### Aren't Heathens just "worshipping nature" or "things in their heads"?

We do see the work of many of our Gods in the natural world. There are also some Heathens who see our Gods as personifications of psychological forces, perhaps as "archetypes." These are both valid ways of seeing them. Our Gods exist partly in the forces of nature, and partly in our own minds, souls, and societies. They interpenetrate with our world, and with our very selves.

However, most Heathens would agree that our Gods are not *only* "natural forces," and they are not *solely* "inside your head." Most Heathens experience the Gods as complex, independent personalities, who speak to us in unexpected ways. Our myths are not literal descriptions of the Gods; they symbolize their natures and ways of working.

### How did the world come into existence?

Our myths speak of a land of ice, Niflheim, next to a land of fire, Muspellheim. The first beings came from the interaction between these two realms. Their descendants, the first Gods, shaped the universe and made mankind. Most Heathens don't take this myth literally; we don't reject scientific cosmology! The important truth conveyed by the myth is that our Gods grow out of the world, instead of standing apart from it. They share in its life and in ours, and we in theirs; we are their friends and kin, not their slaves or cattle.

#### How will the world end?

Ragnarok, the last battle between the Gods and the Giants, will be the end of the world. Most of the Gods will die fighting, and flames will destroy the world. Yet afterwards a new world will be reborn, more beautiful than the old. The Gods and humans who survive the battle will live on in this new world. Again, this myth is open to many interpretations. What matters is the fact that our Gods, like us, take part in the cycles of birth and death that make up the life of the Universe.

### What is The Troth?

The Troth is one of several international organizations that promote the ancient religion of the Northlands, known as Ásatrú, Heathenry, and by other names. We are incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation in the state of Texas, and are recognized by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt religious organization.

The Troth publishes a quarterly magazine, *Idunna*, along with other writings on Heathen belief and practice. We serve as a networking organization for individuals and kindreds, and we try to assist our members to form local groups to practice our religion and make it more widely available. Once a year, the Troth sponsors a major gathering at which members and interested folks conduct workshops and ceremonies, and discuss and demonstrate their many skills and practices. The Troth also conducts a certification program for clergy, incorporating training in lore, theology, ritual, and counseling.

The Troth believes that the Gods call whom they will—regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, or sexual orientation. To hear their call is a joy, an honor, and also a duty. If you hear that call, and you are willing to live by our values and honor our Gods, then we invite you to take your place among friends and kin, and bring new honor and strength to our ancient Heathen faith.

### How can I find out more?

- Visit the main website of The Troth at http://www.thetroth.org/
- E-mail the Troth at troth-contact @thetroth.org
- The Troth has a network of local coordinators, or "Stewards", who are happy to answer questions and provide contacts. To find your nearest Steward, go to http://www.thetroth.org/memsyc/stewards/
- Write to the Troth at the address on the front of this flyer.

# Gods of the Heathen Way



## A Brief Guide



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### Who are the gods and goddesses of the Heathen way?

Our gods belong to two "tribes", the Aesir and the Vanir. This flyer does not list all the Gods worshipped in either ancient or modern times; it can only give a brief overview of the best known.

### Who are the Aesir?

**Odin** or **Woden** is the giver of inspiration and magic, the stirrer of battle-frenzy, and the god of death. He works in countless ways and guises to hold off Ragnarok for as long as possible. The bravest of slain warriors live on in his hall, Valhalla, and will fight for him at Ragnarok.

**Frigga** or **Frige**, Odin's wife, watches over households, families, birth and children. She is also a seeress who knows all fates. She is Odin's match in wisdom; she shares his high-seat, from which they look out over the worlds together.

**Thor** or **Thunor** is the son of Odin and Earth. Thor is a storm-god; the lightning is his thrown Hammer, with which he defends Gods and humans against the Jotnar. He also brings the rain that makes the fields fertile, and his Hammer blesses marriages and other ceremonies.

