

# Odinism/Ásatrú

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## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Ásatrú (pronounced “Ah-sah-tru” or “Ow-sah-tru”), translated from Old Norse, means “Loyalty to the Gods (Æsir),” or “Faith in the Gods.”

**Required Daily Observances.** None. Many Ásatrúar begin and end the day with prayers honoring the Gods, Goddesses, and their ancestors. Many also carry their runes with them at all times, and use them regularly.

**Required Weekly Observances.** None. Many Ásatrúar meet weekly to study and perform rituals such as Blots (pronounced “Bloat”) or Sumbels.

**Required Occasional Observances.** The two main rituals of Ásatrú are the Blot and the Sumbel. These can take place either indoors or outdoors. Outdoors, however, is the more natural setting for a Blot.

The Blot is a ritual sacrifice made in honor of a God or Goddess. Some groups retain the ancient practice of an animal sacrifice, in which an animal is sacrificed, then cooked and eaten at a feast after the Blot. Some Ásatrúar make only a symbolic animal sacrifice, offering an edible image, such as a cookie, in the shape of an animal. This is an appropriate alternative for incarcerated Ásatrúar. Most modern Ásatrúar make their sacrifice symbolically with homemade mead, an alcoholic drink. Wine and beer may be used. Fruit juice or a non-fermented mixture of water, honey, and fruit juice is a suitable alternative in Bureau facilities.

The Sumbel is a ritualized celebration, which includes drinking mead and offering toasts, boasts, oaths, stories, songs, or poems. A Sumbel generally consists of three rounds:

- In the first round, toasts are made in honor of the Gods and Goddesses.
- In the second round, toasts are made in honor of the participants’ ancestors.
- The third round would be open for participants to share a boast, oath, story, song, or poem.

There is much variance in the exact days and names for the dates celebrated by the different kindreds and associations of kindreds (from 8 days to almost 30). The list provided by World Tree Publications is a good guide. Some dates shift a day or two each year, so a current calendar should be obtained.

These dates are observed by the Ásatrú Alliance and the International Ásatrú/Ođinic Alliance. In the community, celebrations are generally observed on the nearest Saturday to the actual date; thus, most can be observed during regularly scheduled meeting times. However, the High Feast Days of Ostara, Midyear, Winter Finding, and Yule must be observed on the listed dates because of the solar significance of the Solstices and Equinoxes.

## **January - Snowmoon**

3<sup>rd</sup>— Charming of the Plow.

9<sup>th</sup>— Day of Remembrance for Raud the Strong.

13<sup>th</sup> – Thorra Blot (*Sacred to Thor*).

## **February - Horning**

2<sup>nd</sup>– Barri (*A day to plant seeds*).

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Eyvind Kinnrifi.

14<sup>th</sup> – Feast of Vali (*Sacred to Vali*).

## **March - Lenting**

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Oliver the Martyr.

20<sup>th</sup> – High Feast of Ostara (*Sacred to Ostara, Freya, and Frigga*).

## **April - Ostara**

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Jarl Hakon.

14<sup>th</sup> – Sigr Blot (*First Day of Summer in the Old Calendar – Sacred to Oðin*).

22<sup>nd</sup> – Yggdrasil Day (*A day to plant trees and shrubs*).

30<sup>th</sup> – Walburg (*Sacred to Freya and the glorious dead*).

## **May - Merrymoon**

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Guthroth.

19<sup>th</sup> – Frigga Blot (*Sacred to Frigga, the AlMother*).

## **June - Midyear**

8<sup>th</sup>– Lindisfarne Day (*A day of new beginnings*).

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Sigurd the Volsung.

21<sup>st</sup> – High Feast of Baldor (*Sacred to Baldor*).

## **July - Haymoon**

4<sup>th</sup>– Founders Day (*Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson, Rud Mills, and Thorsteinn Guthjonson are honored as the founders of modern-day Asatru*).

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Unn the Deep Minded.

29<sup>th</sup> – Stikklestad Day (*A day of atonement*).

## August - Harvest

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance.

18<sup>th</sup> – Freyfaxi (*First Harvest Blot – Sacred to Frey*).

## September - Shedding

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Herman of the Cherusci.

21<sup>st</sup> – Winter Finding (*High Feast of Oðin, the Harvest Feast*).

## October - Hunting

8<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Erik the Red.

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Leif Erikson (*Discovery Day*).

13<sup>th</sup> – Winter Nights (*First Day of Winter in Old Calendar – Sacred to Freya and the ancestors*).

## November - Fogmoon

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of remembrance for Queen Sigrith of Sweden.

11<sup>th</sup> – Feast of Eiherjar (*The Chosen Battle Slain*).

