



# ***Drinking at the Well of Mimir:***

***An Ásatrú Man's Meanderings  
Through the Last 30 Years***

**Discoveries, Musings,  
Puzzles and Ponderings  
From the Bottomless Well of Mimir**



*Bil Linzie*

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Drinking at the Well of Mímir  
An Ásatrú Man's Meanderings through the Last 30 Years  
Of Drinking at the Well of Mímir

Dec. 8, 2000

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***Enjoy!***

**Happy Yule and a Prosperous 21<sup>st</sup> Century!**

***Wm. (Bil) R. Linzie, Eyvindr Hearth, Dec., 08, 2000***

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# Preface

I don't consider this volume to be any great piece of research. There are plenty of researchers out there far more knowledgeable than I, and I have no problem with that. I don't consider these books revolutionary in any way either; I seriously doubt whether they will change the practice of Ásatrú in the modern world. What they are is an Ásatrú man's view of the world after having been Ásatrú two years short of a full third of a century. They are *my views*.

When I was in 6th grade just entering junior high school in Lambertville, Michigan, I had few thoughts about religion. Our town was a collection of German-American Lutherans (who, like my grandfather, rarely, if ever, attended church) and Polish-American Catholics who only went to church until they were old enough to start helping on the farm. My mom was the oddball French-Canadian-Ojibwa Catholic who forced me to go to Mt. Carmel Catholic church until I was 14 years old and who does not know to this day that I *schwäntst* (played "hookey") catechism from age 8 on. I asked my Grampa Jack one morning when we were hoeing corn what religion he was. After a minute of leaning on his hoe and thinking he said, "I guess I belong to the Linzie religion" and that was good enough for my 6th grade mind. Back then, I really didn't think much about anything except for Laura Berry (who still comes to mind off and on) and Melanie Sigler.

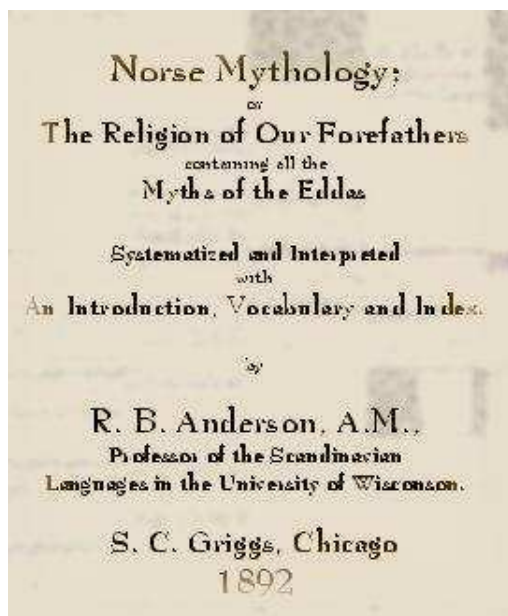
I was *schwäntsing* Mr. Thompson's study hall one fine day and wound up in the school library which really wasn't much except that Laura or Melanie might show up once in a while. I don't know why I was looking at the books on the shelves (a rarity for me at the time), but I ran across an old book:

Norse mythology,  
legends of giants and elves, trolls, wizards.

The tales, poetry and the like were all familiar to me familiar to me. I had heard many of the stories, and nasty giants, ogres, and elves were all a part of growing up in that time and place which almost seems like a foreign country now.

Growing up in a German-Polish-American farming community which had barely crept into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the early 1960's, one was barely out of rural Germany and the stories were common. Most kids (except for the ones just moving from the

Figure 1. Frontispiece of the old book



(a)

city or just visiting on summer vacation) and about half the adults of my parents' generation accepted the reality of elves. I remember the time when old Pussig VanGunten and his wife climbed the tree in front of their place, and told the road crew that if they were going to chop down the tree, they would have to chop it down with the two 80 year olds in it. Pussig was smart enough not to tell the road crew just *why* the tree couldn't be chopped down, but most of us *knew* who *really* lived in that tree. So, when I pulled the smelly old book down, it felt familiar.

I creaked open the cover and read the quote by some guy named Thomas Carlyle.

*"I think Scandinavian Paganism, to us here, is more interesting than any other. It is, for one thing, the latest; it continued in those regions of Europe till the eleventh century: eight hundred years ago the Norwegians were still worshippers of Odin. It is interesting also as the creed of our fathers; the men whose blood still runs in our veins, whom doubtless we still resemble in many ways. Strange: they did believe that, while we believe so differently. We have tolerable means to do it; for there is another point of interest in these mythologies: that they have been preserved so well.*

*"Neither is there no use in knowing something about this old Paganism of our fathers. Unconsciously, and combined with higher things, it is us yet, that old faith withal. To know it consciously brings us into closer and clearer*



*relations with the past,-with our own possessions in the past. For the whole past, as I keep repeating, is the possession of the present. The past had always something true, and is a precious possession. In a different time, in different place, it is always some other side of our common human nature that has been developing itself."*

—Thomas Carlyle

I loved that book and read it cover to cover at least four times a year for the next 3 years. My Grampa Jack was “Linzie religion” and so was I, but I belonged to the Ása-Faith as well.

I later bought a second printing of the book and still enjoy it. After 30 years of Ásatrú the book has begun to even take on the smell of that original I once held in my hands.

I love the fact that I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation German-American. I now live in the southwest in a predominantly hispanic community and enjoy *enchiladas y tamales* as much as I do *Sauerkraut mit Schinken und Äpfeln*, but I never mistake where I came from. I read a lot more now than I used to and move a little slower than when I was still chasing Laura (and I do mean *chasing—she was fast*). I have a family of my own and I am 30+ years and 2000 miles away from the place of my upbringing, but I feel more a German-American now than I did growing up. I wrote this book as an expression of thanks, I suppose.

This book came together over a period of 10 years. I started in 1990 (the year that our town’s electricity went out on Superbowl Sunday), and I lost the first thirty or so pages to an old, borrowed Apple IIe. Fortunately, I still had the original handwritten copy. Since that time, I’ve gone through 3 computers, Windows3.1, Windows95, Windows98, and now Linux/ FreeBSD; countless rewrites, and have lost half my hair, grown long in the tooth, became a Grampa, and got remarried only to have two more sons (one of whom is “Jack” born 99 years and 9 days after his namesake and founder of the ‘Linzie-religion’). A lot has happened in those 10 years.

The book actually started out as a 5-page essay but quickly took on a life of its own sprawling out well beyond a ream of paper. The topics wander mainly because I like it that way. It starts with the individual who slowly discovers his relationship to the world. It starts at the center of the universe, i.e. *me—(yes, I’m slightly narcissistic)*, and then looks out, then up, then down, and then further out. It is not an instruction manual, but rather a record of learning. I’ve put in beaucoup quotes and named the authors and their books as well. There are plenty of personal observations in here (actually, the bulk of what’s here is *personal observations—I just ‘scotch-taped’ the personal observations together with quotes*).

I’m well aware that authors like to argue. One writes about a new theory—the

next knocks it. *I* am not one of those authors. The older I get, the less I like to argue and the more I like to play fiddle and play with my sons (and my wife, when she lets me *catch* her). If you want to get hold of me to tell about a great fiddle tune you heard, you'll have my undivided attention; on the other hand if you want to tell about a mistake I made in my logic—forget it, I'm not biting.

I put this book out for free. I did that for a reason. If you find that some of my ideas are good, fine, they are there for the taking. Information is really no different from fiddle tunes in my mind. They are both there to be taken—enjoyed. I don't figure the book's a top-seller anyway, so I prefer to give it away. The way of life that the Ása-Faith offers is an enjoyable thing, and this is my way of giving-back.

One other thing: I believe that the Ása-Faith should be free and personal. No one can *tell* another how to experience life, and certainly, no one should *pay* to learn about how to experience life. I am not against people coming together for Ása-Faith holidays, but I still don't like organized religion any more than Grampa Jack did. I wrote *The Ásatrú Folk Manifesto*<sup>1</sup> in honor of him. He was my greatest inspiration, was a family man, and farmer, an upstanding member of our little community, a regular at the Grange, and the best of Grampas.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for *The Ásatrú Folk Manifesto*. It is self explanatory.

## Chapter 1

# World Views



*Recently, I made a trip to the State of Washington to visit some friends. I had never been there before so they opted to take me out and show me the sights particularly the mountain plant life since I am an avid herbalist in my adopted home of New Mexico where I have lived most of my life. Some of the sights I had seen piqued my interest, others simply bothered me such as the late rising of the sun and overcast skies, but on the last day of my stay I truly saw a miraculous event in the sky: a huge, inverted thunderhead. This was no ordinary thunderhead. I am well acquainted with impressive New Mexican thunderclouds, some of the most impressive in the world, but this thunderhead was the Grandmother Thunderhead of All, and the fact that it was built upside down was, by far, the most remarkable event in the skies that I had seen since Halley's comet!*

*After a few minutes of the awe-inspiring sight (the imagination roams at the speed of light in the presence of such majesty), Nancy, the driver, said, "Boy, Mt. Ranier looks great in this light!" Visions of massive rains, and lightening snapped out to be replaced by a magnificent mountain. Never again did I see the magnificent Ranier as a thunderhead, but I know that the spirit*

*of that mountain “looks” like a thundercloud because she revealed Herself to me.*

*On my return to New Mexico, I mentioned the sight of the inverted thunderhead to a friend of mine. She said that she had seen it the first time she went to Washington as well. Apparently, that mountain spirit reveals herself to New Mexicans—we have an affinity with mountain spirits, you know.*

This chapter is about a different way of conceptualizing the world, about seeing it in a different light from some very different angles. It is about understanding the world as would an anthropologist. It is odd but very true that the thing which absolutely fascinates anthropologists about folks from other cultures is also that which irritates and angers others who hold rigidly fixed belief systems such as separatists from certain Muslim sects now living world wide and dwellers in the breadbasket or heartland of the United States, and it should also be mentioned in the same sentence that white, Anglo-Americans and Europeans are not necessarily the only xenophobes in the world. To grasp importance of and sometimes even deadly seriousness of worldviews and the deeply ingrained effect that stems from the rigidity some of these, one only need to think back as far as the recent events in Bosnia, opposing religious groups within a single culture trying to annihilate each other. This book is not about separatism, though. In fact, if anything, it, like the anthropologist, elevates and celebrates the vast differences between cultures.

Each culture in the world has its own way of viewing how things are put together, how things relate to one another in time and space, and what the meaning of each event is. Each interprets events through its own history, language, landscape, economic support system, religion, and its social structure. Each fits the individual into a concept of the whole. This is the worldview of a culture. Over a period of time, the tangled Shakespearean web of events within which each culture is enmeshed changes significantly enough that the culture itself is measurably changed, sometimes so much so that the members of the particular culture begin to separate themselves out from their ancestral heritage. Sometimes a change like this comes slowly and easily while at other times being spurred on by plagues, drought or war, but a shift in worldview for any culture is inevitable. This book documents such a shift.

The prehistory of Europe is nebulous and open to much speculation as to what actually happened prior to the written historical record, and in spite of the fact that much has been recorded since the time when Romans still occupied Britain, when the historical Jesus was still in the ancient equivalent of diapers, and when the great German Nation was still but a handful of small clans separated from one another by vast stretches of primeval forest. So much has changed that the records themselves do not even seem accurate. A trip to the history section of any university library

will inform the reader quite sufficiently as to just how much there is that we just do not know.

This book is not really about history though. It is, however, about worldviews: *one* world view in particular. But before commencing any further, perhaps, the word *worldview* should be defined so that everyone concerned is understanding the concept in a similar fashion.

**worldview**, *n.* *sing.* (*plur.* *-s*), a matrix or set of matrices that an individual human being or a defined group of human beings utilize for the purpose of storing, manipulating, and accessing information.<sup>1</sup>

The problem with this definition, although precise, it is not self-explanatory.

First, just exactly what *kind* of “information” is meant here? The term “information” is not limited to any specific type (at least in this definition). Normally, with such a “scientific” sounding word, one immediately thinks of that information which is learned from textbooks and experiments, but there is no need to be so technical. “Information,” in its most basic form, is of the most immediate kind: data collected from the body—data about what is going on inside the body, in the immediate surroundings of the body, data collected through the sensory systems (visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory). In other words, the “information” collected really relates to what one can *sense* and *know*.

Primary information is gained from sensory experience, but information can also be gained secondarily by talking with someone, watching events on TV (or hearing them on the radio), reading books about worldviews, etc. Even though the latter type is extremely prevalent, experience generally holds the primary position. For example, all school-aged children learn that the sun does not move around the round ball of the earth, but that the earth rotates on its axis resulting in a visual illusion of the sun’s “movement.” The average individual’s sense of vision stores this visual information (primary) of the sun’s *rising* and *setting* so much so that the English language continues to use these terms as a standard way of marking time. We speak of *sunrise* and talk about *when the sun goes down below the horizon* and not about *when the earth’s rotation brings the sun into view*. Primary or sensory information is deeply rooted into one’s culture regardless of whether the information is correct or not.

In this same example, it is easy to see the less important status the secondary information has. Indeed, although it also comes through the same sensory systems—through

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<sup>1</sup> Do not bother to look up this definition in any dictionary because I made it up. It may or may not be similar to that which is defined in Anthro 101 textbooks; I do not really know. This definition was constructed from many different sources. “worldview” is simply the translation of the German word *Weltanschauung* which according to the American Heritage Dictionary (1978) means “a comprehensive *worldview*, especially from a specified point of reference.”

reading, hearing lectures, seeing movies, etc.-it does not leave the same impact on the human mind as the “direct” experience of watching a sunrise!

Now, there is a problem with what has just been termed “direct experience,” however. The human being is a complex animal, and because of this complexity many things are often chalked up as direct experience when, in fact, they are not. For example, a young man walks into the grocery, and looks directly in to the eyes of a young woman of approximately the same age, who then smiles at him. The “direct experience” is that of a young woman *smiling* at a young man; the “interpretation” of the event, on the other hand, is that the young woman *likes* the man (which may or may not be the case). The physical event or experience is then stored together with the interpretation of the event. As could be easily guessed, this kind of information storage can lead to a whole variety of problems for the individual.

Direct experience as the primary source of information becomes even more confusing and complex in the case of “hallucinations” or simply “imaginings.” A hallucination is direct experience without a correlate in physical reality, and also often without a correlate in consensus reality. However, because hallucinations do involve direct experience, i.e. are “experienced” by the individual, they must be treated as a part of that individual’s (or group’s) reality. Even more confusing is that people deal with hallucinations (at least by this definition) quite often. For example, memories fit this definition, and so do dreams, fantasies, ideas, visualizations, etc., but most twentieth century people disregard this type of information to be either illusory or having come from the mind’s memory banks and give greater credence to only those things which have a correlate in physical reality. At least, this is how *some* people respond. Here is a fictitious example which could be found in almost any daily newspaper:

*A man has killed his wife in what seems to be cold blood. An investigation reveals that the man felt that his wife was having an affair with a mutual acquaintance. Further investigation reveals that the wife had to work late at least two times per week, and the husband who has been known to be quite jealous, killed her in a fit of rage one evening after she returned from work. As it turns out, the man was quite mistaken. His wife fearful of the jealous outbursts had been faithful to her husband all along.*

Fantasy, fueled by the powerful emotions of insecurity and jealousy, has created a very *real-feeling* hallucination, a direct experience, with no more relationship to physical reality than the wife’s not being home, and so *real* did it feel that the individual felt “forced” or “obliged” to react. Although seeming a pretty extreme example, on the one hand, most folks will “misinterpret” at least one other person’s behavior on a daily basis and then will react to their own misinterpretations as if they were a part of physical or consensus reality. The problems presented by

fantasy, memories (as in “false memory syndrome”), or even ideas fueled by powerful emotions are quite common in spite of the fact that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is supposed to be the age of logic, reason and enlightenment.

So called *normal* people come equipped neurologically with some ability to distinguish between what takes place in physical/ consensus reality and what does not. This is a decision that is mediated by an area of the brain called the limbic system, and, interestingly enough, this is also the same area of the brain which is instrumental in the production and the tempering of emotions. If this area of the brain is damaged in certain ways, the person has a very difficult time differentiating between direct experience, which is related to events occurring in the external environment, and fantasy or hallucination, which is produced completely within the brain itself. These same people tend to feel that characters in a book or on television are part of consensus, physical reality as well. Generally, these problems are related to the psychological disorders of schizophrenia, personality disorders, and mental retardation and are beyond the scope of this book. In spite of the fact that these folks respond to many things which have no basis in physical reality, it must be understood that they are directly experiencing the events.

Common sense will usually tell us that our interpretation of the *real world* is the direct result of personal experience with it, but the above examples complicate such a simplistic version of reality. The above examples indicate that there are many two-way interactions which occur with experience feeding into interpretation which, in turn, guides how one experiences. The above example of the man shooting his wife was not just an example of a single misinterpretation, but rather the shooting was the result of a very complex personal reality which was built slowly out of the repeated interactions between personal experience (the man’s wife being late twice a week) and his interpretation (she is having an affair). These repeated interactions were built up, one on top of the other, like layers of plaster across the surface of a wooden table. After enough layers are put down, the resulting plastered surface begins to differ greatly from the original wooden layer until it’s *woodeness* is no longer recognizable. This is how a worldview, or a personal interpretation system, affects the interpretation of reality.

The difficulties that normal people experience when reacting to their own misinterpretations is fairly commonplace and show up in the home, in social settings, and at the workplace, and because it is so common, people or groups of people create sets of rules to help individual members of the defined group decide what is *real* (worth responding to) and what is not. These rules also define how bits of information must relate to one another. For example, in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, a dream is not treated as *real* because it does not correlate with physical, consensus reality, even though, depending on the sub-group that one belongs to, a dream might be interpreted

as memories, as completely random neuronal firings, as the brain working out its problems by bringing itself back into balance, as the *soul* visiting other places, or as a *spirit visiting the individual*. There are rules, then, for how a dream is to be interpreted and dealt with depending on the cultural surroundings. The abstract concept of *dream* fits into a nice cubby-hole somewhat like a postbox at the post office. This post office-style arrangement of reality is called a *matrix*, and there are cultural rules governing how all pieces of information are to be handled, how they are to be stored, how each piece relates to the others, etc.

Those who suffer from mental disorders are often operating with a different set of rules than others around them. Because of this, they tend to behave or react in some very socially inappropriate ways. They work by a completely different set of rules than those they were taught as children, and this idiosyncratic set of rules is often in conflict with the general or consensus set of rules (*the common worldview*) of people they work or interact with. In some cases, these folks *appear to understand* consensus reality (that which members of a defined group agree upon), but have very often added, for reasons only known to themselves, other supplementary rules which can result in some very bizarre behavior patterns. In other cases, there are those who seem completely incapable of functioning within the matrix as prescribed by their *group*, and these are often institutionalized for their own protection.

Interestingly enough, somewhere in this discussion, *foreigners* must fit. Anthropologists are well acquainted with this phenomenon of *culture clash*.

*A young student from the University of New Mexico finds his first assignment in Zaïre. The first 6 months of the assignment are spent by his being the laughing stock and endless source of entertainment for the locals. They love to tell him little harmless lies such as a spirit-lives-in-everyone's-left-nostril or the death sentence is applied for burping at the dinner table, and for enjoyment, they often work very hard to set up a whole variety of situations simply to watch his inappropriate reactions.*

*On the other hand the tribal members think the student a fool for not knowing that medicines must be applied with certain feathers to be truly effective or that the eyeballs of sheep are delicacies to be served only to honored guests.*

The difference between a foreigner and one with a mental disorder is that the normal, but naive, foreigner is able to quickly learn about and adapt to his new setting. Very soon, out of a sense of self preservation, he learns which behaviors his adopted culture deems *crazy* and consciously drops them from his repertoire, and even though he may always be considered a *foreigner*, his attempts and successes in trying to learn the new culture gradually become acceptable to the locals to a degree which is defined by that group.



Occasionally, there are problems associated with one worldview clashing with another. The mildest of these is what is normally termed *culture shock* where one person begins to interact with a culture that is slightly different than his own, such as moving from one area of the United States to another. Moving from Kansas or Michigan to a small town in Arizona will make clear to anyone that there are distinct, albeit subtle, regional differences in accents (dialects), slang vocabulary, the types of jokes people tell, customs relating to gender differences, cooking/ eating habits, styles of dress, acceptable color coordination for homes, styles of furniture, leisure-time activities, etc. ad infinitum. The reason for the existence of cultural differences should be obvious and predictable, but how each individual will react to such differences is not. The individual can view the differences as curious points of interest, something *to write home about*, or might be quite incapable (without assistance) of understanding and accepting the differences between cultures to the point where cultural differences can become a source of disgust or even hatred, in some extreme cases, leading to pathological behaviors or hate crime: racial or cultural discrimination, assaults, cross-burnings, hate speech, even murder. The ease with which an individual can move from one worldview to another is part of that individual's make-up and is highly correlated with socio-economic status, cultural background, behaviors learned as a child, and religion/ education.

A worldview is not only made up of things/ concepts fit into a matrix or a mental filing system but is also made up of how these things relate to one another. In some cases, relationships are obvious and require little thinking. In Michigan, *kielbasa* (a form of smoked sausage), Polish culture, and farming communities are closely correlated; in New Mexico *chiles*, Hispano/ Native American culture, southwestern cooking are all easily related. However, the blatant extermination of owls by members of the northeastern New Mexican culture is not easily explainable nor, even after it is explained, is it easily accepted by *foreigners*, especially 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Americans from an urban background. The fact is that owl in this area of the country is associated with the *fact* that witches (*brujas*) fly around the small communities in the dark of the night spying on innocent Christians and casting malevolent spells resulting in sickness, madness, and in some cases, death. For the people of the northeastern New Mexican culture, the evil reality of the owl is just as much a *reality* as viral infections are for the modern physician. For these people, the equation, owls = *brujas*, is true.

It is *relationships* between events and objects, in other words *the personal interpretation based on a cultural worldview*, which create the most complicated differences between cultures. For the average American, an owl is a night-flying bird of prey which in many areas of the United States is on the endangered species list. Possession of live birds, feathers from dead birds, and causing the death of any

of the various owl species found throughout the country is illegal (and immoral to some degree), and for the most part, these birds are usually thought of as being an important part of the ecology of its geographical area. This way of viewing owls and their relationship to the earth is part of the “standard American” worldview. However, to many of southwestern heritage such a view is absurd! The owl is, in fact, evil! The “spotted owl controversy” of the early 1990’s, which started in the Pacific Northwest, brought these two previously insignificant views into conflict and, in some cases, actually became the source of physical altercations between the two opposing factions. Though seemingly important to the members of each party involved, to those taking a neutral stance, the fights appeared trivial, and the idea of taking sides sounded ridiculous. Who is right depends entirely upon the worldview from which one is judging. For lumberjacks and Hispanics dead owls are fine; for Native Americans all owls are to be avoided if possible; and for the ecologically minded, dead owls were a sin against nature and a blemish on humanity. For folks of different heritages, relationships such as these can be confusing.

Differences in worldviews have been the cause of wars from time to time. One group persecutes another because both are unable to create some kind of “common ground.” The most bloody wars in history have been fought over differing worldviews, often in the name of religion (which is just another layer in one’s worldview), such as the Crusades, and some of the cruelest cold wars, such as the Inquisition which had by some reports approximately 6 million so-called heretics put to death.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous cultures almost always end up being overrun based on the idea that they are “Heathen” regardless of whether such a statement is actually true. Saamí, Filipinos, Jews, Africans, Bushmen, and Native Americans of both northern and southern hemispheres have all been subjected to often more than one attempt at genocide because the members of the incoming culture were incapable of adapting to or accepting the native worldview. Even in the year 1999, in countries such as Norway, Canada, and the United States which are supposed to be technologically and sociologically advanced and somewhat culturally sensitive, prison inmates, hospital patients, and persons dying in rest homes are denied access to spiritual practices if such practices fall outside the accepted “normal” religious definitions. In these same countries, cults practicing neo-Nazism, racial purity, political exclusivity, and

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<sup>2</sup> This number has been rather hotly debated. Some members of the New Age movement (usually neo-pagans) like to claim the highest number which is over 6 million, but this author has seen reports which indicate that the number may have been much lower. Additionally, the presentation is such that it *sounds* like it happened all at one time like a tribal extermination, but the fact is that the executions lasted over a period of 6 centuries and the deaths included men, women, children, and folks from all cultures known at the time. Reports of these deaths have also made it sound as though the folk exterminated were primarily women, but this is also not the case.

even “*barrio*” gangs continue to flourish and carry on the traditions of inflexibility, intolerance, and xenophobia.

So far, particular worldviews have been discussed as if they belong to particular cultures, and, to some degree, that is true. There is another interesting feature of worldviews, however: they can *change* within the same culture over a period of time. They become altered due to various changes taking place in the social, economic, or physical environments. The worldview of the midwestern American farmer, for example, has changed drastically over the past 50 years. Changes in technology, communications, weather conditions, education and educational standards, human movement patterns, economics, and general experience have all come together to bring about changes in how the once rural Iowan or Nebraskan now views/ interprets his world. In fact, there have been so many changes over the years that one could easily create a field of study at the university level revolving only around rural mid-western United States of the early to mid-20th century! So far we have pointed out that worldviews are subject to change depending on the conditions supporting them, but they can also be changed intentionally, and this book documents one such change.

What is it that encourages or pushes one into adopting a different worldview especially when it may differ from “consensus reality” (the prevailing ‘mental filing system’ of one’s own community) or may differ radically from the one that one was raised with? The overall purpose of a worldview has already been defined as a way in which we humans store and retrieve information. In computer terms, if *information* is the “data,” then a *worldview* is the filtering software which renders the data usable by the rest of the system. Data are no good unless one is able to retrieve and manipulate them to some end. Additionally, a worldview is a way for an individual to be able to *place* himself spatially within the universe and temporally in terms of history and allows him to communicate with others within the same system. The data are then manipulated so that certain predictions can then be made about the universe. Without a worldview, the entire universe is simply made up of a chaos of facts, a place wherein one cannot survive. Even cats and lizards with their experience-generated worldviews are able to make certain predictions about the world around them. Were they not able to do so, they would starve to death. But why would one wish to adopt *another* worldview in addition to the one they were raised within?

There really may not be any good answer to this question. Some folks are born seemingly satisfied with the way the world appears to work around them while others are born *seeking*. The question really seems to have much to do with a sense of “wholeness” which is what this book is about. A precise definition of “wholeness” is nebulous, but relates to a feeling of well-being within the universe, a feeling of

belonging. Some folks seem to be born with this feeling (the number is very few, however), but most begin to develop a feeling that “Surely, this can’t be all there is!” From that point on, the search has begun. It is this unfilled need which drives and spurs on scientific research, goads philosophers, causes spouse to leave spouse, and children to leave home. It is the feeling that the grass is always greener somewhere else, the human longing to return to Eden, Oz, or to the Land of the Ancestors. The search for “wholeness” is the reason why cults and gangs never seem to lack for members, and why suicide often seems the only viable choice for the chronically depressed. This book is about this search.

Stability is an important function of a worldview. Stability comes from knowing where one stands within the family, community, or world and from being able to predict with a fair degree of accuracy what one’s standing will be tomorrow. Stability springs from being able to remember and compare the past to the present, and from being able to project that information into the future: “I was born as my mother’s son, I still am my mother’s son, and I will continue to be my mother’s son.” Such a simplistic statement should be easily understood by anybody with any sense at all! Not quite . . . . There are a whole variety of events, disorders, or choices which can lead to a disintegration of even the simplest forms of stability. Individuals in any of these cases can be thrown into madness where the world no longer holds any meaning and where chaos is the order of the day! Amnesia induced by blows to the head or by drug overdoses is a complete loss of identity in many cases requiring institutionalization and extensive treatment. Alzheimer’s Disease decreases the ability to interact with the world efficiently. Severe psychological disorders such as schizophrenia and diseases like chronic drug or alcohol addiction can lead to a break with one’s personal worldview and certainly with consensus reality by either mutating existing worldviews or in some cases even generating a new one. Psychological trauma such as Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome, Near Death Experiences (NDE’s), or the death of a loved one can lead to the permanent dismantling or rearranging of one’s worldview. Although for an outsider looking in, it appears that nothing has changed, i.e. “he is still his mother’s son,” but for the afflicted individual, it is *the world* that has gone mad. There is no longer any stability. The world appears in a constant state of flux and, because of this, there is no possibility of being able to predict. To end the madness, a new worldview is needed to regain some sense of stability.

Worldviews are changed by outside forces as well often associated with trauma, crises, or changes in consensus reality and is bound to occur particularly if the original is very rigid in nature. Some of these changes may take place quietly through choices, although somewhat rarer and more difficult to obtain a complete break from one’s own worldview, can also be effective. The adoption into certain

religious brotherhoods such as monasteries, for example, or into certain military services (particularly mercenary or undercover groups) is a personal choice that sometimes requires/ forces a complete break from one's own past which may include, then, the changing of how one perceives the world.

Other changes occur somewhat more abruptly. Folks in this position occasionally belong to very strict, fundamentalist traditions which sometimes make it very difficult for the individuals to accept change. These folks try to divide their world into either black or white, and when confronted with too many very *grey* tones, begin to feel the stability of their existence (i.e. their worldview) slip away. This can become an impetus for them to renew their relationship to their worldview, or will eventually open the doorway into chaos. In this way, religious fervor can override the tenets of the religion itself to become the driving force behind religious wars promoting terrorism or genocide. This is probably what is also behind the proverbial "wildness of the preacher's daughter" (if it's not a proverb it should be) with the rigid sexuality of early upbringing being ousted by puberty, and also behind the idea that people attending universities tend to fall away from their previous religious convictions. Members from both these groups get a little bit away from the nest that they were raised in and begin to discover that the world is a little more complex than saying prayers and attending service. Science and scientific discoveries, especially at the rapid pace that they are being presented in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often conflict greatly with rigidly structured religion; thus the ongoing battle between the scientists/ evolutionists and the Creationists.

It is not a battle for truth or even for reality; it is a battle between worldviews. Truth *exists* as a part of reality, and no matter how people choose to interpret it, *truth*, in and of itself, exists. So the battle between a Right-to-Lifer and a Right-to-Chooser is really little more than a skirmish to determine whose opinion has more supporters, more weapons, more voters, classier slogans, more charismatic speakers, and better written propaganda, and has nothing to do with truth or with reality since these things will continue to exist no matter which side is eliminated, exterminated, or just beaten to a pulp. The battle between Creationists and the evolutionists is really no more important than whether the Dewey Decimal System is better than the Library of Congress or whether one walks 6 miles as opposed to 10 kilometers. Both groups are simply vying for the temporary (and arbitrary) position of "King of the Hill," and the stability (if any) offered by His Royal albeit Transient Highness is fleeting.

Stability comes in different flavors. If reality can be divided into an inner or an internal reality and an external reality, stability then is the one being equally matched against the other. In some worldviews, the external is assumed to be static and non-evolving, so if any mismatch occurs, it is an internal problem, i.e.

psychological or spiritual. In other worldviews, the opposite happens, so that when anything goes wrong the problem and the answer to the problem lies somewhere outside the self. These are the two extremes, however, and most worldviews will lie somewhere on the continuum in between. In general, the only “dangerous” way of viewing the world is through the idea that neither changes, in other words, through a very rigid and, consequently, non-tolerant, inflexible, and, therefore, fragile system. When one holds such a view, eventual instability is inevitable.

According to some of the more modern psychological theories, small instabilities occur all the time and are dealt with at almost an unconscious level. For these thinkers, this is the “learning process.” Arnold and Amy Mindell, a husband and wife team of psychologists, call the point where instability is reached an *edge*, a point where some type of change must occur to continue, and they maintain that for balance or reconciliation to be attained, one *must* cross the edge. In their system, the edge is always marked by a guardian who must be overcome.

“An edge is a filter to what you are perceiving. It marks the limits of who you are and what you imagine yourself capable of. It describes your capacities in a particular channel at a given moment.

“Edges are a core issue in working with yourself because when you come to an edge, you lose your perceptions. You suspect, you even somehow know, that some signal or some feeling is there, but for some reason you cannot let it in. You get confused. You know that something’s there, but you don’t seem to be fully aware of it. You have to ask again and again what’s happening. You forget things, and get embarrassed and mixed up at the edge.”<sup>3</sup>

Mindell goes on to explain that the reason that “the edge” is so important is that the identity of the individual, i.e. the “ego” and how it relates to the rest of the world, or the entire worldview is affected:

“These edges are really important. . . . because your whole identity as a person is called into question. The edge protects and conserves your old identity. Making that identity change isn’t very simple; it usually involves a huge crisis.

“There are all sorts of methods for getting across that edge.”<sup>4</sup>

For many of the so-called newer scientists, *not crossing* the edge can be dangerous to one’s mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health and that the way to wholeness is over the edge. In their writings the Mindells’ describe several methods for accomplishing this, one of which is to “battle the *edge figure*,” a personification of one’s

<sup>3</sup> Arnold and Amy Mindell, *Riding the Horse Backwards: Process work in theory and practice*, (Penguin Books, London), 1992, p.43.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

confrontation with instability. Some worldviews will consider the *edge figure* to be an internal or psychological construct while others consider it to be external with as much validity and physical density as anything else within consensus reality. In the past, as well as in the present, traditional cultures have had, and some continue to have, ways in which one who had come to the “big edge” could cross over into the unknown, could become healed and could return to his or her community with the message of healing. In most of the circumpolar cultures, for example, the one who had returned was labeled “shaman.” For the Samí (Laplanders), such a one was called *noaide* or *ofelaš* (the first term means ‘shaman’ and the second means the ‘pathfinder’). These individuals were often leaders and led their people onto paths of wholesomeness, health and prosperity; they cared for the community and functioned as its guide. In other cultures, particularly of the temperate zones, the community was led usually by a king who was the earthly representative of the luck and power of the community. In these temperate cultures, the one who stepped over the edge and was able to return from the unknown was the healer (AS *heliand* = “healer” or the “one who heals”). This book deals with crossing over the “big edge” as handled by the Germanic peoples; it does not deal with shamans, but rather the “Wholemaker.”

There are several reasons for my putting together this book now. On a personal level, I have been cultivating the worldview of the Wholemaker for almost 30 years. It is a functional one in that I am able to fit comfortably into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. My day job is in the field of mental health; I am well trained in science. I am quite happy with the fact that I am less than 1/16 Native American and am of more than 3/4 northern and western Germanic. My people have been in the United States of America for less than 150 yrs. and, as far as I know, no one in my family has ever done anything to merit a place in *Who’s Who*, *Guinness Book of World Records*, or even the front page of the local newspaper.

About a dozen or so years ago, I met one of those “edge guardians” that the Mindells write about, suffered for it, questioned my own place in history and then moved on. Somehow I had moved through a state of internal chaos (and quite a bit of external chaos as well), and at the breaking point, I was “healed.” I can remember years spent chasing dreams and rainbows, wishing one day that I had been born Native American, or that I could be famous or, at least, descended from someone of fame or nobility. I remember seeing the movie *Roots* and remember how I longed for *roots*, too. My life was a pretense, and at one single point, the fragile pretense was exposed. I was left with nothing, or almost nothing: I had my Germanic studies and my mixed bag of a personal history. It was as if I had one Well of Information, and through all those years of pretending, the well had become so overgrown and

filled with garbage that I had no idea of its depth or of the richness of its waters. This book then grew out of my own clean up exercise.

Secondly, this book is dedicated to those whom I've come across over the years standing frozen at the same crossroads that I stood at. They are scared to look behind themselves into their own histories because of what they may discover: their lives have been a pretense as well. Many have gone on to clean up their own wells and have become satisfied citizens of the 20th and 21st centuries. That is what healing is about in this book: bringing one to a state of stable satisfaction, satisfaction that their lives are their own and satisfaction that their lives have some kind of meaning in the overall scheme of things.

This book wanders and its focus becomes very dim at some points. This is because it is a reflection of my process of coming into a state of wholeness. I've worked in health related fields for almost 20 years now and never have I seen anyone simply make a beeline into a perfect state of health. There are always meanderings, ponderings, backtrackings, and wanderings. The reader is forewarned. There are also areas rich in technical details while other areas may show either lack of knowledge about certain topics, lack of understanding or simply what appears to be wild speculation. The book may even seem incomplete at times. No matter, again it reflects my life which I consider to be in common parlance a *work in progress*.

Some words of caution are necessary. The underlayer of this work is Germanic history, but the accuracy of this worldview should be drawn into question. Exactly, how accurate can anyone be that a complete version of this worldview even exists? The fact is that no one can. It is not as though the traditions have continued down through the ages in an unbroken fashion like Buddhism, for example. Therefore, no such claim is being made here. Secondly, there does not appear to have been anything like a pan-Germanic tradition; rather, traditions were localized in both time and space. The traditions of one town were not necessarily those of the next town over, and the traditions in a town in 950 CE may have differed significantly from the traditions in the same town 50 years earlier. Thirdly, it is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to discuss traditions in and of themselves; one needs some kind of standard to compare them against, and that standard will almost always be the standards set by the society/ culture through which the discussion comes. In this case, the discussion is by 20th century standards. Concepts which are completely unknown or are at least very foreign to a culture needs analogies (comparisons) both for definition and explanation, and while one part of the comparison comes from an ancient Germanic tradition the other part comes out of consensus reality<sup>5</sup>, i.e.

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<sup>5</sup> "Consensus reality" is a term which will reappear throughout this entire book and its meaning will depend upon the context in which it appears. It means "a reality upon which a specified and defined group of individuals agree upon." Consensus reality for Christians is that "God made



the reality that the readers all agree upon. Let the reader be forewarned then, this author makes no qualms about the Germanic world view as presented in this book being *resurrected* and *reconstructed* and, furthermore, can only speculate with the reader as to the accuracy of the information contained in these pages even though every attempt was made to keep interpretation to a minimum.<sup>6</sup>

The inherent danger, then, in reviving then following any tradition is that the tradition itself becomes dogmatic. There is something pleasant and comforting about engaging in ritualistic acts, but if the meaning becomes lost, the tradition is either dead or might as well be dead. A poem by a Chinese Taoist goes

“Watching a performance of warriors, I was told  
 ‘This fighters tradition is  
 600 years old.’  
 And I saw a performance so mired in ritual—  
 As if nothing valid had happened in 600 years.  
 We must honor the classical without being irrelevant.”<sup>7</sup>

The point is valid. Even many of the newer movements have become “so mired in ritual” that its purpose is no longer known. The bulk of Christianity, much of the Buddhist, and even some of the more modern traditions such as Wicca have become tired and meaningless. There will always be a few who will attempt to revive the meanings of tradition, but these become quickly lost because of the familiar comfort that ritual itself provides. This book discusses meaning behind Germanic traditions in the hopes that some of the readers will pick up those meanings and be able to apply them in their lives today. Deng Ming-Dao comments on his poem by saying “The adherents [of a tradition] must be fully capable of manifesting the greatness of their tradition in contemporary settings. If some says that they are an expert in traditional medicine, then they [sic] must be able to heal others today. . . . If someone says that they [sic] have mastered esoteric spiritual traditions, then they must be able to manifest the spirit of that spiritual power today” (*ibid.*). There

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the world,” and for atheists, it is that “the world came into being by chance as a by-product of other processes which were taking place in the universe.” Individual differences always occur but “consensus reality” is a set of similarities which binds a group of individuals together.

<sup>6</sup> Every attempt was made in the preparation of this book to keep out highly speculative information. The author, on the other hand, is not a scholar in any area of Germanic history, literature, poetry, etc., and, so, if information has crept into the text which is more of the “fantasy genre” as opposed to well-documented fact, the author offers his humblest apologies and is willing to stand corrected.

<sup>7</sup> Deng Ming-Dao, *365 Meditations*, (HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco), 1992, p. 342.

is no point in creating a new set of rituals for the 21st century because they will only become dogma in a few short years. On the other hand, there is a richness in studying the worldview of one's ancestors—acting through that worldview provides one a place in a long of tradition, and it is in this *place* that people can find comfort.

There are movements, at least in the United States, in several different directions which justify the writing of such a book now. First, there is the movement which not only places one into an ancestral lineage in terms of race, color, language, family, culture and tradition, but which also encourages humble pride and the senses of comfort and of belonging to something greater than oneself. There is also the spiritual tradition as well; where one's "ancestral-roots" offer a place within the community of man, the "spiritual tradition" offers one a place in the cosmos. Anglo-Europeans have too long been filling these needs by "inventing" historical roots and traditions by creating "traditional cultures," such as the 50 year old religion of Wicca,<sup>8</sup> or by following spiritual paths which really have nothing to do with their own "roots," such as the so-called "Red-Road" of the Native American or Voudoun of Creole-Haitian all the while justifying their actions by stating that these spiritual traditions are universal. Lastly, then, this book is written for those of Anglo-European extraction who are searching for beauty, comfort, and a sense of belonging both to the diverse community of man and to the cosmos at large.

Many books are designed to be *pure discipline through ritual*—there is very little of that here; Germanic tradition is not really much about discipline/ ritual—for that one can purchase paperbacks on any of the 85 different flavors of Wicca or its thinly disguised derivatives; it is more about adventure. Life, for the ancient Germanic peoples, was not to be a drudgery or, as is often presented in the modern Christian worldview, a test or a 'cross to bear.'" Life was and can still be a vast uncharted sea full of creatures never before seen and events never before participated in. The explorers fare forth into the unknown and bring back health, wisdom and wholeness to their respective communities. The disciplines of this cultural tradition allow one to navigate the chaos with a sense of strength and the ability to survive.

In 986 CE Bjarni Herjolfson sailed out from Iceland bound for Greenland after having heard it described by others. After several days of sailing, the ship became lost in a windless fog. He came to three different lands to the west (one of which was Vínland or North America; the other two are still unidentified), and none were consistent with what he had heard about Greenland. Immediately thereafter, his ship was overtaken by a strong gale which lasted for four days. It took all the

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<sup>8</sup> Invented by Gerald Gardner ca. 1949 out of pieces of Anglo-European traditions well mixed and smoothed over with pieces from Leland's *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*, Margret Murray's *The Horned God*, and Robert Graves *The White Goddess* and just a dash of Freemasonry. The "tradition" caught on quickly and now has become a beautiful religion in its own right.

skills and disciplines of seamanship that he and his men could muster to survive the storm. They were forced to constantly watch and adjust the rigging of the ship for the entire time until the evening of the fourth day when they made land-fall. This time luck had finally brought them to the land they sought: Greenland, the adopted home of his father, Herjolf Bardarson.<sup>9</sup> It is this spirit of adventure matched with skills borne out of discipline that readers will need.



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<sup>9</sup> This tale comes from the *Groenlendinga Saga* translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson in *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America* (Penguin Books, London), 1965, pp. 51-55.

## Chapter 2

# Connections



Most modern folk tend to think of time and space as being an immutable part of reality, something that cannot possibly be changed or altered in any way, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture is no exception to the rule. Moderns tend to talk faddishly about the importance of "being in the present" but usually lay all their money, time, and efforts on ideas of the future. They put money into IRA's, invest in stocks, and save for their children's college funds. Additionally, 20<sup>th</sup> century folk have a tendency to worry and depress themselves about future events, becoming psychologically and physically sick over the upcoming nuclear war, entropy, the inevitable economic depression, and the decay of society and disappearance of social mores. Americans, as well as members of many other industrialized nations, live for the future, and this is their reality.

Cultures which have continued to place more importance on past events than on the future are often considered "backwards" or 'primitive" by modern standards, and anyone who seriously proposes that the modern concepts of linear time and three-dimensional space may not be the only form of reality is deemed by the masses to be living in a fantasy world rather than in "true" reality. Since the onset of the "Age of Science," society has become rigidly "reality oriented" not realizing that,

in fact, its perception of time and space is little more than a mental construct, an interpretation, an arbitrarily constructed system for the storage of information, or possibly just a hallucination, having no more or less to do with “reality” than the mental construct/ worldview of a Tibetan Lama, a South American witch-doctor, a Fundamentalist/ Creationist preacher, or a schizophrenic. Stepping outside this 20<sup>th</sup> century worldview, however, is often difficult, not because one is moving *backwards* to more primitive thinking, but because such a move is not very socially acceptable and because the rigidity of modern thinking does not allow for shifts outside its concept of reality. Rather than having to experience resistance to shifting the way one thinks about reality, simple open-mindedness is exactly what is necessary to understand the world as the ancient Germanic people saw it. It is not a step backwards, but a step laterally into a different but equally viable framework for perception and storage of information.

The ancient Germanic concepts of time and space differed greatly from those of modern man. Paul Bauschatz in his *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*<sup>1</sup> a series of well thought out essays presents his interpretation of worldview of the ancient Scandinavians which differs greatly from, and even stands in direct opposition to, many modern paradigms, at least those within the industrialized nations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His thesis is that the ancient Teutonic people held a concept that all within the known and unknown sectors of the Universe is encompassed in a World Tree and that *time* and *space*, and even the World Tree itself, are but out-pourings of a spring or well from which that Tree sprang forth and was fed. His essays also aptly show how, society, religion, and the philosophy of that period of time were all tied together within this single concept.

“The worlds of men, Gods, and other beings are directly expressed by the Tree. Ultimately, however, all significant worldly concerns (concerns of the Tree) are related and structured by that part of the cosmos configured by the Well [the Well of Urð], which expresses that portion of universal reality lying beyond the direct reach of worldly, Tree-related beings, be they men, Gods, or others. The iconography of the Tree and Well mutually interact and support each other. The action of men, Gods, and other beings layer and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Bauschatz in his landmark book presents the philosophical background for much of this chapter, and his work is quoted here often. If any book is a preliminary to this one, it is Bauschatz'. However, the reader is cautioned that his writing style is very dense and the material covered is highly academic so that reading is often slow and laborious. I spent several years trying to make my way through all the material and to understand it. Additionally, Bauschatz' work was primarily literary in nature and was never meant to be a springboard for a practical worldview.

fill the Well, and these layering strata themselves structure and influence the affairs of men.”<sup>2</sup>

Bauschatz writes, however, from the angle of a literary critic and offers only a smattering of information which could lead to the practical application of such a worldview. On the other hand, such a world-view was apparently normal to the everyday life of the ancient Teutons, in general, and may have been necessary to the work of their Cunning Folk<sup>3</sup> or Healers/ Whole-makers,<sup>4</sup> in particular. To understand Bauschatz, it is mandatory that one withhold any preconceived ideas about the nature of space and time as it pertains to the average person, and because this requires a fairly large shift in the perception of reality from that which is commonly accepted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some explanation, description, and discussion are probably necessary.

Because 20<sup>th</sup> century society is extremely literate and because much has been written in the past 50 years on what has been called the “East/ West Connection,” those seeking to interpret the spiritual path of the ancient northern Europeans often have a difficult time *not* incorporating the prejudices of the modern worldview into their understanding of the philosophies of northern Europe. There are phenomena which are described and defined extensively in modern books on spiritualism/ religion/ New Age, such as reincarnation, out-of-body experiences, karma, and UFOs, which are occasionally “tacked on” to Germanic spiritual philosophy. This type of patchwork is unnecessary. The Germanic worldview handles these phenomena quite well, and there is no need to dilute the beauty and richness borne in the Saga-Masters’ minds. One simply needs to look deep enough into the system itself! How these phenomena are stored within the Germanic worldview and how they relate to other events within it often results in explanations, definitions, and descriptions which differ greatly from the “Eastern view,” for example, but there is no need to generate the “patchwork quilt” philosophy so common today. The system of the northern Europeans has always been complete in itself.

An important feature of the ancient Germanic worldview that is often overlooked in modern discussions about northern folklore, anthropology, sociology, psychology,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Bauschatz, *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Germanic Culture* (University of Mass. Press), p. 19, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Cunning Folk is a loose translation of the words *fjölkyngi* (“much knowing” or “much knowledge” or, possibly, “knowledge of the many things”) and *kloka män* (“clever man”: cognate in modern German *kluger man*).

<sup>4</sup> “Wholemaker” is a modern term based on the Anglo-Saxon epithet for Christ the “Savior,” *Heliand*, which basically translates as the “Primary” or “Best of Healers.” In modern German, the phrase *zum Heil machen* means to make “well” or “whole.” Because these words all stem from the same Indo-European root-word, the term “Wholemaker” was developed and is used in this text with “whole” in its very broadest sense.

etc. is that these ancient folk were concerned with the *history* of an object. No object, no ‘thing,’ could be presented, given, bought, borrowed or stolen which did not have a history tightly bound to it, trailing like a ribbon behind it, far into the past. Historical qualities of an object such as its sentimental value, sordidness, luckiness, or its inherent evil could be, and often were, far more important than its actual function in daily life. The idea of underlying or “hidden” relationships within all that is permeated the entire system of northern thought, showing up initially in the eddaic<sup>5</sup> descriptions of the Creation of the universe, weaving an intricate pattern of relationships throughout the sagaic literature and begins to slowly lose importance long after the conversion to Christianity. In fact, vestiges of this concept continue to this day although “keeping an object for sentimental value” is generally considered frivolous and somewhat “silly.” The tradition of attending to the history of an event, person, place, or and object is persistent and tenacious, but the importance has been lost.

Restoration of the importance of relationships, connections, and underlying currents is not to be overlooked; it is the core of the ancient northern philosophy. Without an understanding of the dynamic concepts of space and time, the philosophy itself is little more than a collection of fairy tales, the mental meanderings of an ancient people. On the other hand, being able to visualize the central role that the World Tree/ Sacred Spring complex plays in the entire thought system brings life to the old philosophy allowing it to bloom in all its richness and detail. And, as in all great undertakings, it is necessary to start with the beginning.

## A Tale of the Beginning

*In the beginning there were two realms. Far to the north lay Niflheim, the frozen, primal land of ice and snow, in the heart of which lay the Spring, Hvergelmir. From that Spring or Well flowed the eleven rivers, the Élivágar: Svól and Gunnþrá, Fjörm and Fimbulþul, Slíðr and Hríð, Sylgr, Ylgr, Víð, Leiptr, and Gjöll. Far to the south lay Muspell, the hot land of fire, forth from which shot sparks and flame. Between the two realms lay Ginnunga-gap, the great vast emptiness which separated the two. The icy rivers, the Élivágar, flowed into the gaping void meeting Muspell’s spark and flame, and*

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<sup>5</sup> Here we are making an assumption that the poems of the Elder Edda or Sæmänder Edda are actually older than the family sagas. The actual physical, written versions of the collection of poetry known as the Elder Edda were written later than some of the mythological and family sagas. The source material of the Edda appears to be older in origin than that in sagaic literature, while some of the poetry itself is in reality younger than the saga material; hence, the assumption is based on source.

*the intertwining of the two wove swirls of ever shifting fog, ice and hoarfrost, always shifting from ice to water, to fog, and back again; constantly changing, building, growing, and falling back upon itself. This was the first Current, and with the constant roiling of fire and the Élivágar's poisonous waters and ice, life quickened and grew into the first being, the giant called Ymir. Thus, began the second Current or the first of a long lineage of beings.*

*The rime-frost kept moving and shifting, and from it another being was formed: the cow, Auðhumbla, who fed on the frothy, frozen brine. From Her teats flowed four mighty rivers of milk upon which Ymir was fed. On the first day as Auð humbla licked away at the blocks of ice, the hair of a man appeared; by the second day, a head; and the third day, the entire man. He was called Buri and was the first of the long lineage of the Gods. The process continued and after a time, Buri had a son named Bor who eventually married one of the daughters of Bolþór (a frost giant), named Bestla. She and Bor had three sons: Óðinn, Vili, and Vé.*

*The three sons bore no love for the frost giants, and after a time, they killed Ymir. The blood from his wounds flooded the land of the frost giants and killed all except Bergelmir and his wife (frost giants) who escaped with their lives in a boat made out of the trunk of a tree. The three sons laid Ymir's body in the Ginnungagap, which forms the world. His flesh became the Earth (Midgard), his bones became the mountains, his teeth and shards of bone became the broken boulders that are strewn about. His blood flowed into low areas becoming the salty seas and, eventually, the lakes of the world. His skull was raised up to become the sky. Pieces of brain were thrown up into the air to become clouds, and sparks as they flew out of Muspell were caught up and were tossed up to become the stars, the sun and the moon.. His eyebrows were raised up from the surface of the earth to become a bulwark separating Midgard from the Utlands (the Outlands) of Jötunheim.*

*The sun began to warm the rotting flesh of Ymir, and from that newly made earth all manner of things began to grow. Maggots quickened within the flesh becoming dwarves, and other Hidden Folk of the earth. Grass and leeks started, then trees came up, two of which became the first man and woman.*

*As the brothers were walking one day, they came upon two trees with no fixed fate, neither breathing nor speaking. They had no hair nor fairness of face. Óðinn gave them life's breath; Vili, mind; and Vé, hair and fairness of face. Thus began the race of men on Midgard, and to them, the three brothers became Gods. Here was the beginning of the third Current of the Waters of Life and the first of the long lineage of people.*



*A third tree rose higher and higher; its roots reached far out into the Utlands with one reaching the Well in Niflheim, Hvergelmir, another to the Well of Mímir in Jötunheim, and a third out as far as the Well of Urð in Ásgard, the newly made city/ home of the three brother/ Gods. The top of the growing tree reached to the furthest point in the heavens, the Nail (which is now called the Pole Star). This tree encompassed all and became known to the three brother/ Gods as Yggdrasil, to men as Læraþ, and to the giants as Mímameið.*

The Tree which enfolded all things was not safe from the ravages of its inhabitants, however. Below the root which extended out over Hvergelmir lay the serpent, Níðhöggr and her brood which eats and poisons the Tree from below, and

“there is an eagle which sits in the branches of the Ash, and it has knowledge of many things, and between its eyes sits a hawk called Vedrfofnir. A squirrel named Ratatoskr runs up and down through the Ash and carries malicious messages between the eagle and Níðhöggr. Four stags run in the branches of the Ash and feed on the foliage. Their names are Dáin, Dvalinn, Duneyr, and Duraprör. And there are so many snakes in Hvergelmir with Níðhöggr that no tongue can enumerate them. As it says here: The Ash, Yggdrasil, suffers hardships more than people realize. Stags bite above, and at the sides it rots, Níðhöggr eats away at it below.”<sup>6</sup>

From above the hart, Eikþryrnir, ate away at the foliage, and from his antlers fell the dew (honeydew) back through Midgard, eventually, back down into the Well of Hvergelmir. At the Well of Urð, the three strange women from the Utlands to the East, the Norns, determined the fate of all things and besprinkled the Tree with the healing Waters from the Well which served to stave off indefinitely the inevitable destruction of the Tree. This was the outward appearance of the World Tree (aka Yggdrasil or Læraþ)/ Sacred Spring.

The Tree both supported and was supported by the force of dynamic tension, a balance between opposing dynamic forces. The ever changing flow of ice out of Niflheim and the fire which flew out of Muspell kept the Tree and the supporting Ginnungagap always in a state of flux much the same as a river that keeps changing its course through the forces of the relentless sameness of the currents.

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<sup>6</sup> Snorri Sturluson *The Edda* translated by Antony Faulkes (Everyman's Library, London) 1987, pp. 18-19. All quotes coming from Sturluson's *Edda*, sometimes known as *The Prose Edda* or *The Younger Edda*, are taken from this translation unless otherwise noted. The translation is somewhat difficult to read because the complex Germanic metaphor known as a *kenning* is left intact. There are other translations available. The one by Jean Young is very readable in modern translation.

The circular aspect of the Flow of the Waters through the Tree has lived on in the collective memory of man and resurfaces periodically, most recently as the American folk concept of the Round River which was rediscovered and explored by Aldo Leopold, one of America's first ecologists, when he described the Earth as a "biosphere" in his collection of essays, *The Sand County Almanac*.

"One of the marvels of early Wisconsin was the Round River, a river that flowed into itself, and thus sped around and around in a never-ending circuit. Paul Bunyan discovered it, and the Bunyan saga tells how he floated many a log down its restless waters. "No one has suspected Paul of speaking in parables, yet in this instance he did. Wisconsin not only had a Round River, Wisconsin is one. The current is the stream of energy which flows out of the soil and into the plants, thence into animals, thence back into the soil in a never ending circuit of life. 'Dust unto dust' is a desiccated version of the Round River concept."<sup>7</sup>

It would seem that the ancient Germanic peoples somehow naturally sensed the importance of "dynamic tension" and flux several millennia before the various ecological crises of the 20th century forced people to take notice and describe them again.

The upward movement of the Waters of Life pouring out of Hvergelmir was crucial to the well-being of Læraþ, the World Tree. The Waters flowed out of Niflheim and up through the capillary structures of the Tree feeding all life as they moved although this is a gross oversimplification of the process. The primary and original source of the Waters in the pre-Christian Germanic mind was Hvergelmir, and it was only after the Tree had finally grown in place that the other two Wells appear which serve to further distribute the Waters out to the far reaches of limb and leaf.

Looking through the filter of the Germanic worldview, movement does not *carry* life with it; "movement" itself is the equivalent of "life." Waters rise up from a nebulous source below and are then distributed (or redistributed) out over Midgard, and because of this arrangement, there is a delicate relationship between an underworld and Midgard which has to be maintained. (This need will be more fully discussed in later chapters.) The Waters, once they reach the uppermost Well<sup>8</sup>, the Well of Urð, mixed with clay serve to heal the World Tree from the damage caused by the

<sup>7</sup> Leopold, Aldo *A Sand County Almanac* (Sierra Club/ Ballantine Books, New York) 1966, p. 188. There can and will never be enough praise for this man and this work. Anyone wishing to seriously follow the path of ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy will find this book indispensable!

<sup>8</sup> Over the years there have been some rather heated discussions about the *actual* placement of the Wells. Frankly, I don't feel that such an argument merits discussion here. The point is *Of course, a Well can exist in the sky!* Logic doesn't apply to worldviews.

beings living in its protective branches, and they then fell back through Midgard, the underworld, and fed back into the original Well, Hvergelmir, in the form of dew which dripped from the antlers of the celestial hart, Eikþryrnir. In this way, the entire Tree was pulled into the healing process from the very top to the lowest root over Niflheim.

Bauschatz feels that the Wells were actually lumped together as one which he calls *Urth Well* [*sic*] or Well of Wyrd. I'm not sure how necessary it is to go to such an extreme. The purpose (as a source of dynamic flow) is served with either one or three Wells (*the number 3* has more of a classical Germanic ring to it), but clouds could function as the source of flow without changing or adversely affecting the worldview itself. One, two, or three Wells—the number matters little. Number arguments show up in modern literature fairly often. Number, position in space, and details of history all seem to vary throughout the Germanic realm depending upon the period of time in which the piece was recorded, and where the piece originated. Modern folk are wont to lay some importance on qualities like number, color, time of day, etc. but this type of detail is better suited to more classical mythology like Roman or Greek; the northern Europeans come across as being far more utilitarian in their approach to almost everything. The most pertinent point to the discussion here is that the universe was viewed as points around which life-giving waters flowed; rather than a sterile rock, the universe was more like an archipelago.

One area of detail which plays an interesting figure, however, is that the shape of the Waters, their essence, was altered as they passed through each Well. The original function or purpose was that of *movement* or *life*, but, over time, they were recast in the form of “universal medicine” as they passed through the Well of Urð, and the alteration in the Land of the Giants at the Well of Mímir was the addition of wisdom. Óðinn drank from the Giant's Well and the wisdom He obtained was not the ordinary “intelligence” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century academician but the wisdom of the Tree/ Waters complex, knowledge of the past and present, and this wisdom flowed out in all directions. The Waters which were transformed in the Well of Mímir carried information from the Lands of the Gods, Men, and Giants, and after the transformation were spilled back out over the Lands within the Tree much the same as elsewhere in the mythological cycle, the contents of Óðroerir,<sup>9</sup> the mead of poetry, was spilt back out onto Midgard.

“The iconography locates wisdom in the well but imparts it to the Tree through the reciprocal relationship between the two. A knowledge of the

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<sup>9</sup> The Mead of Poetry refers to a draft of magical mead (the Mead of Wisdom) spilt by Óðinn upon Midgard which became the impetus for poetic inspiration. See Faulkes translation of *The Edda* pp. 62-64.

workings of Urð will lead one to wisdom, and the Eddas imply that such knowledge is not easily gained.”<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge or wisdom then was another characteristic of the Waters flowing up and out of Hvergelmir as they passed through the Wells of Mímir and Urð: knowledge of movement.

The ancient Scandinavians had a very simple periodic table of elements: fire and ice combined to form everything in the Universe. From the standpoint of our modern worldview this sounds like a metaphor, but from the worldview being presented here, it is not. It was *fact*. The current way of expressing the same thing, however, is  $E=MC^2$ ; mass, or “things,” is equal to the amount of energy divided by the speed of light squared. Now, it would be ridiculous to even suggest that early Germanic peoples had some understanding of the Theory of Relativity (this is a type of tactical comparison often used by New Age writers: pure and utter nonsense), but they did have some feeling that what was experienced on Midgard was an expression of energy (fire) and mass (ice) and the way they communicated this was through the use of poetic language to describe something that was to them real but intangible. The point here is that the modern Cunning Man<sup>11</sup>, the scientist, is privy to the wisdom that what is experienced is part and parcel of the human perceptual system and, as such, is part of reality.

It is interesting that the average man, utilizing the common 20<sup>th</sup> century worldview, feels his life is separate from the rest of Creation and, because of this, feels himself to be individually important. On the other hand, scientists, as well as people following some of the more primitive spiritual paths, know (as part of their worldview) that all “things” are related, or in other terms, little more than swirls and eddies within the flow of the Waters of Life whether they choose to label them God, the Tao, or simply Energy (with a capital einsteinian “E”) –nothing more than little pools of mass and energy. They know that all things are constantly in a state of flux, ever moving and changing, and that the feeling of being separate from the rest of the Universe is an illusion, or a corporeal metaphor, resulting from reality having to be filtered through the human perceptual system. The feeling that things, events, or people have some kind of stability, some kind of physical realness, comes from how one whirlpool within Round River relates to another, and, if the relationship changes between two of these swirls in the Waters, the things themselves appear to change. A normal human changes the complete lining of his stomach every six days but does not notice the change because no relationships have changed; on the other hand, a dead animal as it decays appears to change because its relationship to the rest of the universe has changed: parts have been exhausted as gasses, other

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<sup>10</sup> Bauschatz, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> “Cunning man” is a translation of *Klocka män*.

parts go through chemical/ physiological changes. Everything, then, according to all these worldviews, is an expression of relationships: how one whirlpool of cosmic mass/ energy interacts with another. All things between Niflheim and Muspell for the ancient northern Europeans were an expression of the flow of Waters, even the Gods themselves who were born of Buri who was released from the rime by Auðhumbla who, in turn, was born of the frozen brine formed at the meeting of fire and ice.  $E=MC^2$ .

Actually, fire and ice as the primal elements makes perfectly good sense. Much of Scandinavia and Iceland were volcanically active during the early centuries when Iceland was formed. Such images in nature are never taken lightly. Explosions of lava when a flow crosses into an ice-field. Geysers, sparks, mud-pots, steam vents, and smoke interacting with the cold turn quickly into intricate white ferns of hoarfrost, the hissing, grinding, booming, ear-deafening “Cracks!,” squeals, and screeches mixed with lung-burning fumes and smoke, and when all is quiet again, there is land or changes in the land which did not exist before. Within a few short years, new, rocky land springs to life and is covered with grasses, flowers, grazing animals, birds, and eventually people. Observations of these phenomena are rare in the sagaic literature but show up in the eddaic poetry particularly those poems dealing with cosmology.



As mentioned earlier, merely being able to discuss connections between things in northern Germanic terms is all well and good but rather like trivia. Great for showing off at parties. Ideas are merely ideas until they can be effectively (and usefully) applied in the present. Understanding that simply altering the relationship between two or more objects will effect changes in the objects themselves, and sometimes these changes can be very great.

