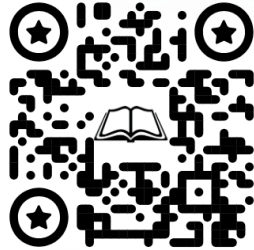


*May you find a path that fills your heart,  
and sanctuary wherever you go.*

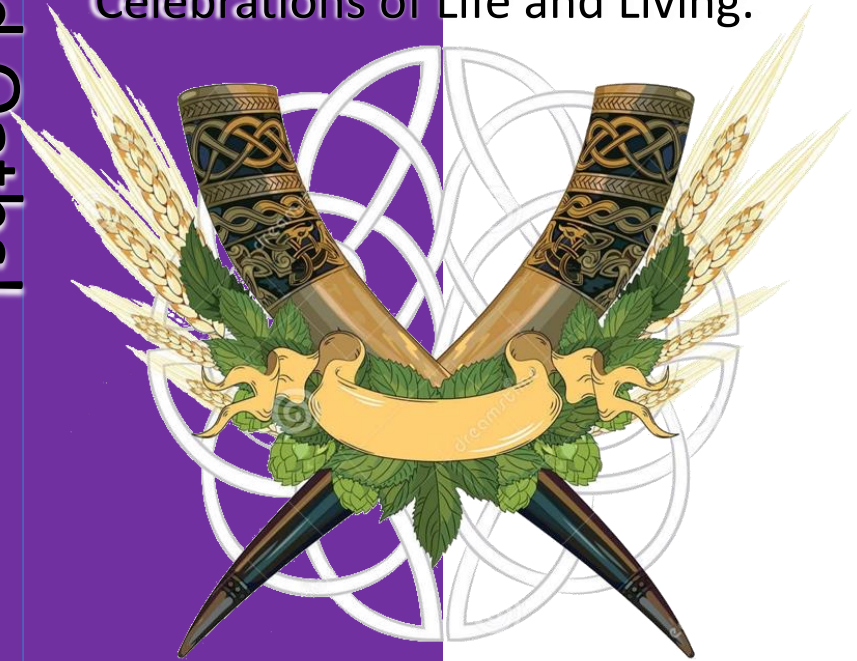


*Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!*

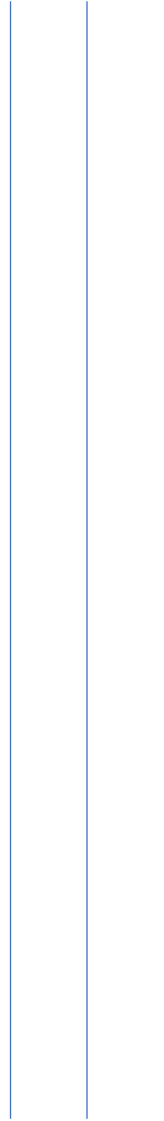
Boasts and Oaths!  
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# Boasts and Oaths!

A Guide to Declarations as  
Celebrations of Life and Living.



By Ryan Robinson and Ryan Burks



# Build Your Boasts and Oaths-

Is this a deed you have done (boast) or something you will do (oath)?

What is the deed you wish to talk about?

What makes the deed important or cool?

Describe it like you're a fantasy character. Talk about dragons, demons, fireballs, faeries, or something else out of myth and magic.

Are there any promises tied to this? (Is there a type of spirit or god whose support would be appropriate? Is there an offering you can give in thanks?)

One common Heathen traditions, especially around the major Blots, is called Sumbel. This is a practice of bragging, boasting, asking of blessings, and swearing of oaths.

**This guide exists to help you learn how to do this yourself!**

In modern society we're often told not to boast or brag. Not to tempt fate or the designs of the gods by declaring things you intend to do. To be humble, simple, and small. And, sometimes, those are important traits. But they should not seep into our bones or become who we are. As Witches, Druids, and Heathens we are the heirs to figures of myth. We are the village wisdom and warrior, and we serve none of those purposes when we make ourselves smaller than we are.

