



Northvegr  
The Northern Way

# **Northvegr: The Northern Way**

## ***An Introduction to the Northern Spiritual Faith***

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With and Edited by  
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## INTRODUCTION

More than 2000 years ago the ancestors of those of Northern European descent practiced a tradition that honored their native gods and goddesses; those we call the Regin or Tivar. Their names are still known to us and their stories survived the Christian dark ages. There is Othinn, great chieftain of the tribe of the Aesir and Vanir - who, along with his brothers, gifted the progenitors of the Northern European peoples with ond, othr and la which can be translated as breath, soul and movement. There is Thorr; friend of man, great protector and warder of our world, Middle-garth, as well as Asgarthr and eternal foe of the jotnar; the giant race. There is beautiful Freyja, the most lovely of all the goddesses, holder of the power of love and fertility. These are just a few of the Regin to whom our ancestors were once in troth with (loyal to).

Unlike the picture painted by Roman and Christian scribes, these Heithinn (ON – Heiðinn), as those who followed the Northern spiritual faith were called in the middle ages, had a highly developed ethical system, world view and spiritual tradition, the roots of which extended far back in time. They had a system of law, the remnants of which still survive today. It was a tradition that honored kin, tribe and nature. They were not simply blood-thirsty Viking looters. They were great merchants and explorers, who went farther than any man had at that time. They were women who were healers. They were land owning freemen who worked the land and warded their communities. They were great skalds whose poetry and song still survives to this day. They were a people with a rich and developed culture and spiritual tradition.

The Christian religion changed all that. It did not do it suddenly. No, it took time but eventually the culture, ethics and ideals of our Heithinn forefathers and mothers receded into history to be replaced with an ethic and world view totally foreign to Heithinn ideals. For those of us of Northern European ancestry, our ancestors broke troth with the Regin and began to pay homage to the desert god. And so it has been for the last 1000 years.

Though the grip of Christian dominated society is still a strong one, it no longer has the power it once had, and like soil receiving water for the first time in many years, some are feeling a stirring within them; a need to find their roots which for so long have been denied them. All across the globe people are awakening, as if from a bad dream, to the realization that they can find the deepest security in the strength of their own roots; in the ways of their own ancestors.

But all is not well. Foreign ideals abound, disguised as traditional. The books written on what is claimed to be the Northern spiritual faiths seldom have anything in them that our ancestors would have recognized as their own. Secular,

occult and social-political ideals, as well as individualism are peddled as ancestral ideals. The person looking to return to their ancestral ways is often left deceived or abandoned on the seas of misinformation promoted in many of these books and groups.

Contrary to the opinion of some authors, there is indeed a great storehouse of information from which we can glean the traditions of our Heithinn ancestors. But the research into the literature and language of our fore-fathers is not enough. We must learn to think in a different way. Modern ideals are not compatible and sometimes even hostile toward the way of thinking that is required. Shaking the paradigm that this Christian dominated society indoctrinates us with, is no easy task. But it can be done. Reading about traditional Heithinn ideals is the first step. One must then act on them. Heithni is truly a way of doing. It is through deeds that we begin to clear away the scales of secular/Christian ideals and begin to "think Heithinn." This process may take years but the more you "act" the more scales you clear away and the more your mind is opened to a new way of thinking that is in reality, a very old and very holistic way of thinking.

This book is intended as an introductory text for those wishing to live by the ethics and theology of the Northern spiritual faith and more specifically for those who wish to live by the Northern Way. This book is also for those who would like to know more about what our faith consists of. What is contained in this book is not comprehensive by any means but the material here presented will give the reader a firm enough foundation to begin to pattern their lives in a way that is Holy and a way that our Northern European ancestors would recognize. Such Holy living will, as well, draw the attention of the Holy Regin themselves.

A departure from that which many books of this nature take has been taken and detailed outlines of rituals or other such instructions are not included. Instead this book concentrates on the theology and ethics of our faith, almost solely. What is needed above all else is a clear understanding of the theology and ethics of the Northern Way. Without this understanding, any attempt at a genuine spiritual practice can be nothing more than an empty shell and is doomed to failure.

In this book the word "kin" is referred to often. As such we should define exactly what we mean by the word so that there is no misunderstanding. In the times of old this would have referred to blood-kin. The Northern Way is a faith that is based on kin. Do we then mean to say that if one does not have blood-kin that are Northfolk, that one cannot be of the Northern Way? We definitely do not mean to say that. Though the Northern Way was, in days of old, a faith that was completely based on kin, this in no way means that its modern practice can only be by those with blood-kin groups who are all Northfolk. In fact, such a group is near impossible to find in the modern age. The fact is that many may have a spouse who is not Heithinn and most certainly most of us will have family members who are not Heithinn. What we can find (and create) in this day and age are kin-groups made of kinswo/men who are spiritual kin. It is important that the reader keep this in mind when reading this book. The bonds of spiritual kinship

are no less than those of blood-kinship. This ideal finds reinforcement in the lore in the form of foster-kinship, an institution that was a major part of Northern society. The bonds between foster-siblings, and foster-children and their foster-parents were just as strong as those they had with their blood-kin. These bonds were, of course, not blood related, but where, in every way, spiritual. When a man or woman became fostered to another, they were, in effect, joining themselves to the kin-line of that person they were fostered to. So in no way does the fact that the Northern Way is based on kinship mean that if one does not have blood-kin who are Heathen they cannot live by the Northern Way. Even if one is solitary the ties of spiritual kinship stretch across distances because such ties know no boundaries or distance.

It is my sincere hope that this book will help the reader come to that understanding. With the information contained in this book you will have enough information to begin to clear away those scales, and make your way back to the comfort and security of home, for that is truly what the ways of our Heithinn ancestors are. Their ways are home. Their ways are our birthright. Their ways are our ways.

May you find what you need to navigate those seas of misinformation and come safely to the harbor of Heithni; the ways your ancestors would recognize as their own.

Heil to the Holy!  
Alfta "Svanni" Lothursdottir  
16 May 2003

We are always glad to hear any comments you may have about this book so the reader is welcome to contact us anytime with questions or comments at: [northvegr@yahoo.com](mailto:northvegr@yahoo.com). You can also visit our web site at: [www.northvegr.org](http://www.northvegr.org).

## CHAPTER 1: GIFTING

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

- *Havamal 44, Bellows Translation*

"When an article of value is passed across the boundary of frith and grasped by alien hands, a fusion of life takes place, which binds men one to another with an obligation of the same character as that of frith itself." - *Grönbech, v.2, p.54*

The main foundation of Heithni is gifting. It is an ideal that is at once simple and deeply profound. The chieftain of the tribe all Heithinn hold troth with is its greatest exemplar. It was Othinn and his two brothers Lothurr and Hoenir, who gifted the progenitors of the Northern European peoples with ond, othr and la, and it is a gift we carry to this day. It was Alfather who gifted the Mead of Poetry. It was Tyr who gifted (or sacrificed) his own hand in order that Fenrir might be bound and his chaos contained until the time of the Ragnarok.

Great kings and heroes are often given the title of "hater of gold" or "A spreader of gold" and it is directly from their generosity and gift giving that they gained these titles. Beowulf was called the "willing giver." They knew the secret of gifting.

One should not underestimate the powers that are set in motion from gifting. The forces released are not only social but spiritual as well. This is why a clear understanding of gifting must be had, else ill can follow. To put it most simply, gifting creates bonds. These bonds can be a positive or a negative thing. To Heithinn, friendship is never a function of simply affection, though that may enter into it. Friendship is a binding of the very orlog and gipta of the individuals, because friendship is always initiated with gifts, be they material or of a more social, supportive nature. It creates responsibility on both sides. We could say that friendship is a commitment to mutual support.

"Therefore, no power on earth can check the effect of a gift halfway, when it has once passed from hand to hand, and therefore, none can resist the spiritual effect of that which he has suffered to come too near." - *Grönbech, v.2, p.58*

So then, to accept a gift is to accept responsibility for the person you receive it from.

"One who has exchanged weapons with a stranger can lie down to sleep by his side; he can do no harm. One can even leave the other to keep guard against a third party, for the security produced by the gift is not restricted to a passive refraining from action. 'As father to son, as son to father, thus the two now reconciled meet in all doings together where need shall arise,'" runs the formula." - *Grönbech, v.2, p.61*

When one realizes this, the implications of gifting begin to become clear because gifting can be used as a weapon and indeed was. It was not uncommon for a person to refuse a gift if it was suspected that there were ill intentions. You should never feel obliged to take a gift from one whose motives you do not trust. To do otherwise is to court disaster.

Like any powerful thing gifting has the potential for great good and great harm. In accepting a gift from a person who has ill intentions, ill can result as you will be putting yourself under the power of that person. But just as powerful can be the effects of a gift given selflessly. Such selfless gifting is a boon both for giver and receiver. It increases the *gipta* (luck) of each and great things can result from it. Selfless gifting always brings benefit to the gifter though often that return is in a different currency. Selfless gifting is, in effect, promoting healthy cycles.

In nature all things live in cycles and it is only when they stagnate that death begins to occur. Gifting's antithesis, hoarding, is just this kind of stagnation. It is the ideal of the enemy of the Regin; the jotnar. Just as the tales of Othinn and his tribe give us an example of gifting so does that same lore give us an example of the results of hoarding. Where gifting is life-sustaining and healthy, hoarding is stagnating and death-bringing. The highest example of this is in the great Northern epic, *Völsunga Saga*. Here the Nibelung gold cuts a long path through kin and tribe, wiping out whole kindreds. The only owners of the gold to ever survive its curse were Othinn, Loki and Hoenir. They survived it because they knew the secret of gifting, i.e. they gave it away. No owner of the gold from that point on could resist the temptation to hoard it, and all were brought down by it, even the great hero, Sigurthr.

So in the lore we find time and time again great men being called 'haters of gold'. This kind of ideal is, of course, in direct opposition to the consumer driven society we all find ourselves living in today, where we have company CEO's bankrupting their companies in the desire for their own treasure of the Nibelungs. This society is no longer driven by the ideals Heithinn hold dear, but instead is driven by jotunn ideals.



We as Heithinn must strive to reclaim this ideal in our lives. In attempting to live Heithni without it, we become nothing more than little Fafnirs curled around our own little heaps of gold.

As Heithinn we are encouraged to be selfless gifters; haters of gold. We are encouraged to be wise givers and wise receivers of gifts. Our orlog and gipta depend on it.

## Chapter 2: Innangarðr - The Heithinn Community

"But even if the direct contribution is not large, we shall find, when we look more closely, that the peasant life, with its pride, its consciousness or racial continuity, and its faithful adherence to those next of kin, is at the very foundation of the entire culture of the people. Even if the contribution of the chieftain's hall is the first and most noticeable, a deeper study will soon reveal the figure of the peasant rising from it." - *Olrik. p.26-27*

Another main foundation of Heithni is the innangarthr, the ethical root of the culture. The innangarthr is kin and tribe or what we might call today, community. In the quote that begins this chapter, it should be noted that Olrik's peasant is the land-owning freeman, not the uneducated wage slave the word would normally bring to mind. These were men and women of community.

Northern society is divided into two halves. There is the *innangarðr* (i.e. the community) and the *útangarðr* (the wilds, or that which is outside the community and outside the law) (Wodening, p.2). That which was in the utangarthr is outside the law, in other words, it is the domain of the outlaw or the foreigner. Those who live within the law live in the innangarthr. It should be noted that the word foreigner is not used in a pejorative fashion and does not have a negative meaning to it, as the word outlaw does. It means someone that is not known. It is simply the stranger who is not of the community.

In order to have the privilege of living in the innangarthr one has to live by certain standards. Any community, in order to thrive, must have a minimal set of standards. In Heithni we call these standards Law. What that means will be discussed later, but for the time being think of it as a set of standards no different than perhaps a set of standards you might have in your own household. Just as every household has a certain way of doing things, so does every community. If you live within a community you live by the standards that community sets, and whether you abide by them or not, they exist. If you break those standards you are, in affect, stepping outside the boundary of the innangarthr into the utangarthr. By doing so you put yourself at odds with the community of which you are a part of. This juxtaposition is mirrored in the lore of the North as well.

"But this mythic poetry which we encounter in the Viking Age, with its wealth of sharply defined individual characters in this rapid succession of splendid scenes, has also evolved a unified conception of the world order, a definite philosophy. The world holds naught - so the myth teaches - that can be enjoyed without struggle, not an indiscriminate fighting of all against all, but a combat between the forces that would preserve human life and all that is of value to it, and those that would destroy these things: between the Asir and the Giants." - *Olrik*,

### **Folk Law**

"For with law shall our land be built up and settled, and with lawlessness wasted and spoiled." - *Sögumál 9*

"Germanic law was personal, not territorial; it 'belonged' to each member of a people wherever he or she went. It tended to limit itself to a narrow range of social relations, principally, those which would be called torts - injuries- in a modern court. It was not legislated, as was Roman law, but existed as custom..." - *Drew, p.xiv*

In order for the innangarthr to survive and prosper it needs Law. Right off we should note that the modern conception of Law, (we might say Roman law) is not the same as Folk Law. Modern Roman Law is based upon an imposed moral code, inflexible and decreed or legislated from some far off ruler or ruling party. More often than should be, it is oppressive.

Folk Law is of a completely different nature. It is the cumulative result of an organic ethical force, arising from within the folk themselves. Where Roman law can be oppressive and stale, Folk Law is nourishing and protecting. It is vital and dynamic; it grows with the community. No Folk Law is made until there comes need of it and then only at the decision of the community itself. It is the personal possession of every Northwo/man. In his excellent book, *We Are Our Deeds*, Eric Wódening notes that Folk Law by definition cannot in any way harm the community which it serves (Wódening, p.3-4), and this is a very important point. Folk Law serves the community, not the other way around.

So when we talk of Folk Law we talk of those standards which ward the gipta and health of the community. Folk Law helps the community stay healthy and grow. To think that any community can do without Law is a sure-fire recipe for chaos and the eventual death of the community. This Law must be manifest by the common agreement of the community itself to be valid. Imagine if you will, a city in which every person was free to decide what was and was not lawful in that community. Such a community would not be a community at all but a chaotic grouping of individuals doomed to self destruction.

In order for a law to be Folk Law it must then arise from the people which live by it, by common agreement. It must ward and nourish the community which it serves. The challenge is to make sure that law wards and nourishes the community (i.e. the innangarthr) and does not oppress it in any way. This is really more simple than it might first appear, as those of a common purpose and common faith will find their sense of ethic and mores always more similar than divergent.

How this applies to modern Heithinn communities is really no different in practice, though the innangarthr of today may be more an ideal than a physical reality. Simply put, every community no matter what its makeup has a certain set of standards that are expected of its members. Using the example of the household as the foundation of a community, and therefore an innangarthr within the innangarthr, there are certain standards each household has that each member is expected to follow. Let's say, for example, you visit your parents' home. When you walk into your parents' home, you are walking into a small innangarthr. You might be expected to take off your shoes when you enter. You might naturally be expected not to curse while there. In effect you might have a different mode of behavior while at your parents' home than you do while at your own home. These are standards and are an apt metaphor for what Folk Law is. Folk Laws are those commonly agreed upon standards that all people are expected to abide by when they are in that innangarthr - or as we might say today, in that community.

Folk Law is based entirely on custom. That means it grows as there arises need for it. We all could probably call to mind modern Roman laws that would seem to work in theory, but when they are put into practice, either have unintended effects or do not work at all. Prohibition is one that readily comes to mind. Folk Laws, however, are laws that have come into existence through experience; organically. They are flexible and generally they are brief. In Heithinn times, where ever Christianity began to take hold, the number of laws increased.

"Valla-Ljóts saga (ch. 3), in fact, shows how the mere presence of Christianity increased the density of rules in the culture, giving rise to more claims people could make against others..." -*Andersson and Miller, p.5*

Folk Law was simple, concise and to the point. So should it be for any Heithinn community today.

Now that we know that Folk Law is that which nourishes and wards the community, we might ask, who makes these Laws? The answer is "no one". That is a loaded answer because the meaning may not seem apparent without explanation. What is meant is that no single person makes it. It is a decision of proper behavior that is reached by common agreement within the community itself. The community itself decides what is proper and what is not proper.

As Folk Law is that which nourishes and wards the community, we might next ask, what Laws should there be? Each community will have its own unique set of Laws by which it is governed, but there will be a common base upon which these Laws are built. Whether a person subscribes to Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Icelandic or Germanic ancestral faiths one could expect to find a common ground on which they all meet. To use a metaphor we could say that these various forms of the northern spiritual faiths are like limbs on the great oak of Heithni. They each are connected to the trunk of that great tree but each branches off in ways that are unique to it alone. The various forms of northern ancestral faiths are like those limbs. Though they are each unique they also have a common base, i.e. the trunk of that tree that connects them, and their spiritual roots. For example we would expect that no matter if one were of the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Icelandic or Germanic faiths they would believe in the keeping of oaths. They would hold courtesy, generosity, hospitality, courage, loyalty and the other praiseworthy virtues of the North as their ideal. We would expect then that whatever branch of that great tree a community resided within it would have Laws that were based on these common virtues.

The purpose of the Law is to maintain balance. As we will see, moderation has always been a greatly prized virtue because it encouraged the balance that was the ideal of Northern communities. Folk Law's primary purpose is to maintain a state of balance and to restore it when imbalance occurs.

Again we might ask, who decides what these virtues are? The answer again, is no one. Our ancestors through observation and hard-earned experience learned what was ethical, and it was from these ethics that Folk Law sprang. Our ancestors took their wisdom and wove it into narratives, some of which have survived for us to find after almost 1000 years. Anyone with enough patience and diligence can unearth them and bring them back into the light of day. This has been done and is ongoing as we gain our first Heithni scholars.

In our modern Heithinn communities what then is the outlaw? Is he or she someone that goes against the Law? One strike and you are out? Not hardly. Being human means making mistakes. We learn most from our mistakes, at least the person who has Holiness as a goal does. The person who has committed an offense against someone creates for themselves a debt. Debts can be repaid. Folk Law was geared toward encouraging two contending parties to settle their disputes by mediation or arbitration instead of adjudication. If a dispute could be settled between the two contending parties before it was taken to be judged at a thing (*law council*), then it could only work toward the maintaining of frith in the community. Any application of Folk Law in our modern communities should prove itself valid by doing the same.

Debt is an imbalance. When a person carries a debt, he is burdened with a commitment either to society or to another individual. In paying a debt before the community, though it is usually a symbolic act and not a pure material or spiritual rebalance in and of itself, it is made a balance by the consensus of the community and the debt is taken off his orlog. The force of the community to

work toward a predominant lack of indebtedness amongst its members is a communal gift of the highest order, as the wholeness and well-being of every single individual affects the greater whole.

The outlaw was one of two things. He was one who, by his actions, committed acts that were so harmful to the community that the debt could only be paid by his expulsion. Or he was one who refused to pay the debt he had incurred through his offenses. So we see that simply committing an offense does not make one an outlaw, but refusing to pay the debt incurred for the committing of that offense does. The outlaw is the person whose actions bring more harm to the community than their continued presence can justify. Their expulsion in the highest sense is for the good of themselves, as their indebtedness may not be able to be repaid within the current community setting, though they may be shed of it in another environment more congenial to their own nature. Needless to say the outlawing of a person should be something that is done only in extreme circumstances.

### **Heilagr and Óheilagr: Holy and Unholy**

"Holy - From Anglo-Saxon *halig*, derived from the base *hal* - 'sound, whole.'  
- *Webster's New Work Dictionary of the American Language*

Before we can talk of the concept of Holy and Unholy in Heithni we must first define our terms. This is because the modern Christian definitions of these words are not in line at all with their original Germanic meanings. The word holy has its origin in the Germanic language group.

The word holy in Christianity is used to refer to something set apart, that is, opposed to that which is natural. For them that which is natural is flawed and "sinful." There is no such connotation of the word in its original Germanic meaning. That which was Holy was that which was whole, healthy and natural. That which was not Holy, i.e. unholy, was that which was not natural, imbalanced, ill and diseased.

Holy actions are those actions that bring about the health and well being of one's kindred and community. Those actions that are unholy are those actions which bring harm to one's kindred and community. It is important that Northfolk act in ways that are Holy. This is not always something that comes purely instinctually. We may want to smack the living daylights out of that person who has just acted in a way that is insulting or harmful to our person. But to react without thinking is the way of the thrall. We must always consider if our reaction will bring Holiness to our kin and community. It is for this reason that actions and deeds should be considered before committing them - because once they are committed, their holiness or unholy is placed into the well of Vyrð and there is no taking back the results that are born of them.

As Northfolk we are not left adrift when it comes to learning which kind of actions are Holy and which harmful. There are no hard and fast rules but there is a highly developed ethical system, based upon the experiences of our ancestors over the centuries, which we can use as our guide.