22<sup>nd</sup> – Feast of Ullr (*Post Hunting Feast – Sacred to Ullr*).

## December - Yule

9<sup>th</sup>– Day of Remembrance for Egil Skallagrimsson.

20<sup>th</sup> – Mother Night (*Beginning of Yuletide*).

21<sup>st</sup> – High Feast of Yule (*Beginning of the Runic Year – Sacred to Thor and Frey*).

(This Runic Era Calendar has been prepared by Valgard Murray, Allsherjargoði of the Ásatrú Alliance.)

**Holy Days.** Four dates are sometimes set aside as religious holy days – the High Feast Days of Ostara, Midyear, Winter Finding, and Yule. These must be observed on the listed dates because of the solar significance of the solstices and equinoxes.

- March 20 – High Feast of Ostara (*Sacred to Ostara, Freya, and Frigga*).
- June 21 – High Feast of Baldor (*Sacred to Baldor*).

- September 21 – Winter Finding (*High Feast of Oðin, the Harvest Feast*).
- December 21 – High Feast of Yule (*Beginning of the Runic Year - Sacred to Thor and Frey*).

**Note:** These four dates are not included in the annually issued Operations Memorandum, “Holy Days Calling for Work Proscription and Public Fast Days for Inmates, Recognition of,” because these are not universally recognized days of work proscription by the Ásatrú community. The Warden has the authority to approve requests locally, however.

## RELIGIOUS ITEMS

### Personal Religious Items

- Thor’s Hammer medallion and chain.
- 1 set of runestones/cards with instruction book (if using runestones, runes should be plastic and no larger in diameter than a nickel).
- Hlath. A solid-colored headband containing one or more runes. Worn during services only.
- The **Poetic Edda**, a collection of 29 poems, including the Havamal, considered to be the words of Oðin AIFather.
- The **Edda** written by Snorri Sturluson – an ancient book written to develop the techniques of skaldic poetry, using numerous myths as examples.

**Security note:** Small personal mead horns are not authorized personal property.

### Security note: Hlath

- The hlath may be worn during services in the Chapel area only.
- The hlath must contain runes to be of religious significance for Ásatrúar. Plain headbands have no religious significance and are not authorized.

### Congregate Religious Items

- Stalli (altar). Usually wood or stone. A properly adorned table will suffice.
- Altar cloth. Used to drape the Stalli; can also be used as a kindred banner.
- Bowli. Sacrificial bowl used to contain mead for the offering and blessing. It should be made of a natural material such as wood or ceramic.
- Oath ring. An oath ring, up to 6 inches in diameter, is brought to all functions

and placed on the altar. It is used by those who wish to make a sacred oath.

- Runestones. Used in identifying powers available for growth, protection, and healing, to name a few.
- Ritual mead horn. Used to accept the sacrificial mead by worshipers. Mead may be poured into paper or plastic cups from the ritual horn, if participants do not wish to drink from the communal horn.
- Mead. A mixture of water, honey, and fruit juice used as a sacrificial offering.
- Altar candles. Various colors are used to honor Gods and Goddesses, signifying the eternal light of Asgard (realm of the Gods and Goddesses).
- Gandr. A wooden staff with the runic alphabet written or carved upon it. It represents the spear of Oðin. Since it is a symbolic representation, it does not need to be very large, or shaped like a spear. A stick ½ inch thick and two feet long is sufficient.
- Thor's Hammer. The hammer may be about 12 by 10 inches and can be constructed out of wood or strong cardboard.
- Statues of the Gods and Goddesses. The statues are placed on the altar.
- Evergreen Twig. A fresh twig will be needed for each blot, to disperse the blessings of the blot on the participants.
- Sun Wheel. The sun wheel is placed on the altar. This is the same shape as a Native American medicine wheel, inscribed with two intersecting lines emphasizing the four compass directions of the circle. A sun wheel inscribed with swastikas (a combination of several runes) is not part of Ásatrú practice.

**Security note:** The Oath Ring is not to be confused with jewelry, such as a personal ring or wrist bracelet. It is a congregate religious item, about six inches in diameter, used only during worship services and religious programs. It is not a finger ring.

**Security note:** The Sax or Sword is used for swearing holy oaths and during the Tyr blot in the community. In a correctional setting the use or display of swords is never authorized. The gandr and oath ring may be substituted.

**Searches.** While Ásatrú inmates place great value in their rune cards, religious medallion, and other religious items, these can be handled by other people. Staff are expected to show the same respect for such items as for religious articles of all traditions. Religious articles are not to be mishandled, thrown, placed on the floor, brought into the bathroom, or placed on the toilet or washbasin.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Requirements.** Membership within the Ásatrú community is a matter of free choice. Ásatrúar do not condone coercion, intimidation, or use of force in recruitment of new members. An individual is free to leave the Ásatrú community if it does not satisfy his or her spiritual needs.

