

GERMANIC SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT. Germanic heathenry is under fire from within. Although it is a growing religion, most converts are coming from other religion, and with them, usually unknowingly, they are bringing with them baggage from their former religions which becomes entangled into Germanic cosmology which is eroding that cosmology until it is indistinguishable from any of the hundreds of generic New Age "mixed bags" pre-packaged and readily available at local bookstores.

First this article looks at significant changes which have been accepted, at least partially, into Germanic cosmology, proposes guidelines for investigating the Germanic worldview, and then seeks to put these alterations into a proper perspective as foreignisms which are, in essence, removable. This article then opts to look at the genesis of some of accumulated baggage, identify and label it, and set much of it into perspective so that the modern heathen can choose whether to incorporate some of the superfluous borrowings into local kindred gatherings being fully knowledgeable of where the concepts came from.

Lastly, this article looks at Germanic spirituality as being independent of these borrowings and worth pursuing without any need of support from other world class religions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Germanic heathenry has grown greatly over the past several years. Newcomers are migrating from all different philosophical backgrounds and religions, some having been atheist, Buddhist, Moslem, a variety of New Age religions (primarily wiccan), and from Christian religions including Catholic, Pentecostal and Baptist. Each, of course, converts to heathenry for personal reasons, but many come because "they are trying to find their roots." Additionally, and fairly well documented in psychological literature as well as pop-psychology,¹ is that there is a growing unease and general dissatisfaction among the common populace, and as a consequence many people are on a quest to find that one "little thing" which will bring meaning to their lives. Weekend yoga and meditation workshops fill quickly with attendees willing to shuck out hundreds of American dollars per person. Families often buy thousands of dollars worth in self-help books in search of a cure for a troubled mind. Others will gladly heap their family's traditional religious beliefs onto the sacrificial altars of foreign gods for one small handful of self-satisfaction. None of this is being said, however, with malice—the need for a well-rooted spiritual way of life is pervasive and the seekers feel that meeting this need is so important that they are willing to go to extensive lengths to meet that need.

Germanic reconstructionism also sprang from this same need. Its beginnings were humble. In the late 1960s at the "Dawning of the Age of Aquarius," a plethora of small alternative religions and spiritual paths unfolded in the footprints of well-known spiritual gurus. Mahareeshi Yogi Mahesh had enough people engaged in transcendental meditation, commonly known as TM, to start a small nation with celebrities such as John Lennon, George Harrison, Mia Farrow and Carlos Santana to run the smaller offices such as handing out personal mantras, standardizing saffron yellow, and handing out begging bowls. Carlos Castaneda had just published the highly popular and highly controversial *Teachings of Don Juan* and those not following East Indian gurus were following Native Americans—Rolling Thunder, Chief Frank Fools Crow, hanging out a Rainbow Tribe Gatherings,

¹The reader is referred to any number of books by well known researchers such as Stanislov Grof, Ralph Metzner, William Perkins, Timothy Leary, Arnold and Amy Mindell, etc. Some of these are listed in the bibliography.

listening to the Grateful Dead, and quoting the Scripture of Juan Matus. At the time, it seemed that every culture on the planet had some kind of spiritual inheritance with the exception of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants who traded their spiritual bankroll for a piece of the industrial age which was paying back only in dollars and cents but not in piece=of=mind.

Wicca became a fast-growing force between 1967 and the mid-1970s, but Ásatrú, as one faction of Germanic reconstructionism would become known after 1973, was just a stirring in the country-bred minds of a number of independent thinkers who dared to ask the question "With all this spiritual seeking going on, I wonder if maybe we are forgetting *who* we really are and *where* we really came from?" Rather than delving into New Age literature which obviously had its roots securely planted in science fiction and fantasy, these individuals grabbed up their history books and started rediscovering their own roots. They grabbed up their sorely beaten heritage like an antique coffee urn and started slowly polishing and burnishing until 1974 when the United States of America and Iceland both announced Ásatrú as a viable spiritual path worth pursuing.

At this point, it is well to distinguish between that which would become known as Ásatrú and that which would become known as the Theod. Specifically, Ásatrú was initially intended to be the reconstruction of the religion of the continental Germanic realm of the Viking Age utilizing a body of northern Germanic literature known as the Eddas and the Sagas supplemented by information taken from other related sources. Ásatrú was formalized as a reconstructed religion when groups of like-minded individuals began to come together in the United States under the banner of the Ásatrú Free Assembly headed by Steve McNallen. On the other hand, the Theod was based primarily upon the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Germanic tribes who settled in what is now called England. The effort was spear-headed by Garman Lord and a small following of retainers. Although there are more similarities than differences between the two completely separately developed groups, there are some very fundamental differences in their approaches to the reconstruction. Ásatrú has been much more liberal in its cultural exchange with other neo-pagan religions of the latter part of the 20th century whereas the Theod has been much more conservative choosing to try to hold to the original ideal of *reconstructionism*. The rest of this paper is mainly concerned with the effects that Ásatrú's liberalism has had on its ability to stay close to the original ideal. Because of the Theod's strict adherence to Anglo-Saxon sources it remains an example of the effects of conservatism but is of small concern to the actual following content.²

Initially, it was enough to simply reinstall the Germanic gods to their rightful place. Prayers were mostly on a personal level; sacrifices were small—a splash of beer here, a piece of meat and bread there. Quickly, however, as Ásatrú began to collect adherents, it was realized that some sort of religious service was necessary to be conducted on certain special days. The ceremony, the blót, was simple to piece together from descriptions in the sagaic literature,³ but holidays were a different matter. Early on, in the U.S.A., since only three holidays are mentioned in the sagaic

²The writings of the Theod have caused quite a stir over the past 2 decades among Ásatrú in general. It does not espouse racism in any way but recognizes a class system which modern Ásatrú, perhaps out of political correctness, have chosen to avoid. However, this author feels that the avoidance of such a fundamental issue could, if left unaddressed, be destructive to Ásatrú *as a reconstructed religion/ worldview*, and, so, will be addressed below at length. At the time of this writing, an uncomfortable relationship continues to exist between reconstructed Ásatrú and the Theod.

³Two main kinds of primary sources are recognized by modern Ásatrú: information gleaned from the poetic sources, a series of manuscripts generally accepted to have been written over a period of time extending from about 750 CE to 1350 CE (exact dating is constantly being questioned) called the Eddas (numerous articles and books are available documenting research on these documents) and the prose sources, commonly called the Sagas, family histories, which provide the modern researcher with much needed descriptions of everyday life during the Viking age.

<i>wiccan Sabbats</i>	<i>Ásatrú-(McNallen)</i>
Yule–Dec. 21	Yule–about Dec. 21
Imbolc (Candlemas)–Feb. 2	Charming of the Plow–Feb. 2
Lady Day–March 21	Summer Finding–March 21
May Day–May 1	May Day–May 1
Summer Solstice (Midsummer)–June 21	Midsummer–about June 21
Lammas (Lugnasad)–August 1	Freyfaxi–August 1
St. Michael’s–Sept. 21	Winter Finding–about September 21
Samhain–Oct. 31	Winter Nights–October 31

TABLE 1. Wiccan and Ásatrú Calendars

literature,⁴ it became common to accept the holidays generally celebrated by wiccans since it was still believed by many to be a surviving unbroken pagan tradition also from northern Europe. This type of borrowing was considered ‘fair-use’ since 1) followers of Ásatrú knew the true source of the revised holiday calendar, i.e., wiccan, and 2) wicca was believed by many if not most to be the remnants of a surviving heathen tradition in the same fashion as Ásatrú but with a greater amount of legitimacy. Stephen McNallen, founder of the first American Ásatrú organization called the Ásatrú Free Assembly, generated the first desktop-published documents on modern American Ásatrú between 1975-1976 with the following holidays:

As can be seen in the above chart, the holidays are clearly wiccan⁵ with the names altered slightly to reflect Germanic heathenry. Again, this wasn’t a problem since everybody at the time basically understood the origins.

(from an interview between Stephen McNallen and Margot Adler)

“I had wandered out of high school in rural Texas,’ he told me, ‘and had shaken off Catholicism because it conflicted with my basic instincts. I sampled many religions, read about Wicca, looked into Crowley, but none of it clicked. Then I ran across a novel about the Vikings. In retrospect it wasn’t a great novel, but the Vikings, in contrast with the monks, were real; they were alive. They had all the intensity and courage. It was clicking into something I already believed, but it was still awhile until I became aware that you can choose your gods.”⁶

Ásatrú grew into its own over the next two decades. Organizations came and went. Today, very few remember the Runic Society, The Viking Brotherhood, Ásatrú Free Church, The Ásatrú Free Assembly, the Nation of Odin, or the Odinist Committee. Few remember the excitement of the legal recognition of Ásatrú in Iceland which was felt in the United States the same year when it was written up in a Newsweek⁷ article on the Icelandic legal recognition of Ásatrú as a religion

⁴*Summer-finding* (around the 15th of April, *Yule*, which seems to have been a tide (short season approx. one month long, around the last half of December) and *Winter-finding* which seems to correlate with modern mid-October. All the dates varied to some degree and were probably all based on the agricultural functions of the local region rather than on known calendars or astronomical year-markers.

⁵The history of the *wiccan* calendar really goes back to Gerald Gardner who adopted the calendar which was currently in use by a number of occult groups and was based on early highly speculative and often fictional attempts at historical research. See Ronald Hutton’s *Triumph of the Moon*, 1999, Oxford Univ. Press, UK.

⁶p. 275, Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 1986, Beacon Press, Boston.

⁷Newsweek, Aug 20, 1973, p. 52. 10 years later there was a picture of Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson and a short description of his function as Álskerjargoði in *National Geographic*, Feb. 1987, p. 186.

under Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson and gave a two paragraph description of the legitimization, or who can remember the dissolution of the Ásatrú Free Assembly which finally resulted in ownership of information/ research being split between the Arizona Ásatrú and the new to-be-formed Ring of Troth under Edred Thorsson who was, himself, once a member of the ÁFA and who wrote regularly for the official ÁFA journal, the Runestone. That was early Ásatrú with it 300+ members in the United States.

Somewhere between 1981 (with the publication of Thorsson's *FUPARK*) and 1989 with the original formation of the *Ring of Troth* as proposed by Thorsson in his book *The Book of Troth* Ásatrú gained in membership. They were entering Ásatrú from all walks of life as opposed to the early members who were primarily from rural areas and they were coming from every religious background. By this time, Ásatrú had become fairly solidified in structure and organization. Little had changed as far as the religion goes from 1974 when it first came to this author's attention. Even with so few changes, one thing was fundamentally different: newcomers didn't know what the originators knew, i.e. how much early members had borrowed from a variety of sources and why.

The newest generation of Ásatrú brings with it very distinct problems inherited from the original American Ásatrú members—the foundations of Ásatrú are flawed. Now, they are continuing to build and expand upon Ásatrú further without reparation of the flaws. This, then, is the reason for this paper to separate the wheat from the chaff so that Ásatrú can continue to grow.

The divisions of the paper are as follows:

- (1) Introduction (what has just been read)
- (2) Concepts affecting understanding of Germanic cosmology
- (3) Concepts affecting Germanic religious practice
- (4) Germanic spirituality as opposed to New Age Spirituality

The final section hopefully fits Ásatrú into its rightful place as a viable spiritual practice not only worth following as a way of life into the 21st century but with firm enough foundations that will allow Ásatrú to continue to grow on its own rather than having it become an addition to the already large New Age heap.

2. CONCEPTS AFFECTING GERMANIC COSMOLOGY

2.1. Cosmology, in General. The area that will most assuredly be affected by new-comers coming from other religious and philosophical background is cosmology or the worldview. It has often been stated by many new-comers to Ásatrú and even a few old-timers that the entire Germanic worldview cannot be known. This author as well as most other researchers will agree with this statement at least to some degree. The Germanic worldview is still being detangled and teased out of grave digs, other archaeological finds, interpretation of monuments, literature (both early and late), linguistics, social and psychological sciences and may very well never be complete in every detail.

Secondly, interpretation of any new findings must be done with extreme caution. To interpret any evidence is in essence to *translate* that evidence into modern terms. As is commonly known *things often get lost in translation—either through subtraction or addition*, and the additions and subtractions must be as carefully recorded as the original evidence. The researcher must *know* exactly the process of addition and subtraction which yields the final product.

Ásatrú is a reconstructionist religion. In a sense, Ásatrú is to ancient Germanic religion what the Living History Museum at Williamsburg, VA, is to colonial American life. The attempt is to recreate as closely as possible what the religious, philosophical and moral mind-sets of the ancient northern and/ or western Germanic individual.

Early on, because Ásatrú was little more than an acceptance of the Germanic gods as belonging to a certain defined by cultural heritage and because it had little in the way of religious ceremony beyond the blót/ feast and sumble (ritual drinking), it was easy to keep track of where ideas for ceremonies came from. Indeed, these were often freely discussed at local kindred meetings or regional gatherings. But ceremonies don't always separate from their sources easily or without additional baggage. Early on, this made little difference, but now this *extra* baggage needs to be sifted through.

Another argument put forth by new-comers is that Ásatrú should not be overly affected by what individuals bring with them, or if it is affected then these changes really represent new growth or the spiritual evolution of Ásatrú and that without it Ásatrú could easily become stagnant and dogmatic rather than remaining a viable religious/ philosophical pursuit. We must address these comments separately.