## **Heithinn Leadership**

### **The Chieftain**

"Then said Hjalti the son of Thord: "It shall not be so; we will hold the peace with you although our minds have altered. I would not that men should have the example of our having broken the peace which we ourselves gave and declared. Grettir shall depart unhindered whithersoever he will, and shall have peace till such time as he reach his home from this journey. And then this truce shall have expired whatever happen with us." They all thanked him for his speech, and thought he had acted as a chieftain should under such circumstances." - *Grettir's Saga*, c.72

One of the most important concepts in the innangarthr is the chieftain/ess. A Heithinn community without a chieftain is one that is like a longship without a rudder. It drifts at the whim of the currents and has no direction. Chieftainship is more than simply a title, it is an integral part of the Northern community. Whether that leader may carry the title of gothi, drottinn, or other similar terms it is not the title that makes them a leader. What makes them a leader are their actions.

The character of Heithinn leadership is a very particular kind and one that is not often seen. The Heithinn leader is servant to those whom he or she leads. That leader is not concerned with personal power, fame or wealth but with the well being of their community. When that leader allows concerns to influence them other than the health and well being of the community they lead, that is when they begin to cease being a leader and degenerate into an opportunist or a despot. Such leaders bring unholiness to their communities.

Such was the devotion of some Northern leaders to their community that some would be willing to offer themselves as a sacrifice to the Tivar in exchange for the well being of their community. Such dedication to community is rarely seen in leadership today but is one that is a treasure beyond any price. If you have a leader who exhibits such dedication, treasure them like the rare jewel they are.

The primary responsibility of the Heithinn leader is to ward the gipta of their community. In elder times, the gipta of the community was a direct result of the right action of the chieftain. This right action included presiding over the seasonal blots to insure the bonds between the Tivar and the community remained strong. If the chieftain performed right action, then the community

would have good crops, frith and prosperity. If, however, the chieftain did not perform right action then the community could suffer. Famine, drought and bareness could be the result.

Though most modern communities of Northfolk at present do not immediately depend on good crops and weather, the concept still applies as much as it ever did. If a Heithinn community is not prospering, the blame lies first and foremost with its leadership. Excuses are just that: excuses. Results are the symbols of success.

A true Heithinn leader will have a force of luck (*hamingja*) that seems almost magical. He and he alone will possess this luck and it is a birthright from his ancestors. He is the one chosen from among his kin to carry it forward. His or her actions seem to always be successful, almost as if ordained. This does not mean that there will not be conflicts that need to be fought but in these conflicts the *hamingja* of a true leader will often lead them to success no matter what the adversity. As our Heithinn fore-fathers and mothers knew, the *gipta* of the community flows straight from the leader and the *hamingja* of a true leader is a powerful thing. They are, in effect, the conduit from which flows the frith and prosperity that the community thrives upon.

## **The Lögretta**

"Affairs of smaller moment the chiefs determine: about matters of higher consequence the whole nation deliberates; yet in such sort, that whatever depends upon the pleasure and decision of the people, is examined and discussed by the chiefs." - *Germania c.11*

Though the chieftain is the leader of the community, he is not the only person who functions in a role of leadership. Indispensable to any Heithinn community is the *logretta*. They are what we might call a council. They are the body which creates the law of the community. In elder times, the *logretta* might have been composed of, for example, a representative of each household. They would meet at set times in the legal assembly which was called the *thing*. It was during these things that law cases were settled and that new laws were enacted when needed. Though the chieftain was the leader of the community, the real power rested with the people in the *logretta*. The chieftain lead at their consensus. If he were to do something that was harmful to the community the *logretta* could and did remove him from his position. In elder times this could even result in the chieftain being killed, to hopefully right the ill actions he had performed and aide in bringing back balance within the community.

What this illustrates plainly, is that unlike modern democracy, the Heithinn form of leadership was actually a government by the people. In this community only the *logretta* had the right to make mutual law. In other words



that right to make Law was one that only the people themselves had. The chieftain only enforced it. It was the chieftain's responsibility to lead in way that was Holy. His primary duty was to be the living example of the ideal which the community held highest. It was the logretta's responsibility to make sure they had a leader that acted in ways that were Holy or else to remove him if he proved not to be so.

The parallels for modern Heithinn communities are easy to see and little needs to be said about how this form of leadership functions in modern communities, because there is no difference in the concept, though the community itself may be of a different nature than historical Heithinn knew.

### **Frith and the Innangarðr**

"*Frith*, then, does not simply mean 'peace,' although it is often translated as such. It carries with it senses of being secure and free from harm, even when being used to mean 'peace.' Similarly, when used to mean 'security' or 'refuge,' it still carries with it the sense of 'peace' in being free from violence or hostility." (Wódening, p.9)

The end all goal of the innangarðr, which it achieves through the Holiness created by Law, is frith. Frith operates on the kindred level as well as on the level of the innangarðr, but the concept applies equally to both. So we will talk about frith again in the chapter on kin and tribe. Frith is often translated as "peace" and perhaps if we were to have to choose one word in English that most conveys the Northern concept, it would be peace. However, one word in English does not convey the full meaning and if we limit ourselves to one word to define frith in all its fullness we have failed to do it justice.

Though frith does include the meaning of peace, it also includes the ideals of joy and prosperity. Frith is that feeling of being home. If you have ever been away from your home community for some time, assuming it was one that fostered Holiness to some degree, and then returned, you might get a closer idea of the real meaning of frith. It is a feeling of content and belonging that one can only know when one is home. One is among friends and secure. All feelings that this can generate are connected with frith. Joy itself is a byproduct of frith, not the cause of frith.

This is the purpose of the innangarðr. The Law, the chieftain and the logretta; it all is designed to make sure the community has a maximum amount of frith. It would be a mistake, however, to view frith as passive. It is not. Frith is active in that when a situation arises that may disturb the frith, action must be taken to ensure that the situation does not degenerate to the point where imbalance is predominant and frith is broken. This sometimes means that action is taken that might include conflict, but this conflict is taken toward the maintenance and restoration of frith. We must always remember that frith is an active principle, we might even say it is a responsibility, and one that each

member of the community shares. Each member of a community must act in ways that foster frith. Eric Wódening notes that police officers are still called "peace officers" today (*We Are Our Deeds*, p.6-7), and they illustrate the concept of the active nature of frith as opposed to a passive nature.

All the ideals discussed in this chapter have as their goal the bringing of a state of prosperity, peace and joy within the community. These ideals are all intertwined and one cannot function properly without the other. No Law, no leadership, no frith, all mean no community.

### **A Brief Overview of Innangarðr Organization**

"Affairs of smaller moment the chiefs determine: about matters of higher consequence the whole nation deliberates; yet in such sort, that whatever depends upon the pleasure and decision of the people, is examined and discussed by the chiefs." - *Germania* c.11

This is intended as a brief overview of innangarðr organization that is based on the tribal ways of our Northern European ancestors. The purpose of this is not to say that this method of organization is required for an innangarðr, but rather to give the reader an idea of the method of organization Northfolk of old used and found to be workable through long experience.

The primary organization is centered around what we might call three positions of leadership. The first position is that of chieftain. This chieftain may have many different titles, such as truhtinn, dróttinn, gothi or others, according to their predominant role. Their duty is, however, the same. They are the leader, the person for whom, "the buck stops here." They lead by example and inspiration. Their leadership is not of the Christo-Roman kind. They lead by exemplifying the highest ideals of the community. They are the servants to the community and their only motivation is in service to it. The primary purpose of the leader comes when times are rough for the community. When these rough times come they have strength and hamingja enough to not simply react to the situation but to do what is Holy and best for the community, whatever that may be. When the time comes for a decision, it is the chieftain, well versed in the Law, who makes it.

The second office is that of lawspeaker. This person is someone who is not involved with the diplomacy as the chieftain must be. Diplomacy requires that one must be "diplomatic." The lawspeaker on the other hand speaks of what is Holy, i.e. Law and ethics. Whenever there is a question concerning Law or ethics, they are the one consulted. Their words are such that diplomacy is not possible, for their duty is to speak truth, which sometimes requires that diplomacy must be set aside. Lawspeakers do not make good diplomats. However, sometimes the chieftain and lawspeaker are the same person. In this case that person must make sure he or she keeps the lines between the two positions clearly defined. When dealing with those outside his innangarðr he must remember that

diplomacy is his duty and the role of lawspeaker is left for its proper place, among his own innangarthr.

The third position is that of a member of the lögretta. The lögretta is a legal council which is formed by the heads of each household in the innangarthr. Their duty is to act as advisor to the chieftain and they are the makers of Law. Earlier, we saw that Folk Law is organic and grows only where it is needed. When it is needed it is the lögretta that agrees upon it. The chieftain never creates Law. That right rests solely with the people in the form of the lögretta. It is also the right of the lögretta to choose their chieftain or to remove him or her if it should become necessary. The real power in the innangarthr lies in the hands of the lögretta despite the fact it is the chieftain who makes the final decision. In 'making a final decision' he is taking the orlog of that decision upon his own vyrð, removing the consequences of an improperly or imbalanced law from the folk as a whole and taking them upon himself. This is his duty to his folk. The wise chieftain consults his lögretta before making a major decision and by doing so keeps his finger on the pulse of the people. It is the lögretta's responsibility to make sure they have a chieftain who exemplifies the ideals of the community and it is their responsibility to make sure they have a chieftain whose decisions they will support even if some among them do not agree with those decisions. The lögretta does not make the final decision but if the chieftain and lögretta are indeed acting in ways that are Holy, the lögretta will give form to the final decision that is made.

None of these positions is all-powerful and a person's success in these positions is shown by the amount of frith in that community. Though the chieftain is the person who makes the decisions and represents the innangarthr to the outside world, his actions must ever be with their well-being in mind. If his actions become motivated by greed or self-aggrandizement, he can and should be removed from his office. The lawspeaker has little or no actual power but they have a great responsibility as they must promote what is Holy. If their words do not promote Holiness, they should be removed as well. The lögretta, where most of the real power lies, must be of the same mind as the chieftain. In other words their motivation must be the well-being of their own kin and the innangarthr just as much as the chieftain's. But they must also allow the cheiftain to do his job. When the people in all three of these positions have their primary motivation within the frith and well-being of their innangarthr, that community will grow into a powerful thing. What tells the tale of success of anyone in one of these positions is the frith and well-being of the community. If the community is not in a state of frith, the people in these positions are not doing their job.

### CHAPTER 3: KIN AND COMMUNITY

"Surrounding the individual there was a protecting layer of neighbors, friends, kinsmen, and sons- or brothers-in-law - a group of persons who had emerged from the ancient clan society and were permeated with its basic principle of loyalty to kinsfolk. The rules of wisdom in the *Hávamál* continually inculcate the fact that a tree crumbles if it stands without shelter of other trees, and there are no end of directions as to how one may best win and retain friends: why should the man live whom no one loves?" - *Olrik, p.26*

"We find here a community based upon general unity, mutual self-sacrifice and self-denial, and the social spirit. A society, in which every individual, from birth to death, was bound by consideration for his neighbour. The individuals in this community show in all their doings that they are inspired by one passion: the welfare and honour of their kin; and none of the temptations of the world can move them even for a moment to glance aside. They say themselves, that this passion is love." - *Grönbech, p.24*

Another major foundation on which Heithni rests is kin and tribe. The way of thinking behind this ideal is what we might call, *tribal thinking*. It is a way of thinking that is foreign to modern individualists who are concerned primarily with "number one." For Northfolk, what always informs their action is not personal desire but the well being of kin and tribe, as they know that frith in the community will empower them individually to the utmost degree, and the freedom such frith grants is impossible to measure. Heithinn ethics and culture is based solidly on this concept. In ancient times, if a member of your kindred or tribe killed a person from another kindred, the family of that person who was killed had the right to take revenge on ANY member of your family/tribe, not just the person who actually did the killing. This is an example of the responsibility each member held for the other, that each Heithinn carries for his fellow kin. Such a responsibility propels one's thinking to a whole new level when one realizes that their actions have results that not only affect oneself but one's whole kindred.

Such compact of personal interest is not only immediate but can and often does involve complex lines of action. The extent to which ties of communal gipta were felt are expressed in various examples in the lore. One form is mentioned in the *Morkinskinna*, as well as this example from *Flateyjarbok*. "Some time passed, but it wasn't long before Thorleif grew so gloomy he could barely sit and drink with his benchmates. The king soon noted this and had Thorleif called before him. He asked, 'What causes this gloom, Thorleif, that you can scarcely keep

company with us?' Thorleif answered, 'You should know, lord, that one is bound to take away another's troubles, if he asks about them.'

This was not a mere expression of empathy, this was a statement of intertwined action.

In this age, perhaps, it is not an easy way to learn to think. Our modern society is one that does not encourage this kind of attention outside one's self-interest, but it is imperative for the Heithinn community that each of its members learn to think in this fashion again. If they do not it is more likely the result will be not a community but an unruly bunch of individualists. No innangarthr can truly function in a way that is Holy without Tribal thinking.

### **Earning One's Place**

" Every action calls to itself other actions to which it is significantly linked. " - *Bauschatz, p.96*

"Then began I to thrive, and wisdom to get,  
I grew and well I was;  
Each word led me on to another word,  
Each deed to another deed." - *Runattal thattr Othinns 4*

In today's New Age saturated pagan community the concept of earning one's place is something rarely seen. However, the ideal of having to earn one's place was a time-honored tradition among our Heithinn ancestors. One did not gain a position within the community or even the right to have a voice in that community until that right was earned. And this right is only earned with actions. In a Heithinn community there is respect for the opinion of the elders and leaders of that community because they have earned the right, through deeds and actions, to have that opinion. All too often in modern religious communities, the person just finding their way back home will be all too willing to state their often uninformed opinion and think that it deserves as much consideration as the elders of that community. It simply does not deserve such, and in the old times, the young pup was certain to get his snout smacked for trying to offer an opinion when he had not earned the right to offer it.

The next point about earning one's place is one that will become more clear once the chapter on honoring the ancestors is read. The concept of "the gods called me" is not one that is really a Heithinn ideal at all. This new age ideal is one that, with a little consideration, can be seen to border on the ridiculous. What we must understand is that we each carry the kinsael (kin-luck) of our ancestors. This kin-luck is an accumulation of the actions and deeds of our ancestors stretching back into time. Very few of us, if any, could seriously say that our family line has been true to the Regin since the days of the Christian

conversion. To be blunt, our ancestors betrayed the Regin. They broke troth with them to bow at the feet of the desert god and for most of our lines, that has been the case for over a 1000 years. Why then would the Regin want to "call" those who are the children of the untrue? The answer to that is that they would not. To think otherwise is the height of egotism. More than likely the "call" is not the Regin getting on the phone to us but is instead the product of the clearing away of Christian scales that occurs when one finally sees the bankrupt religion of Christianity for what it is, and starts to open their minds and souls to the kin-luck that has for so long been ignored and stifled. And again this is a result of actions. It is earned. There is no ancestral state of grace.

This doesn't mean that we can't earn the right to call on them again. It does not mean that we cannot correct that breach of troth that our ancestors committed so long ago. We can. But it only comes at our initiation, and through actions. Acceptance is never freely given. It is earned. In Heithni we gain acceptance the old fashioned way. We earn it.

The right to be called Heithinn is one that is earned as well. Simply saying one is Heithinn is no more valid than saying one is a doctor without having performed the deeds that are required to legitimately be called one. The right to call oneself Heithinn and have others take you seriously, is one that is earned through actions. Let your actions tell others you are Heithinn. Words are nice, but actions are golden.

## **Frith and Kin**

"Frith is the state of things which exists between friends. And it means, first and foremost, reciprocal inviolability. However individual wills may clash in a conflict of kin against kin, however stubbornly individual heads may seek their own way according to their quota of wisdom, there can never be question of conflict save in the sense of thoughts and feelings working their way toward an equipoise in unity. We need have no doubt but that good kinsmen could disagree with fervour, but however the matter might stand, there could - should, must inevitably - be but one ending to it all; a settlement peaceable and making for peace - frith." - *Grönbech, p.33*

"Frith constitutes what we call the base of the soul. It is not a mighty feeling among other feelings in these people, but the very core of the soul, that gives birth to all thoughts and feelings, and provides them with the energy of life - or it is that centre in the self where thoughts and feelings receive the stamp of their humanity, and are inspired with will and direction. It answers to what we in ourselves call the human. Humanity in them bears always the mark of kinship." - *Grönbech, p.53*

The qualities of the word frith cannot be understood properly if we insist on using one English word to describe it. To do so would be a gross injustice to the full scope of what it is. It is also unlikely we could do it justice by dedicating only a sentence or two to its definition. So we will not limit its description when we say that frith is joy, love, security, loyalty, friendship and prosperity as well as those things that give birth to these conditions.

Grönbech says of frith that it is "reciprocal inviolability." It is a commitment of inviolability between kinsmen and friends, that all who are within a community or kindred give to each other not in word but in deed. Kinsman may knock heads over this matter or that, but any conflict between kinsman is not conflict at all but some necessary action toward frith.

Frith applies solely to that innangarthr it exists within, whether it be an innangarthr of kindred or of community. The members of that innangarthr have no responsibility toward those in the utangarthr (i.e. those outside the innangarthr) in any way. Those in the utangarthr are foreigners. They are not looked upon in a negative manner nor are they considered enemies necessarily. They are simply outsiders whom may or may not be hostile to the innangarthr. Whether hostility is the case or not will be seen in their actions, but until the time they prove they are an enemy, they are looked upon with indifference.

Frith then requires foremost that kinsman cannot act against kinsman. This even applies to those troublesome kinsmen we all know too well. As long as their troublesome ways point outside the innangarthr, no kinsman should ever betray them or fail to rise to their defense in times of need. In the sagas there are quite a few examples of men of honor helping that troublesome kinsman in any way they could.

We might ask then, should a kinsman be tolerated no matter what he does, no matter how vile and ill his deeds? The answer to that is a qualified no. As long as a kinsman directs his ill or troublesome actions outside the innangarthr, without affecting his kinsmen thereby or bringing in trouble from outside, frith is to be maintained with him. But when that kinsman directs ill actions inward, or stirs up conflict from outside that is directed at the community, or to the body of kinsmen of which he is a part, he becomes like a malignant cancer eating at the healthy body of the kindred. Would we suffer one who has molested a child to remain among us? The answer is no. Frith is a strong bond that cannot be broken but there are times that an infected part of the body must be "cut off" in order that the body can survive. The kinsman who directs ill toward his own innangarthr is a cancer, and if the ill is serious enough it may require his being cut out of the innangarthr, i.e. outlawed.

This is a possibility we should view as a drastic action comparable to how we would view the cutting off of our own arm. In other words it should never be done until the choice comes down to the very survival of the innangarthr. As anyone who has had a loved one who was dealing with some serious illness knows, the experience of having a part of the body cut out is one that is very damaging to the health and one that takes a long time from which to recover. Sometimes that recovery never brings the body to its former way of life. This

equally applies to the innangarthr that must cut out one of its kinsman in order to survive. Frith is not an absolute though it is nearly so.

It should be noted that the kinsman who forces his kindred to take such a drastic step has, in effect, cut himself out of his kindred. He has, by his actions, broken frith which is the highest rule an innangarthr can have.

Frith was not a virtue for our Northern ancestors, it was an expectation. It was a spiritual concept as much as a social concept. The very soul of the Northman sprung from the fertile grounds of frith. Grönbech tells us that the thought of breaking frith was so foreign, so strange, so horrid, that it was considered to be the effect of some madness or evil force. So too they would have viewed the modern paradigm of selfishness, me-ism, and personal greed.

Frith is not merely a passive ideal. It is active. One could not merely refrain from harming a kinsman and necessarily remain in frith. One was expected to actively defend him if he knew danger were near. Like all Northern ideals and ethics, frith requires action to gain its full effect.

Frith does not imply that if a kinsman creates a debt for himself by committing an offense against another person, he should not be made to pay the debt. In fact if a man incurs debt, it is that man's kinsmen who are responsible for making sure the debt is paid. In incurring a debt a person incurs it for their whole kindred. If that man does not pay the debt his whole kindred can be held responsible for the paying of the debt, and this includes revenge killings. Kinsmen are the doers of each others' deeds.

Frith is not peace itself. Peace is the result of frith. Frith was a concept that operated both on kindred and communal levels. Contrary to modern conceptions, Northfolk were not the warmongering maniacs they are often depicted as. They knew that continual war could destroy an innangarthr and should be committed only in order to regain balance, and that prosperity was not possible without peace. Since frith is an active concept, it required sometimes that conflict happen in order to either restore the frith or ward it. Hakon the Good was one of the most beloved kings of Norway. He was not so beloved because he was a great warrior but because of his tolerance, and because of the prosperity and peace that reigned in the land during his rule. So highly regarded was he that he was said to have gained a seat in Valhöll even though he was a Christian. This kind of prosperity and peace was a direct result of the balance brought about by frith.

