leaving their husbands devastated. There are also numerous stories of spirits who haunt the woods and who will drag wayward travelers into rivers to drown or to some other untimely death. When people do have dealings with the elves these beings seem to operate on an entirely different set of expectations than we do. Most of us would be gratified by the gift of a ♦bonus♦ from our employer, yet time and time again in folklore this is the easiest way to anger a house spirit. We

know that elves were honored with blots, but it's just as possible that these ceremonies were made in propitiation to them rather than in kinship as are our blots made with the Gods. We suggest caution in dealing with beings with a set of values so foreign from our own. They should be approached in the same way one would approach a person from a country whose ways are very different. In general, we're also very reticent to make decisions about classifying the various "other peoples." It would be very easy to draw lines and place certain spirits into little boxes which label their function, but that seems overly mechanical and of little utility. Elves and other "wights" are not human, and it might be too much to try to classify them in other than subjective terms. It's probably best to simply make your intent clear, experiment, and use the terms which work for you, remembering only to be true to the sources.

Demi-Gods There are a whole classification of Gods which are not truly part of the Aesir, Vanir, or even the Jotunn. Wayland the Smith is the best example of this that we can offer. Wayland, called Volund in the Norse version, is the greatest of smiths, but it's clear in the mythology that he was more or less a human man. The myth tells of how he lost his wife and was enslaved by a human King. While his powers allow him to outwit and take vengeance on the king, it's clear throughout that he's not on the level of a Thor or an Odin. What one does about these demi-Gods or local Gods is a good question. I see nothing wrong with pouring a blot in their honor and dealing with them as you would any other God or Goddess. On the other hand, they are not part of the Aesir and I think it might be disrespectful to honor them with the Aesir or as part of a ceremony dedicated to the Aesir as they seem of a different nature.

Ancestor Worship: Honoring ones ancestors was one of the most sacred duties of the Norsemen. One of the most important parts of greeting new people was the exchanging of personal lineages at sumbel. The worship of the Disir is closely linked to ancestor worship. However, it is difficult for modern day Pagans to seriously engage in ancestor worship. We are for the most part without a strong connection to our heritage, and even if we feel motivated we would probably need to skip at least a thousand years back to find ancestors who would not have been appalled by our Heathen beliefs. One substitution for ancestor worship in the modern Asatru movement has been the veneration of heroes from the Sagas and legends of our people. The manner of how we honor ancestors is also somewhat troubling. I reserve the blot ritual to Gods and other powers, and I'm not sure if it's appropriate to pour a blot to an ancestor, no matter how important he was. It's touchy when you are honoring someone that you knew was a mortal. I think the most important part of ancestor worship is remembering, and the sumbel seems the most important part of that. While we discuss ancestry, I must mention that some modern Asatru groups, in part because of holdovers from 19th century cultural movements, have placed a great deal of emphasis on ancestry in terms of race. Many have held that Asatru was a religion for whites or Northern Europeans only. In my not particularly humble opinion, this is pure idiocy. The basic argument for this is that people of other cultures do not share the same background and values. This is certainly true, but the key word in my opinion is culture, and all Americans by definition share a culture. Also, while I admit I would think it doubtful that people from outside of our own cultural heritage would be attracted greatly to Asatru, if they are it is for a reason and they should be welcomed and not shunned. It proves the worth of our religion and way of life that it is so strong that one would leave his own cultural path behind to take up ours. As far as culture is concerned, the ancestry of the ancient North is alive and well in modern America. A thousand years ago settlers sailed to Iceland to avoid the growing influence of powerful kings and centralized government. This centralization of power was one of the things which Roman Christianity brought with it. Two hundred years ago we in America rebelled against our king for much the same reasons. Our culture is much more profoundly influenced by the Vikings than most would care to admit. Our law is based on English common law, which in turn has roots in Norman and Saxon law. (Both the Saxons and Normans were descended from Germanic tribes.) Our culture is based on many of the same ideas

which the Northmen held dear: the importance of the individual and the belief that individual rights outweighed collective rights. Thus, it is my assertion that we are all descended, at least in part, spiritually from the ancient Norse.