The idea goes like this:

*I get into an argument with two other people. Now, these two people are firmly convinced that my position is incorrect so the chances of my convincing these two are rather slim. For example, we might be arguing about an emotional topic like ‘abortion.’ The argument can lead to a firm dislike possibly even moving into the realm of potential “enemies.” I have no chance of winning them over. If I want to maintain a functional relationship with these people, I might opt to alter my relationship to them. Since I probably won’t be engaging in an action which will involve the 3 of us in an abortion, I may wish to drop the seriousness of my tone.*

*The result will be a lessening in the tension between us and will allow for, at least, acceptable working conditions.*

The idea of altering the relationship between things to alter the end product works. My own personal difficulty is that I like to think that I am right much of the time, and it rarely occurs to me to simply drop the seriousness of the topic. I work with handicapped children a lot, and they can often be a challenge behaviorally. I had a professor who sensed my frustration so he described to me a pair of concepts which he called “First and Second Order Change.” A first order change was what I was trying to do most of the time; that is, I was trying to force the child to simply alter his behavioral pattern, such as screaming at the top of his lungs, at my request. When the request failed, I would try again and again, and of course, I failed. My professor suggested a different tack, a second order change—scream *with* (not *at*) the child, for example. Find out how it felt to scream. Perhaps the acoustics in the room are interesting. Perhaps the acoustics of the voice. Maybe it feels good to stretch the limits of the vocal system. Who knows, but altering my behavior worked and was far less frustrating to both of us than my original method. Changing relationships between things produces an altered set of results (though, perhaps, not quite as predictable).

The Germanic idea of *fjölkonngi*<sup>12</sup> (ON., trans. *sorcery*, literally “much knowledge”) may have had something to do with this idea of altering relationships between things. Not much is known about how Germanic sorcerers went about their jobs, but many, including myself, suspect that Germanic wizards much like their circumpolar counterpart, the shaman, used trickery and psychology in addition to their craft to achieve results. The trickery and psychological techniques are important to the circumpolar shaman because by these (especially if they are done well) the audience’s belief system is either temporarily or permanently altered. The change in the belief system results in a change in general behavior leading to the individual interacting with the world differently. The change in interaction, i.e. relationship, results in different outcomes. Marionette shows are interesting. Done properly, with the right lighting, good puppetware, and good puppeteers, the figures present the audience with the illusion that one is looking at a slice of real life. People are able to suspend their belief that puppets are just lifeless wooden figures and are really dependent on the movement of strings behind the curtain. And children, yes, children “know” that the personages on stage are real within their worldview even after they have been shown the strings and the operators; for them the illusion is complete. It’s true that it is difficult to “fool” children when performing a weak stage magic trick (this is common knowledge among stage magicians), but when the trick is “pulled

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<sup>12</sup> *Fjölkonngi* actually means “much knowledge” but, as the word was used in Old Norse, the word means “magic” or “sorcery.” The literal translation serves our purpose well, however.

off” the children are fooled utterly and completely whereas adults will often reserve some amount of doubt. But, how curious it is that adults, even those who can laugh knowingly about the children, believe in exactly the same way when it comes to dealing with the “things” of Midgard.

The average man who no longer *believes* in Santa Claus or magic tricks *believes* that he is looking at a slice of life when he reads the *New York Times*, but the true Cunning Man, one who has knowledge of the movement puppet’s strings behind the scenes, knows that the reader is only reacting to what he is visualizing while reading the paper made to feel real by his emotional response to the visualization rather than to the event itself. The actual event occurred in another place and another time, but for the average man **reading = experience**. Of course, reading about something is no more *real* than a stage trick, but for the average man, the trick *is* complete: he is fooled. One should also note here that intelligence has nothing whatsoever to do with the Cunning Man’s knowledge; one person is simply privy to the action behind the curtain while the other is not. Reality for the Cunning Man is movement and mass, but for the average man it is only the interpretation of movement and mass that is real; he is completely incapable of looking up and seeing the strings behind the newspaper story.

A term which people often tend to use interchangeably with “knowledge” is “intelligence.” The average man memorizes long strings of trivia and confuses this process with *knowledge*. People with true knowledge, however, engage in actions which changes underlying relationships, and this in turn results in a change or alteration of “things” on the surface level. Returning to the analogy of physical reality being a marionette show, Cunning Folk are able to act as the stage hands behind the curtains who change the relationships between the strings so that the puppets on stage actually appear to move and change of their own accord. In this job, the need for a sense of wholeness is crucial but an advanced degree in microbiology is not. Intelligence need not be written off, however; it functions as a great lubrication in social settings and can actually be used to fool people into changing their relationships to objects or other people, but intelligence does not impress or alter objects themselves.

Obviously, to view reality as a great marionette show is in itself just a worldview, but how does anyone *know* what is the correct one? The truth of the matter is that no one does know which is the right one. No one single worldview is better than any other (see Chapter 1). The problem is, and always will be, that reality simply *is*, and each individual must translate it into something meaningful and useful. Some are content to live within a very small portion of reality and are able to extract all the meaning they will ever need through a very tight rigid translation system, seeing the world as black-and-white or good-vs.-evil, for example; others, if not

most, need something more flexible - a lot of *grey* can fall between black-and-white. To extract the most meaning from life is the criterion for deciding what system or which worldview is right. The ancient Germanic folk, then, sensed reality in quite a different fashion than modern man. While modern man's attention is caught up only with the world of physical things, the ancient perception of the world was overlapped with dreams and visions (now, usually called 'hallucinations' or 'figments of the imagination'), in other words, perceptions and experiences without the presence of a physical object. In the *Tale of the Beginning* people were created from trees. To continue the metaphor, in our modern worldview, folks have lost the sense of a trunk and a root system which, combined, are the history or *lineage* of the organism and fall to believing that only the *treetops* (i.e., *the outward appearances of things*) represent reality, and because of the trivialization of objects' histories, there is often a feeling of separateness and alienation from the world. Any "non-treetop" information which flows up from below, i.e. comes from beyond the normal five senses, is ignored or is not regarded as important to *treetop reality*. In the ancient Germanic worldview, however, the trunk and the root system were still regarded as an integral part of reality. Knowledge could flow freely from beyond the self upward through all trunks and, because all trees are nourished in the same earth, allowed for constant, albeit indirect, communication with all other parts of creation. Rather than feeling separate and alienated, these ancient folk enjoyed an underlying sense of belonging, a sense of community even though they may have been alone much of the time.

Of course, the early Teutons used exactly the same five traditional senses that we learn about in school and when they focused their attention was still the *treetops*, i.e. the world of things. They accepted experience and perceptions coming up from "below" as being part of physical reality. A common concept from northern Europe handed down through folklore and oral history is "second-sight" which can be defined as information received from outside the traditional five senses.

"Once they were churning at Vaaland, but they didn't get any butter. Someone must have bewitched the churn. So they heated the scythe until it was red hot, and thrust it down in the churn. On the following day, they went to church, and there they met people from Møgedal. They exchanged greetings, and the man from Vaaland asked how they were getting along in Møgedal. 'Oh, not very well,' said the Møgedal man. 'My wife cut three fingers off one hand.'

'Well, it served her right, she was in our churn. We churned the whole day without getting any butter,' replied the man from Vaaland."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*.



Dreams, visions, and omens, then, were as acceptable as sources of knowledge as any experience within consensus physical reality, and this is well documented in both sagaic and eddaic literature. Knowledge gained in either fashion could be incorporated into any decision making process. For the ordinary person though, action was carried out at the treetop level, the normal point of view.

Direct access to knowledge was quite a different matter, and this was the realm of the Cunning Man. The Cunning Man's or Whole-Maker's was able to shift his or her point of view from the treetops to that of the root system itself. Often this person was regarded as something not quite human, something suspicious or perverse, because he or she had forsaken the safety of the *treetops*, physical reality, and community to wander in the wilderness of the unknown. The suspicion here, of course, was that all sense of humanness and compassion for others were either perverted or lost leaving the individual to be viewed with the same mistrust usually reserved for "foreigners." And, in northern European folk literature, these folk are very often presented as dwelling on the brink of insanity or, sometimes, completely over the edge. The motif of the wizard or witch completely consumed by his or her own spirits is very common in the folklore of northern Europe not only among the Germanic people, but also among the Celtic, Balto-Slavic and Finno-Ugric peoples.

I tend to think of the Cunning Man as a distant cousin to the Japanese Bonsai-Master. The *Bonsai-Master* understands that to change the outward appearance of his miniature tree, actions must take place in the trunk, boughs and roots. The roots must be carefully trimmed periodically to effect fuller foliage; bends in the entire tree must start with the relationship between the trunk and root; and for the true master, the relationship between tree, pot or tray, rocks, dirt and moss is important for the overall effect so a tree may be carefully placed to one side and a rock turned just so before the tree is deemed presentable. The Cunning Man then had to have access to knowledge of trunks and roots as well.

The ancient Germanic peoples had developed several techniques to help them engage in proper action<sup>14</sup> without actually having direct access to knowledge. This should not be confused with the idea that they acted out of ignorance; they did not. They engaged in proper action which allowed them to function as an integral part of the World Tree and its Flowing Waters, and by doing so they gained access to luck and power which brought meaning and comfort to their lives, prosperity to their fields, some assurance that the ground was made ready for their descendants. They were able to do this through the proper use of ritual/ ritualistic behavior such as leaving out food for the Ancestors or the elves, attending to taboos such as avoiding certain regions, certain acts, or certain foods, or observing holidays in

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<sup>14</sup> Proper action is based on *knowledge* as opposed to that based on intelligence or simple reaction.

a manner which was consistent with their community and their time. They gained their knowledge through close observations of the things of their world, the World Tree, such as the behaviors of horses, the flight of birds, and other omens. Direct access to the knowledge of the Well of Mímir was only for those few who were destined by their lineage:

“...men do not know directly anything of the nature of the reality of the well. It is clear, though, that it is, in opposition to tree-oriented reality, conceptual rather than physical, abstract rather than three-dimensionally real. Within the well, the interrelations among actions rather than actions themselves are of paramount importance; here, within the realm of the well, are the motives and reasons for and the final causes of the acts that occur within the realm of the tree. Within the well, the power of all events past still surges, writhes, twists, whelms, and weaves the whole of this greater reality ‘out’.”<sup>15</sup>

Although most of the ancients may not have been able to “look up and see the strings operating the cosmic puppet show,” by engaging in proper action as defined in their overall worldview, they were able to live out their lives within the community with few problems. When need arose, the Cunning Man was usually available, to crawl up behind the scenes and untangle snags and knots. For the early Germanic peoples we know that this had much to do with the loss of luck, health, missing farm animals, irrational fears, and unexplainable ill health.

Germanic ritualistic behavior was “proper action” which served to groom and strengthen relationships between men and men, men and Gods, men and the ancestors, and men and the forces of nature. The *symbel* or “sumble” as it is now written, according to Bauschatz, served to relate man to man through the ritualized sharing of drink, oath-making, and gift-giving:

“No Gods are mentioned in the Germanic feast; indeed, the *symbel* does not seem to be an occasion upon which men’s affairs are related to those of the Gods. As a matter of fact, a good deal of the material (literary) . . . indicates that both men and Gods share the practice of the *symbel*. Thus, there are no prayers in the Germanic ritual. In the *symbel* \ldots the emphasis is on drinking, pledging, and swearing oaths. Those taking part directly and literally associate themselves with the flow of events and hold themselves responsible for forthcoming actions.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bauschatz, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Bauschatz, pp. 80-81.

The ritual of the *blót*<sup>17</sup> (pronounced “bloat”) as described by Snorri in the *Ynglingasaga*, however, was the Germanic method for aligning the community with the God-Powers and the Ancestors. The *Julblót*, or Christmas as it is called in the post-conversion era, was a sacred time of celebrating the closeness of the community of the dead with the Land of the Living, and the *álfar-blót*, as described in *St. ’s Saga*, most likely dealt with the making or remaking of ties between the world of man and the guardians of nature. Relationships and connections dominated early Germanic religion and thought, and it was necessary to renew these periodically for the sake of the living.

It is important to realize here as well that the terms “ritual” or “ritualistic behavior” often brings to mind, at least in this modern era, something similar to a formal ceremony. This is not necessarily the case and certainly is not the idea that this author is trying to convey. “Ritual” can be something as simple as leaving offerings at certain trees or tipping one’s hat toward specific rocks, or wells when one visits the vicinity or the setting of an extra serving of food during the course of a holiday season. Ritualistic behavior in this sense is more akin to a child’s “not-stepping-on-a-crack” type of tradition than to a Catholic mass. Granted, there are a few descriptions of blóts conducted at certain times of the year such as the *Jól blót* described in the *Heimskringla* or large official blóts at the Icelandic *Alþing* or the great blót allegedly performed every ninth year at the *Vé* at *Uppsala Gammla*, but these are the exception to our discussion rather than the rule. For the most part, when I am discussing “ritual,” I mean minor or private ritualistic behavior unless I specify otherwise. Secondly, ritual is a behavior that is dependent and secondary to how an individual views the world around him and relates specifically to what one does to maintain alliance with that world.

This is the real function, then, of religion: to systematically realign an individual, a family, or a community with the Powers governing it by allowing one to engage in proper action. The Flow of the Waters of Life passed through the underworld up to the Land of the Living, but also, the Waters fell from the Heavens and trickled back down through *Midgard* into the Land of the Ancestors. As long as the checks and balances of the flow remained, everyone benefitted. When either the Community of the Ancestors or of the Living withheld, the other suffered, but there was also a “boomerang effect” so that the withholder (initially) became the sufferer (eventually). The situation became “unhealthy,” “unwholesome,” “unholy” and needed to

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<sup>17</sup> “Blót” is an Old Norse word which basically means “a sacrifice.” Snorri describes the killing of the animal and the sprinkling of the attending crowd with the blood from the *hlautbollí*, or “blood bowl.”

be brought back into a balance or “wholeness.” This was the job of the King<sup>18</sup> or the Cunning Man.

## The Problem of Balance

In many worldviews, including the so-called New Age, there is generally something or some force which actually is balanced or is used in balancing, but review of the ancient Germanic literature, etymology, or linguistics does not reveal ‘concepts’ of power, energy, force, or balance. This is the problem:

If the early Germanic peoples accepted this idea of balances and checks between the different Lands in their worldview, which, by all indications, they did, then shouldn’t there be a single word or concept by which they called “that which is balanced,” this “power” which supposedly poured forth from Hvergelmir?

The Polynesians, after all, have the concept of *mana*; the Ojibwa have *manitou*; the Chinese, *chi*. Sorting through all the literature, eddaic, sagaic, and even modern folklore, one runs across several terms which seem to indicate some form of localized power, but an overall term is lacking. I’ve seen books in the New Age section of bookstores which apply these foreign terms to the northern Germanic worldview, but the authors admittedly made these deductions themselves. Swain Wodening in his booklet *Beyond Good and Evil: Wyrd and Germanic Heathen Ethics*<sup>19</sup> lists *main* (OE = *mægen*) as “the magical, spiritual, or life force possessed by every human being” (p. vi), and he considers it to be comparable to the *mana* of the Polynesians and equates it with “*hamingja*” of the ancient Scandinavians. Thorsson calls *hamingja* “a magical force” attached to a human being,<sup>20</sup> even though it is usually defined as a “guardian-spirit” in glossaries, dictionaries, and books on northern mythology, but he does not explain why this force is attached only to human beings and not to mountains, trees, etc. Of course, one can always speculate that trees have a soul but no *hamingja*, or that trees are only objects plain and clear, and that being the case *hamingja* is a poor candidate as the counterpart to *mana*. Bauschatz in *The Well and the Tree* provides some very clear evidence that the early Scandinavians

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<sup>18</sup> We have not yet discussed the King’s role and how it relates to the role of the Cunning-Man. Whether one became a King or a Cunning-Man really depended on (at least before the Conversion to Christianity) where one lived. The roles and functions relate closely to one another, and as we shall see later, both are instrumental in the luck of the community.

<sup>19</sup> Wodening, Swain *Beyond Good and Evil: Wyrd and Germanic Heathen Ethics* (Endweorc Press; Watertown, NY) 1994.

<sup>20</sup> Thorsson, Edred *Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic* (Samuel Weiser; York Beach, ME) 19, p. 150.

had an understanding that everything in the universe was but an outpouring of the Well of Urð and that they were obviously able to work within that system to make meaning of their world, but as to the name of an all pervasive force? He lists none.

The three most commonly used words in the modern Norse revivalist traditions<sup>21</sup> are

1. *hamingja*,
2. *mægen* (OE) or *megin* (ON), and
3. *and* or *önd*.

All three are good terms and at least *megin* which has as one of its meanings “supernatural strength”<sup>22</sup> appears to be somewhat related to the concept of a universal power, but none of them actually mean the same thing as *mana* when the context of the Eddas is truly explored. In other words, the ancients did not use the words in the fashion that the modern writers are intending. Modern writers are clearly looking for something that translates (or can be translated) as “electricity/ energy” which can be directed, manipulated and utilized to heal as well as deal out death blows, but what did the ancient Scandinavians think of such a concept? Did they really think of *önd* as a force which can fly like sparks from the fingertips?

We moderns can be very creative sometimes. When we get an idea in our heads that this must be the way a thing was, we whip out Occam’s Razor, bend it in half and dash it to the ground in the blink of an eye, and then walk away. We are so firm and unwavering in our convictions that when we are faced with a simple fact, we will ignore it *even when it comes directly from the source!* The study of anthropology is almost two centuries old now having gotten its start in the late Romantic Era by the early collectors of folklore. The picture that is drawn by anthropologists of people living in predominately rural areas is that these folk tend not to think in terms of electricity, energy, or power but in terms of spirits and ghosts. *Hamingja* (to be discussed more fully later) is listed in most good ON dictionaries as a “guardian spirit” whose function was to help access power/ luck; *önd* or *and* means “breath,”<sup>23</sup> but in the modern Christian sense it means “holy spirit”; *megin* related to the modern English word “main” has the sense of “strength or even supernatural strength but in a physical sense” like the “strength” of a berserker, an ox, or a sorcerer. None of

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<sup>21</sup> Note: these “revivalist” traditions are discussed in *Pagan Europe* by Jones and Pennick (Routledge; London, UK) 1994.

<sup>22</sup> LaFarge, B. and John Tucker *Glossary to the Poetic Edda* (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag; Heidelberg) 1992, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Many of the meanings seem to be related to the animation of the human body. *To bear breath* meant “to live”; *to lose breath* meant to die. *And* or *önd* may have pertained to a “vital animating-” or “life force” bound to the confines of Midgard.

them as far as can be ascertained were ever used as a blanket term to mean *mana* (in the New Age sense) or a universal but manipulable power.

Modern writers, perhaps unable to divorce themselves from the East/ West or New Age literature of the past three decades, have been looking for this “mysterious force” for too long and may be looking needlessly for a needle when really the haystack itself is all that is needed. According to Bauschatz’ work, the World Tree and all it contains are little more than outpourings or an overflow from the initial battle between the ice rolling out of Niflheim/ Hvergelmir and the sparks flying out of Muspell. The overflow pours into and fills the Ginnungagap (“the gaping void”) as rime (“hoarfrost”) which is quickened by the ever changing tension between the two.

One can easily speak of, visualize, and understand stagnant ice and fires, but the “quickening” itself is difficult to describe<sup>24</sup>. Of course, the idea that “ice can live” appears to be completely illogical, unscientific and irrational those of us living in the modern industrial world. We are scientific. We know for example that worms or ghosts don’t make us sick, but that it’s virii and bacteria which cause disease. Even though most of us have never actually seen a virus, nevermind having seen a virus infect another organism with a disease, we accept that virii and bacteria exist because

1. the germ theory of disease makes sense,
2. diseases are explainable in these terms, and
3. the germs respond to medications specifically antibacterial and antiviral.

These are good reasons to accept “the germ theory of disease” but oddly enough, the same rationale was used as the basis for magic, charms, the humour theory, homeopathy, Bach Flower Remedies, and naturopathy. The “quickening” of ice is really not much more mythical, weird, or mystical than that which comes out of the long chains of organic proteins to make up DNA. It is fairly simple to give a description of the chains themselves, but what is it that brings life into the complex? When does the “quickening” occur? The early Scandinavians, in the eddaic poetry, offer the concept of dynamic tension and ever changing balance. They often utilized the words “Urð” (ON) or “Wyrð” (OE), but the concept of Wyrð as it is used by the modern writers of Norse revivalism is only another snapshot of frozen Waters. So far, there is no single term to accurately provide knowledge of something akin to “mana,” “chi,” or “manitou.”

Bauschatz in his first essay in *The Well and the Tree* ran into the same problem. Although his writing style is complex and somewhat difficult to wade through, and although he never clearly states the problem (at least not in one sentence), his

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<sup>24</sup> To “quicken” means “to bring to life.”

response and ensuing discussion fills a full three pages.<sup>25</sup> The upshot of his presentation is that speakers of modern Germanic languages have lost or misplaced the concept of a universal power which was originally contained in the overall meaning of the Old Norse word “*brunnr*.” Usually, the word is translated into modern English simply as “well” or “spring,” but something has been lost in the translation. In northern Europe, springs are common and many of them are spectacular in the form of artesian wells, geysers, mineral springs, hot springs, cold springs, etc., and the general format for naming each type in modern English is “descriptor + ‘spring’.” Furthermore, the word “spring” itself usually denotes simply a water source such as in “spring-fed lake” or “spring-fed river,” etc. For the early Germanic peoples, the term “*brunnr*” implied a “spring-complex” as opposed to simply meaning a source of water.

“The idea of the *brunnr*- came then to include the enclosure (the walls of the well), the water within it, and the powerful, active force that allows it to fill the differing developments of the reflexes of the word in modern languages show a separation of these earlier joined attributes.”<sup>26</sup>

Some permutation of the word *brunnr*- is used in almost all modern Germanic languages, including English (“burne”), but each of these languages emphasize only one of the attributes of the original water–spring–movement complex. The original meaning of the word, then, included “movement” and “power” in a single word, but in modern English it is necessary to talk about the spring, the water, and the flow of waters separately. The concept of an all pervasive, universal power appears to have been most likely contained within the meanings behind the names for the primal Wells or Burnes of Hvergelmir (primarily), and Mímir and Urð (secondarily), and, as a consequence, there was no separate term which would translate as “mana” or “chi.” The term settled for in the rest of this book is simply the “Flow of the Waters.”

There is another concept which requires some further explanation: “balance.” The word is from the Latin (*bi* = “two”; *lanx* = “a pan”) and is used profusely in books on modern occultism and neo-shamanism to mean an equalization of power. It almost seems impossible to talk about the workings of the Cunning Folk or Wholemakers without resorting to the term. Surely, if there was such an occupation as Wholemaker there also must have been a word or phrase which essentially meant “to balance” in terms of a universal power or of the Flow of the Waters. (It must also be admitted that the word “balance” is used periodically throughout this text.) There is a concept which existed for the ancient Teutons that, like *brunnr* for the concept of universal energy, stands in the place of “balance.”

<sup>25</sup> Bauschatz, pp. 16-20.

<sup>26</sup> Bauschatz, pp. 17-18.

There is a complex of words in all old and modern Indo-European languages based on the proto-Indo-European root "kailo-." The following is taken from The American Heritage Dictionary:

**Kailo-.** Whole, uninjured, of good omen. 1. Germanic *hailaz* in: a. OE *hal*, 'hale,' 'whole.' b. OE *halsum*, 'wholesome.' c. Germ. compound *hailewidis* (*widis* = 'wide') in Fr. feminine name 'Heloise.' d. ON *heill*, 'healthy,' 'hale' WASSAIL: 2. Germanic *hailitho* in OE *hæth*, 'health': 3. Germanic *hailjan* in OE *hælan*, 'to heal': 4. Germanic *hailigaz* in: OE *hælig*, 'holy'; Germanic derivative vb. *hailagon* in OE *hælgian*, 'to consecrate,' 'to bless,' HALLOW; c. ON fem. name 'Olga,' 'Helga' (= 'holy')."<sup>27</sup>

Modern writers have come to depend on the concept of balance when talking about healing, and to depict the concept, they often resort to the Chinese Yin/ Yang. The symbol shows two slightly curved raindrop shapes in perfect balance completely filling and surrounded by a circle. Modern writers usually focus on the *balance* between the two raindrop figures, but the early Germanic spiritual philosophers, at least in light of the *kailo* word-complex as described above, apparently focused more on the *wholeness* of the circle surrounding the figures.

Stephan Glosecki in his *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* expanded upon this concept of "wholeness" somewhat. He cites several verses from "Beowulf" where the *skald* (ON = "poet") speaks of Beowulf having to "cleanse" (*fælsian* = to cleanse or purify) the Hall, Heorot, of the "unholy wight" (OE *wiht unhælo* = unwholesome or unholy being).<sup>28</sup> Although Glosecki's discussion on this topic is short and rather loose, he clearly demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxon mind-set was in terms of whole-unwhole, healthy-unhealthy, holy-unholy, and also in terms of prosperity-dearth, whole-wounded, and lucky-unlucky all related to *hæl-unhæl*.

In another related argument, Glosecki presents the idea that early after the arrival of Christianity to the North, Jesus was deemed the "Healing One" by the English-speaking people through the use of the epithet *Heliand* related to the OE word *hælend*. It is highly probable that one of the main reasons that Jesus was acceptable to the early Englishmen was because He, as the primary god-figure of the religion, was considered the "fore-most Healer," the One who would maintain the "wholeness," "holiness," "health," and "prosperity" of the Germanic peoples. It is also important to note that in some cases, at least early on during the conversion

<sup>27</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary*, William Morris, ed. (Houghton-Mifflin; Boston) 1978, p. 1520.

<sup>28</sup> Glosecki, Stephen *Shamanism in Old English Poetry* (Garland Publishing, Inc.; New York) 1989, pp. 176-79.



to Christianity, people simply accepted the “new God” into their already existent Heathen pantheon rather than dropping their Heathen faith completely.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of “wholeness” is found sprinkled through both Western and Northern Germanic literature—in the eddaic and sagaic literature from the description of the Tree in the “Völuspá” to the “healing” (whole-making) of districts such as Hrothgar’s kingdom in *Beowulf*. At the beginning of time, right after the creation of Midgard by Óðinn, Vili, and Vé, there was a war between the two tribes of Gods, the Æsir and the Vanir, which required tricky negotiations and the mutual exchange of hostages to bring the Tree back into “wholeness.” This drive to negotiate and reconcile has been a part of Germanic philosophy since prehistoric times, and it formed the foundation of the wergild system which was a part of the legal system used for setting things right in a community that had ceased to function in a healthy manner.<sup>30</sup> Negotiations, reconciliation, and actions taken to put a community back in order included the levying of fines, the removal of something (cf. Grendel in “*Beowulf*”) or someone as in the case of outlawry, or, most drastically, the actual complete changing of a thing from one state of being to another through destruction as in the case of Ymir at the beginning of time or even Ragnarök at the end of time. In the “Völuspá,” the *völva* predicted the end of the Tree wherein life has become so intolerable that the only cure is total destruction. In this case, the destruction of something is the catalyst for bringing something back into wholeness.

All these actions served the purpose of bringing a “healing” or a harmony back into a simple unit such as an individual who was ill or a field which was unable to produce crops, or into a complex unit such as a community or a nation. As can be seen from the examples cited above, the healer or Wholemaker could easily have been a priest, a diplomat, a judge, a warrior, a scientist, a lowly farmer, or a king and did not need to demonstrate any superior knowledge nor any profound belief; he needed only to be able to act with knowledge of the “illness” or “unwholesomeness” and be able to guide the people or land back to a state of “health” or “wholeness.” He needed to engage in “proper action.”

So far all that has been discussed is relationships in a horizontal fashion, in other words, all within the same time frame, the present, and, essentially, these can be

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<sup>29</sup> This dual-faith idea has been well expounded upon by many authors including Turville-Petre in *Myth and Religion of the North*, H. R. Ellis-Davidson in *Scandinavian Mythology*, and recently in R. I. Page’s *Chronicles of the Vikings*. In several correspondences with members of the Ásatrúarfélagið, the Icelandic reconstructionist group/ state religion, that members do not have to denounce the Lutheran Church or Jesus to consider themselves members of the Heathen religion.

<sup>30</sup> For a lengthier discussion of the wergild system, the reader is referred to Foote and Wilson’s *The Viking Achievement* which has several chapters dealing with all the topics discussed in this section. Although the book is quite long, it does more than most others at describing explaining the Germanic sense of moral, ethical, and legal responsibility towards individuals, family, community, and king. It was published by Sidgwick and Jackson Limited in London circa 1984.

considered spatial relationships. Rather than being separated by time, they are separated by distance only or in what we would call a cause-effect relationship, one event leading into another. Complex temporal relationships are often less obvious in the early writings of Germanic culture and are probably somewhat more difficult for modern man to conceptualize let alone understand. Modern white Americans can be heard to say, for example, “I had nothing to do with the slave trade; that was over a hundred years ago!” in response to remarks made by black Americans about current living conditions, employment opportunities, and general attitudes of white America towards the black community. Modern folk generate an excuse out of the *apparent temporal separation* between events to absolve themselves from the responsibility of engaging in right action; instead, they use this as an excuse to turn their heads away, to ignore racial prejudice. The tired cliché “All that we have is the present” is another way that people can remove themselves from and blind themselves to events that have gone before, but such a belief would have seemed odd to an ancient Scandinavian sitting near the fire in a mead hall listening to a poet/ singer recite glorious battle songs composed in honor of a long dead king.

For the ancient Teutonic peoples, the past was the very foundation upon which the present floats. Events taking place in the past directly determined the status of the present. For the ancients, the responsibility for past action was not to be ignored.

“Thence wise maidens three betake them—  
 under spreading boughs their bower stands—  
 Urð one is hight, the other, Verthandi,  
 Skuld the third: they scores did cut,  
 they laws did make, they lives did choose:  
 for the children of men they marked their fates.

(Völuspá 20, Hollander, 1962)

In the above verse, the Old Norse word usually translated as “fate” is *ørlög*. For the purposes of poetry, the translation may serve well enough, but from a philosopher’s or a cultural anthropologist’s point of view, “fate” or “fates” is a very poor choice. The ON word, *lög*, and its companion, *lag*, are defined in the Glossary to the Poetic Edda thusly:

**lag** n. ’lay,’ order, disposition: *heyra lag orða* ‘to catch the drift of words. In the pl. (lög) a) preordained fate: *leggja lög* ‘to determine someone’s fate’; b) law. *lög*, see *lag* (Völuspá 20) and *lögr*.

*lögr*, m. 1. water, liquid. 2. sea.

Although the word is translated as “fate,” one can easily see that the feeling behind the word is more closely related to “layering” (as in “silt falling to the bottom of a river”), “ordering” (as in “the ‘layers’ of silt”), and “water.” Even the phrase *heyra lag orða* (“to understand”) would then translate into something like “to hear the ‘layers’ of the words” or “to hear how the words ‘layer’ themselves into meaning.” The prefix *ør-*, which has as its cognate in modern German *Ur-*, translates most literally as “primal” or “original.” The word, *ørlæg*, then translates as “the most significant things laid down, the earliest things accomplished.”<sup>31</sup>

The Well of Urð, the *Urðabrunn*, is concerned with movement much the same as the other Springs, but its outward flow is ordered and layered as opposed to chaotic seething of Hvergelmir. Somehow we have lost the sense of the word “spring.” A spring in this new millennium brings to mind the image of a *small pond* fed by an unknown source, but originally the word was concerned not with the *thing* that we now call a spring, but with the action and movement of the water. The word “spring” is a verb that was used as a noun for so long that it has all but lost its sense of being a verb. In the elder sense of the word, springs dealt with movement and action which can be translated as the power of the Flow of the Waters through the Tree. In the Tale of the Beginning above, the primary flow was to the center of the Ginnungagap and up the Tree through the Lands of Giants, Men, and the Gods, but there is also a return flow back downwards which falls as dew from the antlers of the Hart, Eikþryrnir. It is the layering of action and movement into the third Well, *Urðabrunn*, at the beginning of this downward flow that is read each day, i. e. the “history” of the Tree, and the new layers are what becomes “the present,” “the Now.”

The early Germanic peoples envisioned and experienced time differently than does modern man. They saw the past as being layered into an immense Spring with the far past being the deepest layers, the immediate past as those layers just below the surface, and the surface of the Waters as the present. All that was above the surface, i.e., had not been layered into the Spring yet was unknown. The surface itself had no real existence other than it was the dividing line between that which had already happened and that which was yet to be. All actions which were committed fell into the Spring and became layers slowly moving deeper into the past, and like rocks and logs slowly sinking below the surface of a lake, they directly affected the appearance of the surface. Such a conception of temporality is very different from the current idea that the past and the present are separate: “Then was then, and now is now.” For the ancient Germanic people the cliché would have to be recast as “All we really have is the past for the present is still not ready yet.”

<sup>31</sup> Bauschatz, p. 7.

Knowledge as defined above would also have a different feel to it since to be truly knowledgeable one would not only have to understand the connections between things or events but would also have to know and understand the layering of actions/ movements in the Well of Urð and how these layers were affecting the surface/ present time.

”The phrase *lög leggja* is the usual term in Old Norse for the act of making laws, but the literal meaning of the phrase suggests something else. *Leggja* is ’to lay’, ’to place’, or ’to do’. *Lög* (the plural of *lag*) is literally ’strata’ or ’that which has been deposited or laid down’. *Lög leggja* is, then, to lay down that which has been laid down or to lay down or implant strata. There is a strong feeling of the physical here. Of course *lög* occurs again in *ørlog seggja*: ’to say or to speak the *ør*-strata, the *ør*-things-laid-down, the *ør*-law’. The phrase is usually translated as ’to set fate’, but fate is a non-Germanic word. If fate’s meaning is to be limited to denoting ’that which has been spoken’ or ’that which has been laid down’, then it translates the context well; if not, it will cause problems.”<sup>32</sup>

Knowledge, then, comes from having gained an understanding of the past.

Snorri in the *Prose Edda* tells of the Tale of Óðinn’s seeking wisdom from the Well of Mímir:

“But under the root that reaches towards the frost-giants, there is where Mímir’s Well is, which has wisdom and intelligence contained in it, and the Master of the Well is called Mímir. All-father (Óðinn) went there and asked for a single drink from the Well, but He did not get one until He placed His eye as a pledge (into the bottom of the Well).”<sup>33</sup>

One did not gain wisdom or knowledge simply by drinking from the Well; one had to be able to see the layers/ actions and the currents, the connections, which relate one stratum to another to understand the true make-up of the surface. For Óðinn to have knowledge, His eye had to be left in the Well. Knowledge of the past or “remembering” the events and how they related to one another resulted in “knowing” the present, and this type of knowledge was within the scope of the Wholemaker’s skills. And indeed, it has often been the case, that modern collectors of northern European folklore have found the local “healers” to be some of the best and most complete repositories of local history, geneologies, as well as tales of the Otherworld.

The Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages separates itself from other European languages of the same tree in that it does not have a built-in future tense.

<sup>32</sup> Bauschatz, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Snorri, p. 17.

To create the sense of the future, it is necessary to utilize modal auxiliaries such as “will” or a form of the present progressive “is going to” preceding the infinitive form of the target verb. Looking back at the “water/ flow/ movement/ power/ action” complex, one will notice immediately that which is above the surface of the water, i.e., the future, does not fall within the constraints of the complex and, therefore, is devoid of power. For the Germanic people, the future had no real power; it did not exist within the realm of the Well and the Tree.

It is the past, the *ørlög*, which is the shaping force of the present, not the future. The movement of the Waters bubbles upward from the chaotic seething of the Well of Hvergelmir through the combined actions of Men, Giants, Ancestors, and Gods which are then laid down in the Well of *Urð*, chaotic Waters now ordered, and these eventually find their way back down into Hvergelmir. Every human action performed as part of the present becomes part of the layering process and with action comes responsibility. Action performed in the benefit of the intertwined Well/ Tree is proper action.

Men perform actions which affect the Tree and Flow of the Waters through it. Giants, Gods, Ancestors, *Landvættir* (land- and water-spirits) only have an effect in that they guide the actions of men either on a conscious or subconscious level by regulating the Flow of the Waters in the sense of luck/ power, but there is no indication in either the eddaic or sagaic writings that they have any direct effect other than through men. People are led, guided, tricked, conned, forced, or advised into action by these ghost-beings usually invisible to the inhabitants of Midgard (except to those with second-sight), but it is only people who are the ones to actually commit the acts which are then laid down as *ørlög*. The overall function of the folk of Middle Earth then seems to be as the executors of schemes made by either equal or greater beings. Man’s purpose in the overall plan is to lay down layers of the past which become the foundations of the present.

This is not to say that the Gods, Giants, or the *Landvættir* do not *do* anything for they obviously do. For the ancients and up to fairly recently, the *álfar* or the Elves, the *Jötnar* or the Giants, and the *Vanir* and some of the *Æsir* (particularly *Thór*) have been concerned with the well-being and fecundity of the earth. Weather, the care of certain localities, the fertility of animals, and the fruitfulness of plant-life have all fallen under their auspices. Even mankind itself was closely guarded and guided by the Gods, Ancestors, and a variety of other beings. However, it is only the actions of men which become the *ørlög*-layers in the *Well of Urð* and which change the nature of the Waters.

The idea that the past is the container of power for the present is not specific to the early Germanic culture. The same idea exists around the globe in pre-industrial nations where Christianity is not necessarily the primary religious

philosophy. These cultures, in general, place a great amount of importance on family lineages, clan-structure, marriages (often arranged), and oral history of places and people affected by significant deeds. Often modern people when reading about these cultures misinterpret these philosophies as being form of “ancestor worship” and the long recitations of family lineages which are usually part of these cultures as being ritualized formality. What is often overlooked is that these people, by their actions, are engaging themselves in the flow of power; to do so is to directly access the Flow of the Waters of Life in the Germanic sense of “luck.” These cultures all strive to maintain or improve their luck in all areas of life.

*Everything* has a lineage, but some lineages are simply more significant than others. To interact with a powerful lineage is a way to engage power either for evil (*unhælo*) or good. The gold-hoard of Andvari the Dwarf in Wagner’s famous *Nibelungenlied* (*Saga of the Rheingold*) was cursed upon its being stolen. That evil lineage was then melded with the lineage of an unsuspecting family when the gold was used by Óðinn, Loki, and Hnir as atonement (*wergild*) for death of Ottar, a son to Hreiðmar. Often, modern interpreters will attempt to show that the family somehow “deserved” the curse of Andvari’s gold, but “deserving” really had nothing to do with it. The family interacted with a powerful, evil lineage, volunteering to be blinded to the gold’s history because the satiation of their greed was foremost in their minds, and as a result, the family’s lineage became inextricably part of that cursed, evil line. On the other hand, Beowulf entwined his noble lineage with that of another, the lineage of the “giantish sword” with which he used to do battle with Grendel’s mother, and as a result, his already great power became even greater so that he was able to kill the monster which was indestructible by mere human hands. (Notice here how the “giantish sword” provides the power, but a man supplies the action.) Bauschatz relates that

“the extensive description of the sword may seem strange to modern readers, because very little of it beyond the phrase *ecgum byhtig*, ‘mighty with blades,’ seems to be of any direct relevance to Beowulf’s problems. All this historical, descriptive material is, however, in the Germanic context, extremely relevant. Hrunting, the sword he has tried to use against Grendel’s mother and that has failed to bite, is the very best of human swords, but it is not sufficient to the greatness of this task. Beowulf is dealing with the greater-than-human, and he needs a corresponding weapon; hence, we are explicitly told of this sword’s origin and history. This greatest of swords will provide the greatest action in the hands, naturally, of the greatest of men. As a result, the glory of the deed is shared by Beowulf and the sword.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bauschatz, p. 100.

In early Germanic culture, wise men sought to interact with powerful and noble lineages which would provide them and theirs with luck and power. Only fools such as the unfortunate but greedy family of Hreidmar in the Saga of the Rheingold would blindly align themselves with a lineage without knowledge of its *ørlög*. Therefore, the long recitations of lineages of pre-industrial, pre-Christian cultures such as are seen in the well-known “begats” of the Old Testament were never meant to be merely a formality but were of absolute necessity.

Tacitus in *Germania* spoke of the importance of omens and divination to the Germanic peoples of 2000 years ago. In the 20th century, we often think of divination as being either a parlor game or a serious way of glimpsing the future. But to the Germanic forebears, divination was a way to gain knowledge of the past and its effects on the present. Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* describes very clearly how important it is for the captain of a paddle-wheel steamboat to know the conditions of the waters, both on the surface and underneath, for the sake and safety of the boat and passengers. Measuring the depth of the waters, or “sounding,” was used in close conjunction with visual inspection of the surface to make determinations on passability. The exact same reasoning was used for the existence of divination among the northern people: testing or “sounding” the past with all its connections between events and inspecting the present to determine the proper course of action to be taken. Divination, then, had little or nothing to do with the future and certainly nothing to do with “predicting” events which had not yet come into being. It had only to do with gaining the wisdom of *ørlög*, those conditions which made up the present, so that the seekers of knowledge could advantageously place themselves within the flow of power.

The early Teutons have often been called a fatalistic group of people who believed that man’s destiny (future) was rewritten at birth. Snorri tells of this setting of “destiny”:

“There stands one beautiful hall under the ash by the well, and out of this hall come three maidens whose names are Weird, Verdandi, Skuld. These maidens shape men’s lives. We call them norns. There are also other norns who visit everyone when they are born to shape their lives, and these are of divine origin, though others are of the race of elves, and a third group are of the race of dwarfs, as it says here: ‘Of very diverse parentage I think the norns are, they do not have a common ancestry. Some are descended from Æsir, some are descended from elves, some are the daughters of Dvalin.’ Then spoke Gangleri: ‘If norns determine the fates of men, they allot terribly unfairly, when some have a good and prosperous life, and some have little success or glory, some a long life, some short.’ High said: ‘Good norns, ones

of noble parentage, shape good lives, but as for those people that become the victims of misfortune, it is the evil norms that are responsible'. ”<sup>35</sup>

However, if the concept of the future was, at best, hazy for the ancients, then so was the idea of predestine. There are quite a large number of folktales where “fate” is cheated and an equally large number where fate is not cheated although good attempts were made. The point is that, for the ancients, the future was not fixed absolutely but only tentatively.

It’s a fairly common belief that most early peoples believed in a fixed destiny.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the names *Urð* (cognate:“weird”; OE *Wyrð*), *Verdandi*, and *Skuld* are often translated in the classical fashion to mean “Past,” “Present,” and “Future.” It is also necessary to consider that not only do modern scholars tend to view the Norms in such a fashion, but that by Snorri’s time Christianity had a solid foothold in the northern countries.

“It is also clear, however, from all that has been presented that the Christianization of the pagan Germanic peoples eventually must have created very great conceptual problems for them. The temporal reorientation toward the future, which the Christian conception stresses so strongly, involved a 180-degree wrench away from the past toward a future that did not even exist prior to Christianization . . . . The term (*Wyrð*) comes to denote a somewhat ambiguous concept in Christian times; sometimes it seems to refer to the will of God, at others to something like Fortune (and, as such, subservient to God’s will), but it was there forcing itself meaningfully into the speech of those new Christians who struggled to reconcile it somehow with their recently acquired Christian orientation and belief.”<sup>37</sup>

Because Christianization occurred prior to the recording of the eddaic and sagaic literature (since anyone who was capable of writing in the roman script had been trained by the Church), one needs to be very careful not only in the translation-interpretation but also in the content of what was actually written. In any case, it is obvious from the time of Tacitus down that the early Germanic people held some concept of dispensers of destiny or *ørlög*, but information is lacking in the northern literature as to the nature of what was actually dispensed. Until the early part of this century, there was a living tradition among the Norwegian Samí (Laplanders) of the three Goddesses of childbirth who were known as the Daughters of Madderakka. Their

<sup>35</sup> Snorri, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> This is another area where people tend to ignore the evidence as it is presented by the anthropologists. Moderns often hold set beliefs and then “page through history books” looking for the evidence that they are right. Getting into the habit of reading anthropology texts from front to back with an open mind is a skill that can be learned and cultivated.

<sup>37</sup> Bauschatz, p. 154.



names were Sarakka (*saret* = “to cleave”; akka = “old woman”), Juksakka (“bow old woman”), and Uksakka (“door old woman”), and they correspond to *Urð*, *Verdandi*, and *Skuld* respectively. Sarakka was the guardian of pregnancy, or the splitting of woman into two beings, who governed life in the womb. Umo Holmberg provides a description of a ceremony dedicated to Sarakka:

“... women in childbed drank ‘Sarakka’s brandy’ before deliverance and, together with other women, ate ‘Sarakka’s porridge’ after giving birth. In the porridge three sticks were placed; the first one was cleft and had three rings hanging from it, the second was black, and the third white. These were all laid for three days at the door of the tent. If it were found that the black stick had disappeared, it was believed to indicate that the mother or the child would die. If, on the other hand, the white was lost, both would live.”<sup>38</sup>

(Note: It is interesting that the tradition of *nornagreytr* [Norn’s groats] was a custom which lived on until fairly recently in this century as a birth custom among the Faroe Islanders and that the ceremony was basically the same as described for the Samí above.) Juksakka warded over the birthing process and, according to tradition, was able to change a girl-child to a boy immediately prior to birth if the proper sacrifices were made to her. Her symbol was a small bow, and she would provide a boy child with the necessary skills to become a good hunter. Uksakka lived under the door to the tent and received the “newcomer on his arrival in the world, [and], later, she watched over the first steps of the child to prevent its falling and hurting itself.”<sup>39</sup> The Samí made sacrifice to her by pouring a drink onto the ground by the door where she dwells.

If the names of the Norns, *Urð*, *Verdandi*, and *Skuld*, are translated as Bauschatz suggests, i.e. “that which has become,” “that which is becoming,” and “obligation,” then the idea of the dispensation of “fate” as was retained by the Samí would run something like this:

Part of the Flow of the Waters of Life are brought up together as a swirl or eddy out of the Well of *Urð* (‘that which has become’) and is moved to the surface (‘that which is becoming’). Once the child is born out of the events

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<sup>38</sup> Holmberg, Umo *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, published as vol. 4 of *Mythology of All Races* edited by J. A. MacCulloch (Boston MA) 1928, pp. 253-54. This book contains much material pertaining to the cultures neighboring the Germanic realm immediately to the north and to the east. Holmberg also has many discussions about the speculation of “borrowings” between the Scandinavians and the Finno-Ugric tribes. Holmberg’s material is also used in many of the chapters that follow and it was this work primarily which encouraged the author to look closely at the border-zone culture as being a way to fill in gaps, particularly by what the Scandinavians chose to “borrow” presumedly to fill in gaps that they themselves perceived.

<sup>39</sup> Holmberg, p. 254.

which have already occurred and is brought into the present time frame, its lineage ( *ørlög* or ‘obligation’) is affixed.

There is no need then to think in terms of destiny (future) when what is actually being given to the child is its present complete with its heritage, and all obligations, debts, and deeds accomplished which occurred prior to the present. Such a view of birth may seem grim to modern readers. People of the 20th century like to think that children are born with a “blank slate” ( *tabla rasa*) which is a pleasant idea except that science now says that, from a genetic standpoint, children are born with certain physical and neurological characteristics with which each is destined to live. Research into such areas as addictive personalities, psychological traits, physical traits (such as muscularity or obesity), and socio-economic status has shown that children are born with package and parcel which comes from the lineage of their forebears. Grim or not, the idea that children are born with the debts and obligations of their immediate ancestry is viable in this day and age.

The concept of heritage at birth, which was apparently affixed at the naming ceremony, is really little more than the idea that each individual has his own starting point provided at birth. From that point on, the future is undetermined and each is free to do with his life as he will within the constraints of heritage. However, it has been shown that past actions determine the make-up of the present, and it may well be that two lineages, prior to a child’s birth, are on a collision course with one another improving the probability that certain events will occur in the future. Knowledge of *ørlög* becomes vital then for gaining access to luck/ power. Since nothing is really predestined, those things that have already been put into motion can be modified so that all eventually can benefit, but proper changes can only be made by acting knowledgeably; acting without knowledge is a fool’s game. *ørlög* is only fixed up to the present so that one can interact with other lineages and can thereby gain access to power which ultimately can result in changing what was once a dull, miserable starting point into a rich and prosperous life.



With the Germanic concept of time and space laid out, the next obvious questions should be, “Is such an ancient philosophy applicable in this day and age, and if so, what changes would the application of such a philosophy bring about?”

The answer to the first part of the question is always going to depend upon personal experience. The “ancientness” of the philosophy makes no difference; the important issues are whether it works and whether one’s current philosophy is a

success or a failure, i.e. a functional worldview. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are several problems which recur in the therapy rooms of counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists: feelings of isolation or alienation, depression, addictions, feelings of powerlessness or victimization, low self-esteem and a variety of psycho-somatic illnesses. Some seek out help from conventional medicine while others try to improve their spiritual side by connecting with all different kinds of cults, sects, organized churches or alternative medical practices such as homeopathy, shamanic counseling, crystal healing, etc. The bottom line is that many would like to know how they fit into the world as it stands today, and a good spiritual philosophy should be able to define that role.

The ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy is applicable today in that it matches well with the current knowledge base of the scientific and, in particular, the medical communities, but, more importantly, by shifting modern man's point of view from material things more toward the relationships between events, people, places, etc., one is free to find one's role in the overall functioning of the world in a realistic fashion, free to relate to the world in such a way that all can benefit. The spiritual explorer will find that after applying this *weltanschauung*, the role of any single individual appears relatively small and usually fairly insignificant within the scope of the entire picture, but also with this same realization comes a sense of belonging. An incredible sense of freedom begins to develop out of the idea that the future is still unwritten. At every turn of the present, one is granted a series of choices, choices which will place him in the mainstream of life if he so chooses. Choosing to look at the currents (relationships) flowing through the world rather than at the myriad material things reminds people that they are never truly isolated;<sup>40</sup> the very existence of any single person is, in essence, entirely dependent on the number and quality of relationships that the individual has to the rest of the world; pathological ego-centrism, which is the taproot of all the psychological problems listed above, is not a part of this philosophy although self-enjoyment and love of life are certainly good possible outcomes. Always, though, the answer to the first question is personal and individualized.

Many changes can be brought about by the mere acceptance of this ancient philosophy, but there are many changes necessary in the way a person lives before benefits can be won. Individualism, for example, is a trait commonly ascribed to the ancient Germanic peoples of the Viking Era (roughly 700 - 1000 CE) and even

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<sup>40</sup> Through this book the imagery of water, the flowing of water, movements of water are prevalent. This is not an error. I have chosen to avoid the traditional interpretation of "fate as the universal weaving" mainly because I find it a tired metaphor, but also because the ancient Norse (and the early Indo-European culture in general) placed the imagery of water into their cosmologies. I personally find the concept of water much easier to work with and much more prevalent in eddaic/ sagaic literature and in later folk lore as well.

earlier, but the ancient interpretation of the concept was somewhat different than that which has developed in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Back then, people understood that a person was only an individual in that he or she brought special personal talents into the overall functioning of the community. Talents or skills were developed by the individual but were “gifted” to the totality of the community in which one lived. A Viking warrior’s skills were added to the collective skills of the crew because only by finely-worked team effort were battles won with a minimum loss of life. A woman’s skills in the household or in the fields were added to those of the family unit or to those of the community. Individualism, then, had more to do with one’s individualized function/ role within a community, country, or world than with acting “individually,” contrary to or in spite of current trends. This philosophy also brings with it responsibility to family, friends or community and responsibility for one’s actions and ensuing consequences. By choosing to look at relationships between things instead of simply *at* individual things, one quickly begins to realize that no act is ever committed in complete isolation, and that each act initiates a set ripples in the large pond (reverberating effects) with the greatest effects being felt closest to the act’s point of origin. To use an exaggerated example, if a woman slays her husband, the effects are felt greatest in the families of both parties, slightly less so in the community (depending on the size and the ‘tightness’ of the community), and at the national level, the act *is* reported but generally merits but one or two small paragraphs on the some back page of USA Today (if even that). However, if a senator commits the same act, because of the number and quality of his relationships throughout the nation, i.e., the quality or power of individual *ørlag* (pl. form) he has interacted with, the effect felt is greater.

In this worldview, responsibility is a burden that only human beings bear, and it comes in two distinct varieties: responsibility *to* family, community, and ultimately to the entire Tree/ Waters complex, and responsibility *for* one’s own actions. In the Germanic system this is so because only people are capable of committing physical acts which result in new layers being put down in the Well of Urð affecting the Flow of the Waters/ power/ luck through the whole Tree. The wise person, according to this ancient spiritual philosophy, chooses to interact with strong, compatible lineages, such as Beowulf’s interaction with the “giantish sword’s lineage,” strengthening the individual line, but also better to gain access to the flow of power/ luck for the individual himself. By accepting this challenge of responsibility and by acting in an honorable manner, one is assured of at least maintaining one’s standing in life in the community if not ultimately improving it. To act out of ignorance, voluntarily or otherwise, one is dooming himself and his lineage to loss of power/ luck. Germanic sagaic literature is filled with such stories. Responsibility means acting out of wisdom.

The spiritual road begins with accepting one's *starting point* in the world. A child is born from a family tree, a bloodline, complete with debts and payments. Some of these take the form of genetic inheritances, some of socio-economic status, and others are simply learned over the course of growing up. People inherit psycho-emotional tendencies with all the strengths and weaknesses passed down through familial as well as community lineages. Some babies are born from blue-collar lines and some from white. Whatever the case may be, all have a starting point inherited at birth, and none, absolutely none, are born as a "blank slate." Each member of the existing family will slight differences in inheritance because of being born at different times, but all access the same lineage for luck or power.

The great American dream (myth?) is that all sons have the same chance for presidency, but this is little more than a dream and has nothing to do with reality. There is a current trend among young people (the trend actually has a long history) to turn their backs on their own personal history. Some refuse to admit, even to themselves, that they come from a long line of blue-collar workers, or perhaps from a lineage rife with alcoholics, thieves, prostitutes, con men or drug addicts. Some come from families with members who suffer from mental illnesses, or where domestic violence is a part of everyday life. Certain familial weaknesses are often embarrassing to individuals (although, oddly enough, an "addiction craze" has been rather faddish for the past decade in spite of the fact that 'addictions' previously were thought of as the result of weakness). In any case, there are many who cannot accept their own lineage for whatever the reason, and these spend a lifetime running and hiding from their past.

On the other hand, there are those who, while still not accepting their past, choose to fight against their lineage and their starting points in life. For the past two decades or so, the fashion has been for "lineage-haters" to write books or appear on talk shows so that they can publicly denounce their past. But these are no different in essence than those who turn their backs on their family lineage and hide their starting points in life behind glittery false fronts; they still are unable to accept their own origins and their own *ørlög*.

The eddaic lay ('song'), the *Rígsthula* ('the Song of Rig'), describes the starting points of people; in the pre-Viking era not all folk were created equally. The general interpretation of the "Song of Rig" is that the White God, Heimdallr, at one time traveled through Midgard. During his travels, He met up with Ai and Edda (Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother), worker of the earth, and stayed with them three nights. It was during this stay that a son, Thrall, was engendered. Eventually, Thrall married Thir-the-Drudge, and they, in turn, began the race of thralls (workers of the earth; slaves) having ten sons and nine daughters, all of whom had names such as Stinking, Dumpy, Oak-Thighs, Shouter, and Horse-Fly. Heimdallr continued his

journey and met up with Afi and Amma (Grandfather and Grandmother) with the same results except that they became the original parents of the race of peasants (free men under a ruler or king). After a time, he met up with Faðir and Moðir (Father and Mother) who engendered the social class of free men and royalty.

A common Ásatrú interpretation of this lay is to help explain and rationalize the existence of royalty; however, taken at face value the lay says only that people are not born equally, that they do not have the same lots in life. A popular trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way to avoid one's starting point in life is to accept reincarnation and to look into the "karmic" past or the "akashic records" for some sign of royalty or heroic personages to compensate for what is conceived to be poor a starting point. This trend often involves selectively searching familial history to find royalty or another aesthetically pleasing personality, and once such a personage can be claimed, rightfully or not, he or she becomes the material for serious "name-dropping." Most of us can find something good in our personal lineages, I suppose, but we find a lot more that is unacceptable to our overly sensitive 21<sup>st</sup> century tastes. The tendency is to consciously and conveniently "forget" the disagreeable characters with the polly-annic attitude of "Out of sight, out of mind," (therefore, "out of reality") but this is a game only to fool ourselves. Accepting one's starting point as it is not always easy or comfortable, but at some point, it *is* necessary.

There are and most likely will always be some people who either accept their starting points in life and have adequate access to power/ luck or who do not accept it and seem to enjoy adequate access anyway. They seem to be settled in their ways and do not have any real problems in maintaining their status quo. This can be somewhat disconcerting to some. However, simply by being born into Midgard, each has a connection to the Flow of the Waters of Life regardless of whether a person believes it or not; belief is not an issue here, a workable worldview is. Some of these folks live out their lives completely unconcerned about ancestry yet always continuing to access power/ luck from their familial lines. This is often the case with many children who are adopted. Adoption also usually allows a child to begin life with strong interactions with another lineage adding to the power/ luck their family histories. They begin life with complex starting points. There are others who have, for whatever reason chosen to turn their backs on their heritage and seem to continue accessing power/ luck by acquiring and maintaining close ties to other lineages. As long as these maintain those ties by living their lives in such a manner that they remain in good standing with the communities of Læraþ, the World Tree, and they continue to live well. Other people simply go along through life until their power/ luck runs out, then a change in the way of life becomes necessary.

An individual starting point is the opening through which one's lineage/ luck can be tracked back to the source of the Waters. If one turns his back on his

own lineage, he may be denying himself access to that source of power/ luck. But more crucially, since, in this worldview, people are born with both *payments* and *debts* of the family line, accepting one's starting point also has much to do with the knowledge of personal *ørlög*. The debts which were already settled prior to one's birth give access to power/ luck making the journey from birth to death comfortable and significant for the individual. Without luck, life is little more than a series of wishes or daydreams. Unpaid debts and obligations, however, are very important though mainly because they can and often do drain away power/ luck from the individual often resulting in the development of psychological or physical problems as described above.

Ralph Metzner, a successful clinical psychologist, ran into some of these problems in his own life. He had spent years trying to find his *place in the Tree* by studying eastern religions and philosophies such as Zen, meditation, experimentation with mind-altering drugs, etc., while at the same time he was turning his back on a "shameful," unwanted past.

"For some years, I have been gradually coming to a deeper realization of the importance of connecting with one's ancestors. My own inner work and the experiences of my students and my clients in psycho-therapy have long convinced me that, while the origins of many disturbances can be found in patterns of relationship with one's parents (who are, after all, our ancestors too), one often needs to go beyond biographical factors to prenatal and perinatal conditions, to multigenerational family patterns, and to ethnic, cultural, racial, or national influences \dots. A few independent minded psychologists and psychiatrists have occasionally ventured to suggest the existence of an ancestral complex, or something like a family curse, that could be affecting the inner psychic life of individuals and, hence, their relationships and general attitude toward life."<sup>41</sup>

Metzner spent many years coming to grips with his ancestry both in understanding the need to do so and in the acceptance of his own starting point, his *ørlög*. The result of this decades-long search is the book cited above, which, although containing some historically inaccurate information regarding Germanic spirituality as it was apparently practiced by the early Teutons, is an excellent internal view of a man's thought processes while in search of his individual source of power/ luck, and it remains as a record of a man's personal experience with the Gods and philosophies of his ancestors.

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<sup>41</sup> Metzner, Ralph *The Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom Myths of Northern Europe* (Shambhala; Boston) 1994, p. 5.

The spiritual philosophy of the early Germanic peoples, unlike that of Christianity, was not a route to salvation since they did not believe that anything to be saved from. One starts out in life as part of a family lineage and remains part of his lineage. The worldview and its proscription for action and responsibility was a way to access the power/ luck flowing with the Waters that fed the World Tree and a way for an individual to participate in the overall functioning of the Universe bringing meaning and value into a life well-lived. Our primary concern today is generally for personal comfort through life, but for the ancients, the ultimate desire was to fit comfortably into the scheme of things which, of course, brought with it a sense of personal comfort and well-being. Really, once one realizes that no individual life is separate from any other, the main desires in life, i.e. to be the best that any one can be, to live life to its fullest potential, and to go to the grave as a complete human being, are the same no matter the century or the place. Only the process of achieving these ends is different.

Common 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy is something like “I must learn to love myself before I can love, care for and nurture others.” A quaint philosophy and rather commonly heard, but it is very ego-centric (almost pathologically so) and typical to this century. People already *do love themselves above all others* often to the point that they sometimes forget that *others* even exist (on freeways in the USA, in grocery store lines, at garage sales, etc.) and in their forgetfulness, they take the lives and conditions around them for granted sometimes actually causing great harm and destruction while engaging in their personal use of the world around them. Self-gratification has been the rule for ages. In fact, it was the very thing that brought the Roman Empire to ruin. Folks sate their desires for money, comfort, love, material goods, possessions, land and power without thought or concern for the effects that greed is wreaking. They search for royalty in their pasts to satisfy and pacify egos that have grown great at the expense of everything around them, but, in reality, these modern folks are the inheritors of Andvari’s gold. It is not that we do not “love ourselves” but that there is no value to our lives.

For the ancients, the spiritual goals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would seem crude at best, for they believed in leading a life that was “worth” (from the same IE root as *Urð*; *Wyrd*) something, and that interacting with the Waters of Life was the means to a life of “worth.” The *Hávamál* or the “Sayings of the High One” (one of the poems in the Elder or Poetic Edda) is often viewed as the Viking Code of Conduct as Lee Hollander’s introduction to her translation of it would indicate:

“They (the poetic verses) stress especially the laws of hospitality, the rules of decent conduct, the value of circumspection in one’s dealings with men, the need for moderation in eating and drinking, the vanity of mere wealth compared with true merit—all in the spirit of Germanic Heathendom,



with many a pearl of shrewd wisdom, of terse humor, of noble sentiment. We single out for admiration the deeply moving stanzas on having a home of one's own, however humble (Sts. 36-37), and those magnificently asseverating the lastingness, in a world subject to the law of change, of a fair name (Sts. 77-78)."<sup>42</sup>

The poem, however, is far more than a simple list of suggestions. When one reads the poem in terms of interacting with the Flow of the Waters of Life, a different picture of early Germanic "morality" begins to emerge.

The only things gained by participating in life for these ancient Scandinavians was "worth" and a "fair name." "Worth" went with the individual into the Land of the Ancestors, and the only thing left behind on Midgard after death was a starting point for descendants, good or bad depending on the individual's choices in life.

"Cattle die and kinsmen die,  
 thyself eke soon wilt die;  
 but fair fame will fade never  
 I ween, for him who wins it.  
 Cattle die kinsmen die,  
 thyself eke soon wilt die;  
 one thing, I wot wilt wither never;  
 the "doom" over each one dead."

*Hávamál*" Sts. 76-77, Hollander, tr.)

The "doom over each one dead" is the individual *ørlög*, the swirls and eddys left on the surface of the Waters in the Well of Urð and the layers directly below, after one has left Midgard. These layers become part of the starting point for the following generations. By interacting knowledgeably with the flow of luck seething up from the original source, a person is able to leave a "fair layer" in the Well of Urð for those coming up later to act upon, and, in this way, then, one has led a life of worth.

