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

Our gods belong to two "tribes", the Aesir and the Vanir. Our myths speak of a time when the Aesir and Vanir were at war, but made a truce and exchanged members. This myth may be based in part on historical battles between human tribes who later formed an alliance; at the same time, it reflects the ways in which our gods work together.

Perhaps the best-known of the Aesir is Odin. He is the god of many things: inspiration, ecstasy, poetry, healing, the runes, and death. Frigga, whom we see as Odin's wife, protects homes and families. Thor is the storm-god who defends the world of humans. The lightning is his weapon, the Hammer; the rain that he brings makes the fields fruitful. Tyr is the upholder of right order and justice, both among humans and in the universe. Heimdall is the watchman of the gods, and also the progenitor and teacher of the human race.

The Vanir are sometimes called "fertility gods", but they are far more than that; they are the gods of all the things in this world that we are meant to enjoy, whether good harvests, sexual love, or riches. Frey is invoked for peace and plenty; he and Odin were also the founders and protectors of many dynasties of Heathen kings. His sister Freya rules over magic, sexuality, and riches, but is also a battle goddess—she takes half of those slain in battle to be with her. Their father Njordh watches over the sea, ships, sailors, and trade.

The Jotnar or "giants" are a third group of powerful beings. Many of our myths tell of fights between the gods 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 sometimes destructive, and not especially heedful of human concerns. Yet others of them are depicted as wise and helpful. In fact, some giants have been adopted among the gods, and nearly all our gods have giants in their ancestry.

#### 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/ memsvc/stewards/

• Write to the Troth at the address on the front of this flyer.

# Heathen Gods and Rites



## Some Frequently Asked Questions



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#### Whom do Heathens worship?

We worship the Gods and Goddesses that were worshipped in Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia, and other Germanic countries before their forcible Christianization in the early Middle Ages.

#### You're not serious, right?

We're quite serious.

We don't take our myths and tales absolutely literally. We know that lightning and thunder are not physically caused by a muscular red-bearded man riding a goat-drawn chariot and throwing a massive hammer. We know that the Sun does not really travel across the sky in a chariot. Such interpretations miss the point: our images of our Gods are symbols of what they are like. They convey to our minds truths that are hard to grasp in any other way. We feel Thor's great might in the fury of a thunderstorm; we come to know something of the laws and cycles of nature through the image of Sunna's chariot. We see Frey's power in green fields; we know Freya's magic in the love's wild sweetness; we recognize Odin's own self in the blaze of creative inspiration.

#### Aren't you just "worshipping nature" or worshipping "things in your head"?

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 partially true. Our Gods exist partly in the forces of nature, and partly in our own minds, souls, and societies; they interpenetrate with ourselves and our world. These are valid ways of experiencing them.

However, most Heathens would agree that our Gods are not mere "natural forces," and they are not solely "inside your head." Most Heathens experience the Gods as complex personalities existing apart from humans, capable of growth and change. Sometimes they speak to us in unexpected ways as our knowledge of them deepens.

#### How do Heathens worship today?

Thanks to a lot of written lore and folk customs surviving in Iceland, England, and to a lesser extent other Germanic nations, we know a fair amount about how the Gods were thought of and worshipped in ancient times. Not all Heathens are scholars, but most Heathens use historical and scholarly writings to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, what our forebears actually thought and did and believed. It is often said that Heathenry is "the religion with homework"! Yet although we use this lore as the basis for what we do, there is plenty of room in our faith for personal inspiration, for individual creativity, and for updating and renewing our ways to reflect the world we live in.

A Heathen rite of worship is called a blót (pronounced to rhyme with "boat"). A blót may be simple or complex, but usually involves sharing a drinking horn of ale or mead among the worshippers; prayers and calls to the deity being honored; and sharing drink, and sometimes other offerings, with the deity. In a rite known as sumbel, participants toast the Gods and ancestors, boast of their accomplishments, and swear binding oaths before the Gods and the gathered folk. We view our Gods as Elder Kin-we don't bow or kneel before them, and we don't beg for their redemption or forgiveness. We stand proudly before them, share our offerings and our deeds with them, and ask for their aid to guard and strengthen ourselves and our kindreds.

The calendar of holidays varied among different peoples in ancient times, and it varies among modern Heathens today. Almost all Heathens celebrate Yule around the winter solstice, Ostara in spring, Midsummer near the summer solstice, and Winternights in autumn. Some Heathens, but not all, celebrate a cycle of eight major feasts per year. Heathens may also make blóts to a God or several Gods whenever they feel the need to communicate with them.

#### Do Heathens do magic or cast spells?

Some do and some don't. Magick, spellcasting, and esoteric work are not as central to Heathen ways as they are in typical Wicca or other witchcraft traditions. Many Heathens don't feel the need to use them. That being said, there are several magical practices that are documented in our lore, which modern Heathens have reconstructed and use. One of these is seidh—a kind of soul journeywork, similar to shamanic practices in other cultures. Rune magic may include divination, galdor (chants), or taufr-magic (carving and staining magical objects).

#### Where do Heathens go after death?

It depends. There is evidence in the surviving lore for many different fates after death. Some people, especially warriors, go to Odin's home, Valhalla, or to Freya's hall Folkvang. Some go to be with whichever god or goddess they were closest to in life. Others may stay on the earth as guardian spirits, watching over their lands and their families. Still others may go to the realm of Hel-which is not a place of torment, but rather a land of rest. (Christian missionaries borrowed the word Hel and used it to mean the lad of fiery eternal punishment for sinners. Although there's some evidence in the Heathen lore that extremely bad people are punished after death, the concept of a land of eternal torture is alien to Heathenry.) Finally, many Heathens believe that at least parts of their souls, if not necessarily complete "personas", are reincarnated in later generations of their families.

#### What are those emblems on the cover?

The large picture is taken from a carved stone from Alskog Tjängvide, Sweden. It depicts the goddess Frigga, or perhaps a valkyrie, welcoming Odin with a horn of drink. The Thor's Hammer in a wreath is the emblem of the Troth, one of the largest Heathen organizations today.