The Jotunn The Jotunn or giants are the sworn enemies of the Gods. While the Aesir represent order and the Vanir represent the supportive powers of nature, the Jotunn represent chaos and the power of nature to destroy man and act independent of humankind. In the end, it is the Jotunn who will fight the Gods at Ragnarok and bring about the destruction of the world. In essence despite being called Giants or Ogres, the Jotunn are Gods just as much as the Aesir or Vanir. In many cases they correspond very closely to the Fomoirie in Celtic mythology. Most simply put, the Jotunn are the Gods of all those things which man has no control over. The Vanir are the Gods of the growing crops, the Jotunn are the Gods of the river which floods and washes away those crops or the tornado which destroys your entire farm. This is why they are frightening and this is why we hold them to be evil. The Jotunn are not worshipped in modern Asatru, but there is some evidence that sacrifices were made to them in olden times. In this case, sacrifices were probably made "to them" rather than shared "with them" as was the case with the Vanir and Aesir. It would be inappropriate to embrace them as friends and brothers in the way we embrace our Gods. One doesn't embrace the hurricane or the wildfire; it is insanity to do so. However, we must also remember that fact that we see their actions as bad, they are not inherently evil. The storm destroys the crops, but it also brings cleansing and renewal. We humans are only one species on this planet and in the end we are both expendable and irrelevant to nature. This is the manner in which the Jotunn act, and it is not surprising that we see this as evil. However, one must also take into account the premonitions of Ragnarok recorded in the eddas. If the Jotunn are merely amoral, why are they the sworn enemy of the Aesir and why will they bring about the end of the world? It's possible that Jotunn was more of a catch-all term for dangerous Gods rather than a reference to a specific family. (It is the case in many languages that there is one word for people that speak the language, usually translating as "people," and another term for those persons of other cultures and tribes.) The dangerous forces of nature are "Jotunn" because we cannot control them, but there are other forces, principally those of chaos, that are considered "Jotunn" as well. There is abundant evidence for this in the Eddas. Various Jotunn are seen to marry into the Aesir without a great deal of trouble from the Gods, but at other times the mere sight of one throws Thor into a rage. The obvious conclusion is that they are more than one specific race of deities. The destructive powers of nature were tolerated to some extent, and often married into the Aesir bringing them more under control. However, other "outlander" Gods were completely destructive to the Aesir (and thus mankind) and the Gods only thought for them was death. The Religious Structure of Asatru The ancients, for the most part, did not have an organized system of Temples or churches in the way that our society does today. Religion was a very personal affair, mostly between the Gods and their worshippers. If there was a formalized temple or perhaps a grove that was dedicated to the Gods and tended as a temple it was most likely built by a wealthy landowner and dedicated to his or her patron God. Such a person would then, usually, become the Gothi (Priest) or Gythia (Priestess) of the temple. Such temples were generally maintained by the family after the builders death, the title being more or less inherited by whomever was lord over the land. Today most Asatru groups are similarly unstructured. This has been a problem because there is little in the way of religious education other than in books such as this one and personal research. While this sort of learning is fine, there are always some things left out and I'm sure that mine will be no exception. There are a few groups who are attempting to initiate training programs and present sets of standards for people who would declare themselves to be Gothi or Gythia, but these groups have unfortunately been somewhat inflexible and dogmatic, seeming more interested in creating hierarchies than with service to the Folk or Gods. Gothi is a honorary title only. It does not

mark any administrative power or rank within Asatru. One would probably not call oneself Gothi unless one had some experience of deity and had led many rituals, but as it entails power over no one and it is up to no one to comment on one's qualifications or abilities. Similarly there is no need for someone to be a Gothi or to have access to one in order to practice our faith. While the more experienced might get more things "right" in the ritual, this is purely subjective and if your heart is true to the Gods this is enough. Most persons who were given the title Gothi in the old days were dedicated to a single God. The title most often formed their last name: Thorolf Thorsgothi for example. This dedication to a God or Goddess was usually part of one's family heritage and was passed down to your children. While there is no compelling reason why one cannot act as Priest to the entire community of Gods and Goddesses, it is most common for one to be dedicated to a single deity. A kindred may have persons who are each dedicated to a different deity, or it may orient itself towards a single deity as did families in the Sagas. The most basic unit of Asatru religious worship is the hearth or homestead. This is nothing more than it sounds like: a household of Asafolk who worship the old Gods and Goddesses. Several individuals or hearths may group themselves into a "kindred," which is a term that has many meanings to many different groups. Some kindreds have many members and function like mainstream churches, others are more familylike and attempt to hold to their privacy. The place of a kindred is more or less analogous to a clan or small tribal group. A kindred is made up of people you are familiar with and with whom you meet in person and in it's best sense it's an organic grouping, however it's not the same sort of bonding that one would find in a single family or even in an extremely close knit group of friends. In a true Pagan society, the kindred would be found on the level of a farmstead or small village.