The "Sayings of the High One" is much more than a testament of Teutonic morality; it is a manual for interacting with power/ luck in a fashion which will benefit all who come later. The 165 stanzas of the poem stress acting with knowledge and how to act so that knowledge does not pass one by. As Hollander mentioned in her introduction, there are many stanzas which deal with moderation, a sentiment not commonly associated with the Viking era, because without moderation one is

<sup>42</sup> Hollander, Lee *The Poetic Edda* (University of Texas Press; Austin TX) 1962, p. 14.

acting out of self-gratification, greed, and, consequently, ignorance. Greed, self-pity, depression, jealousy, envy, hate, and hunger all place blinders over the eyes so that one becomes incapable of acting knowledgeably. In the *Hávamál* stress is placed on taking care of oneself so that life is not just a series of “re-actions” but is rather a string of “actions” based on the knowledge of the past. And, indeed, the past *is* stressed:

“The unwise man waketh all night,  
 thinking of this and that—  
 tosses, sleepless and is tired at morn:  
 nor lighter for that his load”

(St. 23, Hollander, tr.).

The poem guides one through a life where the future is yet unwritten and uncertain.

The bulk of the poem implores one to interact with others cautiously. To interact with an *ǫrlög* which stems from a good lineage increases one’s own access to power/luck but a poor lineage decreases it and should be avoided, therefore, at all costs:

“For from an evil man not ever wilt thou  
 reward for good;  
 a goodman, though will gain for thee  
 the love and liking of many”

(St. 123, Hollander, tr.).

“With his friend a man should be friends ever  
 and pay back gift for gift;  
 (the enemy’s scornful laughter he learn to repay,  
 and eke give lies for lies)”

(St. 42, Hollander, tr., [reformatted using the footnotes notes]).

Stanzas 112-137 are all prefaced with “Hear thou, Loddafnir, and heed it well, learn it, ’twill lend thee strength, follow it, ’twill further thee” which is often considered to be just a formulaic device, but the “strength” which is lent is most likely that which is acquired from knowledgeable interaction, i.e., that which is gained from the Waters of Life. To imply that this is simply a formulaic phrase is a severe understatement. The value of the entire poem is that by using it as a set of guidelines one is lead

to interact with power in a beneficial fashion thereby improving one's access to the power/ luck flowing up from the source. The wake left behind upon one's death is such a powerful one that all those coming after will benefit.

The value, then, of resurrecting and practicing the spiritual philosophy of the ancient Germanic peoples, even in the 20<sup>st</sup> century, is to generate a life of value, honor, and worth. By interacting with the Flow of the Waters of Life , one finds his individual place in the overall scheme of things. That which is left behind is not just a meaningless stack of material goods, but a powerful gateway through which descendants can gain access to the same power/ luck that pervades the entire Universe. The spirituality of these people stands in direct contrast to the selfish, materialistic philosophies which are rampant in the world of the late 20th century, and acceptance of this ancient path requires for many a shift in focus of 180°. The first requirement is the accepting of one's *ørlög*, the personal starting point; the second, acting out of knowledge instead of reacting out of ignorance. The end result is a life of worth. Can anyone really ask for more?



## Chapter 3

# Midgard



The ancient Germanic peoples viewed their lives on this earth, which they called Midgard, differently than modern man. Their interaction with the environment was straight forward, more simple, and direct. The primary economic base was agrarian (farming and animal husbandry), fishing, and hunting and gathering as needed. Industries were mainly home based and involved (usually) very low impact technology. Even though, by 21st century standards, these people were relatively simplistic and primitive in their lifestyles, looking into their production of art forms such as poetry/ prose, carvings, weavings reveal some about the depth and breadth of their spiritual life and something of the complexity and sophistication behind their thought processes. In literature, poetry, and legal documents what is uncovered is a philosophy of life that is rich and complex, sometimes harsh, but at other times surprisingly gentle and comforting. More interestingly, though, with very few changes necessary to bring them into accord with the times, their ancient views are applicable in this modern world of industry, concentrated population, and ecological upheaval. The current way of viewing the planet is sadly and dangerously out of date, and it seems that a drastic change in the way of thinking is necessary if Midgard is to survive.

There are endless combinations of philosophies concerning the state of this planet, home and host to billions of organisms, but all these philosophies can really be narrowed down to three points-of-view: the 'single rock,' the 'living planet,' and the 'part of the living universe' theories. It is important to remember that any of these theories are simply parts of worldviews, and a worldview is not something that needs to be "proven." A worldview is a matrix for storing information about the world outside of ourselves which allows for maximum and efficient interaction. So, all the worldviews presented here serve their adherents and their life-philosophies.

A worldview has certain criteria that must be met. First, they should match, or at least be compatible with, consensus reality to some degree. The further away a personal philosophy is from consensus reality, the fewer the people one can interact with. An extremely distant worldview, for example, such as viewing the earth upon which we live as a giant sea-cucumber would do little more than draw laughter, concern, or fear from the "non-believing faction." Secondly, it should be functional so that it can be used as the basis upon which fairly accurate predictions and decisions can be made. Such decisions allow us to interact with the planet in a way that both the individual and the planet itself benefit. The capability to "blow the planet up three times over" has existed now since World War II, but to do so would serve no end. To be sure, there are groups of people who would love to eliminate certain other groups of people, but to accomplish this by destroying the planet is the very epitome of non-functionality, akin to "cutting off the head to spite the nose!" Thirdly, a worldview should satisfy one's set of aesthetics. By subscribing to a particular worldview, one should see the world with a sense of awe or wonder. Granted not everyone is going to see the world as a beautiful place; many seem to enjoy having something to complain about. Having something to complain about is in reality aesthetically pleasing to 'complainers. They receive a sense of enjoyment and fulfillment by discovering a "new thing wrong in the world" Finding something aesthetically pleasing then does not necessarily mean that one finds beauty; finding something aesthetically pleasing means that one's needs are sated with interpretations of the world which might include beauty, but also perhaps wonder, or maybe just some new material to ponder.

The first of the three general worldviews is common to many different Christian communities as well as to much of the scientific community: the earth is a sterile "rock" which functions as non-living matrix within which a system of ecospheres are located. An ecosphere, more realistically a biome, is a region of interdependent species of life which function together as a unit, for example, a swamp or a mountain, and includes all forms of life in that region from one-celled organisms all the way up to the most complex forms (including the self-aware form, man). This theory allows its followers to extract materially as much as possibly can be gotten from the

ecosphere within which they live without having to deal with feelings of compassion, sadness, or gratitude. This group is ruthless, i.e., devoid of any feelings in its interactions with the earth. (Note that “ruthless” here is not used in its negative sense but in a completely neutral sense.) This particular group has been responsible for much of the scientific advancement enjoyed by people living during the latter half of the 20th century including better nutrition, medicine/ surgery, improved communication/ information systems, etc. Although much good has come out of this faction of mankind, not all discoveries have been good. The group with its lack of compassion for the environment has been responsible for many of the ecological crises of the age, and as a result, many individuals are currently in search of a worldview which will prove to be less damaging to the environment and which will result in fewer feelings of guilt or shame for the individual. Remember the Valdez/ Hazelwood incident in Alaska? DDT? Asbestos? Thorazine, thalidomide, and the first polio vaccines which resulted in psychoses, birth defects and comas, respectively? Chemical fertilizer? CFC’s? Our modern interaction with the earth has also shown similar damaging results.

Many from the scientific community are beginning to shift their views slightly. The scientific theory called the “systems theory” states basically that individual components do not exist independent of one another but belong instead to a system or a matrix and that the relationships between the components are just as important as the components themselves. A human body, for example, is made up of billions of individual cells and can be even further subdivided into molecules and further into atoms, but to study the human body, one must take into consideration how all these parts interact with one another. The second way of looking at earth, then, is as a single organism which expresses itself as billions of life forms.

People who buy into this theory subscribe, generally, to the Gaia Matrix Theory as first outlined and explored by James Lovelock or belong to one of the many so-called “Earth-Religions” which are really branches of the pervasive New Age movement. Actually, it is not uncommon to find folk who accept both these worldviews by blending them together. These folk, as opposed to the first group, do not act in a ruthless manner, but out of compassion, concern, and even love. They see the earth as a single “living” system where any manipulation of individual parts results in changes throughout the entire system. Many of the 20th century advances in ecology, holistic medicine, anthropology, psychology, etc. are a direct result of this age-old way of viewing the earth upon which we live. This view of the planet as the “Earth Mother” has been around for possibly 10-20 millennia and seems to go through periods of renewal occasionally. The number of 21st century adherents to this group appears to be growing quickly.

The third theory states that the earth itself is part of an even larger system. Some

from the scientific community are beginning to move in this direction although at this point in time the second group seems to contain the largest numbers. This group holds that the universe itself (or possibly even a system of “universes”) is a single system or organism and, as in the second group, any change made in an individual part of the system will affect the entire system. The 60 year old theory of quantum mechanics is partially the result of the efforts of this group, as well as some of the newer ideas such as “chaos theory” both of which are far beyond the scope of this author.

In the case of the ancient Germanic people, Earth is an integral part of a tripartite concept known to them as Yggdrasil, Lærað, Mímameið, or, in modern terms, the World Tree. In this ancient view, the entire universe is represented by the living World Tree and contains all that there is and all that there can be. In modern Germanic languages, the normal word for the universe is *das* (or other appropriate article)*All*, literally translated as “the everything.” In Chapter 1, the connections or the relationships between the individual parts were discussed. For the ancients these relationships are represented by the Flow of the Waters of Life with the word “Life” being that of the entire organism of the World Tree. For these folk, then, *Das gesamte All lebt*, “The entire universe is alive!”

Among these groups of people, for the most part, there are a large percentage of people who are concerned about the welfare of the planet. The “sterile-rock” group’s concern is purely selfish, however. The Christian faction believes that the earth is here for man’s use, i.e., to be exploited: “All things in God’s Creation are here for the service of Man.” This group is becoming concerned, however, that over-exploitation without control will eventually shorten man’s stay on the planet. With knowledge of the effects of pollution, and the over-harvesting of non-renewable resources, man can either poison himself into extinction or will run out of non-renewable resources (mainly fossil fuels) so that the planet becomes uninhabitable for anything except possibly cockroaches, coyotes, and a large number of bacteria and virii. Many in this group justify their use of the planet by stating that it is the Will of God and that, since their stay on this planet is temporary, the extinction of a few species matters little or is according to God’s Plan.

The part of the scientific community that subscribes to the sterile-rock theory is often very willing to explore alternative forms of energy in a unbridled fashion and is also willing to move ahead with such experimentation to better the living conditions of man. Many if not most of these scientists are careful not to “over harvest” any one particular thing because they realize that there must be a balance, but, if a species of life happens to fall into extinction as a result of “forward motion,” so be it, as long as man benefits. This constant push forward resulted in the accidents at Chernobyl and Three-mile Island, however.

The second group, the “Earth-Religion Group,” is much more cautious in its approach to research. These people are concerned about inter-relationships between biomes and want to know what effect any experimentation is going to have at a local level as well as the regional, hemispheric, and global levels. Regardless of whether any individual in this group believes that the Earth is a sentient being or not, he or she has a “feel” for the idea that any single change does not occur in isolation, but that one change results in everything being changed to some degree. These folks often scream loudly at congressional hearings that an environmental impact statement is either needed or is incomplete, that animals are in need of protection from man, or that unchecked nuclear testing on the environment is a threat to all life. This group has done much to improve not only the living conditions of man but those of all organisms. In general, this group has done more than any other first because it is very active at the national level, and secondly because it is already large and growing in numbers every day.

The third group is almost completely unknown except in the so-called “backwards Third World countries” where shamanistic or animistic practices are still prevalent, yet this is the group which will be dealt with most specifically in this chapter. The central idea is that man does not live on earth but on Middle-earth (Middle World in the terms of neo-shamanism; Midgard in ON) which is situated between an Upperworld and a Lowerworld. This Middleworld or Midgard does not nor can not exist in isolation but is dependent upon the Upper- and Lowerworlds for sustenance. In more modern terms, it could be said that “earth” is but part of a greater whole. A modern, scientific analogy is that this world that we call the Earth belongs locally to the solar system, regionally to the Milky Way galaxy on a broader scale, and to the Universe on the broadest of scales. Additionally, there is no single point where “earth” stops and the rest of the solar system begins. Elementary particles, photons, neutrinos, and electrons, travel from the sun to the earth which in turn interacts with moon and neighboring planets gravitationally; comets and asteroids travel about on a larger scale. The Hubble telescope has revealed to us that the solar system is but a minuscule archipelago of planets and planetoids floating in galaxy-sized seas of gas. This is accepted by most of the scientific community regardless of the group they belong to. Not only is Earth part of a larger *whole* but its edges are continuous with the larger whole as well. In fact, everything that is acknowledged by the second group is also acknowledged by this third group but the idea that effects, results, repercussions and reverberations are not only felt upon the planet but throughout the entire Universe to some degree at least. Even though these scientists usually accept quantum physics and chaos theory viable models for explaining the workings of the universe, they still have a difficult time moving from the idea that the universe a “sterile thing” to the idea that it is “alive.”



In the tripartite system of the ancient Teutons, all parts are interdependent; i.e., one part is always dependent on the other two. In ON this Universe was known as Yggdrasil, Lærað, or Mimameið, and in more modern anthropological literature, as the World Tree. The other, more common, way of looking at the ancient Germanic philosophy of the *All* is to say that “Yggdrasil” is how the World Tree was called by the Gods, “Lærað” by men, and “Mimameið” by the giants.<sup>1</sup>

Modern researchers suspect that the early Germanic people probably held deep respect for Midgard and this probability will be discussed at length below; however, to say that the ancients followed an “Earth-Religion” as is described in much of the New Age literature is an oversimplification and is probably incorrect. Earth is personified in the eddaic and sagaic literature as *Jörd*, Mother of Þór and one-time mate of Óðinn, and sometimes as *Rind* or *Fjörgyn* (speculative), but worship of this goddess/ giantess, although speculated through archeological finds, cultural anthropological studies, etc. as being a probability, is completely unrecorded so to label this ancient philosophy an Earth Religion is probably over-extension and perhaps little more than wishful thinking among members of the New Age community. She is primarily known as the Mother of Þór and appears in kennings (poetic metaphors) as an adjective to describe objects or people. Snorri does say, however, that “Þór’s mother Jörd and Vali’s mother Rind are reckoned among the Asynjur.”<sup>2</sup> Although Earth does not appear to have been worshipped as an entity in the Germanic pantheon, there are recordings of many public and private events which deal specifically with fecundity, particularly in agricultural regions. The cults of the Vanir or Nerthus would be an example of this (discussed later), but their ceremonial purpose may have had more to do with the fertility of the earth through proper care than with being a true “Earth-Religion” as defined by modern neo-pagans.

The early Germanic peoples lived together in small communities usually comprised of a few extended families living near one another. At the time of the Viking Age (usually thought to start at around 750 CE<sup>3</sup>), it was not uncommon to find some communities allying themselves with others to form small regional kingdoms similar to the concept of “counties” in the USA, and these were either lead by a king and his retinue or by a council<sup>4</sup>. Prior to their congregating in cities, northern

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<sup>1</sup> See *Snorri’s Edda* translated by Anthony Faulkes (Penguin Books, 1995) for a discussion of *kennings*, a type of metaphor utilized by Heathen and Christian Germanic poets (called “*skalds*”) and specialized classical northern Germanic vocabulary such as these names for the World Tree.

<sup>2</sup> In *Edda* translated by Anthony Faulkes and published by Everyman’s Library (London) in 1987, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> There has been and will continue to be serious debates as to the actual starting point of the so-called Viking Age. Such a discussion here is completely useless to our purpose; therefore, the starting point is kept at roughly 750 CE which is little more than a midpoint between 500 CE and 1000 CE.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Mosby in his *History of the Swedish People* discusses how these small community

Europeans led a life which was closely bound to Earth and her moods. Up to the Viking Age, the ancient Scandinavians depended almost entirely upon the Earth as a source of income. According to archeological evidence, the Swedes who occupied Sweden early on, from about 5000 - 3000 BCE, were hunters and gatherers, from 3000 BCE to 0 CE, herded small livestock or *smale*, and from 0 CE to the last century, were engaged in family farming operations. Additionally, they hunted game in the wilderness, fished the lakes, streams, and fjords (in Norway), and foraged the forests for wild foods. In fact, until the industrial revolution most families entire income came from farming, fishing or mining, and it was this close tie to the land that shaped much of Germanic culture as it is known today.

In the 20th century, vestiges of our agrarian way of life often go unnoticed. For example, the modern American “school year” was originally set up so that young people would go to school when they were least needed around the farm. The payment of income tax comes when the last of livestock are sold off (most ranches will not start selling this year’s calves until June). For the most part, these “customs” left over from farming days long gone are no longer meaningful since income for almost 90% of American families comes from business and industry rather from laboring in nature. Lacking any firm ties to the cycles of nature or to the earth, it is no wonder that the “sterile-rock” group got such a strong foothold in this country between 1920 and 1970.

Up and into the last century, all aspects of folk life from birth to death, including art, music, and spirituality, were shaped by the forces of nature and the changing of seasons. Secular festivals related primarily to planting and harvesting or animal husbandry. The modern Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter were originally Heathen holidays. Christmas was called Yule or *Jól* which according to Snorri in the *Heimskringla* was a holiday to celebrate the fertility of the fields for the coming year but it also came during a period of leisure time at the tail end of the butchering season and was closely tied to the disappearance and reappearance of the sun at the Arctic Circle during the winter solstice. Easter is allegedly named after an unknown Goddess or giantess tied to the return of spring to the land and was known in the ancient north as “summernights.”<sup>5</sup> Both holidays, now under the sway of the Church, retain trappings and ritualized customs related to their earlier form as fertility festivals with but a thin veneer of Christianity. Baptisms, weddings,

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councils (which he calls a *by*) functioned. This type of government also became the standard for Iceland with regional differences, of course. Both kingdoms and councils are also alluded to by Tacitus in his *Germania*. Both systems of government apparently have long histories and were known to work comfortably beside one another.

<sup>5</sup> See *Heimskringla: Saga of the Norse Kings*, translated by Samuel Laing (Everyman’s Library #847, London), 1961, p. 13 and p. 49. The footnotes on these pages define “winternights-summernights” and *Jól* respectively.

and in some places of the north, even funerals were held off until spring when ice and snow had cleared enough so that traveling priests could perform the ceremonies. The North is a land of extremes in terms of the weather and the soil, so, really, it is inevitable that nature shaped and continues to maintain the shape of the northern folk life.

It was stated above that the early Germanic people did not generally practice an “Earth-Religion” as it is commonly defined today in that they did not worship the “Mother Earth” as a specific deity. On the other hand, the ancient Teutons did worship several deities who were closely involved in caring for the fertility of the land, specifically, the Vanir, Nerthus (a Goddess who is often viewed by modern interpreters as the Earth personified). Temples were known, at least at the time of the Viking Age, but the names usually utilized in Old Norse to mean “temple” had to do primarily with “sacred land.” In general, these were groves, hills, mounds, and in other cases, mountains, waterfalls and springs. There are many place-names throughout the entire north ending in *-lund* (grove), *-Vé* (consecrated land), *-hörg* (harrow or altar). Tacitus, the Roman historian, stated that Germans

“did not confine their gods within walls, and did not make images of them, but rather consecrated forests and groves, calling by the names of gods that hidden power which they beheld only with reverence of their own eyes. . . . These passages show that, among the Germans, the belief in personal but unseen gods was highly developed, and that worship was often conducted in the open air, without buildings or idols. Later sources also show that open-air worship was widespread.”<sup>6</sup>

Worship, religion, and spirituality, for the ancients were continuous with the land around them, and they apparently found no real need to separate them until the coming of Christianity when the folk were finally forced under penalty of both Church and secular law to cease the practice of leaving sacrifices for their Heathen deities, land- and water-spirits, and ancestors in these sacred places.

Since folk-customs often die a very slow death, the Church even found it necessary to sanctify many of these sacred plots to one saint or another and build churches or shrines either next to the original spot or immediately on top of them.

“When Christianity was imposed, the most important Pagan sacred sites were occupied and churches built upon them. The *Vé* at Jellinge, Denmark, is a prime example. Similarly, At Gamla Uppsala in Sweden, a great wooden temple existed until around 1100. It is thought that this site originated as a

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<sup>6</sup> In *Myth and Religion of the North* by G. Turville-Petre, p. 175.

sacred grove, then evolved into a *Hörgr* and then a temple. A cathedral was built upon the temple site.”<sup>7</sup>

Pennick and Jones also present several cases where Christian holy places were desecrated by the Heathen hoards such as “the action of Ota in Dublin” or “Peel Cathedral on the Isle of Man”, but he feels that this “might equally have been part of the reverent tradition of continuity.”<sup>8</sup> Their conclusion seems most reasonable in view of the Germanic people’s spiritual philosophy of needing to interact with people, places, and objects of power/ luck.

What the church leaders failed to understand is that for the northern peoples *landhas lineage*; it has its own *ǫrlög* independent of the people living on it. A holy spot is “holy” because that is its “fate,” and people gather there because it *is* holy, plain and simple. Family land is family land because the destinies of both land and family are intertwined, and people are drawn to these areas naturally because power/ luck pours up from the Original Spring through the underworld out onto the surface of the land. Early on, the Church greatly disapproved of such activities as this Canon enacted during the reign of King Edmund (959-975 CE) clearly reveals:

“16. And we enjoin, that every priest zealously promote Christianity, and totally extinguish every Heathenism; and forbid well-worshipping, and spiritualism, and divinations, and enchantments, and idol-worshipping, and the vain practices which are carried on with various spells, and with peace-enclosures, and with elders, and also with various other trees, and with stones, and with many various delusions, with which men do much of what they should not.”<sup>9</sup>

Over the centuries, though, the Church has not needed to be quite as harsh as in the early stages of conversion since it sanctified and rebuilt many of these holy spots in the names of its saints which was, in the long run, much easier than trying to prevent the folk making periodic pilgrimages and leaving offerings. In general, these holy places are often still maintained and protected by the local churches.

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<sup>7</sup> In Nigel Pennick’s and Prudence Jones’ *A History of Pagan Europe* (p. 121), a history textbook written by two practicing Heathens of the late 20th century. The book is very nicely done and stays only with history as it has been documented. “Legendary histories” such as those of the modern movement of Wicca or the older Freemasonry while mentioned are treated as unsubstantiated claims. An indispensable text.

<sup>8</sup> Pennick and Jones, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> In *Anglo-Saxon Mythology, Migration, & Magic* by Tony Linsell. This book is a very beautiful volume of artwork and translation of the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem. It is published by Anglo-Saxon Books (1995) out of London, is very well researched, and although it treats many of the topics often addressed by the New Age community such as “northern shamanism,” Linsell sticks very close to the facts as they could be had from written documentation and leaves the more wild speculations to others more daring.

Northern Europe has a long history of regarding the earth, or at least specific places, as being holy, and this holds true not only for the Germanic peoples, but the Celts and Balts as well. The Roman historians, Tacitus and Procopius, both writing before 500 CE, discuss in their records of the North the importance of “sacred” places, which include islands, wells or springs, groves, hills and trees, and mention that these were named after Gods, spirits, or ancestors.<sup>10</sup> What remains today, however, are place-names that can be traced back to their etymological origins, and these have been studied quite in depth since the development of historical linguistics during the middle of the last century. H. R. Ellis Davidson in *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* states that the “the study of the landscape and of the names given to local features that go back to early times”<sup>11</sup> is an important area of study, but that caution is necessary in the interpretation of the information because many of these place-names are not as old as first speculated. A study of about 100 Icelandic places suffixed with the word *-hof* (usually denoting “temple”) was made in ca. 1910 CE, and it was found that only about 5 of these existed in the early 1800’s. She warns that great “caution is needed, since even if *hof* names can be traced back to medieval times, they may merely indicate chapels built by the Christians, so that there is little reliable evidence on which to draw” (pp. 54-55). The studies do reveal, though, that many ancient sites are generally associated with the worship of Þór, Tyr, Frigg, Frey, Óðinn, and in northern Scandinavia, Ullr. Many of these places have been confirmed as ancient religious sites, as opposed to habitation sites, through archeological excavation of pits containing what are obviously offerings and fire pits which are not the size or shape of normal cooking/ house-hold fires.

In history recorded by the Germanic peoples themselves, there are places which seem always to have been holy to the people; these would include meeting places for secular/ legal/ religious reasons, and places which have been dedicated to ancestral spirits or particular Gods within the range of the sagaic era which extended roughly from about 700 CE - 1300 CE. Iceland, in particular, has a large number of these, Thingavellir, the ancient place of the Icelandic parliament, and Helgafell (the name of several mountains, actually) being some of the more famous. Uppsala in Sweden has also been much described particularly by the German monk, Adam of Bremen.

Family land holdings in the North have been important throughout all of written history with the rights to the holdings ever being passed down to the eldest son, but Moberg in *A History of the Swedish People* considers the smallest unit of free society to have been the village rather than the family:

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<sup>10</sup> *Idunna* vols.4; 1-2; James Chisolm, “The Grove and the Gallows, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> See p. 54-55 of Davidson’s book for a short discussion of cautions about reading too much into the old place-names. This is something that is often thrown to the wind in some of the newer literature and articles.

“The village was the peasants’ castle. Its *raison d’être* was mutual assistance. In illness, want or danger they came to each others’ assistance. Always there was someone in the village who knew how to drive out evil with fire and steel. If a cow fell sick, it was handy to have a neighbor who knew how to cure it. Birth and marriage, death and funerals, all were the common concern of the village council. Agriculture too was carried out by the men of the village. The soil was distributed in such a way that the peasant’s plots of land might well be scattered in thirty different places. Since the fields were tilled simultaneously, the work had to be done on a basis of mutual understanding. The cattle went out, hoof by hoof, to graze together on the common land. Each villager drew his water from the village well, and at festivals all gathered on the same hillock, the ‘court’ (*hóf*) of some god.”<sup>12</sup>

He goes on to say that since about 1000 CE, there have been solitary farms on record, but these have always been associated with a village. The ancient Germanic people have always been social, community loving people as far as can be discerned from the archeological record, and they worked together and celebrated both life and death as a community.

The concept of ownership is relatively new. In the 20th century “ownership” generally means “to belong to one person,” in fact, the word “own” comes from the same root-word as “one.” To truly have a sense of ownership, one needs also to embrace the idea that one is somehow immortal: one owns something now and one will continue own on into the future. This sense of continuity, however, was somewhat foreign to the early Teutons who carried with them the idea that this life was somehow transient and that they would each pass away, leaving nothing but names and memories of good deeds performed during their short stay on Midgard. This is the meaning of the formulaic line from the *Hávamál* mentioned earlier,

”Cattle die and kinsmen die, thyself eke soon wilt die.”<sup>13</sup> (Hollander, St. 76).

Property was in one’s care until it was moved to another. Wealth was acquired so that it could be given away. A kenning for a king was “gold-hater” because kings were expected to give what they had acquired. And ownership of land was no exception to this rule; it was passed on to the eldest son as the successor in stewardship over the family lands which were lived upon and worked by the extended family. The ancestral lineage tied to the land was important so lands were often kept within the same family, but true *ownership*, in the modern sense, did not develop until long

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<sup>12</sup> In *A History of the Swedish People*, p. 39, by Vilhelm Moberg. This is a very pleasant, easy-to-read history of the Swedish people republished as a two volume set by Dorset Press (New York) in 1989 from the original 1971 translation by Paul B. Austin.

<sup>13</sup> Hollander translation, *Hávamál*, St. 76.

after the Christian invasion. By that time, people had forgotten about or neglected ancestral guardians, land-spirits (see below), and lineages of both families and land.

In modern Germanic countries, lands still usually held by the same family generation after generation, but this is becoming, for the most part, a matter of convenience. The last real vestige remaining of this ancient concept of stewardship is the “family heirloom” which is still fairly common throughout all the modern countries where the descendants of Germans, Scandinavians, and Anglo-Saxons settled.

Central to many communities in the north is the church and its graveyard. Interestingly, the word in modern German for cemetery is *derFriedhof* and is cognate to the OE *fridhgeard* which was a sacred place where sacrificial offerings were left. The word literally translates as “peace-enclosure” where violence and bloodshed were banned and which was often situated near plots where luck was felt to flow up from the Land of the Ancestors out over Midgard. Although it can not be said with any degree of certainty that the *fridhgeard* was the fore-runner to the Christian cemetery, it is known and well recorded that burial mounds, howes, and barrows were a central feature in many communities and were often considered to be the place where wisdom could be dispensed throughout the community in the form of reciting the laws or holding court. Additionally, the burial mound of ancestors is the traditional place for the practice known as *útisetja* or “sitting-out” which was apparently a night-long vigil during which leaders and kings sought inspiration prior to making important decisions from the ancestors but was probably practiced by common folk for similar reasons as well. The topic of community cemeteries will be expanded upon later in the chapter dealing with the underworld; the only point being made here is that cemeteries have always been considered 1) a place wherefrom luck and knowledge could flow out upon Midgard, and 2) by maintaining a line of ancestors buried beneath the soil, one could rest assured that the lineages of the individuals within the community were bound well with that of the locale.

The health of fields were important to the Germanic peoples, which is somewhat of an understatement since farmers’ livelihoods depended upon the ability of a field to produce; no farmer, even in the 20th century, can say that he does not mind if his fields are blighted or barren. However, the approach that the ancients used was that of “one person (really, a community) blessing and healing another.” The *Acre-bot* is a “field ceremony” which has survived in written form in an 11th century Anglo-Saxon herbal preserved as a manuscript in the Harleian Collection:

“Earth, divine Goddess, Mother Nature, who generatest all things . . . thou indeed art duly called great Mother of the Gods . . . . Those who rightly

receive these herbs from me, do thou make them *whole* (my italics), and so forth.”<sup>14</sup>

Although the main body of the “Acre-Bot” is Anglo-Saxon, the rite, in varying forms was fairly well known throughout the entire Teutonic realm and versions of the ceremony can be found in manuscripts, “dating from the 6th century onwards, Breslau, Florence, Montpellier, and Vienna” (Grattan & Singer, p. 432), also there is another Anglo-Saxon version in the Cotton Collection.

Some of the “field charms” were yearly ceremonies to promote fertility as in the well known “Erce, Erce, Erce, mother of earth . . .” version, and some were conducted only when a field became ill:

“Here is the remedy by which you can improve your fields, if they will not grow properly, or if any harm has been done to them by sorcery or witchcraft.”<sup>15</sup>

The reason for the rites or “charms,” as they are often called, is the same in both cases: to bring the field and its lineage back into wholeness (health). A field whose lineage has been crossed with another more unwholesome one becomes weak and lacks access to the flow of the Waters of Life. This could happen through some form of witchcraft or simply by the stewards of the field having broken some taboo. In any case, the treatment of the field was the same as it would be for any other being suffering from a similar disorder.

The scholarly interpretation of these charms has been varied but always along similar lines. Storms, in his *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, interprets at least one of the charms as being hymns to the Sun and to Mother Earth.<sup>16</sup> Such views seem to be left over from the scholastic interpretations of the late 19th century à la Frazer’s *Golden Bough* where all mythologies were deemed to be related to a Sun God and an Earth Goddess. In the mid-20th century, this particular view became the basis of a pseudo Earth-Religion created by the Englishman, Gerald Gardener, known as Wicca. These scholarly attempts at explaining the existence of the group of charms collectively known as the “Acre-bot” neglected out of ignorance the idea of power/luck, lineage (ǫrlög), and the early Germanic concept that the earth or Midgard was really part of a greater whole. It should be noted that there is no true form of

<sup>14</sup> Grattan and Singer article as quoted in Bonser’s *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 431.

<sup>15</sup> In Storms’ *Anglo-Saxon Magic* published by the Hague ca. 1941. This book is the classic treatise on Anglo-Saxon magic from the anthropological and historical points of view. Granted, it may have had some shortcomings but in view of some of the poorly researched texts being published today as “how-to” manuals of Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, or Germanic magic it is still one of the best. There is no nonsense here (as of 1941)!

<sup>16</sup> Storms’ p. 48.



“Earth worship” indicated in these charms. The charms were conducted with the stewards of the land playing the role of Whole-maker or healer curing the land.

Another ceremony, which had a relatively common form throughout the entire Germanic realm, was the leading of a wagon containing either a wooden image of a deity of fertility or a human representative of a god or goddess through the local area to promote an abundance of crops for the year. Usually, this rite took place in the spring so it can be assumed, at least according to the ideas being proffered here, that the purpose of this ceremony was to “groom the lineages of people, places, and animals” so that all had good access to power/ luck. There is a description of the rite probably related to the Goddess Nerthus in Tacitus’ *Germania* as having taken place in Denmark around the 1st century CE, and another two mentioned in the *Flateyjarbók* as having taking place in Sweden during the Viking Age. Moberg describes this ceremony and it’s probable relationship to a ceremony still conducted by the Swedish monarchy:

“Each summer the wooden image of Frej [sic], set up in a wagon, made a journey through Sweden. Carried round the country to bless the grain on the fields, the god promoted the year’s growth and reproduction. It is here we probably have the origin or the *Erikskata*, a progress through the realm still undertaken by Swedish kings after their accession.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Snorri in the *Ynglingasaga*, the kings of Sweden trace their ancestry back to the God, Frey, and because of this lineage the kings have access to the power/ luck of that lineage:

“They [the kings of Sweden] were worshipped by their subjects as possessing supernatural powers. The common people believed their rulers could regulate natural processes as they pleased, distribute rain and sunshine as might best help the crops and promote the fertility of man and beast, producing *healthy*, well-fashioned offspring free of all blemish or deformity. Under a good king the grain was plentiful, women became pregnant, cows calved, man and beast multiplied, and no monsters were born into the world. As long as a ruler could prove his divine power by the happy courses of nature, he sat safely on his throne.”<sup>18</sup>

As representative of a divine lineage, the Swedish king then traveled throughout his realm to allow all lands, beasts, and men to interact with him so that lineages were intertwined and all life within the realm were increased in power/ luck. Lineage interacts with lineage to improve access to luck/ power regardless of whether one is

<sup>17</sup> Vilhelm Moberg, *A History of the Swedish People*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> Moberg, p. 56.

speaking of Gods, men, places, or objects. Interpretations of the ceremony in terms of Earth-Worship (as is often done) is not necessary because the increase in access to luck here functions the same as it did for the lineage of Beowulf to interact with the giantish sword—simply an interaction between lineages and an intertwining of luck/ health/ wholeness.

Without going into a deep analysis of the various field charms, a quick overview shows that there are certain elements which are common to most of them. First, turves or sods were taken from each corner of the field and were marked so that they could be placed back exactly as they were dug up. These sod-blocks represented the extreme boundaries of the land to be healed. These were then taken to be “blessed.” Secondly, a gift was made to the field itself. (This is consistent with what has already been discussed in the first chapter on gift-giving and the linking of lineages.) The gifts usually consisted of incense, herbs, bread, yeast, milk, honey, and oddly, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, old soap. Another charm also lists seeds collected from a beggar who was paid back in double. The prayer was directed to the “east” which seems significant since usually prayers were directed to the northern quadrant of the compass. However, the spring of the year and the eastern quadrant are linked. Spring was felt to enter Midgard from the east. This eastern “tie” will be discussed in a section dealing with the northern skies (The Sky Connection) and also in the chapter dealing with the Underworld Tradition of the North, but it is clear that the eastern direction was important to the field ceremonies. Lastly, the turves were returned their exact spots in the field bringing the ceremony to completion.

The exact process of the “blessing” depended entirely on the religious orientation of the community. Early on, these blessings, of course, were completely Heathen in nature, but later on, some of these were mixed with Christian elements and Heathen elements were reduced in strength so that only terms such as “Eorþan Moðer” (Mother Earth) and a conspicuously unnamed “God Almighty” were used in the charms. Apparently, these terms were found acceptable by the Church. The purpose of the blessing was to call upon the powers that exist to help protect the field from maliciousness. Originally, these powers were probably the Vanir, the álfar, or ancestral spirits all of whom seem closely related at least as far as agriculture is concerned, and possibly Þór who protects Midgard from attacks by either giant or troll forces.

Cemeteries have already been mentioned as being a central focus for geographic communities, but certain burial mounds of specific ancestors, and especially kings, were considered to be the spirit home of local protectors of the fields. In Snorri’s *Heimskringla* there is the case of Hálfðan the Black’s death and what occurred in the countryside thereafter:

“Now when the king drove over that stretch, the ice broke under him, and

he perished with many of his followers. He had reached his fortieth year then. There had been excellent seasons during his rule; and people were so affected by his death that when they learned of his demise and that his body was being returned to Hringariki in order to be interred there, men of influence from Raumariki, Westfold, and Heithmork came and prayed, all of them, to take the body with them to be buried in their lands; for it was thought that he who got possession of it could expect good seasons.

They reached an agreement in this wise, that the body was assigned to four places: the head was laid in a mound at Stein in Hringariki, but each of the others carried away their share and interred them in burial mounds in their homelands, and all are called the Mounds of Hálfðan.”<sup>19</sup>

The king’s power/ luck which had been increased over the forty years of his reign still poured out over the surface of Midgard even after his death, and, for a community to access that power, gifts or sacrifices had to be given “for aye doth a gift look for gain.”<sup>20</sup>

Since the eddaic and sagaic literature is primarily heroic in nature, ancestors of either a family or of a community are rarely mentioned. Communities such as villages belonged to the peasantry. Holmberg, speaking of the Finno-Ugric people says that

“the duties of the living with regard to the dead do not cease when the latter have been carried to the grave with all honors. The dead continue to need the help and care of the living. If a dead man is not given his rights, he may resent it and, coming back, disturb the peace of his survivors.”<sup>21</sup>

Although Holmberg is speaking of a culture east of the Germanic realm, there was a large overlap in folk customs so that customs of the Swedes differ from those of the Finns for the most part in language only. The western Finns, for example, celebrated their general memorial feast for their ancestors at Yule or Halloween with the same customs as the Swedes; however, Christianity, as it existed in Sweden, covered up many of the ceremonial aspects of these holidays which were to placate the dead for the upcoming year.

“In Germany and Scandinavia it was said that they came back at either Halloween or at Christmas, and there are records of food left out for them on Christmas Eve and the fire made up, while folk went to Mass. Next morning

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<sup>19</sup> Hollander translation, pp. 57-58, 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Hávamál, St.. 145, Terry translation.

<sup>21</sup> Holmberg, Umo, *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, p. 37, 1928.

their footprints might be seen on the ashes of the hearth, and in Iceland elves were said to visit houses in a similar way.”<sup>22</sup>

Davidson later presents a case from the Orkneys where an ancestral spirit (*haugbui* or “hogboy”) dwelling in a mound near a farm was periodically offered milk or wine for his protective services. When a farmer desecrated the dwelling place, a revenge of six cows was exacted. The most interesting part of the story, however, is that it took place as late as the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>23</sup>

Because the Vikings moved about often settling in new places, they were occasionally confronted with land-holdings which had no ancestors underneath. This happened in the case of the early Germanic invasions into Celtic or Baltic lands, Iceland, and Greenland. Since access to power/ luck was of greatest importance, they resorted to other methods. It is commonly reported, for example, that Viking invaders would “rape” the women of a country being invaded. So much so, in fact, that the idea of “rape” was often synonymous with “Viking invasion,” and there is no doubt that these invaders most likely enjoyed their work. The end product of such a brutal practice, however, was that the lineages of the invaders and the inhabitants of the country being invaded were intertwined, giving the Vikings access to the power/ luck of that land. Often the women who were raped were the daughters and wives of local leaders meaning that the lineage being interacted with was strong. If the Vikings were simply brutal barbarians as some scholars believe, then why not rape and torture or kill the women or perhaps keep them as personal concubines? Usually, the women were left in their homelands to raise the illegitimate children of the invaders.

There were other occasions when the country being “invaded” had no inhabitants, such as Iceland.

“In early Iceland the dead could hardly be pictured as waiting in their mounds for an opportunity to visit the living. There seems little doubt that the natural world in both Celtic and Germanic areas was held to be peopled with independent spirits dwelling in rocks, waterfalls, springs, and mountains. These were prepared to befriend the living and make the land fertile, but violence and bloodshed were offensive to them, in contrast to the battle-spirits. No doubt the dead in their graves might also help the living, and the spirit of a dead king, in particular, might possess such powers. Iceland, however, was without kings or ancestors, and there seems to have been a vigorous belief in a host of supernatural powers in wild places as well as on the farms, and in natural hills as well as in burial places. The spirits

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson, H .R. E., *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*, p.114,1988.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

driven out when Christianity came were not those of the pre-Christian dead within the earth. . . . As time went on, the power of dead ancestors became important in Iceland as it had been in the land from which the Icelanders came.”<sup>24</sup>

Folktale collections from Iceland contain a very large percentage of tales dealing with different land- or nature-spirits. Greenland was a country which presented a similar problem. However, by the time the Germanic peoples settled there, Christianity, which took a dim view of the worship of ancestors and nature-spirits, was the dominant religion. The Greenland colony under Christian rule lasted approximately 300 years before it failed. Perhaps one of the reasons for its failure as opposed to the successful colonies of the Faroes, Shetlands, Orkneys, and Iceland was related to the failure to establish a true relationship to the land. Certainly, there were other more economically based reasons which satisfy the modern scholar, but the coincidence is curious nevertheless.

One of the roles of an ancestor after death was to help maintain the familial ties to power/ luck, but the example of Iceland also demonstrates that there were roles played by other beings which had an effect on the luck of the land-holding as well. These beings were often bound to a specific geographical area and were called by *tusse* or *huldrafolk*. Such beings were non-organic (“never having been flesh and blood”) but had a lineage which ran through a limited geographical area which sometimes is described as “7 miles by 7 miles”<sup>25</sup> in modern folklore. In *Scandinavian Mythology* Davidson writes more at length regarding these land-spirits:

“Such spirits do not seem to be regarded as ancestral, linked with particular families, but rather as powers who resided in the very land itself. It was of the utmost importance for settlers in Iceland, a new and uninhabited country, to come to terms with them and win their favor. There are references in the sagas to mountain or cliff-giants, who were linked with certain features of the Icelandic landscape.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> In *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, Kvideland and Sehmsdorf relate several folktales which talk of the importance of boundaries in Germanic folklore. Some boundaries were natural, such as rivers or rocks, some were man-made such as roads or boundary-markers at the edge of the farm and some seem to be a combination of the two, such as 7 mi. x 7 mi. or 3 leagues from a particular point. Another curious feature of Germanic folklore is the more powerful the being, the wider the area it roams. Land-wights, farm-wights, and ancestors are spot specific; heroes, demi-gods, and ancestral leaders govern a region; and Gods travel the world over.

<sup>26</sup> *op.cit.*, p. 117, 1969.

Figure 3.1. Goðafoss–Falls of the Gods



It makes good sense that the early settlers of Iceland would try to make peace with these beings because they knew that it was the only way to tap into the land's power/ luck without which life in the new country was sure to be unsuccessful.

The next obvious question would be why these indigenous, non-organic beings would even bother with men. After all, they are obviously more powerful and more knowledgeable than men, and being discorporate, they are not in need of food or wealth. Davidson provides a clue:

“Another race of beings linked closely with the earth were the land-spirits, said to follow ‘lucky’ men and to give help with hunting and fishing.”<sup>27</sup>

Since the only real difference between these beings and men is the fact that men have bodies (wherewith comes the need for food, shelter, clothes, etc.), and since these beings are an expression of the flow of the Waters of Life as they move through the Tree (for everything that could ever possibly exist is part of the Tree in early Teutonic world-view), then they are looking for the exact same thing that men are: a life of honor, value, and worth, which are built through interaction with other beings of power/ luck, as discussed in Chapter 1. Through mutual, honorable

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<sup>27</sup> *op. cit.*, p.117, 1969.

exchange both man and land-spirit benefit. To strip everything down to its basic core, all beings are little more than lineages seeking to interact with each other.

It should be noted that although the term *huldrafolk* basically translates as a being that “cannot be seen by humans, normally,” or “Hidden Folk,” it is not usually applied to beings known as trolls, dwarves, or giants. There seems to be a difference in lineages. The lineages of giants can be traced back to Ymir and his descendants. Apparently, early on, the race of giants was split into two basic groups: 1) Ymir up through Bergelmir and his wife who survived the flood caused by the outpouring of blood after Ymir was killed (called *thursr*), and 2) Buri up through a split lineage, one being the race of Gods, the other being giants (called *jötunar*). Dwarves and trolls trace their lineages back to the corpse of Ymir, but are not truly the offspring of Ymir. Men trace their lineage back to the first man and woman, Ask and Embla, created by the Gods from trees with the same names, and land-spirits appear to have a similar lineage to people, most likely created by the Gods (the Vanir) out of the Tree as opposed to dwarves, trolls and giants who came into being prior to the existence of the Tree. According to folklore, all beings can interact with the lineages of men, but those who have a lineage resembling that of man tend to have the greater number of interactions.

In the story of the creation of the World Tree, there are three Wells: 1) Hvergelmir, 2) Mímir, and 3) Urð. It may very well be that the lineages of trolls, dwarves, and giants (*thursr*) are related primarily to the Waters flowing out of Hvergelmir, the Gods, *Jötnar*, and álfar to Mímir, and that men and ancestors spring forth from Urdhr. This, however, is pure speculation with no real evidence to be gleaned from eddaic, sagaic, or folkloric literature.

There is another curiosity, however, and although it is merely conjecture, when looked at in light of the importance that the early Germanic peoples placed on lineages, appears to make sense out what has been confusing ever since scholars have been attempting to interpret Northern Mythology: the War between the Æsir and the Vanir. The War between the Æsir and the Vanir relates back to an event where a witch of the Vanir comes to Ásaheim, and the Æsir suspecting some type of treason try to kill her unsuccessfully. But it is the resolution of the war that is significant. The Æsir given as hostages to the Vanir were Mímir, a giant with impeccable wisdom and memory extending back to the beginning of time, and Hoenir, one of the three who created humans. The Vanir given as hostages were Njörd, a God normally associated with wealth, prosperity, and the sea, and Freyr, a God associated with prosperity and fecundity of the earth and the ruler of Alfheim which was given to him by the Gods as a toothgift.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps, there was a different cause for the War than is usually suggested. Sup-

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<sup>28</sup> A tooth-gift was a gift presented to a child at the cutting of his first tooth.

pose, initially, there was a scramble to populate Midgard, and the beings created by the Æsir were people, and those created by the Vanir were the álfar/ *landvaetter* (land-spirits). To resolve the conflict each side sends a God of extreme intelligence and one of the creators of each side's proposed populace for Midgard. The resolution in the home of the Gods resulted in the Æsir and the Vanir living side by side, and the resolution for Midgard was for man and land-spirit to live side by side with the only real difference between the two being that the land-spirits were disincorporate and non-organic.

The evidence from the sagaic, eddaic, and poetic literature is scanty. However, an interpretation of the tale as a "contest" between the tribes of Gods provides a motivating factor for the initiation of the conflict between the Gods and a rational reason why land-spirits/ elves and men must seek to live in harmony with one another. It also offers some explanation as to why the cults of the álfar and of the ancestors appear to overlap to the point of one being confused for the other. Lastly, it means that the Æsir did not overthrow the earlier worshipped Vanir but that the two tribes of Gods may have been worshipped together, or at least side by side, from very early on. Turville-Peter alludes to such in his *Myth and Religion of the North*:

"From such records as we possess, it does not appear that the polytheistic pagans of Scandinavia and Germany were so dogmatic or fanatical in their religious beliefs that they would be likely to go to war for the worship of one tribe of gods or another. This first war in the world seems to be part of the creation myth. It explains how the [G]ods who promoted such different interests as the Vanir and Æsir lived in friendship<sup>29</sup> . . . . They explain how gods and men, who have such different interests and ambitions, as the agriculturalist, the merchant, the warrior and the king, can live together in harmony."<sup>30</sup>

According to such a view, because of their similar origins, land-spirits and men are destined live side by side, by the same set of rules, interacting with one another through gift-giving, honor and respect. The relationship is tenuous, however, because people are ever prone to petty squabbling, thievery, oath-breaking, lying, etc., and land-spirits appear to be vengeful by nature, often being the source of disease to land, animal, or man.

That the Huldrafolk were created by the Gods, similar to men, can be seen in the Heathen idea that Álfheim was ruled over by Freyr, one of the Vanir, and in the Christian idea that they were either the first children or the "hidden children"

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<sup>29</sup> In *Myth and Religion of the North*, by Turville-Petre (rpt. by Greenwood Press, Westport, Ct.) p. 160, 1964.

<sup>30</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 162, 1964.



of Eve, or of Eve's predecessor, Lilith, and although they were under the dominion of the Christian God, they did not possess a Christian soul and had no chance of salvation at the end of time; they were part of the earth and were to perish with the earth during the Apocalypse. As creations of the Gods or of the Christian God, however, the lineages of both man and land-spirit are similar, and as a consequence, interactions between the two are common even in the most current folklore.

There is much power in these interactions between lineages. Of all the Heathen knowledge and customs that the Church tried to eradicate, those dealing with local nature-spirits were by far the most difficult either to alter or get rid of. Knowledge of some of these non-organic forces is still alive and well in all countries having European ancestry, although in some cases, like the United States, European beliefs have meshed with those of the indigenous peoples. The popularity of these beings can be gleaned from any trip to the local bookstore, knick-knack shop, or even by watching children's cartoons on an afternoon after school. Gnomes, fairies, unicorns, gargoyles, nisses, necks, devas, dryads, naiads, mermaids, elves, and pixies can be seen every day in some of the most unlikely places. Even Christian angels of the 20th century are little more than elves with wings. Sometimes, to be as "politically correct" as possible and not to offend Fundamentalist Christian groups, Huldrafolk are given made-up names like *The Smurfs* in the hope that fewer Fundamentalists will take notice. Knowledge of nature-spirits is part of the living folk memory, and as long as Disney Cartoons, Grimm's Fairy Tales, and the Wizard of Oz are still around, there is no chance of the memory being erased.

The early Germanic concept of these hidden beings, however, was much different than the 20th century version. For them, they were truly forces with power for both good and evil. Interaction with the beings was inevitable for they not only dwelt in the wilds of the mountains and forests, but everywhere on the land-holding. Hearths, bath-houses, cellars, thresholds, barns, stables, mounds, ponds, streams, and trees were all likely abodes for the "Hidden People" as the Huldrafolk were known, and their individual names depended on their abode.

Of all the different branches of the Teutonic folk, the Scandinavian people have left the most detailed record of non-organic beings and by far the largest number of number of names for these beings. The names, however, are not usually personal names of the beings, which by tradition the beings themselves did not give away for fear of giving away their own personal control and power, but are "noa-names" which describe only their roles or places of residence. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf in *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* describe them as being probably of the same species with names varying according to their roles:

"The protection and welfare of the farmhouse and its immediate surround-

ings found expression in traditions about a solitary being called by various names.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the farm beings recorded are *Tomte* (in the northwestern districts), *Nisse* (in the southeastern), *Gaardvord* (literally, “yard-guardian”), *Tusse*, (invisible farm-hand), and *Tunkell* who seems to have held the “luck” of the farm from the original man-settler onwards and was attached specifically to a farm and not to the family as were the Nisse or the Tomte. Also there is another interesting dweller, a *Haugbui* (literally, a “mound-dweller”) who may or may not have been ancestral in nature; the dwelling in the mound may have been a burial place. Other terms occasionally crossed in the sagaic literature are *Armaðr* and *Spámaðr*. The function of many of these beings overlap and not all farms had them all as non-organic inhabitants.

Some of the beings appear to be closely attached to the human household while others are more attached to the land. The *armaðr* (literally, “hearth man”) as described in the saga of Ólaf Tryggvasson is one who seems attached to the household and in stories where a family packs belongings and moves such a being will often move with them; however, the *tunkell* is attached to the luck of the land. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf paraphrasing Svale Solheim from a 1951 article on “Yard-fellows” state that

“Solheim interprets the Norwegian materials as the remains of an ancient ancestral cult; according to Solheim, the *tunkell* represents the original owner of the farm, and, thus, the sum of good luck and prosperity associated with the farm.”<sup>32</sup>

Although these beings were associated with the land specifically, it was possible to drive them out by destroying the residence, often an outbuilding or bunkhouse, which became a common act after the introduction of new agricultural techniques and due to the indifference or antagonism of Christianity towards providing a special dwelling area for these land-spirits.

Offerings are reported to have been left for these domestic spirits well into this century, but the attitude of the general populace, as recorded in modern folklore, towards these beings has been slowly leaning towards the view of them as a nuisance rather than a blessing. However, the 1994 Winter Olympics opening ceremony from Lillehammer, Norway, included scenes of land-spirits in a choreographed “battle” with “trolls” (*landvættir*) which may represent a shift in attitude toward this part of the northern Germanic heritage since the “good” land-spirits were indeed presented in a traditional beneficent fashion.

<sup>31</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>32</sup> Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, p. 247, 1988.

The benefits of interacting with the lineages of land-spirits revolved around maintaining one's wholeness, one's quality of life, in general, and increasing access to luck/ power. Individual and family health was maintained as the ancestral lands prospered. As with interacting with powerful human beings, one's access to luck/ power (ON = *heill*) was increased through interaction with powerful non-organic beings as well. In a few recorded cases an individual was lead to buried wealth which improved the overall standing of the family within the community. The protective function of these beings also took the form of presages of deaths, visitors and approaching "bad luck" in whatever form it might take, and in at least one recorded story collected by Ivar Aasen in 1842 a *gaardvord* beat up and killed a troll which had threatened a man's life.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the wonderful benefits of interacting with the lineage of a land- or domestic-spirit, the relationship was always tense and dangerous to some degree.

The results of either knowingly or unknowingly interacting with these non-organic beings in a inappropriate fashion could have dire results because the breaking of a specific taboo would not only result in one's family's losing access to power/ luck, but also because the non-organic beings of either household or the wilds were notorious for exacting revenge. Revenge, although often directed at the taboo-breaker, was often carried out with unbaptized babies or couples immediately prior to their weddings being very easy targets most likely because they had not been officially blessed and therefore under the protection of the Church. Acceptance of the Christian religion was supposed to help protect one from the vengeful activities, but the Heathen utilized other protection in the form of charms or simply by setting things right with the offended spirit if it was at all possible. Ignorance was considered to be of no protection whatsoever.

Revenge was often considered to be a primary cause for disease, infant mortality (which was high at the time), death of mothers during childbirth, deformities of children at birth (probably the source of "the changeling stories" in northern European folklore), madness, or an individual's simply disappearing (being lost forever in the wilderness, for example). Madness, coma, and general malaise in cultures surrounding the Teutonic realm such as the Saamí or the Finns were, and still are, considered in the folk culture to be related to soul or power theft by non-organic beings and is best treated by charms, ceremonies, or, in the worst cases, by the Cunning Man (*noaide*), or the Whole-Maker. Within the Germanic realm, there are a number of diseases well-recorded in not only the sagaic and folkloric literature which are directly attributed to these non-organic beings (usually with the prefix *alf-* attached) but also in early and medieval herbals:

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<sup>33</sup> *Folktales of Norway* by Reidar Christiansen, tr. Pat Iversen, The University of Chicago Press, p. 143, 1964.

1. *ælfside*n = "nightmare"
  - a) *ælsogodha* = "hiccups"
  - b) *ylfagescot* = "elfshot" (ranging from a stitch in the side to serious loss of faculties or paralysis)
  - c) *álfabrúni* = "elfburn" (skin disease in animals)
  - d) *ælfadl* = "elf-disease"
  - e) *wæter ælf-adl* = "water elf-disease" maybe chicken-pox, c.f. modern Germ. "Wasserpocken"<sup>34</sup> or dropsy.<sup>35</sup>

Often these diseases are cutaneous such as ulcers, and other times they are related to madness.

A good relationship between land- or domestic-spirits and people depended much on the paying of small offerings (such as a bowl of porridge *with* butter, or a splash of one's drink toward the dwelling place of the spirit) or simply paying respect to spirits by acknowledging their role in the prosperity of the place. But these beings by their nature are as fickle as people. Some are pleasant and easy to get along with, some are mean and love to deceive or trick people into either failure or dangerous situations, and some are simply indifferent. When having to deal with such unpredictability, it is easy to understand, in the long run, why some people have preferred not to have to interact with these beings at all if given the choice. In several stories, farmers built outbuildings over the dwellings of the *tunkell* and were either required to move the building or get rid of the spirit at the risk of losing the luck of the farm. On the other hand, a large percentage of Celts Germans, Finns, Scandinavians, Saamí and various islanders have opted to endure the tenuous relationship and its associated risks as opposed to ignoring the *tusse-folk* altogether, perhaps bringing even a greater risk over the course of time. In the Heathen way of thinking, developing and maintaining a good relationship with the spirits of the area was considered to be the best practice even though it meant extra work and caution, for a good relationship resulted in health, luck, and prosperity for the family and community.

The Christian conversion of the North was not a simple affair which was accomplished over a few decades; it was a long term effort by the Church, which has lasted almost one and a half millennia, with knowledge about land-spirits, ancestors, elves, and other huldrafolk being the last Heathen practice to be eradicated. People could be forced to give lip service to the Abrahamic God, and the Church could make claims of eternal salvation after death, but its track record for increasing or maintaining the prosperity of a farm was no better than the older system. One still had to prepare the fields, sow the seed, weed the gardens, feed the animals, care for

<sup>34</sup> In *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, G. Storm's, p. 160-161, ca. 1941.

<sup>35</sup> In *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* [Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga,'] J. Grattan and C. Singer, (Oxford) 1952.

the animals (especially during the summer months when diseases were spread by hoards of insects), reap the harvests, and store meat and produce for the upcoming harsh winter months. After the work was done there was still a certain amount of trusting to one's luck that the crops wouldn't fail or that the grass would be good or that the animals didn't succumb to some epidemic, and obviously the Germanic peoples, particularly in the far north, felt more comfortable trusting their luck to local spirits than to a foreign God who seemed more concerned about life after death than the dirt in the fields.

If one allows that the eddaic and sagaic writings are representative of the people's attitudes towards nature at the time of their commitment to manuscript and in spite of the fact that there are most certainly Christian interjections and interpretations in the texts, then the early Teutons were possibly not truly animistic in their philosophy. Animism implies that everything has a soul and a life to some degree, and some researchers enjoy pursuing evidence of such a philosophy believing that all primitive peoples must buy into animism in one form or another. From the recorded sources, however, nature seems to be divided up into small "domains" with various guardian spirits over them. Grain mills have the *kverngrubbe*; forests have *skogsraan* rivers have the *näck* waterfalls have the *fossegrim*; the sea has "merfolk"; cliffs, rocks, mountains have a variety of giants and trolls; and, mounds and hills have huldrafolk, "hogboys" (*haugbui* = "mound dweller"), or ancestors. One could also choose to take the perspective of lineage, and in doing so would quickly notice that all things are "alive" in the sense that they all have a past or an *ǫrlög*. No direct evidence for such can be found in any of the Germanic writings, but such can easily be implied applying techniques of analysis similar to those which inspired Bauschatz or Glosecki. Which ever view one takes makes little difference in the long run because it is quickly realized that all things must be treated with a degree of respect either as individual objects or as part of a larger domain under the care of some local guardian.

For many moderns, an animistic worldview is frightening because any single action, no matter how small, may inadvertently irritate the spirit living within a thing and may result in revenge for an act unknowingly committed or that before acting an individual would have to spend an inordinate amount of time asking for permission which would result in very slow progress overall. For societies which thrive on progress such as the industrial nations of the 20th century, such a process would be slow and laborious. Additionally, it is well stated that modern Christians believe that the "things" of this world are under the dominion of man, and so an animistic worldview would not only be a hindrance to progress, but would also stand in direct opposition to their God-given right to do what is necessary for the betterment of mankind. For the most part, 20th century folk resist a move towards

animism considering it to be the most primitive of all religious beliefs and believing it to be the main reason why so-called primitive societies such as tribes in the Amazon or the East Indies have such a difficult time moving into the industrialized world. There is also something frightening about animism for 20th century man resulting in an overall distrust of animistic religions such as Voudoun, Santería, and some of the African tribal religions to the extent that an entire genre of “horror literature” has been created around the practices and practitioners.

Such opinions are ill-founded and represent an egocentric human resistance to changing one’s point of view rather than any real threat to progress. The early settlers of Iceland, for example, sought to live in harmony with their new environment by seeking the assistance the local genii of the prospective settlement through the ritualized custom of gift-giving (offerings, sacrifices). Such an approach actually facilitated progress rather than hinder it. Animism has little, if anything, to do with progress; it has much more to do with acting out of an attitude of respect and honor for those things outside of oneself, and a general sensitivity to the fact that no act is ever committed in isolation of anything else. In 1992, a funeral service was held on the rooftop of a large Japanese microchip firm. The services were conducted by a Buddhist monk and were performed for the benefit of the souls of all the microchips which were sacrificed over the past year through experimentation and through the destruction of inferior products. The funeral was considered “normal” by most of the Japanese population, including the administrators of the firm, but was “bizarre” enough in a western sense that it rated 10 minutes of airtime on National Public Radio. Japan is considered to be a very progressive country, although many western people feel that its sense of tradition is somewhat “backwards,” “out- of-date,” or at least somewhat unnecessarily “old-fashioned.” These same western people also notice what seems to be a paradox between the practice of ancient tradition and the development of high technology with its concomitant domination of the world economy in Japan. Paradoxes only exist, though, for philosophically rigid people who are unable to readjust their world view so that it reflects reality.

The early Germanic peoples, at least during the Viking Age and shortly thereafter, ranged greatly from being “highly superstitious” as is recorded in Tacitus’ *Germania* to devout atheists such as the Dane, Hrolf Kráki. Turville-Peter devotes an entire chapter to “the Godless Men” in his *Myth and Religion of the North* but concludes the chapter with a discussion about the need even for these men to subscribe to the cultural, moral philosophy of the day which is best represented in the *Hávamál* (discussed in Chap. 1). Animism, land-spirits, and polytheism are thought by many to be incompatible with many philosophies of the 20th century, but the idea that the world or Midgard is composed of a highly complex set of relationships, and that any act that is committed is never done in complete isolation, is not.

The concept of *þrlög* was understood by those who did not embrace any religion. They may not have believed in the World Tree, Yggdrasil, but they understood its function; they may not have accepted the idea of the flowing of the Waters of Life, but they understood the workings of power;

“Among these unbelievers was the Danish Hrolf Kráki, ‘most famous of all kings of ancient days’. Neither Hrolf nor his chosen champions ever sacrificed to the gods, but believed only in their own might and main (ON = *a matt sinn ok megin*). Hrolf once exclaimed that it was not the wicked Óðinn who governed men’s lives, but rather fate (*auðna*).”<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the fact that atheists, or near atheists, existed, everyone (for the most part, because there are always exceptions) subscribed to the same set of spiritual principles. Turville-Petre in his discussion about the possible origins of the *Hávamál* and the common knowledge that this poem was composed by several skalds (Germanic poets) even suggests that part of it may have been written by one or several of these “godless men.”

“Although the title *Hávamál* (Sayings of the High One) is given to the whole collection only two of the first seventy-nine strophes contain allusion to Óðinn. The rest tell hardly anything about religion or belief in gods. They read rather like the words of one who has travelled far and seen much (st.. 18), and had come to despise tradition and all the comfort which traditional religion might bring with it. Yet the title *Hávamál* is not altogether inappropriate, even to this part of the collection. As I have attempted to explain, the cult of Óðinn, in some of its aspects, represents a breach with tradition and a rejection of traditional morality and social organization. In this way the cult of Óðinn draws near to atheism.”<sup>37</sup>

The author is addressing the fact that many men left their homelands and communities during the Viking Age to sail the open seas. These men did not remain in any single place long enough to embrace any of the religious/ cultural aspects of the locale but still felt the need to adhere to a spiritual philosophy which would enable them to access power/ luck during their short stay on Midgard. This sophisticated philosophy was collected at some point during the Viking Age or within a few centuries thereafter and has come down through the centuries known as the *Hávamál*. As discussed in Chapter 1, the poem is a collection of pieces of wisdom which when applied in life will allow an individual to grow in luck and power. Like the Chinese philosophy of Taoism (as opposed to the religion of Taoism), it encourages a person

<sup>36</sup> Turville-Petre, p. 264.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.

to walk through life with respect and honor towards all life on Midgard, friend or foe, and that action and interaction are the keys to accessing the Waters of Life.