As with peace, other qualities of frith such as love, security, joy and prosperity were not really qualities of frith but were actually results of it. Frith also contributes to one of the most prized possessions Northfolk have; *honor* (not to be confused with reputation). What we find when we do any detailed examination of Northern ethics and Folk Law is that both had their primary function in the restoring and maintaining of frith and Holiness. Any true Folk Law will contribute to the frith of the community, else it is not Folk Law at all. The community that has leadership with the luck and sight enough to be able to tell what is or is not Folk Law, will be a community that prospers. It will grow without any effort at all. Frith is then the root of community and kindred.



## **The Modern Innangarðr**

"We find here a community based upon general unity, mutual self-sacrifice and self-denial, and the social spirit. A society, in which every individual, from birth to death, was bound by consideration for his neighbour. The individuals in this community show in all their doings that they are inspired by one passion: the welfare and honour of their kin; and none of the temptations of the world can move them even for a moment to glance aside. They say themselves, that this passion is love." - *Grönbech, v.1, p.24*

How do the ideals thus far presented apply to the modern Heithinn innangarðr? Must we all fare away from the cities and form a communal group somewhere in the wilderness, living in log cabins without running water or electricity to have an innangarðr? No, certainly not. Technology is simply a tool like any other. It is not the technology (in most cases) but the ideals that are unhealthy in today's modern society.

The traditional rural town could be seen as a type of innangarðr. The communal nature of barn-raising, where every member gathers to help build a barn, is in the tradition of the innangarðr. But one need not even live in a rural community to have an innangarðr. The innangarðr is first and foremost for the security and nurturing of its members. One could live in the city and still have an innangarðr. When the plumbing goes out in John's house he can call his kinsman, Joe, to come over and help him get it fixed. When Sheila needs someone to watch her kids for a while she can call on her kinswoman Nancy to come over and watch them for her. When Doug is in the hospital the whole kindred can take turns cooking meals and running errands for the family till he gets back on his feet. When one family finds themselves coming on hard times financially they can count on their kindred to pony up to raise the money that is needed. When Jim and Jack have a dispute another kinsman acts as a mediator and helps them settle the dispute with proper debt paid. When a wedding occurs or when the great tides come around, the whole innangarðr gathers to celebrate together. When someone dies they gather to honor that person and give support to the family whose kinswo/man has passed on. This is what an innangarðr is all about. No matter where you live this is what your innangarðr can be.

## CHAPTER 4: SOLITARY LIVING

“In the past, a (heathen's) birth had been the most decisive element in his life, determining his family ties and the 'nation' (ME, *nacioun*, from Latin *nation-*, *natio* birth, from *nasci* to be born, see *kin*.) to which he belonged. This 'national' consciousness remained strong even after the establishment of the new barbarian states...From the legal point of view, this strong 'national' consciousness led to the development of what is known as the “personality of law” concept. The “law” by which a man was to be judged was determined by his birth (i.e. by his “nation”) rather than by the territory in which he dwelt.” - *Drew*, p. 12

The above example is an illustration of how, to heathen tribes, personal responsibility and actions were regarded as abiding within each and every tribal member, even to the extent of common law being portable and attached to one traveling or dwelling in foreign lands - and respected as such. This attitude of carrying one's roots with and within one is something extremely important to keep in the front of one's mind and heart as, most likely, the Heithinn of this age is alone. Not only in a spiritual or religious context, but more deeply felt, a societal one. She or he lives without the cultural support, spiritual education, and role models our ancient ancestors grew up with. It may even be difficult to express aloud what we feel, at times, and likely quite difficult to wear any symbols of our faith without some sense of immanent censure or reproach.

But we are fortunate that we are now in a time of a weakening of the grip of Rome's Church and her paradigms. In most countries on Middle-garthr we have been granted at least a limited freedom to study, understand and pursue what we feel true in our hearts. It may or may not entail difficulty with our families, friends and coworkers, but strength will flow from good orlog and proper action, and in this feel of personal empowerment we have the prime opportunity to become ambassadors of the faith. One need not say a word, if it bring them danger or threatens to upset the social or psychological balance of the ones they love. All it takes is one's willingness to allow their knowledge of the elder ways to inform, reform and direct all they do.

We are spiritual kin, and together we make up a spiritual 'nation', as we are born with the ties of our original homelands, our mutual tree, deep within our souls, regardless of where or into what body we are now born. Through the simple means of living according to the ancient ethics and principles, we prove our worth to the dominant society, we express our faith in deeds that, unfortunately, may seem a bit old fashioned, or even entirely out of place in this ego-centric, amoral atmosphere. Yet when our personal spiritual roots are firmly planted, our faith colors and shapes every aspect of life. Our behavior, actions and reactions amidst society will come to reflect our inner ethical system. The spiritual path-notes of our ancestors and creators will inform and reshape everything we do. With our hearts seated in the tree, everything we observe falls into context of our own cosmology, and in time others of the same minds and hearts will feel our presence, if there are any near. Our gifts to the worlds, to nature, and even to the society in which we find ourselves will be subtle, perhaps, but strong as an undercurrent. And the Regin, nature and our spiritual ancestors will hold and support us, and carry us into a greater skuld.

## CHAPTER 5: HEITHINN ETHICS

"If we as modern heathen wish for our religion to prosper and grow, then we should embrace the morals and ethics of our forebears. Indeed, we should perhaps make extensive study into ancient heathen morality a top priority. At the very least we should insure that anyone newly entering the religion is thoroughly educated in the law and the way by which our forebears abided. To do otherwise could well be to condemn our faith to obscurity." - *Wóðening*, p.75

The system of ethics of the Germanic Iron Age and Viking Age Heithinn was one that was highly developed and deeply profound. To Roman and Christian writers of the times, looking into their culture from the outside, the actions of Northfolk seemed almost chaotic and without reason. This was because they did not understand the foundation upon which the ethics of the North were based. Its system is one that is completely incompatible with the Christo-Roman ideals of the time, on which our modern society is based. Having read this far the reader now knows that the major foundations of Northern culture and society were, kin/community, Law and gifting. Every aspect of their society was interconnected with these ideals. The Folk Law we discussed earlier was based on the ethics which these Northmen held dear. In this chapter we will talk about what those ethics were and how they related to the honor, gipta and frith of community and kin.

### **Praiseworthy Virtues of the North**

"It is, however, becoming ever clearer, and to an increasing number, how supremely important is Icelandic as a word-hoard to the English-speaking peoples, and that in its legend, song, and story there is a very mine of noble and pleasant beauty and high manhood."

- *Sparling's Intro to the Magnússon and Morris Translation of Völsunga Saga*

In the sagas, heroic tales, and other stories of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Northern Europe are to be found some examples of ethics of the North, as well as unethics as we might call those actions which do not conform to that which is praiseworthy. What was considered praiseworthy, and just as frequently what was not considered praiseworthy, was penned in great detail. In order to thrive, any tradition must have a well explained ethic to go along with its world-view. In this chapter will be a presentation of those ethical standards, with commentary.

The reason we call these ethics praiseworthy is because they are not artificial morals imposed by some legislative body. These virtues are virtues that were genuinely admired among the folk. We might, like the Law of the North, call them Folk Ethics. These ethics were passed down to Northfolk and exemplified by the Regin themselves, and their efficacy was proven to them by experience and observation.

For Northfolk it was more important to die and leave a good name than to live in disgrace. They had total faith that if their lives were lived in a

praiseworthy fashion it would earn them a seat in the after life with the ancestors, their patrons, etc.

In addition to leaving a good name they realized that they were not cut off from their ancestors by death. They knew that there is no gulf separating us from our ancestors. Our actions have effect on our ancestors and they saw it as a great duty, above all, to preserve and increase the kin-luck that had been built up. This kin-luck is their heritage and our responsibility. To harm that heritage by the commission of villainy was to harm the ancestors. This was and is a responsibility Northfolk took seriously.

This was especially true when we consider that ancestors were and may again be reborn into the kin-line, and to damage the kin-luck one was entrusted with meant that one would be passing on that kin-luck to their children in a degenerated state or even worse, pass on "unluck" to their children. As we saw in the discussion of frith, above, our deeds have affect not only on us but our ancestors and kin, whether they be dead or alive. If we could give one word to describe why Northfolk felt living in a praiseworthy fashion was so important, it would be "responsibility."

## **Generosity**

"At Herjolfsnes lived a man named Thorkel. He was a capable man and the best of farmers. He gave Thorbjorn and all his companions shelter for the winter, treating them generously. Thorbjorn and all his companions were highly pleased." - *Erik the Red's Saga* c.3

Generosity was a virtue that, again and again, was used to praise great men and women in the sagas. Kings and chieftains were said to be hater's of gold or glad givers and it was their generosity that seemed, to the writers of the sagas, to be as important a virtue as courage and prowess in battle. Earlier we talked of how gifting created bonds. Friendship to Northfolk was never simply a function of affection and though it could include affection it did not have to. For the Northman friendship was created through gifts. The bonds created were strong and virtually unbreakable.

Generosity can be seen as a way of sharing one's good fortune with others in one's community and kindred, just as the Regin share their gifts with us. There are few things that will bind a community together more strongly than if its members are generous. Hoarding or selfishness, on the other hand, will destroy the frith and cohesion of a community just about as fast as anything can. The importance that Northfolk give to generosity can be seen in the Old Norse word, *dugnaðr*, which could mean both virtue and aid or assistance. The word *dugnaðarstigr*, which comes from the same root, means "path of virtue."

What Northmen knew is that the generous man was never in need because what we send out always comes back to us. This will be explained more when we talk of orlog and gipta.

## **Courage**

"I am not so sure of that," says Skarphedinn, "for now he is 'fey'; but still I may well humour my father in this, by being burnt indoors along with him, for I am not afraid of my death." - *Njal's Saga*, c.127

Even Roman and Christian writers took note of the courage of the Northman, facing death as if it were nothing at all. Fear saps the strength and clouds the mind. What need of fear when we are confident that, if our actions be virtuous, we will have a place in the other worlds when we die? What need of fear have we if we have total faith in the reality of our sal (ON – sál)? There's no denying that it sometimes takes courage to live up to the ethics herein described, but Northfolk know that the scorn of their ancestors is far worse a fate than anything unpleasant resulting from sticking to one's virtues. Additionally we know, as we will find out below, living one's life in a praiseworthy fashion adds strength to our gipta and brings us good orlog, just as villainy takes away from it. In the sagas it is said that a man can win the day, though his sword be dull, if his courage only hold out.

### **Loyalty**

"The boy was good-looking and accomplished from an early age, even-tempered, witty, far-sighted, steadfast in friendship and moderate in everything." - *Vatnsdæla Saga, c.13*

This virtue could rightly be placed under the ideal of frith, for one aspect of frith is indeed loyalty. In the quote above for courage, Njal's son displayed not only courage but loyalty to his kin. For Northfolk, it was unthinkable to break frith (betray) their kin and friends, for betrayal implies self-centeredness. Nothing harmed one's gipta and by extension kin-luck, more than betrayal.

### **Freedom**

"King Skate, though he had no troops to meet them with would rather die with honor than lie with shame; he would rather fall in his kingdom than serve his foes. He therefore went to battle, having no other troops than his courtiers." - *The Saga of Thorstein Viking's Son c.17*

Freedom is not so much a virtue as it is an ideal but it is one that Northfolk clung to with ferocity. It is said that Iceland was first populated because of the tyranny of Harald Fairhair, the despotic ruler of Norway at the time. As the quote illustrates, Northfolk were willing to die to be free if necessary. This is, of course, an ideal we are familiar with.

Freedom was, however, not just a privilege. It was, as well, a duty. In the early days of the Lombard nation, before Romanization began to weaken it, every Lombard freeman was expected to serve in the military, when the call to arms was given. (Drew, p.23-24) This is an ideal that finds its expression in countries like Norway where every male is required to serve in the military for a set time. What we find then is that freedom, like frith, must be actively warded.

## Hospitality

"Ofeig was a married man; his wife was named Thorgerd, Vali's daughter, a woman of good family and very strong character. Ofeig was a very wise man and a shrewd adviser. He was a man of distinction in every respect, but was not well off financially, because he had extensive lands but not much cash. Although it was quite a struggle to supply the needs of his household, he denied no one hospitality." - *Bandamanna Saga*, c.1

This quote perfectly illustrates the importance with which Northfolk held hospitality to be. Ófeig, though he had to struggle to provide for his own family, never denied anyone hospitality. It was thought that the Regin walked among us in disguise from time to time. The thought of refusing them hospitality was unthinkable. This is not unique amongst the North, it is an Indo-Teutonic ideal, expressed in the sanskrit phrase 'let the guest be your god'. The idea was later taken up by Christianity and instead of the Regin, it was angels, apostles, etc. that would come. One of our most famous texts, *Hávamál: Words of the High One*, gives numerous illustrations of the hospitality that was expected of Northfolk. There are few virtues that Northfolk could be more proud of than to be praised for their hospitality. And conversely there were few more harsh condemnations than that given to the miser.

## Cleanliness

"Combed and washed shall the wise man go,  
And a meal at morn shall take;  
For unknown it is where at eve he may be;  
It is ill thy luck to lose." - *Reginismal* 25

Unlike the stereotypical view presented by church scribes of the dirty barbarian, Northfolk were very concerned about cleanliness. Their name for Saturday was Laugardagr which means, *wash-day*. The irony is compounded in that it was the church that promoted the ideal that to keep one's body clean was to exhibit the sin of pride. *Hávamál* counseled that even if a man's clothes were patched he could still fare to the legal assemblies with clothes that were clean and well kept. It is obvious then, that Northfolk considered cleanliness to be an indication of the worth of the person. A person who was too lazy to keep themselves clean and well kept was a person who could not be trusted. It is reported in the chronicle attributed to John of Wallingford that the Danes, thanks to their habit of combing their hair every day, of bathing every Saturday and regularly changing their clothes, they were able to undermine the virtue of married women and even seduce the daughters of nobles to be their mistresses. (This might not be considered virtuous action, however. It simply proves the efficacy of good hygiene.)

## **Respect for Elders**

"He was a valiant man, and very popular, and lived with Thorstein, his father-in-law, who was sunk in age and much in need of their care." - *Laxdaela Saga*, c.10

Respect for elders was one that was high on the list for Northfolk. Scorn not ever the gray-haired singer, oft do the old speak good, says the Hávamál. Another way of considering just why the elderly were so respected lies in the theology of Heithinn. For Northfolk death meant taking a seat among one's ancestors. If a person's ancestors had not been honored when living, it is unlikely that person would be welcomed to take a seat among them in the after life, and rightly so!

## **Dignity**

"Thorkel asked Gisli, 'How is Aud taking her brother's death? Does she weep much?' 'It seems you know quite well,' said Gisli. 'She shows little and suffers greatly.'" - *Gisli Sursson's Saga*, c.14

Aud the Deep-Minded was one of the most well respected women ever to be written of in the sagas. As the quote portrays, she exemplified the Northern ideal of dignity. This maintaining of one's composure even when there is a reason to be sad is a good example of how Northfolk believed in maintaining dignified conduct. For them, to complain about one's lot was a rare thing, if it ever happened at all. This virtue manifested in other ways as well, such as a general disdain of gaudiness. Though Northfolk believed in cleanliness and neatness there was a point where it turned into gaudy display and at such point it ceased being a virtue.

There are many instances in the sagas where a person of royal lineage is immediately recognized by the way they carried themselves, however plainly they were clothed. Likewise churls (low-minded individuals) and thralls (slaves) were known by their actions and the way they carried themselves.

## **Courtesy**

"Then the king caused those brethren to pour out, and set the earl in the high seat beside him; and the brethren did straightway as the king bade, and gat great praise of men for their courtesy." - *The Story of Viglund the Fair* c.3

Courtesy was a quality that was highly valued by Northfolk. It takes its place among generosity and courage as a quality often used to describe great men and women. Today it is a virtue that is found far too seldom. When one reads enough of the sagas they are struck by the fact at how often death and sorrow are the result of the smallest of discourteous deeds or words. The courteous word has the power to strengthen ties between kin and community just as much as the discourteous word has the power to completely rip those ties asunder. As we will learn when talking of orlog, gipta and kin-luck below, all actions create a reaction, and often that cycle grows in strength with each action and reaction. One need only look to the sagas for detailed examples of how this plays out until death or infamy is the result.

## **Industriousness**

"But as soon as Ketil was a few winters old, he lazed in the kitchen, seeming a laughing-stock to brave men, and was taken to be such." - *The Saga of Ketil Trout, c.1*

This quote on the virtue of industriousness shows the contempt Northfolk had for this virtue's opposite, sloth. The sagas and eddas have ample comment on the extent to which industriousness was admired. In societies that depended upon farm life, fishing, and hard work to obtain the daily meal, and indeed even today, this virtue cannot be underestimated.

## **Refraining from Abuse of Power**

"The saga, admittedly quite hostile to him, suggest that his power was unnatural, because divorced from honor." - *Andersson and Miller, p.62*

In Andersson and Miller's excellent book, we are treated to a detailed examination of Law and ethics as they appear in two sagas; Ljósvetninga Saga and Valla Ljót's Saga. In Ljósvetninga Saga the character of Gudmund is presented as one whose power is un-natural because it was divorced of honor. He visited the homes of those in his district often with a large retinue of men and stayed until he and his men had virtually "eaten them out of house and home." We know that for Northfolk, to stay as a guest longer than the prescribed time was considered to be in bad form. Gudmund did what he did because he could. He abused his power. The scorn heaped on such men is just as common as the praise heaped on those who used the power they held fairly and wisely.

## **Persistence**

"The younger son, Bosi, was a tall strong fellow, swarthy and not so handsome. A cheerful, humorous man, he took after his mother in personality and looks. Whatever he started, he would see it through, and never flinched, no matter whom he had to deal with." - *The Story of Herraud and Bosa, c.2*

As this quote illustrates, finishing what one started was considered praiseworthy. For Northfolk, this could be the difference between survival and death in many situations. Persistence is often the difference between the success and failure in any undertaking.



## **Moderation**

"Excessive pride and the inevitable fall are not reserved for Gudmund alone. Immoderation appears to run in the family; it is also characteristic of his son Eyjolf. This continuity make the problem more than an individual quirk and raises it to the status of an endemic peril in the history of the region." - *Andersson and Miller, p.104*

Few un-ethics could be a peril to a community more than immoderation. The praises for men and women of moderation are high and many in the lore. When we make a closer study of Northern Law we see that it was strongly based on the concept of maintaining and restoring balance. If one man killed another man's kinsman he must make restitution either with his life, liberty or money. His killing of that man had created an imbalance (debt) and that imbalance must be corrected. Moderation is the virtue that promoted this desired balance in community and kindred. Without it the community is unbalanced and in danger. Immoderation has many facets, the more obvious being in drinking, eating, and hoarding, these being examples of a lack of concern for others within one's sphere of responsibility; all are forms of selfishness. Other forms of immoderation include one allowing one's attention to be taken up in thoughts of adultery or theft, gossip for the sake of pleasure, and excess bragging.

## **Keeping Oaths**

"Never swear thou wrongsome oath; great and grim is the reward for the breaking of plighted troth." - *Völsunga Saga, c.21*

Perhaps one the most famous virtues of the Northmen was their steely insistence on adhering to an oath once it was given. The most severe and harsh part of Hel, a place called Nastrond, is reserved for the worst of villains. For Northfolk this included oath-breakers.

The reasons for this lie deep within the theological beliefs of the North. Taking an oath was an act that created an obligation. When we spoke of moderation above we pointed out how Law was based on the need to keep and maintain balance. The reasons for this are beyond mere ideal, and rest in the very Laws of the multiverse. All things seek a state of balance. The Laws of the multiverse are such that if that state of balance is not present it will seek to make it so.

So for Northfolk, taking an oath was to create a responsibility that must be maintained. If that oath was broken, the oath-breaker incurred debt and that debt had to be paid in one fashion or another. Just as breaking an oath incurs debt, so does the keeping of one give reward. Fulfilling one's oath was a Holy (i.e. healthy and whole) affair. Among the rewards was an increase in the person's honor and thereby an increase in their gipta, as well as gaining them good orlog. This gain is one that extends to the person's kin as well.

Integrity is a very misused word in this age, and seldom understood, but it means exactly what it says, that one's actions are integrated along a solid line. If a link is broken, a chain lacks integrity. If a circuit is open, an electrical line fails. Only by matching one's words and assertions with one's actions does a person have integrity.

To break an oath is to break the integrity of one's orlog, and it sets in motion powers that make sure that the debt created is collected. As the quote mentions above, great and grim is the reward of such an act.