Because of the ideals of freedom and individuality, there is no definitive way in which a person becomes an Ásatrúar. Many Ásatrúar believe that you must be descended from the ancient Ásatrúar to be an adherent of the faith (“Folkish” Ásatrúar). Others believe that anyone who honors the Gods and Goddesses and receives blessings from them is an Ásatrúar (“Universalist” Ásatrúar). Some kindreds have formalized rituals for a person to join, which would include a renunciation of vows to other deities, and a vow of loyalty to the Gods and Goddesses of Ásatrú. To join a local kindred, that person’s membership would be voted on by the current members. Any group of family members and friends who are Ásatrúar can declare themselves as a kindred. Various associations of kindreds require certain criteria to be met for a kindred to be voted into membership. Most kindreds align themselves with one or more associations.

**Total Membership.** Total membership is unknown. There are more than 100 local kindreds in the U.S. and many more throughout the world. Kindreds may range in size from 2 to 100.

## **MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS**

None.

## **DIETARY STANDARDS**

No special dietary standards exist. Pork, however, is considered sacred to the God Frey, and is generally eaten at the Yule Feast. Ásatrú inmates should be able to self-select from mainline foods.

## **BURIAL RITUALS**

There is no one correct way for burials to take place in Ásatrú, although several practices appear to be commonplace. The first obligation is a ritual display of respect for the dead. Grave goods are important, as they provide for the needs of the dead during the long journey to the other world. Both interment and cremation are acceptable. There are no prohibitions concerning autopsies.

Many readings in the **Poetic Edda** are appropriate for a memorial service. The words

said at the gravesite are specific to the individual's God or Goddess worshiped – Oðin, Frey, Freya, Thor, Balder, Frigga, Tyr, etc.

## **SACRED WRITINGS**

Ásatrúar differ in their perspective on the sacredness of any particular writings. Whether they are considered sacred or not, all Ásatrúar consider the **Poetic Edda** (Elder Edda), the **Prose Edda** (Younger Edda), myths, and sagas to be inspired and inspirational literature. At the very least, a copy of the **Poetic Edda** should be available, since it contains the Havamal – considered to be the words of the God Oðin, the Alfater.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

**Headquarters Location.** Ásatrú is a non-centralized religion. Each kindred is an independent organization. Most kindreds affiliate with one or more kindred associations.

**Contact Office/Person.** Since Ásatrú is a non-authoritarian and decentralized religion, there is no Minister of Record.

## **HISTORY**

Ásatrú, or “those who are loyal to the Gods,” is the Old Norse term for the indigenous pagan religion of the people of pre-Christian Northern Europe. The precise time and place of its origin is not conclusively known, but it is commonly accepted to be thousands of years old. Today, many people use the name Ásatrú and Oðinism interchangeably, yet most adherents of Ásatrú would say that the term Oðinism places undue emphasis on only one of the Gods, and is too narrow a characterization of the religion.

After the Christianization of Northern Europe, Ásatrú was thought to have died out as an actively practiced religion. Sweden was ruled by a pagan king until 1085 C.E. and Iceland formally converted in 1000 C.E. to avoid economic sanctions from its trading partners. Some modern Ásatrúar assert that the beliefs and practices never totally disappeared, but were practiced in secret or incorporated into the Christian culture. Other modern Ásatrúar assert that there is no direct continuity with the old faith, and that modern Ásatrú is a reconstructed faith. The modern revival of Ásatrú began in the early 1970's.

In 1972, Ásatrú was recognized by the Icelandic Government as a legitimate state religion, due to the efforts of the poet and Goði (pronounced “go-thi” the Old Norse term for a male Ásatrú religious leader) Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson.



In North America, Ásatrú was organized in 1973, with the formation of the Ásatrú Free Assembly. A split developed in 1987 that led to the dissolution of the Ásatrú Free Alliance and the formation of the Ring of Troth and the Ásatrú Alliance. The Ring of Troth maintains that participation is open to all “Trú folk” regardless of background, race, gender, or sexual orientation. The Ásatrú Alliance, on the other hand, accepts that some member kindreds would not wish to worship with those who are different from themselves – usually described in terms of race and sexual orientation. They are often called “folkish” Ásatrú. Many inmate groups have formed along the lines of the Ásatrú Alliance, the “folkish” Ásatrú.

With the growth of the Internet, information about Ásatrú has grown exponentially. Steve McNallen, original founder of the Ásatrú Free Assembly, has created a new organization called the Ásatrú Folk Assembly, which has forged close ties with international Ásatrú organizations.