For the early Germanic peoples, Midgard was the place where all changes are made. *ǫrlög* is the state of the Waters and in itself is static. Changes in one's access to power/ luck are made through deeds either for the good or bad. According to the ancient cosmology as it exists today, the Waters rise up from their source, pass through Midgard and, consequently, through the acts of Midgard which modify it, then into the realms of the Gods where it is redispersed back through Midgard in its changed form (through the Well of Urð), and back down to the source where the cycle is started over. All beings within the realm of the World Tree are involved in the movement of these Waters, but Midgard, the realm of action, is the only place where they are modified, reshaped, and changed.

Both tribes of the Germanic pantheon knew this, and for this reason there originally was a "war" over Midgard which was resolved by resolving to work jointly. The end result of this resolution was that no one group of beings, or Gods, would have complete dominion over Midgard. Through joint effort *ǫrlög* is continually modified and in this way the End of the World Tree, or *Ragnarök* as it is called in the eddaic poetry, is held off. In a sense, all beings are striving for the continued existence of the Tree, Yggdrasil. The image of the Tree constantly renewing itself was discussed in Chapter 1; the Tree is constantly being destroyed by forces hostile to it. The serpent Niðhogg and her brood is gnawing at the roots and the heavenly harts nibble at the tender new growth, but the Tree is ever repairing itself by allowing the Waters of Life to trickle back down through the lands in its protection into Hvergelmir, the source. The role that Midgard plays in this scheme of things is to continually to modify the shape of these Waters (*ǫrlög*) so that when they are poured upon the Tree by the Keepers of the Well of Urð, they heal the wounds which are inflicted over the course of time. The joint effort of the two tribes of Gods is to guide the inhabitants of Middle-Earth toward changing *ǫrlög* in such a way to stave off the end rather than move towards it, and it is Their foresight and guidance, Their understanding of the larger system through the personages of Mímir, Óðinn, Kvásir, and Njörd, that guide the dwellers of Midgard.

The early Germanic peoples understood their roles as well. The constant striving to interact with power/ luck was understood not to only improve the lot of the individual or the family, but the community and ultimately the Tree itself. Their guidelines for this interaction has been left to modern man through the words of the *Hávamál*. Modern research methods have revealed that the "Sayings of the High One" was not written by a single person but was composed by several, and according to at least one researcher, possibly even one of the "godless men." Many interpreters



have taken this to mean that the poem itself is not representative of pre-Christian ethics. R. I. Page in *Chronicles of the Vikings* addresses this issue:

“In recent years there have been attempts to divert much of this material to the post-Christian phase of the Viking Age, and indeed to as late as the twelfth century. . . . It is fairly clear, at any rate to the unbiased, that (whatever the date of its edition into a composite *Hávamál*) a good deal of the poem derives from earlier times. Also that a good deal of it illustrates aspects of the Viking Age not otherwise recorded, notably the life of the poor or underprivileged.”<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of whether “godless men” composed part of the poem, or that it came into its final edition during the post-Christian Era, the poem’s content is consistent with behaviors recorded in writings from Tacitus (in the 1st century CE) on up through the Age of the Saga (700 CE through 1300 CE). The phenomenon of the “godless man” seems to have been a by-product of the Viking Age possibly due to lack of exposure to one’s own homeland (community) and one’s cultural history, but it did not change the knowledge that one needed to interact with power/ luck.

The conversion to Christianity apparently did not affect the common man’s knowledge/ worldview that one needed to interact with one’s environment in a harmonious fashion, and that resolution is a far better means to an end than all out extermination. Perhaps man had forgotten about the original war between the tribes of Gods, but the noble method of bringing such a problem to a good conclusion was held in the folk-memory to the point where the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and even Finland, at least, have been able to maintain neutrality in the world political arena for most of the current millennium. And, although Christianity has been able to change the face of much folk philosophy it has been unable to wipe out completely the folk belief that one needs to interact honorably and respectfully with the spirits that also form a part of this world, whether ancestral, land/ water, or domestic.

The so-called New Age has really been an attempt at turning the modern folk mind back toward a concern for the environment and the land; however, this same group of people has turned its view away from their own cultural heritage and towards eastern philosophies or Native American. Eastern, Native American, and Germanic philosophies, although having some things in common, are very different in both approach and practice. As mentioned earlier, the ultimate goal of the eastern philosophies is to blend into the One (the first bardo), but the goals of the ancient northern Europeans appear to have been to make peace with the third (everyday reality) and second bardos (hallucinations and “second-sight” being here equated)

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 140.

and by doing so, the “One” or the World-Tree will be taken care of. Mixing the two, or even three, very different systems does not result in a deep understanding of any of the systems any more than using all the spices in a cabinet makes a good pot of stew. For modern man, looking at the world through the eyes of the ancient Teutons results in a very different view than he is accustomed to. The Earth is no longer here solely for the purpose of serving man, but it is to be participated in as a part of a grander scheme. Individual objects, no longer owned, exist in relationship to all other things so that any action committed on one thing is not done in isolation but affects a myriad of things. Man’s role in the larger picture is much smaller than that granted by the Christian Church, but each act engaged in carries much more weight. Although one is no longer the center of God’s Universe, each deed is significant. Moving within the dynamic tension created by the World Tree, moving with honor and a sense of worth, a sense of value is gained: not the value of the ego-centrist but of the participant in family and community lineages, and the overall welfare of an earth centered neatly between the Land of the Gods and the Land of the Ancestors.



## Chapter 4

# The Sky Connection



*From the south the sun, by the side of the moon,  
heaved his right hand over heaven's rim;  
the sun knew not what seat he had,  
the stars knew not what stead they held,  
the moon knew not what might she had.  
Then gathered together the gods for counsel,  
the holy hosts, and held converse;  
to night and new moon their names they gave,  
the morning named, and midday also,  
forenoon and evening, to order the year.*

The sky above, particularly the jewel-bedecked night sky, has held man in awe since the beginning of time, yet it is peculiar that in the great poetic and prose

literature of the Eddas and sagas there is very little mention of the sky other than the aperiodic report of an omen surrounding thunder or lightening and a couple of mentions of spectacular night phenomena such as comets, shooting stars, and the aurora borealis. Viking raiders were some of the best sailors in the world at the time, and they were able to navigate beyond the sight of land utilizing knowledge of the movements of the sun by day and stars by night. Additionally, ancient Scandinavia engaged in farming and herding indicating that there was much time for observation of the movements of the heavenly bodies for marking seasons, etc., but the greatest amount of information pertaining to sky lore must have been handed down orally through a different tradition of folklore than stories and legends since we have only scanty descriptions in written form.

This dearth of information regarding the sky lore of the ancient northern Europeans is fact, yet there are more than a couple of modern writers/ astrologers who have spent “years” allegedly re-creating systems of astrology based on Celtic or Norse sky lore apparently pulling their information out of thin air. *Omens* were known and are occasionally described in a document here and there. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, the name given to a collection of handwritten periodic descriptions in report form of significant events occurring in England from 1 CE to 1154 CE, even gives what is considered to be an early description of Halley’s comet and its evil portents.

“A. D. 1066. This year came king Harold from York to Westminster, on the Easter succeeding the midwinter when the king (Edward) died. Easter was then on the 16th day before the calends of May. Then was over all England such a token seen as no man ever saw before. Some said that it was the comet-star, which others denominate the long-hair’d star. It appeared first on the eve called *Litania major*, that is, on the 8th before the calends of May; and so shown all the week.”<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Grimm in his monumental work, *Teutonic Mythology*, writes that “its [a comet’s] appearing betokens events fraught with peril, especially the death of king.”<sup>2</sup> Beyond this Grimm did not find anything that would indicate that a form of northern European astrology was practiced.

“I do not find in our earlier Heathen time the fates of men were calculated from the stars at their birth. This kind of sooth-saying seems not to have become known till the latter part of the Middle Ages.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Saxon Chronicle*, tr. by Rev. J. Ingram (Studio Editions, London) p. 257-258, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jakob Grimm (Peter Smith, Mass.)p.722, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 860.

In fact, Grimm was even unable to any names of heavenly bodies that would indicate any form of divination:

“Our old Heathen fancies about the fixed stars have for the most part faded away, their very names are all supplanted by learned astronomic appellations; only a few have managed to save themselves in ON. legend or among common people.”<sup>4</sup>

Of the names which have come down to us in modern times, none indicate an astrological system of any kind.

Many of the Anglo-Saxon herbals or “leechbooks” also mention propitious days for collecting herbs, blood-letting, making charms, etc., but most of this information seems to have been imported from the medical systems which came with the Romans and later with the monks. That the night sky was important to the Germanic people has been known since the time of the Roman historian Tacitus. In his *Germania*, written around 0 CE, he writes that

“except in the case of accident or emergency, they [the Germanii] assemble on certain particular days, either shortly after the new moon or shortly before the full moon. These they hold are the most auspicious times for embarking on any enterprise.”<sup>5</sup>

Even though indigenous northern European astrology is an interesting concept, its existence is not borne out by any of the facts as they exist today and does not appear to have had any place of importance in the Northern scheme of things.

The ancient Germanic peoples were privy to much “scientific information” and many very sophisticated technologies, such as navigation and time-keeping by the stars, but these do not appear in written form. They also understood well the techniques of “damascened” steel for sword-making, fancy metal-working for jewelry, very sophisticated techniques for boat-building, and had developed military strategy into an art-form which allowed them to rule northern Europe for almost a half millennium, but for them, writing seems to have been an art form reserved primarily for poetry, stories, and their dearly loved histories of families, communities, and nations, not for the transmission of technical information. Incidental pieces of information pertaining to the northern sciences and technologies did find their way into some of the sagaic and historical writings but as literary techniques to lend credibility to their stories and as “fill-in.” Therefore, any claims to the discovery of an indigenous northern European astrological system should be regarded as pure

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 723.

<sup>5</sup> In *Tacitus: The Agricola and the Germania* tr. by H. Mattingly (Penguin Books, New York) p. 110, 1970.

wishful thinking on the part of the so-called discoverer and highly speculative at best.

On the other hand, some of the ancient technologies have been “revived” to some degree. Cultural anthropologists, archaeologists, psychologists, and other behavioral scientists occasionally come together in a team effort using historical knowledge from their respective fields to recreate some of these, such as ancient sword-making or boat-building, for example. Most all of these technologies which have been recreated in such a fashion were used to produce artifacts such as can be found in the archeological record from ancient grave or habitation sites: houses, clothing, jewelry, ancient cookware, weapons, boats, etc. Even certain medical practices have been rediscovered by “team-sleuthing,” but a “system” such as astrology, without written or archeological evidence will remain little more than an armchair archeologist’s evening reverie.

Germanic sky lore will probably always remain somewhat of a mystery, but from the fields of comparative folklore and comparative mythology, there is some evidence that the skies over ancient northern Europe played a fair part in the formation and maintenance of the overall Germanic world view. Much of this information would reach far back into prehistoric times, however, and most likely will not ever leave the realm of archeo-anthropological speculation. Consequently, much of what follows is little more than observations and coincidences and cannot really be proven, but backed by information from comparative folklore from neighboring geographical areas and areas which are related to the Germanic region culturally, at least there are some shreds of credibility to the theories presented here.

There is one other concept that is probably part of the Teutonic ancestral heritage that will need to be applied rather copiously in this presentation. It is named after an English philosopher of the 14th century and modern writers and scholars often dump it by the wayside when contemplating obscure topics such as northern European sky lore: Occam’s Razor. The philosopher was William of Ockham, sometimes spelled as Occam, and his philosophy was simple: the simplest explanation is often the best. Six hundred years down the line, dazzling complexity replaces simplicity, and the exquisite beauty of a Shaker chair is forgotten for all the glitter and moving parts of the “Amazing La-z-teen Vibra-lounger with Built-in End Tables.” Enter: the New Age. “Vibra-lounger theories” are not necessarily wrong nor are they generally malicious, they are simply overly complex, utilizing improbable comparisons, and are usually unnecessary. All in all, the philosophy called “Occam’s Razor” is good and sound and probably can stand to be applied a little more often in this day and age.

The wide ranging, personally collected folklore of Jakob Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology* and Otto Sigfrid Reuter’s *Germanische Himmelskunde* play a special role in

the sky lore of the North. Both writers about midway through the 19th century, went about the rural areas of northern Europe collecting living folklore, and among the variety of information collected was much pertaining to a Germanic concept of constellations and their uses in a rural agricultural society. They did not find the remnants of a northern European or Germanic astrology but they did find that the yearly migration of heavenly bodies held special meaning for the farming, fishing, and herding communities as important markers of time. They found that there were approximately 17 constellations in use at the time of the writings and many star names which were most likely *not* borrowed from the classical astronomical/astrological systems in use during the middle of the last century. A couple of these are very interesting and form a basis for the following discussion.

There are two sky features which are mentioned in the eddaic poetry; these are the rainbow and the Milky Way. The rainbow has a long history in rural areas from all over northwestern Europe up to the current century of being considered the “brig’ o’ dread” or the Bridge of the Dead. The eddaic writings allude that the Bifröst or the “Shimmering Way,” as it is described in Sturluson, not as the Bridge of the Dead but rather the Bridge of the Gods, ás-bridge, or the “Power’s Way”. In England, Lapland (Finnmark; northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland), the archipelagoes of the Shetlands, Orkneys, and Faroes, and many, if not most, of the northeastern European localities, the Rainbow-Bridge leads to the Otherworld. Rudolf Simek in *The Dictionary of Northern Mythology* concurs with this body of folklore and felt that Bifröst was the rainbow;<sup>6</sup> Jan de Vries, on the other hand, in his *Altgermanische Releligionsgeschichte* assumes that the term Bifröst, in its translation as “the Shimmering Way,” refers to the Milky Way, the bright strip of starlight which progresses predictably through the night sky on a yearly basis, and, in northern Arctic and subarctic cultures closely adjoined to Scandinavia, the Milky Way is indeed considered to be the road to the Land of the Dead.

The World Tree and its associated “Homes” (ON = *heim*) is central to not only ancient Germanic religion/ mythology, but also to both Indo-European and non Indo-European religions as well. Cultures, diverse, and completely unrelated to the Indo-European, such as the Lakota Souix in North America, the Auricanians of Tierra del Fuego, the Mongolians of northern China, and some of the hindic sub-cultures of India share the same theme as the center of their perceived Universes. On the other hand, cultures as close as the Saamí, the Finns, the Ostiak, the Balts, and the Cheremiss of eastern Europe share a very similar belief system to the ancient Germanic peoples, yet many modern writers prefer to search through those extremely distant (often not even related at all) cultures for comparative purposes.

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Rudolf Simek, tr. by Angela Hall (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge) p. 36, 1993.

Some even pull a little from the Jewish Qabalah, a little from Assyrian astrology, a little “channeled info from the Pleiedians” to be able to come up with highly complex systems and charts complete with lines and circles to “make everything fit.” The current descriptions of the Germanic universe have become rather complex, but for all the knowledge available, it is not known how these ancient people truly visualized the World Tree and its homes.

It is in the modern interpretation of the underworld, the World Tree, and the sky connection that there is a dire need for the liberal application of Occam’s Razor. The most recent “Germanic maps” of Yggdrasil contain nine separate worlds connected by lines and arrows despite the fact that no such ancient depictions have ever been found either in written form or pictorially. The Teutons most likely started by observing the universe around them.<sup>7</sup> They lived within a cosmos which was ever moving and changing, and learned to keep pace with the moving world around them. If the modern scientist starts with observation, he finds very quickly that symmetry and balance are but fleeting points in time, for not only does Nature abhor a vacuum, she also is not very fond of stasis. Without a static universe, lines and circles, no matter how pretty they look, are not of much use.

Watching the sky at night is an ancient pastime, still enjoyed by millions today which can be educational, fun, and almost addictive especially when one has a copy of Peterson’s *A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets* in hand. One can sit outside on a summer’s evening for hours hanging names onto little points of light, naming groups of stars, and drawing mental pictures much the same way the ancient Babylonians or Romans did.

Book in hand, one notices two things right away: 1) the hazy path of the Milky Way is blatantly obvious even in many cities, and 2) it moves. Another curious thing about this aggregation of stars that goes unobserved by many, if not most, is that at midnight at the winter solstice it faces almost exactly north and south. Through the progression of the months (when observed at the same time each night), this stripe of stars continues to change shape and rotate in a clockwise fashion so that around April 1st it is east and west with the section shaped like a “Y” whose “arms” touch the eastern horizon. It continues to rotate on an apparent central axis so that around October 15th it is centered again east and west with the arms of the “Y” to the west. All these configurations are seen only at midnight.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See any of the books written by Edred Thorsson. Most of his books utilize a diagram of the World Tree which more closely resemble the quaballistic “Tree of Life.” Many of the modern writers apparently have a background in the Quaballah which is not well suited for understanding northern European concepts.

<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon is readily observable using any commercial “Star-Finder.” This rotating star map is available at most good “chain” bookstores around the United States such as B. Dalton’s or Waldenbooks.



There are some secondary observations which are equally interesting. The N-S shape of the Milky Way at midnight at the winter solstice is very tight and narrow as if it were constricted or frozen in the cold of winter; whereas the E-W configurations on April 1st and Oct 15 look more like flowing streams of water. In reality, there is no change in shape; it is simply an optical illusion resulting from the Milky Way's relationship to the horizons. Most interesting of all is that in mid-July at midnight (except in the far north where the midnight sun prevents a clear view), one can see the Milky Way but it never makes a clean N-S shot; one side of the galaxy is either a little too far to the southeast while the other is at the north point of the horizon, or the other is too far to the northwest.

It is quite probable that the Milky Way served the ancient Germanic people as a "year-marker" of sorts. Sturluson has recorded in the *Ynglinga Saga* that there were three holidays (sacrifices) during a year which were celebrated by all the Swedes and Norwegians in general.

"On winter day (October 14th) there should be a blood-sacrifice for a good year, and in the middle of winter for a good crop (Yule, Þórri, Disting?); and the third sacrifice should be on summer day (April 14th), for victory in battle."<sup>9</sup>

In Scandinavian folklore, and in those non-Germanic cultures surrounding the Germanic realm, these same sacrifice dates are also associated with the dead, the underworld, and with the cross-cultural phenomenon of the "Wild Hunt" where one could be swept up by the swiftly moving hoards of souls following their leader who is variously "identified as Óðinn, the devil, or some other demonic being,"<sup>10</sup> (usually one of the álfar or elves; see Chapt. 4). People commonly believed that at these times of the year one needed to exercise extreme caution because gates to the Land of the Dead stood open especially at Yule, the Middle of the winter sacrifice. Between April 14th and October 14th people were basically safe from attacks out of the Land of the Dead. These dates basically coincide with the observations noted above about the Milky Way in that there is no true N-S configuration for the summer months, and also with the fact that the number of nighttime hours is drastically decreased during the summer months.

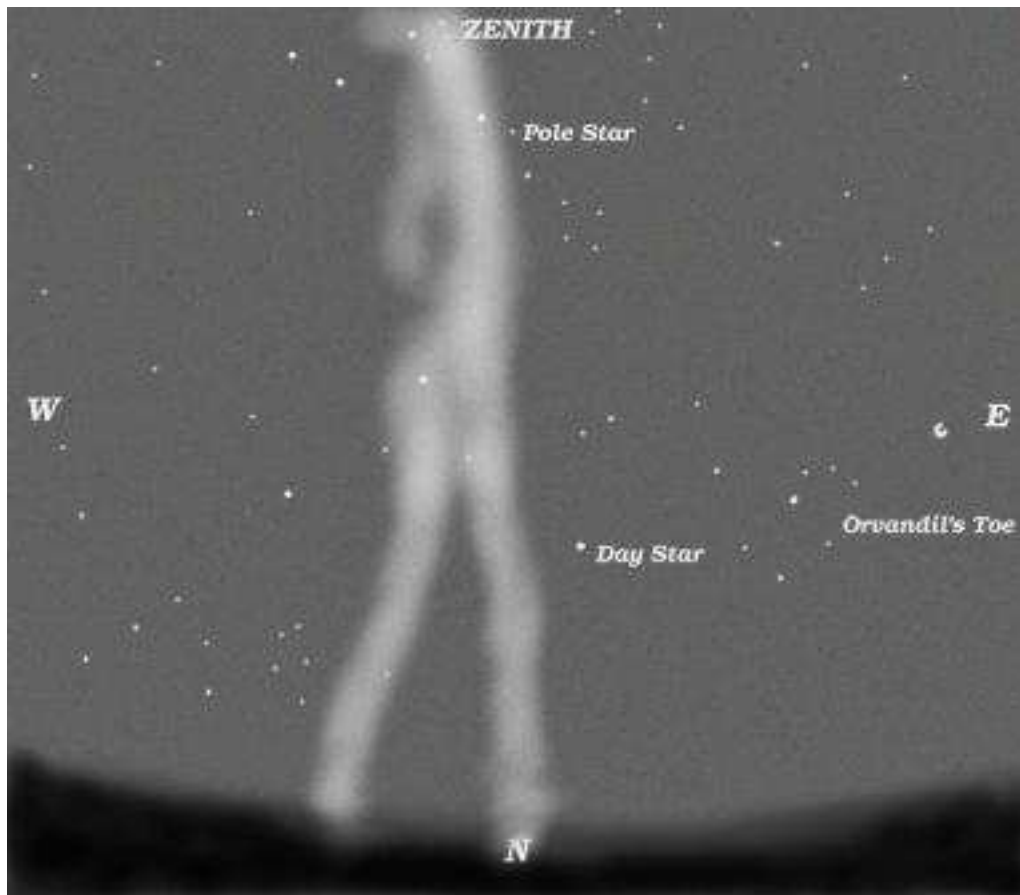
It is not known for sure that the ancient Germanic folk utilized the Milky Way in this fashion, but this use was not unknown to the cultures immediately neighboring the Germanic realm, and given their tendency toward trade in both goods and technology, it is not inconceivable that the early Scandinavians either picked up

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<sup>9</sup> In *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway* by Snorri Sturluson, tr. by Lee Hollander (University of Texas Press), p. 13, 1964.

<sup>10</sup> In *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* by Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, eds., (University of Minnesota Press) p. 273, 1988.

Figure 4.1. The Forked Bridge—Midnight at Jól



the use from a neighboring culture or had even developed the use in this fashion themselves. The Lapps (the Saamí), the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia, call the Milky Way *Lodde-raidaras*, that is the “Path of the Birds”<sup>11</sup> (the ‘souls’), or the *Jakke-moerka*, the Year-Mark and definitely use the starry strip in this fashion.<sup>12</sup>

The night was obviously important to the ancients; they reckoned time by nights. Tacitus in his *Germania* says that

“they do not reckon time by days, as we do, but by nights. All their engagements and appointments are made on this system. Night is regarded as ushering in the day.”<sup>13</sup>

Heathen holidays which have been passed down into the modern era are started in celebration the night before: Christmas Eve, Halloween, May Eve. Additionally, they reckoned annually by the number of winters. For them the word “year” implied “season.” The importance of the night sky as a marker of the passage of time is also reflected in their use of the word “moon” to mean month which was equal to two “fortnights”—note the measurement using ‘nights.’

During the historical period, many of the sky lore traditions seem to have fallen by the wayside. The Roman calendar was used by the church (although runic calendars continued to be used fairly commonly in the rural areas until well into the late 1800’s). Whether the Milky Way, in fact, played the role as a sky-marker as well as being a candidate for the path to the Land of the Dead for the ancient Teutons is not known for certain but it can be surmised without much effort. In any case, even though the ancient lore has been lost over the centuries to be replaced by other, more accurate, systems, the names of the ancient measurements of time have been retained and are still in use in virtually all the Germanic languages today.

There is a third set of curious features about the Milky Way. This galaxy, from the point of view of the earth, is “forked” like a large letter “Y,” and the single-legged bottom of the “Y,” near one side of the horizon, is in a compass direction 180 from the forked top, which touches the horizon at the opposite end of the sky (see Figure 4). Reuter gives the names Vil and Van for each side of the “fork” but the source of his information is not given. Both supposedly were the names of mythological rivers; Van is usually translated as “hope”<sup>14</sup> (although the translation is highly speculative, at best); Vil has never been truly translated at all. These “rivers” flow around either

<sup>11</sup> It is a common belief in many northern cultures (not just the Germanic) that the ‘soul’ leaves the body and travels to the underworld in the form of a bird or a butterfly (see J. Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology* pp. 828-829).

<sup>12</sup> In *Turi’s Book of Lappland* by Juhan Turi (Anthropological Publications, the Netherlands) p. 289, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> *Tacitus*, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> See Simek, p.350.

side of the northernmost point of the horizon at midnight on the winter solstice, the westernmost point on winter night, and the easternmost on summernight. Perhaps the arms of the “Y” were viewed by our ancestors as either a “gate” leading from the otherworld or two bridges, one leading to the sky and one leading to the underworld. Only scanty pieces of evidence can be had for either speculation. Neither classical Germanic literature nor folklore sources contains any such specific information, but such a view of the night sky is neither impossible nor improbable within the confines of Germanic cosmology.

Like the Milky Way, rainbows exhibit some interesting features. They only appear in the morning or in the late afternoon because the sun needs to be at a fairly sharp angle from the horizon for light to be refracted properly through water particles in the air. Secondly, a rainbow only appears on the side of the sky opposite the sun so that in the morning a rainbow will appear in the western sky and vice-versa. Thirdly, because of the position of the sun necessary to produce rainbows, south of the Arctic Circle, they will only run basically N-S direction.

There is an interesting line in Snorri’s *Prose Edda*:

“There also is a place called Himinbjorg. It stands at the end of heaven at the bridge’s end where Bifröst reaches heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

The point that Snorri is referring to is obviously the horizon where the edges of the underworld, the sky realm, and Midgard all come together at the very place where the rainbow touches the ground. The place is unattainable by people in their crude earthly bodies; it can only be reached by a disincorporate being. Himinbjorg is the Hall of Heimdall, the watching God, sometimes called the “White God.” Scholars often consider His duty to watch the “gates” to make sure that evil giants or trolls do not enter into either Midgard or the sky realm. The placement of his hall is most interesting, however; he is located at the point where the three realms come together giving additional credence to the idea that the same bridge, Bifröst, may have had a dual function in Germanic spiritual thought. It has also been shown above that the rainbow was considered by some, including Snorri, to be the *Ásbrú*, and by others to be the “Brig o’ Dread.”

Tony van Renterghem in his book *When Santa was a Shaman*<sup>16</sup> speculates that all the holidays between winternights and summernight were all originally dedicated to the Dead, to the ancestors of the tribe, who were important to living descendents for luck, fertility (of animals, plants, and people), and general well being. The two holidays which were specifically associated with the ancestors in Scandinavia

<sup>15</sup> ( In *Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, tr. by Anthony Faulkes, (Everyman’s Library, London) p. 20, 1987.

<sup>16</sup> *Van Renterghem, T. V. When Santa was a Shaman. Llewellyn Publications, 1995.*

Figure 4.2. Himinbjörg—to the far North



were, and in many places still are, Halloween and Yule, and the period of time in between the two holidays was considered to be an especially dangerous time for being outdoors at night. Because of the reciprocity between the middle- and underworlds (see Chapt. 4), the best time for travel for the inhabitants of the underworld would have been at night in the winter (in middleworld terms) because in the Land Below it would be early summer during the day. The primary Day of the Dead for the Scandinavians was Yule—essentially Midsummer for the inhabitants of the Land of the Dead, and for the Celts it was Halloween or Samhain.

For the inhabitants of northern Europe around 1000 CE, including the Scandinavians, the Saamí, the Finns, The Rus (Germanic folk living in the border area/trade route along the Dnjeper), several of the east-European tribes, the Eve of the Dead was somewhere between December 15th and January 15th, and the gate to the Land of the Dead which lay far to the north, coincidentally at the north end of the rainbow-bridge and where the gate of the Milky Way lay at midnight on the winter solstice. For the Celts, whose underworld gate lay in the West, Samhain was the primary holiday when the gates leading to either the Land Below or the “Blessed Isles” were open, and at midnight on that date, the arms of the Milky Way embrace the westernmost point on the horizon.

With preliminary observations out of the way, an explanation of the night sky

can be attempted starting with what is actually seen. Caution is necessary so that unneeded complexity is not tossed into the picture out of habit; simplicity is far more necessary than symmetry.

Looking at the night sky, these ancient people saw fixed stars in constellations with a hazy, star-studded band of light running through and around them. At midnight, once a year, the “open end” of the frozen, solid-appearing band of stars led directly from the center of the common night spectacular known to us as the *aurora borealis* to a point which passed immediately over the Land of the Living. All the colors were certainly awe-inspiring, but the flashing curtains of reds brought to mind bloody battles they had known in their lives with memories of ancestors and relatives who had fallen by the sword. Memories, for these pre-scientific-age people, were not by-products of neurons firing in a pattern, but were actual visits by the souls (hugr, hug: ON) of those remembered. With the sighting of the red mottled aurora borealis, memories were of those who had crossed the threshold from life to death, particularly as the result of violence. Umo Holmberg writes

“During the pagan period, separate worlds for the good and the bad dead were unknown. But, already at that time, there seem to have been views that the dead attained to different worlds, not on account of their deeds during life, but according to that which had been the cause of their death. Those who died in battle or as the result of some accident did not go to the underworld but peopled another world up in the heavens. . . . According to the Finnish Lapps the aurora borealis is ‘the dead in battle, who, as spirits still continue battling with one another in the air.’”<sup>17</sup>

He further adds that

“to the same folk belief may ultimately be traced the Scandinavian belief in Valhall, where the souls of the dead in battle dwell, and, according to *Gylfaginning*, ‘take on their accoutrements, go out into the yard and fight and kill one another.’”<sup>18</sup>

Looking more closely at the sky-gate formed by the forked end of the Milky Way, the ancients noticed one side “seemed” to lead upward and the other down. According to ancient folklore and even some of the more modern, there appears to have been a tradition of two bridges to the otherworld, one leading to the fighting fields forming the entire north end of the sky, and the other to the more peaceful landscape of the Lands Below.

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<sup>17</sup> In *Finno-Ugric Mythology* by Umo Holmberg in *Mythology of All Races* ed. by J. McCollough, p. 80-81, 1928.

<sup>18</sup> op. cit., p. 81.

Both places were known to the travellers to the Land of the Dead, the Germanic wizards or the Saamí *noaides*, the ones who could ride in the shape of animals. Two bridges: the one leading up is Bifröst, and the one downward-aiming, the Gjallarbrú. The Milky Road leading across the sky and down to the bridges was frozen solid enough in midwinter to carry the souls of the dead back and forth from the Land of the Ancestors, but from late spring to early fall its shape was (is) imprecise, flowing around the night sky like swollen rivers in the spring, dangerous for the crossing of souls but because of this Midgard was left in peace during that time of year. The way to the Land Beyond certainly involved some dangers as in trying to cross a huge river on an old swaying bridge.

No one can say with any degree of certainty that early Scandinavians thought in these images, but scholars are certain that these were exactly the images used by tribes immediately to the North, East, and West of the homeland of the Germanic realm up to the middle of the last century, and even as late as 1995 in some of the more rural areas. It would seem very peculiar indeed if the ancient Scandinavians had held a completely different set of beliefs.

There seems to be substance to Jan deVries' argument that Bifröst, the Shimmering Way, may be seen in the Milky Way. The first part of the name, according to Simek, seems to mean "swaying" rather than "shimmering" from the ON *bifa* to "shake" or "sway" which is exactly what the Milky Way appears to do as it rotates around the sky every night. In the night sky, then, the Road to Hel or Ásgard in its N-S orientation could be seen every night, but only at Yule did this orientation coincide with midnight.

The Teutonic heavens were, of course, supported by the branches of the World Tree. Nowadays, Lærað is conceptualized as little more than a chart with circles and lines with nine worlds symmetrically spaced throughout the whole thing. It is doubtful, however, that the ancients thought of the universe in such terms. In fact, it not even clear if they really even understood how to create maps, never mind charts and diagrams! If that were in their repertoire of skills surely there would be at least one type of pictograph which would represent the universe, but to date none have been found which would suggest such an arrangement of worlds although there are glyphs which suggest the Tree itself.<sup>19</sup>

With a neat application of Occam's Razor, one is returned to a simple picture which the Germanic peoples could easily have seen as the physical arrangement of the universe: a green Earth covered partially by wide expanses of ocean, a sky

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<sup>19</sup> Some writers such as Edred Thorsson and Nigel Pennick show a particular glyph which looks similar to two "Y's," one right-side up and the other upside down, superimposed upon one another so that there is three branches going up and three going down. The upper branches are the branches of Lærað, and the lower ones are the roots. This is still very simple and primitivistic compared to the diagrams of some of these modern authors.

filled with objects that moved in a circular fashion, and a single sky object which did not move that they called the “Nail of the Heavens,” to us it is known as the Pole-Star or the North-Star. Descriptions in Scandinavian literature do not tell us that the Pole-Star represents the upper end of the World Tree,<sup>20</sup> but they show it to be the apex of the bowl-shaped sky. It also known from northern European folk culture that it was the primary reference point in the sky from which all other movements were reckoned and compared to stationary geographical locations such as mountains, local trees, house orientations, etc. In other words, as the stars moved around the Pole-Star, the amount of movement could be easily visualized by how far they moved in relation to the “stationary” earth-bound objects. But, it is the Samí to the north end of Scandinavia, and their eastern neighbors, the Finns, who have remembered that the Nail (as they also call it) is the apex of Yggdrasil and it would be well to note that the apex is slightly to the North (hence the term North Star). This concept is relatively common to rural folk throughout the entire circumpolar region from the Baltic sea to the Aleutians; it may even have been common enough that it was not worth mentioning in heroic poetry or family sagas, since the main thrust of such literature was to leave a record of either Gods or men *not* to create a forerunner to the Duden “Picture Dictionary” of Life in the Viking Age.

Doing away with all the modern low-charts and mathematical diagrams, the picture of the universe becomes much simpler and clearer: a disk of the Earth, one side being the World of the Living, the other, the Land of the Dead; a stationary sky much like a glass cover over a cheese plate; the land-sky connection, Lærað, in the middle of it all holding all life within it. There are also two other connections between the plate and the glass cover which are not stationary, but move according to the time of day or the season: the Rainbow-Bridge or the “Brig o’ Dread,” and the Bridge of the Night, the Shimmering Way, Bifröst. In both cases of the land-sky bridges (they could have been the same bridge seen as the Milky Way at night and the rainbow by day), the ends connect to points where sky meets earth, the horizon, and the center rises up into the sky passing through the upper branches of the World Tree. This is a very simple arrangement compared to the many others floating around out there. Such an arrangement also matches up to most other tribal systems of the subarctic, both European and Asian, as well as many in the more temperate areas, for defining the cosmos. Is it too simple? After all didn’t the Völva in Völuspá mention that she remembered *nine* worlds not just three as the system here would imply? Perhaps.

Although there are a variety of theories around, dealing with the idea that the

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<sup>20</sup> Some of the Siberian tribes describe the Pole-Star, *Polaris*, as being the upper point of the world’s “tent-pole” or as the apex of a world tree. The reader is referred to Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* for a more complete discussion of these concepts.



Otherworld has a very real existence in some other parallel dimension or plane of existence, it is doubtful that northern Europeans thought about the reality of the Land of the Ancestors in terms of worlds lying truly separated from Midgard by dimensions of time and space. Pseudo-scientific explanations are usually offered by people trying to lend some credibility to faulty arguments. The Otherworld was simply *here* but invisible, or under the earth/ up in the sky.

On the other hand, people who really do have something to offer will often rely on metaphors based in current technology, mainly, because people tend to explain the unknown or the difficult-to-explain with terms that both the explainer and the listener will recognize and understand. Neuroscience in the latter half of the 19th century explained the function of the human body in the simple “mechanical/clock-terms” of Newtonian physics, within 30 years, the explanations from classical physics gave way to the newer concepts from radio electronics, then it was psychology, and now, computers.

Following this argument back into time, the technology of northern Europeans of 1000 years ago revolved around blacksmithing, farming/ herding, and trading/traveling/ raiding (sailing). The world was concrete, not abstract math. These people knew of other lands or countries on Midgard. They also described lands outside the realms of man (but not necessarily separated physically from the earth), such as floating islands like Svínoy, or invisible or underground cities, towns and homesteads. They understood well the idea of different tribes, cultures, and boundary lines, but in none of their descriptions is there anything like worlds separated, truly separated, from the World of Man; Álfheim, Ásgard, Vanaheim can all be interpreted (using eddaic poetry) as contiguous with Mannheim. Travel back and forth through Midgard world was common and had nothing to do with careening through empty space or hyper-jumping over dimensions of time and space and travel between this world and the Otherworld, though not quite as common (the stuff legends are made out of), did not require warp-drive.

The word “heim,” according to *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, in its primary definition is “1) settlement, farm or farms; place of residence;”<sup>21</sup> as 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> definitions the meaning changes slightly to the “whole world.” However, there is no real implication that anything is ever meant beyond the idea of an inhabited region enclosed by some sort of boundaries. The word “land” carried more of the meaning of “a country,” and the word “*ver old*” carried the meaning of “world” or “universe.” The terms “Vanaheim,” “Ljósálfheim,” “Svartálfheim,” “Helheim,” “Niflheim,” “Muspelheim,” and “Jötunheim” all implied then the residence of . . . (fill in the blank) . . . rather than some kind of *parallel universe*. It would seem that all the

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<sup>21</sup> In *Glossary to the Poetic Edda* by Beatrice LaFarge and John Tucker (Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg) p. , 1992.

Otherworlds described in the eddaic poetry and in Sturluson's *Prose Edda* as well as Saxo's<sup>22</sup> *Gesta Danorem* were worlds that could be seen, to some degree, but could not be attained by mortal man in his mortal guise. Some worlds like the floating isles, or Vanaheim, for that matter, could be glimpsed only periodically or only by people with the "second sight" but the general direction of where the land lay was known, the effects of the "home" could be felt, such as the spring winds flowing out of Jötunheim, and travellers from these lands, or homesteads, could be spotted either in person or by their deeds. Rocks were moved, rivers changed course their courses, lakes were formed. Where do the winds originate if not in the Utlands? It appears that none of the "heims" were thought to be truly disconnected from Midgard.

All these measurements, configurations, and orientations of the Milky Way are for *midnight* on specific nights of the year, and although it is well documented that the Germanic peoples measured time by "nights" rather than days, is it reasonable to suggest that they would have known exactly when 12:00 am occurred since clocks would not be invented and in common use until 500 years after the invasion of Christianity? Probably not. However, exact knowledge of hours and minutes is not really necessary. Observations of the Milky Way and its orientation in the night sky point up the fact that the Bridge of the Night Sky appears most solid in its N-S (the "split of the fork" touching the northern horizon) orientation and appears to be fluid in its S-N orientation. The time of year in the far North when the bridge can be observed in its "solid" state for the highest number of hours, of course, is around Yule when there is no sun at all (above the Arctic Circle). The amount of time spent in *solid form* continues to increase from when the forked end of the Milky Way "rises" in the East and "sets" in the West which occurs during the ancient season of winter, mid-October to mid-April, with its high-point around Yule, the time of no sun. During summer, there is no problem with the reckoning of midnight since the amount of time spent in actual darkness is minimal.

All the evidence presented thus far would make it seem that the Milky Way, in particular, and the night sky, in general, probably played a large role in the formation of the Germanic worldview with the sky being the top of the World Tree and the Milky Way being the Path of Souls lining up with the gate to the underworld once every 24 hours. The probability of this being fact is increased when one includes collected evidence taken from modern Scandinavian folklore and that from tribes

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<sup>22</sup> Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorem* or *History of the Danes* has been translated several times. The work, as translated, generally consists of nine books and was written in approximately 1215 CE. The author is decidedly pro-Danish and anti-Heathen. The accuracy of the mythological material upon which the *Gesta Danorem* is based has been rather hotly debated over the years. For the purposes of this book, this author has chosen not to join the fray but simply regards the material for what it is, i.e., northern mythology recorded by a staunch anti-Heathen of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

of non-Germanic people living immediately to the north (Saamí) and to the east (Finns, and various small tribes living just east of the Ural Mountains). However, direct evidence is sorely lacking.

By the time that the Germanic peoples had moved into the historic era and had committed their own beliefs to parchment, many changes had taken place which were the result of foreign influences being brought in by the Church and by importations made by the Vikings themselves who traveled extensively between the years of 700 CE to 1100 CE. What is missing from the body of evidence is clear information that the Celtic peoples, who also had a fairly large body of lore pertaining to the night sky, also understood the role of the Milky Way. Also lacking are vestiges of this folk belief in modern Scandinavian folklore although it still exists in Saamí folklore. As a consequence, the above information can only be presented as a series of coincidences with some degree of probability of it being fact.

During the last century and continuing through the 20th century, there has been a move to reduce all religions in their “reconstructed form” to sun-moon worship. The theory was made popular with the publishing on Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*<sup>23</sup> and has been used as the basis for interpretation since that time. Storms in *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 1948, was also caught up in this theory when attempting to interpret the Anglo-Saxon charms from the manuscript called the *Lacnunga*; however, eddaic literature relegates both the sun and the moon to demi-Gods who play only a minor role during the creation of the World Tree and, according to the *Völuspá*, at the end of the World, the Ragnarök.

Although the sun (ON *Sunna* = a Goddess) and the moon (ON *Maani*; *Máni* = a God) were described in the eddaic poetry, complete with their lineages and their *grlög*, there is no indication that they have ever been worshipped as anything but minor demi-gods and markers of the passage of time. In the Norse mythology as it exists today, these two were destined to be chased across the sky by the wolves *Sköll* and *Hati* until the final battle when they will be killed and devoured. There is much folklore and folkscience pertaining to the two in their roles as “markers of time,” and this is discussed quite in depth by O. S. Reuter in *Germanische Himmelskunde* (Germanic Skylore), but even in the Anglo-Saxon charms they do not play as large a role as many wishful modern scholars would like.

As stated earlier, astrology only began to appear in the north in conjunction with ancient medicine after the Roman and Christian invasions. Prior to that, it appears medicinal herbs were picked according to their own timing and ripeness with twilight and dawn being the most propitious times, according to common folklore, because “the sky was lit, but there were no lights in the sky;” it was an “in-between

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<sup>23</sup> Frazer, Sir James G. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1963.

Figure 4.3. Aurora Borealis—Souls flying



time,” a crack between this world and the Otherworld. Such “cracks” are common in Germanic folk medicine and folk magic, such as making magic on the sand at a point in between the levels of the tide or in a cave.<sup>24</sup> This concept continues to figure in modern native herbalism of northern Europe and will be discussed at length in later chapters.

The eddaic and sagaic writings do not contain anything directly pertaining to the “lights of the sky,” but there is much in Finnish, Saamí, and modern (germanic) Scandinavian folk lore mostly revolving around the idea that the aurora borealis was “souls” flying to the Otherworld, and that the reddish hues often seen were bloody battles either between warriors or *noaides* (shamans).<sup>25</sup> There is a body of folklore, particularly among the Scandinavian Lapps (Saamí), and in modern northern Germanic folklore which at least concerns the phases of the moon for operations such as blood-letting, slaughtering animals, planting, harvesting, other farm chores, building

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<sup>24</sup> In *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* by Ernest Marwick (Rowman and Littlefield, New Jersey ) pp. 48-52, 1975.

<sup>25</sup> There is a body of lore among the Saamí describing the “fire Lapps,” but unfortunately, not much of this has been translated into English. The term “fire Lapp” refers to the *noaide* as he battles other shamans, and the fire refers specifically to either the “will-o’the-wisp (doubtful) or the aurora borealis (most probable).

, etc. However, from the information as it exists today, it is very difficult to tell what came from foreign sources, and what was only native knowledge to particular peoples such as the Saamí, the Celts, or the Finno-Ugric subgroups. Many of these customs deal with the moon as a primary temporal indicator for activities, and this is congruent with the idea that the ancient Germanic peoples marked time by nights and the moon as discussed above. Tacitus, in *Germania*, (cited earlier) records that important activities took place according to the phases of the moon. It is likely then that the moon continued to play a large role in early Germanic culture.

Additionally, given the diversity of local customs pertaining to the moon, several other theories can be postulated.

1. The moon as a marker of time for specific events was most likely widely accepted.
  - a) The moon as a component in the making of charms, medicine, or *seiðr* (Germanic oracle/ magic with many shamanistic overtones) probably played a role since these operations were often done at night.
    - i. The waxing moon generally dealt with operations requiring an increase (cutting hair, marriages, building, etc.);
    - ii. the full moon for operations being done at “full maturity (cutting hay, chopping wood, etc);
    - iii. the waning moon for decrease (making medicines to rid pestilence, etc.).<sup>26</sup>
  - b) Sets of customs or interactions with the moon may have varied from village to village or may have been familial or personal rather than pervasive.
  - c) The customs may have varied easily over time depending on outside influences, exchange of information between communities, etc.

Holmberg in *Finno-Ugric Mythology* and Hazlitt in *Faiths and Folklore of the British Isles*<sup>27</sup> give numerous examples of lunar knowledge as it existed between approximately 1600 - 1900 CE, but very little can be said regarding the origins of the beliefs, i.e., whether they were from foreign sources. The fact, though, that pieces of lunar knowledge were accepted easily indicates that lunar knowledge was most likely part of the Germanic worldview in some form or another, and it was felt that the information “needed updating” regularly; it was most likely not part of the general religious complex which tend to be more conservative in nature.

Solar folklore is even more scanty in the Germanic culture, even though the Sun was extremely important to the Samí and Finns, and as a Goddess or sometimes a God, appears in many of their legends of folk cosmology. The sun for the Germanic folk was considered to be feminine and still is in modern German (*die Sonne*), may have had oaths sworn to Her (or She functioned as a “witness”), and was greeted

<sup>26</sup> See Grimm pp. 707-719.

<sup>27</sup> Hazlitt, W. Carew *Faiths and Folklore of the British Isles*, 2 vols. Benj. Blom Publishing, New York, 1965.

in the morning either by the baring of the head or bowing.<sup>28</sup> There is also the possibility that the sun and the moon, brother and sister, were originally formed out of the eyes of Ymir after His death at the hands of Óðinn, Vili, and Vé. This argument is supported by the idea that the eyes are the “lights of the head” and this kenning continues to be used in modern English in the phrase, “knock one’s daylights out!” Whatever place the sun may have held in the minds of the ancient folk, it must have been relatively important to command bowing with bared head by the peasantry. Perhaps, as with the Saamí, She was held in a constant state of reverence as the “Bringer of Warmth.”

Lastly, the sky seems to have been the window through which the ancient Germans and Scandinavians could view the effects of the otherworld upon Midgard. The sky held the Road of the Dead which ran over the apex of the World Tree and it was the screen against which played omens from both the Gods of the air, the Æsir, and the Ancestors. It was a physical, visual and constant reminder that the Otherworld was a reality, and was the link between this world and the next. Omens (ON *heill* = “portent or omen”) came in the form of birds’ flight patterns, shooting stars or comets, aurora borealis, or visions and were regarded as one of the best forms of prognostication, pieces of which can be gleaned from the sagaic literature and the heroic poetry.

In spite of the fact that omens were definitely important to the ancients, their interpretation seems to have been by consensus of the community or, perhaps, individual. Perusal of the entire body of northern European folklore reveals that what was considered a “good omen” for one locality was interpreted as an “evil portent” for another although there did seem to be general consensus that “red lights” in the sky or “a comet” were held to portend evil times ahead. Because of this inconsistency, any attempt to “recreate” a system of divination based on sky omens would be meaningless.

That the sky held a special place in the pre-Christian Germanic worldview is obvious, but how consistent that role was may never be discovered. In the view of the World Tree complex, it represented the apex of the Tree and was home to the Road of the Dead which terminated at the gate to the underworld. Movements of lights in the sky-world marked the passage of time and presented to the inhabitants of northern Europe indications for the correct timing of schedules pertaining to work and leisure, and individual or community activities, but unlike the cultures of the more southerly countries no indigenous form or system of astrology has been discovered. The sky itself was a visual link between the Land of the Living and the otherworld lying above Midgard like a large sheet against which played visual messages, omens and portents for those who knew how to see them and interpret

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<sup>28</sup> See Grimm pp. 700-706.

them. Beyond the sky's being a link to the otherworld very little can be said regarding any system of skylore which would cross cultural or spatial boundaries.

The sky, as can be seen from Midgard, was part of the world of man. It could be sensed physically with the eyes, and it was a boundary that could not be crossed by the living. The surface of Midgard formed the floor of the Land of the Living and the sky formed its ceiling, these things could be touched and sensed physically by everyone. Beyond the sky and below the Land of the Living are the mysterious abodes for the disembodied.



## Chapter 5

# The Underworld



*Dreary fog rolls across a darkened plain. Ghosts float easily among the angular lifeless branches of trees reaching toward greenish grey skies like the withered limbs of corpses. Straight ahead and slightly to the right unidentifiable dark-furred vermin about the size of rats slurp noisily on desiccated carrion, filling the air with sounds reminiscent of sludge winding its way through over-flowing sewers. The stench of decay blends with the musty cold damp hanging from bark and cloth like Spanish moss. The cold dampness swallows sound silently like a mouse being slowly worked into the maw of a water moccasin. Such is our modern day image of the Heathen Underworld. The desolate eternity; the home of the dead.*

The Underworld tradition of the Germanic peoples is rarely discussed. Most articles (both scholarly and “pop”) and even textbooks on northern mythology spend a great deal on Valhalla and Valkyries, but the space that is devoted to the Germanic Underworld or the condition of the dead tends to cover only the dreary aspect of Helheim such as is described above. However, there is an unusually rich tradition surrounding the northern Land of the Dead which is truly a vast unexplored region. The tradition of Valhalla is well described in the heroic poems and sagas, but it is



only the tradition of the Underworld that has survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of the living folk culture of the northern countries in spite of attempts at eradication by the church fathers. If a gloomy life-after-death were all the tradition had to offer, it most likely would have been dropped from folk memory long ago; however, it *has* survived, and, if probed deeply enough, the Underworld of the ancients yields forth vast treasures which forms the very foundation of many ancient and modern folk traditions and holidays.

Germanic tradition apparently did not depict the Underworld as simply the Land of the Ancestors but held that it was already populated by various races in a manner similar to the Celtic belief system. The Underworld was home to Giants, Elves, Gods, and a variety of otherworldly beings both beneficent and malicious. Although the ancient Germanic religion was officially laid to rest by approximately 1200 CE, the beings of the Underworld tradition continued to play a large role in the so-called “fairy-tale literature.” This genre of literature, however, was originally not meant as moralistic teachings for children, as is generally now the case, but was an integral part of folk-culture dealing with life in rural areas and had much to do with the oral transmission of information pertaining to farming, fishing, hunting, birth, healing, and death. Folklore was the “science” of the rural north, and fairy-tales were the “science fiction.”

Christians have an interesting way of handling the concepts of death and life thereafter. Originally, in the Old Testament, there was an Underworld called Sheol or Gehenna. Without belaboring the point, Sheol or Gehenna (both mean basically the same) was a place where souls went after leaving the Jewish version of Midgard. There were apparently no other places like Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory as there are now in some branches of modern Christianity. About the time when Jesus is supposed to have walked the earth, there began a change in the way of thinking about the afterlife so that souls would no longer be loosed into an Underworld but would return to Eden or Paradise, later called “Heaven” (from OE pl. *heofenum* = “heavens”); however, those gates were closed to any but of the line of Abraham. People from other cultures obviously experienced death, but by Jewish proscription were not to be allowed within the Gates of Paradise which was reserved for Jews only. They had to go some place else, which from the Jewish point of view of the time, must have been *somewhat less than*. The Underworld, Gehenna, (now emptied of the Heaven-bound Jews) fit that description in the Abrahamic cosmology—the new home of the gentile dead.

When Christians (a modified version of the the Judaism) began their all out effort to redeem the northern world around 600 CE, the Underworld became a rhetorical weapon for convincing the Heathen. By this time, demons, and all other spooky critters which gave any good Christian the chills were also relegated to the

Underworld which they now called Hell after the northern Goddess of the Land of the Dead, Hel or Hela (*ONHel*). The list included not only Satan, Beelzebub, et al. but also heathen gods, demi-gods, and non-organic beings from all other cultures as well. Óðinn, Þór, and Saxnot were all dumped into the Underworld part of which was called Helheim or the Home of Hel. Really, within the Christian logic of the time, this was not a bad line of reasoning. Heathens, unless baptized and accepting of Jesus as their Savior, were doomed to the demon-filled Halls of Hel, which was “downwards,” and the good, properly baptized Christians were “decked out” for Paradise which was by the same line of reasoning “upwards.” After the conversion of heathens to Christianity, the concept of “down” was considered bad, and “up” was associated with good.

The northern concept of the Underworld was not always viewed negatively. The story of Frau Holle which is a common childhood story presents a view of an Underworld with two distinct sides to it. Granted, this is one of those “moral” stories mentioned above about why it is such a good idea to do chores without complaining, but the visual images are quite interesting. First, it is a pleasantly lit land in contrast to the dreary picture one gets from the eddaic or sagaic writings. It does not lack for food, light or comfort. There are fully leaved trees, blooming flowers, and water aplenty. Similarly, but in a completely different tale describing a chieftain’s funeral among the Rus<sup>1</sup>, Ibn Fadlan records a slave girl’s visions after peering into the Otherworld: “I see my master seated in Paradise, and Paradise is green and fair. . . .”<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Otherworld appears to be a mirror image of Midgard. Secondly, what occurs in the Underworld of Frau Holle has a direct impact on Midgard; both sisters are told to fluff the pillows until the feathers fly so that snow might cover the Earth. Thirdly, how the children behaved in the Underworld resulted in either fortune or failure upon their return to their Middle-earth home.

Actually, this concept of an Underworld having both dark and light sides seems to survive in a collective/ cultural memory of people with a Germanic/ Celtic ancestry. Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* is a modern tale which, although written mainly for children, has delighted both children and adults since it was written in the late 1800’s. Oz exists “somewhere over the rainbow” which is highly reminiscent of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Rus were an Eastern branch of Scandinavians living in what is now called Finland and Western Russia. It is their name (which is related to the word for “red”) which gave Russia its name.

<sup>2</sup> Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, p. 273. Actually, Michael Crichton wrote a fictional account of this story called *The Eaters of the Dead* which is quite pleasant to read. His version is based on translations of several existing manuscripts of the Ibn Fadlan account which Crichton is very careful to mention in his Afterword.

“brig o’ dread, na brader than a thread”<sup>3</sup> or the rainbow bridge Bifröst. The Land of Oz has both bright and dark aspects as well as good and evil. In Oz, the good is exemplified by Glenda the Witch of the North, and evil by the Witches of the East and West. In the eddaic literature, however, all these are combined in the two-sided Goddess, Hel, whose face is half beautiful and half in decay. It is not known whether Baum was drawing directly from Germanic mythology or not, but it can be surmised that he drew from his imagination and memory of childhood stories which often are but the surface structure of the collective/ cultural education through oral tradition.

On the one hand, these descriptions can be merely written off as a storyteller’s fanciful imagination; on the other, however, the tale weaver may have been recanting the living oral tradition of his ancestry. With a little investigation into the folk memories of cultures bordering the Germanic peoples such as the Finns, the Saamí, the Celts, and the Balts, one finds that the storyteller’s memory might even run a little deeper than simply Old Norse, perhaps a Northern European–subarctic culture.

For some, comparative mythology is truly a source of contention, and, in many cases, contention may be justified. Comparing North American mythology with Germanic (as is often done among New Age folk) is truly mixing apples and oranges except at a very broad and general level, but comparisons should not be completely disregarded. While it is true that linguistically Finnish is non Indo-European, Celtic *is* Indo-European having branched off the proto-Germanic line approximately 1000 years earlier, Baltic appears to stem from a completely different line of Indo-European and the Saamí language (Lappish) is a mixture of the languages of the indigenous people of Northern Europe, Finnish, and Swedish, and that all these languages differ from one another greatly, the speakers of these different tongues demonstrate many cultural commonalities. True, each culture considers itself to be an autonomous ethnic entity, but each is in a great part defined by geographic location, and geography, weather patterns, availability of and types of food, occupations determined by the land, and cultural intercourse helped to create large border areas around the Northern Germanic peoples where the distinguishing characteristics of one culture blurred into the next often making it difficult for even the inhabitants of the region itself to form any true alliance with either one culture or the other.

These border zones become important, then, for the purposes of comparison. To ignore the similarities between these cultures, especially within the border-zone regions themselves, would either have to be an act of prejudice based on some silly notion of racial, religious, or cultural purity, or simple ignorance. The ancient

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<sup>3</sup> MacCulloch, J. A. *Eddic Mythology* published as vol 3. of *Mythology of All Races* edited by J. A. MacCulloch (Boston, Mass.) 1928, p. 305.

Teutons obviously were able to withhold their prejudices long enough to create the border regions through both cultural and sexual intercourse in the first place!

Trade, migration, and inter-marriage played a large role in the creation and maintenance of these border areas. H. R. , in her conclusion to *Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* points out that

“once we reach the Viking Age, we have also to be prepared for tales and motifs from abroad being imported by the Scandinavians returning from their travels to their homelands.”<sup>4</sup>

One also needs to remember that while these importations seemed to be accepted rather freely, they were accepted for two reasons:

1. they were not felt to be necessarily incompatible with the existing beliefs of the time, and
2. they were most likely modified, or were at least modifiable, to fit into the current prevailing worldview.

One need only look at the changes made in Christianity after it arrived in the North to see that even a conservative religion/ culture can and will be modified after encountering another culture. (Note: the reader is referred to the section below dealing with the creation of modern Christian holidays and holiday customs.)

An interesting feature of border areas is that they tend to be in isolated areas, and *isolation* often is concomitant with *conservatism*, a resistance to change. Thus, in Switzerland, for example, the regional dialects spoken in many of the valleys is a form of archaic southern German which disappeared in other areas 500 years ago, and in New Mexico, in the southwest corner of the United States, the dialect of Spanish spoken is very closely related to that spoken in medieval Spain coming to the continent in the early 1500's with the conquistadors.

In any nook of preserved tradition, the modern anthropologist or folklorist is happy to find remnants of ancient cultures like rites of passage, food customs, and magic related to hunting, occupation, marriage, and disease. For example, it is very common, not only in Northern Europe, to find a flourishing set of traditions revolving around the indigenous form of witchcraft (here in the anthropological sense, not the New Age Wiccan) which is commonly applied to help family and friends and also to harm enemies. These isolated areas have resisted changes brought by the early Christian missionaries and the cultural legacies continue to this day so that the Shetland and Orkneys, and the lives of folks in the northern zones of Norway, Sweden, and Finland are still often controlled or manipulated to a great degree by

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis-Davidson, H. R. *The Lost beliefs of Northern Europe* (Routledge Press; New York, NY) 1993, p. 158.

the effects of the local practitioners of magic and healing, and that in the Baltic States where the conversion to Christianity was held off until the mid-1400's locals still utilize many charms, medicines, and forms of magic many containing blatant and undisguised Heathen elements. But because *border zones* are being dealt with here, the very nature of which is the blending of two or more cultures, care must be taken that one does not begin to believe that a culture is being observed in its "original form."

"When we survey the possible complications and varied influences which could have affected pre-Christian religion in Northern Europe, it is evident that such 'scientific proof' as Strenski desired in his criticism of the theories of Eliade is hardly possible to provide. Nor is it possible to reach firm conclusions as to the religious beliefs and myths of the Indo-European peoples from whom the Celts and Germans are descended."<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the "isolation = conservatism" theory, one must take some precautions because changes *have* occurred over the centuries, and it is usually not clear as to what is original (if the term can be truly applied at all) and what is "imported."

The complex and pervasive nature of the entire Underworld in the Germanic worldview is not clearly depicted in the eddaic or sagaic writings. Studies of common folklore in Northern Europe indicate that knowledge of an Underworld formed an underlying foundation to much of the belief system but did not necessarily stand out in detail. For the Northern European, the land seems to have been divided into at least two parts. For the Germanic peoples, Helheim was the term usually reserved for the Land of the Ancestors or the Land of the Dead, which was ruled over by the female offspring of Loki, Hel; however, other parts of folk tradition in the North suggest that the Underworld was also considered home to *álfar* (elves), dwarves, some giants, the *Dísir* (sing. *dís*; 'a female demi-god'), and a few other assorted beings who may also have been closely bound up with the tradition. Turville-Petre in *Myth and Religion of the North* has presented a fairly convincing position that both the *álfar* and the *Dísir* belong to the Land of the Dead.<sup>6</sup> This position is echoed by other scholars as well.

In addition to these beings, there are numerous examples of guardian spirits attached to certain families often going by the generic terms of *Kynfylgja*, *fylgja*, or *hamingja* (usually associated with luck), but also by the name of Elf (in the case of a *male guardian*), such as the "Elf of Geirstad," or simply *Dís* (in the case of a *female*). From these descriptions it is difficult to determine, at least by the general

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<sup>5</sup> Ellis-Davidson, 1993, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> See Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion of the North* (Greenwood Press; Westport, CT) 1975, pp. 221-235.

Figure 5.1. A photo of Helheim—Fosnes—Reflection in the water



reader, whether these familial guardians are actually ancestors who have taken up a new role as family protector or whether they actually constitute a distinct race under a single generic name. Davidson is describing this same problem when she discusses the fisherman, Porolf, buried near Helgafell:

“Helgafell is not unlike a large burial mound, and here we may have a transference of beliefs about dead leaders in their great mounds in Scandinavia who brought blessing to the land when they were laid to rest in their graves. Snorri in *Ynglinga Saga* traces such beliefs back to the god Freyr, who once ruled over the Swedes at Uppsala and had his chief temple there. He is said to have brought good seasons and prosperity to the land, and so when he died, the Swedes brought great offerings to his mound, and believed that he remained alive and potent in the earth. The connection which seems to exist between Freyr and the elves and the land-spirits thus provides an additional reason to associate them with the dead in their graves.”<sup>7</sup>

When one looks to neighboring cultures for possible clarification, the problem remains. For example, no one is quite sure if the *sidhe* constituted a distinct race of people who inhabited Eire (modern Ireland) prior to the coming of the current inhabitants or if the race of the *sidhe* considered to continue growing even in modern times because some of those who die from Earth are taken into the Blessed Land. In other words, it is difficult to tell if souls after death were understood to have constituted a “new tribe” or somehow have changed status. A similar blurry distinction exists among the Scandinavian Lapps, the Finnish Lapps, and the Finno-Ugric peoples proper.

Perhaps, there is a parallel to the problem which, although not offering any real explanation, will make the ambiguity at least somewhat tolerable. The ancient Northern Europeans were well aware that Midgard was comprised of several different races, cultures, and religions which moved around, intermingled, and overlapped to some degree depending on geographic location. People south of what is now modern Germany had darker hair and skin than the northern peoples, Celts were tall, the Saamí were short and dark as were the Greenland Eskimo, etc. This does not really present a problem to the modern way of thinking until somebody tries to figure out who the indigenous people of France were, for example. If Midgard and Helheim were understood to reflect one another in structure, then it might also be assumed that tribes of beings living in the netherworld were as capable of migration and intermixing, trading, marrying, feasting and visiting as were their counterparts in *Mannheim*, and remnants in Northern European folklore including Celtic, Germanic, and Finno-Ugric would indicate that this certainly was the prevailing belief.