What we find, as is exemplified in the story of Beowulf, is that oaths given extend beyond the giver of the oath in many cases. A son was expected to keep the oath of troth given by his father to a friend. In one peace oath that has been recorded, the oath states that it applied to "self and heir, born and unborn, conceived and un-conceived, named and unnamed..." (Grönbech, v.2 , p.169). This illustrates why, when we talked above of how our ancestors broke troth with the Regin to worship the desert god, that we, their heirs, must earn our place once again. The ill orlog and gipta created by that "breaking of plighted troth" is a debt we have to fulfill before any true relationship can hope to begin between us and the Regin.

This ties in as well with what was mentioned above on how our actions have affect not only on our descendents but our ancestors. An oath broken affects not only you but your ancestors and is a debt that is carried down to your descendents.

It should then become abundantly clear that oaths are powerful things that can bring as much benefit as harm. The keeping of an oath can bring an increase in one's gipta and kin-luck. The breaking of an oath brings the opposite. In the Jomsviking Saga is an example of an oath given while overly intoxicated that later resulted in the death of nearly every man of the Jomsvikings. Though their oath was fool-hardy, they attempted to fulfill it anyway, to their honor. We can take two lessons from this. One is that if we swear an oath we are expected to fulfill it no matter how difficult it is to do so or how foolhardy the oath originally was. Second, we would be wise to swear few oaths. We might take the following rede as words to live by: Swear few oaths and keep all.

### **Honoring the Holiness of Marriage**

"Thorgrim said he would not have it so: 'I will hold,' says he, 'to my words, and the oaths that Olof and I swore betwixt us; and her will I have or no woman else. And since thou wilt help me not, I will serve thee no longer.'" - *The Story of Viglund the Fair, c.5*

That Northfolk thought adultery to be the most serious breech of ethics is shown that the most severe part of Hel, Nastrond, was reserved for adulterers as well as murderers and oath-breakers. For them an adulterer was on the par of a murderer. We have described the Holiness with which an oath was considered by them, and for them there was no Holier oath than the oath of marriage between a man and a woman. The frith of a community, ultimately, had its foundation in the frith that existed between husband and wife.

What constituted troth kept in a marriage depended on the oath given in that marriage. While a man taking on a concubine might be well within the plighted troth of that marriage it might not be so in another marriage. But whatever that oath of marriage included, to break it in any way is to court disaster.

## Keeping of Frith

"Yngve was a great warrior, always victorious; handsome, expert in all exercises, strong and very sharp in battle, generous and full of mirth; so that he was both renowned and beloved. Alf was a silent, harsh, unfriendly man, and sat at home in the land, and never went out on war expeditions." - *Ynglinga Saga*, c.24

Frith is the foundation and maintainer of community. Northern ethics, natural as they are by design, create and foster this frith. So the keeping of frith is a virtue as well as the object of virtue.

## Vigilance

"They would be worthless men if they failed to give you loyal support then, whenever you needed it. We're giving you this advice because we want you to succeed in everything and we think you're really a very brave man. Be careful now and stay on your guard, one must always watch out for the wicked." - *The Saga of Hrafnkel Freysgothi*, c.15

For Northfolk that which was wicked or evil was that which would harm one's self, kin and community. For them evil was not based on opposition to some moral code as it is with Christianity. As Eric Wódening notes, the word evil is descended from terms meaning, basically, to step out of bounds. (*We Are Our Deeds*, p.4) That is exactly what actions are that are harmful to any community or group. They are actions that are outside the bounds of community and are therefore evil. It is something that creates a harsh imbalance, and indebtedness, if not to the community, then to one's *vyrd* itself. Vigilance is therefore necessary to make sure that such actions are addressed when they occur and not allowed to continue on and harm the kin and community, for "one must always watch out for the wicked."

## Respect for the Dead

"The ninth I rede thee; burial render  
If thou findest a fallen corpse,  
Of sickness dead, or dead in the sea,  
Or dead of weapons' wounds.  
A bath shalt thou give them who corpses be,  
And hands and head shalt wash;  
Wipe them and comb, ere they go in the coffin,  
And pray that they sleep in peace." - *Sigdrifamal* 33

Respect for the dead and making sure they had a proper burial or cremation was something that Northfolk carried over into the Christian conversion and remains to this day a virtue that is closely followed. To deal respectfully with the dead was important because it was thought to do so helped them find rest. If the body was not taken care of properly then the *sal* (spirit) of the dead person would not find rest. The reasons for this are more complicated than it is possible to describe here, but there can be no doubt that this virtue was

universally respected, even to the point where a person was willing to allow bitter enemies to be buried on their land in order that proper respect be shown to their bodies.

### **Refraining From Arrogance**

"The second, Arngrim, was a tall strong man, big-boned and ginger-haired, with a prominent nose. He had gone bald at the temples while still young, his eyebrows met but his eyes were large and fine. He was a very arrogant man and unjust, which got him the name Styr." - *Eyrbyggja Saga, c.12*

Any time arrogance is mentioned in the lore it is always done so in contrast to those things that were considered praiseworthy. When arrogance was mentioned it was always given as the quality of an ill person. Its antithesis was, on the other hand, often mentioned among the praises of great men and women.

There was a time for boasts however, but this was during a Holy rite known as the sumbl, and to boast outside it was considered to be bad form, for if a man or woman had done anything praiseworthy, it would be sung of them by other people.

### **Boldness**

"Who knows, but Gisli may  
again draw cold sword  
from sheath when warriors  
from the assembly report  
the slaying of Thorkel  
to the polishers of rings.  
We will dare great deeds,  
even to the very death." - *Gisli Sursson's Saga, c.30*

Like the keeping of oaths, the boldness of Northmen was one that was well known and respected even by their enemies. The saying "nothing ventured, nothing gained," comes from the sagas. Goethe said that boldness had magic in it and his words are indeed true, for boldness creates possibilities that are not possible otherwise.

### **Guarding Women**

"In those members of the clan who constantly dwelt within the narrowest circle of luck, holiness was at its strongest. Women were filled with frith to such a degree that an attack upon them did not amount to an injury but an outrage, as we know from the special care wherewith their inviolability was fenced about in the legal decrees; and the strong condemnation of the law finds its best commentary in the insuperable loathing felt by the Northmen for thoughtless breaches of this rule." - *Grönbech, v.2, p.121*

In our modern society where battered women's shelters dot the landscape we should feel compelled to proclaim this virtue of the North to the four corners. As Grönbech notes, women carried with them the very essence of frith, without which the community cannot and will not survive. The leadership role of women

in Northern society is one that is seldom understood due to the fact that it is a form of leadership that is not granted with title as that of the chieftain is. Perhaps this is because the use of title would be merely redundant. Nonetheless this kind of leadership is not only important, it is essential for the survival of the kin and community. For all the good that the modern feminist movement has done (and there is no doubt of that), it has also done a great deal of harm by failing to recognize the role of leadership that a woman fills in the home. The woman is warder of the kin-luck and of communal orlog.

"In the midst of a society in which a man was called to account for every idle word pronounced against his fellow men, a woman stood and took the measure of this world of responsibility, as if a word had never turned upon the speaker again, and she knew her power, when she freely dressed her view of a man's worth or lack of worth in words that hid nothing. He who falls under a woman's tongue and feels her words hailing down upon him, never attempts to stop such fateful utterance with the same means as he would involuntarily apply to a male derider, or, if he forget himself so far as to lift his hand, it is to be hoped he may have a good friend at hand to prevent him from committing that unluck. And yet, the reason for this toleration is certainly not that a woman's words have less force than a man's; on the contrary, he goes his way with especial discomfort of soul, for there is a double point in a woman's words, as in a woman's counsel, they come directly from 'the powers'". - *Grönbech, v.2, p.121*

We know from Tacitus that the Germanic tribes believed women to be more in tune with viewing and understanding the import of the power of orlog and gipta and as such the counsel of these wise-women, as they were then called, was always listened to and considered with great deliberation. To do otherwise was going against the powers of the multiverse in their eyes. Striking an unarmed woman was seen as an insult to these same powers.

The woman then, in affect, is the warder of the kin-luck of her house and kindred. To disregard her words and fail to give them due consideration is not only unwise but dangerous for the health of the family.

This is not to say that a woman automatically took this responsibility and used it wisely. As with chieftains, the responsibility could be misused or poorly utilized. The sagas give ample example not only of women who use their position of "luck-warder," as we might call it, in ways that brought prosperity to their family, but also of women who took that position and brought death and destruction to their family. It is the duty of the Northwoman of today to make sure she exemplifies the former.

### **Refraining From Mockery**

"After these events, Thorstein rode home, and as he approached the farm, he saw many men riding towards him, and he spotted his father and many people whom he knew and all were on their way to look for him; and when they met each other, Ketil greeted his son warmly and felt that he had reclaimed him from death's door - 'I straight away rued the words which I spoke to you in taunt and reproach.'" - *Vatnsdæla Saga, c.4*

Ketil's words here, that he felt he had reclaimed his son from death's door, are not just mere sentiment. Many are the examples in the lore in which the shortest sentence uttered in mockery results in death and destruction. Few deeds can destroy frith quicker than the idle word spoken in mockery.

### **Refraining From Slander**

"Likely is ill the result when words of slander fly." - *Sögumál 56*

There are few actions that cause more ill and misunderstanding than mockery, and we could easily say that slander is mockery's twin brother. Its ill fruit is to be no less avoided than mockery.

### **Tolerance**

"Well was it seen that Hakon still  
Had saved the temples from all ill;  
For the whole council of the gods  
Welcomed the king to their abodes.  
Happy the day when men are born  
Like Hakon, who all base things scorn.  
--Win from the brave and honoured name,  
And die amidst an endless fame." - *The Saga of Hakon the Good, c.32*

Hakon the Good was a true rarity. Even though he was a Christian he was tolerant toward the ancestral faith of his people. So loved was he for his tolerant attitude that we find an occurrence that has only happened one time in all the vast lore we possess. His people believed that even though he was a Christian he was given a place in Othinn's abode, Valholl (Valhöll). For any leader to serve in a way that brings true freedom to his or her people, tolerance is indispensable.

### **Peace**

"The intervener's or peacemaker's role was not formally institutionalized. But in most serious disputes there would be someone structurally situated to play the role. The sources on occasion refer to peacemakers as 'men of good will' - góðjarnirmenn. The term suggests that the ideal intervener was motivated by the general interests of the community, a partisan of everyone rather than a disinterested neutral." - *Andersson and Miller, p.30*

The stereotypical view of the Northman as the bloodthirsty warmonger is shown here for the falsehood it is. There was of course war, for war is a reality of the world we live in. There are times when war is required so that the frith of the community can be either restored or maintained. However, this was not the desired result of any true community. The leaders of communities knew that excessive war would harm a community and that peace was always preferable when it could be had. Hakon the Good was also praised for the peace which the land and people enjoyed during his rule.

The balance of peace might be seen as the same as frith and it can be rightly said that peace is a result of frith.

## Respect For Position

"Thrand was a big man of growth, and red-haired he was, and red-bearded, freckled and grim of look, gloomy of mind, cunning and shrewd towards all men, bad to deal with, and ill-natured to most folk, yet fair of speech to greater men than himself; but in his heart he was ever false." - *Færeyinga Saga, c.3*

Though Thrand, as he was pictured here, was a hard fellow to deal with, he knew the virtue of respect for station. The reasons that Northfolk valued this virtue lies, most likely, in their world-view. A person who is in a position of leadership was there for some very important reasons. Chief among these is that they had earned it through deeds. In Heithni, the man or woman who has a position of leadership, has it because they have earned it through their deeds. If they have earned it, chances are good that they have that powerful quality which true leaders have, called *hamingja*.

Northfolk honored such leaders through word as well as lowering oneself to one knee as a way of honoring that person. This was not a sign of submission, as is so often thought, but a sign of the high born mind who knows the value of honoring those of greater ability and power than one's own self, with this sign of respect.

Elders, through their long life experience possess a wisdom that young pups will have to go through many trials to gain. Northfolk, as a sign of respect for the position that elders hold in the community, had a tradition of calling every man and woman who was older, father or mother, or uncle, whether or not the person was blood-kin. This tradition was a way of honoring the wisdom and position of these elders; a position gained only through deeds and experience.

## Honor

'If frith and honour sicken, the result is a decline in all that appertains to the family, decline and finally downfall. The Beowulf has, as we have seen, already given a description of the effects of villainy; the dying out of the stock and the wasting of its goods. These verses wherein the wages of cravenness are so depicted, no doubt allude primarily to the sufferings originating in men's contempt for lack of honour; but the picture can be applied word for word to an earlier and more original view, according to which the social consequences of shame were only correlative to its directly destructive effect: "Never more shall any of that race grasp gladly the gold." - *Grönbech, v.1, p.150*

Out of ethical deeds arises honor, something that all Northfolk strive for. The importance with which the ancestors considered the maintaining of honor cannot be overstated. One's honor was more important than gold. It was worth dying over.

Honor is also one of the most misunderstood ideals of the North that modern folk have. Often what is mistaken for honor is a kind of ego-gratification that may or may not have much to do with honor at all. Though it is true that Northfolk did at times fight duels over an insult for the purpose of honor it was not the insult that was the real reason for the duel. Eric Wódening notes:

"Among the elder heathen only an insult accusing the individual of some crime was grounds for dueling; an individual could not challenge another to a duel simply because he had been called ugly, cheap, or stupid. Second, it is quite clear that such duels were not fought to defend the individual's honour, but instead to prove or disprove the validity of the charges." - *Wódening*, p.71

This distinction is an important one, because it points to the true nature of what honor is. Honor was not reputation, though good reputation could and did result from it. Honor was the living of one's life by the ethics of the North. In other words it was the exemplification of these virtues that was Honor. The reputation was not Honor itself but the result of it.

Like the layers of the well of *vyrd*, we begin to see how the concepts of Northern ethics and paradigm are layered upon one another and how each ideal is intertwined with the other. This makes any attempt at living the tradition without one or the other doomed to failure.

If one commits what we might call unvirtues (i.e. actions that were not praiseworthy) then one's honor will suffer. So does one's honor increase with the practice of these virtues. As we'll see, one's honor has definite and strong effects on one's *gipta* and *orlog*, communal *gipta* and kin-luck.

### **Gipta: Luck**

"That luck and progress are dependent on frith and honour was a maxim borne out by experience, but the sentence could with equal truth be read conversely: Luck is the condition that determines frith and honour." - *Grönbech*, v.1, p.151

*Gipta* is a concept within the Northern paradigm that is crucial to understand. The word is commonly translated as 'luck' but that word will give an improper impression, if not redefined. Luck implies chance whereas *gipta* has nothing of chance in it. *Gipta* is a spiritual quality, or we might even say power, that each person can cultivate within themselves. It is cultivated no less than one might cultivate a garden or field. Through ethical action we plant the seeds of frith which sprout into honor and bear the fruit of *gipta*.

What we find often in a culture is that when a concept is highly developed, that concept will have a great many words to describe it. A more mundane example is the cultures in the Arctic which have a great number of words to describe snow. It is no different with spiritual concepts, and we are not surprised when we find that the Old Norse language has literally hundreds of terms describing *gipta* and *ungipta* (*úgipta*). *Ungipta* is the opposite of *gipta*. Where *gipta* brings benefits *ungipta* brings hardship.

That *gipta* was indeed a spiritual concept is seen in the many words denoting different forms of this luck. The word *afsæll* meant 'to be unfortunate'. *Byrsæll* meant 'to be fortunate in getting a fair wind for sailing', *drykksæll* meant 'to be fortunate in drink' and *fangsæll* meant 'to be fortunate'. The suffix on all these words, *-sæll*, is derived from the word, *sál* which is a word that means



'soul'. Other words that have the root word *sál* have meanings of 'that which is healthy for the soul' or 'that which is helpful to the soul.' So we can say then that through a direct line to *gipta*, the ethics of the North were healthy for the soul.

Just as a person could cultivate *gipta* they could also cultivate *ungipta*. This cultivation is the mirror image of *gipta*. Unethical action sows the seeds for the imbalance and dishonor which sprouts and bears the fruit of *ungipta*.

'Villainy, the act and state of the niding, is identical with unluck. "Late will that unluck pass from my mind," says Bolli when Gudrun congratulates him on having killed his cousin Kjartan; and in the *Volsungasaga*, *Sinfjotli* is taunted with his violent career in these words: "All unluck came upon you, you killed your brothers.'" - *Grönbech, v.1, p.152*

*Gipta* is not a concept that is passive. It thrives on deeds. One can not simply sit around and expect one's *gipta* to bring prosperity. It has to be put to work. This is reflected in the large number of active verbs in Old Norse that are used in conjunction with words to indicate this concept, such as verbs like, *stefna* which means 'to go in a certain direction' or *ganga* which means 'to walk or fare'. *Gipta* is then a principle much like water, that must flow in order to produce healthy results, else it will stagnate like still water.

*Gipta* also carries with it a strong connection to prosperity, joy and health. We should not be surprised with this, as other words describing luck are connected with words meaning joy and health. Among the meanings for the word *heill* are 'luck, sound (which Merriam-Webster's defines as 'free from injury or disease : exhibiting normal health' or 'free from flaw, defect, or decay'), blessed, happy and true (upright). *Heill* especially shows how the concepts of frith, ethics, honor and *gipta* are all intertwined and dependent one upon the other.

We also know that *gipta* is a quality that is stronger in some than it is in others. When two men meet in combat it is often said that the winner's *gipta* was stronger and that was the reason he prevailed. The reason that we find so many instances of men in the sagas going to great extremes to fight their opponents in a fair way, sometimes going as far as to keep some of their own forces back from the fight to make the contest more fair, is that they believed that the contest was a test of *gipta*. It was not solely about skill of arms. If their skill at arms was good and their *gipta* was stronger they would prevail.

What then is *gipta*? It is an unconscious quality or power that gives its possessors the ability to exploit the potentialities in every situation, for their benefit. We all could probably think of that person whom modern society calls "lucky." They seem to know, without thinking, the right step to take and when to take it. Far from being a creature of chance, this person has *gipta*, whether he seems to have earned it within this lifetime or not. We can also think of the person who never seems to get a break; who is always a step behind or even worse takes the wrong step. This person has *ungipta*.

*Gipta* is an accumulation of all positive actions done by a person, in any of his lifetimes, that extended beyond the mere balance of the situation within which they were committed. Actions done to balance other actions merely maintain status, whilst actions such as gifting in any form, beyond the need of the situation at hand, and without the thought of immediate personal gain, yield reserves of *gipta* that will manifest themselves in times of need.

With a better understanding of what honor and gipta are, we begin to understand a little more clearly why Northfolk were so concerned with honor. It was no simple matter of reputation but the very prosperity of their kin and community that was at stake. If one's gipta is harmed then by extension it harms one's friends and kin.

### **Communal Gipta**

"First and foremost, the feeling of kinship is an outcome of luck, and when ill-will and villainy break forth, these disorders prove that the heart of that family is ruined, and we can then with absolute surety foretell that the one villainy will be followed by others, and the work of that race be barren." - *Grönbech, v.1, p.155*

Just as the individual has their own gipta so does the innangarthr. The innangarth's gipta is dependent on the very same aspects as the individuals'. In fact we could say that the gipta of the innangarthr is composed of the combined gipta of its members. As such the rules that apply to an individual apply in the same way, though on a larger scale. When a community begins to experience villainy then its gipta begins to decline and there is little hope of recovery for it.

The reasons for this are more complex than we have time to examine here, but we can make some general observations that we can count on to hold true. As the chieftain is the warder of the gipta of the community, when it begins to fail then it is first and foremost his doing, either by direct ill deeds or lack of action.

What is clear about the Northern paradigm is that lack of action was considered sin. (Wódening, p.48) As with the word "Holy" we must be careful about attaching a modern Christian definition to the word. Sin for the Northman was failure to act or stagnation. As we noted before, words that implied health and Holiness were almost always placed with verbs denoting action. We can, with confidence, say that for the Northman, ethical action was Holy and that lack of action, for whatever reason, was sinful. So the Northern leader who fails to act in ways that are Holy sins, and by so doing brings about the downfall of those who have entrusted him with the leadership he bears.

Such an egregious mistake made by a leader goes against the very nature of what Heithinn leadership is. The power of the Northern leader is not one of decree. His or her power lays solely in their ability to inspire. They are the living embodiment of the ideal of the innangarthr and their every action is an example of what ethics and honor are. By refusing to lead by example the leader deprives his community of that example and more important he stagnates the flow of gipta that would flow unhindered when right action is performed. He also deprives the community of his hamgingja which it needs as much as it needs good gipta.