- (1) Ásatrú is a living reconstructionist religion with its time frame fairly well set between approximately 350 CE to about 1180 CE, that is from the writings of Tacitus to the official change over to Christianity in Sweden. Not only does Ásatrú function as a living religion, but like the Living History Museum at Williamsburg, it can and has functioned as a resource for researchers. The latter capacity is being quickly eroded, however.
- (2) Although Ásatrú is locked into a specific time frame, dogmatism and stagnation are unnecessary mainly because the *code*, i.e. the cosmology, remains rather incomplete, and new interpretations are constantly being made based on new archaeological finds and other new evidence as it crops up. Historically, the details of Germanic religious philosophy varied very significantly from place to place—it does not have a history of stable, consistent religious conventions. Ásatrú, on the other hand, is quickly becoming very *stylized* into another New Age alternative religion fairly indistinguishable from Wicca except for specific differences between trappings, decorations and god-names mainly through a homogenization process—it can quickly reach a state of dogmatism because of this.⁸
- (3) The foreignisms either knowingly or unknowingly brought into Ásatrú result in distortions of the overall worldview. Some of these distortions are great and some are small, but they remain distortions nevertheless. The reader might well view these additions as being akin to bringing a Dremel Tool into the woodwright's shop at the Living History museum.

The arguments will certainly continue as some of the mainstream New Age religions continue to seek out new territory to claim.

New -Age "seekers of knowledge," particularly those who move quickly from one religion, i.e. one (religious) worldview to another, maintain a poor understanding of exactly what the function of a worldview is. In general, these people will talk about a worldview as if it simply a specific body of knowledge or sets of techniques; these folks tend to treat worldviews as modular trading one out for another. In the case of Ásatrú, one often speaks of the cosmological picture as being how the "worlds" are laid out, but a worldview has little to do with a specific body of knowledge. In fact, it would be most likely that were a group of these "seekers" evaluated over a lengthy period of time or through say, perhaps, three different "phases of their development," it would most likely be discovered that the individuals' actual worldviews had changed little if at all even through phases as radically different as Wicca, Hinduism, and neo-shamanism. A worldview does not represent a

⁸Since its founding in the late 1980s, the Ring of Troth, the largest of American organizations has been led by two wiccan priestesses, Prudence Priest and Diana Paxson, and Kveldulf Gundarsson, although an excellent researcher into the Germanic culture, had a sympathetic ear to those who felt that Ásatrú should align itself with the common neo-pagan community at large.

specific body of knowledge but rather is the matrix, the "file-system," as it were, in which any body of knowledge can be stored. The following can be said about worldviews:

- (1) A worldview (or in religion a "cosmological model") can be described as a special kind of "map" which defines relationships between events and describes/ predicts how two events interact with one another.
- (2) Because the "map" defines, describes, and helps to predict interactions between events, the model then leads to the development of protocols for "proper interaction," i.e. the development of social mores, legal systems, and moral/ ethical systems.
- (3) The worldview or cosmological model then becomes a necessary set of guidelines for the design of both secular and religious ceremony since ceremony is a way for a given group (usually cultural) to "honor" or demonstrate the "worth" of a relationship or a set of relationships.

The main problem with the "seekers" given in the example above is that they simply trade out one specific body of knowledge for another. Some of the most recent demonstrations of this problem can be found in the responses that many Native Americans have had to the Anglo population taking over their sacred ceremonies. For those traditionals who argue against allowing whites into their traditional ceremonies the image is that whites are removing the Native American ceremony from its original context, i.e. the traditional worldview, and plugging it into the white, middle-class American and spiritually bereft cosmological model. This being done, the ceremony then loses all meaning for its originators; it has been called by some *cultural theft*. For the New Age seekers co-opting the ceremony, however, no wrongs have been committed. From their point of view the ceremony could not have *lost meaning* (because *it is simply a set of techniques*) and therefore demand recognition for reproducing the ceremony. They demand recognition as Native Americans, "Red-Roaders," but do not understand that the ceremony has been removed from its context. They only see a "transference of technology" as is common within the industrial age Anglo American worldview.

The same has happened over the past two decades in Ásatrú. Wiccans have converted themselves to Ásatrú. What they have done in reality is switch out details, a specific body of knowledge, and plugged another set of details into the very same worldview slot. This could be likened to switching the flavor of Jell-O but continuing to use the same mold.

Switching religions is easy but actually changing worldviews is very difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that a man functioning within *[worldview-A]* cannot directly "see" *[worldview-A]* because he is using *[worldview-A]* to interpret itself. Similarly, it has been said that "a brain surgeon cannot operate on his own head."⁹

Trying to step outside of one's own culture is a daunting task. It requires not only looking at another culture's mythological cycle (which is the most common approach used by wiccans today) but requires looking into cultural pastimes, legal systems, moral/ ethical systems, cultural dress, social stratification systems, medical issues such as the classifications of diseases, economic bases, economic stratification systems, etc. And, it requires that one look at these things, i.e. "the world,"

⁹The reader is referred to Edward T. Hall's *Beyond Culture*, 1981, Doubleday Pub. This topic is complex and is very often neglected by those inside the New Age. As Americans, we are often very mono-culture oriented. We like to read books and watch cultural channels on cable television, but most middle-class white Americans can do little more than make a pretense out of understanding other cultures. We are usually monolingual, mono cultural and are steeped so deeply in in the middle-class cosmological picture that we have a very difficult time seeing from another's point of view which goes to explain, at least partially, the anti-French, anti-Russian, anti-German sentiments so often expressed immediately prior to the 2003 War on Iraq.

from the perspective of the native. Emotional topics such as female circumcision, infanticide, inequality between men and women, slavery, class or caste systems, lack of education for females are all issues which become 'sticking-points' for a convert to another worldview; the individual almost always feels it just and right to *reinterpret* subjects to which he might be morally attached. It is very difficult for an American to justify slavery or caste systems in any way, for example, so true conversion of the American to Hindu is all but impossible, but if one is looking to really *convert* then conversion *must* be complete and an *untouchable* must not be touched.¹⁰

2.2. Guidelines for Exploring Worldviews.

- (1) Try to get total immersion in a second culture, not so much that one may learn the second, but rather so that one can learn as much as possible about one's own native worldview. What is commonly called "culture shock" is the bringing of one's own native worldview to the fore so that its validity may be questioned and examined. If one has never experienced the complete humiliation and embarrassment of having committed *un gran faux pas*, one is so embedded in his own worldview that he has never even been offered the opportunity to investigate never mind actually having done the investigation.
- (2) Stick as close as possible to literal interpretations. In other words, avoid over interpreting because the 'interpretation' itself must be translated through our native culture-centric worldview.
- (3) Learn the native language and pay strict attention to how "words are used" and how "idioms" are formed. Words which have two completely different meanings and idioms are both the worldview expressing itself through the language of the people.
- (4) Assume that social mores, legal systems, art, favorite colors, folk music, religion and stereotypical social customs are all expressions of the same worldview.
- (5) For studying a cultures which only exist in writings and artifacts such as the Viking Age western and northern Germanics' always look for at least three instances of a particular event. A single case is interesting as a fluke or an exception, a second case is a very interesting coincidence worthy of more investigation, three instances, however, is usually a sure thing.
- (6) Lastly, there should always be vestiges of events as discussed in #5 in later folk literature or artifact record. Although part of a culture can change quickly, such as the conversion of Iceland from heathen to Christian in 1000 CE, the worldview is much slower to change. We're always reminded of this when an American says something about the sun *rising* or *setting* (which it really has not successfully done since Copernicus).

While many 'alternative religions' offer adherents a plug-and-play approach to religion, i.e. the ability to switch cultural modules in and and out of a motherboard worldview, reconstructionist approaches offer the individual a lifetime of discovery, but the road is far more arduous.

The following sections look specifically at borrowings which have either been brought in as baggage by new comers or which were adopted consciously by early Ásatrú but the origins of which have been forgotten or misplaced.

¹⁰Although it may appear that I am singling out *wiccans* as the 'bad guy,' it needs to be made clear that most new converts to Ásatrú have at least passed through one or two wiccan initiations. Most others, including Stephen McNallen founder of the original ÁFA, have seriously investigated the religion as a possible choice. These *new converts* are now making most of the large changes in Germanic cosmology. Many of these changes as addressed below are becoming *part and parcel* to Ásatrú and simply need to be put back into perspective.

2.3. The Layout of the Germanic World. The Germanic layout of the so-called 'worlds' in modern Ásatrú parlance often results in heated discussions between members of Ásatrú.¹¹ Prior to 1984, the relationships between and the placement of the the *heims* was little more than an interesting puzzle. Numerous pictures have been drawn for various layout over the past one hundred years. Most of these show a large disk with a tree, Yggdrasil, growing up through the middle, Jötunheim to the outer rim, Helheim below and Ásaheim above leaving Mannheim to occupy the central region.

Rather than redo the layout of the world as can be found in most books on Scandinavian or Norse mythology, it is probably easier to look at the world's cosmic structure from how it was viewed in sagaic literature starting with the most common, Mannheim. Mannheim, i.e. "the settlement of man," is located centrally in the Germanic mind. Basically, the body of Ymir was laid out in the Ginnungagap and Mannheim, or Midgarð, was the central dwelling place. The gods, Óðín, Víli, and Ve, threw up a bulwark between the realm of man and the realm of giants, who were hostile to man: frost giants (ON *hrímþursar*) to the north, sons of Muspilli to the south, the risar (ModGer. *Riesen*) in the wild mountains. Those most dangerous to the world and which will play a role in the Ragnarök are those relegated to the north and south obviously held at bay by the bulwark of mountains formed from the eyebrows of Ymir. Those not necessarily harmful to man or at least not seeking the destruction of man seem to travel through Midgarð quite regularly. Some seem to have fixed homes in the mountains and show up fairly regularly in folklore from the Viking period up to the present alongside other with other creatures, huldrafolk, such as the skogsraan (wood-wives), various álfar, trolls, etc. The divisions often overlap greatly and vary from region to region. The main point here is that the world is mentioned as being simply divided into two main areas: the inside (Mannheim) and the out realms (Útgarð) and this as a general concept runs throughout the Germanic worldview especially as it pertains to relationships and the legal system.

Germanic worldview attributed much to being on the *inside*. For the Germanic mind all things good and nurturing were of the 'inside.' The 'inside' was home, community, civilization, good fortune, love, and luck. There were strict social mores to bind the inside together as a cohesive whole. The Hávamál is really little more than a set of rules which have their basis in maintaining a community together as a cohesive whole.¹² Maintaining a sense of balance within a community was primary purpose of the entire early legal system. So, the sense of 'inside' develops then into a set of concentric circles each being encompassed by the next. The center circle and the most 'inside' is the family encompassed by the community which is then encompassed by the kingdom which is then encompassed by the various local deities. *Outside* begins at the borders of the kingdom which then moves out deeper and deeper into wilderness. Inside to outside can also be seen as a continuum, on the radial-crosscut view, starting at the center with the most familiar continuing outwards to the most foreign or even as the most safe out to the most dangerous.

¹¹The older term, 'home,' used often by early Ásatrú reconstructionists has been long laid by the side. Kveldulf Gundarsson made several good attempts to revitalize the term but to date 'world' is the term of choice. Both *Our Troth*, 1993, published privately by the Ring of Troth edited by Kveldulf and *Teutonic Religion*, 1993, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, written by Kveldulf utilized the terms 'home/ homes' or 'realm/ realms' when referring to different groups or clans of beings and their place of residence.

¹²Modern Ásatrú of the most recent decade have taken what are now called the Nine Noble Virtues which really seems to be an imitation of the 10 Commandments. This is not to say that the Nine Noble Virtues were really created to be a heathen set of commandments but rather a simplified distillation of the wisdom given through the Hávamál: it is far easier to remember a list of nine words than to memorize a poem of more than 100 stanzas, written originally in a foreign language. Fortunately, most reconstructionists are able to quote some from the Hávamál and have incorporated the early Germanic skill of using "common sense to navigate the large amount of grey area."

The legal system particularly as it pertains to inheritance and marriage reflects this concept of a continuum from inner to outer reaches. Inheritance and marriage laws have to do with either broadening the family base and making it, therefore, more stable or in maintaining an already broad base within the community. Marriage is the binding of two families together not only for the purpose of love and offspring but generally as a business deal of sorts. Dowry was important, as well as the provision of housing and the combining of natural resources such as farmland, animals, treed land, mines, etc. This way of thinking has not completely died out even in modern times. The same thinking also affected how wars were conducted. In Ireland, for example, Vikings often sired children onto local women because in 15 years' time a Viking had, hopefully, a home base in Ireland through a native son by which, then, new deals could be made. Having a son in a foreign land gave the Viking an 'inside' to come home to.

A concept of life after death was pervasive throughout all of Germanic Europe yet Hel was not a foreign land or another world. In reality, in the Germanic mind, it was part of this world, the one world that was once Ymir's corpse. 'Hel' is a word that linguistically is related to the word 'cellar' both of which also had the meaning of 'hidden.' Although there are various views on death presented in the Eddas and the sagas, the most common and the one which appears to have been the most heathen in origin is that the dead enter into folds of the ancestral family with the grave, barrow, or mound being the entrance point. Death into and existence within the grave continues in Germanic folklore long after the conversion to Christianity¹³, and although details of life after death seems to have varied somewhat from family to family and even within the same family over a period of several generations, death into an ancestral home seems to have been the most common belief.

"At the outset, it must be that we can look for no consistency. Different men held different beliefs, and a man might hold views which were not logically consistent. Beliefs in the after-life were hazy, but, in general, it may be said that life went on after death, at least for a time, and that there was communion, more or less intimate, between the living and the dead. The dead were trusted, venerated or feared. They could give advice and help the living, but also injure them.

"It was often believed that the after-life was inseparable from the body. The dead man lived on, but his life was in the grave, and he could still exercise his influence from there. This is shown in numerous stories about Icelandic peasants."¹⁴

The land of the dead, then, appears to have be separated from Mannheim in concept only. The entrance to the Land of the Dead is through the grave or basically any hole into the earth—exchange of luck, health, wealth, fame, wisdom, and assistance from 'beyond the grave,' in modern parlance, take place at any time and are recorded in the large body of folklore coming from the Germanic countries up to the present century. Interactions with the land of the living appear to have been intimate, and vestiges of the overall Germanic concept of death and the land of the dead continue .