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<sup>7</sup> H. R. Ellis-Davidson, *Myth and Symbols in Pagan Europe*, 1988, p. 116.

When Christianity came into Northern Europe, the idea that the Afterlife as a *state of perpetual stasis* seems to have come with it. The image of Paradise (or Hell) as a resting place for all eternity replaced the many of the older beliefs of life after death, and this concept of “Rest in Peace” continues into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Christian assumption is that once something enters into the Underworld, its evolution stops, but, for the Scandinavian of a thousand years ago, the after-death progression in status of a local hero to that of a family protector, then continuing to increase in status up to demi-god for the northern peoples was not that uncommon. Bard of Snæfell, Þorolf (mentioned above), and the “Elf” of Geirstad are examples of this elevation in status after death from local leader to guardian, and to these local demi-gods sacrifices were offered on a regular basis. This very same mechanism for elevating status after death continued even after the introduction of Christianity to the Scandinavian countries, so that Scandinavia itself possessed more local saints per capita (unrecognized by the Vatican) than any other area of the world. Davidson goes on to say

“Evidently the conception of land-spirits linked with the dead within the earth was a persistent one, although it remains vague and unspecified in the literary sources. Belief in the potency of such spirits to help or hinder men and women in their daily lives on the farms, and to unite with the king to bring blessing to the community was something difficult to eradicate. The evidence of folklore makes it clear that it lived on in local legends long after the coming of Christianity, and it survives in vigorous folktales and rhymes which can still stir our imagination . . . . Cultivation of the soil, weaving and spinning, and the raising of animals all fell into the province of the nature spirits, and so apparently did the destiny and upbringing of children.”<sup>8</sup>

Although nothing is solved as far as the nature of the Underworld is concerned, at least the idea that it is as dynamic as Midgard offers some rationale for there being so many variations in traditions revolving around death, burial, and beliefs in an Afterlife.

For all the northern cultures concerned here, there appears to be a common theme regarding the Underworld. Umo Holmberg says that “in its nature this Underworld resembles the world we live in everything.”<sup>9</sup> Later, he goes on to describe that it is a belief of the eastern Europeans that the dead live in villages below the earth and that these villages are comprised of the same people who lived together during life. Granted he is talking about the Finno-Ugric people, but in *The Se-*

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<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>9</sup> Holmberg, Umo *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, in *Mythology of all Races* ed. by John MacCulloch (Boston, Mass)1928, p. 72-82.



*cret Commonwealth*, Robert Kirk, a Scottish clergyman, describes exactly the same situations for the inhabitants of the Scottish Underworld:

“Their apparel and speech is like that of the people and country under which they live . . . . Their women are said to spin, very finely, to dye, to tissue, and to embroider . . .”<sup>10</sup>

Here Kirk is talking about the land where the *sidhe* and the co-walkers live, co-walkers being the equivalent of an Underworld *doppelgänger* which is intimately attached to a person who still lives. Of course, the story of Frau Holle was mentioned earlier wherein bread was baked, beds were made and houses were in need of daily cleaning. All the northern non-Christian cultures (and even some of the Christian ones) seem to agree that life in the Underworld is no different than life on Midgard.

Burial goods found in the Northern European countries would also indicate that life below was expected to be the same as above. Women have been found buried with household items such as combs, spindles, needles and needle-cases, cooking pots and utensils, even a supply of food. Men are found buried with those items which were pertinent to their station in life, even to the point that kings were buried with riches so, presumedly, they could continue playing the role of leader and “gold-hater” or “ring-giver”<sup>11</sup> as in kennings provided by Snorri. Logically, it was expected that the dead would continue with their activities of daily living just as they had done while alive. Some burial goods have been found in a damaged state. For example, pots have been found which have been deliberately broken and swords or other weapons have been found either bent, broken, or dismantled. It is known that in some local regions of the northern cultures that items destined for interment with their owner needed to first be “ritually killed.” From an animistic point of view this makes good sense since the “soul” of an object could not possibly be released until its earth-bound form was broken; however, because not *all* grave goods are damaged before burial, this theory can never be said to have been universal among the northern peoples. It is most likely related to regional cultural variations, and the current belief held at the time. Damaged, “killed,” or in their original state, by their presence grave goods which relate to everyday activity indicate knowledge that life below is a continuation of life above.

The Underworld not only seems to reflect the land above seems but appears to be inextricably tied to it as well. For all the northern peoples concerned here, those living in the Land of the Ancestors reside in the “mountain below the mountain” or

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<sup>10</sup> Stewart, Robert J. *Robert Kirk: Walker between the World* (Element Books; Dorset, Great Britain) 1990, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> The reader is referred to Chapter 3 for a discussion of these terms and what they meant to the Northern Germanic peoples.

the “village below the graveyard.” For the Finns, Saamí, Shetlanders, Highlanders (Scotland), and many of the other small, rural Scandinavian districts, the cemetery or burial place still represents both the “marker” of the Underworld home for the dead and also the “entry place” into the Otherworld (previously Helheim or Hel for the Scandinavians) for the newly dead. Because of this, there are many precautions to be taken when in a graveyard so not to “accidentally” bring them back to the Land of the Living as a *draugr* (ON = “reanimated corpse”).

In many districts throughout Northern Europe, regardless of linguistic culture, there are customs surrounding interment which are precautionary in nature so that the newly dead will make a “one-way” trip to the graveyard because the soulless corpse returning to the Land of the Living was considered very real, dangerous and deadly. In many areas in the North, for example, a body is removed from a house through a specially created opening next to a door, between the removed door and the hinged jamb, or through a “special” window so that when the corpse should decide to return home, it cannot; its return path is blocked by closure. The belief here is that the body or *draugr*<sup>12</sup> can only return by the same route by which it was taken out. Additionally, there are customs dealing with the return of the corpse such chopping off the head and placing it between the knees to keep it from walking. All these customs taken together are to bring the dead to the final resting place and to make sure he stays there. The final resting place for the corpse represents the new “home” in the Underworld and the soul’s starting place for its new life .

When customs in Northern Europe pertaining to death and burial are investigated by collecting by ethnologists, comparing both within single cultures and between neighboring regions, a hazy, but definite picture of a northern Underworld begins to emerge which crosses cultural boundaries. The Underworld is similar in many respects to Midgard or the Land of the Living. The inhabitants live in villages and communities comprised of others from the same geographical location on Midgard or in extended family units below the ancestral burial grounds. Life goes on differing little from the life they had known previously and they engage in the same daily occupations known to them from above ground. There are others who live below as well who have never had earthly such as the *álfar*, *Svartálfar* (dwarves), giants (*jötunar*), *Æsir*, and Vanir. The Underworld really seems to be a continuation of the life lived above ground with certain exceptions. There is intercourse with races of beings rarely encountered above and with ancestors and friends who had gone before, and there are dangers as well as fortune associated with such encounters.

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<sup>12</sup> ON **draugr** = “reanimated corpse” often retaining a small amount of the personality of who the individual was previously, but which has tremendously increased strength, and is always dangerous to the living except in special cases where the draugr’s killing harming an individual was taboo, especially in the case of familial relationship.

One's status or occupation after death is also subject to change depending on one's reputation (fame) at the time of death and the continuing defense of that reputation after death. And although interaction between the dead and the living is limited, the Underworld is intimately related to Midgard or the Overworld: the two feed one another.

The ancient Teutonic peoples (as well as the Celts, Balts, Finno-Ugric peoples, etc.) understood well that the Underworld is not somehow separated from the rest of the universe, i.e., the Lands with in the Tree, but plays a fundamental role in the well-being of Lærað, the World Tree. The description of the Tree itself is relatively unimportant here, but the movement of the Waters is not. According to Snorri Sturluson in the *Gylfaginning*, the Waters move from Hvergelmir, the spring in the depths of the Ginnungagap, out through the eleven streams of the Élivágar and course upward through the Tree of the Worlds. The Waters feed all rivers, lakes, springs, wells, and seas of all the Worlds. Indeed, they truly are the source of all life. They continue their journey until reaching the very top of the Tree where they drip from the antlers of the four harts which feed on the uppermost buds of Lærað and fall back, some reaching Midgard as the morning dew and, obviously, eventually fall back into Hvergelmir completing the cycle. The role of the Underworld by its very location in the scheme of things is to distribute those Waters immediately upon their release from the original Well out into the worlds and to receive the return flow for funneling back into Hvergelmir.

Another part of this intimate relationship between Middle-Earth and the Underworld is the idea of reciprocity. Holmberg describes the Underworld as resembling

“the world we live in everything, with the exception that, seen with our eyes, everything there would appear inside out or upside down . . . The same rivers and streams exist there, but flow in opposite directions. The tops of the trees there grow downward; the sun rises in the west and sets in the east.”

<sup>13</sup>

Ailo Gaup, a Samí multi-media artist and *noaide*, stated one time that “our Ancestors walk under the Earth, upside down, with their feet against the soles of our feet.”<sup>14</sup> These mirror-images are more difficult to find in the bulk of Scandinavian literature than in the neighboring cultures except in small pieces here and there. The Frau Holle story offers some indication that the idea of reciprocity, or mirror-imaging, was not unknown to the early Germanic peoples. The shaking out of the feather bedding, normally done on sunny days, resulted in snow falling on the

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., pp. 72-73.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication in Oct., 1994, in Albuquerque, NM, during a group discussion about the Ancestors.

earth, and smoke from her fire resulted in fog. (One should take note that smoke from a fire will only “rise” on clear, cool days which is opposite weather from a foggy day on Midgard.) In Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*, Hadding is led to a place where “herbs grow in winter.” In some folktales, touching an Underworld being with cold iron results in him feeling a burning pain. In other folktales, elves or other Underworld folk complain of starvation when there is an abundance of food on Midgard and vice-versa. Even the *Hávamál* alludes to the idea of reciprocity when one is cautioned to observe moderation in everything, which, seems very much out of place since the general view of Vikings is that they tended to overindulge in almost every area of life. Moderation in food and drink, here on Midgard, however, with reciprocity as the rule, meant a similar distribution of food and drink in the Land of the Forefathers. The concept of moderation may have been practiced, then, over the centuries as part of an all-out effort by individuals or communities to maintain a healthy give-and-take relationship to the Otherworld. Although mirror-imaging between the Over- and Underworlds is never overtly depicted and only rarely alluded to in the eddaic or sagaic literature, it was definitely not unknown to our well-traveled Teutonic forebears, even if only mentioned lightly or implied in folktales.

The way in which the ancient Teutons measured time also provides some indications as to how reciprocity may have fit into the overall scheme of things. It is well attested that the normal unit for measurement of the year by the ancient Scandinavians, as well as the Celts, was the half-year.

“In Iceland, the *messori* were summer and winter, each season twenty-six weeks in length, and the beginning of each was marked by feasting and religious ritual. The passage of time was marked by winter and nights.”<sup>15</sup>

The period of time between *Winternights* and *Júl*<sup>16</sup> was especially dangerous for the Scandinavian forebears as well as for their Celtic cousins since this was the time of the *gandreið*, or the “Wild-Hunt,” which, in the Germanic culture, was believed to be Óðinn and a retinue of reckless followers riding across the land. *Winternights* (approximately mid-October) and *Júl* (Yule) are both holidays associated with the Land of the Dead and were variously viewed as times to commune with Underworld beings: ancestors, the *álfar*, the *Dísir*, and local guardian/ demi-gods. The period of time in between these two holidays was the “dangerous time of year when Ghosts ride in the “Wild Hunt,” and folks were at risk of being swept up never to return

<sup>15</sup> Ellis-Davidson, H. R. *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse University Press; Syracuse, NY) 1988, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> In other words, the period of time between October 14 (approximately) and the winter solstice which were called “Winternights” and “*Júl*” (Yule) respectively. These are two of the “three holiday-celebrations” celebrated by the people of the Viking era according to Snorri Sturlason in the *Heimskringla*.

to their Midgard homes, or if they did, their sanity would not come with them. Winternights later became Halloween or “Hallowed Evening,” now, long associated with the grave, and Júl became Christmas. Although modern culture does not normally link the latter with a Feast for the Dead, modern Saamí as well as many Scandinavians continue the older belief that it is the night when “the Dead walk” and still consider Christmas Eve to be “the most dangerous evening” of the year.<sup>17</sup> For those living on Middle-earth, winter was the time of rest and travel was kept to an extreme minimum out of necessity due to severe weather conditions and the hazards of travel by either foot or horseback, but for the teeming dead it was “summer,” when activity level was at its peak, the time of travel.

The period between mid-October and mid-January was important to the Germanic peoples for a variety of reasons. In the rural community, it was the time when the final harvests were put into storage, when animals were butchered and the meat was prepared and hung. Life and activity within the home increased; weaving new cloth and the mending of winter clothes were common daily activities along with making ready for the upcoming festive holidays.

For these people, the winter festivals were the high points of the year.

“They met to renew their contract with the supernatural world, and to ensure luck for the coming season, and this was something for the whole community to share in not just selected guests.”<sup>18</sup>

Luck and prosperity were brought forth from the Underworld through proper observance of ritual during the winter months so they could be enjoyed throughout the summer, only to have a part of the harvest returned back to the Land of the Dead at the turning of the year at Winternights to start the cycle anew. Reciprocity, a cycle of give-and-take, for the ancients was the concept of the Underworld feeding into Middle-earth, and Middle-earth then feeding back into the Underworld in a never ending circle of events periodically marked by holidays.

Holidays were the temporal markers of the cycle of the ancient year, but it was necessary for these events to be combined with physical-spatial markers as well. The local graveyard was a family’s link to the Underworld. For luck, ancestors were kept placated through sacrifice on certain holidays particularly during the winter months when the spirits of the dead were most active, and these sacrifices were placed within both temporal and physical frameworks. Often these annual celebrations, or at least part of them, were carried out near or in cemeteries, burial mounds, etc. There are many folktales which tell of aspiring poets or musicians who go to the graves of “past-masters” on these nights when the temporal-spatial doorways stood ajar, and

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<sup>17</sup> Holmberg, *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis-Davidson, *Myth and Symbol in Pagan Europe*, 1988, p. 40.

occasionally, there is the tale of the young heir who goes to the ancestral grave mound at Yule to retrieve the familial sword. Indeed, for many cultures including the Germanic, graveyards were very important and were well kept not solely for the purpose of giving the corpse a “pretty place” to lie but because it was the link of the community to the Underworld and the place from which the Waters of Life could pour forth. By caring for the locale where the dead lay, the living could be assured of help from below.

That the barrow, i.e., family graveyard, was considered to be the home of ancestors is well attested. Folklore from over the entire north relates stories concerning a family member wandering near a new grave and seeing a newly dead family member among his or her relatives enjoying life after life. Cults of the dead or of ancestor worship were also very common in Northern Europe primarily at a local level. Dead grandparents watched over the family homestead, the crops, or the livestock. A Scandinavian rite called *útiþeta* (literally “sitting out”) involved sleeping on the burial mound of a dead ancestor for inspiration such as the aspiring poet did as reported in the *Flateyjarbók*, for example. One of the old English charms for preventing miscarriage required the pregnant wife to step over the grave of a “dead man” presumed because he had an intimate link with the Otherworld and, therefore, could intercede on the part of the unborn child. Although not clearly spelled out in the charm, the *grave* could very well have been that of a relative. Naming children after newly dead or famous ancestors was also a way of gaining the protection of that ancestor for the child by providing the child with an Underworld connection, a linguistic link to the Land of the Dead. A belt was removed from the howe of Ólaf (the “Elf”) of Geirstad to be used in the birthing of a child most likely to gain the protection of this ancestor. The family graveyard was indeed a sacred place, an opening through which luck/ power could flow into the community.

During the Heathen period in the North, there does not appear to have been any differences in where a person “went” after death. In fact, it seems that everyone probably went to the same general place. In modern times the deciding factor in a soul’s final destination is a man’s “good works”: one either goes to “Heaven” as a reward for a life well-lived, or goes to “Hell” as punishment for unrequited crimes. For the Heathen, however, the Otherworld was the only destination. Now that a gross generalization has been made, the ubiquitous exceptions can be described.

The conditions surrounding one’s death seems to have determined the final abode of the soul. Holmberg in *Finno-Ugric Mythology* while discussing the beliefs of the tribes west of Russia, including the Saamí bordering Sweden.

“During the pagan period, separate worlds for the good and the bad dead were unknown. But, already at that time, there seem to have been views that the dead attained to different worlds, not on account of their deeds

during life, but according to that which had been the cause of their death [sic]. Those who died in battle or as the result of some accident did not go to the Underworld but peopled another world up in the heavens.”<sup>19</sup>

Juha Pentikäinen in his brief essay “The Dead without Status” echoes the same thought but also includes the Germanic folk (both Heathen and Christian):

“In that it contains the sociological term *status*, the concept of ‘dead without status’ is a reference to social position; it indicates that the problem before us may be considered social as well as religious. The dead without status are those *whose admission to the community of the departed has, for one reason or another, been denied* (my emphasis). Such dead persons lacking position or status either in the communities of the living or those of the dead, remain in a permanent transition phase that may be compared to the Catholic concept of Purgatory. Finnish belief tradition embraces a similar concept, *sijattomat sielut* (placeless souls), which refers to those among the departed who are restless. In German tradition they are called *arme Seelen* (poor souls).”<sup>20</sup>

The cause of death or the condition of the corpse at the time of burial appears to have been important throughout the entire northern half of Europe from the Heathen period well into this century.

Most likely, the Land of the Dead was subdivided into different regions. It is quite probable that the early Germanic people saw the Afterlife as a reflection of this life. Communities of the dead, group of the dead traveling from one place to another, the dead’s engaging in daily agricultural duties including herding cattle, cooking and weaving, engaging in battles between communities, and feeling of *human* emotion are all commonly described activities throughout recorded history. If seeing the Underworld as a reflection of Midgard is the most common view of the Land of the Dead in spite of the fact that it is contrary to Christian teachings, then there is only one Land of the Dead as there is only one Land of the Living.

Heathen reconstructionist groups of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have a tendency to glorify “death in battle” as some how being the *noblest* way to die with dying after a life of good works running a close 2nd place. Simply going into a common Land of the Dead is very distasteful for many if not most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ásatrú folk. The Christian concept of “sitting at the right hand of God” seems to have washed over into their way of thinking so that “going into the Halls of their Gods” after death is far better than dying into the arms of their

<sup>19</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Pentikäinen, Juha ”The Dead without Status” in Kvideland and Sehmsdorf *Nordic Folklore*, p. 128.

ancestral communities. The idea is definitely modern, is most likely carry-over from Christian upbringing,” and may never have really played any major part in the Northern European Heathen worldview at all. This, however, is one of those things that cultural anthropologists will be trying to sort out for a long time.

The idea that becoming one of the “straw-dead”<sup>21</sup> was somehow a bad thing is an ill-founded modernism probably having its origin in the warrior sects of the Late Viking Age. The Finns and the Saamí both had an ancient saying common into this century that “going up” after death was a bad thing, and that “going downwards” (into the earth) was a good thing. “Going upwards” meant that one had died a violent death, such as having been murdered or killed in battle, and the results of the bloody death could be seen in the night sky particularly in the omen of the “red lights,” a reddish aurora borealis, which forebode ill luck for the village. In their belief, they knew that the bloody dead went to the Finno-Ugric equivalent of Valhalla, and being usually a nonviolent people by nature, felt that an eternity of warfare and violence was one of the worst fates that could befall a person. Dying back into the fold of the kin, where one was safe, fed, and loved, was ideal. Although the Icelandic sagas are records of the exploits and lifestyles of a part-time-warrior society, most people in Scandinavia at the time were engaged primarily in agriculture, hence the need for gaining and holding the favor of the ancestors. For the professional mercenary, perhaps, the idea of becoming “straw-dead” was abhorrent, but, then, so was being stuck at home as a father/ farmer.

Dying outside the circle of the kin was not a good thing. The drowned, for example, were scooped up into the nets of Ran and were removed to her hall far below the waves. Egil Skallagrimson says

*“My lineage ends, like the storm-  
Felled maples of the forest.  
I have buried the bodies  
Of too many of my kin.  
I search for speech, for telling  
Praise of my long-dead parents.  
Words bud in my mind now, break,  
Blossom and blaze in green song.*

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<sup>21</sup> “Straw-dead” is a kenning (Nordic-type metaphor) for one who dies in his/ her sleep either from illness or “naturally.” In modern times, and probably in Heathen times as well, it is generally used in a pejorative sense.



*The battering wave that broke  
 My father's line broke my life.  
 It smashed through as the wild sea  
 Breaches the widest sea-wall.  
 Ran, you have been hard on me.  
 My dearest friends are all dead.  
 And now you have slit that strand  
 Ásgard and I wove with love.*<sup>22</sup>

It was customary, however, among all the northern peoples that the sea-dead be given a proper “burial” even if no body were found, for if the body should return to the earth it could and often did according to classical and folkloric Germanic literature seek to return to its home as a *draugr* becoming the source of further death and destruction.

The newly dead needed to be properly introduced into the Land of the Ancestors, into the circle of the ancestral kinfolk, so that the family luck would not be lost. Human beings are born of the earth and not of water. In the case of Egil's son, the body was found, and the funeral feast was made according to the ancient custom. Had the body not been found it would have been necessary to set up a memorial of some sort, a so-called “rune-stone,” most likely between the shore and the home, to give the dead one a new resting place beneath the earth. (Not every rune-stone was set up for this reason, however.) Funeral pyres during mercenary or trading exploits to far off places were also customary since the family burial ground was not readily available, and funeral feasts and memorial stones were done just as if the warrior had drowned. In any case, if one had died outside the kin circle, precautions were necessary.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, funerals and funeral preparations are done to placate the living, but to the ancients this was not true. Minne-ales<sup>23</sup> were drunk 30 days after a death and one year after a death. These “memory-ales” were drunk not simply to honor the dead but also to help the deceased to remember those he/ she had left behind and that the family is ever in need of assistance. Minne-ales were also drunk to stay in good favor with the dead since the luck of the family flows from the Land of the Dead out into Midgard (see above). Juha Pentikäinen in *Nordic Folklore* discusses what he calls “the dead without status” quite extensively:

<sup>22</sup> *Egils Saga* tr. by Christine Fell (Everyman's Library; London, UK) 1975, pp. 146-49.

<sup>23</sup> Literally “memory-ales” or toasts to the honor of the dead usually done on the anniversary of the death of a loved one (from the Old English *minne* = “memory”).

“The intimate relationship between the family and its dead may be envisioned as a circle, one half of which is under the ground, the other half above . . . . The family organizes the funeral as well as periodic commemorative ceremonies, and provides for the dead by granting them part of the annual harvest. The dead direct threats against the family in the form of warnings against neglecting and against improper behavior.”<sup>24</sup>

To offend the ancestors was to invite disaster to livestock, odal grounds, and kin, especially those yet to be born. To offend those under the ground, especially those whose status had moved up to local demi-god of the land, was to create something similar to a toxic waste dump. In New Age circles this is often described as “having the power of an area drained away,” but according to the Germanic worldview the natural flow of the Waters of Life to an area was blocked.

One is reminded of modern stories about businesses which will not prosper because they are built over ancient Native American burial grounds. The stores or businesses are, in essence, the focus of revenge because the dead have been neglected or dishonored and as revenge the flow of luck and prosperity which would normally rise from the depths of the Underworld are being held back. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dead are ignored for the most part unless they interfere with an individual’s ability to make money.

*Niðstrond* (“the strand of the corpses”; *niðing* was the greatest insult a person could receive, “the lowest of people”), a place of suffering for evil or sociopathic people, is often interpreted as Christian in origin since the description of the inhabitants suffering resembles that of a Christian Hell. But the concept of *Niðstrond* does not necessarily have to have had a foreign source. In fact, the pre-Christian inhabitants of the North seem very well to have understood the concept of a place of suffering after death (but not necessarily in a separate place as in the concept of a Christian Hell), which for them was any place *outside* the community as demonstrated by the practice of *outlawry* as a form of punishment, prior to the invasion of the monks.

The practices of outlawry and wergild as forms of retribution were practiced in Northern Europe long before written history. If a man conducted himself in such a way that he can no longer be safely supported by the community without harm coming to that community, then he was sent away to dwell outside the realm of human habitation. The concept of wergild was that not only is each man, woman, and child worth a certain price to a community, but that each body part was of value as well. Wergild had to be paid by the wrong-doer when anyone was physically hurt or killed. The payment of wergild was an atonement for wrongs committed within the community and, in essence, was a way for an individual to buy his way back

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<sup>24</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 130.

into the community. If wergild was not paid for some reason, or if the crime was too serious to allow for reintegration of the criminal into the community after payment, then a sentence of outlawry was commuted, which basically condemned the outcast to the wastelands outside the bounds of society, and the price of the wergild was removed from his own “head” at the same time which essentially condemned the man to death. He literally was free to be killed. If the term of outlawry was survived, the crime had been paid for, and the former outcast was re-enfolded into society.

There were certain deeds which could not be atoned for in this life, and, therefore, greatly affected life, in the Germanic way of thinking, as it continued in the Underworld community. These were the betrayal and breaking of a formal oath to a comrade, friend, relative, or king, or the killing of a relative since wergild could not be paid within the same family.<sup>25</sup> (Note: the payment of wergild was an agreement between families, a negotiation.) A family could not pay itself for something it had done to itself; this is no payment at all. In these cases, after death, the individual was outlawed by members of the ancestral community in the Underworld which meant banishment to the northern wastelands, the *Niðstrond*. He was considered unfit to live within family or community, and being deprived of family, companions, or a means of sustenance, there was only suffering, but no death or end to it all. Punishment after death in the Northern sense, then, is not a judgement or proclamation of the Gods, it is simply being rejected by the family/community.

The Underworld was viewed as a primary source of energy for the land, the community and the family, but it was also the source of power/ luck for the individual. Luck or the individual’s or the family’s source of personal power flowed out from the Underworld and was disseminated throughout Midgard and the upper worlds as the result of an individual’s actions. One of the individual’s roles in life was to function as a distributor for that power, for the Waters of Life.

According to tradition, there were three personal connections to the Underworld: the *hamingja*, the *fylgja*, and the body. Names for these connections exist or existed in traditions from other cultures as well usually associating the *hamingja* with the ancestral line, the familial connection to the source of power/ luck, the *fylgja* as an individual spiritual connector or guardian spirit, and the body or body/ soul complex as being fed bilaterally from the land (physical body) and the Underworld (ON *hamr* = “moldable spirit pattern for the body-shape”). Also, according to tradition, these

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<sup>25</sup> Wergild involved terms of payment of a price prescribed by the existing legal system for physical damage caused to an individual. The terms of payment were agreed upon in front of witnesses by the families of the individuals involved. Payment of the wergild restored the individual’s rights under the existing legal system. It should be noted, however, that restoration of rights legally was not the same as restoration of social standing in the eyes of the community. Foote and Wilson discuss this system in depth in their *The Viking Achievement . . .*

connections needed to be “groomed” and cared for, because if they were not, what is commonly called “disease” could set in and cause generalized weakness to varying degrees or even death. Elf-shot, traditionally, was a source of weakness/ disease or a leaking-out of individual luck through holes in the hamr, whereas soul-loss or a complete disconnection from the source of power was a cause of death.

The hamingja and fylgja are interesting figures in the Underworld tradition. Because the Scandinavian traditions of soul-craft and the Underworld have continued to live in folk-tradition and have continued to evolve, some elements have tended to change meaning or cause overlaps in distinction creating some technical problems for the modern 20<sup>th</sup> century researcher. In this age of science, the average person tends to like things to fit exactly into paradigms. Plants, for example, fit neatly into complex classification systems, and as new plants are discovered, they are found a place in the botanical family tree; the plant, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to mind because it simply *exists* regardless of a scientist’s ability or inability to pigeon-hole it. Problems come up when one is confronted with a group of things which refuse to be neatly classified and such is the case with beings such as the hamingja and fylgja. One is perhaps better off defining the roles the beings play in the life of an individual as opposed to attempting to classify the beings themselves.

The overall function of the hamingja appears to be as an individual’s primary connection to the source of power flowing through the Underworld. Whether the connection is to Hvergelmir, the source of the Waters of Life, no one can truly say. However, there does exist a description of its tie to ancestral lineage. Additionally, in a similar fashion, the luck of a family is usually passed down from generation to generation as in *Viga-Glaums-saga* wherein Vigfuss, Glum’s maternal grandfather, passed on his hamingja to Glum after dying. In this case, the name of the being “hamingja” is some confused with “fylgja” in the term *kynfylgja* or *fylgjakona*.<sup>26</sup> In general, the hamingja takes the form of a woman, often helmeted, and appears large but has no resemblance to any member of the family. Whether accompanying the individual or the family, the being functions as the embodiment of the connection to the source of luck, power, health, or prosperity pouring forth from the Land of the Ancestors.

The distinction between individual or family luck becomes even more blurry because of little personalized “twists” put on it for the benefit of the individual. In folklore, the motif of the fairy-godmother or of a group of three fairy-godmothers is

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***Kynfylgja***, ON = “kyn” (family) + “fylgja” (guardian). *fylgjakona*, ON = “fylgja” (guardian spirit) + “kona” (woman). Generally, these terms are considered to be synonymous.

The spirit was described in *Viga Glaum-saga* as a very large woman who was the embodiment of the family power/ luck.

often encountered. Much has been written about whether these beings are Norns (the Weavers of Fate), Dísir (demi-goddess protectresses), women of the álfar<sup>27</sup>, or ancestral spirits. Judging by the amount of confusion the concept presents, in all likelihood, all these theories are correct to some degree and classification becomes meaningless. If this part of the system is viewed simply as “luck” which pours forth from the line of ancestors and which takes on a certain twist at the birth of an individual, i.e. becomes personalized, there is at least some understanding of the function or the role the being plays, in spite of the inability to classify the actual being or beings.

Luck is sometimes thought of as being a fixed storehouse of power. However, such an idea is not clearly indicated in the traditions of the ancient north as they have been passed down to us either through written or oral traditions. The hamingja did not seem to function as a “store-house” of personal power or luck as some would have it, but appears to have had more to do with access to power. Luck changes as times change. If a relative died, the hamingja or fylgjakona moved on to the next in line often as a last wish of the deceased but also apparently at the whim of the being itself.

Access to luck was also apparently closely related to action. If a taboo, laid on the individual at birth (geis), was broken, the individual’s “access” to luck was decreased or completely inhibited. This is occasionally described as the individual’s losing “his power,” or having “his luck turn bad” or “his luck leave.” Davidson alludes to this connection:

“The test of beliefs and practices was how far the individual who held them proved lucky and successful, for a fortunate man or woman was felt instinctively *to be in tune with the powers governing the world*, (my emphasis) and it was prudent not to swim against the current.”<sup>28</sup>

Gambling, which seems to have been a national pastime of our forebears, most likely had its origin as a method for “testing” access to luck as it does among many North and South American tribal people to this day.

Traditionally, the fylgja often took the form of an animal which was generally representative of an individual’s personality. A Swedish folk-tale tells of a young girl who instead of going into a dance one night decided, for whatever reason, to

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<sup>27</sup> There is some argument as to whether *females* existed among the álfar or not. The argument seems pointless, however. What is really being discussed here is the idea that there was believed to be some type of being which were 1) Otherworldly, 2) appeared to be more closely aligned with the Gods (whether Vanir or Æsir), 3) and who seemed to have something to do with the assignment or attachment of *orlög* at or near birth. See Simek’s *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* p. 61-62 for a discussion of the term Dísir.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis-Davidson, *Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe*, 1993 p.142.

peer through an open window. Inside the house where the dance was being held, she saw different animals, such as foxes, geese, wolves, bears, etc., cavorting about the place, and she recognized these animals as being the fylgja of the people attending the dance. All the animals dancing in the room reflected the personalities of the people there.

These animals were also known to appear in dreams, and this is very well documented in both folk-tale and in the sagas. In modern folk-lore research, the fylgja is sometimes called the dream soul. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf in *Nordic Folklore* give this description of the modern concept of the fylgja which apparently is nowadays commonly mixed tightly with “conscious thought” or the *hugham* (ON *hugr* = “consciousness” or “thought”):

“Although the hugham (variant spelling) and the fylge (variant spelling) often have the same appearance, the hug and hugham lead very unstable lives between the individual and the surroundings and can be consciously controlled, while the fylgje and vor(d) are passive and people have very little control over them.”<sup>29</sup>

The fylgja had an intimate connection with an individual so that there was no separation until the death of the body, and in some cases the connection remained after a period of time even after death, particularly, if there was some unfinished business.

That the fylgja was attached to the individual, as opposed to the hamingja or kynfylgja whose connection to the individual was through one’s lineage, is well attested. In Iceland, the fylgja was often described as being an animal which closely represented the individual’s personality, but in Sweden and the Shetlands, the fylgja was usually described as a doppelgänger, or an exact, otherworldly, duplicate of the individual. People with the “second-sight” were able to see this double (either as an animal or a person) and could tell much about an individual’s personality from it. In Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Commonwealth* this being is described as the “co-walker” and throughout the northern lands there were many traditions surrounding it. Walking a person to the door upon leaving was a common custom in all countries with a large population of Germanic/ Celtic ancestry which had its roots in allowing the fylgja out so that it did not become separated from the individual for separation could mean death. Seeing one’s own fylgja or that of another often meant that death was immanent under certain conditions “If a person arrived immediately following the *vardøger* (fylgja), he or she was going to die; if some time elapsed, the person would live a long life.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bente Alvers, “The Concept of Soul in Nordic Folklore,” in Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, eds., *Nordic Folklore*, 1989, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

In folk tradition, the fylgja may also have been the vehicle for soul-travel during sleep (“dreaming”) and for the Otherworld journeys of the noaide of the Samí culture although it should be mentioned that, in Norway, the dreamer did not always travel in the shape of a animal.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the fate of the individual and his fylgja were so closely tied that if the fylgja was injured during travel so also did the individual suffer. The only apparent difference between traveling during sleep and traveling voluntarily into the Otherworld was that during sleep the individual was only passively attending the dream-events, and during a noaide’s journey, the noaide or shaman was consciously aware and had control over his own behavior.

Both the fylgja and hamingja, in function, had close ties to the Underworld and, no matter how they are described as beings, which is often confusing to the student of tradition and folk-lore, acted in ways very distinct from one another. The hamingja in its role as “guardian” as it is often described was a direct link through the line of ancestors to the source of life. In itself, it did not “store” power, but depending on an individual’s ability to disseminate power, functioned as a distributor. The fylgja, in its role, worked in tandem with an individual, like a guardian angel in the pop-Christian sense, to help lead him into situations which may have been of benefit from the standpoint of power. Such situations might have dealt with health, prosperity, or knowledge. Later on during the era of the Inquisition, individuals who had a good personal relationship with their fylgja often called these beings their “fetches.” An accused woman during a witch trial in 1660 described the fylgja or vor(d) thus:

“There is a vord in people’s breasts, which goes out at night when they are asleep. And if an evil spirit comes and prevents it from coming back again, that person will lose his mind unless it returns in a day or two.”<sup>32</sup>

The vor(d) is a protector of a person’s health and well-being and is a Swedish word for “fylgja.”

Caring for the ancestral line was important to virtually all the ancient Northern Europeans because of the need to maintain connections to the source of all power/luck which they knew to be deep in the Underworld. According to this line of logic no individual could truly function independently of the entire system; each had a role to play in the overall scheme of things. The “systems theories” now being applied in 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific thought is little more than an inevitable extension of this age-old Heathen logic. The ancient Germanic peoples, however, realized that

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<sup>31</sup> In most of the Scandinavian stories about a dreamer *traveling* in his sleep, the dreamer perceives himself to still be human whereas a witness to the event (often another dreamer) sees the traveler as an animal such as a bird, butterfly, wolf, etc. This differs from how a noaide perceives himself while traveling which is either as an animal or a man-spirit.

<sup>32</sup> Østberg, Kristian *Svartboka* (Oslo) 1925, p. 84.

not only did each individual have personal ancestral lineage but so did all things (see Chapter 2). Here the catalog of beings and roles that these beings played in the system of the Universe becomes uncountable. Everything in the visible world had its Underworld counterpart. Everything had a “soul” hence the burying of weapons, tools, household goods, etc. with deceased persons; the recounting of the lineage of a sword; or the naming of houses, boats, trees, etc. For the ancients, lineage was important and was to be honored. For a tie to the past was a tie to the source of life, and by “grooming” those ties, the Waters of Life remained free flowing.

The Underworld tradition of the Teutons was already becoming misunderstood and misrepresented by the time it was committed to writing by the Christians. In the folk mind, distinctions between concepts were already becoming blurry. Twelve hundred years of Christian indoctrination plus the growth of science which has leaned towards breaking things down to their fundamental parts for analysis and classification has damaged people’s ability to accept the idea that this are not all there is, but that people themselves are only a small part of the whole. People are only now beginning to realize that when a corpse is dissected for examination, for example, they are no longer looking at a *human* body because of one fundamental difference: a human body *lives*. By regaining access to the ancestral lineage both in terms of time and place, people will come to know exactly where they stand in the Universe, and by doing so, they can come to know the limitless power of the Waters of Life flowing through the World Tree.

Acceptance of relationships or connections between things and events and of Midgard as being one small part of a whole is workable even in this day and age, but complete acceptance of the Germanic Underworld tradition is a little more difficult. First, people are trained from early on that non-physical beings outside of themselves are constructs of the imagination, so to go around saying that one believes in elves, giants, dwarves, Gods, or ancestral or guardian spirits is to invite ridicule by peers, or worse, the local authorities. Consequently, the current trend is to talk about the Underworld tradition in terms of symbols, analogies, and metaphors instead of simply accepting it for what it is: a worldview.

The second reason that the Underworld tradition might be a little difficult to accept is that there is another faddish tendency to make the Underworld tradition into something that its not: a sweet, light, and airy place where all negatives are removed. The Underworld like Midgard was divided in the early Germanic mind set into halves, with the one half being the sanctuary of community and the other half as wilderness. Many in this modern age subscribe to an idea that the entire Universe is filled with quaint butterfly winged fairies who cavort about the heads of those blessed with Aquarian Age enlightenment just waiting for any chance to bestow glittering gifts upon the New Age saints. This idea of “fun elves and hobbits who love people”



would not have only seemed foreign to the ancient Northern Europeans, but would have been considered foolish or insane. Anyone believing such was leaving himself open to attack, illness, and possibly even death. The idea that the Underworld is a fun, cute, and exciting place is becoming relatively pervasive in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, so anyone proffering the idea that there might be danger involved in the tradition will not only be viewed by the “authorities” as being slightly weird, but will also be lambasted by the newest generation of “psychic flower-children.”

The Northern European Underworld is part of a worldview, a Germanic worldview to be precise, and in this worldview otherworldly beings, as with many in the Land of the Living, are potentially dangerous. Destruction and creation are side-by-side processes. The ancient Germanic peoples did not survive by hiding themselves in a quaint fairy-tale fantasy but by plowing their fields, butchering their animals, and fighting and killing off invading forces when necessary. Their worldview provided them with information regarding choices in the course of action. They lived their lives in the physical world as they interpreted it; they did not live a pretend life within the constructs of their imaginations.

Another area of “wishful thinking” which is imposed by the New Age upon the Germanic worldview is that of reincarnation. The debate can (and really *has*) gone on endlessly about whether or not the ancient Germanic people believed in some concept which involved the transmigration of souls. This, for the most part, is an importation of the whole East-West connection thing (discussed in Chap. 2). It is a nice philosophy which involves the learning of life’s lessons over a cycle of lifetimes and will not really be dealt with here. It should be mentioned, though, that in some rare cases in sagaic and eddaic literature, an individual (or at least part of him) was *reborn* to carry out a specific task usually related to revenge or leadership. The two cases usually dredged up for “proof” of the belief of reincarnation are those of Helgi Hundingsbane<sup>33</sup> (from the Sigurd cycle) and of St. Ólaf<sup>34</sup>. Without belaboring the point, Helgi had an act of revenge which needed to be carried out, and St. Ólaf denied being reincarnated. The fact that the individual asking St. Ólaf about the possibility of reincarnation most probably relates to the idea that if a soul is not completely laid to rest, it will wander. Reincarnation, as it is commonly understood today, most likely did not have a place in the early Germanic worldview. The passing on of familial luck/ power through the hamingja, and unrestful souls, however, did. These ideas are presented above and in Chap. 2.

On the other hand, the ancient Underworld tradition is applicable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and forms the basis of one of the most profound forms of transformation

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<sup>33</sup> Hollander, Lee *The Poetic Edda* (University of Texas Press; Austin, TX) 1964, p. 179.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of this see Ellis-Davidson’s *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*, p. 122.

known to modern man. Its power is attested by literary authors, as well as clinical psychologists, as being probably the most common motif for personal-transformation and has been so since mankind has been engaged in the writing process. Even beyond literature, in the realm of the average person, near-death experiences have been transforming people since the beginning of time. Every single small community can name at least one person whose life has been drastically altered for the better by a close brush with death, i.e. the Underworld, and over the past two decades or so, many with terminal diseases such as cancer or AIDS whose lives have been lengthened by modern medicine have given lectures, been on talk shows, and have written books about how their living with death has altered their views of life. The applicability of the Underworld tradition, then, is to allow people the chance to re-align their attitudes about living long before their own deaths occur. To accomplish this, however, it is necessary that people learn to attend to, accept, and learn from their own mortality, i.e., their own deaths.

The Underworld tradition dealt with death. Reincarnation, although not totally unknown, was not a part of the Germanic system of thought. For the most part, when someone died, he was *not* coming back. Death is something from which people hide these days. They like to soften the blow of the concept of death by using euphemisms in their speech like “passed on,” or “went to a better life.” Death is not discussed. All arrangements for burial of the “dearly departed” are left to funeral directors. In fact, people have separated themselves so far from death that they don’t even know how to go through the normal process of grieving and need psychologists and counselors to help them move beyond the “passing away of a loved one.”

Not only is human death not dealt with in any realistic way, but neither is the death of pets, or even stock animals for food. Some are even unable to cope with the autumn of the year because the falling of the leaves reminds them too much of death. People have separated themselves from death and do everything possible to keep from getting too near it. Some try to stave it off with longevity programs consisting of drinking down herbal formulas or eating special diets, some through the science of cryogenics. Some choose to turn their attention in other directions like to “Pearly Gates” or “Violet Flames” and, in doing so, ignore the facts of life on the planet earth or at least consider them to be somewhat loathsome. Modern folk hide from death and do their damndest to keep from being found.

Contemplation on death and mortality, at least as far as life on Midgard is concerned, can be one of man’s greatest sources of wisdom. The practice of *útisetá* was one way that an ancient Scandinavian could gain access to the wisdom from the ancestors. For modern man, nothing need to be so elaborate. One needs only to contemplate mortality. Much of a modern person’s time, energy, and sense of

well-being is spent in maintaining the illusion of immortality. Because of immortality, or the illusion of such, one can afford to believe that all of life's little details are of greatest importance, and because everything thing is important to such a great magnitude, many spend their illusory immortal years pondering the "right decision." In this sense, the ancient Scandinavian knew where the source of wisdom truly lay: in the Underworld, the Land of the Dead. These "great decisions," most of which are little more than silly pontifications made great only by the amount of time and energy put into them, can usually be pared down to realistic proportions in the face of one's own demise. If one is going to be put under the grass tomorrow, a great decision like whether to "buy American" or to "go with a Japanese model" becomes relatively meaningless and trivial. Contemplation of death and mortality carries the message that there really are very few "big" decisions, and in this way, ancestral wisdom can be utilized.

There is an interesting phenomenon which seems to be common to those nearing death: they tend to drop all the meaningless little details of life, the things that they once thought were so important, and try to put their lives in order before they die. They call their family together, atone for harm they have brought to others or to hose they have neglected through the years, and, in general, attempt to deal with only those things that are truly important. Most curiously, those are the very things about which the *Hávamál* speaks: family, friendship, quality of a life lived, and the prospect of leaving a fair name for oneself. The entire chaotic list of life's little details fall together for the very first time in many cases, so that only the truly important things carry meaning. Without an Underworld tradition, modern man must wait until he is confronted with the reality of death before the true meaning of life, the wisdom of the ancestors, makes itself known.

The Germanic concept of Midgard has much to do with people's desire and ability to place themselves spatially in the universe utilizing the constructs of the World Tree and the Flow of the Waters of Life. Within such a world view, each has a place and a function which is not separated from anything else (see Chap. 3). This is not difficult to accept or realize because it is observable in the world at large. On the other hand, the Underworld tradition is only observable in the *effects* that it has on people's behaviors, in their sense of well-being, and in their personally-experienced quality of life. That those who have undergone near-death experiences have been changed by the experience is rarely doubted, but exactly what has been changed is not always clear. These changes cannot be seen directly but can only be experienced, and experience without physical evidence is difficult for the 20<sup>th</sup> century mind. The tradition of Midgard places one spatially within families, communities, and the World Tree, but the Underworld tradition places one temporally.

For the early Teutons, life was viewed in cycles, and birth and death were a part of one of the cycles. Another was the yearly cycle of the seasons. Agricultural peoples are more closely attuned to the yearly progression of the seasons than is modern man and this yearly cycle included, obviously, dealing with work as the weather permitted but, also, with the cycle of holidays and festivals celebrated both within the family unit (such as birthdays, rites of passage, etc.) and outside the family unit (such as community celebrations, funerals, festivals, markets, etc.).

For the ancients, forces emanating up from the Underworld, the Land of the Ancestors, forced changes on Midgard, but with these changes also came the sense of continuity or “sameness.” Everything, for the ancient Germans, had a birth and a death whereupon the cycle was started anew. Change, for them, was acceptable because of their belief in the somewhat circular nature of time. For modern man, there is generally a sense of “pending doom” because in modern philosophical terms of the average man “time” is linear; therefore, the world as it is changing today is progressing towards a chaotic end. “Society is getting worse!” the papers say. “Pollution is out of control!” Thinking in terms of a linear flow of time is depressing and it is no wonder that modern folk have such a difficult time accepting change. This new generation, this Generation X, is seen by many as the-end-of-it-all. They are violent, apathetic, they do not attempt to live within the bonds of society as it exists; they question everything and offer no solutions. In one sense, however, a cyclical sense, they are nothing more than the newest cycle of the Baby Boomer generation of the 1960’s and curiously enough resemble in many ways the generations which produced the Viking Age! Everything changes but somehow there is a *sameness* running through it all.

In the ancient mind, everything moved in cycles, but the force driving the cycles appears to have come from elsewhere. For the ancient Teutons, the force came from the Land of the Dead which is implied in the reciprocal relationship between the Underworld and Midgard sometimes used as illustration in Germanic folklore but more prominent in folklore bordering the Germanic realm. The idea of ancestor worship which is repugnant to some is not really necessary to participate in the Underworld tradition. All that is needed is the development of a sense of acceptance and respect for one’s own starting point and for the forces which created that starting point, i.e., the ancestors of one’s personal lineage. Grooming the links between the Underworld and Midgard need not be really any more elaborate than offering an attitude of thankfulness, which, for the ancient Germanic peoples, occurred communally during the primary festivals of the year: Winternights, Júl, and Summernights. One does not even have to entertain any particular spiritual belief system, or have any belief at all, for that matter, to demonstrate some sense of gratitude.

Modern psychologists have interviewed people who have endured near-death experiences rather extensively, and there are certain factors in these interviews which are quite common to most of them. The survivors report an increased passion for life in general, and a decrease in taking for granted simple things like health, and a sense of well-being. For the ancients, these things were gifts passed on through family lines, things such as luck, health, and prosperity. For them as well as for those who have faced death, these things were not simply part of being human nor were they birthrights; they were “gifts” handed up through the family lineages and were “granted” by forces outside themselves. If these things were truly part of being human, then humans should have complete control over them, but the fact is “they do not.” The fact is that luck, health and prosperity can whither away slowly or, sometimes, very quickly with no rhyme or reason. The *Hávamál* says:

*“Better living than not living.*

*Only the living know wealth.*

*I saw fire blaze up in a rich man’s home,*

*But death stood outside the door.*

*I knew Fitiung’s sons when they had sheep in their folds.*

*Now they carry the beggar’s staff.*

*Wealth changes in the twinkling of an eye.*

*It’s the most fickle of friends’<sup>35</sup>*

Birthrights are meaningless when one is dead; they only apply to the Land of the Living.

The idea that the ancient Germanic peoples lived in a world of illusion does not hold up well. Their worldview which contained otherworldly beings and an Underworld to which their sense of luck/ power was inextricably tied helped maintain some organization in a chaotic universe much the same as modern mathematics and quantum mechanics serve the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By living out their ancient spiritual philosophy, they were able to access a passion for life which seems to be sorely missing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were able to tolerate changes theoretically at least, better than their modern counterparts because of no need to view “time” as a linear progression of events, and because of their worldview, were potentially able to access the wisdom that comes from having few, if any, illusions about their own mortality. In view of these arguments, it is difficult to tell who the “world of illusion”

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<sup>35</sup> R. I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings*, pp. 141-142, 1995.

idea really applies: the thanophobic 20<sup>th</sup> century folk or the 5<sup>th</sup> century Germanic. In any case, it seems that moderns have much to gain from in depth exploration the Underworld tradition.



## Chapter 6

# The Sky



By far the most difficult area of the northern European worldview to address is the nature of the Gods themselves. For centuries scholars raised and educated in a Christian world have been trying to make some kind of sense out of mythologies or worldviews which were considered normal by ancient Heathens but are completely alien to modern man and which have long since disappeared leaving only small but tantalizing traces of what were probably complex systems of thought. Because a person can only define something using terms, analogies, and comparisons that are borne out his own cultural background, understandable during his own time, each interpretation reflects his own culture. Making the leap in thinking, i.e. completely switching worldviews, is for all practical purposes impossible. The old fishing, hunting and agricultural communities are gone, and if one such community has continued to exist, it is so completely changed through modern technology like electricity, improved transportation, and faster, more efficient communication that it does not even remotely resemble itself from a hundred years ago, never mind a thousand.

During the mid- to late-1800's, when the theory of evolution was fairly new, scholars were automatically lead to think in terms of linear development from "primitive to sophisticated," and, consequently, interpretations of northern mythology such

as those promoted by Frazer, Anderson, or Kaufmann were related to the idea that religion must have developed from a primitive form comprised of vegetation and fertility Gods since these were the only things that a cave-dwelling hunter and gatherer could have been concerned about. When these men wrote about Germanic mythology, they did so with a historical approach; the “old Gods had passed on.” To them this was obvious and inevitable because the natural evolution of society from the simple agrarian to the much more complex industrial/ scientific necessarily created the need for a “new God,” being more sophisticated Himself, and, therefore, more sympathetic and suitable to the needs of a new world.

Later, beginning in the late 1800’s and continuing on for nearly a century, the development and practice of behavioral sciences such as psychology, sociology, neurology, and anthropology, helped to produce a whole new breed of “interpreters” which includes the famous Freud, Jung, and their descendants, Georges Dumezil, Jan DeVries, and a list of followers much too long to be included here. Their interpretations included much material that had come before, but they also modified some of it to suit the development of the “new sciences.” This generation of interpreters believes that the Gods have not passed completely away but that they continue to live on in the folk-, collective-, cultural-, or genetic memories of mankind as archetypes, and that they resurface on a regular basis to guide folk towards their eventual destinies as whole and complete beings. This resurfacing of archetypal thought-patterns has been interpreted as the cause or at least the facilitator of every great event of mankind from time immemorial.<sup>1</sup>

By continuing to pursue this line of reasoning, these new behavioral scientists believe that their understanding of archetypes will eventually lead to the understanding of why people do what they do; at any rate, that is the theory. For these scientists, the Gods do not live outside human consciousness but are actually part of its very fabric; they live within the very neurochemical patterning of human existence. The new move in sciences is towards either existentialism or Taoism, saying that there is no such thing as objective existence, that all perception is subjective, i.e. can be had only from the viewpoint of the observer. The observer and the observed are inextricably intertwined so that it becomes impossible, in a Cartesian sense, to determine the existence of anything outside the self. Oddly enough, however, these same men of science continued to present their material from the traditional viewpoint of the “objective observer”; they were not able to make a clean break from the viewpoint of their predecessors. Right or wrong, this anthropocentric view

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Jung, the psychologist and foremost promoter of the “archetype theory” wrote an essay in the 1930’s called “Woden” which attempted to show how an entire society could be led to accept a single worldview. The upshot of the essay was that Germany was being reshaped by the northern Germanic archetype of Woden (ON *Óðinn*).



permeates every aspect of human life in a large percentage of modern industrialized nations, and it is exceedingly difficult to write about the objective reality of the Gods without looking very naive, simple, or just plain foolish.

Starting in the late 1950's (occurring only rarely before that), some rebellious anthropologists, psychologists, and a handful from the other behavioral sciences as well began to disregard evolution, anthropocentrism and the whole objective/ subjective problem and began to go straight for the heart of things: personal experience. This was a break from the traditional approach of being the "objective observer" which was started several centuries ago, but also from the "subjective observer stance." There is no longer "the observer"; there is instead "the participant." One would think that such an approach would be acceptable in modern science since the idea that nothing can be observed directly had been around in the "hard sciences" for several decades prior to the "anthro-rebels" picking up the ball and running with it, but this was not the case. An anthropologist who chooses to "participate" in that which he is supposed to be observing is considered to be no true research scientist of human behavior for by their very participation they are "spoiling" the objectivity of the project and, therefore, are contaminating the results. Often these people are outlawed from the scientific community to live in the borderlands of pop culture alongside charlatans, quacks, and confidence men. Colin Turnbull,<sup>2</sup> Michael Harner,<sup>3</sup> Florinda Donner,<sup>4</sup> Stanislov Grof, and Timothy Leary<sup>5</sup> are only now beginning to gain some recognition in the fields that they truly explored: those

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<sup>2</sup> Turnbull wrote a book about his experiences with the rainforest pygmies. The book, however, was written in a documentary-story format wherein not only did he describe his experiences, but he actually talked about how it *felt* to be with these people. Not only did he discuss his *feelings* but he actually had the audacity to present himself as a human being suffering from culture shock and completely capable of the worst thing a cultural anthropologist could ever engage in: *human error*. His story was called *Children of the Rainforest* and has been out of print for many years.

<sup>3</sup> Harner's experiences among the *Jivaro* of the Amazon Basin resulted in his writing *The Way of the Shaman* (Harper & Row Publ.; New York, NY) published in 1980 and his starting the New Age movement of neo-shamanism (at least from a business point of view) through his founding of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. Although the activities of this his "foundation" are respectable in the eyes of some it is still regarded with much suspicion by many of the old-style anthropologists.

<sup>4</sup> Ms. Donner has written three books in the style of Turnbull, and along with Carlos Castaneda, is most often considered a fraud by the "professional community." This is not to say that she *is* a fraud, but her writing style is so much from a personal experience point of view that the story itself could not be proven (whatever that means) to have occurred in physical reality.

<sup>5</sup> Both Grof and Leary were pioneers in the use of *d-lysergic acid diethylamide* (LSD-25) in serious studies in psycho therapies and the study of human consciousness. Timothy Leary recently died (1995) and Grof is still working and writing; both have over the course of their lifetimes produced incredibly brilliant works on the one hand, and thoroughly irritated others who consider themselves to be far *more legitimate* on the other hand.

of personal experience, altering one's frame of reference (state of consciousness), and the overall effects that these things had upon reality or perception of reality (160). For these folk whether the Gods lived inside as archetypes or outside as part of an objective reality made no difference: experience through personal participation was the only possible key.

What is the validity of human experience? Who knows? Interaction between Gods and men is well documented in the eddaic and sagaic literature (160), and to take a man's description of such an interaction and to reinterpret it as a meeting with an inner archetype or as an encounter with a Dumézilian function, or as an encounter with a "Christ-metaphor" is to demean or degrade the personal experience to suit another's needs and desires. For an individual, an encounter with a God, a spirit, or a dead ancestor is a meeting with power/ luck, i.e., a lineage. It is a full participation in a personal experience and needs no further interpretation. This is the approach taken here. Often it may sound as if the Gods as They are presented here do have an objective existence beyond the human realm of perception, and if that is the case, so be it.

Personal experience, as well as group experience, was obviously very important to the early Germanic peoples. Evidence for this lies in the fact that even though their religion was organized to some degree, at least a local level, individuals and communities varied greatly from each other in their approach to the northern pantheon, so that some communities, such as many early Swedish kingdoms, were more closely allied with the Vanir and landvættir, while others, particularly in the later-developing Viking communities, aligned themselves with warrior Gods such as Óðinn. Not only were there differences between geographical locations, but a single community could change its godly allegiances over time so that a community that was once part of a Vanic cult would gradually become part of the cult of Óðinn or Þór. Iceland's history also shows a wide variety of approaches to religion so that individuals arriving in the same fleet could belong to the cults of Óðinn, Þór, and even the White Christ, while some of the professional warriors professed atheism. Obviously, the northern Germanic people, for the most part, were very tolerant of differences between themselves, and that personal experience (or group experience) and cultural legacy were of primary importance.

The northern Heathen view of the Gods was much different than that of the Christians towards their God, which has kept Heathenism almost incomprehensible to the Church of Rome for almost two millennia. In the Christian mind, as with the followers of many of the other "southern religions", the "true God" is omnipotent. The Heathens, on the other hand, knew that their Gods, although powerful, are subject to the same universal laws as any other part of Creation (the Tree), i.e., orlög (see Chap. 2). The Æsir and Vanir were considered to be long lived, true, but

they could age albeit very slowly, and are kept youthful only by eating the apples of the giantess/ Goddess, Iðunn, wife of the God of Poetry, Bragi. They also knew that their Gods held no immunity against death. Balder, son of Óðinn and Frigg, was killed by the blind God, Höð, burnt on the funeral pyre, and now resides in the underworld Halls of Hel, Goddess of the Land of the Dead. Ragnarök, the battle that will destroy the Universe at the end of time will bring many of the great Gods to the end of their lives.

How different from the all-powerful God of the Christians. So different, in fact, that one of the great ecclesiastical questions supposedly to help convince the Heathen to convert was “If your Gods are so powerful then why do they require sacrifice?” The Christian answer to this question was obvious: “Since the Heathen Gods are not omnipotent, and the ‘true God’ is, it follows that the Heathens are worshiping mortal demons who have been deceiving the ignorant barbarian, and who are ultimately subject to Jehovah’s judgement in the end times; therefore, it is Christian duty that the Heathen barbarians be saved from eternal damnation as a public service of the Mother Church.” In the year 1014 CE, Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, preached the following as part of his “Sermon on False Gods”:

“Many other Heathen Gods also were devised in various ways, and Heathen Goddesses likewise held in great honor throughout the world to the ruin of mankind; but these, though, are reckoned the most important in paganism, although they lived foully in the world. And the scheming Devil, who always deceives mankind, brought those Heathen men into profound error so that they chose as Gods for themselves such vile men who had made their vile lust a law for themselves and for as long as they lived spent all their lives in uncleanness.

But blessed is he who completely scorns such affairs and loves and honors the true God who created and fashioned all things.”<sup>6</sup>

Differences, which were tolerated by the ignorant barbarian as belonging to a personal viewpoint, were believed by the more enlightened Christian to be but evil deceptions created by the Devil in his continuing befuddlement of mankind. It is interesting to note that punishment or death for “heresy” and “blasphemy,” were not punishable crimes during the Heathen Age; the burning of heretics was a phenomenon which came later and was associated only with the Holy Mother Church and the coming of the Prince of Peace to northern Europe.

Actually, the confusion suffered by the Christians as to why the Heathen so tenaciously held onto his set of older beliefs rather than automatically converting

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<sup>6</sup> Swanton, Michael, translator and ed., *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (Everyman’s Library; London) 1993, p. 187.

to a religion worshipping an all-powerful God was a byproduct of their worldview. In the early Christian way of thinking, the entire Universe was created and supported/ maintained by a single God who, in spite of delegating some power to other beings like angels, saints, etc. for various trivial reasons, was the absolute, and sole authority over heaven and earth. The Heathen definition of a God, if one can be put together, was a being who was powerful and knowledgeable about the World Tree, its function and all its inhabitants, and who could play direct or indirect roles in the preservation of It right up to the Ragnarök. To the Heathen, a God was like a king whose kingdom was the entire Tree, *Lærað*, and whose authority over the inhabitants of Midgard was as parents to children: loving, strict, but not over-bearing. If a Heathen felt that one God had interfered too much in the affairs of his life, he, as often children do, rebelled, sometimes even changing his allegiance. Egil Skalla-grimson, the famous Icelandic poet, warrior, and general rogue, in a poem known as the *Sonatorek* (“The Wreck of the Sons”), laments his often blind trust in Óðinn but considers the burden of his sons’ deaths his own rather than blaming his patron God:

“And then I think of Óðinn:  
 A branch was torn from my tree,  
 But Óðinn bore it away  
 To the high halls of the Gods.  
 This God has been good to me.  
 Yet I trusted Him too much  
 And more than was good for me,  
 For He did allow that death.  
 Still, I sacrifice to Him—  
 Not eagerly, but because  
 He gave me my two great gifts  
 And they salve my heaviest hurts.”<sup>7</sup>

Within 150 years of Egil’s death, the above poem, had it been written about the God of the Christians, would have been considered a blasphemy and, consequently, punishable under canonical law.

<sup>7</sup> Fell, Christine, tr., *Egil’s Saga* (Everyman’s Library; London, UK)1975, pp. 148-48.

Interestingly, it was the Heathen definition of a God which eventually allowed for the acceptance of the Christian religion. Initially, people did not give up their religion, their allegiance to the Æsir, the Vanir, the landvættir, and the ancestors at all but accepted the triune God of the Christians, particularly the “White Christ,” (see Chap. 8) into their pantheon as an equal. Traders, kings, warriors, and, of course, entire communities, have all been recorded in the sagaic literature as being prone to “dual-religionism.” Traders, because of their occupational need to deal with a great number of people, would often accept the God of the new religion but continue sacrificing to the Gods of their fore-fathers as well. Helgi the Lean in Iceland

“...one of the best known of these [dual-religionists] <sup>8</sup> ...grew up in Ireland. He believed in Christ, but would call on Þór to guide him at sea, and when great decisions had to be made. When he drew near to the coast of Iceland, he called on Þór to tell him where to land, and the answer came that he must go to the North. But when he had established his new home, Helgi called it Kristnes (Christ’s Headland), as it is called today.” <sup>9</sup>

The tolerance of the early northern Teutons, however, was not their undoing; it was a combination of the intolerance of the new-religionists, conversion of high profile political figures, Christian customs which essentially tainted all Heathen holidays with “christianized interpretations,” and forced conversion of the common folk by figures such as King Olaf the Holy who viciously persecuted, and executed, as many Heathens as he could possibly find. Even so, the tenacity of belief in the northern Gods in conjunction with the Germanic world view made the conversion to be a very slow and painful process.

The Germanic view of the world as being a place of ever changing flow of power/luck was a system which supported the northern pantheon and was provable through personal experience. For the early Germanic people, the all-or-nothing philosophy of the Christian worldview left too many paradoxes which could only be reconciled with very weak explanations. The northern view allowed for “good years” and “bad years” although each would strive to improve their lot over the course of time. Personal experience showed that ancestral lands which have been long cared for tended to produce more consistently, for example, because the family over time had aligned itself with the power/luck of the land through sacrifice and through the laying of the dead into the soil. New land, on the other hand, was a more precarious venture

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<sup>8</sup> Note: the term "dual-religionism" would be from a Christian point of view because for the Heathen the acceptance of Jesus would be simply adding one more God into a pantheon which already existed.