## **Words, Deeds and Spirituality**

"Within the Germanic languages, there are several other words which also meant 'a wrong action' or 'inaction' as well as 'sin, crime.' In fact, there are so many words of this type, that it is clear that the Germanic peoples viewed *action* as generally good and *inaction* as generally evil..... As inaction is usually not beneficial to the community and does nothing to maintain the community; inaction is not *good*. Inaction is *evil*. - *Wódening*, p.51-52

As should be abundantly clear by now, the entire paradigm of the North is based around action and inaction. For anything to express its power in a way that is Holy, it requires that actions accompany words. Where ever words are not accompanied by actions they lose all power and become little more than hollow sentiment. Innangarths where words are not followed by action find their spirituality beginning to dull until it dies out completely. Once the process of degeneration has begun it is unlikely the death of the community will not be the result. Those members of that community who live in a way that is Holy would probably be better served to kill the community and start a new one, with a fresh *gipta*, and a commitment to make sure that they will choose a leader who will properly ward the *gipta*.

On the other side of the coin, the community where words are followed up by deeds finds itself growing without much effort at all. Its members find prosperity and support. As our ancestors would have said, "It will have the look of luck about it."

The same applies to the individual. The maintaining of honor through praiseworthy deeds and *frith* will increase one's *gipta* and one will find prosperity is an easy friend to make. Ethics are not just a social ideal but the seeds of a potent spiritual force. When we take the seeds of ethics and water them with our actions, honor and *gipta* are our rewards.

## CHAPTER 6: THE ANCESTORS

"The family has derived its renown from its ancestors, from them it has its ideals, the standard of all behaviour: how bold, active, firm, noble, irreconcilable, generous, how lucky in cattle, in crops, in sailing, the kinsmen are to be. From them also, the family has inherited that part of luck which is called friendship and enmity. Honour, and therewith luck, constitutes, as we have said, an image of the world of the family. In the quality of esteem and social position, it contains symbols of the family's surroundings, seen as personifications of the kinsmen's friendship and hate, their condescension and dependence. But these personifications are not characterless types, they resemble to the last degree the enemies and friends of the family. The luck reproduces the sharply defined features of its environment." - *Grönbech, v.1, p.172*

The Northern spiritual faith is a tradition that is based on ancestral ways, and honor given to ancestors is a high ideal within it. This ideal is often portrayed by outsiders as "ancestor worship" but that is grossly inaccurate. The implication that the phrase "ancestor worship" gives is one that really does not describe what is happening. To understand this better, we must go into detail about the philosophy of ancestry that our own ancestors lived by.

As we have seen, the whole ethical system of the North is based on kin and community. The maintaining of frith with kin was without question always foremost in the mind of Northfolk, that is, in the sense that it was the well-spring from which their ideals flowed. If we understand the concept of frith with kin, then we understand what exactly the honoring of ancestors is about - once we realize that for Northfolk there is no gulf that separates us from our ancestors who have passed on to the other worlds. This is a hard concept for modern minds to accept. Today's secular society teaches us that once a beloved kinswo/man dies they are forever separated from us. There is no such separation for Northfolk.

The kin-luck which exists flows directly from our ancestors in an unbroken stream. In examining gipta and kinship we saw that our actions have effect on our kin who are living. Our actions have no less effect on our kin who have died. The reason the tree is used so often as a metaphor for people in Old Norse poetry is that it was seen to represent the kin line. The ancestors are the roots and trunk of that tree and we, their descendents, are the branches. Just as the tree needs the roots in order to prosper, so do we need our ancestors in order to prosper. Just as the roots, trunk and limbs of a tree are one continuous whole, so we are part of that one continuous whole that is our line of ancestry, physical or spiritual. In this sense we can see the sap which flows in a tree as a metaphor for how kin-luck flows in the line of ancestors.

The kin-luck we bear is in effect only warded by us until such time as we pass it on to our descendents or back to our ancestors. As with the temporal material objects of this world, we do not truly own it, and as such we have a responsibility to ward it and to increase it to the best of our ability. It was every

Northman's hope that his son would outdo his deeds and increase the kin-luck of his line.

Another aspect of ancestry that ran strong for Northfolk was that the ancestors were often reborn into the kin line. The practice of naming a new-born child after a departed father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, etc., was done with the specific intention of guiding the *sal* of that ancestor to be infused into the body of the infant. The infant was not considered to have a *sal* until it was named, so when a child was named after a departed ancestor it helped guide that ancestor to be reborn into his or her own kin line.

Again here, we see the importance of warding the kin-luck. Kin-luck is the common possession of the kindred as a whole. This is reflected in the othal laws of the time. Though the head of the family made the day to day decisions concerning the kindred, he or she did not have the right to sell off any land that was a common possession of the kindred. This could not be done without the agreement of the entire kindred. Just as kin-luck was a common possession that was to be passed down to each descendent, so was the othal land.

This illustrates how every Northwo/man's identity was completely bound up in their kindred. There was no life outside of kin. Outside of kin there was peril and loneliness. With kin there was security and home. Truly the words of Hávamál speak with wisdom when they say, "Why should a man live whom no one loves?" and "Man is the joy of man."

What we find in this ideal of kin is something we have lost in our modern times. We have no security, no sense of self. Like a rudderless ship, we drift on the seas of modern society, never sure if we shall get to the destination we desire, if we are even sure of what that destination should be. We don't know who we are because we don't know who we were. For the Northman, who he is, depends on who his ancestors are. His ideal, his goal in life; these things are determined by his roots. In the stories told of his or her fore-fathers and mothers he or she found their ideal of being, their goal. For those of us who don't know who our ancestors are, we know not at what moment a storm may come and wipe us out, leaving us stranded and alone. We have no support, no help to fall back on. Like a tree with no roots we are easily toppled when the wind blows.

This was not the case for our ancestors. In those storms of life they had kin to fall back on. There was no need of nursing homes, because the elderly were cared for by the kindred. It was unthinkable for the elder to be deposited in such a fashion, so that the children were not 'inconvenienced'. When food is scarce the kindred pulls together and tightens its belt so that all can survive until the lean times are over. Kin bring joy to each other and help in times of need. When an individual has need, the kindred is there.

This kind of living is one that has been taken from us but it is not one we cannot reclaim for our own once again. It is a kind of living that gives us security and *frith*. We may not be able to trace our line back farther than a generation or two but we can start teaching our young ones this way of living and exemplify it in ourselves. We can be the generation where it begins again and in three, four or more generations it will be we that our spiritual and blood descendents tell stories of and our deeds will be the ideal they strive to meet and surpass. Will we make sure they have an ideal worth living up to? That is our responsibility. That is our highest goal.

### Ill Kin

"The ancients were quite certain that the moment they allowed their good repute among men to decline, the moment they neglected the reputation of their forefathers, when they failed to maintain their own fair fame, when they committed any dishonourable act - then their luck would sicken. Their certainty was based upon experience. They had realised the importance of a due regard for honour in its effect upon the health and initiative of the coming generation, its stature, muscles and courage; they knew, indeed, that dishonour could kill a child in its mother's womb and render women barren. Honour was nothing less than life itself, and if a man kept his soul in a half-stifled state, then his descendants would be hampered in their growth, coming into the world as weaklings, crippled, and without boldness. If, on the other hand, a man had nourished his soul and enriched his life by gaining dominion over others' honour, then heroes would be born in his house, men keen of eyes and mighty of strength, children who reached out after weapons before they were well out of the cradle." - *Grönbech, v.1, p.251-252*

In our modern practice of our ancestral tradition what happens if the kin we have are ill? Should the woman who was sexually abused by her father still honor that ancestor? Should the man whose mother used her position as warder of the kin-luck to brow-beat the son with guilt and self-loathing be honored? These are hard questions and as with most hard questions the answers are hard as well. It is an unfortunate symptom of modernism that the kindred can be just as harmful to a person as any enemy would be, instead of being the innangarthr of security and nurturing it should be. This modern culture has been a constant assault on the family (i.e. the kindred). Reclaiming the right of kindred is one that will, for some, take drastic actions. Earlier we talked of how sometimes ill tissue must be cut from the body. In the case where it is the kindred that is ill and not the individual, it requires the cutting of the limb from the tree (the kindred) and grafting it to a whole new tree, so that the diseased tree will not spread its disease to that limb.

In Northern tradition that connection of kin runs all the way back to Askr and Embla whom the Regin gave ond, othr and la. When we take ourselves (the limb of that tree) out of the ill kindred and graft it to a new and healthy tree we might view that new tree as the Regin themselves. In affect we are starting again from the source, grafting ourselves directly to the Regin to begin again uncorrupted.

It is a sad indictment of this society that such a drastic and painful operation is not the rarity it should be. The Elder Kin will support the efforts of those who must start over in this fashion and give that person or persons the extra strength they need to begin anew. It is a fact in horticulture that when a graft is made in a tree it sends extra sap to strengthen that graft and heal it.

## **The Dísir**

"Evidently such female guardian spirits are not linked with the land like the Vanir or land-spirits, since they may travel over the sea to reach the men they are protecting. Their link is rather with a particular family, and they seem to symbolize the luck which can be passed on from one generation to another." - *Davidson 1988, p.106*

The disir perhaps might more properly be discussed in the chapter on cosmology but since they are considered ancestors it we will discuss them here instead. The dis was what we might call a female guardian spirit of the kindred. The modern Christian ideal of the guardian angel has its roots in this Northern belief. It was thought that they were the souls of departed kinswomen who, out of love for their kindred, have decided to stay on in Middle-garth and watch over their descendants. One of the major tides, Winter Finding, was primarily held in their honor. This should not be surprising when we consider that for Northfolk there was no gulf between the dead and living ancestors. And we should equally be unsurprised that a woman of the kindred might wish to stay on and fill this role within her family. Many of us can easily identify this ideal in great-grandmothers or grandmothers we loved just for this quality they possessed. Many of us might have had the experience where a departed mother might have appeared to us in a dream or vision at a time of need when we needed the support they offer. These are the disir.

## CHAPTER 7: RITUAL

Ritual is something that community cannot do without. Yet ritual is often misunderstood. We often fail to see that pale shadows of ritual exist in all parts of society; politics, sports and business as well as socially. It is everywhere. It is in the gold watch retirement party of the businessman. It is in the singing of the national anthem at sports events. It is the Monday night poker game. It is the marriage ceremony. It is father giving junior the car keys for the first time. It is the high school prom. All these things and more are rituals.

The purpose of ritual is what we could call "creating cohesion." That is just a fancy way of saying that ritual creates bonds. A second purpose for the ritual is to help restore balance when it has been disrupted, or to help maintain that balance so that it does not degrade into imbalance. Unlike most of the modern rituals listed above which have little more than a social significance, a Holy ritual will have aspects of both social and spiritual significance. As with any community, the Heithinn community must have ritual in order to thrive. It not only serves to maintain and strengthen the bonds between us and the Elder Kin but it also serves to help each member of the community realize their place within that community, as well as making the bonds each have with the other stronger.

It is through the coming of age ritual that a boy or woman enters into manhood or womanhood. It is through the ritual of marriage that two lovers are made one and the creating of a family begins, which is for Northfolk the continuation and growth of the tree of kin. It is in the death ritual that we honor a life well lived and through the grief expressed there, regain our balance. Just as importantly we perform those actions that help guide the soul of the dead to their place in the other worlds. It is in the seasonal blot that we endeavor to maintain that state of frith (balance) between our community and the land in which it resides. And it is in the blot of the Holy Nights that we show our appreciation by gifting to the gods and by so doing strengthen the bonds of kinship with those who gave us soul, inspiration and action. All these rituals we do as community. These things a community needs.

### **The Blót**

"When we enact a ritual that is based on ancient principles, making the motions, gestures and sounds that our ancestors did whilst worshiping the gods, or during more esoteric practices, we begin to become reformed, within and without, by the same Well from which they drank. We begin to resonate with the old patterns and vibrations, and in doing so, and by being where we are now, we are further building upon what has been accomplished before us. Action is an esoteric doctrine of spiritual evolution - action based on what is *Tru*. Such action brings faith in the effectiveness of action itself, because the results are indeed infallibly realized; in sometimes subtle, sometimes phenomenal manners, yet always *in the here and now*. There is no stronger proof than that which is right before our eyes, and felt within our hearts." - *Ari Odhinssen*



The ideology of the blot is one of gifting. When we call to the Elder Kin we do not command or demand their presence. To do so is the highest insult and the sign of egotism run amuck. When we call to the Elder Kin it should be with the attitude one would use to invite a visiting ruling dignitary of a nation to visit our homes. Very few of us would think of demanding the presence of the president of a country at our home. Inviting the Elder Kin into our ritual space is something that should be done with the utmost humility.

The gifts given to them are not done with a sense of flattery or for any other reason than selflessly and with a genuine appreciation, honesty and love. We should never look for a return gift, though we can certainly count on one coming if our gifts are accepted. The gifts we receive back may likely be in a different currency than what we expect, but the return gift is determined by a number of factors including the nature of the receiver, the energies in nature and Vyrð itself.

One might ask then do we not ever go to our Elder Kin in times of need during the blots or the Holy Nights? We do, but the instances where one goes to them asking should only come after the relationship has been strengthened through time and action, and then only in time of great need. To use every blot to ask for something of them is to be like the kinsman you never see unless they want something from you. A good rule of thumb is never blót to ask for something unless you have absolutely no way of getting it for yourself and have need of it for the health of your kin, not just yourself. Selfish asking is unlikely to be viewed with favor.

Working in imitation of ancestral ways maintains the flow in established channels which our ancestors discovered through experience and observation. If one wanted to make a sword the wisest thing to do would be to go about it in ways that have been established by smiths of times gone by, instead of trying to figure out on one's own what methods work and what methods do not work. In working in ways that the ancestors established we keep open the flow of energy that they grant to us by virtue of familiarity, by making them comfortable with what is familiar to them.

This however does not imply stilted rigidity of form. Any ritual formula is only a framework on which genuine and natural action occurs. This kind of action only comes through constant practice; in other words through experience. If one wishes to learn how to blot one must blot, often. When one blots often their actions, their gestures, become honest expressions of the sal instead of the proscribed movements of some instructed formula. When this happens, we are truly making the most of this most important ritual.

In the blots held for the great tides, we blot to uphold the community and the environment in which the community lives. These seasonal blots (as differentiated from the Holy tides) keep us in harmony with the environment in which we live. The way of the North is not to dominate nature but to acknowledge wholeness with nature in the circle of kinship, to create frith between natural forces and man, and to give the community inspiration and a sense of accomplishment by marking the transitions of man's yearly tasks. This is not simply a mundane task but one that works on spiritual levels as well.

The true meaning of the blot is one of maintaining and strengthening frith with the Regin, with the members of the community itself and with the land around them. This is done through gifting, the effects of which are social and more importantly, spiritual.

## **Daily Ritual**

While we cannot say that daily ritual is something that is required in Heithni, we can say that it would be near impossible to overstate how important daily ritual can be in our lives. We are creatures of habit. In this soulless society where the spiritual is seldom found, we all too often become so enmeshed in the needs of earning money that we forget we are spiritual beings, and that this spirit is in need of nourishment as much as, and we might say more than, our physical bodies. We can all too easily center our minds in the physical and forget completely the spiritual from which our true health emanates.

The concerns of earning a buck can quickly work ill on us if there isn't a proper balance maintained. The best way we can maintain this balance is through daily ritual. Daily ritual does not take much. A few words greeting the day, a prayer to the ancestors asking for their guidance throughout the day's work, blessing one's meals; these things all serve to remind us that there is something beyond the physical constantly at work within and around us, and they help keep that spiritual part of us healthy. These are only examples, as each person's daily ritual can be different and so should they be, because such rituals are highly personal. One's daily ritual might be working in a garden for an hour and getting the earth under one's fingernails. Another's may include something completely different. The point is not exactly what you do in your daily ritual but that you do something that serves to remind you of the spiritual, to hold your mind from spiraling toward the materialism of the modern society we are forced to live in.

What you will invariably find when you are faithful in the performance of your daily ritual is that you are constantly recharged by it. You will find that you do not get as tired as you did before. You will find that your overall mood is more positive and that you can find enjoyment where there was only frustration before. We could easily see the same effects on a person who is not getting enough sleep as we would see in a person who was not getting that connection with spirit. Just as lack of sleep will affect you in various ill ways, so will lack of a regular connection with the spiritual. Daily ritual can then serve to keep us balanced.

## **Honoring the Landvættir**

The modern Christo-Roman ideal concerning mother Jorth (Jörð) is one that has caused such damage that we cannot honestly say if what we as humans require to live can now be preserved for the coming generations. The ideal that the land is to be used, dominated and profited from is one that our Northern ancestors would have seen for the madness it is. Northfolk see the land not as something to be dominated but something they are part of. In fact, the very ideal that Northfolk viewed the land with was the same as that of frith with kin. They saw that the land was alive with vættir (spirits) and strove to maintain a state of frith with those vættir just as they would strive to maintain frith with kin, friends and community.

Many of us today no longer depend on that frith in order to derive our sustenance and instead simply trade money for the food we need. We have forgotten what this relationship between man and vættir was like. We have forgotten how important it is. When we leave a gift at the base of a tree or in a

well or by a stream, we are, in affect, extending the concept of frith from our kinfolk and friends to the land in which we live. We may not be directly dependent on the land for food, (although we must remember that we ultimately are), to gain benefit from the extension of frith to landvaettir and tomte. It can translate itself into a general "luck" in which all things around the home seem to just go well. In contrast, landvættir and tomte that have been angered or neglected can make everything around the home seem to go wrong. A simple regular offering to the landvaettir can insure frith, and that the land itself will have a warder who is looking out for your best interests. That is because the ideals of frith apply no less to the landvaett and man than they do with man and his kin and friends.

### **Hearth and Home**

From what we have seen so far we know that the Holiness of a community and its frith was something that was of prime importance in Northern tradition. The Holiness of a community starts in the hearth of the home. It is from here that all frith and Holiness emanate. When a home's hearth is not kept Holy and frith is not maintained the effects spread out like waves into the community.

The hearth was, for Northfolk, the center of the home. It provided heat and light, and it was where food was prepared. The fire of the hearth was one that was Holy. Today we, as a family, seldom eat together and in so doing we miss an opportunity to partake in a gifting that is as strengthening and Holy to the family as any blót can be for the community. We should not underestimate the gift that feeding someone is. In the *Hávamál* we are told that, "With half a loaf and a half-filled cup, a friend full fast I made." Knowing what we know about friendship and its responsibilities in Northern tradition means we know this is no mere sentimental statement. With a meal prepared and blessed in the hearth of the home in which the family gathers together, we have an opportunity to create Holiness and frith. We may indeed see such meals as Holy blóts to the bonds of kinship. The benefits of such meals cross over from the material into the spiritual.

The hearth in ancient times was thought to be the home of a house-vaett called a "tomte." This tomte was a vaett that could be very beneficial to the household or could be very troublesome. As long as some of the meal was shared occasionally it would bring good luck to the home. If it were angered, however, it could be quite troublesome. We might continue this tradition in keeping frith with a tomte by leaving a gift of food on the hearth (stove), or by the threshold, once a week. Gifts are such things that they create a kind of vacuum that must be filled with a return gift. So if we continue to gift to a tomte, even though there may not be one in our home, we may attract one with the gifts. Any home that has a tomte and maintains frith with it will be more prosperous and luck will seem to be at every turn. This, of course, cannot fail to be of benefit to the kindred and by extension the community as well.

## CHAPTER 8: COSMOLOGY

"Of old was the age when Ymir lived;  
Sea nor cool waves nor sand there were;  
Earth had not been, nor heaven above,  
But a yawning gap, and grass nowhere."  
- *Völuspá* 3

When the worlds were very young, in fact before they were truly formed and solid, there were three forces that overwhelmed all other things. There was the force of northern ice and endless cold, and that of untamable southern fire. These two met at a third force, a vast gap, a gap of nothingness, all empty space. Where they met, the ice would melt at the touch of heat coming from the south, and where the ice would touch the heat great mists and fogs and sparks would leap up and fly off in all directions.

After a great long length of primal time, these two great powers began to overlap in the middle, and layers of mist would solidify and become rimes and poisons and fumes, and rivers would begin to run over their layers, and surfaces would rise up, and something solid began to form. The greatest of these rivers was called Elivagar, and its torrents ran across the face of this solid land, amidst the northern ices where it would freeze at the extreme end, and the southern fires where it would steam up into mists and fumes. And after a great long length of time, in between these two forces, it became calm and mild.

Soon the mild air melted down and rearranged the poisons and the fumes and the sparks, and from the most solid things in this middle land a man was formed. His name was Aurgelmir, or Ymir. He stood and wandered the middle land, and discovered another creature coming alive there upon the salty rime, a beautiful cow, and her name was Audumla, the original giver. He lay down and drank from her teats, and her nourishment kept him alive.

Because his body was formed of self-generating stuffs, from his arms and legs and head he could create others like to him, and these were the first folk, the Hrim-thurse, or frost-giants.