Of the so-called 'Nine Worlds' at least seven appear to have belonged to Midgarð; Muspellheim clearly lies outside the bulwark set up by the gods as well as either an unnamed 'Heim' for the *hrímbursar* (possibly the north shore in Niflheim). But what of the two realms occupied by the two tribes of the gods? The general consensus is that the Æsir live in the sky which is a claim

¹³See Kvideland and Sehmsdorf's *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* and also E. Marwick's *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetlands* for tales of interactions between the living and the dead. Also the legends of King Arthur still to this day have him sleeping in the grave with several of his retainers awaiting to be awakened to take his rightful place as King of Britain.

¹⁴p. 269 E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 1964; Greenwood Press, Westport, CT

that comes from Snorri's *Prose Edda*. However, older sources give us no such indication. First it should be pointed out that new-comers, and some with more than a 12 years in Ásatrú even, often use the concept of Bifröst as an indicator of the location of the Norse gods. It must, however, be conceded that Bifröst is a bridge climbing far into the sky, *but both the southern and northern ends touch the ground*. It is a bridge which crosses *over* Midgarð, and it is the northern reaches which would interest the early Germanic the most since it is there that the warriors can be seen practicing their battle maneuvers during the frantic display of northern lights. The home of the Æsir is described as high, but it is never considered outside or in Útgarð. This places Ásgarð, then, within the borders of Midgarð, high in the mountains to the north. It is interesting, then, that Jehovah in the Heliand, an Old Saxon poem¹⁵ in stave-rhyme is described as "living in the hill fort on the highest mount and that his son traveled the earth with his twelve warrior thanes." The OS description of the Christian God living on Midgarð is probably a good indicator that the other mountainly descriptors of Ásgarð lend some veracity, then, to the claim that the heathen gods were "earthly" rather than heavenly. Snorri's tale of Skaði and Njörð now makes sense and in fact gives even more descriptors of the locations of both the Vanir and the Æsir. As far as can be ascertained there is no indication of any settlements of any creatures in the sky until some two hundred years *after* the conversion of Iceland.

The layout of the realms becomes simplified, then. There is one world (ON *wer-ald* "the age of man") made of the corpse of Ymir laid out in the Ginnungagap. The land of the Living lies above, the land of the Dead below. All manner of beings live with the bulwark boundaries originally installed by Óðín with the exception of the giants whose origins precede the 'age of man' and who are harmful or dangerous to Midgarð/Mannheim. These have been forced by the gods to live outside of Midgarð. The Qabalah-type configurations which have all appeared in the past two decades are really little more than an attempt to bring Old Norse mythology up to the complex standards set by modern occult circles which often rely heavily on complex drawings, maps, tables of correspondences and the like and as such can be likened to moderns relying upon blueprints to build a traditional knorr. The final product loses out in the areas of fine, skilled craftsmanship and a good eye for a beautiful line.

2.4. Relationships: The Germanic Class System. Modern members of socio-economic classes in America tend to have, in general, very fixed ideas on relationships between socio-economic classes and each class itself tends to adhere to a different set than the others. For middle-class anglo-America, difference between races *should not exist*. A class system exists but is related to individual income. This class tends to also believe that an individual's dreams can be realized. Minorities from the lower stratum (or strata) usually *hold no such delusions* and often look to the Caucasian race as being the source of the problem—particularly those *in power*. Anglos from the lower economic strata often see the influx of minorities as *ruining America* or undermining

¹⁵Murphy, G. Ronald, S. J., trans., *The Heliand: The Saxon Gospel*, 1992 (Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, UK). This book has many interesting concepts contained in the poetry which should be of interest to a serious reconstructionist looking into the "spiritual aspect" of Ásatrú. Many concepts such as

- (1) Where do spiritual beings, such as gods, live?
- (2) How were "healers" regarded by the general public during the heathen era?
- (3) How were such things as "soul," "life-fore," and "healing power" explained?
- (4) What processes are involved in the healing procedure?
- (5) The effect of words, spoken charms, and songs on the patient/ environment.

This book should not be neglected simply because it is a translation of the New Testament of the Bible: it is really a translation that was *tailored* to the way a heathen would have understood the world.

the equal distribution of wealth. Those from the lower socio-economic stratum see themselves as the *backbone of America* and often belong to segregationist groups and engage in an exchange of simplistic literature outlining their views of the ills of American culture and the potential cures. Those from the upper strata tend to see the teeming masses below them as being a good work force but ignorant of *reality*. They (the lower strata) are much too divided to make good choices on their own and without the good guidance from big business/ politics the entire country would fall into utter chaos, famine and ruin. There is also the tendency to feel that decisions regarding the fate of the nation, thereby the *masses*, would be best left to those in the best position for the job in terms of wealth, education, political connections and know-how.

America has a very distinct and fairly well-defined class system which is basically left over from the older Germanic culture. Control, though, rather than coming from the *understood role* in society, comes from keeping the classes ignorant of one another for the most part. Each group believes that it has the clearest understanding of the others. One thing is for certain for all three classes in America, *communism is bad and is destructive to the American way of life*. Communism probably will never work in the western countries not because it must destroy the class-system to work (which is true according to Marx, at any rate) but because the class-system is so deeply embedded into western culture that it always resurfaces like shower mold in countries (always unsuccessfully) who have tried it. A ruling elite class is usually the first to resurface followed by the development of a large middle-class which further divides itself into two or more classes based on a variety of criteria. Any western country which has become *communist* utilizes not ignorance between class divisions but active denial. Right or wrong, the class-system works and has existed for thousands of years in western culture.

It is not that uncommon for a culture to be completely forthright with the fact that a class system exists. Most 3rd world countries have some type of class system whereby status of an individual is defined by specific divisive criteria which is basically known to all natives within that culture. Even many industrialized nations maintain a fairly rigid class system (England and Japan are two with fairly rigid systems which have been in existence for hundreds if not thousands of years). It should neither be surprising nor unacceptable that early Germanic peoples also had a class system very similar to the existing American system with the exception that classifications were open and publicly acknowledged.

In general, as in America today, there were three classes: a lower, or slave class; a middle-, peasant-, or free class; and a ruling class. It must be stated that the three classes have existed since prehistoric times although the slave class seems to have varied somewhat from true slaves to non-landowners/ households (much like the share-cropper of the American southern States) and civil rights also varied over time. For example, at one point during Viking Age:¹⁶

The definitions of *class* varied from place to place and from one time to another. Relationships between slaves and freemen also varied according to the definition of the time as well.

Different from a caste system, movement from one class to another was relatively common during the Viking Age. It is known, for example, that a free woman captured in a raid might end up in her captor's household as a thrall or might even be given to another household as a *gift* even though her place of birth was a nearby village, she was native, and spoke the same language and dialect as her captor. A man may be taken as a slave into a household in lieu of an unpaid gambling debt. Slaves could also be set free so that their social standing in a community was upgraded and they enjoyed the same protection under the law as any free man. Children of slaves remained either as

¹⁶Table created from p. 68, P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson in *The Viking Achievement*, 1970, Sidgwick and Jackson, London.

<i>country</i>	<i>law</i>
west Norway	"Now a freeman and a slave commit theft together, it is the freeman who is the thief and the slave shall not lose by it, for the man who steals with another man's slave steals by himself."
Skaane	"If a man slave is killed then no leveling oath need be sworn for him any more than any other cattle belonging to a man, should that be killed"
Iceland	"If a master kills his own slave, he is not liable before the law, unless he kill him during legally ordained festivals or in Lent, then the punishment is banishment."

TABLE 2. Early laws regarding slavery.

<i>class</i>	Family	Mega-family	Community
non-free	children/ slaves	children/ slaves	slaves-2 nd class citizens
free	at the age of consent	elders	voting members of the community
ruling	elders	heads of clans	community leaders- divided between war, welfare, and religious leaders

TABLE 3. Table of Germanic relationships.

hereditary slaves or were freed according to the reigning law of the land at the time. In America we have a similar system with civil liberties for so-called "second-class citizens" such as women, afro-Americans, and Native Americans even at the advent of the 21st century.

Class, as distasteful as Americans think it to be, exists the world over. As long as there have been communities there have been social classifications and, for the most part there are labor classes as well as socio-economic. In the Germanic world these were divided similarly in the family and community.¹⁷

The class system as tabled above is the basics of the Germanic class system. It should be noted that one *functions* within a class but one is not necessarily borne into a class as is the case in a caste system, and there is some freedom to move into and out of a class. In many cases there existed special rules for interactions between classes and there are rules for moving into and out of a class. Each class is responsible for the welfare of the class and classes below; additionally, each class has specific community defined responsibilities to the class directly above it. Note also that some members can also be in two or more classes.

The table is simple and should be easily understood. To reach an *elder* status in the Germanic culture required a combination of the following qualities: age, wisdom, and experience. If any of the three were missing ('age' was often a missing component for a *king*, for example), an elder advisor

¹⁷Note that the author uses the term 'community' to mean physical or geographic community. Often in this day and age the term 'community' is used in conjunction with *Internet Community* or *Ásatrú community* neither of which are true communities in the sense that they lack the flow of responsibility. A true community here means 'an individual has a responsibility to those directly above him and a responsibility *for* those directly below him.'

or advisors were often appointed by the community elders to make up for the deficit. Although our culture still retains an innate understanding of these required qualities, as individuals we will forgo the requirements for an advancement in status, thinking that the *title* itself is worthy of respect. Any status title in and of itself is meaningless because in the Germanic mindset the required qualities of *age*, *experience*, and *wisdom* are that which draws or attracts respect to a title. A title is really a single description of a set of responsibilities to those above *and* a separate set of responsibilities for those below. Modern Ásatrú would do well to remember this when organizing. Groups would also be staying within the Germanic worldview to understand that the level of community leader, for example, draws appointees from voting members of the community and from heads of clan. For an elder of a single family to jump straight into a community leader role is *overstepping* and is to be avoided because although age and wisdom may be present experience at leadership roles above a single family is not. In the Germanic worldview *overstepping* without the appointment of advisors is a show of irresponsibility to those one will be responsible *for*.

Through the 20th century, Americans have laid the noble qualities of age, experience, and wisdom aside, first with the demise of the extended family, and secondly by giving individuals in a given class more responsibility than their accumulation of qualities allow for. In reconstructing Ásatrú, then, groups would do well to assess an individual's qualities before assigning titles to those elder status. They would also be staying closer to the Germanic worldview to *title* a person (above) by the assessment of *quality*. If an individual appears and demands the community leader title of góði, and has as qualities only two years as Ásatrú and is only 22 years of age, no one need recognize him by that title except for his subordinates. The new tradition of 'title-seeking' without just cause is to be avoided; if one is seeking the title one is often seeking only the *power* that is concomitant with the title.

Individualism as a concept often attracts people to Ásatrú because the vikings are often viewed as having been 'rugged individualists' which for the American is often interchangeable with 'heroes.' While it is true that 'striving to do one's personal best' was (and is) a respectable trait during the Viking Age, the process of striving and subsequent success served to build one's place with the community. The process of striving to give either to the immediate family, the extended family, or the community was how one *evolved* as a human. Spiritual evolution (discussed below) in the early Germanic worldview was not something that took place on a mystical level but rather something which occurred in real time prior to one's death. It is the community itself which recognizes good effort. Spiritual evolution, then, in the Germanic worldview positively correlates with 'lasting impression upon the community as a whole.'

"Hálfdan the Black rode away from the entertainment in Hathaland and, as it happened, his way lay over from Lake Rond [Lake Randsfjorden, today]. It was spring, and the sun shone with great warmth; and when they drove over Rykins Inlet—people had watered their cattle there during the winter, and their dung had fallen on the ice, and the sun's warmth had melted the ice there. Now, when the king drove over that stretch, the ice broke under him, and he perished with many of his followers. He had reached his fortieth year then. There had been excellent seasons during his rule; and people were so affected by his death that when they learned of his demise and that his body was being taken to Hringaríki in order to be interred there, men of influence from Raumaríki, Westfold and Heiðmork came and prayed, all of them, to take the body with them to be buried in their lands, for it was thought that he who got possession of it could expect good seasons. They reached an agreement in this wise, that the body was assigned to four places, the

head was laid in a mound at Stein in Hringarfki, but each of the others carried away their [sic] share and interred them in burial mounds in their home-lands, and all are called the Mounds of Hálfðan.”¹⁸

Relationships are built and groomed based on these noble qualities, and if modern Ásatrú are to live fully within the Germanic worldview, respect *must be given* to age, experience, and wisdom. This would mean adjusting speech, vocabulary, and tone of voice as a demonstration of respect and recognition for a just title. By a *just title* is meant that the three qualities have been reviewed and have not been found lacking. Disagreements may occur between a community leader and one or more members of the community, but if the leader rightly demonstrates the three required qualities, the subordinate is required to *respectfully* disagree.¹⁹

A second class system was *insider* vs. *outsider*. It is a very simple system which appears to be universal at least at some level. Being an *insider* allows one full membership at his level. For example, a 2 year-old child has the same level of membership within a family or community but does not enjoy the same freedoms, duties, and responsibilities of a 16 yr. old brother. A different set of freedoms, duties and responsibilities is applied to *outsiders*.

Insider vs. *Outsider* is common the world over from the smallest of family units to the largest of megapolises as well as within organizations both secular and religious. It is a common human desire to be accepted as an insider. Often this can lead to large amount of pretense on the part of an outsider trying to be accepted and which will often lead to charges of political incorrectness, prejudice, and discrimination. From an insider’s point of view, however, discriminating between insiders and outsiders is

- (1) necessary for the maintenance of the system,
- (2) benefits insiders from having to endure improper conduct from what would now need to be seen as peers,
- (3) maintains a quality control on the ‘actions of insiders’ so that pretense and fakery do not substitute themselves for what is deemed by the group to be *proper action*,
- (4) prevents the control of change from being shifted primarily to the hands of outsiders,
- (5) and maintains a level of safety, for both insiders and outsiders, by making sure that anyone who engages in the group’s activities at the level of *insider* is adequately prepared to be engaging in such.