The ritual blots are most commonly done on the level of the kindred, or in meetings where more than one kindred comes together. The rituals of a Hearth might be less formalized and more "homey" in atmosphere. The blot ritual is based on a religious observance that was part of the official public aspect of ancient Asatru, and it's likely that there were many other private rituals that would not necessarily be appropriate for a kindred to take part in together. For example, a kindred might not honor the individual family Dis or the house-spirits unless all members of the kindred lived together or were tied by blood as well as companionship. Most persons will want to join or found a kindred in their area, however, before one runs out and begins to solicit people, you should think about what you are doing. The very name of our groupings, "kindred," implies a great deal more than does membership in a church. Today we are accustomed to religious institutions that are more or less anonymous and sterile. A kindred should not be this way. While we must be open to all, we need not act as if we were a public facility with no more intimacy than a department store. It is best to start small and gather people as they come to you. Once you are established, get involved in the local Pagan community if you are not already. Attend a few events of the local Leif Erikson society or the Sons of Norway. Open one of your blots to the public and take note of people who are attracted to Asatru. A kindred is something which should form organically and cannot be pushed. On the other hand, Asatru is not a secret religion or one open only to "initiates" as many Neo-Pagan faiths are. We must be open to outsiders who are truly interested. I am just cautioning against throwing people into a kindred because they are available or it is the only group around or they are too polite to say no. A roommate of mine related to me a conversation he had with another person at an Asatru gathering. The person remarked that "this is all very nice, but when do you think Joe will get tired of this stuff." My roommate being a seriously committed Heathen straightened him out. The person in question was just a friend of Joe's who went to Pagan events because of Joe's interest. He assumed that the rest of the group was "humoring Joe" just as he was. The moral of this story is that if people are not interested, there's nothing you can do about it. We're not the Christians who want anybody and

everybody to join our faith, and we should pay just as much attention to dissuading the dabblers and the kooks as we do to attracting those who truly do have the love of the Old Gods in their hearts. As to what makes one a Gothi, the requirements would vary from group to group. Some might have written criteria, while others might leave it up to the persons heart. Certainly a Gothi is one who has a long term relationship with the Gods and Goddesses. One does not, for example, simply read this book and then proclaim oneself Gothi! (I am writing this book and don't consider myself to be a Gothi.) A competent Gothi should have studied the Eddas and Sagas and know the history of our religion. He or she should also know a bit about the runes, and the other mysteries of our tradition. One should also note that this is a public office and the Gothi of old had responsibilities as leaders of the community. Most importantly one must be sincerely dedicated. There's no push to move to a "higher" level of the Priesthood as there are in religions or magickal orders with "degree systems" and if you do not feel compelled to take on the responsibilities of being a Gothi or Gythia, there is no need for you to and much to say that you should not. The Values of Asatru One of the basic functions of a religion is to offer a set of values on which mankind is to base it's actions. This, sadly, is one area where Paganism has often failed. The cult of anti-values has held sway, taking moral relativism to extremes perhaps even farther from common sense than fundamentalist moral legalism, even to the point where I have heard rape, murder, and genocide defended on the basis of "cultural differences." However, values remain important. All one needs to do is look at the morning paper to see the results of a society that has in many ways embraced the cult of anti-values. Thievery, murder, and plunder exist in our cities to extents which would have appalled our ancestors, no matter how many times they went a' Viking. While this is hardly what the Pagans who have embraced the cult of anti-values had in mind, it is to my belief a natural outgrowth of the same basic philosophical concept. The chaos in our country is the dark shadow of the modern rejection of moral legalism. What should have been an evolution from a legalistic moral/religious culture to one of flexible honor based values and self-responsibility has instead become a morass of chaos and immorality. The lesson we should all learn is that while there is no definitive list of sins; right and wrong still exist. As usual Asatru offers a sensible solution. Our faith deals not in legalisms and rules nor in unchecked chaos and relativism. We instead acknowledge the existence of right and wrong, good and evil, but we deal with actions according to basic philosophical concepts that are applied by the keen intellect of Odin, the simple common sense of Thor, and the solid honor of Tyr - the gifts of the Gods to us. Asatru posits that the basic place of moral judgment is within the human heart and mind. We as human beings with the gift of intelligence are sensible and responsible enough to determine right from wrong and act accordingly. The Gods teach us through the examples of their lives, as chronicled in the Eddas, and through various pieces such as the Havamal which directly offer us advice. In the modern history of our faith, various Asatru organizations have outlined simple sets of values which they hold up as simple guidelines on how to live ones life. The Odinic Rite (the major Asatru group in England) has one of the most cohesive and sensible of all those we've seen and this set has been adopted by the Raven Kindred as an "official" statement of our beliefs. We do this not only as a moral guide for our members, but also to say to the world what it is that we stand for our good name in the community being important to us. Finally, this list is used when someone formally joins the Raven Kindred and we hold a sumble and toast the 9 virtues to the new member in the hope that they will apply them to their life. The Odinic Rite lists the 9 Noble Virtues as Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance.

