

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

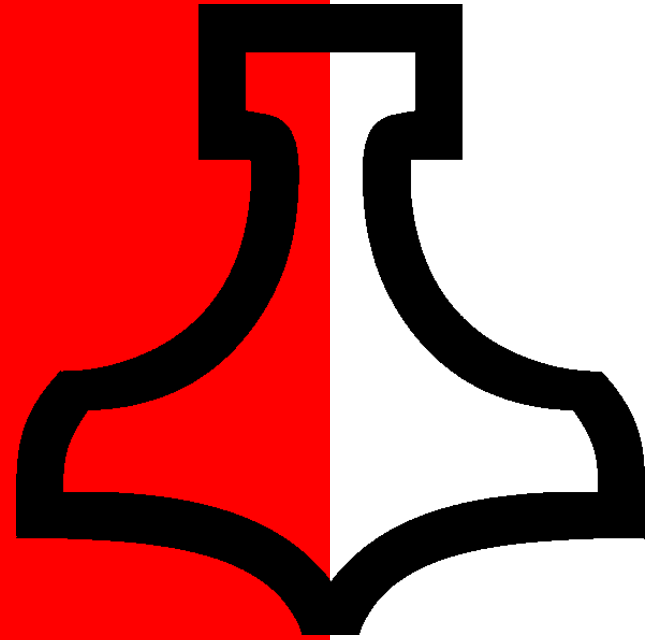


*Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!*

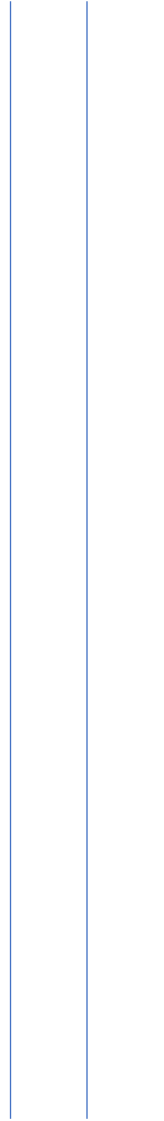
Heathenry  
Heathenry

# Heathenry

Keeping Frith



By Ryan Robinson



## What is Heathenry?

Heathenry is a modern Pagan religion that is either based on or seeks to revive / reconstruct the indigenous pre-Christian religions of northern Europe.

Heathenry is one of the newest aspects of the modern Pagan movement to rise to prominence. However, it has been around for decades. Heathens generally have a strong reconstructionist tendency. Like most reconstructionist religions, it suffers from significant gaps in the written record about the ancient practices and beliefs. As a result, filling these holes requires a more eclectic approach than many Heathens would like. The sources from which these required patches are drawn are a significant source of tension.

There are many branches of Heathenry along numerous divisions. One of the major ways Heathens are divided is geographical (Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Dutch, etc). Another aspect that can divide Heathen practice is their center of focus (Aesir, Vanir, Jotun, landvaettir, community, etc). Even within groups that agree on these divisions, disagreements over sources and translations provide further division.

This booklet can only contain a limited introduction to this broad topic. For more breadth and depth on Heathenry, I suggest the following sources:

Ocean Keltoi

<https://www.youtube.com/c/OceanKeltoi>

Awaken the North

<https://awakenthenorth.org/>

The Troth

<https://thetroth.org/>

The Longship

<https://thelongship.net/>

Forn Sidr of America

<https://fornsidrofamerica.org/>

Skald's Keep

<https://skaldskeep.com/>

Fire and Ice Heathenry

<https://www.onblackwings.com/>

## Heathen

The word Heathen comes from the Gothic *haithn*, through Germanic roots into English. This ancient word means ‘inhabiting open country,’ and is related to the word heath. (*An area of open uncultivated land, with characteristic vegetation of heather, gorse, and coarse grasses.*) This word was adopted by the early Christian missionaries to refer to the practitioners of native religions in Northern Europe. Much like the Latin origins of the word pagan (country, rustic), this was used as a way to denigrate these “backwards non-believers.”

Towards the end of the 20th century both Pagan and Heathen were claimed as terms for people to use when self-describing their religion. The purpose was to mark their efforts at reconstructing ancient religions or constructing modern religions based on those ancient beliefs.

Pagan is used by a wide range of reconstructed and new belief systems regardless of original location. Heathen is often preferred by those who are specifically focused on the ancient religions of Northern Europe. This is largely because the linguistic roots of the word are from that area. Some seek differentiation from the more general “Pagan” and to disassociate themselves from that word’s Latin roots.



## Key terms to know to avoid racists.

**Universalist** – Belief that heathenry is open to all, irrespective of ethnic or racial background. More broadly, a belief that discrimination on any grounds is antithetical to holding bonds of Frith and Grith in good faith to the broader community.

“Inclusive” is a term that indicates a broader, active commitment to supporting people of all backgrounds. Groups that identify themselves in this way are declaring that they do not support racist ideas. Those who attack the ideas of Universalist or Inclusive Heathenry are making the basic arguments for racist positions.

**Folkish** – The Völkisch movement was a German ethno-nationalist movement active from the late 19th century through to the Nazi era. Folkishness, folkish beliefs, etc are modern expressions of this including, but not limited to a racial exclusivity or primacy for Northern Europeans (“White Aryans”) and other forms of discrimination and bigotry.

**Odinist / Wotanist** – Many Heathens center their practice on Odin/Wotan (depending on regional focus). However, this term is best known and mostly used by fascist/white supremacist groups who espouse extremist ideologies.

## A Conflict in Terms

### Ásatrú, Norse Pagan, Heathen

Even within the Heathen movement, there are disagreements on the use of terms. With no central authority to determine what individual words and descriptions mean, these definitions are determined by the individuals and groups that use them. This inevitably means that when discussing terms for the religion there are conflicts and disagreements.

Some terms, like Urglaawe, are extremely well defined. These are uncommon words used to specifically name traditions so they have authoritative definitions. (Urglaawe honors the Teutonic pantheon in the context of the Deutsch – Pennsylvania German – culture.) However, more general terms like Asatru, Norse Pagan, and even Heathen are subjects of intense debate.

The term “Norse Pagan” is sometimes viewed as a term for individuals or groups that have less emphasis on the reconstruction aspect of the religion, or aren’t “reconstructionist enough” for some other group’s standards. Those who identify as Norse Pagan often dispute this, and many of the most knowledgeable and experienced individuals in the Heathen space view Norse Pagan and Norse Heathen as essentially the same. Early Norse Pagan and Heathen organizations relied heavily on Wicca and other types of Paganism to fill in research gaps for their reconstruction activities. Aware of this, some individuals will derisively refer to such practices as “*Wiccatru.*” However, doing so often simply demonstrates their lack of awareness regarding how many Heathen practices and activities accepted by “hard reconstructionists” are still influenced by those sources.

Another often-debated term is Ásatrú. This term means holding a belief in or loyalty to the Aesir. Unfortunately, the term became associated with groups that followed racist principles and hate groups which appropriate Heathen symbols, history, and myth. As a result, many people were less willing to associate with it. Through the beginning of the 21st century, several groups within Heathenry have formed identifying themselves with the –trú suffix (Vanatrú, Rökkatrú, etc). This has led to a resurgence in individuals identifying themselves with the Ásatrú term. However, there is bias in some parts of the community against these other –trú types of Heathenry. Further, all of these –trú types of Heathenry are sometimes viewed as limiting by ignoring the other significant aspects of the same belief system.

## Norse Heathenry

While there are dozens of branches of Heathenry, by far the most common is Norse Heathenry. There are a variety of reasons for that. The single largest reason is the prevalence in media of various aspects of Norse culture and myth. This is a mixed blessing.

Norse mythology and culture are relatively accessible due to its various media portrayals. However, like most popular media, these portrayals are often stylized and inaccurate. This leads people who are new to Heathenry to have many wrong assumptions about the religion and culture.

One of the most common problems is the tendency towards “HavaMarvel vs Havamal.” The Thor movies, and to a lesser degree comic books, have presented a number of the gods and other figures in ways that diverge significantly from their mythic relationships and natures. In the worst cases, this feeds back into Christian assumptions about those characters as the pop-culture awareness conflicts with historical and pre-Christian portrayals.

Another problem that arises is the portrayal of the Norse culture entirely in the context of a hyper-mythic Viking as the centerpiece. This has led to a view of Heathenry sometimes referred to as “Brosatru,” (belief in or loyalty to the *bro’s*, man). Also described as being “the religion of drinking and fighting.” This approach to Heathenry tends to be very theologically thin. It lacks the substance of other, more considered approaches and consequently often resorts to Christian preconceptions.

The final major problem with the common portrayal of Heathenry is that it reduces the awareness of how broad the Heathen umbrella itself is. In addition to the Norse, there are Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Deitch, and others. However, because of the high level of focus on Norse Heathenry, these others receive much less attention and awareness.