<sup>9</sup> Turville-Petre *Myth and Religion of the North* (Greenwood Press; Westport, CT) 1964, p. 88.

with many unknown variables as in the case when the first settlers came to Iceland and needed to deal with the yet “wild” *landvættir* who had up to the time of the first settlers little or no interaction with men. It was understandable, then, that there would be many bad years until the immigrant family had completely aligned itself with the flow of luck seeping up from the Underworld or had been able to coax luck to flow their way. This was a natural course of life in the Germanic worldview. But, for the Christian, any bad year was automatically interpreted by the Church to be a punishment for some transgression against the new God (which may have been somewhat confusing for the newly converted Christian who believed he had committed no “sins”). For the Heathen, life was simply a series of struggles which could in most cases be overcome through knowledge of *Qrlög*, and proper action which would lead eventually to lining oneself up with the same Flow of the Waters of Life which fed the entire World Tree. Such an “all-or-none philosophy” did not match up easily with the unpredictability of lands of the North.

The *Landnamabók* (“The Book of Settlements”), the *Islandingabók* (“The Book of the Icelanders”), and much of the sagaic literature reveals the function of the Gods for the early Germanic people which also differs greatly from how They were seen by the Christians. “Function” here refers to the actual roles that the ancients believed their Gods to play in their daily lives. In the early settlement of Iceland, as is clearly stated in the sagaic literature, the northern Gods “guided” settlers to their new homes, and guidance from the Gods is a key issue from the earliest known writings about the Germanic peoples up through the Viking Age and well into the Age of Conversion. Tacitus, writing around the 1st century CE, describes the Germans as placing much value in the reading of lots (which some have interpreted to mean slips of wood with runes or proto-runes engraved on them) and omens, and that they would not make a move either agriculturally or in war until the “signs,” presumed to be communications from the Gods, Ancestors, or spirits of nature, were right for it. In the settling of Iceland, it was common for the ship’s master or the leader of the expedition to seek an omen which would result in the settling into a lucky place which would prosper. Although there are very few formal prayers directly from the Heathen Era, many of them must have contained a line similar to “(name of deity) lead us to . . .” as opposed to the formal Christian phrasing of “God give (or ‘grant’) us . . .” for in the Heathen philosophy “a gift ever looks for a gift.” The role of the Heathen Gods as guides recurs over and over in the early writings.

The idea of northern Gods as guides concurs well with the early Germanic world view as presented so far. The Waters of Life which maintain the health of *Yggdrasil* need to be constantly modified and changed to suit the needs of the Tree itself so to hold off Its collapse (*Ragnarök*) as long as possible. The joint efforts between

the two tribes of Gods, the Æsir and the Vanir, had led to the creation of the inhabitants of Midgard to that end, but since man nor spirit have direct access to knowledge of the entire Tree (from the Well of Mimir), they need guidance so that the proper “shaping” of the Waters (through the layering of *ǫrlög*) can take place ultimately preserving the Tree and, consequently, the lands of the giants, the Gods, and men. In the Teutonic mind-set, the relationship between the folk and the Gods was that each individual had some role to play towards a common goal rather than the type of relationship between a Christian and his omnipotent God who had His own separate and secret agenda in spite of His Followers.

Gift-giving (*blót*) to the Gods was fairly common, but the concept behind it was slightly different than what the more Christian word “sacrifice” implies. Gift-giving from man to man and from man to spirit has already been described in earlier chapters and the basic format still holds true even with the Gods. For centuries, it has been understood that for whatever reason the various Gods of the northern pantheon “needed” gifts; this is a terribly poor and jaded interpretation of the concept. From the eddaic descriptions of the Gods, they already had everything necessary to their survival and those things could never have possibly been provided by man: the apples of Idunna, huge vats of mead, etc. Whatever a community or an individual was able to provide would have been but a part of a meal and a single quaff of mead for Þór. If “divine needs” were taken care of by tri-annual sacrifices, Ragnarök would have come after the very first sacrifice millennia ago because the Gods would have starved to death. The early Germanic people were pragmatists, and surely recognized early on that they were not “supporting the existence” of their Gods. The ecclesiastical question then posed above is merely an early piece of rhetoric.

Gift-giving between man and God was purely a matter of honor and good-faith. Man gifted man to align himself with power/ luck in terms of lineages (see Chap. 2), and man gifted a God for the same reason. A sacrifice to a God was in a sense telling the God that a community or an individual would allow themselves to be guided through this life, would work with rather than work for the God, etc. The basic format of this “gifting the Gods” really was no different than a man gifting a king as a show of faith and loyalty. And just as a warrior would give his war-leader credit for a successful raid through the composing of poetry and offering of praise, so also gave the farmer credit to Gods for a successful season. Additionally, sacrificial animals were eaten by the participants. Apparently, a sacrifice was little more than a feast planned and executed to the honor of a God or Gods, at least in the Heathen way of thinking, rather than a method for taking care of a deity’s needs.

Gift-giving<sup>10</sup> from the Gods to man was also slightly different than the Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter 3, *Midgard*, deals with the topic of gift-giving. In this modern day, folks generally think of gift-giving as a type of “reward,” but in the older philosophy based on the Germanic

concept. Gifts from the Gods were not necessarily “rewards” for good deeds done or for being on one’s best behavior. To understand the concept, one would do well to look at how kings treated their retainers. Kings gifted their men for a variety of reasons. A successful raid, for example, meant a surplus of wealth within a community which needed to be “shared.” A common kenning, or poetic metaphor, for a king or war-leader in this circumstance was “gold-hater,” i.e., “someone who does not value gold except that it makes a good gift to someone else.” Gold was also gifted to a man for a poem well turned, for a song well sung, for a joke well played, for a battle well fought, or simply for friendship’s sake. The intertwining of luck/ power is of greatest importance here.<sup>11</sup>

Interaction between lineages, as stated in Chapter 2, is the very foundation of all relationships in the early Germanic way of thinking, and the interaction between the lineages of Gods and people was no different. The Gods had long and powerful lineages which reached far back to the beginning of time and which connected them to all lands within the World Tree; therefore, They had access to true knowledge. Mankind, on the other hand, was very limited in its access to knowledge, but because of its ability to engage in action which could effectively alter the state of the Waters flowing out of the Well of Urð at any given point in time, it had access to a power, i.e. qrlög, which the Gods needed. As a team of sorts, the combination of the lineages of Gods and of mankind, i.e. of knowledge with action, the entire Tree benefits. This relationship between deities and mankind is the exact reflection of that between a king and his retainers, a war-leader and his warriors, or, ideally, a peasant farmer and his bondsmen. This is also the relationship stressed throughout the *Hávamál*:

“Give your friends gifts– they’re as glad as you are  
to wear new clothes and weapons  
frequent giving makes friendships last  
if the exchange is equal.” (st. 41)

and

“If you have a friend you feel you can trust  
and you want him to treat you well

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worldview presented here, “gift-giving” was important because that was one of the ways that lineages could be crossed or intertwined. Gift-giving by a king to a retainer or by a God to a man was done out of a “need” on the part of the giver, a “need” whereby the giver is able to participate in the ørlög of the receiver. Gift-giving, then, is a matter of power/ luck as opposed to the simple moving of a material object from one person to another.

<sup>11</sup> Sturluson, Snorri *The Prose Edda*, translated by Anthony Faulkes, (Everyman’s Library; London, UK) 1987, p. 114.



open your mind to him, give him gifts,  
and go to see him often.” (st. 44)

and

“Always as a young man I traveled alone,  
and I would lose my way;  
I felt I was rich if I made a friend—  
no man by himself is happy.” (st. 47)

and

“You don’t have to give large gifts always,  
small things often suffice;  
half a loaf and a lifted goblet  
have found me friends” (st. 52)

12

This same relationship between man and God is described in the first paragraph of Chapter three in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*:

“Besides running a good farm, this Hrolf was a chieftain of considerable standing. He was a close friend of Þór, and had charge of Þór’s temple there on the island (Mostur Island off South Hordaland), so people called him Þórolf. A tall, powerful man, Þórolf was very handsome and his long beard got him the nickname Mostur-Beard. He was respected above all other men on the island”<sup>13</sup>

Not only can the relationship between God and man be seen here, but, so also can the result of the relationship, that of accessing power/ luck through the blending of the two lineages, i.e. the “respect” and the “high regard” of Þórolf by his fellow islanders as well as the success of the farm (which continued long after his death).

That the relationship between deities and mankind mirrored the relationship between king and subject is interesting. Prior to the coming of Christianity to the North, kingdoms were small and kings interacted with individual subjects within the protective boundaries of the kingdom and, for that matter, with the land, itself.

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<sup>12</sup> Terry, Patricia *Poems of the Elder Edda* (University of Pennsylvania Press) 1990, pp. 16-18.

<sup>13</sup> *Eyrbyggja Saga* translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Penguin Classics; London, UK) 1989, p.27.

Heathen kings often traced their lineages back to one of the Gods in the northern pantheon, to Ingvi-Frey in Sweden and to Woden in Anglo-Saxon England, and because of this relationship to the Gods, they were the inheritors of the most powerful lineage of the kingdom. They stood at the center of the community's or the kingdom's access to power/ luck. Interaction with subjects and the land were part of their function, their role as a king<sup>14</sup>. After the coming of Christianity to the northern lands, a king's power was deemed granted by an omnipotent, but impersonal, God, and, as a consequence, the role of a king changed so that he was no longer considered to be an integral part of the kingdom but a ruler over it. Personal interactions between king and subjects became less and less frequent and more of a formality. By the 1300's, kings were viewed by the people as earthly embodiments of the "new" God, Jehovah. Kings were now worshiped out of obligation rather than out of respect. Anything less was now a legal form of heresy, commonly called treason.

Because of the Germanic sense of the cosmic flow of time and order, and because life in the Underworld was considered to be but a continuation of life on Midgard, the Heathen focus was more towards the here and now and less time, if any at all, was devoted to the idea of life-after-death. In fact, the only time that life after death is mentioned as a concern in the classical northern literature is when it affects the present, i.e., for the making of funeral preparations or for tapping into the flow of luck coming up through the line of ancestors. Some warriors expected to go to Valhalla after death, but the Underworld tradition was by far the strongest of the two and was most likely the older. Dying into Valhalla as part of the warrior's way of life (discussed in Chapter 5) was a phenomenon which seems to have been a late development in Scandinavian thought and a product of the Viking Age. Turville-Petre discusses this briefly in his *Myth and Religion of the North*:

"It could be said that the name Óðinn was purposely avoided in some districts because the God was revered so deeply as to be unmentionable. But there is a more natural explanation. If those of the western districts knew Óðinn, they had neither respect for Him as a God nor love for all He stood for. I have suggested that the cult of Óðinn spread widely and rapidly in the ninth and tenth centuries."<sup>15</sup>

Besides, the warrior still needed to pass through the Underworld on his way to Valhalla as can be seen by the need for "Hel-shoes" so that the warrior can "walk the Hel-way" on his journey to the Hall of Óðinn (see Chap. 5).

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<sup>14</sup> Turville-Petre, pp. 190-95.

<sup>15</sup> Turville-Petre, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Neither the Gods nor men appeared to be overly concerned about the future. Man's destiny was to go to the Land of his Ancestors and, as a consequence, take up that role which funnels power/ luck back towards the family of the living and helps descendants make their way through life. The Gods, on the other hand, knew what lay in the future as an inevitability or, as stated in Chapter 2, which "lineages were on a collision course with another," but could only deal with the here-and-now to help push it further forward into the future by working with the inhabitants of Midgard to generate *ǫrlög* and keep the Flow of the Waters of Life in harmony with the needs of the World Tree. The question "Where am I going to go after death?" does not ever come up in the eddaic or sagaic literature because each knew already, long before he died, his final destination. The question of uncertainty was and still is a Christian phenomenon not a Heathen one.

Judgement, after death, by the Gods is unnecessary in the Germanic worldview and did not form part of the Heathen religion as far as can be ascertained. This is also primarily a Christian concept. Sagaic and eddaic literature has many references to revenge being exacted on living men by the Gods, but this is for breaking a taboo associated with a particular God. Glum in *Viga-Glum's Saga* does not have a good relationship with Frey although He was the patron God of his community.

"Throughout his adult career Glum was on bad terms with the God Freyr. To begin with, he slew an enemy on the cornfield, *Vitazgjafi*, and thus defiled it. The father of this man had no legal case, and was expelled from the district. Before he left, he brought an ox to Freyr's temple. The beast bellowed and fell dead, showing that the God had accepted the sacrifice and would repay it.

"Glum's relations with Freyr grew worse as time wore on. He concealed his outlaw son, *Vigfuss*, within the sacred precincts of the temple. He emulated *Óðinn* in swearing an ambiguous oath in three temples, one of which was the temple of Freyr. Afterwards he had a strange dream. He saw Freyr sitting on a chair on the bank of the river, where many had come to visit Him. These were his dead kinsmen, who had come to intercede with the God on his behalf. But Freyr answered abruptly and angrily, remembering the ox which Glum's enemy had given Him. . . .He could no longer withstand his enemies, and was driven from his lands in disgrace."<sup>16</sup>

Judgement, by the Gods, was exacted on the living, however, and not the dead. The above is one of many cases from the sagaic literature although the other cases are not so clearly delineated nor so well described as this one. The form that revenge

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<sup>16</sup> Turville-Petre, p. 70.

usually took was loss of access to power/ luck, which in the above resulted in Glum's loss of "a good name."

That the Gods were an objective reality, as opposed to internal or psychological constructs, seems to have been the only way of viewing them if one held any concept of them at all. The idea that Divine Powers are internal constructs seems to be a modern belief taken from interactions with Middle Eastern and Eastern philosophies such as Zen, Taoism, Sufism, or possibly some of the early Greek philosophies but did not play any real part in the indigenous northern European spiritual philosophies.

The way of the North seems to relate most closely aligned with what the Tibetans call the "second Bardo" or the "realm of hallucination/ fantasies." At present, the term "hallucination" has the unfortunate connotation "experiencing something that is not really there," something not real. But, something is there: experience, particularly, personal experience. Many cultures, including the modern American (in spite of its negative view towards "hallucinations"), count personal experience as being of great importance (seeing is believing). Even modern psychology tends to treat some non-physical entities, such as "emotions," as having an objective existence, i.e. outside the Self, so that they can be dealt with. The non-physical beings of the Northern European worldview, such as elves, trolls, wood-sprites, etc., were also dealt with objectively not because these people were ignorant, primitive barbarians, but, because in doing so, the universe was habitable, tolerable, and, in many cases, pleasant. Knowledge of the Gods, the World Tree, and the interactions between all forms of life, i.e., the entire Germanic world view, was a workable system and that is all that counted.

It is difficult to determine exactly who the inhabitants of the sky regions were for the ancients. Both the Prose Edda of Snorri and the Poetic Edda indicate that the heavens were the realm of at least the Æsir (there is much evidence indicating that the Vanir were more closely associated with Midgard and the Underworld; see Chapter 5).<sup>17</sup> There are at least twelve "Halls" of the Gods listed by Snorri in the "Gylfaginning," but Gladsheim is at one point called "the best [Hall] that is built on earth, and the biggest." Njörðr, one of the Vanir and father to Freyr and Freyja, lives in Nóatún which is both in the heavens and near the ocean, and it is not very clear whether this Hall is associated with his ancestry as one of the Vanir or with His adopted ancestry as one of the Æsir.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Snorri, writing 200 years after the official conversion of Iceland to Christianity, had his facts mixed up, or there may be a completely different explanation.

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<sup>17</sup> H. R. is quite a heavy proponent of the idea that the Vanir, as well as the Álfar, are more concerned with the Underworld and Midgard. Indeed, her book *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Penguin Books; Middlesex, UK, 1964) seems to be almost completely devoted to the topic.

<sup>18</sup> Snorri, pp. 15-58.

The ancient peoples, and many Third World people even today, accepted the idea that the dream-state is nothing more than a continuation of the waking state (or vice-versa); that is, when people sleep and dream, they commit acts in their dreams that they carry the responsibility for. Bente Alver in his essay "Concepts of the Soul in Norwegian Tradition" discusses two concepts of ancient soulcraft which are related to the idea that dream and waking states were perceived to be on the same continuum: the dream-soul and the free-soul.

"In recent tradition, there is very little that can shed light on dream-concepts. But in ancient times, the dividing line between dream and reality was not as strong as it is now. It was believed that part of the alter-ego—we call it the dream-soul—left the sleeper and experienced life outside. From personal experience, people regarded dreams as experiences of the soul. Since there was no threshold between the worlds, the soul could pass through the realms of the living and the dead. As we know from our own experience, a dream can seem so real that we can reach out for someone long lost, and remain in a half-waking state, wistful because no one was there."<sup>19</sup>

The rules of Midgard (of consensus reality) do not apply to the realm of dreams or hallucinations: people can roam in the shapes of animals, non-physical beings exist, time and space are altered so that minutes can pass as days or weeks and miles can be covered in the twinkling of an eye. The sky realm of the Gods appears to have been made of the same stuff that dreams are made of, but this, in itself, does not make the experience any less real.

Alver continues his discussion to show that the journeys made by the Lapp (Samí) shamans:

"The activities of the shaman among the Same [sic] (Lapps) must have added weight to beliefs that certain people could obtain useful information by the transmigration of the soul. But in tradition, the soul's domain was limited to the perceivable world, while the shaman's soul travels everywhere."<sup>20</sup>

Alver feels that although it is true that there is not much material pertaining to the concept of a free ranging soul in the sagaic or eddaic literature, the reason was not that people did not have a knowledge of it, but that collectors of folklore have been poor at spotting and collecting it.

The point here, then, is that what appears to be confusing descriptions of the sky realm and its inhabitants today may not have seemed so to the early Germanic

<sup>19</sup> Alver, Bente "Concepts of the Soul in Norwegian Tradition" in *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies* Riemand Kvideland and H. Sehmsdorf, eds. (Indiana University Press) 1989, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, eds. *Nordic Folklore* (University of Indiana Press) 1989, p. 123.

people at all. They may have simply accepted the conflicting information pertaining to the Land of the Gods as being no different than their own personal experiences in the Land of the Ancestors during their dream-flights. Instability of physical laws (from consensus reality) governing space, time, mass, and energy is common to one traveling in an altered state of consciousness.

The question may then arise, “How can someone live in an altered state of consciousness, or accept obviously hallucinatory material as being on the same par as physical reality, and still consider themselves to be in the here and now?” There are probably a large variety of theoretical answers, but the facts remain: “They did and they did.” In reality, the ancients did not live in an “altered state” but interpreted their world through a different worldview which included as fact much material that is generally viewed as “fantasy” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modern world views are no more or no less fantasy than those of the ancients, however. Theories, themselves, for example, have no physical existence other than the fact that they seem to “work,” for the most part. Imagination, emotions, ideas, religions, philosophies, morality, democracy all have no physical existence which can be perceived by the human sensory system, yet all have their place in the modern worldview. Is there really any difference between an ancient Scandinavian dreaming that Óðinn has provided him with the skills necessary for a sea voyage or Francis Crick dreaming that two snakes are fighting which became the basis for the discovery of the genetic material called DNA? It is truly amazing how little people have changed over the past two millennia.

Who lived in the sky realm? Because of conflicting information from the Sagas, the Eddas, and folklore, it is difficult to say for certain. The Æsir appear to have been the primary inhabitants, and their abode or abodes, depending on whether one is talking about Asgard, the city, or the individual Halls of the Gods and Goddesses, seems to have been located far to the north. Certain ancestors who have died in battle or through the shedding of their blood, i.e., murder, and these were called the Einherjar.<sup>21</sup> Their doom was to fight one another each day and to be renewed each night. The red aurora borealis is supposed to have been the Einherjar engaged in practice battle in preparation for the final battle at the end of time, the Ragnarök, and, apparently, because of the rule of reciprocity, nighttime on Midgard was reversed daytime in Asgard. Sturluson mentions that the light-elves lived in the “second” heaven far to the south and above, called Andlangr,<sup>22</sup> and in the “third” heaven, called Viðbláinn.<sup>23</sup> There were also animals mentioned as belonging

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 4, Sky Connection, which discusses the possibility that Asgard may have actually been on the northern horizon as opposed to "up in the sky."

<sup>22</sup> Faulkes, *Prose Edda*, p. 20

<sup>23</sup> Faulkes, *Prose Edda*, p. 20.

to the Gods or providing the Gods and Einherjar with sustenance which are too numerous to be listed here, but Snorri describes many of them in the *Gylfaginning*. It is also not clear where the Halls of the Giants and Giantesses of time such as Delling (Dawn), Svásuðr (Father of Summer), Nótt (Giantess-Night), etc. live. All the literature seems to indicate is that all these beings live outside the realm of the living.

Over the centuries, scholars have attempted many different illustrations of what the sky realm must look like, but all fall short. In *Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe*, Davidson remarks that “those who have tried to produce a convincing diagram of the Scandinavian cosmos from what we are told in the sources have only added to the confusion .” Some have tried to assign the twelve Halls of the Gods as described by Snorri to the twelve houses of the zodiac, and others have tried to actually create a map of Asgard, but the depictions never really work out. According to the descriptions in the eddaic and the sagaic literature, the high number of paradoxes, which were acceptable to the ancient Germanic peoples, indicate that humans while residing inside the physical limitations of their bodies were completely incapable of understanding the make-up of either the sky realm or the Underworld, but that by slipping outside their bodies either during sleep or during the soul-journey of the *noaide*, the imagery of these realms became quite comprehensible. Pictures of such a world can never be drawn, only experienced.

The Halls of the Gods seem to have been thought of as lying to the North or the West in the general directions also reserved for the *Hel*-journey of souls. The direction of East is where the giants lived, many of whom changed their allegiance from *Jötunheim*, the Land of the Giants, to *Ásaheim*, the Land of the Gods. Thus, in the “*Gylfaginning*” and in the “*Ynglingasaga*,” Snorri implies that the *Æsir* came from east of the Don River (Danube) and that the original home of the *Vanir* was around the mouth of the Danube which empties into the Black Sea. The original city founded by and home to the *Æsir*, Asgard, lay to the east of the *Vanir* (185). After a lengthy period of time, after the Great War between the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*, there was an overall migration of the Gods to the North and West:

“And because Odhin [sic] had the gift of prophecy and was skilled in magic, he knew that his offspring would inhabit the northern part of the world. Then he set his brothers, Ve and Vili over Asgarth, but he himself and all *diar* (chiefs), and many other people, departed. First, he journeyed west to Garthariki Russia, and then south, to Saxland Northwestern Germany. He had many sons. He took possession of lands far and wide in Saxland and set his sons to defend these lands. Then he journeyed north to the sea and fixed his abode on an island. That place is now called Othinsey Odhin’s Island, on the island of Funen.” (186)

From here, Óðinn and his followers continued to move to the north where Snorri tells us in the “Ynglingasaga” that he initially settled around Sweden and eastern Norway.

If one understands the piece of folk knowledge that the aurora borealis is connected with the daily battling of the Einherjar, which covers the northern hemisphere of the sky at night in the North lands, then the final “home” of the Æsir is to the North and the water loving Vanir settled to the West. In reading the sagaic and eddaic literature, however, one gets the feeling that it was not the actual location of the “homes” of the Gods and Goddesses that were important, but the directions. Thus, the East and the South were where both men and Gods went to “battle the enemy.” In several of the eddaic poems, Þór is quoted to have been “off to the East” doing battle with the inhabitants of Jötunheim, and, of course, to the South lay Muspell from where the sons of Surt would come for the final battle at the end of time, the Ragnarök. The compass directions and their significance to the ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy and world view have already been dealt with in preceding chapters.

The sky realm, according to the above descriptions seems to have been pretty much a reflection of the Underworld except that in the sky realm lived the Gods and only a few ancestors whereas in the Underworld lived the largest percentage of the ancestors and few Gods or Goddesses being restricted to the Vanir and the Goddess of the Underworld. Jötunheim appears to have extended across all three worlds and the homes of the Gods apparently being near the northern and western horizons where the three worlds come together. The large expanse overhead as could be viewed from Midgard is the field where the lives of the Gods were played out, and the effects of Their actions were rained down upon the earth. The winds, weather, the seasonal giants (Summer and Winter), the giants of time (Day, Night, Dawn), and the various luminaries (the stars, Sunna, Máni, Bil and Hjúki) all entered into the sky field and let their effects fall into Mannheim from their respective directions (187)

It was from the sky realm that fell the “poet’s draught” from Óðinn’s mouth while in the shape of an eagle, the contents of the cauldron, óðroerir, after He stole it back from Suttung the Giant. Honeydew fell from the antlers of Eikþyrnir. The rumble of Þór’s chariot was heard rolling across the skies as He protected Midgard from the onslaught of the frost giants (188). Óðinn and His followers, the Einherjar, roared through the night sky dooming those to be caught up in the Wild Hunt’s endless battle- frenzy and to be forever kept from a final home in the Land of the Ancestors. From the skies came luck, power and guidance (in the form of omens), on the one hand, and madness or death on the other.

Christianity brought with it many changes, especially in philosophy regarding



the Afterlife. Prior to the coming of Christianity to the North, the concept of an Afterlife was basically a continuation of life on Midgard among the Ancestors with the exception of some very special circumstances, either in the case of a violent death as mentioned earlier or in the case of a great king/ military leader. Information collected from various sources such as archeological finds, written documents of recorded burial customs, anecdotal information from family sagas as well as from the eddaic poetry all indicate that the concept of Valhalla being the “warrior’s paradise” is most likely late in origin and may have even been influenced by the Christian preaching of “going to sit at the right hand of the Father.” In fact, Valhalla in its form as the Hall of the Slain may have originally been conceived as being connected to the Hall of Hel with only the daily battlegrounds being in the sky realm.<sup>24</sup>

Even in this day and age, however, the concept that those making the journey to the Land of the Dead are not on their way to live in the Halls of their Gods is not so strange. What makes it difficult for many to understand is that the western civilizations have been so indoctrinated by pop-Christianity that they can no longer understand the function of the Gods and the role that They play in the Universe. Ego-centric philosophy has led many to believe that Gods or divine powers exist only for the sole entertainment of Their worshippers. This type of philosophy does not yet exist in many Third World countries (190, 191, 192).

The ancient Gods did not often deal with individuals (with the exception of Óðinn) but dealt with the welfare of entire communities. For the ancient Germanic peoples, individual help, wisdom, gifts, luck, power, etc. came primarily from the Ancestors and from each individual’s dealings with other lineages upon Midgard. The Gods did not often interfere with an individual’s life because Their main concern was the well-being of Yggdrasil and the staving off of the Ragnarök until as far into the future as possible. The community system of the sky-realm was for the Gods to gather in council each day and to decide upon the organization or reorganization of the homes within the World Tree. Snorri described this court only briefly:

“The third root of the ash extends to heaven, and beneath that root is a well which is very holy, called Weird’s [sic] Well. There the Gods have their court. Everyday the Æsir ride there up over Bifröst. It is also called As-bridge . . . . And Thór walks (as opposed to horseback) to the court and wades rivers whose names are: Kormt and Ormt and two Kerlaugs, these shall Thór wade everyday when He is to judge at the Ash Yggdrasil, for As-bridge burns all with flame, the holy waters boil.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The reader is referred to H. R. Ellis-Davidson’s *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 1964, chapter 6, (Penguin Books; Middlesex, UK).

<sup>25</sup> Faulkes, 1987, pp.17-18.

The poems in the *Elder Edda* describe many exploits of the Gods but very few of these have anything to do with individuals. Óðinn, the chief of the Æsir, does interfere with the lives of individuals but mostly as warriors, and He was not generally trusted to act on the behalf of the individual so much as to gain worthy, well-tested warriors and battle-chiefs for his band of Einherjar in preparation for the Battle at the End of Time. The Viking Age was a turbulent time and it must often been seen what unlikely chances swayed the outcome of battle. The unpredictable in war was attributed to Óðinn, the fickle God who had his favorites but did not keep them forever: He was openly regarded as One whose oath could not be trusted. Poets and thinkers in the tenth century found an answer presented by Óðinn's unpredictability. There was one event that Óðinn could foresee but not prevent: the destined threat to the order of Yggdrasil maintained by the Gods, like the destined death of every individual, was bound to come. The monsters kept at bay were only biding their time and their attack was in real prospect. In the poem called the "Eiríksmál," composed sometime after 950 CE, Óðinn in Valhalla

"is asked why he deprived King Eirík of victory, seeing He thought him valiant: 'Because it is hard to know for certain,' said Óðinn—'the gray wolf looks at the home of the Gods.' So Óðinn gathers dead warriors and the cream of men—bitter and unjust their defeat—because He must collect His host for battle."<sup>26</sup>

Foote and Wilson obviously consider the above statement to be an excuse created by the "thinkers of the tenth century" for the impersonal actions of Óðinn taken towards individuals in battle apparently basing their opinion on the age of the poem the "Eiríksmál." However, it is not so improbable that the belief existed long before the 10th century and did not only pertain to Óðinn.

The nature of worship of the Gods in pre-Christian times appears to have been primarily communal although there probably were certain rites conducted by families to bring favor and fertility to the land-holding. Families were more likely to invoke the aid of more localized deities rather than of the Æsir and Vanir, however (see Chap. 3 for the relationship between the Vanir and the álfar). There is no clear evidence in any of the eddaic or sagaic literature that any of the Gods were ever viewed as being "*personal saviors*" in the sense that Jesus is thought to be. Certain members within a community were considered both by themselves and by the other members of the community to be "the friend" of a particular God as mentioned earlier, but this relationship between a man or a woman and a God appears to have been more like that between a king and a royal representative to a region of

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<sup>26</sup> Foote, P. G. and D. M. Wilson *The Viking Achievement*, ( Sidgwick & Jackson, Great Civilization Series; London, UK) 1970, p. 391.

a kingdom. The individual indeed may have enjoyed certain privileges provided by the God whom he represented but in terms that would benefit the entire community in short and the overall functioning of the World Tree in the long run.

Again the ancient Germanic view of individuality resurfaces. A person was an individual only as he or she fit into a lineage, a family, a community, a nation, Midgard and, finally, the Tree itself like a series of concentric circles with the center being the realm of personal experience or the point from which perception originated. Each had roles and responsibilities to play out within each of the circles. The “force” of an act diminished the further from the point of the act’s origin with the effects of the most powerful lineages being felt in ever wider circles (see Chap. 2). The relationship between an individual and a God, then, was from the very center of a set of these concentric circles to the outermost circle, and, like throwing a rock into the center of a lake, for the reverberation of an individual to be felt by the Gods, an act would have had to have been very powerful indeed with perhaps only the acts of kings, powerful leaders, and great warriors or entire communities being the most effective.

There are many speculations by scholars as to why Christianity was accepted in northern Europe, and many of them have been mentioned to some degree in the preceding chapters. None of the theories cover all the bases, but they all have one thing in common: Christianity offered a way for the status of an individual to be raised to its highest possible level. No longer did a person have to suffer the supposed indignity of being an insignificant cog/ individual within the workings of a very large machine/ community; he or she could have a direct line of access to the widest of the concentric circles but only by accepting the White Christ. In essence, by accepting the new God, even thralls (slaves) could view themselves on par with kings.

Christianity had something to offer to everyone. It did not acknowledge slavery, so in Christian eyes at least slaves were essentially freed men. The large population of peasants (bonded servants) were offered individual salvation. Kings were offered political power which through alliances with other Christian kings increased their political influence from being the king of a small regional kingdom to something more akin to an emperor. Even though Christianity was supposed to be primarily a spiritual movement,

“it is likely that political as well as religious considerations were significant in determining whether a leader received Christianity and whether he could induce his followers to agree. Cnut the Great is an obvious example of a great Viking ruler who recognized that political success would depend on his

acceptance by Christian rulers abroad, which in turn required him to confirm his own Christian faith.”<sup>27</sup>

Kings who were determined to widen their influence of political power also depended greatly on how many followers they could collect who were sympathetic to “the cause,” and this seems to have been a primary rationale for the often bloody baptisms that are recorded in many of the sagas of kings.

Always preaching the religious and spiritual aspects of Christianity, newly Christianized kings marched through the north gaining converts and ever-widening their cause. The “cause” of King Ólaf, for example, was to become the king of a united Norway, and to this end, he brought the new religion to the ignorant farmers of the interior of Norway, those who were most isolated from the influences of both politics and new religious practices.

“He investigated how Christianity was being kept, and when he considered that there was need of improvement, he taught them the right faith. And he laid stress on it that if he found anyone who did not want to abandon Heathendom, he drove him out of the land. Some he had maimed, having their hands or feet lopped off or their eyes gouged out, others he had hanged or beheaded, but left no one unchastised who refused to serve God. And thus he proceeded in all that district (Uppland). Always he punished both the mighty and the humble.”<sup>28</sup>

Apparently, the benefits of accepting the new faith were not always obvious to prospective converts and some demonstration of the power of God was necessary to help convince those who were reluctant to completely change their worldview.

This new worldview offered mankind a different way to gain a sense of self satisfaction through the Christian teaching of equality in the eyes of God, but ego-centrism and narcissism have their costs. True, on the surface, the Asa-faith appeared disorganized and non-temporal as far as the stories of the Gods were concerned, but from that disorganization came a sense of belonging through well-defined roles within a family and a community. Christianity offered a text, the Bible, and a world view, which were very well-organized, but Christian philosophy left the definition of man’s role up to individual interpretation. Certainly, the new religion allowed for a sense of equality and humaneness in what seemed to be an otherwise unfair, uncaring world, but conversely some of the bloodiest wars in the history of mankind have been fought defending these individual interpretations.

“And here of course we have the great contradiction at the heart of Christianity, a religion which in action denies the faith it confesses verbally: Jesus’

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<sup>27</sup> Page, R. I. *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Barnes & Noble; New York, NY) 1992, p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> Sturluson *Heimskringla*, pp. 309-10.

message of peace on earth. His doctrine of the value of human life has been propagated by force. Apostles of the Prince of Peace advance over corpses. This was not how his first twelve disciples did their missionary work. The statues of St. Paul which I have seen in the Mediterranean lands, with the Old Testament under one arm and a long sword in the other, date from a later age and a time when the zeal to convert others had grown so strong and the faith so fanatical that Christians had completely forgotten Jesus' own doctrine of love and respect for the lives of others. It was their intolerance that caused the sanguinary wars of religion. How many lives have not been sacrificed to fanaticism!"<sup>29</sup>

So, while offering mankind a way to feel wonderful about itself, the new religion also did much to destroy the sense of *belonging* to this world, the sense of belonging to a community in Midgard. A bonded man after the conversion no longer *belonged* to a farm or a community; he was connected solely and with a direct line (through the church) to an omnipotent God. Individualism in its modern sense, then, naturally brings with it the feelings of isolation and alienation which brings the entire point of all the preceding chapters back to the idea that people have lost their sense of connectedness.

The ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy has much to offer modern folk, but the social and political forces being utilized circa 950 CE are still present, even today, in the form of social, religious, and political propaganda against any worldview which is believed to stand in direct opposition to the status quo. People continue to be harassed, tortured, and sometimes even killed because they see the world in a way which differs from the so-called norm.

However, it should also be noted that most of these martyrs have also been very vocal in their opposition to the current worldview, and their vocal opposition was interpreted as a threat to the prevailing Christian masses or to specific individuals. Acceptance of the Northern Germanic spiritual philosophy as practiced by the northern European forebears does not require any overt acts of opposition; in fact, direct confrontation based on philosophical or religious differences would actually run counter to the Heathen concept that the "community" is more important than the individual. The earliest settlers of Heathen Iceland accepted and tolerated Christians as viable members of the community. Intolerance was and still is a part of the Christian world view regardless of how politically correct the Bible is interpreted, and this intolerance has spread to other, non-Christian, groups either through association or simply by the fact that it is commonplace. The western hemisphere is, after all, 50-80% Christian even in this age of atheists and agnostics.

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<sup>29</sup> Moberg, Vilhelm *A History of the Swedish People* (Dorset Press; New York, NY) 1970, vol. 1, p. 84.

The ancients accepted that all individuals were part of a whole system. The sky-realm, for them, consisted of two tribes of Gods who were able to overcome their hostility towards each other through negotiation, so that each tribe eventually could see that there was a greater cause: the preservation of the World Tree. What was initially a struggle between different worldviews became a concerted effort towards maintaining the wholeness/ health/ holiness of Yggdrasil. The individual person gained honor and respect by how much he could give to the community, communities worked together under a king. They understood the power of cooperation in spite of individual differences.

Early Teutons maintained a strong sense of family, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century this has been replaced by the highly mobile “2.8-kids-nuclear-family. Although there are advantages to being highly mobile in terms of material goods, accessibility of job opportunities, etc., there are also some serious drawbacks in the social-emotional-spiritual realm.

“There is no doubt that an individual (during the Viking Age) was less a separate being and more a limb of a larger organism, the whole family, than he is today. His responses would automatically tend to put the well-being of the family first. That demanded the maintenance of the integrity of family property and of the corporate standing of the family in the community. Profit and loss, honor and shame were all shared, and common efforts were required to achieve the good and blot out the bad. As well as sharing in communal religious observances, the family nucleus usually also took private steps to ensure divine favour. There were many divinities and there was ritual to observe at both public and domestic festivals, but there was no compulsion for an individual to establish personal relations with the Gods.”<sup>30</sup>

Because of the passing away of the family lands and the viral industrialization of western society, the concept of the extended family is little more than a quaint anachronism, but the “need” of a family-like support is as important today as it ever was.

A common 20<sup>th</sup> century malady is the feeling of isolation and with this comes feelings of loneliness, lack of support, dissociation, and alienation. In general, the cure for this disease is for the individual to refocus his self-absorbed attention outside himself, out toward others within the environment/ community, and to begin to view himself as a part of a system. Constant struggling for personal salvation, “getting what one deserves,” personal rights, etc. is doomed to failure without community support. The “support group” phenomenon which has infectiously invaded the field of counseling has been, essentially, an attempt to create small micro-communities in

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<sup>30</sup> P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson, p. 5.

a controlled setting which a sufferer can feel a part of, and this approach was created out of necessity since the current worldview does not allow for much interaction either within or between communities.

Other movements now filling some of the same needs include the subdividing of large cities into a series of smaller districts offering individuals a sense of community support which has been sorely lacking since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Neighborhood Associations and Neighborhood Watch programs as well as the return to community-based sports and the long gone "beat-cop" are approaches that some communities have taken on themselves.

The modern world is only slowly beginning to realize the part of the ancient spiritual philosophy that states that "man is meaningless without a community." One of the most severe punishments for the ancient Germanic peoples was that of "outlawry," legally cutting a man off from home and community, yet with the modern worldview, all individuals are subjected to outlawry by the simple fact of being born.

Another aspect of community is now slowly beginning to take foothold, at least in America. Although the concept of communal grazing and farming lands is long gone, many American cities have revised and updated the concept in the forms of Boulevard Median Adoption Programs, Community Owned Parks, Highway Adoption Programs, and Beautification Projects. True, there are processes at work outside human control like natural disasters, for example, but human beings are the ones who can affect the lineage of a geographical area and help it to come back into the wholeness/ health/ holiness of the entire system. Human effort, according to the ancient Germanic spiritual principles, is to imitate the Powers of the sky-realm. As the Germanic deities strove with combined effort to nurture the Universal home against the forces of destruction, so communities strove together to maintain their lands against the destructive forces of both nature and mankind. The purpose of the fall slaughter of grazing animals was, in part, to prevent over-grazing of the lands during the summer season. Concern about the health and well-being of the farmlands can be seen in the *Acre-bot* discussed in Chapter 3. Acceptance of the ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy requires a willingness to participate in community in one form or another.

According to this ancient philosophy, personal responsibility and community responsibility for acts committed are absolutely crucial, and the idea still holds because it is at the very foundation of community-building and maintenance. Too often federal or state governments are expected to "chip in" when a community itself is to blame for littered highways, graffiti-laden walls, or toxic waste in the water. Fines are often paid to the courts or a jail sentence is commuted while responsibility by the perpetrator to the victim is overlooked. In the "suing society" of the late

20<sup>th</sup> century, folks are simply looking for money to grab as opposed to bringing an unwholesome state back into a sense of wholeness.

On the other hand some communities have sold themselves into slavery by grabbing for Andvari's Gold. They bring in businesses, manufacturing firms and government deals looking to increase the value of their own meager holdings only to find that twenty years down the line they have lost all control and rights. Entire towns have lost water rights, mineral rights, land rights, and access rights—all passed over to mega-businesses and governmental agencies to increase the value of property by a few points. To the ancient Germanic peoples, stewardship over family land-holdings was considered a sacred duty; gold and cattle were the mobile forms of money, but man without land was a slave. In this sense, the western hemisphere is filled with slaves, as well as outlaws.

There is an Anglo-Saxon saying that goes "Plan as if you are going to live forever, but work as if you are going to die tomorrow." In other words, "Don't do anything today that you or your decedents might regret somewhere down the line."<sup>31</sup> Germanic mythology is filled with such tales of rash decisions which needed amending. Often such tales were intended to be somewhat humorous and most often resulted in the individual God's (usually Loki, the mischief-maker) taking responsibility for the act committed. For the ancient Germanic peoples, "taking responsibility" was considered to be an honorable act. Adam of Bremen in describing the Danes of Sjøælland said that

"if they are caught in crimes affecting the royal interest or other wrongdoing, [they] would rather lose their heads than their hides. No kind of punishment is found there other than the axe and enslavement; and when a man is condemned, then to be cheerful is an honor. For the Danes so abominate tears and lamentation and other kinds of sorrow, which we count salutary, that a man is allowed to weep neither for his sins nor for the dead who were dear to him."<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that "tears and lamentation" were not unknown; even the Goddess, Freyja, lamented the loss of Her husband, Óðr, and all things shed tears at the death of Balder, the son of Óðinn, with the exception of Þökk, a cave-dwelling giantess, who, at the time of Snorri, was presumed to be Loki. But, taking responsibility was considered to be honorable, a sacred duty, and tears were not to be shed.

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<sup>31</sup> The modern version might go something like this: "Plan as quickly as possible, work like you are going to live forever, and when the inevitable foul-ups occur (as they will, due to poor planning), either do a patch job or fudge the data at the end of the project." We tend to skimp on planning these days and spend millions of dollars in man-hours fixing up botched jobs. Somehow we are made to feel that this is acceptable.

<sup>32</sup> P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson, p. 18.



The word “worship” in its modern sense has taken on the meaning “one giving absolute devotion to,” and, over the years, it has also picked up the flavor of the first Commandment as written in the Old Testament of “above all others.” The word is actually from the OE *weorth-scipe* which literally meant “the act of honoring” or “honoring the worth of” something. So to say, for example, that the ancient Teutons “worshipped” their ancestors would be true in this older sense since they honored them through funeral rites and *minne-ales* or “memorial feasts.” There is no reason to believe that they treated their Gods any differently since their Gods, although powerful, were not infallible and were subject to the same forces flowing out of the Well of Urð as men were. But, because they were powerful, they ruled over the forces of nature which provided the cyclical movement of the seasons, and they had gifted humankind not only with life, but also lineage, luck, and a sense of art and beauty. They were *worthy* of feasts in their honor.

In this modern age, man would do well to pick up the practice of *weorth-scipe*, honoring, of those forces outside his realm of control as the products and effects of a Power or Powers outside of himself. Modern folk greatly lack any sense of gratitude for simple things with the exception of money and material possessions. A gift of money or a new job opportunity is certainly something to be grateful for, but the reality is that each individual participates in a world which moves through time and space providing that person with an endless stream of events and an endless string of opportunities for both participation and personal growth. The American secular holiday of Thanksgiving was initially intended to serve the purpose of “feasting to honor those things,” but some of the meaning has been lost over the past 50 years. A revival of this holiday with its original meaning would serve the purpose well. In essence, the ancient Germanic peoples, according to Snorri, had three such annual holidays on a large scale where communities or groups of communities would gather for a “grand Thanksgiving,” and, according to some of the sagaic sources, families also engaged in this practice at home both during and in between the national holidays.

Showing gratitude is one of the best ways that individuals or groups can align themselves with those Powers that are unseen but whose effects can be felt at any single given moment. Nothing needs to be asked for. Gratitude draws the attention momentarily away from the self, to the great mysterious forces outside the self, and this is something that anyone can benefit from. People have become self-absorbed, ego-centric, and, as stated in Chapter 2, many consider this to be the root of physical and psychological illnesses which seem to plague modern man. No matter how it is adapted, the Germanic form of “worshipping” those large Powers existing beyond the human understanding can be of great benefit to this self-indulgent, self-absorbed society.

Worshiping and showing gratitude are ways in which modern folk can pick up and participate in the spiritual philosophy of the ancient northern Europeans. “Participation” is a key concept here. Over the past millennium people have come to think of themselves as being in control and have striven to ever gain more and more control over their lives, but to do so they have had to sink deeper into a pool of illusion. The ancients understood that events came from the outside and the only real control that any individual has ever had is in his or her own responses to the events as they unfold. True, through participation in life people are able to change events to some degree, but the results of their actions fall back into the Well of Urð. While the movement of an Andean butterfly’s wings may eventually result in a storm over China, there are many intervening factors which make the connection seem implausible and totally unpredictable for the observer of the butterfly. The best that anyone can do is to engage in *weorth-scipe* and to offer a gift of gratitude to those larger Powers out there, and by doing so, better align himself with those Powers. These actions result in power/ luck flowing toward the individual, family, or community. Modern folk would do well to drop the pretense of “control” and begin to learn to simply participate in life as it unfolds for the Waters of Life cannot be held. They must flow.

The great Powers out there exist, and the ancient northerners were able to grasp this concept merely by looking at the sky above, day or night. Midgard is part of a larger complex, the World Tree, and all contained within its branches must, by the fact that they are within, bow to honor the Waters’ currents of which they are a part.



## Chapter 7

# At the Well of Urð



The preceding chapters have dealt with the ancient Germanic worldview as can be gleaned from eddaic and sagaic literature and folklore both ancient and modern. Fields of study such as modern anthropology, archeology, psychology, and comparative fields of folklore, religion and cultural anthropology have all been utilized too in the presentation of the information, but, as mentioned throughout the text, one needs to be somewhat cautious of such information because any presentation of material *must* be biased by the scholar's educational background, current levels of technology (which are often used as analogies to explain difficult concepts), and his personal biases, reasons for writing, and motivation to write. In other words, there can never be any such thing as an objective presentation. One is cautioned to read "in between the lines." This book is, by far, no exception to this "rule of thumb."

One of the reasons for this book, however, is to make available to those millions of spiritually lost people of Germanic heritage certain ancient methods for accessing knowledge/ wisdom and power/ luck, which once understood and put into practice, will improve the quality of life not just for the readers of this book but also the lives of entire communities, groups of communities, nations, and, ultimately, the whole Tree, the universe as it is called. Perhaps such a reason seems nothing more than a grandiose pipe-dream, a wild delusion on the part of the author. But, then again,

one individual whose quality of life is improved through immersion in the spiritual philosophy/ worldview of the ancient Germanic peoples may very well be that single butterfly whose flapping wings over the Andes precede the eventual storm of change one often hears about in conjunction with the metaphysics of quantum mechanics. Who knows? But, even if only the reader's life changes for the better then the effort of this writing has been of some worth.

Unlike the information in the preceding chapters which was presented as objectively as possible, much of the information contained in this chapter is subjective in its presentation. It is an introduction to how the Germanic worldview can be synthesized and put into practice and is based, naturally, in the personal experience of a growing number of people including the author himself. Readers are free to interpret as they wish, creating approaches of their own, but this chapter comes directly from the author's personal experience and the experience of others on the same or a similar journey, and, consequently, should be tried as it is presented before changes or additions get made.

This system as it is presented is about *experience* as opposed to *theory*. Simply reading the material that follows does nothing. The "armchair expert" is a modern phenomenon, and, unfortunately, it has become the standard mode of action for many people. Although there is much material here for the armchair expert, it is advisable that once a reader has finished with the armchair part of the experience of this worldview, the exercises in the next several chapters be attempted in physical, consensus reality. The collective experience of this author and others have shown this method to be of greatest benefit. The reader should, at least, give it a chance before making alterations for changes made based on *real experience* are truly the best method. *Reading* about farming is a far cry from actually having farmed, and having a flower garden is not the same as making a living from the soil!

This chapter is also about choices both voluntary and forced. Some may simply choose to add to their already existent worldview, broadening their knowledge base of the cultures and practices of the world, ancient and modern; some may feel compelled or driven to find and accept a suitable worldview because theirs is either failing or is not broad enough in scope; and some, as was the case with this author, may feel that there is no longer a viable set of choices and are, consequently, left with only one if they are to continue as part of this world. Whatever the case may be, choices are available, and they are always personal ones.

According to the Germanic worldview, one lives by accessing power/ luck from the Flow of the Waters of Life, and knowledge, wisdom, or cunning is based on an internalized understanding of the World Tree (space) and its currents (time). As explained in Chapter 2, intelligence is not the same as knowledge: intelligence is a technical skill, i.e., the ability to manipulate bits of information to a particular

end. Knowledge or wisdom, on the other hand, is an understanding of the Tree/Waters complex resulting in right action which eventually allows one to enter into the flow of power/ luck. Intelligence is of some importance, but the fact is that there are many of great intelligence who are completely incapable of acting out of knowledge or wisdom. “Cunning” is not synonymous with “knowledge” or “wisdom.” “Cunning” is the ability to create proper or improper action based on knowledge. Often the term is given negative connotations as in “cunning as a fox.” For example, notice the slight change in tone between a “cunning grin” and a “knowing smile.” However, etymologically, the word is closely related to the word “to know” and has a cognate in modern German *kennen* (“to know”). “Cunning” is used throughout this text in its neutral form rather than its pejorative. “Cunning” is to “knowledge” as “intelligence” is to “information.”

In such a worldview as is presented here, there are three ways in which one can access knowledge:

1. through ritual or ritualized behavior,
2. through divination, and
3. through the practice of seið or Whole-making.

These are very broad categories with much overlap, and they are somewhat arbitrary having no existence in reality other than the simplifying of the presentation of this material for this book.

The first category can be defined as “*acting* to access knowledge.” Knowledge is the internalized understanding of the Tree/ Waters complex and ritual or ritualized behavior provides the action so to result in access of power/ luck. By acting in specific ways, utilizing guidelines such as the *Hávamál* or the spiritual philosophy as outlined in the preceding chapters, access to the Flow of the Waters is assuredly increased.

Occasionally, one might recoil at the thought of engaging in ritualized behavior, but it is common practice and, at some level, instinctive to all animals including humans. It has evolved simply because it increases the chances of success. The animalistic behaviors of “grooming” and “mating ritual” are human behaviors the world over because they increase the chance of perpetuating human life, they improve the quality of life, and they feel very pleasant to the human nervous system. Non-instinctive ritualized behaviors also function to improve one’s lot in life. “Being polite,” for example, is a social lubricant for easing tension between people, is very ritualized in nature (always say “please” and “thank you”), and increases the possibility of success, and increasing possibilities is all one can hope for since there are no guarantees. So, no matter how one may initially respond to the idea of ritualized behavior, the fact is that it works more often than not.

This method for accessing knowledge does not require that anyone hold any particular set of religious beliefs or hold any beliefs at all, for that matter. It is simply a way of changing behavior so that one is acting “in accordance” with the flow of power/ luck which moves up out of the Ginnungagap, through the Underworld, and out onto Midgard. Secondly, it has historical precedence: ritualized behaviors as outlined in the *Hávamál* were practiced for almost half a millennium before some of them began to slowly be replaced by ideas brought in from outside the Germanic realm.

The *Hávamál* literally translates as “The Sayings of Har,” and *Har* is one of the epithets for Óðinn, Chief of the Æsir. This name does not, and apparently never did, imply that this collection of strophes was composed by Óðinn, but implies that this set of guidelines led one to “act” in accordance with knowledge. R. I. Page in *The Viking Chronicles* outlines the use of the *Hávamál*:

“The collection of the verses known as the *Hávamál* . . . form one of the most important, and baffling, of the Eddic [sic] poems. What survives is a group of separate and very different poems brought together under this one title . . . . Subject matter is diverse, and different metres are used in different sections. There are stanzas of popular wisdom, proverbial in mood and dealing with everyday matters like poverty and riches, hunger, shelter and comfort, how to live and die well, who to trust and who to suspect, how to gain friends and how to keep them, how to outwit your enemies, the temptations of strong drink, and how to avoid troubles with the opposite sex . . . .It is fairly clear, at any rate to the unbiased, that . . . a good deal of the poem derives from earlier times”<sup>1</sup>

The poem is a collection of pragmatic pieces of wisdom that when put into proper action, the measure of one’s life can improve immensely.

Page further divides the *Hávamál* into groups (not necessarily the order of the verses within the collection) and his divisions list out thus:

1. *the poor foot-traveler*: “. . . the traveler, his needs, his reception in a strange but apparently hospitable farm and the qualities he must show . . . . stress on the lurking danger a wanderer must be ready for when he arrives at a strange village, his need to keep his wits about him and to pay for hospitality shown him with conversation and gossip.”<sup>2</sup>
  - a) *the alternative view of death*: of the importance of living well instead of dying needlessly.

<sup>1</sup> Page, R. I., *The Chronicles of the Vikings*, 1995, (BarnesandNoble Books, New York), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Page, R. I. *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Barnes & Noble, New York, NY) 1995, p. 140.

- b) *poverty*: the importance of having and maintaining a place of one's own; pride in one's self and the talent of remaining hospitable towards others, friends or strangers, regardless of one's economic standing.
- c) *moderation*: moderation in all things including drink, food, wisdom, and gift-giving.
- d) *about human folly, credulity, and deceit*: one should always expect a man to do exactly what he is going to do, nothing more; in this way one will never be caught off-guard because expectations were too high, nor does one have to be overly disheartened when one who is essentially untrustworthy breaks his word.
- e) *treachery*: the importance of keeping one's promises to friends; of maintaining an air of hospitality to both friends and strangers. And the cost of disloyalty in terms of both friends and community.
- f) *friendship*: "Friendship was a social bond like kinship. It was seen less as a sentimental tie, more as a contractual one, bringing advantage to both sides and sustained by visits, gift-exchange, and acts of support."<sup>3</sup>

Page obviously is taking somewhat of a cynical view of friendship here for the verses of the *Hávamál* actually point out clearly that of all riches true friendship is of the greatest. Some of the strophes do have somewhat of a cynical tone, but when one considers the importance of lineage in friendship, the access to power/ luck is greatest when the lineages support one another (see Chap. 2).

Adam of Bremen, a canon of the cathedral church in Bremen during the latter half of the 11th century, remarked on the human qualities of the Heathen northerners in his *Discriptio insularum aquilonis*.

"Though all northerners are noted for their hospitality, our Swedes are supreme. To them worse than any infamy is to deny hospitality to travelers, so there is rivalry or competition as to which of them shall have the honor of entertaining a guest. To him they extend all the humane courtesies for as many days as he wants to remain there, and they take to their friends in their various homes. Good things like this are part of their customs . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Although it should be stated that Adam of Bremen was equally unimpressed by some of their other customs since they were Heathen and he was a representative of the Church, his opinion of their treatment of him, not only as a stranger but as a man of a different religion, was high. The Swedes acted based on the guidelines set forth in the *Hávamál* which resulted in praise from a man who had every reason to despise them.

<sup>3</sup> Page, R. I., p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Page, R. I., p. 43.

Ritualistic behavior based on guidelines from the *Hávamál*, which really is nothing more than a distillation of Germanic spiritual philosophy can be put into action by anyone regardless of his or her religious belief system. One could do very well by himself and others by engaging in such “proper” actions, and through this method one is acting in accordance with knowledge without having either direct or indirect access to it.

Common sense is advised by the *Hávamál*. In my 30 years as an Ásatrú man, I’ve seen some fairly nonsensical questions raised about the *Hávamál*. For example, “How hospitable does an individual need to be?” In this century with its drugs and gangs and general lack of concern by one man for another, hospitality means something quite different than it did a mere 30 years ago in the rural community where I grew up. Hospitality at that time meant that we didn’t lock our doors when we went on vacation just in case someone might need something from the house. Borrowing and helping out a neighbor were done as a matter of course. When someone “broke the rules” as would happen occasionally, the cold shoulder treatment by the rest of the community was enough to bring the individual back in line. Now, I live in a town of 20,000 in the year 2001, and I even lock my car doors. One doesn’t approach a stranger for news from the outside because 1) it isn’t necessary because we have cable TV and 2) it’s stupid and dangerous. I’ve seen people try to use the *Hávamál* like Christians do the Bible, as a means to justify bad or socially unacceptable behavior. But in the long run, common sense must prevail. A great man once told me “Don’t try to split hairs with me! You *know* when you are acting crappy!” He was right. When I have to look to the *Hávamál* to justify why I did something, it is only because I’m try to justify my selfishness or rudeness; when I am acting out of “proper action” I never once reach for justification.

There is a phenomenon which has never truly disappeared from humanity, but which seems to have mushroomed over the last 50 years: the existence of earth-based religions. The movement has grown and coalesced into the so-called New Age which is really little more than a “crazy-quilt” built of scraps and pieces taken from all cultures and sources. Anglo-Europeans are often those who seem to be most affected by this phenomenon because this are the people who have allowed themselves to become grossly separated from their cultural spiritual values and, because of this, many have either joined together with practitioners of non-Anglo-European indigenous earth-based cultures (those who have not become separated from their ancestral value systems) or have started new philosophies/ religions. There is much positive to be said about these groups, way too much for this book, but they lack one thing: a cohesive ancestral spiritual philosophy which has its base in Anglo-European ancestry, the ancestral worldview of northern Europe from where most stem. In general, these people are merely reacting against the Christianity and Christian values that



they had known while growing up. They fail to realize that they don't have to make things up as they go along; they can reclaim their own ancestral philosophy which could not only provide them with a cohesive and workable value system but a sense of history and historical pride as well.

Those wishing to "find their roots" in an earth-based religion might do well to look in their own backyard.

"To moot a man should ride washed and fed

Even if he is not well dressed.

No man should be ashamed of boots or breeches,

Nor even of a horse that's no good"<sup>5</sup>

There is an integrity and a sense of comfort in being able to embrace one's own ancestral values even though they might not look as pretty as some others on the surface. No one needs to "look good" for "by his actions will the man be known."

Since the late 1950's, there has been a move to restore various Heathen religions of northern and eastern Europe as accurately as possible. This appears to have been an off-shoot of the appearance of the earth-based religions á la Frazer/Robert Graves, particularly a branch known as Wicca started in its modern form by Gerald B. Gardner. These "restored" religions started with Druidism and Celtic Christianity, but now includes Romuva (Slavic), Hellenism (Greek), and the Ása Faith (Germanic), plus a variety of smaller groups. Most of these groups have attempted to reconstruct the ancient religions as accurately as possible basing their information on literature, court records, archeology, and folklore both ancient and modern, utilizing comparative approaches similar to those used in this book.

The Ása Faith, or Ásatrú as it is called in America (Odinism, Vanatrú or the Northern Way), appears to have begun in its most current regeneration in the early 1970's, and although its membership is still relatively small in numbers, it has grown into an international organization and continues to attract members at a slow even pace. Some of the groups have attracted members also associated with neo-Nazism while others, in an attempt to "clean up" the Germanic image, are very vocal about being opposed to any kind of intolerance based on "ethnicity, creed, color, sexual preference, or any other divisive criteria," to use their own words. There are at least two dozen regional councils in the United States alone.

These organizations stress the reconstructed religious aspects of ancient Teutonic peoples as well as the practice of spiritual values of everyday life. They in no way are forceful in their observance festivals; participation is voluntary, there are no initiations, and the only purpose of the gatherings is to honor the lineages of

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<sup>5</sup> Page, R. I., p. 142.

individuals, the ancestors, the land and land spirits, and the Gods through acts based on the spiritual principles of the ancient Germanic peoples.

The purpose of these approaches is to allow the individual to act in such a way as to be in accordance with the knowledge of the Tree and its currents without actually having any direct, conscious access to knowledge. Accessing knowledge directly is an arduous path requiring sacrifices that many are not willing or are unable to make; this path will be discussed in greater detail below. But, engaging in proper action, i.e. those actions which are of maximum benefit to all, has the effect of bringing quality to life. One can eat in a healthy fashion, take care of the body with only minimal knowledge of medical or dietary sciences, so it goes with acting in a spiritual manner to maintain spiritual health.

There are ways to access knowledge, albeit in a slightly indirect fashion through the use of symbols, without having to engage in years of sacrifice and strenuous searching: the Germanic forms of divination. There may have originally been many forms of divination practiced by the ancient Germanic peoples, but only a small handful have been passed down through the lines of folklore. The main forms of divination as of the 20th century are omens or “lucky-signs” (ON *heil* = “omens of luck”) and the “reconstructed” reading of runes. The third method is not often thought of as divination but is more a way to “change luck” through minimal action: hex-signs and songs or charms.

Divination, in the old Germanic sense, is like throwing small objects into the Well of Urð and watching the patterns that form. Unlike many other forms of divination in use around the world which purport to read the future, the Germanic forms read only the present or the past. Anciently, divination was used to glimpse a situation in a broader scope than what would normally be possible so that changes could be made as necessary. “Reading-the-future” is inconsistent with the Germanic worldview. For many of the modern reconstructionists, divination is considered to be “reading the waters in the Well of Urð” or as it is usually called, the Well of Wyrð.<sup>6</sup>

The Germanic idea of reading omens is a very complex lore involving much time out in nature. An omen or a lucky-sign is an object, animal, bird, fish or plant that is situated in a background in such a way that it carries some kind of meaning for an individual. Modern psychology has been using various oracles for years for determining the unconscious or subconscious *status quo*. It is interesting that some sciences have taken up the use of divination, particularly the *I Ching*, for the same reasons that the Germanic peoples did: to read the present.

“But what significance has such ‘fortune telling’ for our own time? Even those who accept the idea that the *I Ching* is a storehouse of wisdom will

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<sup>6</sup> See Edred Thorsson’s *At the Well of Wyrð* (Samuel Weiser, New York, NY) 1988.

find it hard to believe that consultation of the oracle is anything more than an experiment in the occult. It is indeed difficult to grasp that more is involved, for the ordinary person today consciously dismisses all divining techniques as archaic nonsense. Yet they are not nonsense. As Dr. Jung has shown, they are based on what he calls the ‘principle of synchronicity’ (or, more simply, meaningful coincidence) . . . . It is based on the assumption of an inner unconscious knowledge that links a physical event with a psychic condition, so that a certain event that appears ‘accidental’ or ‘coincidental’ can in fact be physically meaningful; and its meaning is often symbolically indicated through dreams that coincide with the event.”<sup>7</sup>

In essence, Ms. Jacobi is saying that the use of a divination system helps people to look a little more closely at their lives, to notice, maybe, a couple of events which are unfolding at the moment and which do not appear to be related, and by bringing these events together in the mind, they are able to plan a course of action which is in harmony with the rest of the world. The reading of omens functions pretty much the same way as does the *I Ching*, the only differences being that there is not a consistent method for interpretation, and the signs are read directly from nature as opposed to throwing coins to create “signs.”

There is no clear cut Germanic system for reading or interpreting lucky-signs, and neither the sagaic or the eddaic literature offers much in the way of what these signs might be except for a small handful of instances revolving around stumbling at the threshold before going out which is considered to be unlucky. However, Jacob Grimm in his *Teutonic Mythology* has recorded thousands of these that were still in use during the early to middle 1800’s. Anyone wishing to access knowledge through the method of reading omens will find this four volume set of books indispensable both for descriptions of the signs themselves and their interpretation.

It is prudent to keep in mind, however, that the “signs” recorded by Grimm may be borne out the Germanic mind but it is a “mind” that had evolved after the conversion to Christianity. On the other hand, many of the “signs” have exact parallels in neighboring cultures which did not convert until the mid-1400’s with lingering pockets of heathens remaining until the middle of the last century. Again, comparative religion can be of some benefit here especially when the cultures themselves share many beliefs and practices.