Currently, there are kindreds all over the world, with more than 100 in the U.S. Some U. S. kindreds have incorporated as churches in their states. There is even a Boy Scout troop in Utah officially sponsored by an Ásatrú kindred.

One of the greatest challenges facing Ásatrú in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to dispel the notion that to be an Ásatrúar one must also be a racist or supremacist. The responses range from the Ring of Troth’s statement that race is not a factor in determining its membership to an admission that those attracted to Ásatrú are able to trace their origins back to peoples of Northern Europe. Almost all of them, however, state clearly that concepts of superiority and racial supremacy are not part of Ásatrú belief or practice.

## THEOLOGY

**Introduction.** Two factors in the modern revival of Ásatrú make it difficult to conclusively determine what is and is not a tenet of the faith. The first factor is that the modern form of Ásatrú is actively being reconstructed as Ásatrúar uncover more clues about the ancient ways and mold them to fit today’s realities. The second factor is that the religion itself encourages freedom and individuality. Following are some basics upon which most Ásatrúar would agree.

**Ancient Nordic Mythology.** To understand the context of Nordic spirituality, one needs to draw upon mythology. According to Nordic mythology, the universe is organized into nine worlds interconnected by an immense ash tree, called Yggdrasil (the World Tree). The universe is composed of three levels: the upper level where the Gods, the Æsir and Vanir, dwell. The humans inhabit one of the planets in the middle level, as do the frost,

hill, and fire giants. On the lower level the worlds are inhabited by the dwarves, the dark elves, and the dead.

Two of the worlds, Muspellheim (the land of fire) and Niflheim (the land of ice) apparently have always existed. The ice of Niflheim came into contact with sparks and embers hurled into space by the volcanoes of Muspellheim. The first giant, Ymir, was formed from the melting of the ice. Out of him the gods were born. Ymir, in turn, was killed by the Æsir – Oðin and his brothers. From his remains the other worlds were created, with the magnificent realm of the Asgard created last. The bridge between the middle-level worlds and the Asgard, called Bifrost or the Rainbow Bridge, is guarded by the God Heimdall against the frost, hill, and fire giants.

The World Tree that holds together the nine worlds is itself under constant attack. The ravaging and decay of the tree as it touches the nine worlds are counterbalanced by healing water from the Urd's well in Asgard, maintaining the eternal balance between growth and decay. Closely associated with the Well and the Tree is the Dragon, Thor's greatest enemy, who circles the world and grasps his tail in his mouth. The symbolic pairing in Norse mythology of the Dragon (darkness, death, chaos) with the Tree (light, life, order) was an acceptance of the eternal balance of opposites.

**Gods and Goddesses.** Ásatrú is a polytheistic pagan religion. Ásatrúar believe in and honor many Gods and Goddesses, as well as other “beings” (spirits, elves, trolls, giants, little “people,” and other creatures). Traditionally, they have believed in three races of Gods: the Æsir, the Vanir, and the Jotnar. The Æsir are the Gods of society, of all social interactions and offices that take place in human society. The Vanir are more closely tied to the earth and bless the fruits, crops, and the harvesting of the land and represent the natural forces that help humanity.

After a war between the Æsir and the Vanir was settled, the Vanir sent several deities to live with the Æsir to ensure that peace remains between them. The Jotnar are a third race of Gods and are at constant war with the Æsir and Vanir.

- Oðin      Father of the Gods, associated with wisdom, poetry, and victory.
- Thor      God of strength and might.
- Frigga    Mother of the Gods, wise, involved with family and children.
- Tyr      One-handed God renowned for sacrifice, valor, and war.
- Balder    Most beautiful of the Gods, soft-spoken, bold and good, the son of Oðin and Frigga.

- Skadi Mountain-dwelling Goddess who hunts on skis.
- Heimdal Watchman guarding the Rainbow Bridge to the realm of the Gods.
- Idun Goddess who keeps the magic apples that renew the Gods' youth.
- Freya Goddess of love, fertility, and procreation, but with a warrior aspect.
- Frey Virile fertility God, whose domain includes love, joy, prosperity.
- Njord God connected with the sea as a source of food and prosperity through trade.

**The Jotnar.** The Jotnar, the third race of Gods, are never called Gods but are referred to as giants. They represent the natural forces of chaos, disorder, and destruction, and are in opposition to the Æsir and Vanir. The Jotnar are the frost, fire, and hill Giants. The sons of the God Loki, the wolf and the serpent, are also in opposition to the Æsir. This creative interaction of chaos (the Giants) and order (the Æsir) maintains the balance of the world. At the conclusion of history as it is now known, the two sides will meet in the great battle of Ragnarok and the world will be destroyed. A new world will come out of the destruction of the old.