All of that said, because Norse Heathenry has been most broadly studied and followed through the 20th and early 21st century; it is the style that this booklet will focus on.

Declaration 127 signatories shall not promote, associate, or do business with any organization or entity so long as they practice discriminatory policies and exclusionary ideologies.

Discriminatory organizations do not represent our communities. We do not condone hatred or discrimination carried out in the name of our religion and will no longer associate with those who do.

We hereby declare that we will not maintain silence just to keep the peace, especially with those who would use our traditions to justify prejudice on the basis of: age, ability, health status, race, color, ethnicity, national origin (including ancestry), veteran status, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, or any other form of bigotry.

We stand together in defiance of unjust discrimination. Oppressive and exclusionary institutions shall receive no support from us. We will actively work against them in favor of a more welcoming faith community and society which embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion.



**Declaration 127 is named for the 127th stanza of the Havamal:**

**hvars þú þol kannt,  
kveð þú þat þolvi at  
ok gefat þinum fjánum frið.**

**Where you know of evil  
declare it to be injury to you  
and give your enemies no peace.**

## Declaration 127 v2

<https://thetroth.org/declaration-127/>

As in the past, today we are confronted with challenges and choices. Among the most difficult of these is how to respond to those who intentionally cause harm. As Heathens, our religion gives no basis for discrimination of any kind. Unfortunately, that has not stopped certain actors from trying to do so. Their actions force the wider Heathen community to adopt the qualifying word "inclusive" to define ourselves, and to stand against bigoted people who continuously twist the ancient Germanic religions towards exclusionary, hateful, and violent ends. It is illogical to place exclusionary limits on Heathenry.

We decry the damage the Nazi Party, their allies, and those of similar ideologies have caused historically. We also recognize the damage their ilk continues to inflict. They continually weaponize ancient Norse and Germanic symbols for use in campaigns of exclusion and terror against anyone who does not fit their fantasy. They dishonor our deities.

We hold that the deities themselves created and celebrate diversity. We hold that respect is an inherent right of all human beings. To violate those rights is to forfeit the community's good graces. There is no greater dishonor.

The signatories listed below represent a diverse set of voices within modern Heathenry. They are national organizations, resource centers, authors, community leaders, local kindreds, and individuals. They come from every branch of our religion and walk of life.

These signatories have signed this Declaration to state their complete denunciation of, and disassociation from, any and all organizations that include any form of discrimination as described below as part of their policies and practice.

## Dark Chapters, Hard Truths, and Unwanted History

Like any religion, there are several problematic areas in Heathenry. Most religions work very hard to hide or justify their extremists. However, nearly all religions have them.

For Heathenry, some of the problematic aspects are due to broader historical events while others are the result of modern bad actors. Historically, many Heathen symbols, traditions, and beliefs were co-opted by the German Nazi Reich as part of its broad appropriation of European cultures to support its efforts at appearing legitimate. This has resulted in those symbols continuing to be associated with Nazi ideology. This has also led modern white supremacists and neo-Nazis to try and lay claim to those symbols and extend their claim to other aspects of Heathenry in support of their hateful ideology. Worse, many modern practices and assumptions have overtly racist origins because the earliest Heathen groups in the US were explicit neo-Nazis.

There is a saying that "all 13-year-old white males are in the white supremacist pipeline until something happens to intervene." No one starts out wanting to be an extremist, but people searching for (easy) answers become likely targets for the hate group recruitment. Heathenry is like many other systems of belief in that a shallow, pop-culture understanding can be used to support many hateful ideas and ways of thinking.

Regardless of someone's religious beliefs; it is critical to examine what assumptions they are founded on and where they lead to.

While Heathenry has its dark aspects, it also has ways to serve as a significant positive force. Like all religions, Heathenry is at its best when thoughtful and deeply considered.

Like any modern religion, Heathenry should be about building up yourself and your community. Building relationships with the divine in particular Heathen ways. A focus on some "other," including both hostility from or towards the other indicates a significant issue.

In general, it's important to remember that complex problems often have simple, easy-to-understand, **wrong** answers. One common example is how many people try to simplify relationships between the different groups of gods in Heathenry. Often this is expressed as "the Aesir are good while the Jotun are evil." Another example is a hard line between those of in-group Innangard and freely degraded, condemned, and attacked outsiders in the Utangard. Generally, the simpler relationships get, the less they relate to the historical descriptions of these relationships and the more these ideas are justifying destructive ideas like racism and other forms of prejudice.

## Frið

One of the central concepts in Heathenry is Frith. Many Heathens actually consider this *the* most key concept in the religion. Frith is the relationship between family, friends, community, and even the gods. There are similar concepts in many other Pagan traditions, such as the Hellenic *kharis*.

The foundation of Frith is reciprocal relationships, generally built through a cycle of gifts. These gifts may be physical items or actions and are exchanged to build trust and regard between those involved. Frith is not an exchange of debts to be counted and collected, but actions to build happiness and joy. The exchanges between friends buying each other meals or helping with moves rather than bartering and keeping tabs.

This set of exchanges extends to relationships with gods and spirits. Offerings like food, drink, art, and devotion are given to spirits to bring them joy and contentment. In return, they provide blessings and protection. This is not a vending machine where prayer-coins produce packaged boons. It is your friend showing you a new place with an amazing view to share when you bought the drinks you'll both enjoy there.

One part of frith is obligation. While no specific form of repayment is expected in exchanges of gifts, it is expected that you follow through once a commitment is made. If you promise to bring drinks for sharing at a potluck; you show up with sharable drinks. If you promise to help someone move, you come when the trucks are going to be there and you help lift heavy things. More than that, it's expected that you'll actively take part in the giving of gifts in some manner. If you're busy one time when someone needs to move everyone understands – if you can never be found when work needs to be done in the community, people notice.

A person's place in a Heathen group is measured by their contributions to the group's well-being. Can they be counted on to follow through on their promises? Do they give to their relationships as much as they take from them?

One of the most grievous acts an individual can perform in Heathenry is betrayal of those with whom they have established Frith. Oath-breaking is often considered the most grievous "sin" a Heathen can commit. Fundamentally, this is because willingness to become forsworn means an individual cannot be relied on. Without that foundation of trust, an individual cannot maintain their part of the greater communal frith.

The Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA) is one of the best known and longest lasting American Heathen groups. Unfortunately, it directly espouse racism and bigotry. Growing recognition of the need to take an active stand against this stain lead numerous organizations and individuals to support Declaration 127 in 2016.

Over the next several years, Declaration 127 was criticized for it's limited scope, only being directed at the AFA, which lead to the development of a second version and the Declaration of Deeds.

### Declaration 127

<https://thetroth.org/declaration-127/>

The organizations listed below represent a truly diverse set of voices within modern Heathenry. They represent national organizations, resource centers, local kindreds, as well as a plethora of authors and community leaders from every possible branch of our religion and walk of life. These independent organizations have signed this article due to a single shared interest.

*To state their complete denunciation of, and disassociation from, the Asatru Folk Assembly.*

The Asatru Folk Assembly (hereinafter referred to as the AFA) has a long and well-documented history of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity. In a recent statement, the AFA declared point blank that non-white and LGBT Heathens were not welcome in their tradition. While the undersigned organizations listed here fully recognize the AFA's right to govern themselves as they see fit, and with full autonomy, we hereby exercise the same right.

*We will not promote, associate, or do business with the AFA as an organization so long as they maintain these discriminatory policies.*

The AFA's views do not represent our communities. We hereby declare that we do not condone hatred or discrimination carried out in the name of our religion, and will no longer associate with those who do. We will not grant the tacit approval of silence in the name of frið, to those who would use our traditions to justify prejudice on the basis of race, nationality, orientation, or gender identity.

The AFA is free to stand for whatever principles it sees fit.

They are free to stand alone.



## The Nazi Problem

***Historical evidence shows that the Norse and other Germanic people were widely traveled and perfectly willing to cooperate and integrate with people of all types.***

An unfortunate truth is that the German Nazi party drew heavily on the same historical threads that modern Heathenry does. This authoritarian German regime drew on anything it could find to lend itself credibility and authority. However, even the Nazis were following in the footsteps of others, including Romanticist and Völkisch predecessors including proponents of “Ariosophy.” All of these movements included racist, nationalist, and bigoted ideologies. The result, however, is that many Heathen symbols are stained for showing up in this propaganda and iconography.

Even since then, these long-term efforts have resulted in an enormous amount of “academic literature.” In every era starting with the mid-18th century “research” was built as propaganda to deliberately push hate-filled ideas under the cover of “Heathenry.”

The result is that modern neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups have based themselves using these associations and writings to continue trying to lay claim to Heathen symbols. Worse, a warped version of the religion has been a consistent thread within and threat to the community.