It would be hard to get much argument on any of these values from anyone. They simply and briefly encapsulate the broad wisdom of our Gods and ancestors. Courage In virtually every statement of values applied to Asatru, Courage is listed first.

As Stephen McNallen has said, courage and bravery are perhaps the values which the Vikings are best known for. However, despite our history, few of us face such turmoil as a literal battle for one's life. In fact, I believe it might be easier to manifest courage in such a situation than to do so in the many smaller day to day occurrences in which courage is called for. The most common of these occurrences for modern Pagans, is the courage to acknowledge and live one's beliefs. It is also, sadly, the one that we most often fail at. While we may often be full of the type of courage that would lead us to face a shield wall, many of us quake at the thought of the topic of religion coming up at the office or a friend asking what church we attend. We won't offer easy answers, but we ask this: if you toast the courage of your ancestors to fight and die for what they believed in, can you trade away your religious identity for a higher salary or social acceptance? In an essay on values there is also the question of moral courage. The way of Tyr is difficult - to lose one's hand for one's beliefs - but, Tyr thought the price worth paying. In a million ways modern society challenges our values, not just as Asatruar who are estranged from mainstream religious practice, but for religious people in an increasingly not just secular, but anti-religious culture. Values are also not in favor in modern society. Breaking or getting around the rules is encouraged to get ahead. Living honorably is simply too inconvenient. I think most people, Asatru or otherwise, find this repugnant, but the only way to change it is to have the courage to refuse to take part in it. Truth The second virtue, that of Truth, is the one that most led our kindred to embrace the Odinic Rite's statement of values as our own. Early in our discussions, we decided that no matter what values we chose to hold out as our own, truth must be among them. It is a word that holds so much in its definition, and includes such a wide variety of moral and philosophical beliefs that we were all drawn to it as a simple statement of what we stood for. At least one of the reasons we wanted to adopt it was the simple issue of honesty. As Bill Dwinells said at a recent sumbel while toasting truth and honesty: if you don't want people to know about something, don't do it. Truth, in the sense of honesty, is essential to personal honor and also to any system or morality that is not based on rigid legalism. If one is to uphold an honor code, one must be brutally honest with oneself and with others. Truth is also the Truth that comes with a capital T - the kind of Truth that one talks about in terms of religion or morality. It's common to talk of different peoples having different "truths," but it's equally important to remember that while we acknowledge that each person or people has their own belief as to what Truth is or where to find it, there finally is a single Truth. This is not the Truth as we believe it, but ultimate Truth. While we may respect other people's "truths" and seek our own, we must never forget our search for The Truth. Like the Holy Grail of Christian legend, it may never be ours to reach, but when we cease to search we perish. Honor Honor is the basis for the entire Asatru moral rationale. If anything comes out in the Eddas and Sagas it is that without honor we are nothing. We remember two types of peoples from ancient times: those whose honor was so clean that they shine as examples to us and those who were so without honor that their names are cursed a thousand years after they lived. Good Asatruar should always strive to be among the former. However, honor is not mere reputation. Honor is an internal force whose outward manifestation is reputation. Internal honor is the sacred moral compass that each Asatruar and God should hold dear. It is the inner dwelling at peace which comes from living in accordance with one's beliefs and with one's knowledge of the Truth of what one is doing. It is something deeply personal and heartfelt, almost akin to an emotion. It's a "knowing" that what one is doing is right and decent and correct. In many ways while the most important of all the virtues it is also the most ephemeral in terms of description. It is all the other virtues rolled together and then still more. The best way I have found to describe honor is that if you are truly living with honor, you will have no regrets about what you have done with your life. Fidelity Fidelity is a word that is far too often defined by its narrow use in terms of marital fidelity. By the dictionary it simply means being faithful to someone or