**Sif** is Thor's wife, famous for her long golden hair, seen in fields of ripe grain.

**Tyr** or **Tiw** is the god of rightness and order—and of the struggle and self-sacrifice that are needed to uphold them. A wise and brave warrior, he lost his hand in binding the wolf Fenrir, who is fated to break loose at Ragnarok.

Heimdall watches for the signs of Ragnarok and guards Bifrost, the bridge between the world of mankind (Midgard) and the world of the Gods (Asgard). He hears everything that happens in the world, and needs no sleep. Under the name of Rig ("King"), he fathered the human race, and taught runes and lore to his descendants.

**Idunna** watches over the life force, seen in the myths as apples, that keeps all the Gods youthful and strong.

**Ostara** or **Eostre** is not known from Scandinavian sources, but she was worshipped in pre-Christian Germany and England. She is the bringer of spring. Her name was adopted by the Christians for their own festival of spring.

### Who are the Vanir?

The Vanir are sometimes called "fertility gods", but they are far more than that. The Vanir are the gods of all the things that we are meant to desire and enjoy, whether good harvests, sexual and emotional love, peace and friendship, or riches.

Frey, also known as Ing or Yngvi, is invoked for peace and abundance; the heathen Swedes called him "god of the world." He and Odin were also the founders and protectors of many dynasties of Heathen kings.

**Freya**, Frey's sister, rules over magic, sexuality, and riches; she taught the form of shamanic magic known as *seidh* to Odin. She is also a battle goddess—she takes half of those slain in battle to be with her.

**Njordh**, the father of Frey and Freya, is the god of the sea, seafarers, shipping and trade. He is described as exceedingly rich.

**Nerthus** is an Earth goddess once especially worshipped by the North Sea Germans, according to the Roman historian Tacitus. Her worship included the springtime procession of a wagon in which her image was kept; all conflict had to stop during her holy procession.

### What other beings are worshipped in Heathenry?

Heathens believe in and honor land-spirits, called *huldrefolk* or *landvaettir* in Old Norse. Heathens also honor house-spirits, who can be helpful in many ways if treated well, or disruptive if ignored. Heathens honor their own worthy ancestors as well; for example, the *disir* and *alfar* are female and male ancestors who have become guardian-spirits of a family or clan.

### Who are the Jotnar?

The Jotnar or "giants"—also known as etins or thurses—are a third group of powerful beings. Many of our myths tell of battles between the gods (especially Thor) and the giants. However, the Jotnar are not "evil" as the word is usually understood. On one level, some of the Jotnar represent the impersonal forces of nature: not malicious, but often destructive. Others of them are depicted as wise and helpful. In fact, nearly all our gods have giants in their ancestry, and some giants have been adopted among the gods.

**Skadhi** is a winter-goddess whom we visualize as a huntress traveling on skis. Once she threatened the Gods with vengeance for their killing of her father Thjazi, but the Gods were able to placate her and make her an ally.

**Loki** is best described as a trickster-figure—he has played pranks and created dissension among the Gods, and he will fight against them at Ragnarok. Nonetheless, his escapades have provided the Gods with great benefits. Although a Jotun, he is Odin's sworn blood-brother.

**Aegir** and his wife **Ran** rule over the depths of the sea. Shipwrecked sailors were said to have "gone to Ran". Their daughters are the waves.

Hel is the daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrbodha. She keeps the dead in her kingdom, also called Hel. The Christians borrowed her name for the place where sinners are tormented, but originally her realm was seen as a quiet land of rest, not a place of eternal torture.

**Jordh** or **Erda** is the Earth herself, the mother of Thor, and the giver of food to all.

### What are those emblems on the cover?

The large picture shows an ornament excavated from a royal grave at Sutton Hoo, England. It shows a man attacked by wolves, possibly Odin fighting at Ragnarok. The Thor's Hammer in a wreath is the emblem of the Troth, one of the largest Heathen organizations today.