This newest generation also has the tendency to insist that there is no space between the individual and his god. The term ‘patron’ is now being used with regularity among the newest converts to the Germanic worldview to demonstrate this relationship. However, in the Germanic worldview personal responsibility is *always* to the next higher class within the community whether it be at the family level or at the level of the community proper not directly to a god or goddess. Folks who take this stance have always been viewed with a large amount of suspicion within the Germanic realm. Those taking this stance are also demonstrating irresponsibility toward community and family and are often little more than ‘title-seekers.’ Those things which draw the individual closer to his god are the very same required qualities to raise one’s status and recognition of that status within the community.

¹⁸pp. 57-58, Snorri Sturluson, trans. by Lee Hollander, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, in the ‘Saga of Hálfðan the Black,’ 1964, Univ. of Texas, Austin, TX.

¹⁹Disagreements also had to be presented according to strict standards set by the community itself. In some communities this might be by petition, in others, by simple remark, and in others by challenge. In any case, in the presence of the 3 qualities mentioned, *respect was due* by the subordinate.

Evidence from sagaic literature and also from the early writings of the church would suggest that the bulk of prayers by the common man were most likely directed to the next higher class, usually deceased parents or grandparents. Community leaders often prayed to dead kings. Being mostly from middle-class America with the only religious indoctrination, for the most part, being Christian, a concept such as ancestor worship is somewhat disconcerting because it doesn't fit into the white, middle-class. Christian worldview most are borne into. In fact, careful study of the religious ethics of new age groups and wiccan groups²⁰ will show that compared to the religion of the Jivaro, Mapuche, or eskimo, for example, the newer American religions are not that far removed from their predecessor, Christianity. This only makes sense since the minds which created these modern religions were themselves a product of Christian upbringing and socialization by a Christian culture, i.e. of the Christian worldview. Ancient Germanic religion/ worldview, on the other hand, was not a product of such a culture; the same amount of caution used in interpreting data collected on South American tribes or circumpolar tribes should be used. Personal relationships with Jehovah/ Jesus was a selling point for Christianity, mainly, because such personal relationships with *gods* did not exist for the common heathen man. A few persons in sagaic literature are noted to have had special relationships to certain gods defined on these occasions as a "friend of [god's name]." These men (usually families) were titled by the community as *blótsmenn*, one who sacrifices for others. Families sacrificed to ancestors, local elves,²¹ familial protectors such as *dísir*, and at the graves of prominent community leaders, in general.²²

As stated earlier, reinstatement of a class system is a difficult concept for many of the newest generation of Ásatrú, but the history of it is long, and for the most part, it is to the health of the community as a whole. The interfering force is the idea that *class* has been removed in America and discussion of it is highly frowned upon since the civil rights movements of the 60s, the Equal Opportunity Act of the 1970s and 1980s, and the political correctness of the 1990s. Ásatrú has had a long and shady history (much of it little more than rumors by outsiders but also with much truth especially in the early years) with confusing the concept of *social class* with racial or gender discrimination.²³ However, if the concept of social class is investigated closely, it is doubtful that these ancient concepts (which continue to exist as of this writing but are not discussed) will result in any conflicts with civil rights or the E. O. A. Lastly, reinstatement of the class system can help bring ancestor worship²⁴ and worship of local deities (leaders, land-spirits, and home spirits) back into their rightful places within the Germanic worldview.

²⁰See Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, 1999, Oxford Univ. Press, London.

²¹H. R. Ellis-Davidson in many of her analyses shows a correlation between the dead and elves. A good overall view of her theories which were refined in more detail in her later writings was *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 1964, Penguin Books, London.

²²It is also worthy to note that the concept of "everyman is his own priest" which can be found as a basic tenet in handbooks on the modern wiccan religion has been filtering into Ásatrú since around 1990. There have been many attempts at creating "training programs" for *goðar*, but American Ásatrú folk seem very resistant to such. In most cases, the title-seeking individual will simply break away from organizations such as the Ring of Troth and will *install* himself as a 'properly ordained *goði*.' If this still draws reaction from the Ásatrú community at large, the next step is to either change the actual title to something similar or actually change the name of the religion, usually also to something similar. This has happened several times between 1990-2000. The bottom line is always compensation for the lack of one or more of the qualities mentioned above.

²³See Section 4.2

²⁴"Worship" here is used in the sense of *weorþ-scip*, "the attaching of worthiness or value to someone." This is related to "Your Worship" (second person plural [*ultra-polite*] when addressing a king) or the American version of "Your Honor" (same construction except that Americans believe that no human is worthy of worship [pun intentional]).

2.5. Birth, Death and Rebirth. Of the newest foreignisms, and probably one of the most blatant of imports, is reincarnation. More importantly, though, than the fact that reincarnation was brought over to Ásatrú from wicca, is that this is the area which betrays one of the most shoddy methods for new age research: making a blanket claim, and then looking about for evidence to support it. Generally, the evidence is searched for patterns and, thereafter, a hypothesis is formed—from that point testing of the hypothesis is done.

First it is necessary to discuss reincarnation in the sense of what is *commonly* understood. This does not necessarily match up with anthropology+'s view nor a specific religion's view towards reincarnation. Reincarnation in the modern American sense is

that a soul migrates into this world and inhabits a body for a period of time. The knowledge acquired during this period of inhabitation, the lessons learned, are added to the storehouse of information that the soul has already acquired through past incarnations. When enough lessons are learned, the soul then moves to the next level of existence. Wiccans during the late 1960s and early 1970s called the transition phase (the period of time between incarnations) *resting in the Summerland*. The ultimate goal, then, is to learn enough of life's lessons so that the next level of existence, i.e. a better level of existence, can be attained.²⁵

Of course, there are small variations from group to group but in America this is the general sense.

Prior to the introduction of the "New Age" version of reincarnation, the Germanic view of death was much simpler. Most people would simply die and make the journey to Hel which was basically the Germanic version of Hades, an Underworld. Those dying by violence, usually in battle, died into Hel but spent much of their time or at least some of their time either in Oðin's Hall, or Freya's Hall where they would practice the arts of warfare in preparation for Ragnarök. Their time was paid for in feasting in the evenings. The drowned were landless and were scooped up by Ran. The conditions surrounding the death of an individual determined the soul's destination after death, not the individual's personal choice of a favorite god during life.²⁶ The basis, then, of the concept of a Germanic Afterlife was essentially Hel with warriors being retained for periods of time as a type of post-mortem "national reserves."²⁷ H. R. Ellis-Davidson²⁸ notes this as well.

"This impressive conceptive [of going to Valhalla] caught the imagination of later writers, and it is sometimes assumed that all men hoped to go to Valhalla after death. The literature gives us no reason to assume that Valhalla was *ever* [my

²⁵The preceding information was culled together from the author's conversations with wiccans over the past three decades, from some of Raymond Buckland's and Doreen Valiente's early works (pre-1975), and from discussions taking place between reconstructionists and wiccans on Ásatrú mailing lists over the past decade.

²⁶This statement is well-discussed by Umo Holmberg in *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, 1928, in *Mythology of All Races*, ed. by J. McCollough and in Juha Pentikäinen's "The Dead without Status" in *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies*, 1989, Indiana Univ. Press, ed. by R. Kvideland and H. Sehmsdorf.

²⁷Turville-Petre and a number of other author/ researchers viewed the concept of dying into Valhalla as being a development late in the Viking Age. The idea seems to have continued on into the 1800s in eastern Sweden as reported by Umo Holmberg in *Finno-Ugric Mythology* when he recorded the saying which translates to "To die and to go up is bad, to die and to go down is good." Apparently, even 800 years after the close of the Viking Age, the concept of life after death was basically residing within the folds of the family.

²⁸Ellis-Davidson wrote *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 1976, (Penguin Books, Middlesex, England) in which she gives much attention to death and the afterlife from several different perspectives. It is her contention along with many other scholars that the afterlife of the Germanic people was basically bland until until bands of warriors began to appear in Northern Europe so that by the end of the Viking Age spending at least part of the afterlife for dedicated warriors would be spent in Valhalla.

italics] regarded as a paradise for all; it was peopled by the chosen ones, the *aristocratic warriors* who had worshiped the god on earth. Those who joined Óðin in Valhalla were primarily *princely warriors, kings and distinguished leaders and heroes* who followed the god in life and pledged him their loyal service in return for his help. In the speech of the warrior, Biarki as quoted by Saxo, it is clearly Odin who is referred to when he says:

'War springs from the *nobly born*; famous pedigrees are the markers of War. For the perilous deeds which the chiefs attempt are not to be done by the ventures of the common men. . . No dim and lowly race, no low-born dead, no base souls are Pluto's prey, but he weaves the dooms of the mighty, and fills Plegethon with noble shapes.'²⁹

"It is believed by his kindred [the kin of Thorolf of Most] that he had entered the mountains near his home [Thorolf after his death], and that they would join him there. This is confirmed by the tale of a shepherd, recorded in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, who, after the death of Thorolf's son by drowning claimed to have seen the hill Holyfell standing open, and Thorstein and his crew being welcomed inside by Thorolf amid general rejoicing. In *Landnamabók* such a belief is mentioned regarding other certain mountains in Iceland. The people who are said that they would 'die into the hills' were all connected to Thorolf by ties of kinship or marriage, so that it seems as if we have here a family belief, perhaps brought over from Norway by the pioneer Thorolf himself."³⁰

It is also interesting to note that similar belief has been noted throughout Norway and Sweden up to the present century.³¹ By all indications, the modern phenomenon of dying into the Halls of one's *patron* god or goddess may reflect modern man's need for recognition by the upper-class/gods and a general dissatisfaction with one's true status in life rather than any true early Germanic belief.

As discussed above, the smallest unbreakable unit in the Germanic mind was the family. Death, then, in the Germanic mind is to reunite the newly dead family member with the family. A man dying at sea or on the battlefield were special cases because the bodies of the dead could not be laid to rest in the family graveyard. In a very concrete way, the family graveyard was viewed as the family's entrance to the family's ancestral underworld home and families were to be kept together. Without a corpse to be laid in the ground, it was commonly thought that the soul of the deceased may never be brought back home. Marking the grave like a beacon so that the dead may find their way home may have been the rationale behind erecting certain runestones which reflect that the person being honored had died in a foreign land or at sea. Dying into the family barrow, mound, or in the north of Norway, mountain remained a central concept in Germanic thought of life after death.

Reconstructionists look at the idea of the family being central to Germanic Afterlife and can then make sense out of why a brother's killer was such a special case that it could not even be tried in court. Courts were to provide harmony within a community by forcing an offending family to make reparations to the defending family. In the case of a brother's killer, no reparations can be made because the smallest unit *is* the family. The family will suffer because one member has failed. Families in this situation would often be forced to ostracize the offending member which

²⁹pp. 48-49, *ibid.*

³⁰p. 158, *ibid.*

³¹See Umo Holmberg's *Finno-Ugric Mythology*.

in the long run damages the family and the family line because it is no longer complete. Revenge on the part of the defending member could result in fighting and the loss of luck and standing within both the communities of the living and dead could be great. Understanding these concepts depends entirely on being able to see the family as the smallest unbreakable unit.

Converts to Ásatrú find the shift from seeing the individual as the smallest unbreakable unit up to families. In modern America, the family system has been slowly eroding. No longer does America enjoy the extended family—families are nuclear and mobile. 'Elder' no longer means the oldest living member of the family line, but rather the oldest in the household who has the respect of the younger generation. Along with this shift from family to mini-family (nuclear family), we also see the shift of attention to getting *personal needs* met, *individuals'* rights, gaining *personal* respect. Family members now accept that it their personal right to make their own decisions and the importance of the opinion of the head of the family has faded. American culture sees the individual as being the most important unit. American business supports this, American education, and American philanthropy, so the difficulty making the shift should be understandable.

New converts to Ásatrú often do not understand that Ásatrú has never been about *personal salvation* in any way; the frame of mind of the early Germanic people was about being an upstanding and contributing member of a family. Reincarnation as it is commonly conceived in the western hemisphere is a process by which the individual through a series of incarnations is raised to his or her highest level of good. For the early Germanic, this was to be achieved in a single lifetime and the highest level of good for the common man was to become the elder of the family line; the highest level of good for a king (what we would now call a community leader) was to become the central repository of the community's luck.

"A short time before his death, Ólaf the Elf had a dream. He saw a huge ox rising in Gautland. The ox walked through Ólaf's dominions; he came to every farm and blew on the inhabitants and they dropped dead, even the king himself. Ólaf took this dream to mean that severe pestilence would afflict his kingdom, and that he would die with many others. He ordered his subjects to build a great burial mound when he was dead, and to put him in it in full regalia in his chair, but he asked them not to bring sacrifice to him.

"Thus many years passed and his last wish was ignored. When the crops failed and famine succeeded pestilence, sacrifice was brought to Ólaf for fruitful harvests, and that was why he became the Elf of Geirstaðir.³²

Hálfdan the Black and Hákon the Great had also risen to their highest level of good and were similarly sacrificed to after death. An interesting twist in the tale of Ólaf, however, is that *he believed that he had failed his people*, and told them not to sacrifice to him. He even continued to try to repair his failure *after death* and apparently, after a time, succeeded. Continue to strive to attain the highest level of good either for the family or the community even after death is a common theme through Germanic folklore up to modern times and was even common to American folklore until well into this century.