Boasts are often made in the seasons where the sun fades and our thoughts turn inward. We take time as we prepare for the cold, and it forces us indoors, to remind ourselves what we have done. As the cold keeps us inside, and we look eagerly ahead to spring it is also good to consider the deeds we intend to perform in the year to come.

In these pages we'll collect the raw materials we'll use to make a kind of magic...

If you feel that your boast or oath is not enough, either by deed or your ability with words, there are many around you who love to help! Don't worry if you're not able to keep up with the figures of Tolkein, Beowolf, or wizards who cast literal fireballs. Also, remember if your focus is a single year, then the expectations are smaller than those of a lifetime.

### Beginnings

The first step is to craft the words you wish to declare!

What do you wish to proclaim before your community, spirits, and gods? Do you wish to make a boast of deeds done? To brag and have your glories recognized? Do you wish to swear that you will accomplish things in the days to come? To set the stage for future glory, and be held accountable for the things you intend?

Most declarations start with some sort of an introduction. If you're somewhere you attend gatherings regularly you may not need to worry about that. If those gathered know your name, stepping forward is often enough. Perhaps, in the darkness of firelight, you wish to simply say your name and declare that you are known.

If you want to make sure everyone is aware of who you are; spend a few words telling the group about yourself. What is your name, where are you from, who are your ancestors of note? Ancestors can be mentors or individuals from the past who have significance to a group that you have a tie to. They can be people who helped found your profession or some organization you belong to.

*"I am Ryan, son of James, born upon the Great Plains and raised in the City of Fountains."*

The key thing for any declaration is something called a "kenning." Don't say the thing; talk about how the thing feels. A piano is "twinkling ivories," fight your inner demons, seek and find, craft and conquer. Alliteration is encouraged; dance in darkness, seek spirits in shadows, greet the gods. This isn't poetry, but it's poetry's second cousin who gets drunk at public events and ends up making toasts on top of the tables.

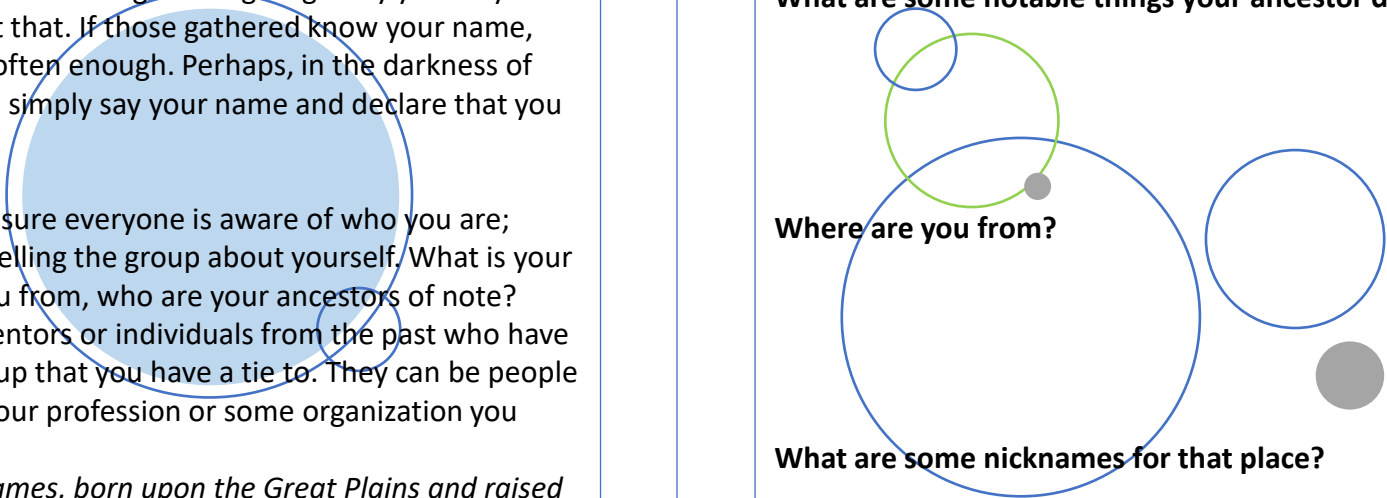
### Build Your Introduction- What do you want to be called?