Audumla lived off the salts and minerals that came up on the lands. She licked from the rime-frost a great long time, and in time she began to melt the rime around a new form, a beautiful, strong man formed from her giving, loving nature and her insatiable hunger. His name became Buri, and he soon found and married one of the hrim-thurse women, and they had a son named Bor. Bor married the daughter of Bolthorn, one of Aurgelmir's sons, and her name was Bestla. They had three powerful sons whose names were Othinn, Hoenir and Lothurr.

Bor's sons and the sons of Aurgelmir became inimical to one another, because Aurgelmir's sons were like unto him, they took and they used but gave nothing back. The useful portions of the new world would soon be exhausted, so Bor's sons sought out the patriarch Aurgelmir, and killed him. His blood was such that it flooded all of the middle lands, and caused a great sea to form, and there were none of his descendents that survived his death, save Bergelmir and his wife. They are the ancestors of the present Jotunn race. From Aurgelmir's skull

Bor's sons constructed the shield of the atmosphere that surrounds the worlds, and from his bones the mountains, and from his flesh the dry lands and fertile soils, and found there were enough materials to build nine worlds in all, set around each other. They caught the sparks and cinders that flew out of the southern fires and set them as lights in the heavens, the greatest of which they endowed with spirit. The living spark they called Sol, and the ashen cinder Mani. Sol to give controlled fire and heat, and Mani to keep the waters in reigns and courses. From the fumes of Aurgelmir's brains they made the clouds, set to exchange the waters of the lands and the skies in equal measure. And then they thought on the hrím-thurse that had survived, and decided that there should be some warding against their ever again overtaking the worlds, and using them up, and so they set up one of the worlds for themselves, to keep guard and husbandry over their creation. They also set up a bridge of trembling ice in cold highest regions, that spans the distances between the worlds, and this bridge is called Bilrost. It shines with the broken colours of Sol's light: manfolk call it a rainbow.

The first of green things to grow within the new nine worlds was named Læraðr, an evergreen yew, and because she was the first she is the oldest living thing. She was later called Yggdrasill. Her branches touch into each of the worlds, and her roots run likewise. Elivagar was tamed by time and sank into the worlds to come up in streams and new rivers and wells, and the greatest of these wells is under her branches. Now it is called by some the well of Urðr, or of all things that have gone before. The reflections of all things that have ever happened shine in those waters, and a drink therefrom reveals the knowledge of what was, that is causing what is becoming.

When the three sons of Bor were one day walking upon the new shores, they came upon two trees, Ask the ash and Embla the elm, and Othinn gave them breath and consciousness, Hoenir gave them life and movement, and Lothurr granted them senses of hearing and sight and speech. Ask and Embla were the first man and woman, and they were given the middle-world Middle-garth to populate and care for.

Bergelmir's children lived in the world named Jotunheimr, to the easternmost side of the worlds. He had a son named Narfi, and his daughter was named Nott, or night. She was married to a Jotun named Naglfari, and their son was Aud. She next took a husband named Annar, and their daughter was Jorth, who was endowed with the energy of growth and fertility, and became a joy to mankind. Nott's final husband was Delling, or Dawn. Their son was Dagr, or the energy of daylight. Othinn asked Nott and her son Dagr to ride two splendid chariots around with the course of Sol, in order to make the day and night for mankind. Nott's horse is named Hrimfaxi, or 'frosty mane', and Dagr's is named Skinfaxi, or 'shining mane'. Sol's horses are named Arvak, the 'always awake', and Alsviðr, the 'all swift'.

There dwells a Jotun woman in Jotunheimr that lives in a forest in the guise of a wolf bitch, and there she breeds many children. It is from them the race of wolves are descended. Two of them are named Skoll and Hati, and they chase and bother Sol and Mani's horses always, keeping them moving swifter and swifter as the years roll on. One of their brothers will be Manigarm, and he will be born when this age of the worlds rolls to an end, a sign of foreboding and danger. One of his kinsmen, Fenrir, is well known in the worlds.

The creatures that first grew out of Aurgelmir's flesh were built like men, but small and dark, and without wit. Bor's sons granted them intelligence and skill, but they chose to live amongst the rocks and under the hills, the lands of

their origin, and they are the race of Dvergr, or dwarves. They spend their lives finding materials to use in creating, forging and forming useful things, and these things they sometimes share with other races. The first plants and animals that came were sometimes endowed with spirit and intelligence, and from those so endowed came the race of Alfar, or elves, who are beautiful and helpful, and were granted the world Ljossalfheimr, nearer to Sol, full of light and healing energies.

The southern lands of fire were impossible for most folk to live within, so the Jotun Muspell was granted them because he of all could tolerate the heat and thrive within it, and he guards his lands with a flaming sword. He and his descendents feel no gratitude for this gift, and will forever be enemies to the Æsir and to mankind.

When so much of the creation was finished, Oðinn took a beautiful form for living within it, then took the spinning energy of the worlds, called Fjorgynn, or Frigga, to be his wife. After he obtained oðr, the spirit of knowledge and language from Læraðr, his descendants and those he chose to similarly endow with oðr were after known as Æsir. Hoenir took a similar form, and called himself Njorðr, and then took energy of the seas and deep cycles for his wife, and her name was Nerðus, and they began the race of the Vanir. Loðurr also took a form to live and work in the worlds, and he was born into the race of Bergelmir by the Vanir woman Laufey, and came to be called Loki, friend and aide to both Æsir and Vanir.

## The Regin

"Hail to the Æsir! Ye Asynjur, hail,  
And all the generous earth!  
Give to us wisdom and goodly speech,  
And healing hands, life-long."  
- *Sigdrifumál* 4

### Óðinn (Othinn)

Oðinn's name is pronounced Othinn. His name comes from the fact that although he was born to Jotun parents, Bor and Bestla, he strove for higher knowledge, and found it in the form of othr, and now shares it with all the worlds. He is the Father of All in this regard, all that have higher reasoning and intelligence, which we call wit; especially of mankind, who may choose to use this intelligence, or leave it off as they please. He teaches the art of giving, and recognizes his children on Miðgarðr by their generosity, their kindness, and their willingness to defend their families and friends at all costs. Every act he does is done for the good of his folk, his children in spirit. In fact, his name Gauð means 'pure good'. To his kin every act he performs is auspicious, to those that are selfish his actions appear to be self-motivated, even evil. It is his will that those that love him recognize his works, and that those who do not are merely confused. In this way his true folk know each other through the gift of recognition, and the feeling of kinship and love.

His natural energy is of the wind, which is calm and nurturing in the proper season, stormy and cleansing when the atmosphere becomes thick and dull, and enlivening when the seasons announce their changings.

His most famous weapon is his spear Gungnir, the stirrer. He travels throughout the worlds, aiding his kin in finding knowledge that they need to survive and prosper, and when he is home he lives in the hall Glaðsheimr, with his wife Frigga. He has two loyal wolves, Frecki and Geri, and their names both mean 'hungry or ravenous'. Two ravens live in his hall and serve him, one is called Munin, the embodiment of memory, and the other is Hugin, the embodiment of intellect. It is natural that his animal companions embody energies alike to his.

His horse is Sleipnir, the son of Loðurr, who is a strong tall grey. It is said that when he runs he moves so fast it seems he has eight legs instead of four. Oðinn is the master of language, naturally, being the embodiment of oðr, and he was the first to bring the knowledge of writing to his folk. In this mastery, he is able to work many forms of art, such as changing natural circumstances to work good for others. This art is known as galdr. With mastery of language also comes poetry, and song, and shared wisdom.

## **Frigga**

Her name means spinner, as she weaves and spins. In some places she is known as Saga, and in some when she is seen as earth's energy she is known as Fjorgyn. She has long grey-blond hair that she wears in a braided topknot when she is spinning, and the loving blue eyes the colour of the flax flowers that are sacred to her. She shares half those slain in noble warfare with her husband, and keeps his hall. Women who die unwed often go to her. She is the chieftess of all the valkyries, and she guides and teaches them when they are at home in the hall. When Óðinn is away from home, she stays in her hall Fensalir, the hall of the marshes. Her weaving is not only of flax and wool, but also of destinies of her chosen favourites. She is reserved of nature, yet when she speaks her words are wise and most often prophetic. She keeps many hunting hounds, and dogs for her sled. Her son with Óðinn is Baldr, his second son upon whom he bestowed the ring Draupnir. Her most well-known handmaiden is Fulla, her devoted friend, and it is said her hair is the colour of the newly cut flax.

## **Njörðr (Njorthr) and Nerthus**

Njörðr is the father of the Vanir race. He is the embodiment of the powers of the sea. His twin sister is Nerðus, who is sometimes known as Ingun, the embodiment of nature's cycles and the powers of the deep rich soil. Their children are the twins Freyr and Freyja. Freyr is often called Inguni after his mother, and Freyja Inga. Njörðr's home is known as Noatun. His energy is cyclical like the seas, and like the seas it grants fertile growth, nourishment and often times storms that are needed for cleansing and beginning anew. Nerðus is said to have gone off into nature itself long ago, after giving birth to her children, but before she went she was often seen walking the fields and seashores, and many folk were devoted to her giving, nurturing ways. Njörðr in time was betrothed to Skaði, the Jotun daughter of Þjazi the mountain chieftain of Þrymheimr, but they were soon divorced. Skaði is famous for her skiing, and sometimes her dog-sledding, and she is a great huntress and warrior, just like her father was.

## **Freyr and Freyja**

Freyr and Freyja are the embodiments of joy, and fertility, and the natural cycles of the seasons. Their names mean 'lord' and 'lady'. Freyja is also called after her origin, Marðoll, or the 'sea-bright'. They are beautiful to look upon, fiercely devoted to their kin, and disposed to giving the gifts of love, and music, joy, and family harmony. They help turn the seasons, and bring the urgings and blossoming of spring - the greenness and newness, and fertile seed sprouting.

Both have boars for animal companions, Freyr's is named Gullinbursti, or 'golden-bristled', and Freyja's is named Hildisvini, or 'battle-swine'.

Freyja has a hall named Sessrumnir. She does not ride, but has a chariot drawn by cats. The springtime is her special season, and as Ostara she is



celebrated with feasts and celebrations. Freyr has a wind-swift boat, and is often said to be out sailing when the weather is fine and the sea is giving. He has the energy and spirit of the young colt, and horses are sacred to him. The end of winter is also special to him, an issuing out of the old and harkening in of the new year. As Vanir, Freyr and Freyja are considered husband and wife, and Freyr also has a wife name Gerð, a Jotnarin, whose brother Beli he killed before he met her.

### **Loðurr (Lothurr)**

Loðurr's name means 'yielding fruit', and he is the embodiment of fire. His energy is able to lock up, or free, the energy that is held in other matter, just like fire. He is Oðinn's blood brother, and great friend, just as wind and fire truly cannot exist without each other. It is said he is one of the first Vanir. He works in the worlds by helping folk unlock their hidden potential, by stirring things up that have become stagnant and foul - in other words he keeps energy flowing in order that the worlds may evolve. It used to be said that certain odd forms of lightning, such as ball lightning, were thrown by his hands. He shows folk the weaknesses and selfishness that lie within them, and helps them to move beyond into noble action and right purpose. His mother is Laufey, her name means 'leafy', and his brother is Byleist. Loðurr's first wife was Angrboda, 'harm-causer', a Jotnarin, and by her his children are Hela, Fenrir, and Jormungandr. He also had the son Narvi, and a child named Ali. Jormungandr's name means, 'jorth's wolf'. His other well-known companion was Sigyn, whose name means 'faithful girlfriend'.

### **Týr (Tyr)**

Tyr is the chieftain of the warrior class. His name means 'god', and just like the rune tivaz, it also means 'victory'. He is known by some as Oðinn's brother. His duty is as a living example of honour, defense of kin and property, nobleness of nature, and right striving. His most famous weapon is the sword, and the shield. Some say he trains the Æsir from youth in the martial arts.

Tyr cared for the pup Fenrir, whose name means 'marsh-dweller', when no one else could train him, and when he became mature and so wild everyone decided to bind him up, Tyr gave his hand to Fenrir for having had to deceive him into being bound. There is another canine, a dog named Garm, whose name means 'rag', that watches the main gate in Helheimr, who has sworn him an enemy.

### **Mimir**

Mimir is guardian of the well under Læraðr. He is known as a master-smith, and some say he too is Oðinn's brother. He shares drinks from the well with those that come in need, and with those that deserve a glimpse of higher knowledge, for the water in that well is empowered with oðr. He is a master with the runes, as well as a master at forging great weapons. Those that are seeking hidden answers often ask him for aide.

### **Þórr (Thor)**

Þórr is Óðinn's son by Jorð, or Fjorgynn, the embodiment of earth-energy. He is fair-haired, strong, and intelligent. He is a constant defender against intruders and trespassers into his father's lands, and because of his strength he is often counted upon to destroy enemies that fight by mere brute force. His troth to his kin is so devout and great that he is often called *Sonnung*, or 'the true one'. It is said no horse will take him, and that he rides instead a wagon pulled by his two goats *Tanngrisnr* and *Tanngrjost*. His energy brings thundershowers that nourish the crops and bring nitrogen to the soil. The weapon he carries is called *Mjollnir*, a short handled hammer, endowed with the power to return to his hand after it has reached its target. Some say this is the same energy as the lightning that strikes down from thunder clouds. His wife is *Sif*, the personification of patience and sweetness, who has golden hair the colour of newly ripened wheat. She is known for her beauty throughout the worlds. Her name means 'dear kin', and many believe she is one of the *Vanir*. She is the mother of *Ullr*, and therefore *Ullr* is Þórr's stepson.

Þórr has two sons, *Moði* and *Magni*, and a daughter named *Þrud*, who is a valkyrie. *Magni's* mother is *Jarnsaxa*, a *Jotun*, and after he killed the *Jotun* *Hrungnir*, his father awarded him the *Jotun's* horse, *Gullfaxi*.

### **Hermoðr (Hermothr)**

*Hermoðr* is Óðinn's third son; his mother is often cited as *Fjorgynn*. His name means 'warrior-spirit'. He is known for his swiftness and bravery, and that he is able to travel into inaccessible places, a gift from his father. Some say he was trained by *Tyr* as his foster-father. His loyalty to his kin, especially to *Frigga*, was shown in his attempt to bring his brother *Baldr* back from *Helheimr*. He is one of the few ever known to have ridden his father's horse without fear.

### **Viðarr (Vitharr)**

*Viðarr* is Óðinn's son by the *Jotnarin* *Grið*. His name means 'wide-ruling'. He lives in a forest named *Glásir*, and is known for being quite silent and meditative. He is an excellent hunter, and caretaker of forests and glades. It is said he will avenge his father one day, and be the bane of *Fenrir* himself.

### **Heimdallr**

*Heimdallr's* name means 'world-brightener'. He is a *Van*, the son of *Njorðr* and the *Nine Waves*, who are *Ægir's* daughters. He is also known as *Vindler*, or 'wind sheilder', as he is the watchman of *Bilrost*, the bridge between the worlds. His hearing and vision are exceptionally keen, he can hear 'grass growing', and nothing escapes his watch. He is golden haired with shining eyes and teeth, and even his horse *Gulltopp* is golden in colour. His horn is called *Gjallarhorn*, and it summons the *Regin* from far away in times of danger, and warns those who are alert enough to listen. Because his mothers were the waves, his animal companion is a ram, just as the lead wave is called the ram, and many a strong sword has been named after him. The duty and devotion of his life is the guardianship of his kin, so much so that some stories even hint of his helping to procreate the race of mankind.

## **Ægir (Aegir) and Ran**

Ægir's name means 'sea-giant' and his wife's name means 'plunder'. He was made an Æs by Oðinn. Their daughters are the Nine Waves. They have a great hall named Hlesey that is lit up by corals and amber and gems, and they are renowned for giving banquets and sharing the wealth that is within their bounds, as well as the wealth that comes to them through the ill-fortune of ships lost at sea. Ran has long dark hair that is tangled like the kelp beds. She has a net she can use to capture ungrateful folk, those that choose to ignore the blessings of a good wind and a safe passage she and her husband bestow on the worthy. It is said one can give them gold over the ship's side, and say a prayer, and be accorded safe journey and landing. Ran and Ægir are very giving to her kin, and have helped them out of many difficulties. Even now in some lands Ægir's name is called upon before faring out, and a certain type of storm-wave is called 'æg'.

Their daughters names are Drofn (foaming-wave), Blodughadda (bloody hair), Bylgja (Billow), Dufa (dripping), Hefring (raising), Himinglæva (heaven-bright), Unn (wave), Kolga (cool wave), Hronn (wave). They are embodiments of the various types of waves that come upon the sea, and they are all very beautiful.

## **Braggi and Iðunna (Ithun)**

Bragi, whose name means 'poet' and 'cheiftain', is endowed with oðr, giving him eloquence and poetic speech beyond all others. He is a musician and wisdom-giver through song and saga. Whenever a man or woman has an unusual gift of song, they are called after his name. He is known to sail the worlds wherever the appearance of spring is due, and to sing in its coming just as the voices of the birds do at the return of the warmth and sun. His wife is the young and beautiful Iðunna, whose name means 'rejuvenator', who aides the Regin in retaining their health and youth. Some say it is through the apples she offers them, and some say it is through her energy of youthfulness alone that she shares amongst her kin.

## **The Nine Worlds of the World Tree Læraðr**

"A tree I know, Yggdrasill its name,  
With water white is the great tree wet;  
Thence come the dews that fall in the dales,  
Green by Urth's well does it ever grow."  
- *Völuspá 19, Bellows Trans.*

Their are nine worlds and these nine worlds are contained within the great world tree, Laerathr which is also called Yggdrasill. In addition to our own world which is called Miðgarðr there are 8 others which exist on the axis of our own world. The reason that our world is called Middle-garth is because it exists as the mid-point between these worlds. The highest world is Asgarthr, the home of the Aesir. This is the world of the Regin. Here are Othinn's great hall, Vallholl, Freyja's hall Folkvang, Thorr's hall Thruthrheimr and more.

To the west is Vanaheimr, the world of the Vanir. Njorthr's hall is here. Alfheimr is the home of the light-elves whom Freyr is said to be the lord of. Muspellheimr is the world of fire where resides the fire giant, Surtr, enemy of the gods. To the east is Jotunheimr from which many of the enemies of the gods come and is the home of the jotnar, or giants. Below the earth's surface is the land of Svartalfaheimr the land of the black elves, or dwarves as they are also known. Niflheimr or Niflhel is the land of ice. The last and lowest world is Hel, which is the name of the world of the dead and its ruler.

There is a great bridge that leads from Asgarthr to Middle-garth that is called Bilrost or Bifrost. Men know it as the rainbow.

All that exists is contained in the great world tree, Laerathr. At its base is the well of vurd. The three Norns, beings who weave the vurd of all, work here, taking water from the well and administering and feeding it to the great tree and in so doing setting the life and death of all beings; men and gods alike. These three Norns are named, Urth - that which was, Verdandi - that which is becoming, and Skuld - that which will be. The phrase used to describe Skuld's function is one that should be taken note of. Though we might have interpreted her name to mean that which will be or the future, that would be inaccurate. Skuld oversees that which must be from the actions of past and present. So we see that what must be is tied directly into the actions of past and present. Present gives birth to the now, and it is both that give birth to what must be. What ever Skuld weaves is a direct result of actions that have already happened.

## Vurd and Örlög

"None outlives the night when the Norns have spoken." - *Sögumál 166*

Vvurd (wurd) and orlog are two concepts that one must understand in order to understand the world view of Heithni. Any attempt at making a simple explanation is fraught with danger, because any such attempt may impart a partial understanding. Hopefully this explanation can walk the tight-rope between too simple of an explanation and one that is too lengthy and still impart what modern Northfolk need to know.

Vvurd and orlog are two concepts that are intertwined, affecting each other in ways both subtle and grand. Above we found that the well of Vurd exists at the foot of the world tree, Laerathr, which is fed from its waters. Like many of the descriptions Northfolk use in their telling of things cosmological and spiritual we should look to the deeper significance of why a tree and a well were used to describe the concepts of the multi-verse and how Vurd and orlog operate throughout it. The Old Norse kenning (a kind of paraphrase) is one that is pregnant with information if we know how to interpret it. For instance when a ship is called "steed of the sea" we know immediately that there are qualities of the ship that are in common with that of a horse. We are able to, in one phrase, pick up a veritable plethora of information that would take us many paragraphs to describe in our clunky modern language, and even then we would likely be unsure of the meanings because of the so-called versatility that afflicts modern English. Any language that becomes "versatile" loses its ability to convey ideas as accurately as it once did. This was not the case with Old Norse.