It is not a common theme in Germanic literature and folklore from the time of the Viking Age to now for certain individuals to be reborn as in the case of Helgi Hundingsbane. There is, however, a common theme which runs through every story where rebirth occurs: the individual has a task which needs to be finished so the rebirth, then, really becomes little more than an extension of the individual's life. Now, understandably, those wishing to defend reincarnation as being at least

³²p. 194, E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 1964, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT

a small part of the early Germanic worldview point out these cases in discussion, but there are several necessary elements missing for this type of 'rebirth' to qualify as support for a belief in reincarnation.

- (1) Rebirth occurs very rarely in surviving Germanic literature and folklore;
- (2) There is no indication of a lingering belief in reincarnation (while there is most definitely a lingering belief in an underworld-afterlife);
- (3) There does not appear to be a set of "lessons unlearned" which prompts the rebirth so much as a set of tasks unfinished;
- (4) Vestiges of complete rebirth do not occur as often as help-from-the-grave by a deceased family member.

None of the above facts from the very same stories used as support for an early belief in reincarnation can support such an interpretation even loosely. A most interesting part of the Ólaf story is that Ólaf the Saint while riding by the howe of the Elf of Geirstaðir was questioned by one of his followers: "Tell me, Lord, were you ever buried here?"³³ However, a simpler and more reasonable interpretation is that the unnamed follower was simply asking if perhaps the Elf of Geirstaðir had left a task undone, and had he been reborn to finish it. Such an interpretation dovetails nicely with what we know about the early Germanic worldview.

2.6. Neither Spiritual Evolution nor Just Rewards. Spiritual evolution is really a by-product of the modern era. It is a searching, a longing, for the *mystical* to be put back into the lives of people. There has been a belief of "This can't be all there is!" or "I certainly deserve better than this!" developing and growing into modern culture since the advent of Christianity in the northern parts of Europe. There is an assumption then that this idea of a better life was present and underlying the early Germanic worldview as well and this assumption becomes then the basis for foreignisms such as not just a belief but a previously unaddressed need for belief to be inserted into modern Ásatrú. The *need* must then be examined.

When we examine the one primary source of spirituality in the ancient texts, we eventually end up focusing on the eddaic poem called the *Hávamál*, The Sayings of the High One. On the surface, the Poetic Edda in contrast to the sagas seems much more *mystical* in that it speaks of gods and their struggles to make and maintain the world, and the *Hávamál* appears to be a code of behaviors which when engaged in should make one more acceptable to the mystical powers that govern the world. Becoming more acceptable then should make one more available to the better life especially after mastering the code itself. Of course, for such an interpretation of the *system* to function correctly, the assumption that something better awaits must be true.

On the other hand, 'spiritual evolution' could have meant something very different to early Germanic peoples. First, what exists in writings, after all, is a collection of tales about the gods. It is important to notice the difference in tone and topic, for example, between the Old English *Cædmon's Hymn* or *The Dream of the the Rood* and eddaic poetry. Now, granted there is some linguistic and structural differences between Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and the same coming from Scandinavia, but there are enough similarities to show that they stem from the same body of literature. The A-S religious poetry, although it seems to have been composed about the same time as some of the eddaic poetry is very different in its sense of spirituality. The focus of the Christian poems is clearly more on an expansive, unseen power through the world with attention to actions committed in this world which will then be judged and rewarded accordingly after death. Looking through the *Hávamál* one gets the sense that the reward of the better is less a matter of a mystical

³³*ibid.*

spiritual reward but an immediate and logical result which takes place very much on the level of consensus reality.

The early Germanic need for spiritual evolution or a reward system may have actually, at least partially been driven by the clash between the older Germanic socio-economic class system and the introduction of Christianity which had a spiritual evolution/ spiritual reward system built into its class-system. By following Christianity, large numbers from the peasant class were guaranteed an equal place in heaven which they most certainly would not attain in this reality; the rewards for the thrall and peasant classes would not only be freedom from pain and suffering after death but also from unfair or unjust land owners. Secondly, from the beginning of the conversion it was made clear to the early Germanics that their *an omnipotent* gods were transient and limited in power and scope while the Christian God was omnipotent, undying, and was *omnipresent*, not in need, therefore, of sacrifice through the community—the Father-Son-Holy Ghost was a personal God which could be approached by anyone equally from the lowest slave to the highest king. Prayer and piety were the great equalizers.

The heathen gods appear in the sagaic literature to be concerned with the function of development and maintenance of community whereas the Christian Jesus was concerned about the individual soul. This personalization does not only seem to have stirred a desire in early Germanics but also shows up in modern Ásatrú as well as many of the other new alternative religions. "I want to have my individual prayer heard by a god who will attend to *me* as an individual." The number of individuals who claim to receive personal messages from the ancient gods of the Germanic north has been growing rather steadily over the past decade. At the beginning of the reconstruction, back in the late 1960s, modern Ásatrú folk were quite satisfied to honor the gods who they felt were controlling or guiding the world. This is consistent with the the A-S term *weorb-shippe* ("the act of honoring the value of"). The approach commonly used now is "common prayer" à la Christianity. Sometime, over the past three decades of the re-existence of Ásatrú, the concepts of

- personal attention from the gods rather than from ghosts or dead ancestors,
- personal messages and wisdom from gods rather than from ancestors,
- a personal place with the gods after death thereby completely bypassing the class-system
- and a general shift from 'community or familial worship' to personal prayer³⁴

have infiltrated from Christianity. It is suspected that these concepts are really part of western man's cultural baggage along with the general distaste for divisions into socio-economic classes. In other words, Christianity has been with western man for so long now that the basic concepts which initially needed to be introduced to the early Germanic people through the drafting and enforcement of the Magna Carta have become an integral and inseparable from the very fabric of Germanic culture. It is almost inconceivable for modern man to think that there are no just rewards after death, that the class system continues after death, and that the "the greatest good" may actually be simply "doing one's best."

Reflecting back on the *Hávamál*, then, the poem does not appear to be a system guiding one's personal interactions with the mysteries of the universe but rather, and much more simply, a set

³⁴Personal prayer directly to gods is encouraged by all authors of Ásatrú "How-to" books. To date, none has even broached the idea that prayer to gods may have been deemed a community affair and that personal prayers should be directed to the next class above the individual. Most, if not all, of these books separate out religion from worldview.

of common-sense guidelines for maintaining social stability within a community and between communities.³⁵ The sense of self was apparently much broader and dependent upon relationships than the more modern concept which is really dependent upon the relationship between an individual and his god(s).

3. CONCEPTS AFFECTING GERMANIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

3.1. Introduction. That Ásatrú is being affected adversely by its close interaction with alternative religions, in particular, wicca, is clearly a bone of contention³⁶ as of this writing. Wiccans in the process of converting wished to be immediately viewed as an insider³⁷ and lay claim that conservative followers of Ásatrú are not following *guest-friendliness* or *hospitality*. It can also be claimed that conservative followers are invoking common sense in being wary of newcomers which although is not one of the so-called Nine-Noble Virtues³⁸ but is a common theme in the *Hávamál* from which the Nine Noble Virtues are taken. Hospitality may prompt one to invite another to his home, but written invitation is definitely not the same as a set of adoption papers.

Conservatives are notorious for asking questions such as “What do crystals or UFOs have to do with Ásatrú?” The defense comes thick and strong often well written with good logical organization. The defenders respond with rhetorical questions “What would Ásatrú look like had it continued uninterrupted into the 21st century?” Both sides make valid points until someone points out that Ásatrú is a religion based solely upon existing lore, everything else is Norse-colored [*insert name of religion*].

Two of the newest concerns are

- (1) Ásatrú should be purged of foreignisms.
- (2) Ásatrú should be broader in scope and needs to be brought up to date.

The first of the two is difficult. Of course, borrowings made over the past 30 years should be relatively simple to track down and eliminate or “tag” so that followers know exactly the history of a certain rite, for example. These intrusions can then be labeled for participants so that no one feels cheated because the authenticity of a portion of a blót is questionable. Gamlinginn, a goði in southern New Mexico enjoys his own particular version of the Hammer-rite³⁹ which involves chanting the spoken lines from the original ÁFA version of the Hammer-rite, but always announces before commencing “I know there’s absolutely no historical precedence for opening the Blót this way, but I just like doing it! If you don’t like it, just ignore it, then!”⁴⁰ Purging intrusions which

³⁵R. I. Page points out in his *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials, and Myths*, 1995, British Museum Press, Avon, UK, that many of the stanzas deal proper relations/ interactions between communities.

³⁶The author has been verbally attacked and chastised on current Ásatrú mailing lists for his conservative views on what constitutes Ásatrú and what does not. Derisive terms utilized are narrow-minded, dogmatic, prejudiced, exclusive, discriminatory, anti-wiccan, anti-new age, xenophobic, and a host of others.

³⁷See Section 2.4 above.

³⁸A condensed version of the *Hávamál* from the Elder Edda initially adopted by the Ásatrú Free Assembly but has of late become rather mainstream. The author believes them to have been originally put together and labeled as the *Nine Noble Virtues* (the “9NV”) by Edred Thorsson during his time with the original ÁFA. The Table below adapted from *Our Troth* lists them out.

Courage	Honesty	Honor
Loyalty	Self-discipline	Hospitality
Industriousness	Independence	Perseverance

³⁹See Section 3.4 below.

⁴⁰In a conversation with the author, Alex who has been Ásatrú since 1968, explained that the chanting sounds to him somewhat like a Gregorian chant and reminds him, in a way, of church during his childhood years.

occurred between the tail end of the heathen age and the time when the Eddas and sagas were finally written down may actually be slightly more difficult in some cases. For example, is dying with the soul going to Valhalla a Christian intrusion? Is the older more authentic version then that all went into Helheim, to the home of their ancestors and then a select few excellent warriors would be chosen at need by Óðin and Freyja to fight in the Ragnarök? These latter questions will most likely remain for many years or perhaps no answer will ever be forthcoming.

The second point is agreed upon by most, but there exist the two proverbial camps of thought:

- (1) There are those who think that Ásatrú should be completely overhauled, starting with a belief in the gods of the Vanir and the Æsir, and working from there cobbling together a religion with completely modern ideas based on modern science as well as alternative healing practices and modern traditions much in the same fashion that wicca has blended with the New Age. In this way Ásatrú would be more compatible with modern western neo-pagan traditions. The problem with this approach is fairly obvious, however, in that the new Ásatrú to be generated would barely be distinguishable from any of the other fairy traditions/ alternative religions which already exist and most certainly would fall away from its definition as a “reconstructed religion.”
- (2) There are conservatives, the author included, who feel that the the body of lore primarily of the Eddas and the sagas should be treated together as a complete worldview⁴¹ which can then be used as a springboard for developing new traditions. This approach would allow Ásatrú to evolve in a manner consistent with the ancient model. The problem would be that much more work will be involved in purging and the very act of developing along completely new lines may actually drive Ásatrú further away from mainstream alternative religions than it already is.⁴²

The rest of this paper deals strictly with the latter approach.

3.2. The Calendar. Now , we shall return to the topic of the calendar which was started in the introduction to this paper. It is important to note that although the calendar has been modified as of 1993, it is really little more than an attempt to legitimize the calendar that was borrowed from wicca 20 years earlier. In *Our Troth* the holidays are given some legitimate history mixed with Christian folk custom and binding by tasteful well-crafted analyses of the northern mythological cycle. Evidence for such a calendar, however, remains non-existent.

The cycle of the year for northern Europeans, especially living close to the Arctic Circle, was and remains to this day to be very dependent on the economic basis of the region. Yule in some of the southern reaches of the Germanic realm fills a tide between December 5th (St. Nicholas’ Day) and January 6th (Three Kings’ Day) while in some of the northern reaches such as the Shetlands it runs from December 20 (possibly reminiscent of Holdastag)⁴³ to Jan. 20th. The difference between the two sets may actually be because Yule was carefully observed during a break in the natural work

⁴¹Really as an *umbrella-worldview* under which there is a large number of variations.

⁴²Under this heading are also two distinct branches: 1) the *pan-Germanic* group whose view is that all the sagas and Eddas combined make up a single worldview, Viktor Rydberg and R. B. Anderson stylized this approach back in the late 1800s, and 2) the *factionalists* who believe the umbrella-worldview to be an artificial construct built out of the recordings of several micro-worldviews; this is an inheritance of ethno-musicologists and cultural anthropologists of the late 20th century.

⁴³Holdastag or Holle’s (possibly an epithet for Frigga) is the Thursday before Christmas on which all work is supposed to have been finished. From this day until the closing of the Yuletide no work is to be done, specifically spinning, weaving, working with nets, etc.

<i>Older Ásatrú—Á.F.A</i>	<i>Ring of Troth</i>
Yule—about Dec. 21	Yule—Dec. 21–Jan.1
Charming of the Plow—Feb. 2	Porrablót—Jan. 19–Jan. 24
Summer Finding—March 21	Idis-Ping—early Feb. ca. the 2nd
May Day—May 1	Ostara—mid-April
Midsummer—about June 21	Waluburg's Night—April 30–May 1
Freyfaxi—August 1	Mid summer—summer solstice
Winter Finding—about September 21	Loaf-fest—Aug. 1
Winter Nights—October 31	Winter-nights—Oct 12–Oct.15

TABLE 5. Original and recent Ásatrú calendars compared.

year for the region. It should also be noted that Hugh Beach in his *A Year in Lapland*⁴⁴ remarks that Yule, i.e. Christmas was rarely celebrated (if at all) during his stay in northern Norway mainly because it interfered with the winter migration of the reindeer. Christmas passed by barely noticed but that February which also brought the return of daylight to Jokkmokk near where he was staying was celebrated for almost the entire month with flea market activity, feasts, parties etc. It would seem that in this case Yule-tide was moved forward to accommodate the reindeer herding lifestyle of the inhabitants. Careful reading of Anglo-Saxon texts also reveal a different *tide* than the three previously mentioned.