something. In marriage this means being true to ones vows and partner, and this has been narrowly defined as limiting ones sexual experience to ones spouse. While I have found this to be great practical advice, many treat fidelity as if there were no other ways in which one could be faithful or unfaithful. For we Asatruar fidelity is most important in terms of our faith and troth to the Gods. We must remain true to the Aesir and Vanir and to our kinsmen. Like marriage, Profession (the rite in which one enters the Asatru faith, similar to Christian confirmation or Wiccan initiation) is a sacred bond between two parties; in this case an Asatruar and the Gods. In order for such a relationship to work, both must be honest and faithful to each other. Asatru, although currently being reborn, is at its roots a folk religion and we also uphold the value of fidelity to the ways of our ancestors. This is why historical research is so important to the Asatru-folk: it is the rediscovering of our ancient ways and our readoption of them. Discipline

In any discussion of the values of Asatru, discipline is best described as self-discipline. It is the exercise of personal will that upholds honor and the other virtues and translates impulse into action. If one is to be able to reject moral legalism for a system of internal honor, one must be willing to exercise the self-discipline necessary to make it work. Going back to my earlier criticism of society, if one rejects legalism, one must be willing to control ones own actions. Without self-discipline, we have the mess we currently see in our culture. Looking at discipline in terms of fidelity, we see a close connection. Many Pagans go from faith to faith, system to system, path to path. Asatruar are much less likely to do this. The discipline of keeping faith with our Gods and the ways of our ancestors is part of our modern practice. In this way, we limit ourselves in some ways, but we gain much more in others. Hospitality Hospitality is simply one of the strongest core values at the heart of virtually every ancient human civilization. In a community/folk religion such as our own, it is the virtue that upholds our social fabric. In ancient times it was essential that when a traveler went into the world he could find some sort of shelter and welcome for the night. In modern times it is just as essential that a traveler find friendship and safety. In our modern Asatru community, we need to treat each other with respect and act together for the good of our community as a whole. This functions most solidly on the level of the kindred or hearth where nonfamilial members become extremely close and look out for each other. It can mean hospitality in the old sense of taking in people, which we've done, but in modern times it's more likely to mean loaning someone a car or a bit of money when they need it (that's need, not want). Part of hospitality is treating other people with respect and dignity. Many of our Gods are known to wander the world and stop in at people's houses, testing their hospitality and generosity. The virtue of hospitality means seeing people as if they were all individuals with self-respect and importance. Or perhaps from time to time, they are literally the Gods in human form. This has profound implications for social action in our religion. Our response to societal problems such as poverty (that's poverty folks, not laziness) is in many ways our modern reaction to this ancient virtue. In terms of our modern community as a whole, I see hospitality in terms of frontier "barn raisings" where a whole community would come together and pool their resources. This doesn't mean we have to forget differences, but we must put them aside for those who are of our Folk, and work for our common good. Industriousness Modern Asatruar must be industrious in their actions. We need to work hard if we are going to achieve our goals. There is so much for us to do. We've set ourselves the task of restoring Asatru to it's former place as a mainstream faith and by doing so reinvigorating our society and culture. We can't do this by sitting on our virtues, we need to make them an active part of our behavior. Industry also refers to simple hard work in our daily vocations, done with care and pride. Here's a few concrete examples. If you are reading this and don't have a kindred, why not? Stop reading now. Go and place ads in the appropriate local stores, get your name on the Ring of Troth, Wyrd Network, or Asatru Alliance networking lists, and with other Pagan groups. Put on a

workshop. Ok, now you're back to reading and you don't agree with what I'm saying here? Well, be industrious! Write your own articles and arguments. Write a letter to the editor and suggest this material be banned - better that than passivity. Get the blood moving and go out and do it. That's how it gets done. The Gods do not favor the lazy.