To be clear; **Heathenry does not support the ideology of racial superiority or extremist activity.** Members of this religion know the unfortunate truth is that they must be careful of hate groups and extremist groups that cloak themselves in Heathen terminology, symbolism, and warped Heathen theology. Heathenry presents no conflict with Equal Opportunity (EO) policies such as those of the United States military and civilian government.

Respectable Heathen organizations continue to push back against the history and ongoing thread of racism in a variety of ways. One way is through the issuance of Declaration 127, its evolution to version 2, and the creation of the Declaration of Deeds. Groups that adhere to these statements, and general “universalist” policies, are open to members of all races, nationalities, genders, orientations, etc. Groups and individuals that have issues with those statements have generally been influenced by this dark history, knowingly or otherwise.

## Building Frith

Building and maintaining Frith is done through a cycle of gift-giving. Gifts can be physical or intangible things. Generally, the most valuable thing of all is time, effort, and consideration. It’s not a coincidence that these largely mirror the “five love languages” that have become common in popular culture.

A key consideration in a gift-giving cycle is that gifts should be roughly equal, allowing the participants to remain roughly equal without debt accruing. When a debt enters the gifting cycle it can create tension, distrust, and even harm. Sometimes gifting cycles will be established that have apparent disparities or imbalances, often as part of a hierarchy. This remains dangerous to the concept of frith, as loyalty and trust are not a gift given in as part of the cycle, but a product of it.

A key part of any frith is that it is not *transactional*. The sides are not kept *equal* because everyone is measuring one gift being given against another – they are kept *in balance* because those involved want to increase the joy and happiness of all involved. Giving is done for the benefit of the recipient, not from the duty of the giver.

The most recognizable types of gifts are ***items of value***. It’s important to understand that an item’s value is not simply its monetary cost. If an item is crafted by the giver that effort and energy are a substantial part of its value. Whatever the gift is, the level of consideration and effort gives it value well beyond simple monetary cost. It’s worth remembering that for most people money is gained through spending time and energy. An item with purely monetary value can create feelings of disparity when the amount of time and energy for the giver is disproportionate to what it would take for the receiver. In the best cases, these are opportunities for people with access to resources valued in the wider society to transfer some of that benefit to those who have skills valued within their community but which don’t translate well. Artists, artisans, and priests are all required to spend time creating the things that we value in our practices.

However, this is not the only way frith is built.

**Acts of service** are the most common type of gift in the cycle. Barn-raising is a classic example of this in a community. A friend providing free babysitting, pet sitting, or house sitting are common modern versions. Other acts of service may be instruction in a skill or activity. Unlike items, which can allow imbalances outside the relationship to intrude, acts of service are direct between the individuals involved. This is also why hand-made items are often valued beyond purchased equivalents.

**Quality time** is a key aspect of building frith, fellowship, or community. Acts of service and items of value are the stones with which the structure is built, these are the gifts that are explicitly exchanged in the gifting cycle. Quality time is the mortar that helps hold them in place. This time can be spent being friends at leisure or doing some sort of co-working. While it's more a leisure activity to share these days; hunting together would traditionally be a key type of co-working, an activity that needed multiple people to succeed at. The modern equivalent might be running errands together. In these situations we become forced to rely on one another for small acts of service, creating the cycles of gift-giving in a smaller scale that builds the larger relationship.

**Words of affirmation** and **physical touch** are often discounted but are still part of the gift-giving cycle. While quality time is the binding material that holds the structure built in the gift-giving cycle together, these become the finishing touches. They indicate the texture, tone, and style of the community that has been built. These small acts of support only come during time spent together and only have weight once a level of trust gives them value. This is not to say they are purely decorative or unimportant. In fact, their existence is immensely important. They are like a keystone in an arch. As a keystone is the last item put in place and often highly decorated, it is also the piece that allows the arch to hold itself up once other supports are removed. These are similar features in a community. Building a community using these is virtually impossible, but the support they bring into a community can be one of the things that help it endure.

Military traditions like coins, awards, and going away plaques serve to capture and immortalize words of affirmation.

## The Christianity Problem, Pt2

Many modern Heathens don't entirely deconstruct the assumptions about religion they are raised with. This requires examining the information that was provided during our upbringing. Even once we've examined the things we think we know and believe, we continue to be bombarded in society which frames itself in a "default Christian" set of beliefs.

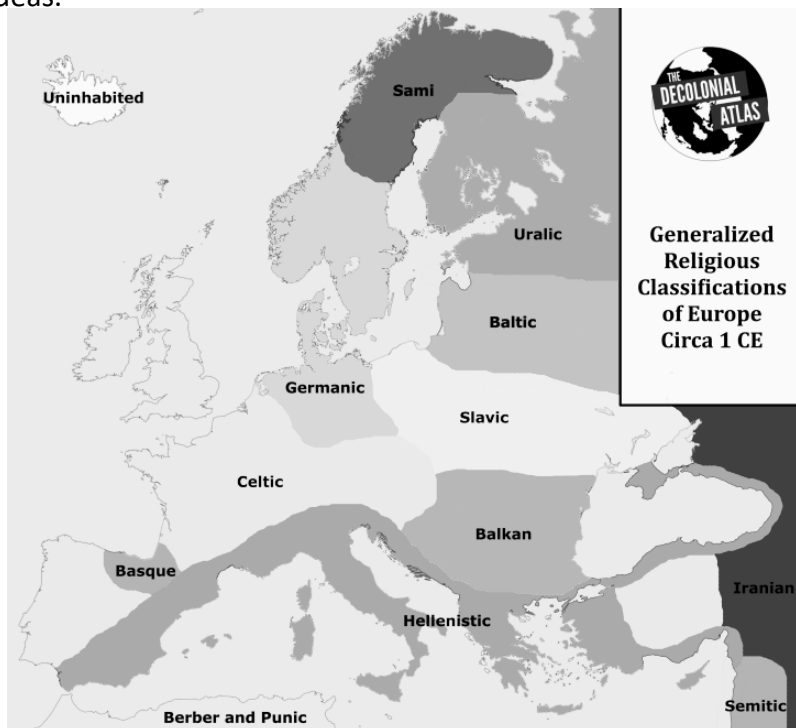
There are some major examples of "base Christian" assumptions leaking into Heathenry. These include a portrayal of Odin as the all-righteous, all-powerful "heavenly father" whose angelic family is locked in an eternal struggle with Loki, his demonic family, and the legions of irredeemable, threatening Jotun. Another is the perception of Thor and Baldur as the supreme ruler's wholly benevolent and pure sons, who protect and bless humanity. Even a perception of Thor as blending with Baldr, and looking like the Western image of the blond-haired Jesus as opposed to the red-haired warrior. Another is the perception of Valhol (commonly called Valhalla) as a "heaven" insert and Hel as the Christian Hell.

Other assumptions about religion are more subtle, but also more damaging. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism rely on the principle of textualism; divine revelation of infallible scripture written down in an immutable, unchanging form. It is easy to forget that the entire Heathen practice was oral; stories told from person to person are rarely written down. The result of oral traditions is extreme variation from place to place and even storyteller to storyteller. One known example is the record of *the Death of Baldur* between "Danish" and "Norse" sources. The significant differences between these versions are numerous. One version hinges on Loki's treachery while the other does not even acknowledge his involvement.

## The Christianity Problem, Pt1

Most information about Heathen lore and beliefs were written down well after the parts of the world where they were found converted to Christianity. Many of these stories have clear edits to make them fit into a Christianized worldview. Some significant stories may have been wholesale adoptions of Christian concepts.

One particular example is Ragnarök. Ideas founded in this story have become well-known and deeply held part of Heathen belief. However, there is scholarly disagreement about how much of it is pre-Christian. Many of the most knowledgeable scholars point to how different it is in tone and content from the other Norse myths, and how much more it sounds like the Christian Revelations / Armageddon in dressed up with Norse ideas.



<https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2018/03/17/european-paganism-and-christianization/>

## Grīð and Hospitality

Where Frith is the long-term, well-established bond of an established community, a related term is “grith.” Grith is the temporary bond of host and guest. These are reflected in the Hellenic Xenia, Roman Hospitium, and more general Guest Rights and Hospitality Laws.

It is possible to think that Heathens, in their focus on Frith, are naturally insular and xenophobic. In anthropology and some Heathenry there is a clear division between Innangard (inner yard) and Utangard (outer yard). Those few within the Innangard are those you are bound to in Frith; sharing fates. Those beyond that enclosure, in the Utangard, are part of the wild, possibly lawless and chaotic world.

However, it’s impossible to understate the importance of hospitality. The idea that one should welcome visitors and treat guests highly appears repeatedly in Norse and Heathen mythos. The first half of the Hávamál is almost entirely dedicated to explaining why and how one should be a good host. In a time when travelers were rare and dedicated inns or hotels only found in larger cities, these relationships were sacred. Travelers were a source of news and wonder from a world where the next town was a faraway place rarely visited. However, these wanderer’s survival depended on the kindness of strangers.