So when we say that there is a tree and a well, do we mean that there is a tree just like one we might see outside our window? That may be or it may not be, but what is more important is that we look at the qualities that Læaraðr and the well of Vyrð have that are conveyed by calling them a tree and a well. In horticulture, we know that a tree takes in water through its roots, and that water circulates throughout the tree and is excreted through its leaves. As we saw in the quote from Voluspa, above, any water that a tree takes in eventually finds its way out through that tree's leaves, where it drops as dew. This water falls again into the well of Vyrð. We see then that a great and grand cycle is taking place. What then is this water? Where does it come from? This water is orlog, the combined orlog of the world to be more exact. What then is orlog? We found above that our actions and deeds create debt and reward for us. By right action, we gain gipta and honor. There is a third, overriding result of our actions: orlog. If we were to give the most simple definition of orlog we would use a saying that exists in some form in nearly all tribal cultures; "You reap what you sow." Every action creates a reaction. This reaction may be a debt, as is the fruit of an unethical action, or it may be a reward as is the fruit of an ethical action.

Orlog we create for ourselves, good or ill, may affect not only this life but subsequent lives we have here in Middle-garth. This will be seen when we understand more how orlog and Vyrð interact.

The word orlog has been interpreted by Bauschatz as "*primal layers*". Another interpretation might be "*forward moving law*". These two interpretations need not be contradictory. Indeed they may serve to illustrate the 3-dimensional quality of orlog. Bauschatz contends that orlog is a laying of layers in the well of Vyrð. We might see each action we take as a laying of a layer in the well of Vyrð. Like a stack of plates, each action we take rests on the actions which preceded it. Once an action has been laid in the well, there is no taking it back. It would be much like trying to take a plate out from the middle of our theoretical stack of plates. Everything above that plate would come tumbling down. This is what we might call the vertical aspect of orlog. We can see how each action we take becomes of supreme importance, for every action we take will have an affect on all that follows.

The second aspect of orlog which we might call the horizontal aspect, reinforces this ideal as well. Every action affects that which follows it. This is why "forward moving law" is a very apt interpretation.

So with orlog our actions affect what we build and affect the events that occur in our lives. We should not expect to build anything on an unstable foundation and expect it to be Holy or endure, no matter how beautiful the structure that rests on that ill foundation is.

This orlog is then contained in the well of Vyrð. We can then see that the well of Vyrð is a well of time and action.

This well feeds the world tree, Laerathr. It affects its being and helps order what is to be. Laerathr is then the present worlds, fed by time and prior actions (the well of Vyrð). The actions which are made in the world then, like the dew we described, drop from the leaves of the tree and fall back into the well, creating an ever changing cycle of action and reaction. If one can begin to grasp this, the realization is mind-boggling. There is no "fatalism" in the Northern world view as so many writers have implied. Instead it is a rock solid knowledge that everything that happens occurs because of what preceded it and is as it should be, because the actions of past and present give birth to what "must" be. We know

this with the same surety we have that when setting a flame to gasoline it will cause an explosion.

This kind of world view does not allow for the "devil made me do it" or the "its not my fault" kind of ideals that so many carry to day. It is a world view of responsibility, where one accepts total responsibility for where one finds oneself. No suing the tobacco companies when you have smoked for 20 years and come down with lung cancer. No victimizing or enabling. This personal responsibility is the origin of the so-called 'fatalism', of the Northman and in fact of all the Indo-European peoples.

Our actions create orlög and each action lays a layer in the Well, as well as planting the seeds for what is to come. Northfolk did not have a conception of the future like modern man does. For them, what we call the future was simply what must be, based on what had gone before. The Norns do not decree the future, they weave it as it must be, based on what had come and gone already. That is perhaps the reason why the Norn whose function is "that which should be" is named Skuld, which also means "debt" in Old Norse. We can look at our actions, then, as creating debt and reward. Orlog is this debt and reward.

To use another metaphor, vrydr is that which the Norns weave out of the collective whole of our actions. They look at our orlog and decide the general direction the strand of our life will be take. We can look at our lives as a strand in the thread of our kindred line that stretches back to its very beginning. This metaphor especially shows the connection that kin have to each other and how there is no real separation between kin, living or dead.

Though the Norns set the course of our life, this does not mean that we have no choices. Though the Norns lay the broad strokes we still may choose how we react to those events that have been laid out for us. Neither does it mean that because the Norns lay out the course of our life we don't have responsibility for our actions. We still can choose to respond to any given situation in a way that is ethical, or react in a way that is not. Our actions, if they be so ill, may even necessitate the strand of our lives be cut out of our kin-thread and the thread begun again from the point we departed. How we react to a given situation can and does make a difference in what is to come. We do not simply live our lives and await 'fate'.

## **The Afterlife**

"Now Thorolf called that ness Thorsness which lieth between Swordfirth and Templewick; on the ness is a fell, and that fell Thorolf held in such worship that he laid down that no man unwashed should turn his eyes thither, and that nought should be done to death on the fell, either man or beast, until it went therefrom of its own will. That fell he called Holy Fell, and he trowed that thither he should fare when he died, and all his kindred from the ness. On the tongue of the ness whereas Thor had come a-land he made all dooms be held, and thereon he set up a county Thing." - *Eyrbyggja Saga*, c.4

The conception of the afterlife by Northfolk is not one of two choices between Valholl and Hel. The first thing we need to remember is that the Northern spiritual faiths had many variations depending on locality, custom and class. What might be considered the highest ideal in one locality might be different in another. Different classes had different ideals of the highest

destination. The warrior/chieftain class of course had an ideal of dying in battle and going to Valhöll. It is interesting to note that hanging oneself or piercing oneself with a spear in the side were ways of entering Vallholl as well. A landowning freeman, however, might consider the highest ideal as going into an ancestral mountain upon death where he would feast with his ancestors in the after life. Some might consider living in a barrow in the after life so they could be close to kinsman. One man wanted to be buried in a barrow next to his foster-brother so they could talk of goings on easily in the after life. Women who committed suicide often did so by saying "soon I will sup with Freyja." We might naturally expect the person who had Thorr or Freyr as a patron would consider their halls the highest ideal. People who died at sea were said to fare to the halls of Ran. There were a great many factors which could affect one's afterlife, not the least of which could be reincarnation on Middle-garth.

Most people will simply fare to Hel upon death where they rest, until such time as they reincarnate, though they need not reincarnate. Hel is described as a dark, cold and damp place and when someone is raised from there by magic they are always depicted as having been asleep. This is accurate because it is a place of rest where one remains in a state of sleep until such time as they return to Middle-garth by reincarnation. There is one section of Hel, however, which is reserved for oath-breakers, murderers and adulterers, and is no wise considered a pleasant place, but there is no indication that the denizens of this area of Hel are ever expected to stay there for eternity.

Another aspect concerning the afterlife that is seldom understood is how human sacrifice was used as a method of entering the afterlife as the resident in the hall of one of the Regin. One could sacrifice oneself and enter the hall of the one sacrificed to. Ideals put out by authors that criminals were sacrificed to the Regin are unlikely given that sacrificing something you did not want would have been considered an insult. Who wants a criminal? Such deaths were simply executions and should not be viewed as sacrifices at all.

This concept of sacrifice is one that our modern minds have trouble grasping. It is easy to see why. We are taught from day one that we are simply physical beings and no more. Our Northern ancestors had a different view. They knew that we are much more than a physical body. They knew that this body is only a container for that which does not die; the sal. If one has total faith in the reality of the sal, then of what worry is death, no matter where it comes from? Why would anyone even think of sacrificing one shred of his or her honor for fear of death? The answer for Northfolk, is of course, that they would not. This quality of Northfolk, this much-heralded lack of fear concerning death, is because they had complete faith in the reality of the sal. Even their enemies could not help but admire this courage. So the greatest gift one can give is oneself, in living this life to the fullest in troth, and in dying the same. Such a gift is one that cannot be ignored.

Of course the modern mind is a whole different matter. Many of us have no real faith in our sal, even if we say we do, and so death is a fearful, frightening experience. But when we learn to truly believe in our own spiritual being, that all changes. Death is put in its proper place; the price of admission. It is no different than paying \$7 to see a movie. It is simply a process that allows us to fare to the other worlds.

Fear is the enslaver. Once we have freed ourselves from this irrational fear we may begin to live our lives free, put death in its proper place, and live truly free.

## Reincarnation

"A special form of family relationship was that in which one newly deceased was reborn in his descendants, and the latter were accordingly given the name of the deceased. This belief appears as late as the period of the Migrations, first among the East Goths, from whom it spread far and wide; in the North it was introduced in the seventh or eighth century, a period at which the general tribal relationship of ancient days had already begun to loosen. It continued to exist as a current folk belief for many centuries. 'We shall come again,' said the old people in Sætersdal when death called them from the ancestral home." - *Olrik, p.23*

Reincarnation was a concept our Northern ancestors held. In the lay of *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*, in the Poetic Edda, there is a short prose ending that states simply, "Of Helgi and Svava it is said that they were born again." Though there can be no doubt that Northfolk believed in reincarnation it was not in quite the same way as what reincarnation is normally viewed today. For them it was not a random event. Part of the naming ceremony that a new child had sometimes included a ritual that was specifically intended to draw a deceased ancestor into the body of the new born child. The child itself was not considered to have had a sal until it received its name and was officially recognized by its father or closest male relative. Just as the mother gave the child its physical form so did the father fasten its sal to that form. As was often the case, the child was named after a deceased grandfather or grandmother or other older ancestor in order to help the sal of that ancestor to find its way into the body of the new-born infant. In this fashion the ancestors were reborn into the kin-line. It was believed that ancestors would naturally wish to be reborn into their own kin-line. Given the importance that Northfolk put on their kin, this should not be a surprise at all.

Reincarnation was not a random event at all but one where the ancestors and those descendants still living worked to maintain the connection of kinship. Reincarnation was also not a certainty. The ancestors themselves would have to wish to come back. They might just as well remain in the sleep of death, or in the after life which they may have earned, or as in the case of the disir they might prefer not to reincarnate so they could stay on as guardian of the kin-line.



## CHAPTER 9: THE TIDES

### Holy Tides

Blotr, or ritual, was in olden times held at least three times per year, during the solstices and near the equinoxes, and many smaller rites were held amongst the community depending upon that community's local patrons or their local industries or crafts. Commonly found in the lore are mentions of Joltide, the twelve day period during winter solstice, representing the twelve months of the year, and the return of Sol to the lands. Solstide, summer solstice, is a bidding farewell to Sol's energy moving toward autumn. The coming of Vor, or spring, is sometimes referred to as Summer Finding, when the first migratory birds returned to the lands or the first flowers began to push out through the snows. This tide was also often marked by foaling. The first day of plowing is often a day of celebration and special rites. Summer itself might be marked by the first haying. Haust or autumn holds a harvest festival, usually at the time of slaughtering or shearing; often a bit later during autumnal equinox a day called Winter Finding is mentioned, when the last of the local leaves have fallen.

Blotr is a means of directly giving back to the Elder Kin and to the energies in nature for what they have given, be it a good harvest, the blessing of children and livestock, security, or peace in the land. It can be as complex as a fortnight's community ritual of light, song and feasting, such as was practiced over the time of Winter Solstice, or as simple as offering a horn of ale. When it is performed together as a community it represents the emotion of the folk as a whole, and when it is done by the family, it strengthens the ties between the energies of the Elder Kin and ancestors, and the household, as well as strengthening the memory and spirit. Keeping the flow of othr, gipta and good-will between the worlds open and clear brings benefits even beyond what otherwise might be impossible for man fending alone for himself on Middle-garth.

Deep thought and memory maintain the highest ties - of ancestral gipta, of patronage, of duty in the individual's and the community's combined orlog, even of vyrd. Blotr should ideally be a reenacting of original patterns or actions set by the Elder Kin themselves. And it should be always remembered that the Elder Kin live within a society based upon gifting. In this way origins are never forgotten, and ties are never broken, but only strengthened and reinforced to grow and evolve further.

### Life Tides

Making clear delineations between stages of life has always been a means of setting the individual's mind into a new pattern of thought and action. Name-fastening, as mentioned above, is an important event, and so also should be some form of a coming of age ritual, wherein the individual is welcomed into the community as an adult, with a new understanding of their roles and responsibilities in an adult's world. Ritual provides a space in one's life for the transition to be made clear and more understandable. The life of a child, with its small responsibilities and services, and much idle time, is replaced by a sense of

their place in the community as a whole, and a small introduction to what their duties will be in skuld. Often, a reintroduction to the parents and the elders of the community is made as if the young adult was now a formal member of the group, and his relationship to the elders is clarified and expanded. In times past, he or she might be given new tools or weapons to learn, new more adult clothing to wear, and even a new name might be fastened to his birth name, or come to replace it. These and similar events in a youth's life are important and should be made to be felt so. Making clear delineations between stages of life has always been a means of setting the individual's mind in to a new pattern of thought and action. Upon entering a trade, rituals are also performed, with celebration.

Marriage or hand-fasting, which should be understood as one and the same, is an extremely important event for the line of ancestors, the community, and the individuals involved. The oaths exchanged during marriage ritual should be understood as binding two individuals' family lines, their heritages, their duties and their upcoming responsibilities into one whole, and thereafter their lives within the community become one thing with one purpose. The oaths of marriage must be understood by both parties and both parties' families before they are taken, whatever form they may have, so that there will be no misunderstandings in skuld on either side. These oaths may be dissolved through divorce if either side finds justified cause, which should be considered only after some deliberate breaking of the marriage agreement, but this should occur rarely in the Heithinn community, as the marriage agreement should constitute deep thought and true mutual understanding before being undertaken.

## AFTERWORD

### The Philosophy of the Tree

Mankind was formed in the image of Laerath. From trees we were made, and only by living in the pattern of trees do we flourish, for such is the most native state to our true natures. As the Nine Worlds are within Laerath, mankind is within its ancestral trees, whether they are physical ancestral lines or spiritual patterns laid out within our very souls. Perhaps in being too long out on the branches, and having for so long so wide and varied a view, we have forgotten our roots. Yet still they exist and hold us here, and still they nurture.

The tree is a giver. When we collect water and take it out to the tree, do we lose the water thereby? No, the tree becomes stronger, taller and more full, and the air is filled with moisture, the fruits are given back to us. When we nourish the tree, are we putting ourselves to loss thereby? No, for we receive back twelve-fold what was given in nourishment for ourselves. When the leaves fall, have we lost the results of our work? No, the tree rests, and the leaves go into jorth to nourish other plants, and warm the animals, and through this again we receive back manifold. When the tree is pruned, the branches are not lost but used to warm and build, the tree is opened more to Sol's rays, and the fruit yield becomes all the more great. Is there ever loss in giving? Never, for as we are but temporary managers of the material gifts we are granted in this world, and nothing will fare with us into the next, so it is that everything we give out we receive back manifold. Material things are ever in flux, from seed to apple to seed again, from clay to pot to clay again, from silver to chain to again a pool of silver. Our bodies are ever in flux, from youth to age to aged. Everything and every situation is ever in motion, there is no such action as 'standstill' in the nature of life, and of all possible constants in this world there is truly only one, and that is mutation, change. No thing is ever ours to claim, no object is ever infinite and final. Even the mind and memory we claim constantly revolve into new figures and forms. What then is permanent?

In this ocean of flow and constant motion objects and ideas flow through our sphere of influence then beyond it, and what we gather to ourselves is always a symbol of its loss in some other similar sphere. When we push out what we have gathered and contribute it to a more useful place, the space we have created in our own sphere is filled again with what is more useful to ourselves, and this is the nature of giving. We are trees, nourished, watered, met with Sol's light and the covering frost in equal measure, and only in what we allow to drop from our hands do we gain again. The tree that yields no fruit nor blossom is unlikely to be tended, nourished or cared for. Do we nurture and prune the thorn that it yield more thorn? So too we must be known as giving, and of value to the worlds, that what we yield to them is held in such esteem that we too are tended by higher hands, and urged to give out what we may offer.

Is there any wrong in enjoying what we are granted? Never, for its value in our joy and contentment is the sum of its existence, whatever it may be. Yet in giving it out again once we have partaken is granting the same to another, and the laws of gifting are certain in that we not only gain from the joy of knowing the receiver has again such as we have known, yet also we gain something new to take its place, and the sphere of our influence expands wider and wider until we have

accumulated not material things, but those things which flow through the ages in purer, less sullied forms; fame, honour, and joyful remembrance.

What then is blot? It is nourishing the tree of our ancestry, a tree that reaches from the heart of jorth through its roots and branches to the Elder Kin themselves. It is choosing the finest and best from the products of our hands, our works and our accomplishments, and sending it into that tree to nourish it as it has nourished us, and granted us life. Why in the form of smoke and steam? Smoke and steam are the finest essences of material things, one to flow up into the higher realms, another to rest again on jorth once the clouds have swollen with it, the winds have tasted it, and Sol touched it.

As we nurture our ancestral trees, and they in turn nurture Laerath, all the worlds benefit thereby, and we flow into an overarching harmony with all things, and this harmony of near-balanced energy of motion and rest is frith itself. Frith is striving and acting as a part of the give and take of the worlds, building and razing, agreeing and disputing, living and dying in a grand harmony of energy, all nurtured and held firm by our roots. The roots must thrive, grow and drink deep, and they rely on us to maintain them, as we rely upon them.

## **SÖGUMÁL: WISDOM INSPIRED BY AND FROM THE SAGAS**

1. A man's own hand is most to be trusted. (VGS, c.4)
2. Let another's wounds be your warning. (Njal's Saga, c.37)
3. Slow and sure. (Njal's Saga, c.44)
4. Ill redes bring ill luck. (Njal's Saga, c.45)
5. His hands are clean who warns another. (Njal's Saga, c.41)
6. It is the turn of mind of all men first to give away what has been stolen, if they have it in their keeping. (Njal's Saga, c.49)
7. Birds of a feather flock most together. (Njal's Saga, c.51)
8. Never break the peace which good and true men make between you and others. (Njal's Saga, c.55)
9. For with law shall our land be built up and settled, and with lawlessness wasted and spoiled. (Njal's Saga, c.69)
10. When ill seed has been sown, so an ill crop will spring from it. (Njal's Saga, c.114)
11. But a short while is hand fain of blow. [1] (Njal's Saga, c.133)
12. It may often be that those live long who are slain with words alone. (Njal's Saga, c.45)
13. Better is one crow in the hand than two in the wood. (Laxdaela Saga, c.24)
14. Never cheat your master. [2] (Njal's Saga, c.86)
15. Be warned by another's woe. (Njal's Saga, c.13)
16. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. (Njal's Saga, c.5) (HR, c.10)
17. Pride and wrong often end badly. (VGS, c.7)
18. The nights of blood are the nights of most impatience. [3] (VGS, c.8) (VA, c.24)
19. The cattle are like their master. (VGS, c.13)
20. Braver are many in word than in deed. (GS, c.4)
21. The friend warns his friend of ill. (GS, c.17)
22. He knows most who most has tried. (GS, c.17)
23. Many seem wise who are lacking in wit. (GS, c.17)
24. The thrall alone takes instant vengeance; the coward never. (GS, c.15)
25. Work not done needs no reward. (GS, c.17)
26. Many a trifle happens at eve. (GS, c.18)
27. Every one is master of his own words. (GS, c.19)
28. Long shall a man be tried. (GS, c.20)
29. The guess of the wise is truth. (GS, c.31)
30. Luck is one thing, brave deeds another. (GS, c.34)
31. True is the saying that no man shapes his own fortune (Luck). (GS, c.41)
32. Be not a braggart for if any work done be praise worthy, others will sing your praises for you.
33. Often he who has many words says little of worth.
34. The over-praised are the worst deceivers. (GS, c.45)
35. One man's tale is but half a tale. (GS, c.46)
36. One evil is mended by a worse one. [4] (GS, c.47)
37. There is more in the heart of man than money can buy. (GS, c.47)
38. The mother is best. (GS, c.17)
39. Many have been brought to death by over-confidence. (GS, c.54)
40. Ill is the lot of him who has an ill name. (GS, c.56)

