* BASIC BELIEFS *

Although there are many variations in beliefs and practices within this faith, Ásatrúers all share a defining personal loyalty to, or "Troth" with, the gods and goddesses of the North, such as Odin, Thor, Frigga, the land wights (spirits), and many others; a deep respect for their Germanic religious, cultural and historical heritage; and a strong determination to practice the moral principles followed by their predecessors.

Ásatrúers take their knowledge of the gods and the universe from "the lore" (the Prose Edda, the poems of the Poetic Edda, heroic and family sagas, the historical record, and folklore); from science (history, anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, etc.); and from their own analysis, insights, and revelations.

Ásatrúers work to establish and maintain right relationships with those around us: family, community, the gods (our elder kin), the natural world, and wyrd (fate). Ásatrú spirituality is not separate from everyday life, but informs it. Ásatrúers see Earth as living, or speak of her as personified by a deity.

Ásatrúers are true polytheists and know all the gods as real entities with separate and distinct, rounded personalities. Some Ásatrúers are called most strongly to the worship of one or more particular gods within the pantheon.

Magic is not part of Ásatrú worship. In fact, many Ásatrúers don't believe in magic at all. Others, however, practice various kinds of workings (such as rune divination) as a supplement to their religious practices.

* DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE *

Ásatrúers believe that your fate in the afterlife is based on how you lived, how you died, and the disposition of your remains. Some go to dwell in the hall of one of the gods in Asgard. Some go to Hel, a pleasant if somewhat dull place, to await reincarnation or the end of this world cycle. Some continue to inhabit this world as guardian spirits for the land or for their families.

* WORSHIP *

Ásatrú worship may be a group observance or a private offering.

A blót (rhymes with "boat") is an offering of food or drink, commonly mead or ale, to the gods. A blót can be as simple as pouring out a bottle of beer to the gods in your backyard, or it can be an elaborate community ceremony. However, the intent is always the same. An exchange of gifts creates a bond between two people. In a blót, Ásatrúers thank the gods for their gifts and offer gifts in return. This celebrates and strengthens the bond between the gods and humankind.

A sumbel is a series of ritualized toasts. The participants sit in a circle, and a vessel of drink (a drinking horn full of mead is traditional) is passed around the circle at least three times. Words spoken in sumbel are witnessed by gods and humans alike and carry great weight. The rite of sumbel can be a profound experience that creates bonds of community among those who share in it.

Ásatrúers regard the gods as honored senior kin, so they offer them their best. It is customary, but not required, to use alcoholic beverages in blót and sumbel and to share feasts of meat and grain.

Asatruers hold blóts and sumbels to mark seasonal holidays and observe life cycles (such as births and weddings) and as needed to give thanks and request assistance. They also commonly hold public ceremonies to witness important oaths.

The most common ritual objects are a patch of ground where offerings may be placed in contact with the earth; a drinking horn; a Thor-hammer; an offering bowl; an oath ring; and various god-icons such as a statue, spear, sword, spindle, or Brisingamen (golden necklace). Those who practice rune magic will have a set of rune tiles that they have cut themselves.

Most Ásatrúers also have copies of several books, including editions of the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda, Heimskringla, and various other sagas and references. There is no sacred text in Ásatrú, however.

* HOLIDAYS *

Different kindreds observe different holidays. There are, however, three nearly-universal observances.

Yule is the only really universal Ásatrú holiday. Typically runs from December 21 (Mothers Night) and lasts for 12 days or more. This is the most important holiday of the year. Many traditional Yule symbols have been absorbed by the Christian celebration of Christmas: evergreen trees, Yule logs, holly, etc.

Ostara is typically observed around the spring equinox with decorated eggs, outdoor festivals, and bonfires. This holiday celebrates the earth's reawakening after the long, fallow winter.

Winternights is typically observed at the beginning of Autumn. This holiday celebrates the harvest and contemplates the beginning of a more enclosed part of the yearly cycle.

There is generally no specific god or goddess associated with a particular holiday. Each group or individual honors those that seem most appropriate to them.

*** STANDARDS OF CONDUCT ***

Ásatrúers are expected to

- honor the gods with regular offerings;
- respect and honor the land and the family;
- live "trú" according to a strict moral code based on honor, courage, and hospitality;
- keep all promises and sworn oaths;
- take bold and decisive action when called for;
- set high goals for themselves;
- be autonomous and yet interdependent with the rest of the Ásatrú community; and
- take responsibility for their actions and the consequences of those actions.

* SOURCEs *

- *The Poetic Edda*, The basis for the Norse Myths as we know them.
- The Prose Edda ,by Snorri Sturluson.
- The Germania, by Tacitus. Translated by Anthony Faulkes. Contains valuable first century C.E. description of Vanic worship.
- Heimskringla, the Lives of the Norse Kings, by Snorri Sturluson. Lots of very valuable information in this collection of histories, including accounts of oath-takings.
- *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, by Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson. Surveys all of the myths, and has references to even the least known deities.
- Rites and Religion of the Anglo-Saxons, by Gale Owen.
 Excellent reference for the Anglo-Saxon branch of the old religion.
- *Our Troth*, online book on the gods and practices, at http://www.thetroth.org/resources/ourtroth/
- Ravenbok, online book on the gods and practices, at http://www.webcom.com/~lstead/Ravenbok.html

* For more information *

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Vituð ér enn, eða hvat? Would you know more, or what?

Asatru-U http://www.asatru-u.org/

* HISTORY *

Ásatrú is the modern revitalization of the indigenous religion of Northern Europe.

This religion was almost completely displaced by Christianity in the middle ages. Although the religion was no longer practiced, many aspects survived in the culture. The old religion left as its rich legacy much of our traditional legal and ethical systems and our folk customs.

Icelanders never forgot their old religion, and in 1972, Ásatrú was recognized as a legitimate religion by the Icelandic government. Since the early 1970's, the religion has been in a period of rapid growth in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Ásatrú in North America was formally organized in 1973. Since then, a number of independent kindreds and other organizations have been formed (in North America and elsewhere).

♦ ORGANIZATION ♦

Ásatrú worship groups, called kindreds (also godhords, hearths, garths, or fellowships), are essentially autonomous. Some kindreds are associated with national or regional organizations which usually operate as federations of kindreds. There is no central authority.

* ROLE OF MINISTERS *

Ásatrú religious leaders are commonly called "gothi" (male form) and "gythia" (female form). Gothis/gythias are selected by the kindreds or communities that they serve; kindreds may have one or more gothis/gythias. Each kindred has its own notion of what role a gothi/gythia plays, but generally gothis/gythias develop and lead rituals and handle kindred administrative chores. All gothis and gythias are expected to be familiar with the lore and to be able to lead ceremonies.

Ásatrú

in Brief

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