There is not a clear term in Germanic languages equal to the Hellenic Theoxenia. However, the idea encompassed in that word appears clearly. Strange and unknown visitors should be greeted warmly and treated well; not only is it the right thing to do, but they might be gods in disguise who will punish those who fail.

While the gift of wonders was enough to make most willing to grant shelter and food there was a mythic aspect to the exchange. As in many ancient cultures, part of the support for this welcome attitude was that the gods and powerful spirits would themselves wander the world. These travelers would bless those they encountered according to how they were treated. Those who treated strangers well would find themselves given fortunate from the wider world, while those who abused strangers might find every strange thorn and blade turning against them.

*Grímnismál* is the only clear story of Odin doing this which still exists. However, his guise of Grimnir and other references are very suggestive it is a hobby he shares with gods of other cultures like Zeus and Mercury.

# Luck and the Heathen Soul

One of the reasons Frith is considered so important in Heathenry are ideas of “luck” and the “soul” in Heathenry. The common Christian conception holds that there are essentially two or three parts to a human. In Christian theology, these are generally described as body and soul or mind, body, and soul. Heathen tradition describes the person as having many parts to the soul. Not only does heathenry describe many parts of the soul, but some of those parts have aspects very different than what is described in popular Christian theology.

The first major difference is that various aspects of the “soul” might be external or even shared. Aspects of what Christian theology dismisses as “merely” part of the material body could be considered parts of the soul such as the lik, ond, and hamar. In the less physical sense, an individual might have a fylgja – a fetch or familiar. These types of spirits were part of them, and the death of one would result in the death of the other, but it was also an external, separate entity with its own thoughts and ability to act. By contrast, the hamingja was a spirit shared between a group. Generally, the hamingja is passed from a person to their descendant upon death.

The second major difference is that some aspects of the Heathen soul carry a type of “luck.” Luck in this case extends beyond the typical “moment of chance.” It includes general fortunes including birth, circumstances, abilities, and other positive or negative trends in a person’s life. An individual would have their personal luck, including their orlog - tally of their deeds which influence their circumstances in the spiritual world. A hamingja carried its own luck, a type of generational set of blessings and curses.

This is not a full list of the different aspects of the soul described in Heathen lore. Further, these two concepts extend to create other possibilities. For example, the bonds of frith might be considered to create a type of “group souls,” with its own associated shared luck for a community.

# YOUNGER FUTHARK



FE:  
WEALTH



UR:  
IRON /  
RAIN



THURS:  
GIANT



AS/OSS:  
OF THE ÆSIR  
(GODS)



REID:  
RIDE



KAUN:  
ULKER



HAGALL:  
HAIL



NAUÐR:  
NEED



ISA/ISS:  
ICE



AR:  
PLENTY



SOL:  
SUN



TYR:  
VICTORY



BJARKAN:  
GODDESS



MAÐR:  
PLANNINGE



LOGR:  
LIFE ENERGY



YR:  
UNDERWORLD

# ELDER FUTHARK



F : FEHU  
CATTLE,  
WEALTH



U : URUZ  
AUROCHS,  
STRENGTH



TH : THURISAZ  
GIANT, THOR



A : ANSUZ  
GOD,  
ODIN



R : RAIDO  
JOURNEY,  
WHEEL



K : KENAZ  
ULCER,  
FIRE



G : GEBO  
GIFT



W : WUNJO  
JOY



H : HAGALAZ  
HAIL, AIR



N : NAUDIZ  
NEED,  
NECESSITY



I : ISAZ  
ICE



J : JERA  
YEAR,  
HARVEST



E : EIWAZ  
YEW TREE,  
TREE OF LIFE



P : PERTH  
MEANING UNCLEAR



Z : ALGIZ  
ELK, PROTECTION



S : SOWILO  
SUN



T : TIWAZ  
GOD TIWAZ,  
VICTORY



B : BERKANAN  
BIRCH,  
BIRTH



E : EHWAZ  
HORSE



M : MANNAZ  
MAN



L : LAUZ  
WATER,  
LAKE



NG : INGWAZ  
GOD INGWAZ,  
FERTILITY



O : OTHILA  
HERITAGE,  
PROPERTY



D : DAGAZ  
DAY,  
DAWN

## Death and Afterlife

One of the most frequently misunderstood concepts in Heathenry is the afterlife. The influence of monotheistic and particularly Christian ideas about the afterlife tend to subtly influence many Heathen's understanding of the Heathen concept of Death.

The first and most important thing to understand is that there is no Heathen equivalent of "Heaven" and "Hell." Even Baldr, most beloved of the Aesir, is described as residing in the Hel's realm after his death. Further, the experience includes feasting and fellowship. In general, the primary experience of Heathen death is that it much like a continuation of life.

The popular idea of Valhalla as "Viking Heaven" is heavily influenced by Christianity. Only warriors who die in battle may be selected for Valhalla. Of those who die in battle, only a small portion are selected by the Valkyries for possible inclusion. Of those selected, Freyja gets first choice and takes half to her hall of Fólkvangr. Only those left, chosen by the Valkyries and not chosen by Freyja, go to Valhol, the hall of Odin, to join his Einherjar. Those chosen for this afterlife do not rejoin the majority of their friends and families like those who go to Hel, and instead spend their eternity in an infantry barracks.

Also, Heathenry believes in a multi-part soul. So different aspects of a Heathen experience different aspects of the afterlife. Some parts have a person's memories and personality, and may go to these otherworldly realms. However, another part is the Heathen body, which may relate to the relationship of Heathen ancestors with Landvaettir.

## The Gods

The Norse pantheon of gods is the most common for modern Heathen practice. These gods have parallels among other pantheons recognized as Heathen and the gods from cultures like the Celts. Often, these cultures will have slightly different details, such as the twin for Tyr being the king rather than then Odin's parallel. As they did everywhere, when the Romans encountered the Heathen practice they made a study of parallels with their own gods, and parallels between other cultures.

The Norse gods are generally divided up into three tribes or clans; described in English as Aesir, Vanir, and Jotun:

- The *Aesir*, sometimes stylized *Æsir*, typically hold dominion over the concerns of civilization and community. Their connections with nature are things like tilled fields and planted crops. They are more comfortable with the concerns of everyday life and strife between mortals than wood and mountain. The best known of the tribes of Norse gods; the Aesir are what most people think of as "the Norse pantheon." However, for as much is known about the Norse gods, there is still much that is not known. Some has been lost to time and broken oral traditions, and other aspects have been obscured by writers with various intents.

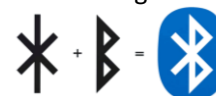
- The *Vanir* are the gods that represented the boundaries between civilization and wilderness. The "near wilds" where one goes to hunt or gather, stepping beyond the safety of the settlement but not out into the remote no-man's-land. The Vanir mostly live in the realm of Vanaheimr. Sometimes glossed over as "the other gods" or a sub-group within the Aesir. However, the Vanir are described as a clearly separate tribe. The best-known Vanir gods are those who had the greatest interactions with the Aesir, including those traded as hostages at the end of the Vanir-Aesir war. A common feature among the Vanir is their balance between the wild and the known.

## Runes

A major aspect of modern Heathen practice is the association with runes. While some of the approaches to runes aren't particularly historical others very clearly are. One of the best-attested aspects of "rune magic" is the power of written knowledge in an illiterate world.

Whether specific practices is strictly historical is often less important than whether or not it is useful. Like most Pagan religions, Heathenry is extremely practical that way.

Some key practices with runes include rune carving, bindrunes, and divination. Rune carving is generally considered the most historical use of runes; where prayers, invocations, and even practical information are imprinted for an effect related to the statement written. Bindrunes are an extension of this, combining two or more runes into a single sigil to represent a concept, then writing or carving that symbol onto the target.



The last major use of runes is for divination. There is little or no evidence that this was historically a practice among the pre-Christian religions that Heathenry draws from. However, it does have similarities with a range of divination traditions from living traditions around the world.

## Alphabets

When discussing "runes," one of the first pieces of information is that they come from several alphabets. The best known are the Norse "Elder Futhark." These are widely used across Heathen and Pagan religions in a number of ways.

"Futhark" is a way of describing an alphabet. This is similar to describing the Latin letters we use for English as "the ABCs." The Elder Futhark is the oldest of the Norse runic alphabets we have records of. The other major Futhark is the "Younger Futhark," so named for the imaginative reason that it is newer than the Elder Futhark.



The last significant runic alphabet to be aware of are the Armanen runes. This is a runic alphabet created by one of the leaders in the creation of Wotanism and early volkish (folkish) concepts that would be adopted by Nazis. It was based on the Younger Futhark but has some specific modifications that can be useful in identifying white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and other extremists.