From the point of view of the ancient Germanic worldview, because an omen has “caught one’s attention,” one has already participated in an event which is related to other events, and as pointed out in Chapter 1, no events occur in isolation. All events occurring at any given moment are related to all other events occurring at

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<sup>7</sup> Jacobi, Jolande, “Symbols in an Individual Analysis” in *Man and His Symbols*, Carl Jung, ed. (Dell Publ. Co., New York, NY) 1968 p. 358.

that same point in time and are laid down as a single complex layer (*ǫrlög*) within the Well of Urð. To see a particular bird, a cuckoo, for example, engaged in an activity which it normally would not engage in, such as singing during the wrong time of day or flying in an abnormal fashion, implies that there are other out of the ordinary conditions taking place in the world to which the cuckoo's behavior is related; the cuckoo's behavior is a signal, then, rather than a supernatural event. The cuckoo's behavior is like the warning light in a car; one needs to understand "the meaning" of the light to know what is happening in some hidden place in the engine. Understanding relationships and connections helps when one is reading some of the odd interpretations in Grimm's.

When using any system to access knowledge from the Well of Urð, it is important to have a consistent worldview. Every worldview, and there are many, is like the logic behind a secret code. By understanding how a code is constructed, one is able to interpret messages with little difficulty; however, if one does not understand the logic behind the code, a message is nothing more than a series of curious symbols on a page. Without an understanding of the fine relationships between events and a method for seeing the role that a lucky-sign plays within the complex layer of events, an omen is just a curious, isolated occurrence and any attempt at interpreting the sign is futile. It is the relationship between the individual, the sign, and the "unknown" of the same layer of events which lends meaning to the sign; this is the background against which the omen plays that was mentioned earlier. When approaching the reading of Germanic lucky-signs, it is crucial to have a good grasp of the Germanic worldview.

In the mid-1970's, a man named Ralph Blum in the now fairly well-known *Book of Runes*<sup>8</sup> created a system for using the ancient Germanic script, known today as runes, as a form of divination. The idea was that each letter in the Germanic FUPARK (Germanic alphabet; the name *fuþark* is actually the first six letters of the alphabet: F U Þ A R K) carried with it a specific meaning. The book and its methods were really a first attempt at "reconstruction" of a Germanic system of divination recorded by Tacitus in *Germania*:

"For omens and the casting of lots they have the highest regard. Their procedure in casting lots is always the same. They cut off the branch of a nut-bearing tree and slice it into strips; these they mark with different signs

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<sup>8</sup> Actually, the use of runes for divination is older than Blum's system by at least one hundred years, at least as far as can be accurately traced without getting into much speculation. Avid *runesters*, as they are often called like to trace the roots of their system back to Tacitus, but the proof of this is rather speculative. Additionally, these same folk disregard Blum's system as being both artificial and non-Germanic and not without reason. Much has been written on the area of runes which is far more traditional and accurate. The reader is referred to Edred Thorsson's, Kveldulf Gundarsson's, or Jan Fries' books for more acceptable runic divination systems.

Figure 7.1. The carved FUPARK



and throw them completely at random onto a white cloth. Then the priest of the state, if the consultation is a public one, or the father of the family if it is private, offers a prayer to the Gods, and looking up at the sky picks up three strips, one at a time, and reads their meaning from the signs scored on them. If the lots forbid an enterprise, there is no deliberation that day on the matter in question; if they allow it, confirmation by taking of auspices is required. Although the familiar method of seeking information from the flight of birds is known to the Germans, they also have a special method of their own—to try to obtain omens and warnings from horses.”<sup>9</sup>

Although there had been systems created in Germany by secret esoteric groups during the first part of this century, Blum’s system was the first to become widespread outside of occult circles and became a very popular item in New Age catalogs.

Blum’s system was not based on the Germanic worldview, however, and another, a young student at the University of Texas, writing under the pen-name of Edred Thorsson, sought to correct this and, eventually, wrote a trilogy of books (see the reading lists at the end of this book) setting the runic system of divination within the Germanic worldview. He based much of his material on Bauschatz’ material presented in *The Well and the Tree*.<sup>10</sup> Although Thorsson presented fairly solid evidence for a historical precedence of this reconstructed system, it is not known exactly what was written on the “slips” of wood described in Tacitus. Tacitus was describing either very early Germanic people or possible even early Celtic, and since this second hand description came from so early on, it could be argued that “slips” were actually an early form of dice or lots, or that they were marked with non-runic symbols. Thorsson and those following in his footsteps used both sagaic and eddaic material to lend credence to their theories:

*“I know that I hung on the windy tree*

*for nine long nights*

*pierced by a spear –Óðinn’s pledge–*

<sup>9</sup> Tacitus, S. A. Handford, tr., *Tacitus: the Agricola and the Germania* (Penguin Books; London, UK) 1970, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> See Chap. 2 for a fairly comprehensive overview of Bauschatz’ work.

*given myself to myself.*

*No one can tell about that tree,*

*from what deep roots it rises.*

*They brought me no bread, no horn to drink from*

*I gazed toward the ground.*

*Crying aloud, I caught up the runes;*

*finally I fell.”<sup>11</sup>*

and

*“He who would read the sacred runes*

*given by the Gods,*

*that Óðinn set down*

*and the sage stained with color,*

*is well advised to waste no words.”<sup>12</sup>*

Right or wrong, no one will ever know. The runic divination system is well constructed, fits well within the Germanic worldview as it is understood today, and, overall, is very workable as a form of divination for thousands of people. It is a way that folk of Northern European heritage can participate in their own ancestry.

The third method for indirectly accessing knowledge, however, is probably the most dubious: the use of hex-signs, charms, or incantations. Oddly enough, many 20th century rationalists think nothing of saying prayers before going to bed, or if they are atheists, to say affirmations in the mirror in the morning, to go to a hypnotist to quit smoking, or to attend a weekend seminar on Neurolinguistic Programming all of which are little more than updated versions of the same thing. The point in this simple form of so-called “magic,” or “magick” as the modern occultists like to spell it to differentiate it from the sleight-of-hand form of juggling, is to bring the individual’s subconscious mind in line with what is desired or is necessary. Modern researchers in the area of so-called psychic phenomena such as James Randi, a stage magician and modern debunker a la Harry Houdini, have attempted to show implicitly that no application of “magic,” as far as anyone has been able to prove, has any effect on the laws of probability whatsoever. On the other hand, people who

<sup>11</sup> Terry, Patricia *Poems of the Elder Edda* “Sayings of the High One,” Sts. 138-39 (Univ. Of Pennsylvania Press) 1989.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* “Sayings of the High One,” St. 83.

practice this art-form swear by its effects, as do the religious folk with their prayers, hypnotists and their clients by mesmerism, positive thinkers by their affirmations and Neurolinguistic Programmers by NLP. Whatever the reality of magic is, many people are obviously comforted by it, and a comfortable life is what most really seek.

The tradition of creating hex-signs is ancient and has continued into this century relatively unbroken in conservative areas like Pennsylvania and some of the other, surrounding states in the northeastern United States where there is a large population of people with Germanic ancestry. Good *Hexemeeschder*, as the makers of hex-signs are called in Pennsylvania Dutch are called, are few and far between in this day and age although Reconstructionists can be found fairly easily.

Lee Gandee was a practicing *Hexemeeschder* in rural West Virginia and authored the book called *Strange Experience*<sup>13</sup>. In this autobiography, sadly no longer in print, he explains in a typical Germanic fashion that the purpose behind the creation of a hex-sign was the same as that behind saying a prayer, so that the Powers outside the scope of man could hear and intervene on the individual's behalf. In a chapter entitled "The Strangest Prayers are Painted," he explains the construction of the Germanic hex-sign which includes the painted portion of the hex, the "painted prayer," but also spoken and written prayers.

Progressing backwards in time, in 1819, John George Hohman wrote *Der Verborgene Freund* or *Pow-wows or the Long, Lost Friend*, which is a manual still in print and still in use in the eastern portion of the United States. Although this small book contains no Pennsylvania type hex-signs as described<sup>14</sup> by Gandee in *Strange Experience*, the construction of the charms have the same three-fold format: drawn (not painted), spoken and written. Of course, the charms were originally written in German with a Christian slant, but many of the techniques utilized such as the times for the administration of medicines or the "use of limbs growing from the eastward side of the tree, cut before the sun's rise" have direct parallels in the Anglo-Saxon leechbook known as the *Lacnunga* written around 1000 CE.<sup>15</sup> There are many aspects of the Germanic Heathen tradition which have suffered gaps in time, but the creation and use of Germanic charms has come through an unbroken line starting far back in the Heathen Age although most of the charms as they have been documented are colored by a very thin veneer of Christianity.

In 1989, Stephen Flowers (a.k.a. Edred Thorsson) translated *The Galdrabók*, an Icelandic manuscript written between 1550 and 1650 CE, from Icelandic into

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<sup>13</sup> This book is sadly out of print but was originally published by Reward Books, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, in 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Hohman, John Geo. *Der Verborgene Freund* or *Pow-wows or the Long, Lost Friend* (Fulton Religious Supply Co.; Brooklyn, NY) not dated.

<sup>15</sup> See Chap. 3, the discussion of the *Acre-bot*, regarding the history of the manuscript called the "Lacnunga."

English. The book contains a text of 47 charms in the three forms (drawn, spoken and written) mentioned above; this time, however, the Christian coloring is either extremely thin or non-existent. Many of the spoken charms mention the Heathen Gods by name, the written prayers are in late runic script (still in use during the period that this book was originally committed to parchment), and many of the signs are of strange, angular shapes, probably, according to Flowers, stylized runic bind-runes, which are much like the overlapping letters of a modern monogram but with magical significance as opposed to simply being the initials of someone's name. Although the original text was Icelandic instead of German, one can still see the Germanic technique of the three forms.

As mentioned above, there are texts from around 1000 CE, either a compilation of charms, such as the *Lacnunga*, or discussing the use of charms within the context of a narrative, such as in Egil's Saga:

“Then the queen and Bard marked the horn and passed it to the beer-server. She took it to Egil and asked him to drink it. Then Egil drew out his knife and stabbed it into the palm of his hand. He took up the horn, carved runes on it, and rubbed in the blood. He said:

*‘I hatch the runes on the horn,*

*help seal each spell with blood.*

*Now, hear the nostrum I’ve*

*notched on this wild-ox horn.*

*Let’s booze as we think best*

*beer those cheerful girls poured.*

*Bard’s marked it. What’s that mean?*

*Mischief? Well, let’s find out.’*

The horn sprang apart and the drink poured down into the straw.”<sup>16</sup>

This tradition shows the carving of runic symbols and the spoken charm as well.

Dr G. Storms wrote an analysis of Germanic magic, particularly the Anglo-Saxon variety, called *Anglo-Saxon Magic* in 1948.<sup>17</sup> Most recently, Kveldulf Gundarsson, Warder of the Lore for one of the more popular reconstructionist organizations (The

<sup>16</sup> Fell, Christine, tr. *Egil’s Saga* (Everyman’ Library; London, UK) 1975, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Out of Print but published by the Hague and occasionally available through inter-library loan.



Ring of Troth<sup>18</sup>) published a book in 1990 CE, called *Teutonic Magic*<sup>19</sup>, which is a practical manual for those wishing to engage in this method for indirectly accessing knowledge. His book is well steeped in the ancient Germanic world view. Since that time many others have written books, some combining the Germanic tradition with the New Age or classical occultism of the Hermetic tradition while others, the reconstructionists, have written very good, well researched books. A reading list of some of these latter can be found at the end of this book.

People are all different in their individual needs, but certain needs are consistent for all. All want to be comfortable with life, in general, and want to make the journey from birth to death meaningful and fulfilling. Virtually all cultures have attempted to accomplish this by creating worldviews which help them extract the most out of life by offering a systems of interpretation which bring seemingly chaotic, random events in accordance with the needs of the community and the individual. Each culture, and each worldview, must take into consideration that a community is made up of a variety of individuals with different spiritual, emotional, and physical needs as well. To this end, any worldview offers a variety of approaches to life ranging from the strictly physical needs of the atheist/ agnostic to the more spiritual needs of others while at the same time offering heritage and a place in history. So it is with the Germanic worldview as well.

The most base, physical approach in the system outlined in this chapter is that of simply acting in a functional manner so as to "go with the flow" to use a modern phrase. Other approaches are more ritualized in nature such as the celebrations of the ancient holidays with an understanding of the purpose behind them as interpreted through the Germanic worldview. Other routes are more spiritual with methods for extracting deeper meaning out of the happenings of the world. Whatever the individual's needs are they can be met out of the same single system.

## TO DRINK AT THE WELL OF MÍMIR

In one way or another, all the methods outlined so far allow an individual to access the *qrlög* it has been laid down in the Well of Urð. Changing one's way of acting results in putting down good strong layers that permit a greater access to power/ luck, reading omens allows one to glimpse relationships between lineages

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<sup>18</sup> The Ring of Troth PO Box 25637 Tempe, AZ 85285-5637. [Since the original writing of this book, the address of The Ring of Troth has changed several times. At this point, it is easiest to track down the current address and officers online by typing "Ring of Troth" into a search engine such as Yahoo!, AltaVista, or Google.—B.L. 08.03.03]

<sup>19</sup> Published by Llewellyn Publishing out of Minneapolis, Minn. As of 08.03.03 this book is very hard to find and may need to be special ordered. There is an ebook version available which may be found online through one of the major search engines.

so that informed decisions can be made, and the utilization of charms encourages one to act in such a way that interactions between lineages can be accomplished in a fashion that benefits all sometimes even seeming to defy the laws of probability. But, for those so compelled, there is a method for gaining direct access to knowledge, and this path has to do with the Drinking of Water from Mímir's Well. It is the path of the Whole-maker or the Cunning Man mentioned in Chapter 2.

The story of the drink from Mímir's Well is short.

*Óðinn, the chief of the Æsir, approached Mímir, the wisest of giants and the Keeper of the Well, to ask if He too could drink from the Well of Knowledge. Mímir was agreeable but told the Allfather that it was necessary to leave a sacrifice. For a single draught of the Water, Óðinn left His eye in the Well, but from the draught, He received immense knowledge and an almost unquenchable thirst for more.*

Because of the events in the tale and in spite of its shortness, Óðinn had always been known to the ancient Germanic peoples as the "One-Eyed God." The tale was of common enough knowledge that most graphic or plastic representations depict Him with only one eye, but why there is only small mention of it in the eddaic or sagaic literature is not known. Perhaps, originally, there was a more complete tale that has since been lost or, maybe, the tale of the draught was part of a larger tale. No one knows for certain.

There is another tale involving Óðinn and one called Mímir. Although some have debated whether this is the same Mímir,<sup>20</sup> Snorri Sturluson demonstrates no doubt in the *Ynglingasaga*. After the war between the Æsir and the Vanir was over, hostages were exchanged. One of the hostages sent by the Æsir was one called Mímir (Mimr), and the Vanir were not completely satisfied with the trade-off. So, as a sign of contempt

“they seized Mímir and beheaded Him and sent the head to the Æsir. Odhin [sic] took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer Him and tell Him many occult things.”<sup>21</sup>

Simek summarized the debate as to whether there were originally two beings or one.

“In the sagas of the Icelanders speaking heads are known but written of in different contexts. They are particularly well known from shamanic practices,

<sup>20</sup> A discussion of this debate and its proponents can be found in Simek's *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (D. S. Brewer; Cambridge, UK) 1993, pp. 216-217.

<sup>21</sup> Sturluson, Snorri *Heimskringla*, Lee Hollander, tr. (University of Texas Press; Austin, TX) 1964, p. 8.

but they are also known in Celtic areas where the link can be found between an oracle-speaking head and a spring. Therefore, it is not necessary to try to separate the tales of the speaking head of Mimr and the wise Mímir into two distinct myths”<sup>22</sup>

At least by Snorri’s time, the beings were considered to be the same.

In recent years, this particular myth has received much attention, as has the tale of Óðinn’s hanging from the Tree to receive the runes. Ralph Metzner’s book cited in several places in this book, *The Well of Remembrance* (the name Mímir is etymologically related to the word “memory”), is even named after the Well. Much of this speculation comes from a growing interest in the area of shamanism both ancient and modern (called “neo-shamanism”). Some of these researchers interpret the tale so that Óðinn has not really lost his eye but keeps it closed so that He can look constantly inside himself, the eye of self-reflection; others think that the eye allows him a different perspective of the world, one that is separate from Himself. Neither psychological nor literary interpretations will serve the purpose here, however. Only the idea that the Well exists and can be drunk from is important.

Before moving on to the discussion of the Well, the matter of the Whole-maker needs to be made clear. There are obvious shamanic elements in much of the eddaic poetry, and with these observations, there are arguments both for and against the idea that shamanism in any form played a role in the development and maintenance of the Germanic religious, agricultural, and medical practices. The term sometimes equated with northern shamanism is *seiðr*, and many others interpret this to mean simply a form of divination. Gundarsson, in a lengthy review of both eddaic and sagaic sources, concludes his position by stating

“It is, thus, fairly clear that the Norse (and probably, as far as we can tell) the other Germanic peoples *did not have their own shamanism* [my emphasis]. However, it is also clear that they sporadically incorporated shamanic elements into their magical practice and a few of these elements may even have survived from earliest times.”<sup>23</sup>

He further goes on to say that any speculation that shamanism’s being a part of early Teutonic culture is a distortion or a misrepresentation of the belief system of the Germanic forbears. It should be mentioned that Mr. Gundarsson speaks as one of the reconstructionists, being the Warder of the Lore for one of the largest ’Ása-faith reconstructionist groups and, as such, has a vested concern in the proper reconstitution of the beliefs of his ancestors.

<sup>22</sup> *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, R. Simek, p. 217, 1993

<sup>23</sup> Gundarsson, Kveldulf ”Spæ-craft, Seiðr, and Shamanism” *Idunna*, vol. #27, Midsummer, 1995.

Gundarsson's definitions of shamanism, in the body of the article are based primarily on Mircea Eliade's classical definition from *Shamanism; Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*<sup>24</sup> based on descriptions of practice from the Tungusic and various other Siberian tribes. Although he clearly states that shamanism was not a core of Germanic culture as far as can be ascertained from written or archeological sources, he softens his stance, seemingly, for those readers involved in neo-shamanic practices, that

“some form of shamanism was probably practiced by the earliest inhabitants of Northern Europe, who were hunters and gatherers and, for a time, reindeer herders. It should be noted that, whether or not the Germanic people practiced genuine shamanism in the historical period, these crafts are ultimately part of the Northern Heritage and . . . the reconstruction of shamanism within the [Ring of] Troth is wholly fitting.”<sup>25</sup>

His position, though, that well-wishing New Agers are fully capable of contaminating ancient Germanic spiritual philosophy is indeed correct since in the past decade there have been numerous books written on the topic of “Shamanism in such-and-such Culture” which are filled to the brim with gross errors of negligence, and faulty, unreliable, and unrealistic information, misinformation, deceptions, and outright lies. For anyone following the path of the Reconstructionist, such writings are abhorrent and an abomination of the greatest magnitude. Some of the books which contain questionable, inaccurate, unreliable information can be found in the reading lists at the end of this book.

On the other hand, there is a very large percentage of authors who have suspected that a form of Norse or Germanic shamanism did indeed exist. Even the foremost Mircea Eliade devoted a portion of a chapter in his *Shamanism* to the probability of its existence, but again his arguments are based on his own definition of shamanism. Eliade's arguments are *a priori* using Siberian shamanism as the arbitrary standard against which all other evidence is weighed. For the purpose here, however, the only approach which can possibly be of any value while at the same time by-passing all arguments is an *a posteriori* investigation which forms definitions *after* the fact as opposed to collecting data to support a theory. In other words, define apples and oranges separately rather than attempt to compare them.

What is being sought for this discussion is characters belonging to a group of enigmatic figures in *any* of the Germanic literature of the time who

1. seem to engage knowledge with a method different than those described above,

<sup>24</sup> Eliade, Mircea *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton/ Bollingen Paperbacks, Princeton Univ. Press), 1974.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

2. are described as having powers which do not fit into the usual (and acceptable, at the time) making of charms or magical use of runes,
3. report visionary and, consequently, direct access to knowledge rather than through means of divination related to omens or the reading of lots (indirect access),
4. report purposeful, intentional and direct use of a “reality” other than “consensus reality,” and
5. play an accepted role from within the bounds of a community but not one that is necessarily liked, respected, or intentionally emulated.

In other words, people utilizing the methods outlined in the first part of this chapter are excluded because their roles have already been defined from within the bounds of a community. Also excluded are those occupations which pertain to the normal everyday organization of a community including warriors or traders; all these folk have titles and roles from within communities of their own. Even the berserks had an acceptable role and function within the community of warriors.

The ON roles which seem to have fell outside the community were those people who practiced as *spá-kona*/ *-maðr*, *seið-kona*/ *-mann*, or had knowledge of *fjölkyngi*, *görningar*, *gandreid*, or *hamfarir*. Knowledge and practice of these things were often considered by people of the late Viking Age to be an abomination (with the exception of the *spá-kona*) or a “perversion” as both Snorri and the poet of the poem called *Lokassenna* from the *Elder Edda* called it.

There are figures who fit these criteria quite well, Óðinn being the foremost. Óðinn is described in the *Ynglingasaga* as having a voracious appetite for knowledge:

“Othin [sic] had the skill which gives great power and which He practiced himself. It is called seith [sic] [sorcery], and by means of it He could know the fate of men and predict events that had not come to pass; by it He could also inflict death or misfortunes or sickness, or deprive people of their wits or strength, and give them to others. But this sorcery is attended by such wickedness<sup>26</sup> that manly men consider it shameful to practice it, and so it was taught to priestesses.

“Othin knew about all hidden treasures, and He knew such magic spells as would open the earth and mountains and rocks and burial mounds; and with mere words He bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what He wanted. Exercising these arts He became very famous. His enemies feared Him, and His friends had faith in Him and in His power. Most of these

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<sup>26</sup> The actual term from the original is *ergi* which is discussed in some detail below.

skills He taught to the sacrificial priest. They were next to Him in all manner of knowledge and sorcery.”<sup>27</sup>

He is also said to have intentionally engaged in shape-shifting (non-consensus reality) while His body lay “as if asleep or dead,”<sup>28</sup> travel in animal-shape while entranced, and<sup>29</sup> had direct access not only to Mímir’s Well (as opposed to indirect access), as in the mythic tale above, but spoke with Mímir’s head physically (necromancy) which Snorri felt was different enough to report in a list of Óðinn’s other “odd” qualities. He fits all the criteria as reported above.

Many of the above skills are reported in literature and folklore sources as being available to the “average man” through the use of charms and access to power/luck, i.e., by practicing some of the methods as outlined above, but shape-shifting, working while entranced, and speaking physically with the dead (Mímir’s head), all, by their nature, took place outside of consensus reality. In the sagaic literature and in folklore both ancient and modern, there is a general agreement that these activities are not part of everyday, normal life although the working of charms, prayer, and medicine is part of everyday life.

There are many figures in the early Germanic literature who fall outside the realm of the norm for a given community but whose skills are utilized by the community by temporarily bringing these folk within the boundaries. The women known as the *seiðkonar* (seeresses) are reported not to have engaged in the normal activities of divination, such as the reading of lots or the taking of omens, for their information and are described as somehow being separate entities wandering from settlement to settlement being called in from the outside, indeed most of these did not even live within a community per se with the exception of the seeress described in the *Groenlendigasaga*. Egil Skallagrimsson, a master of runes and charms related to poetry, is described as a normal man who was able to perform extraordinary feats, but Eyvind Kelda in the *Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason* is described as a “sorcerer and exceedingly skilled in wizardry,”<sup>30</sup> the same words used to describe Óðinn earlier in the *Ynglingasaga*. The “Angel of Death” as described by Ibn Fadlan in his autobiographical tale of his travels among the Rus<sup>31</sup> also seemed to use techniques or methods other than the normal acceptable ritual, charms, or divination.

In the *Ynglingasaga*, Snorri records that the Germanic people of at least his period of time considered the practice of seið and other related sorceries to be

<sup>27</sup> Sturluson, Snorri *Heimskringla*, Lee, Hollander, tr. (Univ. Of Texas Press; Austin, TX) 1964, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>31</sup> Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion of the North* (Greenwood Press; Westport, CT) 1975, p. 272-73.

evil and accompanied by something called *ergi*. In general, the term is translated as having something to do with sexual perversion, and so was only practiced by women. There are several reasons for such a translation but the primary one seems to have come from comparative studies. In many circumpolar-shamanic cultures as described in Eliade's work, there is an enigmatic figure, neither man nor woman, called the "berdache" in French, who is a person of great power and is often the community's shaman. This coupled with the idea that *seiðr* was deemed proper only for priestesses seems to have resulted in the translation.

This translation of *ergi* seems fitting when one considers the line from the *Lokasenna* where Loki accused Óðinn of "womanish ways" (Hollander translation), but others have chosen to simply translate the original phrase *args athal* as traveling the world "in a wizard's guise" (Terry and Page translations). There were no written laws against homosexuality or against transvestitism prior to the conversion to Christianity (remember the intolerant Christians?), and none of the wizards in the sagas are described as being particularly effeminate or homosexual. One would think that if sexual inversion were the basis of loathing towards "wizards" that there would at least be some description of or allusion to such behavior in at least one of the many descriptions of the *seiðmen*, and there are none except where translators have chosen to translate the term *argr* as such. The Germanic writers of the Viking Age seem not to have been overly concerned about the sexual behavior of a man. Their laws and rules of conduct, however, are more concerned with societal roles, social standing, and loyalty to family, community and king. The perversion of *seið*, then, was most likely related primarily to acting the role of and dressing as a wizard. Apparently, there was something about this method of accessing knowledge which was considered perverse, but there is not enough evidence in ancient Germanic literature to point the finger at transvestitism or homosexual relationships between men.

The people known as the Saamí were notorious even during the Viking Age for their skills in magic and wizardry. Although their religion had much in common with that of the northern Germanic people, it also differed much. One of the main differences was their community's use of the *noaide*, or shaman, who played a central role in their religion. Secondly, their religious rituals seem to have incorporated the use of ecstasy to some degree where the Germanic religion did not although it could be argued that the use of mead or alcoholic beverages during the *symbol*, or the drinking bout which apparently accompanied many of the Germanic rituals may have approached this in some way. Thirdly, even though the *noaide* was the central figure in the Saamí community, most of the "common people" in the tribe were capable of shamanic ecstasy and were encouraged to work their own less powerful form of magic in their daily lives. To this end, the "Finns," as they were called by

the Scandinavians and visitors writing about the Germanics of the far north, were all considered skilled in magic.

From what is known about the religion and spiritual philosophy of the Saamí, they most likely resembled the Germanic peoples in a great many ways. The differences between the two groups seems almost not to have been two completely different religions really but variations of one another, at least in the north of Scandinavia. A comparable phenomenon exists today in many areas of the world where Catholicism is the predominate religion so that in Haiti and in the southeastern United States there exists Catholicism side by side with voodoo or Santería, and in the southwestern United States there is the Church and the “Siete Podres” or “Los Hermanos de la Luz y Sangré.” In Mexico, Central America, and South America, there is a use of the Saints by the common people which seems to be an unusual mixture of Catholic prayers and devotion mixed with spiritual techniques of the aboriginal culture. Such variations are not restricted to any particular ethnicity although even though a religion may have had its origin with one particular group.

These are one-way variations, however; one has to be Catholic to belong to Santería, but one does not have to belong to Santería to be a Catholic. Even though the Saamí religion greatly resembled the Germanic in terms of pantheon, spirit-world, and tales, their practical technique and approach was quite different except in areas of overlap (border zones) which also resulted either in or from intermarriage, dual-religionism, and cultural blending.<sup>32</sup>

The further north or east the culture in the ancient Germanic realm, the greater the number of reports of wizardry as opposed to simple charm-makers or diviners. Adam of Bremen reporting on the northern Norwegians said that

“all who pass their lives in Norway are Christian through and through, except for those who live far off across the arctic regions by the ocean. It is said that these people even now are so skilled in magic arts or spells that they claim to know what everyone over the world is up to. By their powerful chants they even draw ashore the mighty monsters of the sea, and by practice easily do all sorts of other things that can be read of in the scriptures about wizards.”<sup>33</sup>

Even though, upon light reading, it appears that he is writing of the Saamí, he is most definitely speaking of Norwegians, the Northern Germanic people because later

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<sup>32</sup> Since the time of this writing Thomas DuBois has written *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (U. Of Penn. Press, 1999). Mr. DuBois puts forth good evidence that there was a good deal of cultural borrowing between the Scandinavians of the Viking Age and the Finno-Ugric peoples, in particular, the Saamí. If the reader has an interest in this particular area, his book is well worth the dollars spent.

<sup>33</sup> Page, R. I. *Chronicles of the Vikings* (Barnes & Noble; New York, NY) 1995 p. 44.



in another paragraph, he discusses the Saamí or “Lapps” proper. In this particular passage, most likely, he is speaking of an already blended culture, a border zone, and a variation of spiritual philosophy which has already crossed the boundaries of ethnicity.

The *noaide* played a central role in the Saamí religion but this seems not to have been the case for the Germanic peoples at least in the sagaic or eddaic writings, but the figure of the wizard and the witch did present itself in these writings rather extensively so that this method for accessing knowledge must have been well-known to the Germanic peoples. James Chisolm, in a review of the Eddas and sagas for references to *seiðr*, *fjölkyngi*, and *görningar* (all forms of sorcery as opposed to charm-making), revealed a body-count of at least 150 different persons in Norway, Sweden and Denmark who were all considered to have had access to the knowledge of Mímir’s Well through wizardry or witchcraft. Less than a half dozen of these are listed as diviners, and even fewer are listed as functioning in any official or central capacity within the Germanic religion of the time. Without the central role in religion or society, they all fall outside Mircea Eliade’s definition of shaman.

In early Germanic society, it was customary that people who lived and functioned outside the auspices of a family, community, or kingdom and sets of social rules were greatly frowned upon. Berserkers, men who were capable of becoming totally overcome with rage in the fury of battle, were regarded with suspicion and tended to live on the outskirts of a town (probably for safety’s sake since they were known to kill both friend and foe in the chaos of battle) but were generally accepted, albeit cautiously, within the communities of warriors. Outlaws, however, people who had been disowned by their own community, were despised and loathed to such a degree that many of the adjectives describing them contain the word *vargr* (ON “wolf”) which was the most hated animal of northern Europe and was usually killed on sight; an outlaw was considered the lowest of human or animal forms and, according to the system of *vergild*, could be killed on sight with no legal need to compensate the family.

The description of wizards in the eddaic and sagaic literature usually showed a man or a woman who did not seem to have any firm ties to a family, community, or king, and when they were described as belonging to a community, i.e. living in the geographical area of a community, no binding ties to family or society are given. It is quite possible, then, that the claims of *perversion* on the part of the wizard had to do with this odd break from community, being neither part of a community nor quite an outlaw, a “fence-rider” with one foot within and the other without. There are a great many descriptions of wizards being killed for one reason or another but never any description of how compensation to the families were handled.

Curiously, Óðinn was often accompanied by “pet wolves,” and considering the

relationship between the word for “wolf” and the Scandinavian words and phrases which meant “outlaw,” one must wonder if the fact that these wizards were not associated with any family or community gave rise to the idea that these people were somehow viewed as being outlaws. Descriptions of them in the early literature certainly lead one to believe that they must have been either transient, as in the case of the traveling *spákonar* (“seeresses”), or living as hermits or eccentrics outside the protection of communities and, as such, would have been accorded the same adjectives as any other criminal.

In any society or culture, visionaries, eccentrics (literally, “outsiders”), shamans or any other such person who has access to “a different knowledge” have a penchant for disregarding societal roles and for going against the grain of social mores. Some cultures, such as the Samí, awarded these “odd characters” a special place in society which offered some immunity against the law. In a similar manner “Hole in the Sky,” an Ojibwa medicine man, described himself as “an evil man” and “greatly feared,”<sup>34</sup> but his society did not kill such people; because of the role he played within his community, he was enjoyed the right to live. Other societies seem not to have protected these people but allowed their wizards/ shamans to live most likely because of the services they provided (similar to way prostitutes and drug-dealers are allowed to live in modern America):

divination (*spá*), changing luck (*fjölkyngi*), psychopomp (“Angel of Death”), changing weather (*görningar*, *fjölkyngi*, *gandreið*), calling animals, fishes, etc. (*gandreið*), healing, soul-craft (probably all forms).<sup>35</sup>

The type of knowledge that these people dealt with often went far beyond that of the charm-makers and runemasters. Rather than simply “reading the Waters of Urð” to gain knowledge of *ǫrlög* so that actions could be adjusted accordingly, these men and women had “drunk directly from the Well of Mímir” and had acquired the knowledge and skills to manipulate events directly. They were no longer the marionettes on the stage like average people, as described in Chapter 2, but are the

Figure 7.2. Northern Seeress—photo from pub. dom.



<sup>34</sup> Landes, Ruth *Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin* (The University of Wisconsin Press; Milwaukee, WI) 1968, p. 57-67.

<sup>35</sup> This list is highly speculative based on how some of the border-cultures deal with these societal problems. A person who was capable of creating charms could, of course, create charms to handle all these situations; a rune-master, likewise, would have used runic forms of magic; a person trained by the Samí, trance-journeying or “diving” as they themselves call it.

stage hands “behind the scenes” manipulating and rearranging the unseen. To be able to do so, however, they had to leave the *stage of culture and society* placing themselves in the same position as the outlaw or the “vargr.” They worked by a different set of rules than their communities of origin (which may have, incidently, included the phenomenon of the “berdache”). They worked unseen by normal eyes, in the world of dreams and visions, and, because of this they were not to be trusted.

Óðinn, although chief of the Æsir, kept company with wolves—the most despised of animals, was an oath-breaker, was unfaithful to those who trusted in Him (including his wife), was a thief, a necromancer, traveled in disguise (a perverse behavior in a society where lineage and knowledge of lineage was important), was a liar, was able to murder by magic, and, generally, was not overly trusted by even those who put their faith in Him as a patron God. His behavior was often sociopathic and erratic not unlike descriptions of circumpolar shamans or Germanic or Celtic visionaries and saints. In spite of this, He was tolerated and revered, and even feared because of His knowledge and power to manipulate events. Such seemed to be the role of the northern wizard.

“Drinking at Mímir’s Well,” if this position can be accepted, had to have been a loathsome choice of lifestyle for the Germanic peoples, requiring a sacrifice not many were willing to give: the sanctuary of community for the freedom of the outlaw, the love of relatives and friends for their fear and derision. The knowledge to which they had access, if Óðinn’s behaviors can be used as the prime example, often required the sacrifice of lives or engaging in behaviors which were often counter to those commonly deemed acceptable so to attain or strive for goals which were far beyond the scope of understanding for the average man. In Óðinn’s case, all odd behaviors such as those mentioned above, and, including the one which Loki accused Him of in “The Insolence of Loki,”

“Be quiet, Óðinn! You never could

decide a fight fairly.

I know how often you have allowed

the weaker man to win!”<sup>36</sup>

were all towards a single end: the staving off of the Ragnarök. He acted in such a way to prevent the early demise the Tree, and in so doing, there were necessary sacrifices along the way including His own son and His own eye. It almost seems that He was compelled or being driven by a force outside Himself towards the preservation of the

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<sup>36</sup> Terry, Patricia *The Poems of the Elder Edda* (University of Pennsylvania Press) 1990, p. 76.

Whole. Indeed, saints and shamans both often describe their lives and the choices they have made as if they are being driven or forced by otherworldly forces.<sup>37</sup>

Óðinn's quest for knowledge was not quenched by his little sip from Mímir's Well. He has a voracious appetite for knowledge which often resulted in his leaving Ásgard to travel in disguise through other lands. In shamanic cultures, the shaman is often seen to have a never ending pursuit of knowledge which leads him to leave the village or community for periods of time only to return so that the knowledge gained can be put to use. In a way, this is very much akin to the literary motifs of "the Underworld Journey" or "the Hero's Journey" in which an individual is driven by either an internal or external force to leave the safety of his home only to return with hard-won wisdom and maturity which is then put to use within the community. The Germanic version of these motifs, however, placed the figure of the Whole-maker outside the bounds of the community, working for the benefit of the preservation on the Whole from without rather than from within as in shamanic cultures. Here, then, is the primary difference between the ancient northern Germanic and true shamanistic cultures.

The role of the wizard or Whole-maker in Germanic society was a precarious one. On the one hand, he or she filled a certain need within a community to bring it into Wholeness; on the other hand, whoever had dealings with a Whole-maker was taking a walk across thin ice. This feeling that one should deal with wizards gingerly has continued to survive in folk-culture so that even the Baum's Wizard of Oz or Tolkien's Gandalf fall into this in-between state of being neither good nor bad. The average man's purpose of task and goal in mind are often different than the Whole-maker's, and just because one has obtained assistance from one of this kind does not mean that all things are going to go well or that costly sacrifices will not need to be made. Here one is reminded that Óðinn often allowed favorite warriors to die in battle. The diviners, herbalists, and charm-makers served the community of man, but the Whole-maker served the higher purpose: the health and integrity of the Tree.

Back again to the problem, then, of definition and whether or not these people qualify as Norse shamans. Eliade early in his classic text on shamanism is quick to point out that "shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia."<sup>38</sup> He goes on to say that

"the presence of a shamanic complex in one region or another does not

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<sup>37</sup> See Joan Halifax' *Shamanic Voices*, 1979 and Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

necessarily mean that the magico-religious life of the corresponding people is crystalized around shamanism.”<sup>39</sup>

Because a culture has the elements of a shamanic complex, does not necessarily translate into the idea that a culture ever engaged in shamanism in its truest sense. Here, there is agreement between what was found by Mr. Gundarsson and the *a posteriori* approach taken here: the Germanic peoples do not seem to have ever engaged in shamanism per se, at least according to the writings which have been preserved. However, there is definite record of a phenomenon which correlates well with the knowledge to which shamans had and have access, to the skills they have demonstrated, and to a role, or at least part of a role, which shamans play within a community.

Some of the pieces of the “classical shamanic complex” found in Germanic culture were outlined above, but they are simply pieces and seem to have always been pieces. Wizards or Whole-makers, in Germanic folk-memory, often travel in the company of others, and this is most notable in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* where Gandalf in but one member of a “council of wizards” each demonstrating one or more skills of the entire shamanic complex, but with none actually practicing as a single independent unit, practicing all the elements. This division of labor also occurs in the sagaic, folkloric, and historical literature, where the “Angel of Death” functions as a psychopomp; the seeress in the *Groenlendiga Saga*, Þórrbjorg, functions as a diviner; Kotkell, his wife, Gríma, and their two sons, were death-bringers; Þórrveig, in Kormak’s Saga, was a changer of *ǫrlög*; and Heið, the völvu in Hrolf’s saga Kráki, was a hide-farer (“spirit-traveler”). There is no evidence that a single person did not practice several elements of the so-called shamanic complex or practice his art alone, although there is much evidence to the contrary, but there is also a large body of evidence that these people practiced in larger groups (much like the Midewíwin Society of the Ojibwa)<sup>40</sup> which may have given rise to the numerous legends of covens of witches meeting on certain mountain tops on the eves of Winternights, Júl, and Summernights. In all, there is no documented case where any individual actually functioned in the capacity commonly associated with the technical definition of “shaman.”

What existed, then, was a subculture of men and women who demonstrated powers beyond the average man, who had access to a wisdom which reached beyond the lineage of any individual person or community, who engaged in forms of trance or ecstasy to access their knowledge and to perform their acts, and who often banded together with others so that a group of specialists could function as a single, whole unit. These men and women were called *seiðmen* and *seiðkonar*, respectively, and

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>40</sup> See Landes’ book cited above.

these titles are commonly translated as wizards and witches. With the New Age titles of “witch” and “wizard” already being utilized for other practices, perhaps the original ON forms are best left alone or, as has been done in this book, are translated into something more meaningful to an English speaking audience such as “Cunning wo/man” (emphasizing *fjölkyngi*) or Whole-maker (emphasizing the ideas that one has access to knowledge of the “whole” and puts that knowledge into use to preserve “wholeness”).

A curious tradition which further leads one to the inevitable idea that the Whole-maker as has been described so far was common in the folk mind of the early Germanic people can be found in a lengthy poem called *The Heliand*.<sup>41</sup> This epic poem is an Anglo-Saxon re-telling of the New Testament. The story line is obviously Christian, but the author of the poem to make this character of Jesus seem believable in terms of strength, knowledge, courage, and power found it best to present Christ as a powerful Germanic wizard with an entourage of twelve “warrior-thanes” to whom He also taught the secrets of “sooth-saying” (divination while lightly entranced. i.e., *seiðr*) and of healing. Apparently, in the author’s mind, a person who had direct access to knowledge, power/ luck, and who functioned on Middle-Earth as the physical arm of a God, i.e. by action alone, had to have been a wizard or a Whole-maker hence Christ’s epithet of *Heliand*, the “Best of Healers/ Whole-makers.”<sup>42</sup> Oddly enough, this resetting of the tale of Christ is possibly one of the most complete and detailed descriptions of the life and death of a Germanic wizard, in spite of the obvious Christian intrusions, from this period of time.

In the epic, Jesus crosses cultural boundaries, and, although He had been born into a community, He forsook the community life to follow a path which He felt had been given Him. He negotiated between “clans,” healed by directly dealing with “evil little creatures,”<sup>43</sup> and by manipulating or protecting “life-force,”<sup>44</sup> dealt with the spirits of nature directly,<sup>45</sup> and because of His dubious position outside of community, was eventually “killed” in a manner which the ancient author obviously parallels to Óðinn’s hanging on the World Tree. To present Jesus to the Anglo-Saxons, the poet needed to place Jesus in a role which was acceptable within Germanic culture. He had to be depicted as somebody who understood the Germanic spiritual philosophy, who understood the need for the staving off of the Ragnarök (Apocalypse), and whose knowledge of all contained within the World Tree extended far beyond the concept of any single community’s *qrlög*: the *Heliand*, the Whole-maker.

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<sup>41</sup> Murphy, G. Ronald, tr., *The Heliand: the Saxon Gospel* (Oxford University Press, Inc.; New York, NY) 1992.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2 for discussions both of the epithet, *Heliand*, and of the “*kailo*-complex.”

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126-27.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 74-75.

The existence of this subculture of wizards, witches, and *seið*folk cannot be denied nor can their role or roles. The entire subculture functioned collectively as did the shamans of the Siberian culture. What is often forgotten, particularly in this so-called New Age, is that the shaman was not strictly a healer; he was creator/destroyer, healer/killer, maker of medicine/poison, black/white, evil/good. In the northern European culture, the polarities were often split apart creating the original Ása-pair Óðinn vs. Loki or Jesus (the *Heliand*) vs. Satan and continuing on down through folklore until reaching the modern counterparts of Tolkien's Gandalf vs. Saruman or the witches of the East/West versus Glenda and the Wizard in Baum's *Wizard of Oz*. The picture drawn in early Germanic literature, though, is that the figure of the wizard or *seiðman* is somewhere between good and evil, both loved and feared. Even the Tree Itself is being both destroyed and renewed at the same time. Whatever the situation may have been, no single figure existed in the Germanic culture; the "Angel of Death" had her entourage, Þórrbjorn needed her singer, Kotkell worked with Gríma, Óðinn depended on Loki. Each individual was always a fragment of the "whole" no matter how well rounded he or she was in skill. Shamans, within their culture, were often viewed as a collection of "whole-individuals"; on the other hand, a collective of all individual Whole-makers made up a single, "whole-collection."

There has always been a percentage of people who are, for whatever reason, driven by forces outside themselves to participate in the Universe as conduits for those forces. They carry within themselves access to power/luck which goes far beyond the straight forward access to lineage. These often do not fit well within a community and, consequently, are "loners" in search of a way of life which will permit them to live functionally. They see far beyond personal needs of any individual or even of any community. In the 20th century, these folk will often move from one spiritual philosophy to another, first yoga, then Buddhism, then New Age cults, then perhaps over to Catholicism. Many become alcoholics or drug addicts along the way because of their need to deal with ecstasy and other altered states. They have tasted the Waters of the Well of Mímir and, like Óðinn, are forever compelled to search for something to quench their insatiable thirst for knowledge. Without a clear world view, many of these live on the fringe of madness, although many others eventually make their way into therapy, ecstatic religions such as the peyote-imbibing Native American Church or Santería, or into insane asylums because they have no other way, in this current age of rationalism and science where the ordinary person is the standard up to which all others are held. A worldview which does not support such people dooms them.

On the other hand, the ancient Germanic world, offered them a place and a function in life. Gunnhild, daughter of Ozur Toti, was sent by her father to Finnmark

(Lappland) to learn sorcery,<sup>46</sup> and Vitgeir, living in Horthaland, one of a band of at least eighty sorcerers who was burnt in a hall with the wizard Rognvald Rettilbeini (son of King Harald Fairhair), when asked by King Harald to cease his practice replied with a verse:

*"No harm that we  
use wizardry,  
beldames' bairns  
and bonders, we,  
since Rognvald does,  
Rettilbeini,  
high-born Haraldsson  
in Hathaland"*<sup>47</sup>

Rognvald Rettilbeini, son of King Harald and Snoefrith Svasisdotter (a Saamí and a sorceress by heritage) practiced his art in Hathaland, and collected those bent to that persuasion around him. Apparently, Vitgeir did not feel that their presence in the world was doing anyone harm; he and the seventy-nine others were simply living in sanctuary under Rognvald and since King Harald "reigned peace with good seasons,"<sup>48</sup> one can assume that the only real crime committed by Rognvald was that he was a sorcerer and that his mother had bewitched the King into marrying her. The men and women who were so driven by the knowledge out of the Well of Mímir collected themselves together and lived out their lives on the edge of society neither completely in the wilderness as an outlaw nor protected by the bounds of society itself.

These folk's sense of sanity and community was filled by the Germanic worldview and also by the need of society for the practitioners' abilities as healers, diviners, psycho-pomps, and poisoners. As the northern countries became Christianized, these people became recognized either as saints or witches (wizards), and in some cases, the two were combined as in the folklore of the Scandinavian parsons and bishops of the early Renaissance who owned "Black Books," attended the "Black School," and regularly had dealings with the "Old Gods," the Devil, and demons.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Sturluson, Snorri *Heimskringla* L. Hollander, tr. (University of Texas Press; Austin, TX) 1964, pp. 86-87.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> See *Scandinavian Folktales* by Jacqueline Simpson (Penguin Books; London, UK) 1988, pp. 121-161.



For these people to function, however, it was necessary that the more ancient Germanic worldview was upheld and retained as can be seen in any of the Germanic manuals of charms, such as *Pow-Wows* or the *Galdrabók*, mentioned earlier.

As reinforced throughout this entire volume, the ancient Germanic worldview is a viable matrix for collecting, storing, working with, and making sense out of personal experience so that the community of all beings within the Tree, including Lærað Itself, benefit. By grooming the ties that bind all together, all are able to access power/ luck in their own individualized ways and according to their own needs. The bundle of lineages flowing through the Tree, the Waters of Life, are that which maintains the wholeness of the Tree and keep it from falling into eternal decay (the Ragnarök).

Over the centuries, society, in general, has lost its sense of overall vision, and, as a result, modern 20th century man is doomed to search for this vision. Until now, those of Germanic heritage have had to look elsewhere for a workable view of the world which has resulted in the hodge-podge, crazy-quilt mess of the New Age. Although *everyone* has a role within the ancient Germanic worldview, these seekers in particular have a special need for they have tasted the Waters of the Well of Mímir and without a home to go to they wander the world ever searching, but rarely settling to play out their role. At one time, the drinkers of these Waters were relegated only to the fringe of community because of their internal need for the chaos of wilderness, but now this chaos is rampant within the enclosure of modern cities. Because the overall worldview of modern Europeans has been corroded by the acid rains of the industrial age, their sense of community and singleness of purpose has fallen into ruin.

The so-called New Age has moved into these communities to fill the gaping holes slightly, but it is rootless without heritage or lineage. Heritage and lineage can be provided, but communities are also in sore need of the ancient healers/ poisoners; these people can bring massive changes that are now so necessary. The Tree/ Waters complex seems to be spewing forth these Drinkers-at-the-Well at an ever increasing rate, but without a single worldview, people of Germanic heritage are floundering, and because of its lost linkages to its own past, this culture carries with it the potential to do the most damage both because of its numbers *and* its strength of weaponry against other peoples and the environment. Indeed, not only does the potential exist, but this culture already has irreversibly damaged the world it lives in through its lack of foresight throughout the entire industrial revolution, the uprising of the Nazi philosophy, and its continued persecution of indigenous peoples as well as the environment in general.

The Tree is in need of *seiðfolk* more now than ever and this “need” is consistent with the ever-growing number of seekers-of-occult-knowledge. Without access to

lineage, however, the overall sense of responsibility to mankind, the environment, and, ultimately, the Tree Itself is lost resulting in the further leaking away of the Waters of Life through ridiculous wastage such as racism, mindless war, pervasive pollution and the overall lack of honor and respect for all things. This book encourages each to use his or her individual bents of nature, strengths, to help bring communities together not by fighting against but by working in conjunction with those of all cultures through the vision provided by their own sacred heritage.

Encouragement and fulfillment can only come by this culture's claiming its own past, right or wrong, good or bad, and by taking calculated steps to come back into its own place in this Middle-Earth. The need for a new generation of Whole-makers is urgent and is now.



## Chapter 8

# The Making of a Seiðman



The foregoing chapters presented the worldview of the Norseman both from a historical perspective and from an applicability to modern times perspective. It was heavy in quotes, I realize, but I felt that this was important since Asatru is a reconstructed religious worldview as opposed to the more eclectic views taken by New Age religions. For the Asatru folk pouring through historical texts is almost a religious act in itself comparable to the Catholics saying of the rosary. But, for the most part, seið is an area of Asatru which is poorly described in the historical texts. In fact, it is apparent from reading these historical texts, that seið was poorly understood even at that time.

I feel that the foregoing chapters were absolutely necessary to this chapter. Initially, when I began to write this book in 1990, I wanted to write about seið and its effect on me, but every attempt resulted in a miserable failure. The approach, then, that I decided to take was to present to the reader first and overview of the worldview of an Asatru man before attempting to write about a topic as nebulous and seið. In reality, this only makes sense since this is how I was made. For almost 20 years I was an Asatru man, but I had nothing to do with seið, i.e. the worldview existed long before the events that I'm going to describe now. If the reader has

read all the preceding chapters up to this point, then, he has followed my life in chronological order.

For the first 20 years of my life as an Asatru man, as stated above, I had nothing to do with seið and had basically grown to despise the eclecticism of the New Age. I've written a number of papers over the years describing my discussed at the "mix-and-match" approach of the Wiccans, pseudo- druids, and fake Native Americans (people of European ancestry parading about in Native American garb and participating in pay-per-event "sweats" and Sundances). I had made light of the fact that many of these had changed their names from their family names to "Indians sounding" names such as Willow Of Light, Owl Wolf, Singing Tree, etc. To this day, I harbor little love for this particular group of people although my heart has softened enough to pity them, to some degree, because they were lost and apparently are still looking for their history. They are generally a sad group of people grabbing and everything "mystical" that they can find.

Before I begin, I must stress the difference between spa and seið. Spá, as stated in earlier chapter, is a form of divination which has been taken to an artform/ performance level by Diana Paxson and her group, Hrafnar, out of Berkeley, CA. Although I have had some interaction with this particular group and I regard many of the members of this group highly, I do not practice spa. Seið, on the other hand, is more poorly defined in the sagaic literature, but is generally considered a form of magic which involves movement of the conscious portion of the mind out the body to interact with the other world to effect changes on Midgard. The plan, then, for this chapter is to describe how this came about in my life, and, hopefully, to more closely defined seið through narrative of my own personal history and practice.

## 8.1. The Death:

My personal history prior to my breaking point about twelve years ago was not atypical of young males in this day and age. By the time I was 35 years old, I had been married twice, had two children (one from each marriage), had been divorced twice, had a professional degree and worked on the cutting edge of my field in a very competitive fashion. Although I grew up in the late 1950s and lived through the hippie era, I had become something that I fully despised: a cutthroat yuppie. My philosophy of life (although I fully embraced Asatru) was simple: trust no one and take first so that you don't get taken. I was playing a game of King of the Hill and would do anything to scramble up to the top. I found that was easiest to beat the ones lower than me down further because I felt their corpses made a firm foundation. The ones up above me could be most easily handled through denigration

and disinformation; if everything worked out right, they quickly became one of the corpses below.

By 1990, I had become one of the big names in my field. Whenever anybody talked about who was actually doing cutting edge research my name always came up with my group of cronies. For quite a longtime this made me feel good about who I was until I realized that I was pretty much alone. Being King of the Hill is great but it is also very lonely and the corpses who form the foundation below don't make for very good company. Most people did not want to be around me for any great length of time. They were bored by my narcissistic tendencies. My family had left me, my children didn't want be around me, and my friends quit calling.

It was during the same period of time that I started to drink more than usual. "Usual" meant every evening. However, I was spending many weekends alone, drunk and often passed out. Looking back at the period of time I realize that I had burnt every bridge that I had. My breaking point came fast and hard.

One morning, a week after being fired from a good job "because of my attitude" I woke up and realized that the game was over. All my luck had been squandered away. From an Asatru point of view I was on the brink of death. Without luck, a human body cannot survive. Intuitively, I knew this. I resigned myself to my apartment to wait for death. I would like to say that death never came but it did. I never, to this day, have recovered any of my luck. On that day I became one of the walking dead.

Now, if I were in the reader's shoes, I would certainly question this last paragraph. "How poetic! How romantic sounding! But obviously you're not dead since your writing this book!" Then I would roll my eyes upward and make one of those sighing sounds that I often make one I've had my fill of a New Ager's rant. Let me just say that I'm not being poetic or romantic. That which I had built up over a time of 35 years completely fell apart before my eyes. I didn't care whether I lived or died, whether I ever saw my children again. I walked the streets of my small town in a daze, hollow-eyed, and severely underweight. I didn't care if I was clean or dirty, if my teeth were brushed, or if my hair had been combed at some point in the last week. My clothes were full of holes and were often dirty. Although I hadn't had drop of alcohol to drink during that time I walked about as if I were in the middle of a blackout and, in a sense, I was.

My consciousness, my *hugr*, was not often inside my body at the time. In general, my body was simply animated and my *hugr* would check in every once in a while to see if it was still alive. This is a common definition of death for Asatru or anyone else for that matter. The soul separates from the body, then the body is buried or burnt. In my particular case, however, the body didn't die (although some who knew me at that particular time would say that whether my body had died or not

was debatable). It was at the same time that I contracted pneumonia which began on December 18, 1991, and ended on Sept. 3, 1992.

Now I must talk about the changes in my body that occurred during that period of time. These were not changes in this sense of the changes that hormones make at puberty; these were a complete restructuring/rebuilding of my body as would take place under a surgeon's knife after a severe car crash. My surgeons were not people; they were ghosts.

The first ghost who came to me and spoke in my madness was what is called in common language "pneumonia." Pneumonia spoke to me from the first day (12/18/91). I was told that time that was being necessarily rebuilt and that he would be living with me for the next ten months. I was also told that time that I was completely devoid of luck in that my fate was in the hands of ghosts and that there was nothing that I can do to interfere with their procedures. Of course, I didn't believe a single word of it. The way I figured it, I was hallucinating (or something along those lines). I told the hallucination/phantasm that I would easily override the silliness of the whole thing by scheduling a doctor's appointment and getting a prescription for some strong and antibiotics. To my surprise the ghost responded with "Go-ahead, do whatever you think is proper, but we run the show now. The timeframe of ten months stands no matter what you do and you can either make it hard on yourself or roll with it." This was rather shocking news to me but I went ahead and scheduled the doctor's appointment anyway. The reader must understand that I am naturally a skeptic, and skeptics don't generally put the fate of their lives in the hands of hallucinations or dreams.

I went to the doctor who confirmed the pneumonia and promptly started a round of antibiotics. These were well but only for period of about two weeks. I was sick that was losing weight quickly. I dropped down to 138 pounds. My face was hollow as is common with those hospitalized with pneumonia. I continued with my skeptical approach throughout the entire course of the pneumonia and returned to the doctor for antibiotics three more times. Oddly, I was never hospitalized for the disease although I'm not sure why did this day. I've seen my medical chart that I doctor's office (I work in the medical field so have access to my own chart) and the diagnosis at that time was severe chronic pneumonia with pleurisy). Throughout this time the hallucinations or madness continued and I was never able to accept that "pneumonia and his cronies" were running the show until Sept. 3rd, 1992.

Over the course of the next ten months I was visited by a number of ghosts who continue to accompany me to this day. The first ghost was that of the Fly Agaric, *amanita muscaria*, which scared me. This ghost came in several dreams/hallucinations. "He" told me who he was, where and when he could be found, and how he was to be prepared. Eternal skeptic that I am I looked up Fly Agaric in not just one

but several mushroom books, studied the chemical makeup of the mushroom, read numerous reports of amatoxic poisonings, and concluded the hallucination to be not only wrong but dangerous. Fortunately, as far as I knew, the mushroom was extremely rare around these parts so while I continued to have the dreams and basically ignored what they had to say. The second ghost/hallucination which came was that of a huge flower that seemed to grow in some high mountainous region of South America. In my mind this was very fortunate because this particular ghost was not very nice. In fact, he was very threatening, warrior like: all business and dangerous to deal with. This ghost was quite different from the Fly Agaric, who was a rather friendly, funny, elflike creature. The ghost of the flower seemed to be more like an evil demon something like a Catholic devil type creature never to be trusted. My life went on in an unpredictable fashion and I would encounter both of these ghosts again.

The plant ghosts described above haunted me through the winter of 1991. There was a change in my disease, however, by March of 1991 and the hallucinations became much more intense. By this time I had tried and failed with the second round of antibiotics. The ghosts began to arrive in small groups. These, different from the plant ghosts, began to take me to places, nasty, dark places, in my dreaming. Also differently, these ghosts began to dismantle my body by ripping, slashing, tearing, and cutting. Through the spring of 1991 I was torn apart several times, had holes torn in various parts of my body, had appendages removed through not-so-surgical procedures, and in general, I was battered, bruised, and beaten severely. My sleep world had become a dungeon of horrors. Physically, I was required to sleep in a sitting position only because lying down would result in spasmodic coughing which could not be stopped. The pleurisy had developed to a point where I had to wrap my chest tightly with an ace bandage just to breathe. I hated to go to sleep because of the dreams but I had no choice because my body would not stay awake.

Through the spring my life consisted of pain and nightmares. Physically, I was never comfortable. Mentally, I was ravaged. At one point, birds of prey came and ripped open the top of my head just to let the wind pass through from the top of my head out through my anus. The pain was immense and unbearable. Another time, I was wandering through some underground caves, was snatched up by a giant of a man, had my head torn from my body, and my body was slowly cut with giant razor blades into hundreds of pieces like human stew meat. Each cut burned. The parts of my body were thrown into three large stewpots with boiling water that looked as if it had been dredged up from the bottom of a swamp. The water burned my skin somewhere way beyond 3rd degree burns. My bones, when the flesh had fallen away to the bottom of the sewage pot, were dredged up and beaten on an anvil with a huge sledgehammer until they were little more than powdery sludge. Each ring of

the hammer shot pain through my head as if I were being beaten with a baseball bat. Eventually, my skeleton was beat back together. The giant of a man informed me that he was placing one extra small bone in my neck. He beat skin together and draped it over my frame. I could see myself from above and I looked like something from a horror film like *Night of the Living Dead*. The dreamtime lasted for three days but I'm not sure how long the dream actually lasted and physical time. No matter, the pain was intense, I was horrified, and seemed to last forever.

The hallucinations/ dreams lightened up somewhat after that experience, but they continued on for the next several years. They should mention that the dreams did not only take place during sleep but during the day as well. I would see ghosts in the forests high in the mountains, walking down the street, at work, and particularly at graveyards and funerals. It was as if a clear plastic sheet were always hanging down in front of me and on that sheet I could see the reflections of people standing behind me. I could see these people, they could see me (usually), I could speak with them and interact with them, but they were thin and translucent. This is really the best way that I can explain it. It was as if the Otherworld were somehow overlapping on to Midgard.

In September of 1992 I went to a fiddle contest in Santa Fe, NM. I was scheduled to play on a Sunday afternoon with a band that we had thrown together. Everything was prepared and we had practiced our numbers several times. I was sitting in the bleachers watching the bands who preceded us. About three bands before we were scheduled to play, I became extremely nauseous. My stomach started rolling, I was sweating profusely, I was becoming faint and I felt as though I were going to fall from the bleachers. I had a suspicion that I was going to fall into hallucination right there on the spot (remember, I still believed these to be the hallucinations) and I told my music partner that I needed to be driven home. At first, he thought I was joking but after he looked at me he realized that I was sick and probably needed to be driven to the hospital. He helped me down from the bleachers and over to the car and we left.

About 30 miles down the road it lifted. Pneumonia, the ghost, detached itself from me and I felt fine. In fact, I felt better than I could ever remember in my thirty-six years on this planet. I felt light, healthy, well rested. Pneumonia's parting words were "It is done. We are finished." It was at that point that for the first time I realized this wasn't a dream or hallucination but some kind of warp in the fabric of reality.

Being a skeptic, a voice felt somewhat queasy about talking in terms of ghosts. On the other hand, my experience with pneumonia over the past ten months left me feeling as if a good friend had just left for an extended vacation. And although I had come to accept pneumonia is not only having a life of his own separate from



mine, I came to realize that he also had a personality and a personal agenda. In a sense, pneumonia had moved in my mind from simply been a disease to being a complete personage, a ghost, as it were. The others were still more aligned with being dream characters or hallucinations, but that was short-lived.

About one week later, I was out collecting herbs in the deserts of NM somewhere south of Santa Fe, and for the first time I saw it: the South American devil flower lived here. I came upon the exact scene that I remembered from the dream of the winter before. The flower was huge with the very sweet, almost sickeningly sweet, scent and leaves stank somewhat reminiscent of crushed leaves of a tomato plant. That I had learned the proper method for approaching and collecting the plant came back to me as a memory. The plant's name is Toloache and the Latin name is *datura meteloides*.

As a medicine, the plant is very unpredictable and dangerous. It is not often used because of its unpredictability. In my 25 years in NM numerous people have died in respiratory distress from toying around with the plant as a recreational drug. However, it is much more common for people to ingest the plant and then commit acts of violence while on a 24-hour blackout. Some of these acts of violence are committed against themselves (like the man who stabbed himself through the skull with an ice pick which had to be removed surgically from between the cerebral hemispheres) and some are committed against others (shooting one's best friend under the influence of Toloache is common). Here I was approaching and collecting this dangerous plant using a ceremony which came to me in a hallucination.

Somewhere in early winter of 1992/1993 I was sitting with my music partner and, Richard, a friend of his. We were kind of chuckling about what an odd year I had experienced, and some point the dream about the ghost of the Fly Agaric came up in the conversation. Richard grew interested at that point. He said in his own quaint south Mississippi way "Hell, them ain't rare. They grow all over my land up in the mountains!" I was stunned and could speak for a moment. "Are you sure it's the same ones?" I asked. "Hell, yes. I get them by the hundreds, all over the place. Never would take them though." (He had a liking for recreational drugs and used them regularly.) I immediately felt strange as if the dream-ghost were reaching out from my sleepy memory guiding my movements so that I would be in just the right place at just the right time. His piece of land up in the mountains were to become my first collecting place for the Fly Agaric, and although I felt him to be exaggerating at the time, if anything, he was understating the numbers.