**Who are your parents or other notable ancestors? (What is your relationship to those ancestors?)**

**What are some notable things your ancestor did?**

**Where are you from?**

**What are some nicknames for that place?**



## Some Final Words

**Practice.** Boasts and oaths aren't easy. They're writing, they're public speaking, and they're self-measure. If you want to boast or oath it's worth doing right. That takes a measure of practice.

Consider writing a single boast each Friday, and making a single request for blessing or pledge each Monday. Get familiar with the feel of the words, and with recognizing what you do each week and each day that you value and is valued by those around you.

**Escalation.** When making oaths or boasts each person often one-ups the person before them. However, you should always be careful. You don't want your boast to be so much grander than the person you follow that it completely overshadows their accomplishments. Boasts and bragging should make everyone feel good about the worthwhile things they've done. No one should be made to feel small. Also, there should always be space for others to talk about their own achievements. If you're saving the world it doesn't leave a lot of space for people to talk about smaller things if you jump in too early. Everyone should appreciate your story, but you should respect other's stories too. Some of the most appreciated braggarts never have the biggest accomplishments; they know how to help their community weave accomplishments together to tell a story about their lives.

**Boasts before Oaths.** Boasts are generally made before oaths. People want the opportunity to talk about the things they have done before talking about the future. There may be a lull after boasts are made, or a more experienced person may find a way to turn the conversation.

**Casual Swearing.** Just because we've discussed boasts and oaths as part of ritual doesn't mean they have to be. Boasting particularly doesn't have to be a formal ceremony. In sagas, casual boasting is often part of a drunken night out. Oath-making often has more ceremony, befitting the seriousness of one's word. But, even oath-making can be done fairly casually; oaths were often made in the sagas while deeply drunk... To the ruin of many.

## Writing a Boast

When writing a boast or bragging, you want to start with at least one achievement in mind. Depending on the context more may be better. If you can think of more accomplishments that will give you more to work with. Maybe you'll find things that sound better.

Think of what you're most proud of. If it feels small; don't worry about that. The smallest pebble can move rivers and the greatest struggles we face are often those no one else can see.

We're often so hard on ourselves and so caught up in the latest thing needing done it can be hard to remember the things we have done and achieved.

Take some time to reflect on what you \*have\* succeeded at.

Most boast text examples you'll find are life stories, they'll have at least five and sometimes dozens of items.

A simpler boast is for a year or a season.

1-3 items are enough and more than enough. Again, remember, for want of a nail a battle may be lost or won and our greatest victories may be those within ourselves. This is your chance to have such things be seen.

More than three can either grow to take too long or weaken the impact.

Sometimes, you just want to brag about a single act. A stumble or its equivalent can happen just as a Friday night out, and you can just talk about the thing you're proud of this week.

~\*~

**If you can't think of anything worth boasting about, you think your boast is too small, or, after trying to write a boast, you want help or a second opinion; many in your community can help!**

**Example Boasts (Fantasy)**

“Here is Aragorn son of Arathorn, chieftain of the Dúnedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar of the line of Valandil, Isildur's son, Elendil's son of Númenor.”

**-The Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkein**

I faced it and said, “Jotun.”  
Its brow furrowed with cold anger. “Who are you and what have you done, that I might know whom I kill?”