The same holds true for our non-religious lives. As Asatruar we should offer a good example as industrious people who add to whatever we're involved in rather than take from it. We should be the ones the business we work in can't do without and the ones who always seem to be able to get things done. When people think of Asatru, they should think of people who are competent and who offer something to the world. This doesn't just apply to vocational work, but to the entire way we live our lives. It is just as much a mentality. The Vikings were vital people. They lived each day to its fullest and didn't wring their hands in doubt or hesitation. We should put the same attitude forward in all that we do whether it is our usual vocation, devotion to the Gods, or leisure time. Self Reliance Industry brings us directly to the virtue of Self-Reliance, which is important both in practical and traditional terms. Going back to the general notion of this article, we are dealing with a form of morality that is largely self-imposed and thus requires self-reliance. We rely on ourselves to administer our own morality. Traditionally, our folkways have always honored the ability of a man or woman to make their own way in the world and not to lean on others for their physical needs. This is one of the ways in which several virtues reinforce and support each other. Hospitality cannot function if people are not responsible enough to exercise discipline and take care of themselves. It's for those that strive and fail or need assistance that hospitality is intended, not for the idle who simply won't take care of themselves. In terms of our relationships with the Gods, self-reliance is also very important. If we wish the Gods to offer us their blessings and gifts, we must make ourselves worthy of them - and the Gods are most pleased with someone who stands on their own two feet. This is one of the reasons for the Asatru "rule" that we do not kneel to the Gods during our ceremonies. By standing we acknowledge our relationship as striving and fulfilled people looking for comradeship and a relationship, rather than acting as scraelings looking for a handout from on high. It takes very little for a God to attract a follower, if worship simply means getting on the gravy train. We, as Asatruar, are people who can make our own way in the world, but who choose to seek a relationship with the Gods. In mundane terms being self-reliant is a simple way to allow ourselves the ability to live as we wish to. In simple economic terms, if one has enough money in the bank one doesn't need to worry as much about being fired due to religious discrimination. We can look a bigot in the face and tell him just where he can put it. It's also nice to have something in the bank to lay down as a retainer on a good lawyer so we can take appropriate action. On the other side of this is self-reliance in the sense of Henry David Thoreau, who advocated a simple lifestyle that freed one from the temptations of materialism. Again, here we are able to live as we wish with those things that are truly important. Religious people from all faiths have found that adjusting ones material desires to match one's ability to meet them leaves one open for a closer relationship with deity and a more fulfilling life. While our ancestors were great collectors of gold goodies, they didn't lust for possessions in and of themselves, but for what they stood for and could do for them. In fact, the greatest thing that could be said of a Lord was that he was a good "Ring Giver." Being self-reliant also means taking responsibility for ones life. It's not just about refusing a welfare check or not lobbying for a tax exemption, but also refusing to blame ones failures on religious intolerance, the patriarchy, or an unfair system. The system may, in fact, be unfair, but it's our own responsibility to deal with it. In societal terms, we have become much too dependent on other people for our own good. As individuals we look to the government or to others to solve our problems and as a society we borrow billions from our descendants to pay for today's excesses. Most

problems in this world could be solved if people just paid their own way as they went. Perseverance The final virtue is Perseverance which I think most appropriate because it is the one that we most need to keep in mind in our living of the other values. Our religion teaches us that the world is an imperfect place, and nothing comes easy. We need to continue to seek after that which we desire. In this imperfect world there are no free lunches or easy accomplishments - especially in the subjects we have set before ourselves. If we truly wish to build an Asatru community that people will hold up as an example of what committed people can do, then we must persevere through the hardships that building our religion is going to entail. We must be willing to continue on when we are pushed back. If one loses a job for ones religion, the answer is not to go back and hide, but to continue until one finds a vocation where one can move forward and live as an Asatruar should.