## 8.2. The Sick Come By:

My life, my new life, was no longer under my control. Events would occur so that I would be there just at the right time. I seem to be moved either in time or place to avoid car crashes and other accidents or I would be put in the path of an event which seemed to be occurring for my benefit. For a period of time it seemed that the hallucinations had switched places with reality. On the one hand I felt that I had very little control over my life, but on the other hand events were being guided from the outside so that I could live and grow. This is how it was when the sick began to come by.

The first few who had come by were like me: their luck had either been squandered like mine or had been damaged in some way or other. There was no real ceremony or distinct method for dealing with these people. I would simply circle us around with a rope which had been given to me by a river ghost. The rope wasn't really there to protect us as the New Age folk would try to tell me; it simply tied me together with the person that I was working with. (Actually, I don't work inside a "circle" like Wiccans mainly because as soon as I get started, I travel – the more about that later.) After a time, a song will come up which brings the ghosts. Some of them run and get information on the client, and some of them confer with one another (and me) to determine a proper course of action. From that point on the session develops itself.

I am uncomfortable using a term like "ceremony" for what I do. The word "ceremony" for me brings up visions of people droning on and on, quoting out of the books, calling on ancient names, and dealing with gods – this is not what I do. I go into a session, call on my friends to help, and from there we simply function as a team to get a job done. I have nothing to do with gods ever in my sessions. There is only me and my SWAT team of ghosts.

At one point during my hallucinatory phase, the pneumonia occupation, Odin approached me and held a spear up to my heart. He offered to teach me and take me under his wing. I found this to be a frightening and repulsive thought and so I refused. He made a few minor threats and then belted out an evil sounding laugh. Before he backed up (to allow me to escape), he made one little scratch immediately below my left breast. As soon as I was able, I turned tail and ran as fast as I could. I've never had dealings with any gods except Thor and only then on very rare occasions. I don't work with gods.

The healing sessions which I do with the sick are always the same in format. A short diagnosis by the team of ghosts is done to assess the situation and the plan of action is drawn up. Generally, although not always, either Fly Agaric or Toloache will offer their services. It's kind of like going to travel agent to help determine the best route to a place and to determine the best means of travel. Fly Agaric

is very lackadaisical and somewhat whimsical to travel with but Toloache is like sitting astride a rocketship. I've never worked with Toloache without some sense of trepidation. Of the two Toloache "seems" the more powerful but looking back over all the years I've worked with these two, it seems to be six of 1 and a 1/2 dozen of the other. The choice between the two really has more to do with advantage as opposed to power.

Once the plants have been prepared and taken the healing process is started. This generally involves much travel, collecting necessary items, and manipulation of the client internally. I don't really manipulate the client physically (although I do on occasion), but by this I mean that I manipulate the Flow of Waters inside him. First, it is necessary to figure out what the normal flow is supposed to be, what is blocking the efficiency of flow, and then to make some changes internally so that flow is normalized. Often there are "knots" inside the body which must be untied, cutaway, or bypassed.

When I am inside the body of the client I am functioning within a small landscape. It's a smaller territory than the rest of the world but it is complete with trees, rivers, rocks, beings (from large beasts to small 'critters'), small villages, etc.. The condition of the landscape shows me the client's overall condition. Sometimes it is very lush and verdant at other times it can be a dry, hot desert. The condition of Flow of the Waters tells me about their luck. The inflow end connects to their ancestry and their immediate family, and the output end tells me about their personal use of their own power/luck. Any point in the landscape can be damaged for any number of reasons. Sometimes, they have committed taboos (personal) against other beings either inside or outside their systems who have taken revenge; sometimes, they have taken on parasitic indwellers such as different kinds of diseases. There are methods and dealing with all these. Sometimes, they have simply squandered their luck like I did.

Interestingly, the sessions generally have very good results but the results are never noted immediately. Generally, the take up to two to three weeks before the effects are noted by the client. The only payment and I've never received is a hardy "thanks," and I have never been thanked and less than two years after a session. Apparently, it takes quite a long while for the healing process to advance enough for the client to realize what has happened. These weird timeframes have often puzzled me. However, while the sick may be very slow at consciously realizing their own healing, the dying are very quick.

### 8.3. The Quick Dead:

Early on I noticed how crowded graveyards seemed to be. I could walk into a graveyard and the place would be almost the deafening. Sometimes the ghosts would want my attention because flowers were tipped over at the gravesite sometimes they wished only to greet me. I've seen happy ghosts, sad ones, and disturbed ones. One time I entered a graveyard in southwest Virginia and the ghosts were all bickering with one another and gossiping (this was not a fun graveyard to be in).

I was curious from the outset why graveyards seemed to be so populated if the dead supposedly moved on to a Land of the Dead. It seemed odd that Christians were not in either Heaven or Hell. In working with the sick it is common for me to encounter entire towns of the dead but still I notice that the graveyards seemed to be full. This was explained me this way: The dead do not go to either Heaven or Hell rather they go to villages of their ancestors. These villages never seem full mainly because space in time are severely distorted in the other world. The graveyard, or specifically the grave, is an entry point to the village of the dead. It is also the point where the Flow of Waters occurs. An individual's ancestral luck flows from the grave of his family or his most immediate ancestor. By caring for grave of an immediate ancestor an individual is grooming the pathway through which the Waters flow. If this is neglected, particularly in a malicious way, the flow of ancestral luck can be stopped. If the individual is low in the area of personal luck, he will become ill. The grave then is the connecting point between this world and the other world.

Catholics and other Christians have a tendency to call their particular ancestral village "Heaven." "Hell" is created for an individual when he is ostracized by his ancestral village and is driven out into the Wasteland. This place, I suppose, can feel either hot or cold but is certainly uncomfortable for the individual mainly because they're not in the fold of their ancestors. The same holds true for heathens as well.

I always wanted to believe that heathens would somehow be different than Christians and that we have a better place to go to after death, but the bottom-line seems to be that we simply go to our ancestral home regardless of our religious affiliations. By the way, from what I can see, the dead worship in the same fashion as the living. Christians go to churches, and I would guess that heathens wind up worshiping alone as they often do here on Midgard (heathens, as a group, are too small to really have something like a church). I have to smile to myself when I hear heathens say "I am going to Asgard when I die" or "I am going to Thrundheim after death." As far as I can tell, we really do just go to our graves and from there go to our ancestral homes (or to the Wasteland if we are jerks and wind up being ostracized). In life, I guess many people have to make themselves feel somewhat 'special' by bragging that they are going to sit at the right hand of their personal King after death.

As I stated earlier, I work in the medical field. For a period of about five

years I worked in a long-term care setting with people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. We have about 150 patients at any given time, and in any year's time, we will lose about one-third of the population. In other words, they come to our facility to die. This provided me early on with a lot of experience and dealing both with the dying as well as the newly dead. Additionally, these people came from all different religions: Jewish, Hindu, Catholic, fundamentalist, and several different Native American religions. Knowing what I know now about death, it was relatively easy to work with anyone who was either dying or newly dead because they would all be going to one place: the ancestral home.

Fear was the biggest problem for any of the ones who were dying. More often than not, by the time I was able to work with them, they were already beginning to split away from their body. I am well acquainted with the fear that splitting away from the body can induce an individual since I suffered from it for about two years.

#### **8.4. Disease Is Everywhere:**

I am a seiðman. I don't do what is commonly called 'Oracular Seið.' I go in behind the scenes, diagnose a problem for a client, and then do what is necessary to remediate the problem. In many cases I'm working with what is commonly called 'disease.' In some other cases I help the dying get to where they need to go so that they do not cause problems here on Midgard.

Because of my work I tend to view disease differently than say, for example, a physician. For a physician, and for most of the modern world, disease is caused by bacteria, virii, or parasites. In other cases there is definite damage to the neurological system (caused by trauma from the outside) or to the physical system. From us seið standpoint, disease is quite different. Disease is for the seiðman anything which causes the individual discomfort to the point where he is no longer functioning normally. For general purposes, I view diseases as stemming from one of the following categories:

1. Fear induced – fear is one of the commonest causes of disease in both the ancient and modern worlds. A review of charms and magical spells from undeveloped areas such as Samiland, Korea, Java, the Australian outback, Africa, and South America will reveal a high percentage of remedies for fear.
2. Indwelling disease – indwelling disease is what doctors often report as causing flu, colds, pneumonias, etc. from scientific standpoint of these are generally associated with germs and microorganisms. From the seiðman's point of view, the indweller is a separate being who has gotten lost or separated from his true home. The indweller must either be driven out or somehow led back to his home.

3. Physical disease – physical disease is generally related to damage to the body. In this day and age these are best left to physicians and surgeons although I have treated some any emergencies particularly the stoppage of flow of blood.
4. Taboo – Asatru does not have sets of taboos like other religions do such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism. On the other hand, however, we have the concept of debt either paid or unpaid. And unpaid debt can often be the source of discomfort to the individual. In many cases, the individual has transgressed another's property or person unwittingly and has left the dead unpaid so that the transgressee has a need to either consciously or unconsciously gain revenge.

Fear is by far the most common cause of disease. If the seiðman confine the base of fear it can be treated and the fear itself will dissipate. Fear is associated highly with physical discomfort, stomach disorders, nervous disorders, and headaches. It can also be associated with muscle aches and pains and back problems. Treatment of fear for the ancients was very important and there's a large body of folklore surrounding it and Scandinavian, Finnish, West Germanic, Celtic, and Spanish.

For the most part fear is the foundation for all negative feelings and emotions. In general, there are only two feelings (although they run on a continuum between each other): fear and love. Actually, these could be better divided from comfortable to uncomfortable with fear being at the uncomfortable end. The fine division points on the continuum are usually unnamed. Most people confuse 'feelings' with 'emotions' but emotions are really how the individual chooses to respond and/or express how he or she is feeling at any given moment. For example, an individual may feel fear but depending on the image that he is trying to present to the rest of the world he may express that fear as

1. being scared
2. anger
3. jealousy
4. envy
5. irritation
6. agitation
7. aggression
8. confusion
9. or may simply ignore it all together.

The above list are emotions. The word 'emotion' is related to the verb 'emote' which means to express oneself – it is usually used among actors regarding how well or how poorly an actor expresses feelings to an audience. In a sense, we are all actors expressing feelings to our audience which is the rest of the world.

Of all be emotions, for the seiðman, jealousy/ envy are the most dangerous. Oddly enough this also holds true for the South American Hispanics as well. And Scandinavian folklore jealousy is treated as a disease and is called *elske* (and South America it is called *envideo* and is closely related to *susto* (fear) and *grano* (envy). Both the Germanic and Hispanic areas treat the problem similarly: find the individual against whom the fear is directed and set things straight. (Noticed that I use the term ‘fear’ in the above sentence. This is not an accident. Fear when it is related to jealousy or envy is the fear that one will not get one’s due or fear of loss or fear that one will fall behind socially.) Jealousy or envy is particularly dangerous because one is using all one’s energy to attack the individual against whom the fear is directed. These specific emotions become very time-consuming and energy intensive to the point where one begins to neglect himself and his duties to others. If taken to an extreme it can even become the basis of some mental breakdowns.

Hunger is a simple fear. It is the fear of death. It is generally handled by the body and one simply goes out to seek food. Social fears on the other hand are far more complex. Fears can be generated by the loss of a loved one or of a good friend (anguish or extreme sadness/ depression); fears of loss of social standing (these are often related to sex issues or material issues but can be more complex such as in affairs which result in discrediting a competitor). The fear of being alone can be great and devastating. The Elder Edda speaks much about the importance of friendship. This is not a quaint fluke. Man is an extremely social animal and needs to interact with other human beings. If this need is not addressed as being as important as any other type of hunger the individual can easily sicken, go mad, become sociopathic, or die. When dealing with humans there is no such thing as *The Lone Wolf*. Fear, then, is a major cause of disease in human beings.

The treatment of fear is crucial but can be very complex. The complexity of fear exists because the individual often does not recognize fears being the basis of his disease. There is a great reluctance among modern people to discuss fear, particularly personal fears, amongst one another because “If you know my fears, you know how to attack me.” From the seiðman’s point of view the best way to remove fear is to confront it directly and then move from the high level of discomfort to a more comfortable level; health, both mental and physical, will be quickly restored.

I worked once with a woman who had not slept in 17 nights. She had been addicted to sleeping pills and decided to wean herself from them. Her disease was fear based. Human beings cannot go indefinitely without sleep so she was sure to fall asleep at some point, but her fear kept her awake for 17 full days. The session with her lasted almost four hours. As it turns out she had previously been an alcoholic and started taking the sleeping pills basically to replace the depressive effect that she once gained from drinking. When she quit drinking, she also cut back severely

on her social life, her creative activities such as dancing and art, and sex because all these activities, for her, were related to her abuse of alcohol. Her fear then had originally started when she decided to quit drinking and became scared that any other activity she engaged in would take her back to drinking.

It was necessary to have long session with her because my ghosts needed to lead me to all the different places where she had stashed her fears. I had to see an experience for myself the mess that she had made out of her internal life. The cure was relatively simple once the information was gained. I discussed with her the need for her to regain her creative and social aspects of herself. I described for her the desert that she had created for herself inside, and the withered plant life, and fires that she had let burn down. It was important for her to discuss these things and she did so with a sense of relief. Additionally, I created a remedy (created for me by one of my ghosts) to help put her to sleep. I gave her the remedy was a prescription for its use – she only had to use it one night. Two years later, after she got married and started up her artwork again, she thanked me profusely.

I've worked with individuals who were severely depressed, who felt as though they had lost all their luck, who felt as though they had lost all their personal power, who were overcome by the death of a child or other loved one, or who could not find a mate. All these were fear based problems and all of them required different types of sessions and different types of cures.

One session that I can remember required a period of three days. The woman was brought to me by a friend. The client was almost manic when I first met her. After the diagnosis of plan was drawn up by the ghosts who work with me and myself. It was to be a three-part session: the first part would be to take her out to a special canyon nearby home and disengage her 'self' from her body – my friend and I 'tied' her ghost body to some rocks and left it to the care of the ghosts in canyon; the second session was for me to fly back to the canyon alone and talk with her ghost body – that time we were able to untangle many knots which were causing her to be somewhat dysfunctional; and the third session we took the young woman back out to the canyon to reassemble her. Of course, there are a lot of details left out here but this was the general course of action.

After a period of three or four months, the woman began working for the first time in several years. I happened to see her at a wedding about a year after the session, and her presence there was very striking for almost anyone who saw her. She still has a tendency to be slightly manic when she feels very comfortable with a person that she has become.

Hers was a disease that was completely fear based but went as far back as early adolescence. It has completely ruined her life to the point where she had become an unemployable recluse. I see people on a daily basis whose lives are being ruined



by their inability to address their own fears, and have watched people die from this. Why this is not addressed by the modern medical profession as being an important aspect of mental and physical health, I do not know. The general method by the medical profession for treating fear is to suppress it with drugs. Although it can be complex and somewhat confusing to deal with, treatment for it especially when it is successful makes the doctor looked like a miracle worker.

Indwellers are generally recognized by the medical profession as being some for microorganism which interferes with the normal functioning of the body. Generally this is also the case for the seiðman. When an indweller is the cause of disease in individual, I make sure that the individual is under the care of a physician while I am seeing him. This is very important because the medical profession is very good at weakening microorganisms. However, why microorganism has invaded individual's body at this point in time is rarely addressed by the medical profession. Sometimes the doctor will address eating habits, social habits, or sleep patterns but beyond this the physicians rarely go. This is the job of the seiðman.

Let me explain something about microorganisms. I work in a hospital and our infection control department did a study at one point to determine how many health-care workers in the hospital had a particular type of pneumonia bacterium colonized, i.e. living inside them. The specific bacterium was related to MRSA (methycillin resistant staphalococcus aureous); this is one of the so-called super pneumonias which response to very few medications and the medicine that is used to treat it is often dangerous for the patient. They found that 70 percent of all the people working in direct care had MRSA colonized in the nasal passages. As it turns out, the reason why none of the health-care workers ever became infected was that their bodies and their minds were in good health; this only when the health begins to fail that the disease, the indweller, is able to take hold.

Most people inhale hundreds of virii everyday and they do not become ill. Simple contact with indwellers does not produce disease. Now we're back to my original point: Germs do not cause disease. The process for ending up with a disease which is caused by an indweller is fairly simple. The individual must be unhealthy physically and/or mentally in the first place. Curing a disease of this type is a two-pronged approach.

The first prong should be the area of physicians. I work with physicians daily and other capabilities. From my point of view a physician is a poisoner. It is their job to go in and find out what type of microorganisms are living inside the individual resulting in the current set of problems, and then they look through the PDR, Physician's (Poisoner's) Desk Reference, to determine which type of medication will poison the specific microorganism. Physicians, contrary to common New Age belief, are an important asset to the field of physical health; they should never be

denigrated. It is far easier for an individual to recover from a disease caused by an indweller if the microorganism itself is either weak or dead.

The second prong falls into my arena. I want to know why the indweller came to live with the individual in the first place. I do not view indwellers as microorganisms. For me, they are beings, ghosts, who for whatever reason had become associated with their own home and have taken up residence in this individual. Did the individual invite the microorganism in? Did the individual damage his own defense systems so then an aggressive indweller could come in? Is the indweller therefore specific reason? The latter is often the case with elderly individuals who are scared to die. Nursing homes are often rampant with pneumonia, for example.

When I first encountered this ghost-disease I was appalled at how completely vicious and ruthless he was what these poor people. I hated this disease because I would see the elderly sitting in their rooms, often on their beds, coughing spasmodically for hours on end. Their energy levels would be extremely low so that they would often fall asleep in midconversation. The appetites dropped to rock bottom sometimes not eating for periods of two or three days at a time. Their lust for life would disappear often not caring if they lived or died. They would often lose 20-25% In working with the elderly, especially those consigned to nursing homes, I realized that these people are living in fear constantly. Many of them are at stage V or VI dementia secondary to Alzheimer's disease. There now living in a 'strange place' with strangers taking care of them often performing acts on them that are normally reserved for infants (such as changing adult-diapers and cleaning them after an accident or spoon-feeding them pureed foods). They fear that they are losing or have already lost their children and their families, their status within family and community, and most of all, their minds and memories. The elderly, unless they can be cared for in the home with specific roles to play within family setting, live in constant fear. The gift that pneumonia brings his release from fear. Pneumonia allows the elderly to sleep, to dream, and to lose fear of death. If it's job is not interfered with, pneumonia will lead the elderly to the Land of Their Ancestors in a quiet, relatively painless, and fearlessly smooth fashion. It is important to determine if the indweller is there to perform service or not.

If the indweller is simply lost or is aggressively attacking the individual, my job is then to treat the individual to bring him back to a state of wholeness. Often diets, sleep patterns, fears, and habits need to be addressed. Occasionally, debts, usually to ghosts of places or ancestors, need to be uncovered, addressed, and paid. When these things are done, the indweller himself needs to be addressed and either asked to leave or forced to do so. The success of the cure is highly dependent upon the client's willingness to act.

Debts or transgressions can also be the cause of disease particularly skin diseases

such as hives or rash. From a Germanic point of view all debts must be paid. Consciously, an individual needs to be respectful when he enters the territory of another. Ghosts-of-place such as certain river- or stream-ghosts are particularly jealous of the lands that they lord over. Certain plants do not like to be touched or bothered in any way. In Iceland, road crews have discovered that it is best to go around certain rocks or other landmarks rather than to put up with the ill luck following the removal of such a landmark. These can often be easily diagnosed and resolved.

Modern times has brought with it the phenomenon of the 'nuclear family.' These are generally very small families which are also very mobile. Because of the high mobility there is also poor attachment to place and specifically to ancestral places such as farms or graveyards. Additionally, modern times tends to downplay the need to honor ancestry as being folk superstition. The seiðman's point of view, and that of the Norse revivalists as well as folk from undeveloped Third World countries, is that the ancestors must be honored because it is from the ancestors that all luck flows.

Diagnosis of this kind of problem is usually fairly easy because the client will generally complain of 'bad luck' always coming his way. Some changes can usually be made inside the client which will result in his altering his own views towards his own ancestors. Results from this kind of session are usually fairly immediate within four or five days.

Disease is not the only area that this seiðman has spent much time dealing with. Because of my job and because of my clientele I was confronted almost on a daily basis with either the dying or newly dead. These were of concern to me because the newly dead can often cause their living descendants problems either by blocking the flow of the waters, i.e. luck, or by simple harassment. Normally when a person dies they were simply leave the Land of the Living and move on. However, religious practice is becoming slightly less common even among the elderly, and death has been removed from the home setting to the sterile setting of the hospital resulting an increase in fear about death with far less acceptance of death as being part of life.

I first began to notice the dying while I was still under the care of the *ghost pneumonia*. I could 'see' that the individual's ghost-body was beginning to peel away from the corpse. Often the patients body was lying on the bed while the ghost was sitting astride. I had the audacity to speak with several of these but it was clear from their answers that they were sure what was happening to them. Sometimes they felt as though they were dreaming; and other times they were completely confused. It was clear that they were in the process of leaving but there was always one portion of their ghost 'stuck' to the corpse usually in an area near their butt.

It was obvious to me what was going on only after their death. The confusion these individuals suffered puzzled me for some time.

After about one year I began to develop a plan for working with the dying. I would walk into a room and address both the body and the ghost. I would ask them if they knew what was going on (the answer was inevitably a resounding ‘No’), and after they responded, I would tell them point-blank that they were dying. At first, I thought this would cause some fear in the individual but it never worked that way. Rather than fear they became curious and would begin asking questions about “Why can you see me?”, “Where to go from here?”, and the scary one for me “How do I know where to go?” Because I live in New Mexico, I have worked most often with Roman Catholics so rather than get into an argument about religion I would tell them to call out for their mothers. Often they would state that they could either hear their mothers’ voices or that they could see them (I never could see their mothers, but they could). Occasionally, especially with the newly dead, I would have to show them how to move, how to pass through walls, how to fly, and in which direction they needed to go. I never told any of them that I was a heathen; I simply told them that I could only lead them up to the gate of Heaven, but that only they were allowed to pass through. They all excepted this is a reasonable answer and never questioned further.

The Christian Land of the Dead has very tight borders with good security. I doubt very much that I could easily slipped inside without being noticed or without being harmed. One time I was at the Christian wedding with my wife. We decided to take some time off and combine a small vacation with going to one of her friend’s weddings. The wedding was held in a very pretty Catholic Church. I was feeling quite uncomfortable being in there but persevered for my wife’s and her friend’s sake. Even though I was feeling uncomfortable, I still had the audacity to mock some of the prayers silently. This was a mistake. I didn’t realize the extent of my actions until one of the candle lanterns at the end of the pew (actually, almost above my head) exploded and shot shards of glass all over me. I was able to save face before the Christian security forces and picked up one of the pieces of glass, smiled, and stuck in my pocket. When I went outside at the end of mass I made sure that caught the attention of the Christian security forces and tossed the bit of glass into the gutter. I made sure to let them know that the gutter outside their church was the domain of the Thunderer. My wife later told me that it was probably not a good idea for me to enter too many churches.

Of all the jobs that I have done as the seiðman by far the most satisfying was working with the newly dead. We were able to resolve the problems quickly and efficiently and the client, the newly dead, was immediately grateful.

## 8.5. On the Gathering of Plants:

As stated in the very beginning of this book, I grew up in a small town in rural Michigan and I started collecting herbs for medicine at a very early age around 9 or 10 years old. I studied herbalism diligently until I was about 17 when I moved from Michigan to the Black Hills of South Dakota. The herbs and South Dakota are quite a bit different than those in Michigan and rather than have to learn a whole new set of herbs, I decided to take only the ones I knew and ignore the rest. At that time, though, I discovered an herb which would become very important in my seið-making, prairie sage. It is a very low growing plant which grows abundantly from South Dakota, west to Washington, and south to the American Southwest where I now reside. At that time, I used herbs primarily for their chemical qualities as medicines. I knew that Native Americans used prairie sage to clear out evil influences but I really didn't understand the process behind it. Herbs, for me, were plants which had specific properties related to their chemical makeup. I continued to believe this until the winter of 1992.

The dreams that I had in the winter of 1992 bothered me. For the first time I was confronted with the idea that plants were not really 'plants.' The dreams seemed to indicate that plants were really ghosts who resided in stationary bodies rather than mobile bodies like animals or people, but beyond this they were almost no different than animals or people. I began to view plants as creatures complete with personalities, personal quirks, personal agendas, and mentation.

In the early summer of 1992 I began to collect herbs for medicine again for the first time in about 10 or 15 years. It was the first time that I never collected herbs where I had to take into consideration the plants as creatures. I actually felt a need to ask them to help me and what they needed from me in terms of respect for what they were.

The rules that the plant-ghosts set down vary slightly from plant to plant, but there are some commonalities.

1. First, for every group of plants growing there is either a grandfather or grandmother who needs to be approached first before any plants are harvested. They need to be greeted formally with a good show of respect. They are, after all, the elder of their clan. They also need to know exactly who is picking from them. Usually, they require that a bit of hair be left with them as a show of faith but sometimes they may also ask for tobacco, blood, or alcohol.
2. Picking should be done slowly and with a sense of respect.
3. Preferably, plants should be plucked or pulled from the ground rather than cut. Cutting is very disrespectful. Pulling or plucking demonstrates the intent of the healer/ wholemaker while cutting resembles somebody who is simply taking

herbs as part of a business. It's the same difference as treating a client as a human being or treating them as a potential paycheck (if potential paycheck feels like the right answer the reader probably needs to start the book from page 1 and not skip any chapters).

4. Roots should be taken from the ground by loosening the dirt around it with either a shovel or knife and then the dirt is removed from the root by knocking it off against the shovel blade or the ground. The dirt should be placed back in the hole.

Time needs to be spent with the herbs. Sit down and take the time. If you have the ear or the eye for it (second sight), you can learn many things. Often an herb is 'known' for a specific thing but hidden uses as well. For example, prairie sage is known for its effect that it has on the digestive system, but a lesser known use is the clarity of vision that it can offer one in a seið session. Sometimes the seiðman's vision will cloud and inhale the smoke from a ball of sage will help clear the eyes and ears. Manzanilla, or chamomile, can be added to a medicine to 'quicken' or 'liven' it. Willow or chaparral can be used as a weapon against ghosts when needed. Just sitting down and listening to the plant-elder of the clan is a wonderful teaching tool.

When using plants for curing, I learned that the herbs should come from one's locale. The rationale for this is that the diseases, particularly the indwellers, are from the same region as the seiðman who is acting as the Wholemaker. If the seiðman is using the method that I described above, the ghosts of the herbs collected will often help out in finding a cure. Additionally, there are often other ghosts who know the herbs of an area. For example, there is one whom I know and whom I will visit either to check on a cure or, if I am stumped, to get direction on creating a cure. Sometimes the ghost of the disease itself will recommend or hint at a cure from the local area.

When I go out to collect, I almost always am by myself. I like the quiet. When I collect, I am never alone. The plants talk; they sing; they will often make light jokes. I am a social person and enjoy another's company immensely, and when I am collecting, I am never alone.

Three plants probably need separate mention. I already mentioned the prairie sage. She is probably one of the most powerful herbs that I know especially when it comes to vision. Another is the Little Red Man. I have written about him quite a bit. I do not consider him to be an herb or plant—he is most definitely a creature and a creature who not only can move like an animal or person but one who can move very quickly. One time I was climbing a mountain, going up to a sacred lake which lies at about 10,500 ft. From the point where I leave the car up to the lake is about an hour and a half walk (sometimes a little longer). The journey is fairly

strenuous. There are three steep sections before the lake and each section usually requires a short break before continuing on. This particular time I was traveling with the Little Red Man and was hunting him in the forests on the way up to the lake. He seemed in a very frivolous mood on this day and was making a number of light jokes. I knew that we were traveling quickly but what I didn't realize is that we would make the trip in 45 mins.! I'm not sure that I could do the trip on my own in that amount of time even if I were on flat ground!

There are times in a seið-session where the Little Red Man offers to run the journey to where it is that we need to go. He very much likes to travel to the North to visit a strange man called the Reindeer Man who is a giant of a man and who herds reindeer. This man has answers about how to find answers. He seems to know everybody and every place and if he does not, he knows how to get to the answer quickly. The Little Red Man also has an herb-doctor friend who lives in a cottage in a forest to the Southeast. As far as I can tell, her only job is making medicines from local plants. She seems to know cures for everything. All in all the Little Red Man is a great traveling companion, he is fun (for the most part—he does have a small bit of a nasty streak which can involve incredible nausea and diarrhea, though).

The preparation for the Little Red Man varies slightly from session to session. His strength also varies to some degree and this can be related to the individual mushrooms used, what was eaten within the last 24 hrs. or the seiðman's frame of mind. If one has a predilection for becoming a companion of the Little Red Man, he will choose you, teach and coach you.

The other plant is by far the most dangerous that I know with the exception of hemlock or monkshood—he is called Toloache here in New Mexico, but his latin name is *datura meteloides*. Now there are other daturas which grow here and in fact some of them are safer to use than this one, but this is the only one who has adopted me.

The collection of the plant is done in the the twilight of the morning when she is in full bloom. Notice that I say 'she'—the ghost is a dark noble woman, royalty, but the seiðmaker will never get to deal with her directly because she is protected closely by a warrior of immense strength and courage. Unfortunately, his treatment of visitors to his queen is poor. Not only can and will he challenge you but if care is not taken, he can harm severely. He cannot be tricked, nor does he even listen. His only job is to protect the queen at all cost.

The medicines made with this ghost are potent! If the ghost, through her warrior translator, decides to help a seiðman procure a cure for a client, she will do so at lightening speed. Sometimes this feels like what it must be to get caught in an avalanche of a tidal wave. The power and speed are often very disorienting. She has

Figure 8.1. The seiðman with Fliegenpilze





no sense of humor like the Little Red Man and is there simply to do a job. I doubt if she even cares if the seiðman himself lives or dies. With the Little Red Man there exists a personality to interact with; with Toloache and her warrior, there is none.

The question often comes up as to why a seiðman would use psychoactives during a curing session. The question is wrong, however, because the asker is forgetting that the seiðman is part of a team. The one who calls the shots on how to go about gaining a cure is rarely the seiðman. I play an important role, for sure, but being the planner of a scheme is not one of them. My job is primarily to put the cure together here on Midgard after the cure has been designed and after the ‘background’ has been managed, i.e. those arrangements which need to be made in the Otherworld. My role is really that of liaison between the worlds. The question about why the seiðman would use a psychoactive plant really has no better answer than asking a nail why it is hit by a hammer. In both cases the ‘design’ is everything and neither the nail nor the seiðman play any significant role in the design stage.

## **8.6. On Cleanliness:**

When I first began being visited by the ghosts back in 1991, I knew nothing of ‘cleanliness.’ For sure, I took a bath every day and brushed my teeth twice a day, but I did not understand what it meant to be clean. I did not understand that the Waters must flow unimpeded; in fact, I did not even know what the Waters were.

Here I should take a little time and review this concept. As the Waters flow through the three (or nine) homes from well to well making a complete circle so do they flow through man. There is an inflow and an outflow area. On many, at least when I am working with them, the Waters flow in through the top of the head and a main course of the internal river flows through the trunk, splits at the crotch and exits through the feet. The arms can either be inflow or outflow estuaries depending upon the need at the time. Usually, when I am working with a client, I will watch the flow of Waters. I will put their hands down along their sides (to make an outflow area at the hands), then I will watch how the efficiency of the flow increases and decreases as I point their head in different directions. While one may have the most efficient flow with his head in the east, another will do best if the head is in the southwest. The directions have no significant meanings as they do for Native Americans and Wiccans at least not for this work.

Secondly, I will watch their insides to see where the flow becomes constricted. Often, this is noticed most in the joints especially the the shoulders and hips, but constrictions can occur anywhere in the system. When I locate these constrictions (everyone will have a few) I will rearrange their body to improve the flow. Before I do any other work on them I want to maximize the flow of the Waters.

A weak flow at the inflow area is often related to unpaid debts (see above). Sometimes inflow can be improved simply by the client addressing certain transgressions often against ancestors. Ancestors can hold back on the flow of Waters if they feel slighted or forgotten. Sometimes there is no transgression but the flow can often still be improved by addressing the ancestors since this is one of our primary sources of luck (note: luck = efficiency in the flow of the Waters). As the flow increases, so does luck in a proportional fashion. I heard from a friend who is well versed in the martial arts that the flow of the Waters resembles *chi* with the main difference being that for the seiðman there is no system to be written down as with acupuncture. The process for repair is basically observation, make changes, re-observe for the effect that the changes made, and so on.

Inside the landscape of the body of the client the Wholemaker may need to make changes by removing dams from the river, rocks, trash and so on, or by changing the course of the river slightly by, for example, building up dams at the riverside to force a split flow to run together. The more efficient and energetic the flow, the 'cleaner' the river. Clean river = increased energy and and increased luck.

As the Wholemaker does his work, he learns about what cleanliness means. Cleanliness is certainly related to a healthy clean physical body, but there are other purifications which can be done. These are always done in the same manner as one would do for a client although the approach varies somewhat.

My first cleansing came about when the bird of prey ripped open my head so that there was a large gaping hole there. The wind came roaring through from the top of my head on down. This was early on before I understood what cleanliness meant, but my luck instantly increased to the point where I missed being in a severe car crash only moments later (needless to say, I was *impressed* by the large increase of luck so suddenly because the car crash had been my destiny up to that point—it was meant for me).

Over a time I learned to wash out my insides by using water from an Otherworld river, by asking a ghost-squirrel whom I know to gnaw open frozen joints and passages, by allowing the winds to blow through to melt out icy constrictions, by using smokes from herbs (especially powerful is the prairie sage), and by using certain herbal preparations. Cleaning up the insides so that the flow is efficient is the most important act a human can engage in.

Sitting in certain areas are beneficial and can improve the flow of Waters. Ancestral graveyards are important places of power. Of course it is important to honor one's ancestors since this is a primary source of luck, but we are a very mobile culture and do not always live near our ancestral homes. A good secondary source of luck (or least a good way to avert transgressions against the ghosts of a strange place) is to visit the local graveyards where one lives. Honoring the dead of one's

new *hometown* especially during the period between Thanksgiving and mid-January when the ghosts are active can help align one with the town's luck. It doesn't have to be some grandiose ceremony—this is not about impressing my neighbors about how eccentric I am—all I have to do is stroll through the graveyard, read the stones perhaps, and listen. I am always polite in strange graveyards. As one who had squandered away all his personal luck before the age of 40 winters, I can use all the luck I can get. Also working with the dying and newly dead paid off well for me because it provided with a handful of ghosts who were willing to 'put in a good word' for me.

Hole-sitting is a good exercise for when the *pressures* are becoming too great. It can be as simple or as ceremonial as one likes since it is done alone. Personally, I can not personally stand pomp and grandiosity and have a difficult time dealing with others who engage in it. Hole-sitting is simple in essence: find or make a depression in the earth (not a ditch). It must be about up to one's chest on all sides and the depression should be about 6 ft.-8 ft. in diameter with fairly gently sloping sides. The process is simple: go there about an hour before sundown, sit in it dead-center facing whichever direction is most comfortable (directions should be functional, not symbolic—personally, I'm most comfortable facing anywhere from west to north), and sit through the twilight until dark without moving from the spot. Scooting one's butt around to maintain good blood flow and moving the legs for the same reason are both fully acceptable. The important thing is to keep everything from the breastbone downwards below the level of the earth, and from the breastbone upwards above the level of the earth. The effect of hole-sitting is to stabilize the flow of Waters within one's self.

Keeping one's system clean is crucial for maintaining the flow of the Waters. For 35 years I did not think about the relationship between my emotions and the flow of Waters. First, I did not comprehend 'the Flow.' I believed that I was running under my own steam; I believed I created reality with my might and main. I thought that when I die the world, indeed, the universe—everything that can be known or perceived—would collapse with me. I could not accept that I was but a small cog in a large watch: I figured that I *was* the watch! My luck, my power was *mine*, granted to me upon my birth into this Midgard. The disease-ghost pneumonia help put that misbelief into proper perspective. Secondly, I could not perceive any relationship between my emotions, my physical health, and the effect that my emotions would have on the rest of the world and my relationship to it.

The Hávamál has much to say about the maintenance of friendships and alludes to why it is important to *act* in specific ways. Prior to the madness in late 1991, I thought the perscriptions in the Hávamál were merely suggestions. At the time, I didn't see the need to 'groom' relationships.

From a physical/ materlistic point of view getting and maintaining relationships is of great benefit to the individual. In this way new job opportunities, and opportunities to make money, come. When I need a hand with moving or cutting down a large tree, good freinds are handy. The ghosts who came to me and particularly the Little Red Man have showed me a completely different view of what a human is, however. These are views of what a human actually looks like *behind the scenes*.

One ghost showed me how a human really does not exist as an individual being. He showed med me a large net which extends out infinitely in all directions.

*“A human is really little more than a small knot in this large net. See? Here you are (he points). When I move this string or this one which is near you, your knot-position becomes immediatly affected. “If I move this one (a little further away), you are still severely affected, but it is difficult for you to see the actual path of relationship between this event and yourself. This relationship is more difficult for a person to understand. Worked out, though, it is still a logical turn of events. “If I move this one here (much further away) you are only slightly affected, but your neighbors are more so affected. You have no way of understanding this relationship between the original event and yourself besides it becomes really complex when one of your neighbors responds inappropriately. See? It’s good to pick and choose your close friends wisely. Interaction with them will inevitably determine your needs to respond.”*

The grooming of relationships is very important for how luck will turn: it can either be increased by good friendships with the right people or made poor by improper action or improper choices on my part.

At some other point, another ghost showed me this image, a small brook with little eddies and whirlpools:

*“See the whirlpool there? See how short it’s life is? That is another human being dying. You humans are little more than little whirlpools or eddies in the large Flow of the Waters from the original Well. You have a birth, a life-span, and then you weaken to the point where you disappear. That is how you appear to us. As a whirlpool you waste time believing that you have a separate existence from others, but in fact you all come from the same Waters.”*

For a long time, I thought I created my own existence. Back then, I felt no need to reinforce the others around me. Now, I know my existence is dependent upon others around me. I take care to groom my relationships with family and friends. I pay attention to how I treat others. I no longer feel justified in destroying them for material gain because it really results in material loss and disease.

As a Wholemaker, my ‘cures’ are often centered around untangling the knots that people have made with their lives. This type of disease is to a great part self-induced. Unfortunately, the cure is often often transient because if the individual does not change his repertory of action, he returns quickly with a completely separate set of knotty relationships. The best Wholemaker that I know for dealing with this type of disease is the disease-ghost, pneumonia. He alone can cause the client to completely revamp his way of action. I’ve seen him perform miracles with some of the nastiest people I’ve ever met. On the other hand, if the client cannot change, he kills them.

### 8.7. On ceremony:

The session that I conduct is very different from the standard New Age ‘ceremony.’ In fact, one of my sessions is so different I don’t even like to use the same term for it. I usually just call it a ‘session’ or more simply ‘acting properly.’

Actually, there is little difference at one level between ‘grooming relationships’ and *ceremony*. There are proper actions for everything (This is something that I did not want to hear 20 years ago!). There are proper actions to take during bathing, eating, preparing for sleep, building a fire, drinking water—everything. Proper actions should really be defined as

*those actions which result in benefit for the actor, for the environment, and for others in the environment, i.e. which result in the increase in the efficiency of the Flow of Waters.*

Most of these kinds of actions are very subtle and are rarely noticed by others. In the past, most of my actions had nothing to do with my knowledge of the of the Flow of the Waters. They were usually done so that I could impress someone (usually a female or a boss). I had a relentless need to demonstrate for people ‘how special I am.’ My gestures and my voice were always grandiose. I was under the distinct impression that if a great number of people were impressed my status would be increased. Many of the so-called ceremonies that I have attended over the years since the onset of my making as a seiðman were really nothing more than a careful design to showcase the High Priest or High Priestess. On the other hand, I have been with Native American medicine people who really understood the rationale behind proper action and its effects—there actions were always subtle and graceful even in the most formal settings.

Engaging in proper action is similar to playing in a jazz band. Playing an instrument is a complicated affair. First one to learn to finger all the notes, then learn the licks and scales, and then practice (often for years) to get that which is learned up to speed. But playing in a band (and doing it well) is only partially

dependent on individual skill on one's instrument. The most important skill in a band is not skill at the instrument, however, it is the musician's ability to *listen* to the band as a whole and then add in only those notes which will enhance the overall sound. A grave mistake often made by many young musicians is that in their desire to climb up the musical ladder of fame, they center only on their own sound and skill ignoring the bigger picture. I know this well because I had made the error over and over for years wondering why my skill as a fiddle player was not lauded by all who heard—I was slowly losing friends rather than gaining them. It was only while I was in the throes of my madness that I learned the subtle skill of hearing/ listening. A handful of clean, well-placed notes can often do more for a tune than a stunning run of complex scales. The notes need to be carefully placed out there and then the player must be able to hear the effect to judge the skill of placement. So it is with 'proper action'; this *is* proper action.

My seiðmaking sessions start out quietly with dialog. I need to know the client and his perception of his own problems. Often, I begin to prepare the session place at this time. I roll up little balls of prairie sage, place my tools (none of them are overly impressive in looks—just rocks, little feathers, sticks, etc.). After finding out the client's perception of the problem, I will begin to sing my ghosts together. The song is quiet with no words—just sounds and tones. My vocal volume is low. The ghosts aren't deaf and I am not here to *impress* a client, but to find a proper course of action which will relieve him of his problem. The ghosts will look at the problem and will decide if Toloache or the Little Red Man are necessary to achieve the goal.

If I must work with the Little Red Man we will often take a break while I make the preparations. Toloache requires little preparation and there is no time lag waiting for him to take where I need to go. The Fly Agaric is much slower both in preparation and waiting for him to travel with me. In the meanwhile, I will talk more with the client about what the ghosts have uncovered, will ask some more questions for clarification, will arrange the client so that he may more easily access the flow of Waters. The latter may involve positioning the client, massage to shift the Flow of Waters, etc. Again, the actions are always subtle and smooth. I always keep in mind that I've a job to do other than show a client how 'cool' and eccentric I am.

Notice that there is no Magic Circle. New Agers don't like this. I usually circle the client and myself with a rope, but this is not for safety or show; it is just a tool for tying more closely together during our short relationship. I don't call guardian spirits or draw a circle of protection. I work, I guess, without a safety net. I work in the real world where we live, work, and play. I am not in the business of either controlling demons or putting up a show of ceremony; I am working on a client. Magic Circles are for die-hard Wiccans and ceremonial magicians. I am a seiðman;

I already exist between the worlds—I bridge the two. I need ready access to both. On most occasions, however, I will ‘call witnesses’ to the curing session. These are not guardians or anything of the sort. They are simply witnesses. They are not symbolic nor do they represent magical directions or anything of the like. They are there only to witness the curing. This is the way I was trained and is the way I work.

I leave at some point and travel with a team of ghosts. Usually, we are tracking down specific problems or are hunting for certain tools to achieve our ends. Sometimes we must track down the real doctor who will design a medicine for the cure. Sometimes we go out into the world to find the original event to make some changes in it so that there is a new set of effects. These new effects may be necessary so that a cure can take place. Sometimes we must temporarily repair transgressions committed by the client often by making certain sacrifices. Sometimes others (malicious enemies or often unknowing friends) have left ‘hooks’ in the client which serve to drain away luck—these must be detached and occasionally payment is due before a detachment can be made. In the case of an InDweller, we must often seek out his true home and try to uncover its reason for taking up residence in the client. Deals must be made in a case like this because InDwellers are not often willing to give up their new home. Such work can take anywhere from one to three hours in Midgard time—days or weeks in Otherworld time.

Upon return, I will often take a short break, and will often present the scope of the problem and cure with the client. If medicines must be prepared, I will mix the plants/ ghosts and make the client take the medicine before leaving off the session. If actions must be taken by the client, these will be prescribed and discussed at this time.

After the short hiatus, I will go into the client with the team of ghosts to make any immediate repairs. These will generally result in some immediate but usually temporary relief. Often the client has not had an efficient flow for some time. The clients usually enjoy this part and often think that this is when the cure takes place. In reality, the cure takes place *when the proper action on the part of the client has taken place*—this is when the patient acknowledges the cure which may be 2 weeks to 2 years down the line.

## 8.8. On the Making of a Seiðman—A Final Word (or Two):

I am not sure that I would ever opt for becoming a seiðman. The constant vigilance, although it gets easier as time goes on, is cumbersome for the individual as well as his family (if he still has one). Looking back over my life, I am not sure that things could have gone differently, though.

I acknowledge that there are three types of seiðmen.

1. The first would be hereditary. I have never heard of one nor seen one. I've heard some folk say that have hereditary access to either heathenry or seiðmaking, but I don't ever believe it. In saga times this may have been a reality, but in modern times, these are always individuals who have a need to impress. They would be best served by learning to accept their *real* starting points in life rather than living a fantasy, but there need to avoid reality is often very strong and I've rarely seen one change his tune in less than a 20 year time frame.
2. The second is the *student*. These can work out if the training addresses the fact that they usually have a need to seek for approval. Often these feel as if they are a hapless person in a semi-viscious world. Sometimes they may be best served by helping them to repair their damaged selves. Once the repair is made, they often forget about the serious need to study seið that they once had. Occasionally, they continue on with their studies and do well with one foot in each world.
3. The third is like me, a luck squandering jerk, who is spared from death by having denizens of the Otherworld place one foot back in the world of the living. Training is always in the hands of ghosts. Usually, they have suffered from a life threatening illness (the result of a lifetime of senseless spending of luck), madness, or perhaps clinical death and have recovered. They will eventually become Wholemakers not out of some need for approval or to impress, but out of a need to do so to live. Seiðmaking for these is not a show but a way of life. Of course, these are of *my clan* so they are my favorites.

I am not sure that those who regard themselves as Asatru will agree with everything in this little book. That was never my intent. I wished only to lay down those things that I have learned at the hands of my teachers. They have taught me much, and for that I must express my gratitude. They have opened my eyes to a lifetime of mistakes that I committed over the years both in my interpretation of the lore but also in my life. Having spent all luck under my own steam, I do not regret in the least the fact that I am hapless. Standing with one foot in each I have seen more in a decade than most see in a lifetime. When my time is over, and my course here is run, I know that I have ever more folks to see, homes to be welcomed back into, and more medicines to make.

Take care, gentle reader. We will run into one another at one point or another. In the meanwhile, –Be Whole.





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## Appendix A

# The Ásatrú-Folk Manifesto

Who are we? The neo-pagan world has heard of the Ásatrú for easily two decades with all the comings and goings, the arguments, the accusations of Nazism, satanic connections, and what often appears to be petty infighting and backbiting, but Ásatrú Folk is a new word. A new word for a new concept.

The reconstructed religion of Ásatrú got its start in the early 1970's by Steve McNallen and was originally called the Ásatrú Free Assembly and since that time has undergone several different incarnations, variously as the Ring of Troth, the Ásatrú Alliance and a variety of less well known variations. Always the theme and rationale were the same: this organization is to preserve and protect the practice of the religion of the ancient northern Germanic peoples. In some organizations literary and archeological research was stressed, and in others, the practical side. In any case, protection of the religion from outside and foreign influence is usually maintained by the organizations through their writings which is often negatively directed at those groups perceived to be the most harmful to tradition, i.e., Christianity and neo-paganism: Christianity because it had almost completely replaced the northern Germanic heathen religion, and neo-paganism because of its willingness to mix religions.

All current and past organizations also have several other things in common with one another:

1. All have an established hierarchy;
2. All recognize leaders both at the local level and at the national or international level;
3. All borrow heavily from the neo-pagan community (whether they admit it or not);
4. All have some internal form of top-down political structure with a primary leader such as Allherjarsgoði (named after the leader of the reigning Icelandic organization) or steersman.

All these organizations borrow their internal structuring from different sources such

as the Catholic Church, favorite political systems, and modern neo-paganism and while this is workable in some ways, it does, at times, become a source of contention and contest with individuals vying for the largest collection of the most prestigious titles, and, as a consequence, infighting, group-split-offs, and rumor-spreading have become the most popular form of Viking Games with spirituality and religious practice often falling far behind in 2nd place.

On a personal level, the general attitude of folks belonging to these organizations varies greatly. The individual is encouraged to maintain allegiance to the organization's political or religious ideologies, and if the organization's ideology is to maintain the "purity" of the religion against all foreign influence, individuals may (and often do) find themselves seriously at odds with their geographical communities (the communities they physically live in) and may feel threatened enough to engage in acts which are clearly against common modern social mores. Because of this issue and the several mentioned above a new movement of those who hold their heritage dear and of those individuals sympathetic to such a cause is launched.

The Ásatrú Folk, the People of the Æsir and Vanir (the two tribes of the northern Germanic Gods), are a collective of like-minded individuals who accept that the spirituality of the ancient Germanic heathen leads to a complete, and fulfilling life. We utilize this spirituality to gauge and to take responsibility for all our actions so that the greatest numbers of our families and communities benefit. Having no leaders and disregarding politico-religious or economically based hierarchies, we are not at odds with anyone. We recognize that the differences between people are as important as the similarities and that these differences whether of opinion, belief, faith, life-style, or physical differences are worthy of celebration.

We are best described as a *Movement* who look to the northern Germanic pantheon of Gods, demi-gods, and ancestors (heroes or otherwise) as a source for spiritual fulfillment, and who work towards the acceptance of this spirituality within the geographical communities by participating in that community rather than by engaging in negative or punitive action. We recognize that no individual, group of individuals, or organization has the authority to stand between man and his personal religion, and we demonstrate this through our actions. We exist only to celebrate the religion of the ancient Germanic peoples and to serve as guides to those who wish to follow this spiritual path.

We, the Ásatrú Folk, accept and hold sacred the following:

1. We hold the Gods and demi-gods of the ancient Germanic peoples, and personal ancestry holy while at the same time maintaining that all other religions, and the right to practice those religions, is worthy of respect.

*Commentary: All individuals have the right under the American Bill of Rights to the freedom of religion. To engage in active maliciousness against others' right*

*to practice their own religions as they see fit according to their traditions is to engage in a personal battle of a political nature and to demonstrate disregard for the well-being and integrity of family as well as community. This movement holds no opinion in this regard with the exception that our role in maintaining the well-being and integrity of family and community is clearly related personal responsibility and respect of this Midgard.*

*Personal responsibility to both family and community takes into regard that social customs and social mores of a community may vary. At times, differences may occur between a family and a community which may require negotiation to bring the differences into harmony; however, the well-being and integrity of family and community are held in highest regard as opposed to personal ambitions.*

2. We define our spirituality as being that which allows the individual to most comfortably interact with the inhabitants of Yggdrasil; our most holy duty is to the integrity of the household and its members, and their role in maintaining the well-being of the geographical community, on out to the regional, then national levels.

*Commentary: While the rights of the individual are highly valued, and proper respect is paid to both community and government, it is the family which must be kept, protected, and molded for proper function within the larger whole. Personal responsibility for action (in this case, for bringing the family together, maintenance of the individual's role within the family, and maintenance of the family's role within the community) is regarded as the greatest of virtues as expressed in both eddaic and sagaic literature.*

*We adhere to the idea that personal responsibility is to ourselves first, but that the purpose behind personal responsibility is always to play a role in the maintenance of the well-being of all inhabitants of Yggdrasil, beginning with the individual and moving outwards in ever widening circles to eventually encompass the whole. We recognize that our effectiveness is always greatest at the local level.*

3. We recognize 'the household' as being the only central organization for our purpose. 'Household' is defined here as the household members (all beings residing within the household unit), the physical living quarters of the group living together as a unit, the lands upon which the household resides, and the rules of conduct to which the members of the household adhere.

*Commentary: The household is the only recognizable organization by the Ásatrú Folk. There are many organizations around the world proclaiming to have true understanding of Ásatrú and how it should be practiced, and while many of these lay claim to respectable research in the area of Germanic Studies (and therefore are worthy of respect for the work they have done), they are not regarded as an authority over any household of Ásatrú Folk. The household is regarded as the*

*center of its own realm, completely sovereign and independent of any organization. Crossing into the householdings of another automatically means that the rules of conduct of that household supersede all others. If an individual cannot, for some reason, abide by the rules of conduct in the household of another, he is obligated to leave.*

*The exception to the above is that household members visiting another household as a group are expected to adhere to the rules of conduct of their own, household as well as those of the host (usually enforced by an elder) as in the case of one family visiting another. If the rules of the 2 households conflict, the visiting family is obligated to leave. Guests causing strife in a host's household is to be avoided.&nbsp;*

4. We recognize that each human being is either the head or a member of a household and as a representative of a household is worthy of respect.

*Commentary: We accept that each individual human being regardless of his or her background, religious or political affiliation, or personal philosophy/ practices retains the right to run or participate in a household of his or her choosing and regardless of whether we agree with their personal/ household philosophy. The member of any one household may set guidelines, rules, etc. for the household of which he or she is a member and is respected in that right, but no one household holds dominion over another.*

5. The Frið-yard is considered either a temporary or permanent household. If the Frið-yard is on the property of an Ásatrú household, the rules of conduct of the host's household apply; if the Frið-yard is on public lands or lands obtained for the purpose of celebration, the guests may either determine the rules of conduct among themselves or the procurer of the temporary site may set the rules of conduct prior. In either case, the temporary rules of conduct are added to any existing rules, laws or regulations which are part and parcel to the land itself and do not supersede them.

*Commentary: Ásatrú Folk enjoy 'moots' as they are called in common Ásatrú parlance and will join them up to several times per year. There must be common agreements to the rules of conduct which may be set by the hosting household (as is often the case even if it is on public lands) or by a committee of elders prior to the date of the feast. All members must agree on the terms of conduct and on the set fines for infractions. Banishment (outlawry) is the commonest fine although monetary fines may also be imposed. In any case, the rules of conduct must be known to all partakers prior to or at the beginning of the event.*

*In the case of events occurring on public lands, rules, regulations, and laws regarding the use of alcohol, drugs, nudity, minor participants, and fires (or any other area of concern) must be taken into account.*



6. Each individual member is responsible for learning and practicing the heathen religion of the Germanic peoples in a fashion consistent with tradition as it has been passed on to us through the sagaic and eddaic literature of the ancient northern Europeans, and through the traditions of folklore as it relates to this heathen religion.

*Commentary: Respect is paid to the heritage of the heathen Germanic peoples through maintaining a personal religious practice unadulterated by obvious foreign influence although it is recognized that some practices bear resemblance to practices from other religions. Although respect may be paid to other, non-Germanic, spiritual presences, especially as they relate to geographical locations, non-Ásatrú Folk familial lineages, and other religions, it is expected that such respect will be paid as a representative of the Ásatrú Folk.*

7. No individual, household, or committee speaks with an authoritative voice for households of Ásatrú Folk.

*Commentary: There are recognized authorities among Ásatrú Folk but these are always in various areas of research. Since the Ásatrú Folk as a whole do not recognize any authorities over their individual households, there are no speakers for us except at the level of the household. No group, individual or committee may make a pretense of speaking for any household of Ásatrú Folk; each household is sovereign.*

*On the other hand, there are elders among the Ásatrú Folk who are deserving of high respect by virtue of merit, deeds performed, or by their generosity. Respect, among us, cannot be demanded by title or rank since none are recognized; it must be given by individuals on a personal level only. In other words, respected elders are only respected elders because individuals offer them respect not because they were voted into an office or had elected themselves.*

8. Our membership is free to all who wish to accept the traditions of the Ásatrú Folk without reservation provided they have no other religious affiliation; we recognize that no organization stands between an individual and his concept of the religion of the ancient Germanic peoples.

*Commentary: Anyone wishing to call him or herself a member of the Ásatrú Folk may do so without fees, registration of name, and without contact from any other member of this religious movement. Since the movement polices its own maintenance of tradition by following above points of tradition, no one need fear reprisal from any other. Anyone who wishes to deviate from the above points simply allows himself to be considered a non-member.*

9. Any group of Ásatrú Folk may gather and call itself as such as long as the group itself maintains the singleness of mind that the tradition of the Ásatrú Folk is a religion only and holds no opinion on outside interests either at a personal or a

group level.

Commentary: *Religious and spiritual practice is the only purpose recognized by the Ásatrú Folk. Gatherings for any other purpose are not recognized as part of this movement.*

*Problems with political, financial, or authority issues serve only to redirect folks away from their spiritual course, and since the tradition of the Ásatrú Folk is a spiritual practice and a religion only, it holds no interest in any other arena. Any one desiring to publish newsletters or books, to speak publicly regarding his or her spiritual practices, or in any way disseminate knowledge or information about the Way of the Ásatrú Folk is free to do so providing that all information presented is given only as personal opinion. No individual can speak for the Ásatrú Folk.*

*Every individual and every group of individuals calling itself Ásatrú Folk is responsible only to the maintenance of the religious practice of the ancient Germanic heathens.*

## A.1. GENERAL COMMENTARY

The concept behind the Movement is more foreign to modern tastes than what is usually presented as a set of *by-laws*. Its action of governing is by *inclusion* rather than *exclusion*. We moderns are much more used to the “Thou shalt nots . . .” We generally govern by excluding those we don’t like and whoever is left over we keep. While such laws may be good for a nation (although this may be questionable), such also do not promote personal responsibility nor are they in keeping with a spiritual way of life.

The ancient Teutons in many communities allowed the *community* to decide who was or was not suitable to live there. If a crime was committed by an individual against a community, the community expected that the individual would make things right again. If a man committed murder, wergild to the worth of the dead person was expected, and the value was set by the community. Refusal to pay was a personal decision, and the community’s response was that the man was no longer a person who wished to remain a part of that community. He was free to go but was no longer protected by the community. His value to that community was set at zero and whether he lived or died was of no consequence. The ultimate choice was left in the hands of the individual who was expected to be completely responsible for his decisions. To set up a movement according to this ancient tradition is not difficult. It is, however, very uncomfortable-feeling to moderns, who have grown accustomed to allowing organizations above them rule their behaviors. In the latter half of the 20th century, we cheat on our taxes, we lie about other people, we drive illegally

(by breaking laws such as running stop signs, invalid plates, no brake-lights, intoxicated, etc.) as long as we don't get caught by the *authorities*. This Movement has no authorities to get caught by. We are expected either to buy into the Movement *or* we don't belong to it.

The question will arise: "How do we protect ourselves?" The answer is simple: We don't. We don't have to. We define ourselves by what we are and what we do. If we wish to follow points #2 - #9, but we cannot accept Point #1, we are not Ásatrú Folk.

Much of our culture is defined by inconsistent behavior. "Today I don't feel like living in a spiritual manner; I'll do it tomorrow." The question which needs to be reviewed by any prospective member of this Movement must be: "Can I afford to lead my life according to the Way of the Ásatrú Folk all the time?" If the answer is "Well, maybe" then one is simply not part of this Movement. If one can act in a manner consistent with Points #1 - #9, then one is a part of the Movement; if not, then one is something else. We have defined ourselves. If one fits the definition, then one *is*.

We are not accustomed to living our lives within an organization that is *self* policing. We rather expect that some authority figure is skulking out there who can catch us, and we lead our lives to stay somewhat out-of-sight of the law. We are not used to watching our own behavior rather than someone else's. However, this Movement demands self-honesty rather *honesty-for-the-cops*. Paying attention to our own behavior rather than someone else's is uncomfortable for us; we are often better trained to gossip than to engage in self-examination, and, additionally, we often seek to gain from others rather than trying to figure out ways to *add to that which others are doing*.

Egotism (masquerading as the "fierce individuality" of modern Ásatrú) really doesn't play much of a role either here or in historical heathen communities. It is and was recognized that each individual has important skills, but that those skills are only important within the context of a community. A carpenter may be very good, but without a house to build, he is not a carpenter. A thread by itself is of little value; so it is with the "fierce individual."

"What is to keep another *group* from coming in and taking over?" Nothing. We have nothing to protect. We define ourselves by what we are and what we do. Another philosophy cannot *move in and take the name Ásatrú Folk* because it is **not** a name; it is a definition. One is either Ásatrú Folk, or one is not, but the name needs no protection. A follower of the Way of the Ásatrú Folk can only be recognized by *action* not by whether he or she has paid the annual dues. A follower's actions are defined in Points #1 - #9. Someone who belongs to a hate-group or another religion falls outside the definition. Someone who incorporates New Age with the Northern

Way falls outside the definition. Someone who mistreats his or her family, or places themselves above or outside the geographical community through acting outside the community's accepted code of conduct and makes no attempt at reconciliation falls outside the definition. Someone who attempts by force or coercion to judge another by his or her own personal ethics is extending his or her own personal laws beyond the borders of the household, and, therefore, falls outside the definition. We are self-defining, and, therefore, self-policing.

The Movement defines only parameters within which a person acts. If necessary that something within a community needs modification, we are fully within our rights to bring that to the community's attention. If cars, for example, are speeding in a designated school zone, and that clearly represents a threat to the children in the area, we are right to act according to the standards of the community by presenting the problem to the community. We are not within our right to throw nails into the roadway or shoot at the cars. If a hate-group springs up in town, we are within our rights as followers to

1. voice our opinion of the *philosophy* (*not* of the individuals),
2. exclude them (as followers of that philosophy) from any invitations into our household,
3. exclude ourselves from community activities which support such philosophies, or
4. leave the community, if it tends to support such a philosophy, in search of another.

We are not to take offense, however, against that community. We are allowed to defend ourselves within the acceptable code of conduct of that community. Much too often the *M-16-from-the-rooftop-of-the-nearest-McDonald's mentality* reigns. So what happens if one of the followers breaks such a rule? By definition, he or she falls outside the definition of the Movement. Such a one is not Ásatrú Folk.

Governing by definition is not something that will be easy for a lot of folks. These folks feel the need for policing. That is fine. There are plenty of groups and organizations out there to do that, but, by definition we take responsibility for our own actions, and we know that our power ends at the thresholds of our homes. We do not (no can we, by definition) engage in unilateral decisions for our communities; we do not govern their behavior. Our measure of worth is value to others and is not determined by us; we are valued by others as companions, good guests, good researchers, good hosts, good carpenters. We realize that there is no point in standing up and *demanding* that we be recognized. We are either recognized or not. One of the kennings for a king was *gold-hater*. Good leadership is a by-product of how much one can give not by how loudly someone yells.

Governing by definition is remarkable in that we do not need to judge individuals but only their words and actions. If one claims to be a follower but demonstrates

hate either in word or action against ethnic groups or people with particular sexual preferences, he or she falls outside the definition, and, therefore, is not a follower as demonstrated by behavior. In such a case, none of us need to judge anyone; we need only maintain the definition. We see the demonstration of behavior as falling outside the definition, and, by that, know that the individual by having engaged in the act is not Ásatrú Folk. If a particular household chooses not to *invite* an individual perhaps secretly because of color, ethnicity, or whatever, neither action nor word has been placed against anyone. In this case, however, the individual may need to question his or her own motives for belonging to the Movement. This, after all, is a spiritual quest not a contest for the most money, fame or power.

The Points as outlined in the Manifesto present themselves as a Code of Behavior which manifests as a Movement. A follower of the Movement is one who manages his or her life according to the entire constellation of Points. No voting on membership is necessary; membership defines itself. Personal feelings are left behind, and responsibility for one's behavior is entirely in the hands of the individual. Recognition by other members of the Movement is by how much is given, not by names, titles, or other forms of transient power. As a consequence, there can be no *striving to reach the top*, or *blackballing*. The Points demand that a follower police his or her own behavior, take personal responsibility for his or her own life, winnings and failures, and participate in a spiritual way of life where the only recognition is by how much one is valued by others.

*The End*  
*Have a Happy Life*  
*and*  
*Be Whole!*  
*The Seiðman*  
*Bil*