**Noble Virtues.** Ásatrúar are expected to live according to the “Nine Noble Virtues.” They are:

- Courage. By facing life's struggles with courage, people constantly extend their capabilities. Without courage nothing else can be done.
- Truth. Blind faith has no place in Ásatrú. People must act in this world as they see it and are expected to respond to it with honesty towards others and themselves.
- Honor. Be true to what people are and insist on acting with nobility as well as upon one's convictions.
- Fidelity. Remain true to one's faith and values. Loyalty is the basis for all enduring human activity and must be a critical component of behavior.
- Hospitality. The isolation and loneliness of modern life is not necessary. People are encouraged to share what they have with others, especially with travelers in their midst.

- Discipline. It takes discipline to fulfill one's purpose in life. It is necessary to exercise self-control and steadfastness during difficult times.
- Industriousness. To work wholeheartedly, hard, and intelligently. This allows a person to keep thinking and growing.
- Self-reliance. Rely on oneself as much as possible and on others as infrequently as possible. Ask only for the freedom necessary to realize life's goals and dreams.
- Perseverance. Hold on to one's goals until completion and don't be ashamed for being strong.

Cattle die, kinsmen die,  
 one day you yourself must die.  
 I know one thing that never dies;  
 the dead man's reputation.

*Havamal - Sayings of the High One*

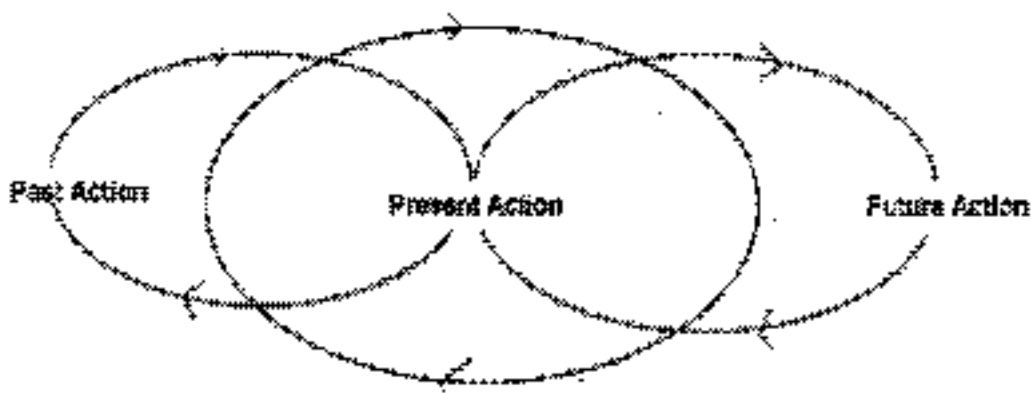
**Rede of Honor.** The Rede of Honor serves as a guideline for daily living. Ásatrúar preach and practice courage, honor, the importance of the family and ancestral bonds, strength, freedom, the preservation of kindred, and joyful, vigorous life.

- In all that you do, consider its benefit or harm upon yourself, your children, and your people.
- All that you do will return to you, sooner or later, for good or ill. Thus strive always to do good to others, or at least always to be just.
- Be honest with yourself and others. This above all: to thine own self be true.
- Humankind, especially your own family and folk, has the spark of divinity within it. Protect and nurture that spark.
- Give your word sparingly and adhere to it like iron.
- In the world, your first trust and responsibility should be to your own people. Yet, be kind and proper to others whenever possible.

- What you have – HOLD!
- Pass on to others only those words that you have personally verified.
- Be honest with others and let them know that you expect honesty in return.
- The fury of the moment plays folly with the truth; to keep one's head is a virtue.
- Know which battles should be fought and which should be avoided. Also, know when to break off conflict. There are times when the minions of chaos are simply too strong or when fate is unavoidable.
- When you gain power, use it carefully and well.
- Courage and honor endure forever. Their echoes remain when the mountains have crumbled to dust.
- Pledge your friendship and your services to those who are worthy. Strengthen others of your people, and they will strengthen you.
- Love and care for your family always and have the fierceness of the wolf in their protection.
- Honor yourself, have pride in yourself, do your best, and forgive yourself when you must.
- Try to be above reproach in the eyes of the world.
- Our people should always endeavor to settle any differences among themselves quietly and peacefully.
- If the laws of the land are beneficial to folk and family, they should be obeyed.
- Have pride in yourself, your family, and your folk. They are your promise for the future.