Finally we must persevere when we simply fail. If one's kindred falls apart because of internal strife, one should go back and start over. Pick up the pieces and continue on. If nobody had done this after the disintegration of the Asatru Free Assembly, this would probably never have been written. We must be willing to continue in the hard work of making our religion strong - not just when it is convenient and easy to do so, but when it gets hard, inconvenient, or just plain boring. To accomplish without striving is to do little, but to persevere and finally accomplish a hard fought goal brings great honor. Appendices: Essays, Raven Kindred Information, Sample Rituals & Networking Information Hailing the Sun: A Sample Blot to honor Sunna at the Summer Solstice This ritual would be ideally performed at sunrise on the day of the summer Solstice. If possible the folk should gather while it is still dark or even better, remain awake throughout the night in vigil. A secondary time would be at noon on the Solstice. This ritual should not be performed at night. At any point in this ritual, within the realm of logic and dramatic flow, the parts marked as Gothi and Gythia may be shared among the folk. In addition, the parts are not necessarily sex specific, but the terminology is used as a convenience. Set Up: An altar should be placed in the center and the folk should form a circle around it, leaving space in the center for the ♦action♦ to take place. For this ritual you will need some sort of mead or beer, a horn or chalice, an offering bowl, a hammer for consecrations, and a wheel of some sort, preferably a wagon wheel to symbolize the turning of the wheel of the year. Any reasonable tools may be substituted. The Wheel is placed on the ground near the altar or on the altar with candles around the rim (unlit). Consecration of space The Gothi goes to the center of the folk and forms the invocational position of the elhaz rune, both hands in the air at a rough 45♦ angle. Gothi: We gather here to honor our sacred lady Sunna, who on this Solstice Morning, reaches her height of power. All hail Sunna! All: Hail Sunna! The Gythia takes the hammer and walks to each of the four corners and consecrates the space. Gythia: Hammer, hallow and hold this holy stead, that it will be a fitting place for our worship of our sacred lady Sunna! Hammar, Helga ve thetta ok hindra alla illska! Gythia returns hammer to altar and faces the altar. Gythia: I consecrate and hallow this altar to the work of our sacred lady Sunna! Here on this Solstice morning may the might of the Gods be brought to our holy stead. May the warm light of Sunna heat our hearts and hold our spirits. Gothi: Our holy lady watches and waits for the blot in her honor. Hail Sunna! All: Hail Sunna! (At this point it would be most appropriate for a song or reading to be performed. It should obviously be about Sunna or the sun or something appropriate to the day.) Invocation Gythia: Our lady Sunna is the light of knowledge, the warmth of love, and the heat of our passion. Let us spend a moment in silence, contemplating those things which she brings us. Leave a few moments for silent prayers and meditation. Gothi: Holy Sunna. Lady of the Sun. Light of the heavens. Ever pursued and ever free. We gather to greet and welcome you and offer you gifts on this day. We offer to you our prayers and love, our devotion and strength, our kinship and honor. All face the sun and form the elhaz posture. All: Hail to thee Sunna, light of Har

newly risen. She whose holy light shone upon our ancestors of old and she whose light will shine upon our children. We give you hail and welcome. Fill our hearts on this Solstice morning with your warm rays that your fires may burn in our hearts throughout the year. Hail Sunna!