Several remarkable things can be said about the northern holiday practices and schedules:

- (1) There does not appear to be an overall calendar for the entire Germanic realm.
- (2) Each region has some holidays which appear to have been its own with its own set of customs. Several of these local sets of customs get added together in *Our Troth* to form the official Ring of Troth calendar.
- (3) Holidays don't appear to have had fixed times based on astronomical, i.e. solar-calendar, markers. They appear rather to have been based on the work cycle.
- (4) Secular activities far outweighed the number of religious activities. Social gathering for feasting, drinking, song and story-telling (often bawdy in content), courting, etc. appear to have been important enough that the holy Mother Church banned much of it (which was blithely ignored).

The calendar, as it stands today, is a clear reminder of some of the origins of modern Ásatrú and also illustrates one of the destructive and fallacious mindsets practiced by early wiccans as well as early Ásatrú: seeking legitimization. Ásatrú, as will be discussed below, is not really needing anything to make it into a viable albeit reconstructed spiritual practice.

A suggestion for modern Ásatrú folk might be to go ahead and eliminate the superfluous holidays down to the *Heimskringla*⁴⁵ set in the above table, then take a look at those times during the local year which seem to be either important events or “natural downtimes” and to use these then as a basis for the creation of a holiday schedule. Areas dependent on specific crops, for example, the

⁴⁴Hugh Beach, *A Year in Lapland: Guest of the Reindeer Herders*, 1993, Smithsonian Institution Press

⁴⁵Snorri Sturluson, trans. by Lee Hollander, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, 1964, Univ. of Texas Press, Austin TX.

<i>Heimskringla</i>
Yule—ca. December—unspecified range
Summer-finding—mid April
Winter-finding—mid October

TABLE 6. Germanic calendar of sacrifice dates according to Snorri.

“chili-roasting” in New Mexico/ Arizona, might provide good timing for an annual feast. Yule can always be adjusted locally to suit that “end of the year break” so long as it incorporates some part of December. The existing calendar is fine as well so long as Ásatrú followers remember its borrowed origin and realize that an agricultural or a fishing year is not the same as the solar-festival year or the pseudo-Celtic Fire-festival year.

3.3. The Hammer-sign. The Hammer-sign came to American Ásatrú early on most likely through Stephan McNallen. Today practice involves "Making the Sign of the Hammer" over food or drink much in the same manner that the priest or reverend would make the Sign of the Cross but with a fist rather than with pointed fingers as a priest would do.

“The simplest means of hallowing food and drink has been practiced at least since the beginning of the Rebirth—the Hammer-Signing. . . . If you are in a mixed family group, or other situations where a large and dramatic Hammer-sign might be a problem, a small and quick version of the gesture can be made.⁴⁶

Now, something as insignificant as the Hammer-sign should not be of any detriment to the religious practice overall, but as we will see later on "Every small piece counts."

There was in an early form as practiced by the Ásatrú Free Assembly as early as 1976, and at that time it was used as part of a self-blessing or self-profession.

“This simple ceremony may be used as a sort of initiation or baptism for those who have decided to profess Ásatrú as their religion. . . .

“Dress simply in a plain robe, or—since this rite will normally be done in complete privacy—wear nothing at all. Nudity, should you wish to use it, will symbolize a new birth, a stripping away of your former religion and conditioning.

“Meditate for a few minutes on the purpose of the ritual, in any position which you are comfortable. Then take up a small vessel of pure water and say

Odin and Thor and Tyr

May this pure and holy water here

Cleanse me from all alien stain

That my mind and heart with our Gods remain.

“Dip the fingers of the right hand in the water and make a fist. Touch the forehead while saying in a clear voice

Odin Give me Wisdom and Inspiration.

“Touch the heart and say

Balder give me Boldness tempered with Goodness.

“Touch the left shoulder and say

Frey give me Plenty and Joy.

⁴⁶pp. 445-46, *Our Troth*, 1993, published privately by the Ring of Troth.

"Touch the right shoulder and say

Thor give me Might and Main.

"Having made the Hammer-sign in this fashion, now address that deity to which [sic] you feel especially close, in words of your own choosing. Close with the sentence

'Now I wish to follow Ásatrú.

"Remain for a few minutes in quiet contemplation."⁴⁷

The above quote clearly betrays both the need that was being addressed by the early Ásatrú in America and the probable origin. First, it should be noted that the quotes taken from *Rituals of Ásatrú* were a reprint of that which was created at the "beginning of the Rebirth" noted in *Our Troth*. Second, the **need** was that of some type of ritualized blessing in the manner of the Catholic Church but identifiable as heathen in nature and meaning. The original Hammer-sign of the "Rebirth" was a *reversed* version of the Sign of the Cross using heathen gods' names instead of the traditional "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

The justification for using the Hammer-sign the fairly well fact that Thor's Hammer was used for blessing, at least in the eddaic poetry, but the hammer-sign itself as a blessing over drink comes from one mention in the sagas:

"King Hákon the Good, a Christian at heart, made the Sign of the Cross over his cup when he drank the libation, but his heathen friends said that he was making the sign of the hammer and dedicating his drink to Thór. The Christian sign might well have been mistaken for that of the hooked cross [swastika, which was sacred to Thór], and the Christian custom of making the sign of the Cross over a drink or a meal, could have lead pagans to hallow their food with a comparable symbol."⁴⁸

The only mention of the use of the hammer-sign during heathen time was actually someone making the sign of the cross. King Hákon was well liked by his followers and was sympathetic to heathens. The king was already Christian when he came to Norway which was still predominantly heathen. The idea of a heavy handed conversion had not yet been set forth (but would be in full swing within a single generation), so his Christianity, for the most part was kept to himself. Because his approach to rule was not to set himself crosswise with the Norwegians and because he sought to have good men at his side, regardless of religion, he was much appreciated and, therefore, defended by his subjects.⁴⁹

It should also be mentioned that Thor's Hammer had always been considered an object which "made things holy" by its touch not only in the Germanic reaches but also in the Baltic and Finno-Ugric reaches as well. That depictions of Thor's hammer are one of the most popular symbols of both ancient and modern heathen practices can not nor should be lessened. The creation of the Hammer-sign, therefore, is completely understandable. In spite of the centrality of the symbol with ancient and modern times, the Hammer-sign is imitation of the Sign of the Cross; it is the re-enacting the actions of a well-liked Christian king engaging in a Christian act. Had it been a heathen act, the king would have required no defense by his retainers.

⁴⁷pp. 25-26 from *Rituals of Ásatrú: Vol. 3 Rites of Passage* by Stephen McNallen in a reprint by World Tree Publications. The original was published by the ÁFA, but after the dissolution in 1983, the rights to the publication of written materials was given over to WT Publ. by S. McNallen.

⁴⁸pp. 84-85 in *Myth and Religion of the North* by Turville-Petre

⁴⁹See Chapter 17 of *The Saga of Hákon the Good*. It is also from this saga that we have some of the finest descriptions of sacrifice in heathen times.

3.4. The Hammer-rite. The Hammer-rite is not only similar to Hammer-signing but it basically came out of the same need and the similar people were instrumental in developing it. The original borrowing of the ceremony was probably by Stephen McNallen, was refined by Edred Thorsson around 1978 and further modified by Kveldulf Gundarsson around 1989.⁵⁰ The most common form, at least in America, is published in *Our Troth* published privately by the Ring of Troth and edited by Kveldulf.

The rationale for the original borrowing and continued has remained the same over the years. In essence, the Hammer-rite is a pre-ceremony declaration of the purpose of the ceremony and that the vé is considered a *friþ*-yard, in other words, weapons and battle-words are to remain sheathed usually under penalty should the declaration be broken. On the other hand, many new-comers enter Ásatrú after a flirtation with the various wiccan religions. The rationale in Wicca (which was taken from ceremonial magic⁵¹) is to *banish* evil spirits and evil minds to a place outside the Circle the border of which is often demarcated by salt. New-comers then often assume that the reason for the Hammer-rite is to *banish* evil which, indeed may have been its original intent by McNallen. We will see later on that this rationale is really not in line with Germanic custom.

The original text from McNallen reads

“To make the Odin-blót, we first perform the gandr banishing. The goði does this by picking up the *gandr*, or rune-staff, and facing North. Raising the staff, he says

Gandr, helga vé thetta ok hindra alle illska!

“He turns to the East, South, and West and repeats this sentence. Each time, as he does this, he vividly imagines a protective wall forming in that quarter, to keep out all harmful forces and all distracting influences. Facing North again, he holds the rune-staff high overhead and intones:

I consecrate and make holy to the service of Odin

this altar and place of sacrifice,

banishing from it all influences which are unholy and impure.

May our minds, in this consecrated place, likewise be consecrated,

as is our will, to the just service of Odin, ancient God of our people.

*As the God Heimdall guards Bifröst Bridge, may this place be warded against all forces unharmonious to our purpose here this day.*⁵²

There are several interesting things happening here. First, the ritual not only imitates the wiccan circle-casting with the mandatory name changes, of course, but we also have here much of the language used within wicca at the time:

- gandr *banishing*
- the use of the terms ‘consecrate’ and ‘banish’
- the four directions (starting with the North of course) and use of the term ‘quarter’
- the ‘raising of the staff’ instead of the wiccan sword
- the sense of filtering out evil influences as well as consecrating the minds of the participants.

⁵³

⁵⁰Gundarsson became the Warder of the Lore for the Ring of Troth in 1993 and still serves in that capacity.

⁵¹see Ronald Hutton’s *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, 1999, by Oxford University Press for a very detailed and fairly complete account of the genesis of Wicca.

⁵²p. 4 in *Rituals of Ásatrú: Vol. 1 Major Blóts* by Stephen McNallen originally published privately and then reprinted by World Tree Publ. in 1985

⁵³We will touch again in Sections 3 & 4 later on.

There are definitely elements from ritual and pomp of the Catholic Church as well as stereotypical elements from what are common to the American mind as to what a mystical ceremony would look like.⁵⁴ The overt evidence of this, of course, is the use of Old Norse to declare *banishment* rather than common English. The use of Old Norse adds *mystery* and effect to what would potentially be a very ordinary sounding declaration. Wicca, itself, is prone to the use of anarchisms for the very same reasons.

Thor's Hammer as an implement of blessing and "making things holy" was brought into the formula sometime around 1978 by Edred Thorsson and when his first book on rune-magic was published in 1984 it appeared in a fairly finalized form.⁵⁵

The following version is the most commonly used today and first appeared in *Our Troth* which was edited by Kveldulf Gundarsson, a protégée and successor to Thorsson as the Warder of the Lore within the Ring of Troth

“The Godwo/man faces North and makes the sign of the Hammer, saying

With Thor's Hammer, ward us in North-ways!

All ill must wend away.

S/he turns to either the Northeast (if s/he likes to hallow the full ætt) or the East (if s/he prefers to use the quarters), and makes the Sign of the Hammer, saying

Wih-Thor's Hammer, ward us in the North-East (or in East-ways)

*All ill must wend away.*⁵⁶

S/he continues in this manner around all eight or four direction, ending by facing North again. S/he traces the sign of the Hammer or swastika above . . . and says

Wih-Thor Hammer, hallow from heavens!

S/he traces the same sign and says

*Wih-Thor's Hammer, hallow from earth's womb!*⁵⁷

S/he stands in full elhaz stance⁵⁸ and says

⁵⁴Americans, like their European cousins, seem to still enjoy engaging in ritual and maintain organizations such as the Masons and the Catholic Church to satisfy the ritual urge. One can easily see the ritualistic elements of the American culture in action by watching the official proceedings of *the House of Representatives* on C-SPAN and then, perhaps, even comparing the behaviors with those from the *House of Commons* from the UK. There are many similarities between the two but the American side of the water is clearly much more conservative in ritual approach than the modern British.

⁵⁵see *FUPARK: A Handbook of Rune Magic*, 1984, Samuel Weiser, Inc.

⁵⁶Another common phrase reflects more the original version and was penned by Edred Thorsson:

Hamar í Norðri, helga vé þetta ók hald vörð (or ók hindra olla illska). This is repeated for all the directions plus "over us" and "under us," i.e. six directions all told.

⁵⁷Certainly as a departure from the standard wiccan formula of the time, the addition of blessing from the heavens and from the earth was an addition by Thorsson and first appears in *FUPARK: A Handbook of Rune Magic*, 1984, Samuel Weiser, Inc. It is not clear from the text how much earlier the rite was conducted in this last most complete form, but somewhere between 1978 and 1984 is suspected mainly because the book was up for a publisher as of 1980. Samuel Weiser agreed sometime during 1983. The basis of the addition is probably either Native American or from later work in ceremonial magic.

⁵⁸The *elhaz* stance is another innovation by Edred Thorsson (See *FUPARK*, 1984) who had studied the texts of the German reconstructionists written during the past century. Historical evidence for "runic stances," *stadr*, is actually very slim. Most likely these were created by German occultists who, in general, also belonged to ceremonial magic orders such as the Golden Dawn, Fraternas Saturni, or the OTO who tended to practice pseudo middle-eastern forms of magical ritual. These fraternities were common from the late 1600s and continue to exist today. These

*From Ases' Garð awesome, from Hella's home deep,
from the worlds ringed around – all might in the Middle-Garð meet!
Hallowed is this stead: no wights may work ill here,
and holy are all within.*⁵⁹

In this final version, the original intent and the origin of the rite still remain clear: nasty things are *banished*, the borders are clearly defined and there is a distinct sense that all inside the “garð,” i.e. the Teutonic version of the wiccan Magic-Circle, are well protected.