- Do not neglect your mate and children.
- Everyone should work according to the best s/he can, no matter how small or how great. We are all in this world together, thus we must help each other along.
- One advances individually and collectively only by living in harmony with the natural order of the world.
- The seeking of wisdom is a high virtue. Love of truth, honor, courage, and loyalty are hallmarks of the noble soul.
- Be prepared for whatever the future brings.
- Life with all its joys, struggles, and ambiguities is to be embraced and lived to the fullest.

**Runes.** To understand the meaning and use of the Runes, two concepts need to be introduced. The first is the Northern European law of cause and effect, called *Orlog* – the essential and unchanging laws of the universe that drive *and* limit events taking place in the world. A person is born with a clean slate; what the individual does in life determines the outcome. One's past actions do influence present and future actions, but do not determine them. To do good means good fortune and a good death. To do evil means one pays the price in this life and the afterlife.



Basic to Norse cosmology is the concept of *wyrd*. *Wyrd* is what has become, what affects the present, and what is to come. The laws of *wyrd* supersede the will of all, the Gods, and all other inhabitants of the Nine Worlds. Yggdrasil, the world tree, holds the nine worlds within its branches and represents the present; the dew that forms on the tree represents deeds being done in the present. The water in the well represents the results of deeds from the past. These

results are brought to the present to shape the results of deeds in the present.

The *Wyrd* can be likened to a giant spider web that spreads its strands through the framework of Yggdrasil. Each strand is made up of different manifestations of energy, with its culmination being the fabric of the universe. Since human beings are part of the universe, they are also part of this fabric of energy, often referred to as the active power of the past on the present. Growth and maturity takes place when one learns the significance of *Orlog* and the *Wyrd* and is aligned with it.

Each strand of energy has been given a symbol – a rune. In divination, the runic energy is seen as having manifested itself around human beings and can be interpreted. Either three or 13 runes are randomly taken and interpreted. Healing can also take place using the runes. An invocation is made to the gods to channel divine energy into the runes, placed around a sick person, to displace negative energy with healing energy.

The **Poetic Edda** describes how Oðin hung on the World Tree for nine days, discovered the runes, and infused them with his power. The **Poetic Edda** states,

I know that I hung on Yggdrasil  
For nine nights long  
Wounded by spear  
Consecrated to Oðin  
Myself a sacrifice to myself  
Upon that tree  
The wisest know not the roots  
of ancient times whence it sprang.

None brought me bread  
None gave me mead  
Down to the depths I searched  
I took up the Runes  
Raised them with song  
And from that tree I fell.

Runes you shall know, and readable staves,  
Very powerful staves, Very great staves  
Graven by the mighty one who speaks  
Carved by the highest hosts.

**Thor's Hammer (*Mjolnir*)**. The hammer is the tool with which Thor fights the Jotuns, the

giants who represent chaos, disorder, and destruction. The hammer is also the means of bringing the goats who pull his chariot back to life. The hammer is used to bless a bride at her wedding. It is, therefore, an object of protection, and also brings fertility and new life.

The sign of the hammer is made by tracing an upside-down T shape in the air and stating something such as “Hammer of Thor, Hallow and hold this Thy Holy Stead.”

**Family and Kin are Pillars of Ásatrú.** It is believed that Ásatrúar are bonded to their ancestors and descendants by spiritual traits that are passed on. There is also belief by some that the spirit of ancestors can be reincarnated in their own descendants. This is why, for example, the Folkish Ásatrúar believe in the essential Nordic character of Ásatrú and its descendants. Ancestors are revered and held in high esteem.

**Equinoxes and Solstices.** Equinoxes occur when the sun crosses the equator and day and night are of nearly equal length at all latitudes. The vernal equinox occurs in May as the sun is moving northward. In September, as the sun is moving southward, is the autumnal equinox.

Solstices occur when the sun is at its furthest from or closest to the equator. The winter solstice occurs when the sun reaches its southmost distance from the equator – the shortest day of the year. The summer solstice occurs when the sun is closest to the equator – the longest day of the year. This happens in the northern hemisphere; in the southern hemisphere, the opposite is true.

Since the earth circles the sun once every 365 1/4 days, the solstices and equinoxes do not occur at the same dates or times each year.

**Afterlife.** Ásatrúar believe in an afterlife; the individual’s place in it will be affected by his or her conduct in this life. There are three main aspects to the afterlife: the heroic good will be taken to realm of the Gods; ordinary folk will be reborn into the family line; and evildoers, oath breakers, etc., will be sent to a place of gloom, cold, and fog. Oðin was able to bring the dead back to life and brought the warriors to the great hall of Valhalla, with its 540 doors and roof of burnished shields, where they were welcomed by the Gods.