## The Nine Realms

The cosmology of Heathenry is famously complex, composed of nine worlds set at various places about the world tree, an immense ash tree named Yggdrasil. The various realms have different natures and are ruled over by diverse beings. Even the counting of the realms varies from source to source.

One common counting of the realms is Ásgarðr, Vanaheimr, Álfheimr, Miðgarðr, Jötunheimr, Múspellsheimr, Svartálfaheimr, Niflheimr, sometimes Hel, and sometimes Niðavellir. However, this list is not agreed on and has contradictions even internally.

Norse mythic history begins with a void called the Ginnungagap, between the flaming inferno of Muspell or Múspellsheimr and the ice and fog of Niflheim. In this space, the primordial Jotun Ymir emerged and with his cow Auðumbra, gave rise to the various races of the gods. Ultimately, three brothers (Odin, Vili, and Vé), would kill Ymir and use his body to build the world, particularly Midgard.

Midgard is the best-known of the realms. Also called Manheimr, or "home of men." It describes the Earth - specifically the world known to and inhabited by mortals. The Old Norse Miðgarðr or 'central enclosure' refers to the area protected by a wall that the gods constructed from the eyebrows of the Jotunn Ymir.

Asgard holds the halls of the Aesir, including Odin's Valhøll, and it is assumed the field Fólkvangr with Freyja's hall Sessrúmnir where she takes the first selection from those chosen by the Valkaries.

Vanaheimr is similarly the realm of the Vanir. Jotunheim is the "realm of the Jotun," yet Muspell, Niflheim, and other such places have their own tribes of Jotun. Alfheim and Svartalfaheim are the realms of the Elves and Dark Elves (or Dwarves). However, Alfheim is also described as one of the halls in Asgard while Dwarves are sometimes thought to be Jotun.

Hel is the land of the dead ruled over by the queen of the same name, and where the vast majority of the dead eventually go. Neither a realm of punishment or reward, it is simply a part of the cycle of life. But it is unclear if Hel is an entire realm, or a hall within the greater realms of Niflheim or Niavellir.

The important aspect of the realms is that there is a complex, shifting spiritual and mythic world associated with Heathenry that extends beyond the boundaries of mundane maps and routine concerns.

•The *Jötunn* are the gods of untamed nature. The goddess of the earth and the god of volcanos. The world of humans was built from the body of the original Jotun. Sometimes Jotun is translated as "giant." While this has been long rejected as poor academics it has stuck in the popular imagination. The jötnar dwell in various realms, including Jötunheimr. The Jötunn are often thought of as the "demons" or "evil gods" of Norse myth. However, the boundary between these gods and the members of the Aesir and Vanir is hard to clearly define. Odin and his brothers were born of the first Jotunn, and he fathered beloved Thor with another Jotunn. This tribe tends to represent concepts of wild nature and the elemental forces beyond the knowledge and control of humans.

At some point in mythic history, the Vanir and Aesir fought a great war. This war ended with a trade of hostages and marriage to seal the peace. However, they are still different tribes and there is tension between them, even though some are honored among both the Aesir and Vanir.

Many stories from Norse mythology include conflicts between the Jotun and Aesir. However, many of the Aesir are so closely related to Jotun it is difficult to determine what the dividing lines are. This includes such honored individuals as Odin and Thor.



## Aesir

- **Odin** – One of the best-known Norse gods, he is accepted as the ruler and leader of the Aesir. For all that is known about him there is a vast amount which is unknown or mistaken about him in common lore. His best known stories show him as a seeker for knowledge and power. With his brothers he slays the Jotun Ymir and builds Midgard, he tears out his own eye for mystical sight, marries the goddess Freya to learn magic, and hangs himself from a tree as a sacrifice to himself to gain further mystic power. In Asgard he is known as honored arbiter, but he is also a trickster who is sworn brother to Loki.
- **Thor** – One of the best known and loved of the Aesir, this red haired son of Odin by the Jotun Jord is the strongest of all gods and men. He is the god of lightning, but he is loved and honored as the protector of humans.
- **Baldr** - Odin's son and beloved child of Freya. He is known for being among the best-loved among the gods, and because his mother bound all things but the lowly mistletoe with promises to do him no harm.
- **Týr** – A god of justice and balance. He sacrificed his hand to the wolf Fenrir to balance the lie he told to bind his trusting companion.
- **Heimdallr** – The son of Odin and nine mothers, Heimdall possesses foreknowledge and keen senses, which he uses to keep watch for invaders.
- **Frigg** – Sometimes appearing to be another name for the Vanir goddess Freya and sometimes described as Freya's handmaiden, Frigg is considered one of the Aesir.
- **Idunn** – A goddess who grew magical apples that keep the gods from aging. Idunn is said to be the daughter of Ivaldi and wife of Bragi
- **Höðr** – The blind brother of Baldr, he is exceedingly strong. One of the signs that lead to Ragnarok is his slaying of Baldr. Some versions of the story attribute this murder to trickery by Loki while others make it his part of his own struggles with Baldr.
- **Víðarr** – Called "he with the thick shoe," and the strongest of the Aesir after Thor. He is known for being exceptionally helpful to others and wearing a single boot made from the cast-off scraps from boots and shoes.
- **Váli** – The son of Odin and the Jotun Rindr, he was born after the death of Baldr for the sole purpose of avenging him. Váli grew to full adulthood within one day of his birth and became daring in combat and a good shot. He completes his task by killing Höðr.

## Modern Holidays

In addition to the ancient holidays, modern Heathens have set aside modern dates for celebration and honor. Again, there is wide disagreement among individual Heathens and groups about the adoption and timing of many holidays.

### April 22nd- Yggdrasil Day

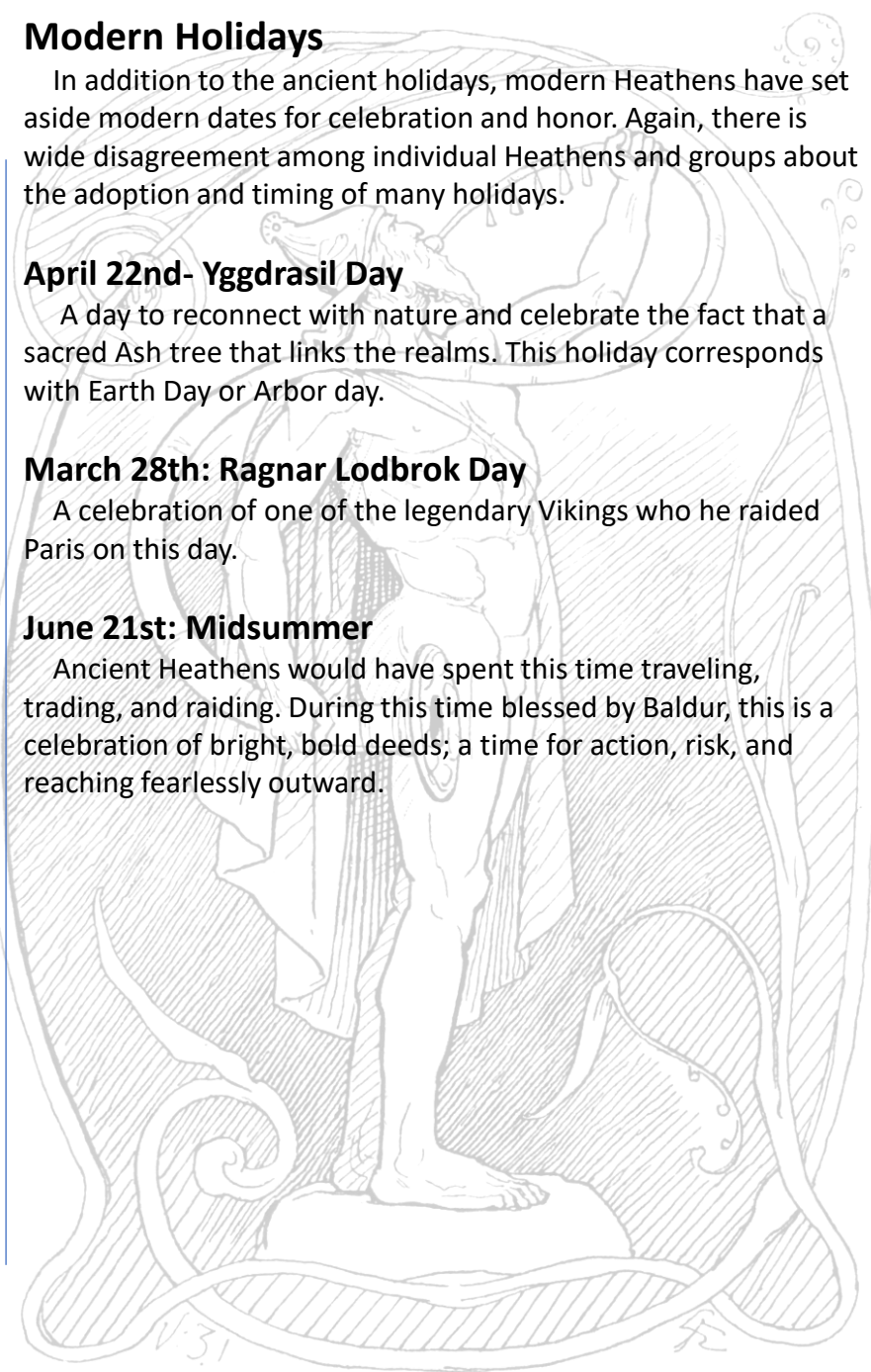
A day to reconnect with nature and celebrate the fact that a sacred Ash tree that links the realms. This holiday corresponds with Earth Day or Arbor day.