41. Oft in the woods is a listener nigh. (GS, c.59)
42. The unjust man prospers ill. (GS, c.62)
43. Trust no man so well that you trust not yourself better. Many are unfit to be trusted. (GS, c.67)
44. The hand turns to its wonted skill, and that which was learned in youth is always most familiar. (GS, c.78)
45. Many go to the goat-house to get wool. [5] (GS, c.78)
46. There are few more certain tokens of ill than not to know how to accept the good. (GS, c.78)
47. Old friends are the last to break away. (GS, c.82)
48. It is ill to have a thrall for your friend. (GS, c.82)
49. Bare is his back who has no brother. (GS, c.82)
50. A wagging tongue is the beginning of ill works.
51. Many a fair skin hides a foul mind. (ES, c.16)
52. Many are the words of bravery in times of weal, but few are they whose actions match brave words in times of woe.
53. Boldly do men talk from a distance. (HS)
54. Ill it is when men, with smooth talk, sidestep what is just and good. (HS, c.35)
55. Best it is, for man's words to seek peace when it is possible. (HS, c.35)
56. Likely is ill the result when words of slander fly. (HS, c.35)
57. Wise men hold it that distance is the cure of rage. (HS, c.35)
58. Many a man keeps his word of foster-brotherhood but middlingly well. (TVS, c.16)
59. It is good to have two mouths for the two kinds of speech. [6] (TVS, c.16)
60. It is better to keep one's oath. (TVS, c.19)
61. Varied will be his fortunes who fares far. (SFB, c.6)
62. Alone is it seemly to hold truly to troth given. (VS, c.4)
63. Fear not death, for the hour of your doom is set and none may escape it. (VS, c.5)
64. Sweet to the eye is that which is seen. (VS, c.5)
65. No might against many. (VS, c.11)
66. Better to fight and fall than to live without hope. (VS, c.12)
67. For whoso comes amongst many shall one day find that no one man is by so far the mightiest of all. (VS, c.18)
68. When men meet foes in fight, better is stout heart than sharp sword. (VS, c.19)
69. Where wolf's ears are, wolf's teeth are near. (VS, c.19)
70. Be kind to friend and kin, and reward not their trespasses against you; bear and forbear, and win for yourself thereby long enduring praise of men. (VS, c.21)
71. Ill it is to take love from another man's wife. (VS, c.21)
72. At the Thing, fight not in words with fools; for the man unwise a worse word than he thinks doth utter oft; lest thou be called a dastard, on the day thereafter send him to death, and let him pay the price of his lies. (VS, c.21) (Sigdrifamal 25)
73. When faring on journeys, ward yourself well. Take not harbor near the highway for thereby dwell many ill wights for men's bewilderment. (VS, c.21)
74. If you hear the fool's word of a drunken man, strive not with him who is drunk with drink and witless, for often only ill and doom come out of such things. (VS, c.21)
75. It is better to fight than to burn alive in the hall of the hero rich. (Sigdrifamal 31) (VS, c.21)

76. Never swear false oaths; great and grim is the reward for the breaking of troth. (VS, c.21) (Sigdrifumal 24)
77. Give kind heed to the dead, sick-dead, Sea-dead, or word-dead; treat their bodies with respect and see that they are laid to rest with respect. (VS, c.21)
78. Trust not him whose father, brother or other kin you have slain no matter how young he be, for often grows the wolf in the child. (VS, c.21) (Sigdrifumal 34)
79. Kinsmen to kinsmen should be true. (OH, c.186)
80. Ill it is to sit lamenting for what cannot be had. (VS, c.24)
81. Who can say what sorrow seemingly carefree folk bear to their life's end. (VS, c.24)
82. Ill is it to abash folk of their mirth. (VS, c.25)
83. Good to love good things when all goes according to thy heart's desire. [7] (VS, c.28)
84. Never nourish a wolf-cub. [8] (VS, c.30)
85. Short is the hour for acting, and long the hour for feasting. (SHG, c.28)
86. Fear is the mother of defeat.
87. No harvest is had without the seed first being sown. (OT, c.8)
88. To take up great resolutions, and then to lay them aside, only ends in dishonor. (OT, c.9)
89. The king has many ears. (OT, c.89)
90. What people wish they soon believe. (OT, c.122)
91. Who can't defend the wealth they have must die, or share with the rover bold. (OH, c.6)
92. The common always love what is new. (OH, c.33)
93. It is their lot who stand with the great that they enjoy high honors, and are more respected than others, but stand often in danger of their lives. (OH, c.67)
94. Every one has some friend even among his enemies. (OH, c.73)
95. Better it is to have a lower position in life and be free than to have a position of power only to be subject to the will of another. (OH, c.79)
96. There are few things for which a match cannot be found. [9] (OH, c.86)
97. Luck accompanies wisdom. (OH, c.131)
98. A rotten branch will be found in every tree. (OH, c.148)
99. Too much ale and a man's heart is laid open for all to see. (OH, c.151)
100. A man's own hand is the truest test. [10] (OH, c.153) (TG, c.46)
101. Two masters is one too many, if a man wishes to be true. (OH, c.170)
102. Eagles should show their claws, though dying. (OH, c.186)
103. With many who come to power and honor, pride keeps pace with promotion. (MG, c.8)
104. The sluggard waits till afternoon. (MG, c.17)
105. Youth is hasty. (SHH, c.27)
106. It is an old custom for the wisest to give way. [11] (SHH, c.27)
107. Ill is the result of letting fear rule thine actions. (SHH, c.46)
108. All a people need in order to rise up against tyranny is a leader bold enough to take up the banner. (SHH, c.45)
109. Numbers cannot skill withstand. [12] (SHH, c.65)
110. Bravery is half the victory. (SHH, c.103)
111. Bad counsel comes to a bad end. (MB, c.6)
112. Many a friend is poor help indeed, in times of need. (MB, c.6)
113. The bold succeed where so ever they go. (MB, c.8)
114. One whose life you save often gives a very bad return. (MB, c.21)
115. Sorrow is lightened by being brought out openly. (SC, c.18)

116. There are plenty of affairs full of danger to start with, that bring good luck in the end. (HE, c.7)
117. Ill luck is home-bred. (DS, c.10)
118. If words leave the lips, they travel. (FS, c.11)
119. It's better to be betrayed than to trust no one. (FS, c.13)
120. Wrong begets wrong. (FS, c.16)
121. Many are wise after the event. (FS, c.19)
122. The one you trust most can disappoint you most. (FS, c.23)
123. He who warns is not to be blamed. (FS, c.23)
124. A miser can never give a gift without a snag. (GA, c.1)
125. Luck follows the generous. (GA, c.9)
126. Warning wards of blame. (HR, c.4)
127. Often is there regret for saying too much, and seldom regret for saying too little. (HR, c.7)
128. A person's actions are often worse than their intentions. (HR, c.10)
129. Stubbornness brings either greater humiliation or greater honor. (HR, c.10)
130. Short is the life of excess. (HR, c.14)
131. A sleeping man's an ignorant man too. (HF)
132. One man can't stand up against many. (JS, c.21)
133. Better to die with honor than live with shame. (JS, c.23)
134. A wounded coward lies low. (TS)
135. Ill it is to take action when a person shouldn't and hold back when a person should. (TS)
136. Anybody who offends a more powerful man can hardly expect to wear out many more new shirts. (TS)
137. Oft one finds, when the foe he meets, that he is not the bravest of all. (Fafnismal 17)
138. It often happens that he who gets a death wound yet avenges himself. (Fafnismal 20)
139. The brave man well shall fight and win, though dull his blade may be. (Fafnismal 28)
140. All should be told to a friend. (Egil's Saga, c.56)
141. He falls not whom true friends help forward on his way. (Egil's Saga, c.67)
142. Bad counsel turns out badly. (VA, c.3)
143. There is more honor in accumulating little by little than in reaching for the sky and ending up flat on your face. (VA, c.7)
144. The reason why young men get nowhere is that they overestimate the obstacles every time. (HR, c.7)
145. Few things are more powerful than wyrd. (VA, c.12)
146. It is hard to fly in the face of wyrd. (VA, c.14)
147. Falling in battle is the lot of brave men. (VA, c.24)
148. Good it is to end a stout life with a stout death. (MB, c.6)
149. Forethought is better than afterthought. (VA, c.40)
150. A person should trust their own experience rather than hearsay. (BS, c.2)
151. Reputation rarely flatters. (BS, c.2)
152. Many eyes squint when there's money around. (BS, c.5)
153. When truth and fairness are different from what is law, better it is to follow truth and fairness. (BS, c.6)
154. A person should not agree today to what they'll regret tomorrow. (BS, c.10)
155. Ill it is to abandon honor and integrity in exchange for injustice and greed. (BS, c.10)



156. Wisdom is welcome wherever it comes from. (BS, c.10)  
157. Gossip often leads to trouble. (GSS, c.9)  
158. A wise man does all things in moderation. (GSS, c.15)  
159. A gift always looks to be repaid. (GSS, c.16)  
160. Great deeds and ill deeds often fall within each other's shadow. (GSS, c.17)  
161. The treachery of friend is worse than that of a foe. (GSS, c.32)  
162. Lighter to pay is the vengeance-price, after the deed, if the son is dead. [13] (Sigurtharkvitha en Skamma 11)  
163. A person should exhibit frith whatever may come. Though many wish for good, ill is oft the more mighty. (Atlamol en Gronlenzku 34)  
164. A man without wisdom is lacking in much. (Hamthesmal 29)  
165. In fashion of wolves, in befits kin not, amongst themselves, to strive. (Hamthesmal 31)  
166. None outlives the night when the Norns have spoken. (Hamthesmal 32)  
167. A man should have his plans worked out before he enters into great undertakings or incites others to them. (RS, c.8)  
168. Ill counselled is it to lend one's money to unknown men. (GW, c.7)  
169. Long is it remembered what youth has gained. (GW, c.13)  
170. The eyes of a maid, tell true, to whom her love she has given. (GW, c.13)  
171. The more folk stand in the way of two hearts that yearn for each other, the hotter the flame of love waxes. (VF, c.11)  
172. Often times it is not numbers that wins the victory, but those who fare forward with the most vigor. (TG, c.19)  
173. Few are bold in old age that are cowardly in childhood. (VS, c.18)  
174. A person should tend to the oak if they want to live under it. (EG, c.71)  
175. Only a coward waits to be taken like a lamb from the fold or a fox from a trap. (LS, c.40)  
176. Least said, soonest mended. (LS)  
177. It can be expected that a man who has a lot on his mind will not always be careful enough. (HR, c.9)  
178. Who dares, wins. (HR, c.9)  
179. It often happens that things go by turns. [14] (TG, c.31)

### Notes:

1. He who hesitates misses the tide.
2. Don't bite the hand that feeds you.
3. The urge to react is most strong on the night a wrong was committed and with time the urge wains. The nights of blood here, means the night of a killing.
4. When one reacts to an evil without careful consideration often the reaction turns out to be a worse evil than the original.
5. Don't search in the wrong place for what you seek.
6. This is a slight commenting on those who are inconsistent in their behavior, courteous and generous one moment and miserly and rude the next.
7. Enjoy what you got while you got it.

8. This refers to the son of man whom one slays. If one did slay a man, that man's son was not only honor bound to avenge his father but most likely be willing to gladly go to great lengths to do so.
9. Here the word "match" refers to something better when compared. For example; "I would be hard to find a match for this sword." i.e. a better sword.
10. The best assurances that something is done right and true, is to do it yourself instead of trusting others to do it.
11. When two parties are in conflict the wise know when to back off so that a bad situation does not become worse than needs be.
12. Quality over quantity.
13. This is basically the meaning of strophe 84.
14. Basically, the tables often turn.

## History

Sögumál is not an ancient text but a modern compilation of ancient texts and sayings based on ancient texts. Since Volsunga Saga includes most of the Heroic lays from the Poetic Edda, material from those lays are included here. The few verses which do not have a citation following, are of my own authoring based on situations in the sagas. All other verses are either direct quotes with perhaps a little editing to put them more properly in verse form or are paraphrases. The paraphrased verses were paraphrased in an attempt to either make the meaning more clear or to update the language into a less archaic form of English.

*- Alfta Svanni Lothursdottir*

**31 August 2002** – Debuted to the public.

**2 April 2003** – Strophes 149-179 added. Thanks go to Philip A. Lee for sending in the quotes for strophes 173-178.

## APPENDIX A: FURTHER READING

***A second book on Heithni will be available in autumn of 2003. It includes an overview of the spiritual arts of seithr and galdr, as well as an exposition on the runic language, suggested blot, rite and ritual, and further information regarding the Northern Way. For more information visit our web site at: [www.northvegr.org/northern/book/](http://www.northvegr.org/northern/book/)***

***Some of the following books are available online at [www.northvegr.org](http://www.northvegr.org).***

### **Introductory**

### **Retellings**

**Crossley-Holland, Kevin (1980)** *The Norse Myths*, Pantheon Books, New York. Crossley-Holland's retellings of the lore is one of the best around. Highly recommended as an introductory text to Northern lore.

### **The Eddas**

#### **The Poetic Edda (The Elder Edda/Saemund's Edda) -**

The Poetic Edda contains a number of poems or lays from un-attributed authors. It is normally divided into two halves. The first half contain the so-called mythological lays which deal primarily with the Regin and the cosmology of the North, and the second half contains the heroic lays which deal with some of the great heroes of the North, including Sigurth and Helgi. There are a number of translations of the Poetic Edda, most of which are inaccurate in one way or the other. Unfortunately the ones that are in print and easily obtainable are in this category. Lee M. Hollander's translation is one of the most popular of these. It is inaccurate as Hollander sacrificed accuracy in an attempt to recreate the poetic meter in English. Terry's translation is also easily obtainable but is generally held to be a poor translation. James "Hjuka" Coulter's translation of *Hávamál* (a lay in the Poetic Edda) is the only available original translation of this lay that was penned by a modern Heathen. It can be obtained through *The Vík* at Northvegr's web site. There is, however, an edited version of Henry Adam Bellows' translation of the Poetic Edda at the Northvegr site that has much to recommend it over the other full translations of the Poetic Edda. It is edited by Ari Odhinsen and as such, is the only available translation that is edited by a Northman with the knowledge required to do so. We recommend it highly.

### **The Prose Edda** (The Younger Edda/Snorri's Edda) -

The Prose Edda, written by Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson, is a kind of manual of Norse poetry that was intended to teach young poets the discipline of the skald by using the mythology of the North as example. Many of the great myths of the North as well as skaldic verse are preserved in this book. The best translation of this book is easily obtained. The Anthony Faulkes translation, titled *Edda* can likely be obtained through any major online bookseller. You can also find a good translation by Brodeur at the Northvegr web site.

### **The Sagas and Heroic Tales**

The sagas can be a gold mine of what was considered praiseworthy in Northern culture but can also present those actions and deeds that were not praiseworthy. One needs to be careful when reading the sagas that they do not take everything presented as Holy even if the writer presents them as such. None the less there are a number of sagas that are good reading and to generally present Northern ethics and theology in a positive light. Here are a few of the best

#### **Egil's Saga**

Egil's Saga is one of the greatest sagas there is. A true example of a vitki (rune magician) whose life is an example of a man who passes from an immoderate youth to a praiseworthy man of loyalty and moderation in his later life. Egil's life is one that was always turbulent though not always praiseworthy in his early days. The Hermann Palsson, Paul Edwards translation is probably the best and is easily obtainable. The Northvegr web site also contains a translation of this great saga.

#### **Völsunga Saga**

The great Northern epic, Völsunga Saga, chronicles the life and death of Sigurthr the dragon slayer as well as his kin line and all those who attempt to possess the gold hoard of the Nibelungs. This saga is more cautionary tale than ethical ideal. Nevertheless its story is a warning worth heeding and is one of the great epics of the world. The excellent Jesse L. Byock translation (*The Saga of the Volsungs*) is easily obtainable and this saga is also contained at the Northvegr web site.

#### **Beowulf**

The great Anglo-Saxon heroic epic, the roots of which lie deeply in the ethics and culture of the North. Beowulf is the ideal example of Northern ethics, generous, loyal to the oaths given by his father, courageous, and the ideal of the Northern leader. Seamus Heaney's translation is easily obtainable and a translation of Beowulf is available at the Northvegr web site.

## **Advanced**

**Andersson, Theodore M. and Miller, William Ian** (1989) *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. This is a book that will give you a new appreciation for the underlying foundation on which all Icelandic sagas function. Aside from two translations of two very hard to find sagas you get a 118 page introduction on Medieval Icelandic law and ethics. After reading this introduction you will never look at the sagas in the same way again because you will get an appreciation of the intricate ideals, ethics and motivations that underlie what may have seemed like, before reading this book, seemingly curious actions taken by characters in the sagas. This book will allow you to experience the sagas on a level more intricate and satisfying than you perhaps would have thought was possible.

**Drew, Katherine Fischer** - (1973) *The Lombard Laws*, University of Pennsylvania Press. An essential book on Germanic law that translates the Lombard laws and that is a very good introduction on the differences between Germanic and Roman law. The introduction and notes in this book are worth the price alone.

**Grönbech, Vilhelm** - (1931) *The Culture of the Teutons*, Vol. 1-3, Humphrey Milford - Oxford University Press - London. This book should be read by every person who lives by the northern spiritual faiths. The ideals discussed in this book are rarely given the kind of treatment that Grönbech gives them. (Available soon at the Northvegr site.)

**Olrik, Axel** (1930) *Viking Civilization*, The American Scandinavian Foundation, W. W. Norton and Company Inc. Publishers. Olrik's book is one of a trio I cannot recommend highly enough. This book is extremely hard to find but if you can find it, get it. Olrik, like Grönbech, and Wódening, comes closer to the true nature of what the Northern spiritual faiths more than any other author.

**Wódening, Eric** - (1998) *We Are Our Deeds*, Theod, Watertown, NY. Wódening's book, like Grönbech's, should be required reading for all who wish to live by the Northern spiritual faiths, whether they be Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Germanic or Icelandic.

## APPENDIX B: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**Wódening, Eric** - (1998) *We Are Our Deeds*, Theod, Watertown, NY.

## APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY

### ON = Old Norse

**Aesir:** (ON - Æsir) The name of the tribe of Elder Kin who rule over consciousness. This tribe is ruled over by Othinn.

**Alfather:** (ON - Alfaðir, Alföðr) A title of Othinn, literally meaning "father of all."

**Asgarðr:** (ON - Ásgarðr) The world of the Regin. The highest of the nine worlds.

**Elder Kin:** Another name used to refer to the Regin. For those of Northern European descent, the Regin are considered our Elder kin.

**Fafnir:** One of the original owners of the Nibelung gold who turned himself into a dragon to in order to guard it. He was later slain by Sigurthr. See Völsunga Saga and the Heroic lays of the Poetic Edda.

**hamingja** - An Old Norse word that is used for a kind of spiritual power that leaders possess. It is a kind of luck that is passed down from one's ancestors and is generally only passed down to one person in the kin-line. A real leader is one of these people that possesses their ancestral hamingja and its presence in a person is unmistakable in their actions.

**Heithinn** (ON - Heiðinn) [Heyeth-een] - One who follows the Northern ancestral faith or used as an adjective used to indicate ideals that are of Heithni, i.e. "Heithinn ethics".

**Heithni** (ON - Heiðni) [Heyeth-nee] - The Northern spiritual faith.

**jotunn(s):** (ON - jötunn, pl. - jötnar) The tribe commonly called, "giants," dwellers of the outlands to the east. Although many of their kind are the enemies of the Regin, there are those which are allies as well.

**Middle-garðr:** (ON - Miðgarðr) The world that we live in. So called because of it being the midpoint between all the other 8 worlds.

**Norns** - Three women who oversee "that which was" (Urthr - Urðr), "that which is happening" (Verdandi), and "that which must happen" (Skuld). They are often compared with the three Greek fates but the comparison is not completely accurate.

**Northfolk/man/woman:** A man, woman or group who live by the Northern Way (Heithni).

**Northern Way:** The Northern Way is another way of saying Heithni.

**ond:** (ON - önd) Breath.

**othr:** (ON - óðr) Higher awareness, inspired higher thought, the link between whole-holy energy and divided-portioned energy, divine energy, >spirit that makes whole'.

**Ragnarök:** (ON - Ragnarök) The term for the Norse eschatology.

**Regin:** ON title meaning literally "*the ruling powers*". It was used to refer to the deities of the North; the Aesir and Vanir.

**Skald:** A poet and singer somewhat similar to the Irish bard.

**Skuld:** One of the three Norns. Her domain is that "which must happen" according to what has gone before. Her name also means "debt". Her name is often used generally to indicate that which must happen or what is commonly called "the future" though that term does not adequately describe it in accordance

with the Heithinn world view. Ex. May your skuld be prosperous. (May your future be prosperous.)

**sumbl:** A Holy drinking ritual in which toasts were made in honor of the Regin and were accompanied by oaths to accomplish some deed, or boasts of some oath completed.

**Thing:** (ON - þing) The legal assembly where cases of law were heard and decided. New Laws were also decided here when there came need of them.

**Tivar:** Another title referring to the Regin.

**Troth:** Loyalty.

**Urthr:** One of the three Norns. Her domain is "that which was", and her name is often used as a general indication of the past. Ex. That happened in urthr. (That in the past.)

**Vanir:** The tribe of Elder Kin governing organic existence and processes.

**Verdandi:** One of the three Norns. Her domain is "that which is becoming" or the present. Her name is also used to indicate the present. Ex. We must live within Heithinn ethics in verdandi. (We must live within Heithinn ethics in the present.)