**Goði and Gyðia.** The terms (pronounced “go-thi” and “gi-thia,” the Old Norse terms for male and female Ásatrú religious leaders) mean “those who speak the godly tongue.” Today, Goði and Gyðia lead the blots and sumbels and other sacred rituals. No formal training requirements exist, except that Goði and Gyðia are expected to demonstrate leadership abilities and be well grounded in the beliefs, mythology, and sagas of Ásatrú.



A course is available through the Ásatrú Folk Assembly, which aspiring Goði and Gyðia are encouraged to take.

**Outdoor Worship.** Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote in **The Germania** that the Teutons worshiped their Gods and Goddess in holy groves and by sacred rivers and springs. Blots and other sacred rituals are generally performed outdoors today. A low, long building was frequently erected on the site, called a “Hof” or “Vé,” where sacred rituals took place. Institutions are expected to provide a neutral outdoor area suitable for worship by the nature-based religions approved to practice in the Bureau.

## APPENDIX: RUNES

The runes consist of 24 characters composed of straight lines that break and cross without any curves. According to tradition, Oðin discovered the runes and infused them with his power when he hung on Yggdrasil, the world tree, for nine days. In addition, the concepts of *Orlog*, the law of cause and effect, which drive and limit events in the world, and *Wyrd*, strands of energy that are part of the universe, are important concepts. Each locus of energy has as its symbol a rune. The power of the rune can be read and interpreted.

The 24 runes are divided into three groups of eight, called *aet*. The alphabet is named after the first six letters, Futhark.



**FEHU Meaning: big-horned cattle, head of such cattle.** This rune is concerned with worldly wealth and possession. Success may be achieved in the face of opposition if a cautious approach is assumed and one works hard and diligently.



**URUZ Meaning: aurochs, wild bison.** The aurochs was a wild bison that roamed the countryside of ancient Europe and is now extinct. This rune represents change, something that requires shouldering new responsibilities, as the saying “taking the bull by the horns” implies.



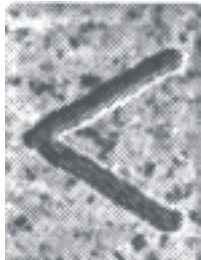
**THURISAZ Meaning: thorn, giant, bitter frost, thorn.** At first glance, thurisaz appears to denote sharpness and pain. It can equally be regarded as a protective shield or warning. The essence of learning is suffering, which can lead to growth and maturity.



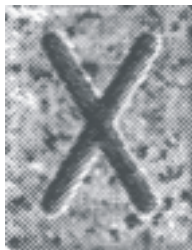
**ANSUZ Meaning: Oðin, God, in a broader sense, father.** The essence of this rune is advice and deliberation. This is a balanced rune. The best course of action is to take the advice of elders or to spend time deliberating before taking action.



**RAIDO Meaning: wheel, travel.** This rune signifies a need to move right away and a choice must be made. It can be both traveling on a journey as well as an inner or spiritual journey that will prove to be enlightening and uplifting.



**KENAZ Meaning: torch, in a broader sense, fire.** This is a masculine rune and relates to making or receiving business offers. It also can mean inner quest, denoting spiritual enlightenment, such as the torch that lights the way. It is associated with the spring equinox, which can symbolize new life and fertility.



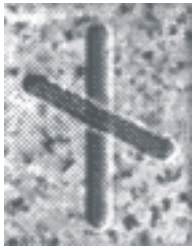
**GEBO Meaning: present, gift.** A cross symbolizes closeness and union. A gift is often a symbol of a covenant, where one party receives and then, in turn, is obligated in some way to the giver. Nothing in life is free.



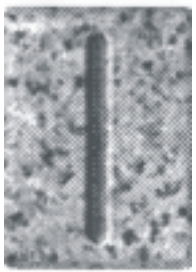
**WUNJO Meaning: glory, victory.** The principle behind the rune is of happiness derived from bending with the wind, implying that inner understanding and fluidity is important. On a more materialistic level, it means that the individual will be successful in the endeavor.



**HAGALAZ Meaning: hail.** This rune denotes limitation, that there is something or someone in the way of achieving the desired end. In ancient times, the weather dominated – either crops flourished with the right amount of sun and rain, or were destroyed by too little sun, rain, or hail.



**NAUTHIZ Meaning: need, necessity.** On a material level, this rune denotes restriction. The individual is confronted by a situation that he/she will not be able to change by drastic or headstrong action. On an inner level, this rune represents spiritual growth through hardship.



**ISA Meaning: ice.** Ice may both be very cold and very protective at the same time. This rune counsels caution. The best course of action is to take no action, to wait until the situation changes. Eventually, there will be a thaw and everything can turn back to normal.