3.5. Rune-Reading: The Norse Tarot. Runes as an oracle in reconstructed Ásatrú contrary to common belief was not present from the beginning. Prior to about 1980, runes were treated primarily as a secret alphabet much in the same way that the Theban script⁶⁰ had originally been used by early wiccans. The earliest reference to the use of runes as an oracle that this author has been able to find was in an early book by Doreen Valiente, a co-creator of wicca along with Gerald Gardner, who mentions in an early book that she had learned the reading of runes from an acquaintance in the UK. If there exists earlier source material for the use of runes as an oracle, it is not only unknown to this author but to others as well.

The fascination with runes, however, has quite a long history in occult circles. Edred Thorsson, who is assuredly the creator of “rune-reading in modern Ásatrú,” has done extensive research into the use of runes by the german ceremonial magicians of the late 19th and through the first half of the 20th centuries and has showed where runes were actually viewed as symbols of forces underlying the function of the entire universe—an occult version of the periodic table. Occult groups in Germany had been experimenting with the various rune-rows.⁶¹ There is quite a bit of information regarding the use of runes in folk magic throughout Scandinavia during the Middle Ages as well, but there is no mention of the oracle.⁶² Modern fascination with runes probably came on the tail end of Ace Paperbacks decision to publish very inexpensively Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* which was extremely popular reading on college campuses from late 1968 to 1977. Tolkien, a well-known British linguist, had incorporated the use of runes deep into the plot through his “languages” which he created for the trilogy. This author can remember endless hours of fascination reading the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* and wondering at the possible mystical meaning behind the symbols.

The oracle as is commonly practiced today was initiated by Stephen Flowers aka Edred Thorsson under the auspices of the Ásatrú Free Assembly. This was done by allowing Flowers a forum in their publication (8 times per year consistent with the wiccan-Ásatrú calendar), *The Runestone*,

groups tend to mix occidental forms of magical ritual with alchemy, and western traditions in order to generate new forms of ritual.

⁵⁹pp. 445-46, *Our Troth*, 1993, published privately by the Ring of Troth.

⁶⁰The Theban script appeared in early books on wicca/ witchcraft such as Paul Huson's *Mastering Witchcraft: A Practical Guide for Witches, Warlocks, and Covens*, 1970, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York as “The Secret Alphabet of the Witches.” The name Theban refers, of course, to Thebes lending an air of antiquity to the alphabet but the script seems to have originated in the late medieval or early Renaissance probably in conjunction with alchemy or ceremonial magic. The Theban alphabet seems to have been part of the wiccan tradition since the early 1960s.

⁶¹Runes are often divided into rows usually as a means for identifying the origin of the particular set. The standard is a 24-rune-row, commonly called the Elder Row by modern Ásatrú which is a misnomer since the development of runes can be traced to some degree to a time much earlier than the current dating of the Elder-Row. Runes are generally listed out as having followed certain orders of presentation and there are generally “occult” or secret meaning often attributed to these presentations. The standard order of the Elder-Row is

Frey's Ætt	F	U	Th	A	R	K	G	W
Hagal' Ætt	H	N	I	J	EI	P	Z	S
Tir's Ætt	T	B	Þ ⁶⁰	M	L	Ng	D	O

“Ætt” in this case means ‘family’ or ‘row.’

⁶²See the internet reference to the Icelandic-Sorcery and Witchcraft Exhibition at <http://www.vestfiridir.is/galdrasynning>. Also see Stephen Flowers' (Edred Thorsson's) translation of Icelandic material from known grimoires of the Middle Ages up to the mid-19th century *The Galdrabók: A Icelandic Grimoire*, 1989, Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach, Maine.

for his work which he had originally started in graduate School at the University of Texas. Flowers interest at the time was ceremonial magic, particularly the work of the Germanic aryan magicians from about 1850-1950. As far as anyone knew at the time, Flowers was a brilliant man who was offering a modern oracle consistent with the Germanic worldview as best it was known at the time and based in the lore. The material was never presented by Flowers or anyone else as an ancient oracle.

In 1982, an unknown author, Ralph Blum, published his *Book of Runes*,⁶³ which popularized the *concept* of runes-as-oracle and made the idea of “reading runes” *seem* ubiquitous to modern Ásatrú. In fact many converts to Ásatrú at that time actually found Ásatrú because of their interest in the *history* of runes. Nonetheless, the reaction by Ásatrú at the time of Blum’s publication was that “A non-Ásatrú has no business publishing this material! It is rightfully ours!” Followers of Ásatrú began quickly to drop the idea that the runic oracle was a new creation based on the lore from their arguments. From that time onward, modern Ásatrú has made arguments to claim the “ancient” *right to rune-reading*, even though it was introduced as a modern creation less than four years earlier.

For members of the time, the publication of the *Book of Runes* was an invitation to battle for conceptual territory. This was the first time in a decade of reconstruction that Ásatrú had been bested at the borrowing game, and, as a consequence, most of the early books published on the coat-tails of Edred’s first published work in 1984⁶⁴ mentioned many of the perceived “fallacies” of Blum’s work. The Ásatrú community of the time felt somewhat vindicated when Blum later admitted publicly that he knew nothing of Ásatrú or that he had tread on ‘sacred territory.’

The perpetuation of the idea probably stems mostly from a desire to be participating in an ancient rite. Often, newcomers to Ásatrú will cite Tacitus’ *Germania* to back the idea that rune-reading is ancient:

“To divination and the lot, they pay as much attention as anyone: the method of drawing lots is uniform. A branch is cut from a nut bearing tree [commonly hazel, beech, or oak] and divided into slips: these are distinguished by certain marks and spread casually and at random over a white cloth: afterward, if the inquiry is a public one, the priest of the state, or if private, the father of the family⁶⁵ makes prayers to the gods and with eyes turned to heaven takes up one slip at a time until he has done this on three separate occasions, and after taking the three interprets them according to the marks which have already been placed on each.”⁶⁶

This is, indeed, the method suggested by Edred Thorsson in his early writings for engaging in rune-reading except that at the time of Tacitus *proto-runes* had not yet evolved into runes and rune-reading as an oracle would not be invented for another 2000 years.

Since 1985 most converts to Ásatrú have passed through wicca and have at least introductory knowledge of the tarot. The effect of this is obvious in numerous articles and books which have been written since 1985 on the reading of runes.

- Most speak in terms of the antiquity of the runic oracle.
- Most use “layouts” which is common to tarot but is hardly obvious from the reading of Tacitus.

⁶³Published by St. Martin’s Press, New York. It came as a book bundled with a set of 25 “runestones” (runes carved into 25 baked clay cookies). The 25th was the notorious “blank rune.”

⁶⁴Edred Thorsson, *FUPARK: A Handbook of Rune Magic*, 1984, Samuel Weiser, Inc.

⁶⁵See Section 2.4 for remarks regarding the proper choice of class for such prayers.

⁶⁶p. 109, C. Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. by H. Mattingly, 1948 publ. by Penguin Classics, London.

- Many change the meaning for upright vs. reversed runes.
- Rune cards are now the most popular form of rune-oracle tools.

Although Thorsson had suggested utilizing an ancient form of lot-throwing similar to what Tacitus describes, the idea didn't catch on probably because lot-throwing is much too commonplace, i.e. "flipping a coin" but also does not have the air of mystery about it that reading the ancient symbols does. Lot-throwing and other Germanic forms of divination which have a historical basis in the lore such as regarding the movements of horses, the songs of birds and other signs and omens remains a large rather blank area in modern Ásatrú and is sadly unexplored as being uninteresting. Perhaps had Tolkien written about mystical lot-throwing and the magic of bird-song in his appendices to the *Lord of the Rings* and had Blum written the *Book of Horse sounds and Movements*, modern Ásatrú would have had a very different look today.

3.6. SeiðR: The Effect of Neo-Shamanism on the Germanic Worldview. Neo-shamanism probably more than any foreign addition to the reconstruction of Ásatrú is altering not only Germanic worldview but also the worldview of many other alternative religions. The generic cosmology offered by what is called Harner-style shamanism has been *decontextualized* so that it can be plugged into any cultural setting much like a plug-and-play video card can be added to a computer. Harner's own rationale for doing this is so that the experience of shamanism which he feels to be one of the most important discoveries of the 20th century can be had by anyone desiring it regardless of his religious or cultural background. The decontextualization also makes Harner-style shamanism into a useful tool for helping shamanistic cultures regain the skills which they may have lost over the past century and to the Foundation for Shamanic Studies credit, they have indeed re-sparked interest in the "old ways" among several Native American tribes, the Samí, Mongolians, Tuvans, and in several areas in South America. To this end, the general approach is to send in a team who will research the culture's cosmological model, collect any remaining evidence of shamanism (often by putting together small conferences inviting all who have been known to have participated in the lost art in any capacity—assistant to the shaman, patient, children of shamans, etc.), then they spend a large amount of time help the indigenous people reconstruct and rebuild the practice and to ensure its continuing into the future, will also help rebuild the original (if possible) methods for election/ selection and training of new shamans. Although there are numerous obvious hazards to such a job, it is a noble cause.

However, what happens when well meaning attendees of two single-weekend workshops begin to re-establish "shamanism" into a culture which 1) is in the process of being reconstructed, and 2) shows no real evidence of ever having been a shamanistic culture? The process of reconstruction then becomes a confabulation with a direction different than its original intent of reconstructing the original, and the very foundations of the worldview can be undermined so that the cosmological is completely altered affecting then how practitioners approach utilizing the cosmological model.

The first position from those who would defend an intrusion such as the introduction of neo-shamanism into a reconstructed worldview such as Ásatrú is "If we can agree that neo-shamanism in and of itself is basically a good thing, then how can it possibly be a bad thing to combine it with Ásatrú? We have only to benefit, and nothing to lose, really."

If Ásatrú is viewed as a reconstructed religion, then it has everything to lose: Ásatrú is the revival (in the literal sense) of a traditional worldview. Combining this tradition with another generates a third. Ásatrú is the refurbishing of an original Stradivarius if we can use the metaphor. The great experiment is to bring back to life an original traditional instrument, a worldview, which can then be used by adherents to engage in the 'tunes' of life. The rebuilding is well-enough underway so that

the instrument is completely functional although it still requires touch-up in the details. To change anything fundamental, such as a top, a back, or a scroll, would be to alter the original. Certainly, the instrument would still be functional and may actually play better (according to modern standards), but the value, the *weorþ* ('worth') of the instrument has been lessened drastically—it is no longer a *Strad*, but a violin with some Stradivarius parts, just another generic instrument with a few good quality parts. What makes a Stradivarius valuable (besides its beautiful, evenly balanced intonation in the hands of a master) is that it was put together by an ancient master: the top was chosen to go with this specific back which was added to the neck, and so on. A Strad is a Strad not because of its functionality (computers can now imitate Stradivari's tonal quality), but because it was built by centuries of experience and brilliant choices by a large number of fine craftsmen (woodcutters, toolmakers, loggers [transporters of logs], apprentices, and assistants all passing through the mind and hands of a single master of his art. Followers of Ásatrú are *rebuilders* and *reconstructionists* as opposed to imitators or creators. The *weorþ* of Ásatrú is its genuine antiquity.

The second position by the defenders: "Well, exactly how can Harner-style shamanism affect an already established cosmology? After all, it has helped any number of indigenous cultures re-establish themselves—it was made to *overlay* onto various cultures without affecting the culture directly. It is like religious make-up which should *enhance* the beauty already there."

The problem is not with Harner-style shamanism. Neo-shamanism is a neutral system and it appears to be very beneficial to its adherents and clients alike.⁶⁷ The problem develops when enthusiastic practitioners with little or no experience with different worldviews begin to apply their new found knowledge to foreign worldviews. Contrary to common new age belief shamanism is not universal nor is the worldview that it espouses universal in any way although there are some common threads which apply to a large number of shamanistic cultures. Also contrary to common new age belief, Harner-style shamanism **does** have a cosmology, a worldview, which has been trimmed and tailored to fit the modern, western European worldview. The reason that the Foundation for Shamanic Studies hand-picks a team to work with indigenous people such as the Tuvans is to help prevent the indigenous worldview from being overwhelmed or overtaken by a non-indigenous belief system by making sure that those working with the indigenous population are careful about not introducing techniques and beliefs foreign or non-compatible with the original. Additionally, it must be acknowledged from the outset that the indigenous shamanism is specific and restricted by cultural boundaries, social relationships/ class system, social function function of the shaman and indigenous worldview. Without this type of respect being paid directly to the culture being addressed, the risk is modifying the culture perhaps even irreversibly.

This leads to the fallacy that cultures are *strong* and that *conservatism* will help retain and protect it from onslaughts from the outside. While it is true that a culture exhibits certain strengths particularly for those who are defined by it, but the *strength* should not be confused with *resistance to change*: cultures are fluid and constantly in a state of flux—change is ongoing. Change is inevitable. However, who has the right to change a worldview? Many new age neo-tribal folk,

⁶⁷Robert Wallis, *Shamans/ NeoShamans*, 2003 [Routledge, London] has written a very informative book defining neo-shamanism and its place in modern culture but also reviews problems which have occurred over the past three decades when neo-shamanism comes into conflict with conventional belief systems, governmental duties regarding land and sacred sites and most importantly with native shamanistic cultures such as Native Americans, South Americans, and Asian cultures. The overlaying of neo-shamanism onto Celtic and Germanic reconstructed worldviews is discussed from a historical perspective and from a modern functional point of view; however, the *effect* that neo-shamanism has on reconstructed worldviews is not discussed directly. That is the purpose of this paper.

neo-shamans, and followers of religions such as wicca deny any responsibility for introducing foreignisms into indigenous cultures by stating that they are simply participating in what is already inevitable. Native peoples the world over, however, are beginning to refuse to *share their secrets*:

“[W]e must maintain the privacy of many of the elements of our beliefs and customs in order to preserve the strength and substance of our culture. There are things about Pueblo life which can only be discussed within our culture for this reason. *We ask that you respect this privacy* [my italics]... There are still many more elements of our lives which we are pleased to share.