### March 28th: Ragnar Lodbrok Day

A celebration of one of the legendary Vikings who he raided Paris on this day.

### June 21st: Midsummer

Ancient Heathens would have spent this time traveling, trading, and raiding. During this time blessed by Baldr, this is a celebration of bright, bold deeds; a time for action, risk, and reaching fearlessly outward.





## Álfablót

Álfablót means the Elven sacrifice. This is possibly the same celebration as that of the start of winter, or a regional variation. It is described as being celebrated near the end of autumn, and as a local or family celebration, and one of the few times where travelers were turned away. Assumptions about it include that it probably celebrates fertility and honors the dead and land spirits in their relation to the elves.

## Disablot

Mentioned in multiple Sagas, the timing of this celebration varied widely by location. It was celebrated in Autumn throughout Iceland and Norway, while Sweden celebrated it around February or March. In Uppsala, Sweden there is still an annual fair about this time called the Disting.

This holiday was held in honor of female ancestors, spirits, and deities, collectively called *dísir*. The feast celebrated new beginnings and was related to fertility for the coming year.

## Mother's Night

Mōdraniht, Mütternacht, Modranecht, or the Night of Mothers is a festival held around the winter solstice as part of the celebrations of Yule or Jól. It is described by many sources including Bede and the Ynglinga Saga. During this night the elder women would be celebrated along with the founding mothers, ancient mothers, the mother goddess Frigg, and other female deities. Those women were in charge of protecting the countryside and the community, and maintaining the welfare of all.

• **Sjöfn** – Directs people's minds to love is concerned with love, relationships, and marriage.

• **Ullr** – Son of Sif often associated with winter, skiing, and snow sports. He is recognized for being a skilled skier and hunter and it is said that the northern lights are the spray from his skis. He was called upon for good luck in combat, hunting, fishing, any kind of winter sport competition, along with safety in the snow and while climbing mountains.

• **Forseti** – A god of law, justice, reconciliation, peace, and mediation and son of Baldr and Nanna.

• **Bragi** – A god of skalds and poetry, known for his eloquence and skill with words, known for welcoming guests to gatherings of the gods. Husband of Iðunn.

• **Sól** – The sun. She bears a shield named Svalinn, that would burn up the mountains and sea if she turned it towards them. Her brother, Máni, is the moon and they are each chased by one of Fenrir's children. She is destined to have a daughter who will continue to ride her course through the sky when the sun is consumed by Fenrir at Ragnarok.

• **Nanna** – The daughter of Nep, wife of Baldr, and mother of Forseti. She sends gifts back to the gods with Hermóðr when he goes to ransom Baldr from Hel.

• **Eir** – "The helper," said to be the greatest of physicians, a goddess of healing and medicine, and related to the Valkyrie's ability to revive the dead.

• **Vör** – "The careful one," so wise and inquiring that nothing can be concealed from her.

• **Var** – Goddess who oversees oaths and pledges, particularly vows of betrothal and marriage, and takes vengeance on those who break their promises.

• **Fulla** – Handmaiden of Frigg who carries and cares for her chest, shoes, and secrets. Also called Volla and associated with gold.

• **Laufey** – Mother of Loki, Býleistr, and Helblindi. Her name is a word for "leafs." She is sometimes called Nál ("needle").

• **Lofn** – A goddess who has permission from Odin or Frigg to bring together couples, regardless of difficulties that may stand in the way.

• **Syn** – A protective goddess who guards gates.

• **Dagr** – Dawn or day, son of Dellingr and Nott (night).

• **Gefjon** – A fertility and protection goddess associated with ploughing.

• **Loki** – A complicated character whose description in lore is mixed. He is one of the most complex figures in any mythology. Worse, there is an enormous amount of misinformation about him that has been popularized.

Popular culture describes him as Thor's brother. However, his relationships with other Aesir included being the blood or sworn brother of Odin. A story explaining how he became so close with Odin doesn't survive to the modern day. However, he is also listed as the brother of Byleist and Helblindi in the *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. Odin calls himself by many names, and in the *Gylfaginning* one of the names he describes himself as is Helblindi. This would make Loki Thor's uncle by blood or honor. This has also led to suggestions that Loki might be Vili or Vé, the brothers of Odin.

Loki has often been demonized. His nature and place are heavily debated in Heathen circles. There are many signs that Christian authors and scribes tried to literally turn him into a demon, if not Satan, to help Christianize Norse myth and the Norse people. This has led to a common understanding of him as a pariah among his "adoptive" Aesir. However, throughout the myths there is little sign of his place among the Aesir being questioned until the beginning of the Ragnarok cycle – an entire myth that is often questioned for its Christian influence.

In the modern day, Loki has become an LGBTQ+ icon for his disregard for gender norms and forms. Discussions of Loki in many Heathen circles end up centering on the group's projections of the "Other." Intentionally or not, an opinion on Loki is often a clear signal of how an individual or group thinks about and treats minorities.



## Winter Nights

Winter Nights is referenced in the *Víga-Glúms saga*, as a blot held at the onset of winter. This holiday is called *Haustblot* in Norway, *Disablot* in Iceland, and *vetrnætr* in Old Norse. *Vetrnætr* was specifically described in medieval Scandinavia as "the three days which begin the winter season." Another festival that seems to be similar in timing is *Haustblot*, on the full moon of *Haustmanuthr*, which means "harvest moon." Norse Sagas and writings also described winter starting "the first full moon after the Fall Equinox." This was called "Winterfylleth," a compound of the words for winter and full moon.

This festival marked the end of the harvest and the time when the animals that were not expected to make it through the winter were butchered and smoked or made into sausage. This blot was described as being for a good year. The description of this celebration carries many similarities to modern Pagan celebrations of Samhain.

The festival is also called *Álfablót* ("Elf-Blessing"), *Disablot* ("Dis-Blessing"), or *Freyrblot* ("Frey-Blessing"). These names suggest it was a time to honor ancestral spirits, spirits of the land, and the powers of fruitfulness, wisdom, and death such as the *Vanir*. The *Elves* were a race of beings believed to be powerful and beautiful while the *Dísir* were a host of benevolent female spirits who controlled the fate of mortal men and were also worshipped to help enhance the next year's harvest.

## Mid Winter

The second holiday is that of "midwinter" or Mid-winter. Situated roughly in the middle of the six-month winter this three-day celebration was called *Yule* or *Jul* and was a celebration of a good crop. It is described as being "three full moons after winter started" or "the first full moon after the first new moon following the winter solstice."

This celebration can be compared in various ways to the Wheel of the Year holidays of Mabon, Yule, and Imbolc.

The *Saga of Hákon the Good* credits King Haakon I, who ruled Norway from 934 to 961, with the Christianization of that country as well as aligning Yule with Christian celebrations held at the time.

## Sigursblot

The last of the ancient Heathen celebrations we have clear information about fell "at the third full moon after the new moon following the winter solstice." It marked the start of summer and was considered a celebration of victory; having survived the harshness of winter. Records say that this also marked the time of the *Disting*, the great blot in *Upsala*.

Most, if not all, Germanic Heathens marked this celebration as the start of Summer. Records show that Scandinavians called it "Sigurblot" while the English, Frisians, and Franks called it "Eostre," or "Ostara."

## The Historical Holidays

There is clear historical record of only three Heathen holidays, all held during the winter. These were on the first days of winter (called vetrnætr, Winterfylleth, or Winter Nights), in the middle of winter (Yule), and on the first days of summer (Sigurblot or Victory blot).

Most of the modern Western world has largely come to think in terms of a standardized “four seasons.” Even in places where those seasons do not look like the seasons temperate and sub-arctic climates, they are generally understood. In some places, such as the tropics near the equator, the weather may be radically different than described by those seasons. However, this “standard” has not been true worldwide or throughout history. For significant periods, much of northern Europe operated on two seasons; Summer (when the days were longer than the nights) and Winter (when the nights were longer than the days). For many of these cultures, the exchanges between these seasons were held roughly at the equinoxes or when the shift became noticeable.