**JERA Meaning: year, harvest.** This is a neutral rune; it represents a wheel; no matter which way it falls, it is the same. This rune implies a time of reckoning, when things have gone full circle and must now be reviewed. It can also mean inner turmoil – two opposing forces within an individual. Being interlocked, they are contained.



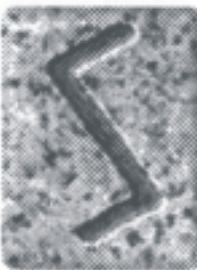
**EIHWAZ Meaning: yew.** Yew was probably the most important wood for the ancient northern people. The longbow was made from it, which provided both food and protection. It also held mystical significance as a symbol of death and resurrection. This marks the middle of the alphabet.



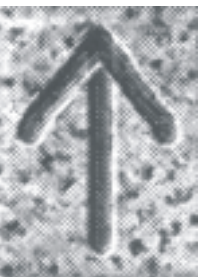
**PERTH Meaning: vulva, secret.** This rune remains a mystery. It may mean that something hidden is about to surface. In ancient Germanic, no equivalent sound existed. This rune is closely connected with the idea of destiny determining one's life path at the moment of being born.



**ALGIZ Meaning: protection.** This rune can be a protective charm; the message is optimistic. It signifies that the individual is shielded from danger or difficulty during the time span to which the question applies. It is a rune of friendship and protection but is manifested through one's inner self. Thus the person deserves what is received.



**SOWULO Meaning: sun.** This rune stands for movement and energy. It lightens adjoining runes and adds power to them. This rune also means to take proper care of oneself, to take needed rest to be able to continue on.



**TEIWAZ Meaning: Tyr, in modern times, passion.** The God Tyr is the original creator, later replaced by Oðin. The appearance of this rune points to battle, competition, and vigorous energy. The individual is about to embark on an enterprise that requires much energy – moral, physical, or both.



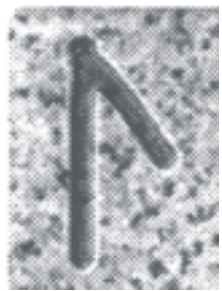
**BERKANA Meaning: birch.** This rune is a fertility symbol. Since it represents the mother, it also represents the child. Success will not come of its own accord: effort and attention are required. This may explain the traditional duality of the birch, the “fruitless tree” – that all is not as it seems and much work is needed for success.



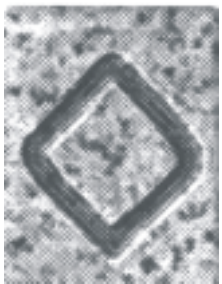
**EHWAZ Meaning: horse.** This rune is largely neutral, implying travel and possible change. On a more mystical level, the rune signifies a need to establish strong connection between oneself and his/her emotions. The horse is a traditional symbol of power that can lead to liberation if understood and handled correctly.



**MANNAZ Meaning: man, mankind.** This rune symbolizes that people are alone, yet not alone. Individuals are separate entities, yet part of the human race and the universe. This rune may point to civic and social duty. On a spiritual level, it can also mean that others must be put behind to tread a new and lonelier path that leads to progress.



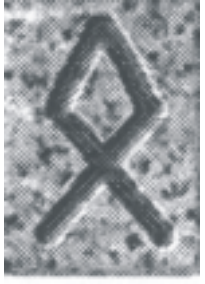
**LAGUZ Meaning: water, lake.** This rune represents the hidden side of an individual’s nature. Water is regarded as one of the four elemental forces, with fire, earth, and air. It is associated with the moon. It is a counter to the logical side and is more intuitive. It is also associated with the feminine, passive, and receptive principle.



**INGUZ Meaning: Ing.** This is the Danish/Anglo-Saxon name of Frey, the God of agriculture and fertility. It is viewed almost always as a good omen. On a more spiritual level, the individual is soon to achieve a state of inner peace and balance.



**DAGAZ Meaning: day.** This is a rune of new beginnings, the dawn of new ideas. It is a very optimistic rune and shows that good times are on the way. It is often more about a state of mind than material matters. This process of inner acceptance often has a positive outward result.



**OTHILA Meaning: property, possession.** This rune represents possessions, land, and building, often represented by the home. The rune implies some sort of restriction or limitation, hence the land, which carries with it duties and obligations. It makes people look where they come from, where they are, and where they are going.

**WYRD Meaning: fate.** Some add a 25<sup>th</sup> rune which has no markings at all. This rune can only impact the surrounding runes. The essential message is one of immutable fate. Whatever will happen is going to happen. This does not mean that it will be unpleasant – it may be quite the opposite. Others, however, do not have a 25<sup>th</sup> rune as part of the Elder Futhark.