A few moments of silence are appropriate here. Blot Gothi: Now it is time to offer sacrifice to our holy lady. Gythia takes horn and Gothi fills it with mead. Gythia holds horn above her head, in the direction of the sun. Gythia: Here is our sacrifice, the essence of our love and spirit. We offer it to you as a token of our kinship and our love. As you drink of it, may your power fill this holy hlaut and feed our spirits. Gythia drinks from the horn and it is then passed around the folk, each taking a drink, with the horn returning to the Gythia. Gythia: Hail to thee Sunna! Gythia pours remainder of horn into the offering bowl. Gythia and Gothi take the bowl and evergreen sprig and walk around the folk, sprinkling the mead to the four corners and on the folk. Finally they return to the center and sprinkle the wheel. Gothi: Hail the sacred wheel of the sun. Now it is the longest day of the year and the sun is triumphant, but all changes and the wheel turns. Gythia lights candles on the wheel and members of the folk take it up and parade it around the grounds. A song or chant would be appropriate at this time. ♦The sun burns, the wheel turns!♦ for example. Once the procession is done (this decision should be based on the subjective feelings of those involved and not planned out) the wheel should be returned to the altar. Gothi & Gythia assume the invocation position Gothi: Sacred Lady Sunna, Summer Sun now strongest. We thank you for your blessings of warmth and light. May you reign long. All: Hail Sunna! Hail Sunna! Hail Sunna! Libation Gothi takes up the hlaut bowl. Gothi: Now our rite is ended and the sacrifice is made. The wheel turns. To Sunna, to the Gods, to the Goddesses, and to Earth, mother of us all, we offer this holy mead, from the Gods to the Earth To us. From ourselves to the Earth to the Gods. Hail! Gothi pours contents of the hlaut bowl on the ground, possibly in the center of the wheel. If this ritual is done indoors, the libation should be poured outside afterwards. We usually trek outside immediately even if the ritual is an apartment. The physical action of pouring the libation is an important psychological trigger to both Gods and men that the ritual is over. Setting the mood: Chant to Odin, Vili, Ve To begin each ritual we offer a three round chant of ♦Odin, Vili, Ve.♦ This serves two purposes. First we are linking ourselves to the Gods of creation and thus to the connections between Midgard and the Gods. Second and perhaps more appropriately it allows people to get themselves mentally prepared for the service. Hammer Rite We offer an invocation to Fire and Ice which are the central elements of the creation of the world. We ask that the place we are meeting be blessed and Holy for the coming of the Gods. Statement of purpose We far too often ignore this, but it's a good idea to have the Gothi or Gythia who is presiding greet the participants and state something general about the purpose of the ritual. It need not be complicated "We gather together today to celebrate the Winter Nights as our ancestors did. To honor our ancestors, the Disir, and Freya the Great Dis and to renew our bonds as a family [kindred]." General Prayer At this point one of our members usually offers up a prayer to the Aesir and Vanir collectively to thank them for their bounty since the last time we met and to ask their blessings upon the kindred and its members. Personal invocations We reserve a time between the opening of the ritual and the blot ceremony for people to offer any prayers or other invocations they feel necessary. This is the time when we Profess new members of Asatru. Other activities done at this time have included a kindred member thanking Saga, the Goddess of wisdom, for her recent graduation from college. Invoke deity of occasion At this point we make a point to specifically invoke and honor the deity that we are blotting. We attempt to list as many names and or functions of the God as possible and this serves a dual purpose in reminding the attendees of who the God is and why we are honoring Him. This is, however, separate from the offering. Meditation At this point we like to remind ourselves why we are here and what the Gods mean to us. We sit and someone either

offers a spoken meditation or more often reads a story from the mythology. While most of us enjoy the poetic edda, we usually use a modern prose version of the myth as it is easier to follow. Offer/sanctify mead The Gothi takes up the horn and his assistant (often called "The Valkyrie" by Asafolk) fills it with mead. The Gothi then steps to the altar and holds the horn aloft and asks the God to partake of it and charge it with his power. Toast to the deity of occasion This is when we begin to deviate substantially from the standard Asatru blot ritual. Beginning with the Gothi the horn is raised and a toast drunk to the God. The horn is then passed around to the Folk and a personal toast repeated. The only rule here is that the round is dedicated to the God invoked. Many times the toasts are personal thanksgiving or requests for aid or wisdom. At the end of the round the remains of the horn (and there should be some) are poured into the blotbowl. Remaining toasts We then take two more rounds to toast whatever Gods, ancestors, and beings each person wishes. There is not necessarily any continuity from one person to the next. Brags or oaths are also appropriate at this time. Professions, other major oaths, and major works of thanksgiving or praise are usually done before the blot. The second and third toasts are usually reserved for small things. Thank deity Finally we always remember to thank the deity and ask for his continued blessings on the Folk present. Oath Ring ceremony Our kindred has a ceremony that affirms our dedication to each other, to the kindred, and to the Gods. Each full Professed and accepted Kindred member comes forward and takes hold of the oath ring. (We are blessed in having a 6" diameter brass oath ring made for us by a kindred member.) One person then recites a rede concerning itself with the symbol of a ring and something which connects us to the Gods, the Earth, and to each other. I should repeat, only kindred Members participate in this. If you haven't sworn on the oath ring, you don't take part in the ceremony. We have enlarged this at public events to all Professed persons, but change the rede to remove references to the kindred. Pour libation Finally we leave the Hof and pour a libation on the physical earth, adjourning outside to do so if we are indoors. The blot hitting the ground signals that the ritual is truly over. When we are working indoors in a living room or other non-dedicated space I always make sure I am the first to return and extinguish candles, turn on electric lights, etc. This provides a good hint to people's minds that the ritual is, in fact, over. If we had a dedicated space, the procession outside to pour the blot would also empty the Hof and we would adjourn to the feast rather than returning to the temple.