The pre-Christian versions of holidays were three days. They were later collapsed into single days, matched with Christian holidays, calendars, and solar-based dates rather than the lunar/solar combination that existed previously.

Each of these holidays moves within a five-week window based on relationships between the Lunar and Solar calendars. The relationship of Equinox/Solstices and full moons determines where in that window the celebration will fall, depending on the lunar cycle of the year. These movements are very similar to the Christian “Paschal computus” – the method of determining the date of Easter.

## Vanir

- **Njörðr** – God of the Sea, and father to Freyja and Freyr. After the Aesir-Vanir war Nord would go with his children to live among the Aesir and eventually become the husband to the Jotun Skaði.
- **Nerthus** – Sister and first wife of Njörðr. A fertility goddess and mother to Freyja and Freyr, she was not allowed to accompany them when they went to live with the Aesir.
- **Freyja** – Goddess of fertility and daughter of Njörðr. Known as a fierce warrior and keeper of magic secrets. She married Odinn at the end of the war between the Vanir and Aesir. Freyja is known for travelling under many names, including Mardol, Horn, Gefn, and Syr. There is confusion whether Frigg is another of her names, or the name of her handmaiden.
- **Freyr** – Son of Nord and sister to Freyja. He is a god of fertility and fair weather. He rules over the realm of Alfheim, as well as over rain and sunshine, and over the fruits of the earth. He is called on for harvests and peace.
- **Gullveig** – Described In the Völuspá as coming to the hall of Odin (Hár) where she is speared and burnt three times by the Aesir, she is reborn each time. On her third rebirth, she took the name Heiðr and began practicing seiðr. Little more is known for sure, but scholars have proposed these are other names for Freyja. It has also been suggested that this treatment may have been the cause of the Aesir–Vanir war.
- **Kvasir** – The god of wisdom. Born from the cauldron where the spit of Aesir and Vanir were mixed to seal the end of their war. He was killed by dwarves who mixed his blood with honey to create the mead of poetry.
- **Hnoss** – Beautiful daughter of Freyja with Oðr (who may or may not be Odin) and also called Gersemi. Her names mean ‘jewel.’
- **Skírnir** – Servant of Freyr sent to “woo” Gerðr to become his wife.

# Jötunn

• **Ymir** – The progenitor of the Jötunn, whose body was used to craft Midgard. Ice flowed from Niflheimr into the void of the Ginnungagap until that ice drew close to Múspellheim where the heat thawed it, revealing Ymir and the cow Auðumbla that licked salty ice and produced rivers of milk on which Ymir sustained himself. When Ymir slept, he sweated, and from his left and right arm grew a male and a female, and his left leg produced a son with his right leg which is where the Jotun came from. Auðumbla uncovered a man from the ice named Búri, who had a son, Borr who married the jötunn, Bestla daughter of Bölþorn. These two had three sons; Odin, Vili, and Vé. These three killed Ymir then took his body to the middle of the Ginnungagap and made the Earth from his flesh; the sea and lakes from his blood; rocks and stones from his teeth, molars, and bones. They placed his skull above the Earth to make the sky, held up by four dwarfs at its corners (Norðri, Suðri, Austri, and Vestri). They then took sparks from Muspell to make the stars and Ymir's brains to make clouds. They left land along the shore of the Earth to the jötunn, but they made a fortification against them out of Ymir's eyelashes. They called this fortification Midgard.

• **Aegir** – A god of the sea. He is the husband of Rán, with who he has nine daughters who personify waves. Ægir is also the father of Snær, personified snow and the beautiful Gerðr. Aegir and Rán are known to be friendly with Bragi and Iðunn. He may also be known as Gymir, the father of Freyr's wife, or he may be an entirely separate individual.

• **Gerðr** – Strikingly beautiful, she is the daughter of Gymir and Aurboda, wife of Freyr, and mother to Fjölfnir. She embodies the mystery of nature, fertility, abundance, growth, the harmony of the natural world, and the nurturing power of the earth.

• **Jörð** – An earth goddess and the mother of Thor with Odin.

• **Ran** – Wife of Aegir whose hall sits beneath the waves, she is keeper of that which is lost to the sea; including the dead.

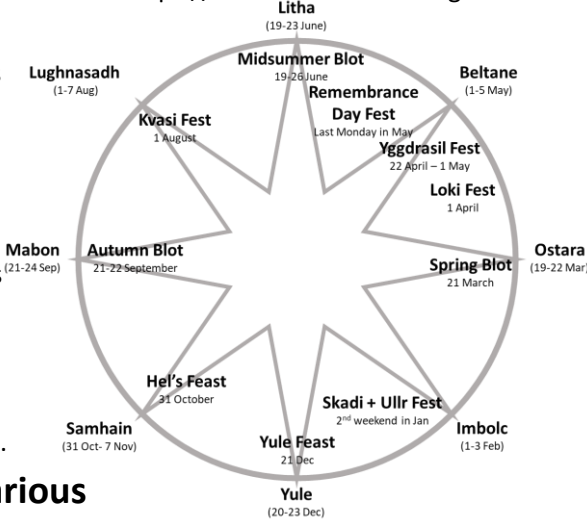
• **Angrboða** – The mother of the Fenris wolf, Jörmungandr, and Hel with Loki.

# Holidays

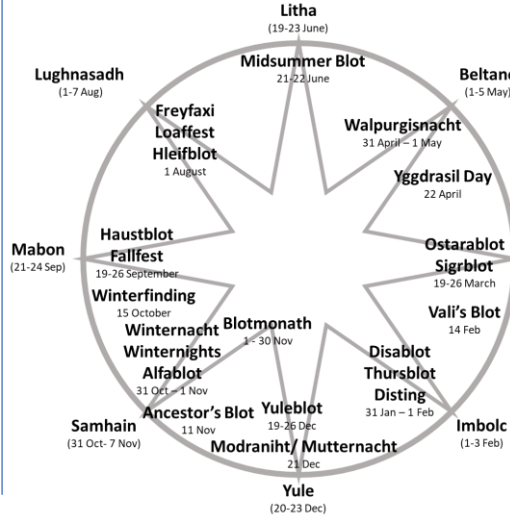
Many Heathen groups adamantly don't follow the Wheel of the Year. However, agreement among Heathens and Heathen groups for an alternative calendar has proven elusive. Part of the challenge is that sources have wildly conflicting and incomplete information.

## Forn Sidr of America

<https://fornsidrofamerica.org>



## Various



Beyond dates for Heathen holidays being highly contested between practitioners, significant amounts of research on the subject has been sourced from white supremacists and related organizations. This makes agreement on appropriate celebrations even more contentious and problematic.



## Seiðr

An often ignored and sometimes maligned aspect of Heathenry is the historically attested practice of Seidr. It is recorded as a type of mystic tradition practiced by Odin, taught to him by Freya, and common among the Vanir. Records of this tradition describe it as a parallel with the shamanistic practices found in other cultures.

Practitioners of Seidr among Heathens are generally described as Volva or sometimes Vitkis. These practices are closely associated with the animistic and priestly aspects of the religion. Practitioners provide intercession and interaction with the spiritual and divine inhabitants of the realms.

Many forms of modern Paganism deliberately put such mystic practices at the forefront. Heathen groups and individuals are often much more comfortable with this aspect being set aside and even ignored as much as possible. However, Heathenry recognizes that such choices are made in the same way an individual chooses to ignore the presence of doctors or mechanics.

• **Skaði** – Referenced as the “ski-goddess,” she is said to rule over winter and mountains and live “where the snow never melts.” She received her husband as recompense after the Aesir killed her father Pjazi, but had to choose based only on seeing their feet, giving Njörðr the honor of having the most attractive feet in Asgard. However, she could not stand the heat of her husband’s coastal life and he could not take the cold of her mountain home, so they live separately.

• **Pjazi** – Son of the jötunn Olvaldi/Alvaldi (possibly the same as Ivaldi), brother of Iði and Gangr, and father of Skaði. He is best known for forcing Loki to help him kidnap Iðunn and her apples of youth. He was later killed by the gods and his eyes were made into stars.

• **Surtr** – The guardian of Múspell who carries a blazing sword and is associated with fire, volcanos, and explosions. Surtr is prophesied to fling fire over the earth and burn the whole world come Ragnarök. Attribution for place names related to Surtr suggests that like many of the Jotun, he was one of the oldest mythological figures. Findings at some of these sites suggest that he was a subject of worship, at least propitiation and appeasement if not veneration and supplication.

• **Fárbauti** – the jötunn father of Loki with Laufey. His name is a compound of fár ('hostility, danger, unfortunateness, falseness') and bauta ('to strike'). He is described as 'dangerous striker,' 'anger striker,' or 'sudden-striker.' This is believed to be an idiom for "lightning" and part of an early nature myth about fire (Loki) being produced by lightning (Fárbauti) striking dry leaves (Laufey) or pine needles (Nál).