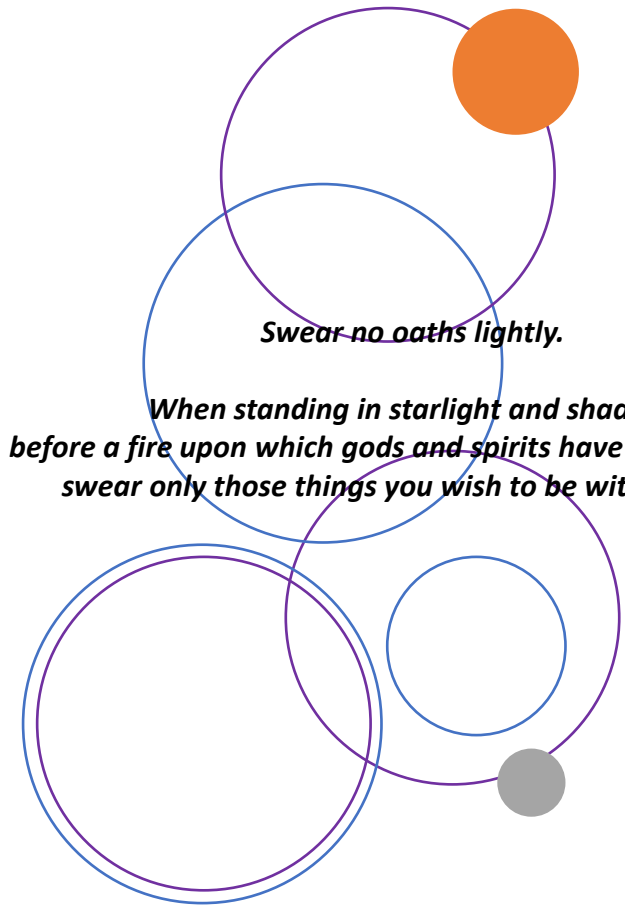
“I am Harry, son of Malcolm,” I shouted back. “I have battled dark sorcerers and black knights! I have fought men and beasts in numbers too great for counting, invaded the heart of Winter, confronted necromancers and the living dead, vampires and ghouls and demons in their hordes endless! I have matched wits with the six Queens of Faerie and prevailed, and thwarted the combined will of the White Council! When they came for my child, I smote the Red Court of Vampires, and laid them in ruin for all the world to see. I am Harry, son of Malcolm, and I have entered the vaults of Tartarus, and stolen its treasures beneath the gaze of Hades himself! And I’m about to add giant slaying to my résumé.”

That seemed to please the Jotun immensely. His smile grew wider and wider, showing more and more teeth the size of dinner plates. “Impressive claims.”

“Damned right,” I shouted back. “Who are you and what do you got?”

“I am Svangar, son of Svangi,” the Jotun roared back. He used one hand to gesture toward his scarred mouth, infusing it with contempt. “I have fought the Odinson and lived to tell the tale.”

**-Battle Grounds, Jim Butcher**



*Swear no oaths lightly.*

*When standing in starlight and shadow,  
before a fire upon which gods and spirits have been invoked;  
swear only those things you wish to be witnessed so.*



## Advanced - Vows

You swear you will perform a deed. Your word is your bond. If you ask aid, it is a minor part of the swearing. You make this oath standing on your pride, and holding it shows the value of your word alone.

This type of oath-making is the stuff of legends. The foundation for the grandest boasting... and ruin. One of the foundations of the Heathen belief that each person's word is their bond, and their willingness to hold to it shows their value. But part of that is to know when to swear, and when to be silent.

Examples:

- *I swear that I will catch the greatest fish you've ever seen. I swear this upon my rod and reel, and should I fail in this task, may it spite me and never catch another.*
- *Before all of you, I swear I will achieve promotion to a higher rank. Let Odin witness me and remind me, for if I fail, I will defer all opportunities to another amongst my fellows. Should I succeed, I will hold a great feast!*
- *I swear to never imbibe the smoke of tobacco again! Let the spirits observe me and heckle me should I waiver in my commitment. If I allow the fumes into these lungs again, I will destroy my favorite object and offer its parts as sacrifice. For each year and day I succeed, I will acquire the thing I want most.*

***When swearing vows, try not to set time limits unless you must—some things simply take longer than we first expect. An oath that takes longer than expected can be redeemed, an oath broken is a harder thing.***

## Example Boasts (Sagas and Eddas)

I'll tell you, though I stand alone. I am Odin's son. I am Meili's brother, Magni's father, strongest of the gods. You, ferryman, you're talking to Thor.