• **Hrungnir** – A jötunn champion who got himself invited to dinner in Asgard, then misbehaved until Thor challenged him to a duel and killed him.

• **Fenja and Menja** – A pair of sisters who turn the mill Grotti which magically produces whatever is desired. They work the mill for a king which has enslaved them until they decide to begin using the mill’s power to create things to destroy the kingdom.

## Others

- **Norns** – A group of female gods associated with the workings of fate. There are said to be Norns for the elves and dwarves separate from those for humans, and sets for good and ill fortune. The best known of the Norns are Urd (past or became), Verdani (present or becoming), and Skuld (future, becoming, intend). They are often associated with the Greek Moirai (Fates), though the weaving of fates is described as a trait of the Valkyries.
- **Mímir** – Considered Aesir or Jotun depending on the source, Mimir is described as exceedingly wise, possibly because he drinks the water of a well under the world tree from the Gjallerhorn. Odin trades one of his eyes to drink from this well.
- **Yggdrasil** – The world tree, the roots and branches of this ash tree spread throughout the mundane and mystic worlds of Norse myth.
- **Rattotaskir** – A divine squirrel and one of many creatures that live on Yggdrasil. He travels up and down the tree delivering messages.



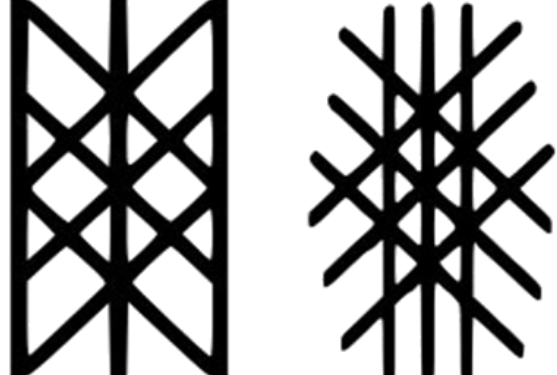
## The Web of Wyrð

One important aspect of Heathenry is the concept of Wyrð, better known as “fate.” The ideas of fate and free will have been important to people throughout history.

Classical Heathens believed that aspects of certain events were predestined, set by the Norns and other spirits of destiny. Among those events that were predestined was the time of a person’s death. Other events that might be predetermined were the outcome of a battle and the rise or fall in power of a government or person.

However, while some aspects of events were predetermined other aspects were entirely controlled by people. Heathens believe the time their death is set; but each individual does their best to determine the manner and circumstance of that death through the choices of their life. The outcome of a battle or government may be predetermined. They still seek to determine the way that outcome is reached. Conflicts lost with honor or at a time of their choosing may be better than a dishonorable alternative or pyrrhic victory if one of those choices destroys future possibilities.

Many Heathens accept that some things are simply destined and live their lives to best meet that destiny. One of the lessons from Odin’s part in Ragnarok is the risk that comes with knowing destiny and fighting to change it.



While these symbols are relatively modern, dating from about 1993, many modern practitioners use them to represent the concept of Wyrð.

## Ancestors

Another major practice in Heathenry is the honoring of ancestors. Modern life has impacted these traditions in numerous ways.

On one hand people can feel disconnected from their ancestors by the mobility and emphasis on the “nuclear family.” In ancient times a family might call the same farm or town home for generations only ever traveling to visit for trade. The result is that sometimes ancestors, and the unknown generations of ancestors living in one place, might take the form of a type of land spirit. Some Heathens seek to reconnect with this sense of personal history. Others have challenges with their biological ancestors and seek other forms ancestors to honor through trade or tradition.

Another way modern life has impacted ancestor practice is the unfortunate stain of racism. This will be more directly addressed elsewhere, but it is important to be aware of how we frame and approach ancestor practices.

## Landvaettir

The best known aspects of Heathen practice center on relationships with the various gods and an individual’s ancestors. However, these are not the only important spirits in Heathenry. Like many polytheist and ancient practices, there are a variety of spirits of the land that are acknowledged and respected. Called landvaettir, they come in a variety of forms. Many of the best known are spirits of major landforms like rivers, mountains, and forests that dominate their local area. Others spirits may be tied to a single tree, boulder, or other similar smaller but identifiable feature.

This aspect of Heathen practice is very animist and can be closely related to various shamanic practices. However, at its core, this is about maintaining good relationships with your neighbors. Maintaining these relationships is very much like any other relationship in Heathen life and practice; balancing the considerations of frith and being a good neighbor.

## Animism

An aspect of Heathenry that is often under-considered are lesser “animistic” spirits and forces in the world. In many ways, the gods, landvaettir, and ancestral simply represent the best-known and most often considered aspects of this belief.

## The Children of Loki

- **Sleipnir** – The eldest of Loki’s children, sired by the stallion Svaðilfari. Sleipnir is the swiftest of horses, able to carry riders between realms, including carrying living riders to the realms of the dead. Sleipnir serves as Odin’s mount.
- **Fenrir** – First of the children of Loki with the Jotun Angraboda, the wolf was raised among the Aesir. However, he was so fierce and ravenously hungry that only Tyr would approach to feed him, so they became close companions. Odin received a prophecy that Fenrir would kill him at the end of time, so he set out to bind the wolf. The Aesir claimed that their attempts to bind Fenrir were a game, but Fenris demanded that someone’s hand be kept in his mouth as a guarantee that he would be released. His trusted companion Tyr offered his hand and Fenrir bit it off when the Aesir betrayed him. Fenrir is the father of Sköll and Hati Hróðvitnisson who chase the sun and moon.
- **Jörmungandr** – Second child of Loki with the Jotun Angraboda. Called the world serpent, he grew quickly after his birth. Odin, seeing how big the serpent was already and knowing a prophecy that Jormungandr would slay Thor in Ragnarok, threw him into the sea that surrounded Midgard. Once in the sea, he grew so large that he encircled Midgard. Thor and the serpent have an ongoing feud.
- **Hel** – Youngest of Loki’s children with Angraboda. She is said to be half alive and half dead. Like her full siblings, she was banished from Midgard by Odin, but she was given dominion over the realm that bears her name; where the vast majority of dead go.
- **Nari (also called Narfi)** – The youngest of Loki’s children by his wife, Sigyn. Nari lived among the Aesir with his parents until the Aesir chose to punish Loki by slaying him and use his entrails to bind his father.

## Practice

Just like any type of Paganism, there are many aspects to what is described as Heathen practice. Key aspects center around the maintenance of Frith with your community. A person's community includes their neighbors and family (by biology or choice), but also the gods, ancestors, landvaettir, animistic forces, and other spirits local to your home and areas of practice.

## Hearth Cult

One of the key aspects of Heathenry is personal practice around the home. Referred to as the "Hearth Cult," this is the shared and individual practices in a Heathen house such as keeping one or more altars, making offerings, and the like. Keeping hearth cult may be extremely private to an individual or involve an entire household, depending on the people involved.

## Offerings and Libations

Any frith is maintained to some degree through exchanges of gifts. Spirits rarely provide physical wealth directly. However, the assumption is that we receive blessings from ancestors, land spirits, and even gods through other means.

An aspect that many Pagans struggle with regarding offerings and libations is how transactional it can feel. It can be easy to create a sense that putting in the right offerings and prayers at an altar or shrine are supposed to work like putting the right cash and pushing the right buttons at a vending machine. However, offerings and libations are like other aspects of frith; gifts given to friends because you want to give them. Just like with mortal friends; even the building of a closer relationship, when it happens, is a byproduct of giving, not something purchased.

## Blots

Blots are formal ceremonies and may be held for any number of reasons. The most common are held as religious observances, festivals, and holidays. How blots are performed varies greatly between groups and even between events based on the reason and purpose. The central focus is always reciprocity and frith between the community and the divine; gods, ancestors, and other spirits.

A blot may involve hallowing the space, readings from lore, chanting, and exchanging offerings with the divine. They often end with a sumbel.

## Sumble

A common ritual, whether part of Blots or other events, is the sumbel. Participants go around and tell stories, recite poems, brag, make oaths, or make other proclamations. Sometimes a single drinking cup, horn, or other container is passed – often if a group is close knit and finds that to be appropriate. Far more often modern Sumbels are performed with individual cups for each participant to have their own drink. Mead is considered the standard beverage used when it's available. However, other drinks can be used by personal preference, including cider or juice.

A sumbel can be extremely informal, as part of any event or celebration. These types of sumbel can be rowdy and even crude, but are still sacred – serving to build fellowship and frith between the participants.

Formal rituals will include a more organized, sometimes solemn form of sumbel. A typical format for these sumbel is three rounds; one for the gods and goddesses, the second to ancestors and heroes, and the last is a round for oath making and boasting. This is not a set formula, but is a common one.

For those who are not familiar with a sumbel, an echo of this tradition can be seen in the ritual toasts performed at military balls.