You want to talk about Hrungnir, do you? That lolloping giant, do you know his head was made of stone? And yet I killed him, I laid him out lifeless. And you, Harbard, what were you doing meanwhile?

I killed the fierce giant Thiazzi and hurled the eyes of Alvaldi's son into scalding heaven. They bear witness to my feats; everyone can see them. And you, Harbard, what were you doing meanwhile? **-Thor, The Lay of Harbard**

Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman, one of his hall-troop. My father was a famous soldier, known far and wide as a leader of men. His name was Edgetho. His life lasted many winters; wise men all over the earth surely remember him still. The days of my youth have been filled with glory. [My people] have seen my strength for themselves, have watched me rise from the darkness of war, dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove five great giants into chains, chased all of that race from the earth. I swam in the blackness of night, hunting monsters out of the ocean, and killing them one by one. I, alone and with the help of my men, may purge all evil from this hall.

I've never known fear, as a youth I fought in endless battles. I mean to stand, not run from his shooting. My heart is firm, my hands calm. I need no hot words. No one else could do what I mean to, here, no man but me could hope to defeat this monster.

The best of my people, prudent and brave, urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out; they had in remembrance my courage and might. Many had seen me come safe from the conflict, bloody from battle; five foes I bound of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan. Hard-driven in danger and darkness of night I slew the nicors that swam the sea, avenged the woe they had caused the Weders, and ended their evil—they needed the lesson!

I count it true that I had more courage, more strength in swimming than any other man.

We would risk our lives in the raging sea. We gripped in our hands naked swords, as we swam in the waves, guarding us well from the whales' assault. In the breaking seas he could not outstrip me, nor would I leave him. Down to the bottom a savage sea-beast fiercely dragged me and held me fast in a deadly grip; none the less it was granted me to pierce the monster with point of steel. The grisly sea-beasts again and again beset me sore; but I served them home with my faithful blade as was well-befitting. And so I was granted to slay with sword-edge nine of the nicors. **-Beowulf**

## Oathmaking

Another practice for people to engage with is the swearing of deeds to come. As we go into a new year we often look at the things we want to accomplish. **Never swear lightly.** Be sure the deed you swear to accomplish is not too far out of your reach! However, there is no glory in swearing to do something easily done.

Do you want help from the gods or spirits? You should **ask for a blessing**. If you are uncertain or unsure about anything, do this.

Is there something you want to achieve? You can make a **pledge**. Ask for aid and make promises in return.

And if you decide to make a solemn **vow**, you may invoke witnesses and consequences. This is no small undertaking as it puts your name and reputation on the line in return for glory and renown.

Any oath begins the same way; what do you want to accomplish? Make this a clear, simple statement. This should be something that you will do or intend to do, not that you will get others to do.

## Beginner - Ask for a Blessing

You know what you wish to accomplish but want or need support to achieve success. You can ask for aid, assistance, and encouragement. You may be asked for things in return from your community, the spirits, or even the gods, depending on who answers your call, but you've made no promises except to do your best at this task.

Examples:

- *As I go into the new year I seek aid to finish writing my novel.*
- *May the gods watch over me as I start my new career.*
- *Bless me with the courage to try new things this year.*

## Intermediate - Pledge

Price for price, you extend a proposal to your community, the spirits, or the gods. Offer to bind yourself on your word and honor. You know what you wish to accomplish and what you will submit in return for support.

Examples:

- *As I go into the new year I want to cook more often and eat healthily. I ask Freyr for his blessing and shall give honor for any aid.*
- *For this year, I intend to always help those who ask it of me. May the gods lead me so I may not shy away, and I will provide regular sacrifice for them in return.*
- *Guide me, ancestors, to share my secrets with my loved ones. Let me not falter or fail, and I promise to speak your names more often and honor your memory.*