(Introductory panel ‘Our Land, Our Culture, Our Story,’ Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM)⁶⁸

Natives have slowly come to the realization that while change is inevitable, that they themselves may act as the guiding force in helping change take place. Indeed, it would seem that traditional cultures are picking up and acting on the insider/ outsider class system which for a long they had been encouraged to drop *because class systems are politically incorrect*.⁶⁹

The third position is “Well, I cannot see how the Germanic worldview has been altered! Neo-shamanism a lá Harner is just a set of techniques.”

Harner style shamanism is devoid of cultural ties but it certainly is not devoid of a cosmological view. It clearly divides the universe into upper-, middle-, and lower-worlds. The existence of gods in the sky apparently came originally from Christianity into the recordings of the early Germanic myths but is now being perpetuated by the addition of neo-shamanism. There doesn’t seem to have been good evidence for gods in the sky prior to the conversion.⁷⁰ Neo-shamanism also utilizes power animals (in Ásatrú this becomes confabulated with *fylgia*—a type of personal guardian which often appears in an animal shape that according to folklore is generally a domestic animal, though not always, and that the animal best matches the individual’s personality) which are foreign to the Germanic worldview.⁷¹

The fourth position is the oldest of all positions. It is the positions that many of us used in the very beginning as a rationale to *borrow bits and pieces* from wicca and other alternative religions as well as from traditional sources such as Native Americans: “The worldview of Ásatrú is sadly incomplete. We must supplement it to fill those obvious blank spots.”

The most obvious and least asked question is “How do we *know* that the heathen Germanic worldview is incomplete?” An example taken from the Hammer-Rite⁷² is that we know

- (1) Early Germanic peoples marked specific areas off by rock or rope & hazel rod boundaries;
- (2) Size and shape of space seems to have varied with the *purpose* of the space;⁷³
- (3) The *eldest*⁷⁴ blessed the grounds and declared an enclosure of *friþ* (peace).

⁶⁸p. 219, Robert Wallis, *Shamans/ Neo-shamans*, 2003, Routledge, London.

⁶⁹see Section 2.4 above.

⁷⁰See Section 2.3 above

⁷¹See H. K. Sehmsdorf and R. Kvideland eds. *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, 1988, Univ. of Minn. Press, Minneapolis for examples of and discussions of personal guardian spirits, the belief in which continued apparently until the late 1800s.

⁷²See Section 3.4 above.

⁷³Investigations of the spaces for *holmgang* (a duel), a *Ping* (court of law), and a feast were all varied in size—shape is never defined. Marking the boundaries seems to have more to do with where weapons were allowed and where they were not. *The Viking Achievement* [Foote and Wilson] is a good source for the type of information.

⁷⁴See Section 2.4 for a definition of *Elder* depending on the circumstances of the particular occasion. Most likely family gathering were handled by elder of the family (eldest ranking insider); community council was probably and

The borrowings then involved including various things that were felt to be missing:

- circle-shaped space
- marking of the quarters (or ætts or a rune-ring)
- space is magically protected from outside evil influence
- using a magical tool (sword, *gandr* [rune-wand], *seax* [short Anglo-Saxon sword], *recels* [AS for “incense”]), etc. for describing the boundary
- invocatory recitation to quarters for protection

These are quaint additions, but are they really necessary? Are the original data incomplete or were they simply deemed incomplete because they were not complex, i.e. because wiccans had a more elaborate ritual? Is there evidence that more pomp and ceremony were necessary to be consistent with Germanic tradition? Looking at the evidence from heathen times it would seem that a simple declaration of boundaries, intent for use, and of peace by the eldest was all that would be necessary. Heathens were noted to be respectful of such declarations judging by descriptions and anecdotal information regarding the legal system; pomp and ceremony appear to have been adopted in imitation of the Christian royal courts and in imitation of the church ceremonies. The original three items above may not look to be much, but they are the best description that we have and they are consistent with the Germanic worldview that a legal declaration of *friþ* was good enough for man, beast, and ghost.

Are the descriptions of *seið* enough for re-creation of the practice. Of course, neo-shamanists disagree, but there exists good description of the types of acts accomplished by seið-folk, description of the places where seið was worked,⁷⁵ and linguistically we have the meaning of *magic being worked*.⁷⁶ The actual descriptions of seið which have been passed down through manuscripts would indicate a form of sorcery indigenous to the Germanic people which could include working with ghosts, weather-spirits, disease, magical weaponry which would include using ghosts to do the seiðman’s bidding, manipulation of the minds of people or animals, and necromancy. Travel in spirit (possibly borrowed from the Samí⁷⁷) is mentioned in several places—spirit travel was either to another geographical region or up in the air to do battle with other *Finns*. There is no mention whatsoever of upper-, middle-, lower-world type geography beyond that already described in Section 2.3 above.

Neo-shamanism in the past decade is resulting in significant changes in the heathen Germanic worldview. These changes are really a distraction and a movement away from Ásatrú as a reconstructed religion, and even though many claim to have found support in the lore for something similar to neo-shamanism, the fact is that the worldview presented by neo-shamanic practitioners remains mostly inconsistent with the ancient worldview. Many newcomers much more prefer the complexity and eclecticism of other alternative religions and prefer to color that religion in Norse history possibly because historical fact adds an air of legitimacy to a synthetic religion. These prefer

elected officer, goði, for the purpose of such blessing/ declaration; kingdom by the king; national court (such as in Iceland) by the Allsherjargoði

⁷⁵Refer to Marwick’s work on the Shetlands and Orkneys. Magic, obviously carried over from the heathen as judged by the recited material, was performed in “in-between places,” i.e., on the land between high and low tide (“neither land nor sea”), in a cave (“neither buried nor above ground”), at twilight (“neither day nor night”), etc. A platform or on the roof (against which there were laws) is “neither on the earth or in the air.”

⁷⁶Personal Communication from Asatru-L mailing list from native Icelandic and Danish speakers “SeiðR refers to ‘magic or magical’ but has nothing to do with *trance* . . . ‘trance’ is defined as in the modern German *Unbewußtsein*=‘without consciousness.’ ca. 1995 during a discussion on seið=trance.

⁷⁷See Thomas DuBois’ *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, 1999, Univ. of Penn. Press, Philadelphia, for a discussion of the relationship between the Samí and the early northern Germanic peoples.

the name *Ásatrú*, on occasion, for the same reason. However, can these really be deemed *Ásatrú*? The question is difficult, unless followers of *Ásatrú* pull back and lay in the idea that *Ásatrú* is a reconstructed religion, but in doing so, followers will have to bear accusations of exclusiveness, discrimination, narrow-mindedness, and favoritism.

4. TOWARDS A RESURGENCE OF GERMANIC SPIRITUALITY

4.1. The Importance of Context. When one thinks about *Ásatrú*, in general, one thinks of rune-reading, blóts, traditional Germanic costuming with swords and amber trinkets, seiðr, mystical rites partially in a high sounding foreign language, but Germanic spirituality at least the way it has been passed down in the existing lore is far more subtle and far less mystical than it is generally made out to be. The hope of many newcomers, but also the hope of many who were with *Ásatrú* from the very beginning, is that *Ásatrú* would be able to hold its own alongside some of the great religions of the world, and this may be true indeed but it seems to have more in common with the subtleness of Taoism or Zen than with the pomp of the Catholic Church or the grandiosity of wicca which were the two original models at the beginning of the reconstruction.

The approach to Germanic spirituality for the past two decades has been primarily through the “trappings of *Ásatrú*,” i.e., the blóts, through rune-reading, and now more recently through seið. While it may work to approach some modern religions this way, most religions that are based in historical tradition must be approached in a different manner. Native Americans have learned this lesson well. Since the early 1960s, there has been a growing interest in Native American religions. It is presumed that this has taken place since American culture through a process of homogenization has lost its cultural approaches to spirituality. Many Americans to regain what they sense had been lost from their own culture found the Native American sense of ceremony fascinating and so began to imitate the sweat lodge, the pipe ceremony, the sundance, peyote ceremonies and the like. At first this appears to have been encouraged by many Native Americans and with a feeling of elation cried out, “Someone is finally taking an active interest in our way of life!” It was long before Native Americans discovered that it wasn’t the Native American *way of life* that was so interesting to white America, it was the glitz and glamor of participating with feathers, herbs, and pipes bought rather collected or made. Americans weren’t interested in the Native American way of life, and therewith the pain, just the glamor of a alien sounding names such as DragonWillow or SunWolf. To change an entire way of life is much too difficult. Native American elders began to refuse. The general feeling was that ceremony is an expression of culture and white America sought ceremony without the burden of culture.

A worldview is a very difficult thing to change and there is speculation that it cannot be completely changed. A large part of the problem stems from one’s not being able to see his own culture’s worldview. Culture is buried deep in the individual and cannot really be discussed easily mainly because words and language, in general, are built *on top* of one’s own culture; culture is hidden far below language and analysis.

“Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function. However, like the purloined letter, it is frequently the most

obvious and taken-for-granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways.”⁷⁸

It has been speculated that the only real way one can confront his own culture even in small ways is through what is commonly called the “culture-clash,” and even this most Americans find difficult because the assumption then jumps forth “This obviously isn’t *right!* *They* obviously are unable to see the *facts* because if they did *they* wouldn’t act in this manner!” Americans like many others who are not accustomed to living among more than one culture are very “culture-centric” and on top of that Americans are often blind to the fact that they are “culture-centric.” It is because of the strength of American culturocentricism that Buddhism, yoga, belly-dance, Chinese-cooking and the like must be americanized before passing the American palate.

Jumping into Ásatrú, or any other traditional religion, takes time. Acculturation to living in a foreign country even if the individual desires to “think like a native” cannot happen within a few short years. Some never are able to make the necessary leap. The author has lived in a small traditionally Hispanic town of the American southwest for the past 20 years. The culture continues to be strong with at least 25% of the population as Spanish speaking only and although some of the overt traditions are dying, the culture in this area still forms the very ground for the way people think about law, justice, religion, insiders vs. outsiders, familial relationships, and which topics are proper in conversation. Outsiders have a very difficult time adapting to this town. Heroin-trafficking, being on welfare, fights (either armed or unarmed), truancy and not finishing high school, alcoholism, children smoking cigarettes, children living with their parents until the age of forty, and dying at a young age were almost never topics of conversation 20 years ago, and they were considered by the locals *not* to be unusual. Two and a half years in jail was deemed by the community to be a normal sentence for murder. Outhouses, wood-stoves, living in an adobe house were (and still are) considered to be healthy. Witches are to be killed, *curanderas* to be seen before doctors, owls were evil, *La llorona* walks the *acequias* and *lherbas* should always be used before pills. Ósha keeps away rattlesnakes, salamanders will crawl into a woman’s vagina if the woman goes swimming, *San Antonio* will find lost car keys, centipedes will crawl through a small hole in the skin up to the heart and kill a man, and always wear a hat and long sleeves. A person “turns on a cigarette,” “gets on the car,” “closes the light,” “burns a man’s mind” (instead of ‘jerking his chain’ or ‘convincing’ depending on the conversational topic). Children and the elderly do not have to use “please,” or “thank you” nor do they have to wait their turn in conversation. All family decisions are decided finally by the grandparents. Anglos are not to see *Los Hermanos de la Luz*, or the *morada*. Many cannot make the adjustment to understanding the natives here and choose to leave after a few years; others move into the area, insisting that thinking here is “backwards” a build up a personal crusade to set things right. After 20 years, this author is still learning about the cultural indoctrination of the first 27 years of his life, discovering those things which lie far below language and logic.

4.2. The Importance of Historical Fact. The title of this section is “The Resurgence of Germanic Spirituality.” This statement probably needs to be slightly refined. Most converts are not looking for spirituality; what they are really looking for is *mystery* or *mysticism*. For the purpose of this paper, however,

spirituality: should be regarded as a set of *actions* which would best align the individual with his gods, his community, and his family thereby increasing his value (*weorþ*) and his luck.

⁷⁸p. 17, Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 1981, Anchor Books, New York.

Granted, there are mystical actions which come through the lore, such as *seið* and leading a blót, and these are quite attractive to some, but the focus of this paper has been to eliminate those things which are foreign to Ásatrú (or at least make removable) and these (*seið* and blót) have been areas of high interest which have also become the most confabulated. Conversely, building a solid worldview from the outset will promote growth in all areas of Ásatrú which will neither be a stylized imitation of wicca nor will it have large gaps which will require borrowing from other religions.

Understanding the Germanic spiritual heritage is not a matter of simply reading the mythology of the Norse. First, it is important to understand the economic base of the ancient Germanics, the community structure, and the processes by which the communities were held together. One must also adopt the Germanic sense of relationships between the individual and the world and responsibility to family and community. Back in the mid-1960s at the beginning of the exodus to alternative religions many were removing themselves from their traditional churches as an act of rebellion against mainstream family values, the values of the governmental, legal and corporate establishments, and against organized religion. Ásatrú's first clash with alternative religion then was that it had stressed family and community from the outset. The Odinist Committee, an Ásatrú organization back in the 1970s created what was probably the first edition of the so-called Nine Noble virtues which they called the Nine Charges and are reproduced as follows:

- (1) To maintain candour and fidelity in love and devotion to the tried friend; though he strike me, I will do him no scathe.
- (2) Never make a wrongsome oath: for great and grim is the reward for the breaking of a plighted troth.
- (3) To deal not hardly with the humble [meaning 'submissive' or 'having a low opinion of one's self'—*BL*] and the lowly.
- (4) To remember that respect is due to [those of] great age.
- (5) To suffer no evil to go unremedied and to fight against the enemies of family, nation, race and faith: my foes I will fight in the field nor be burnt in my house⁷⁹
- (6) To succor the friendless but to put no faith in the pledged word of a stranger people.
- (7) If I hear the fool's word of a drunken man, I will strive not: for many a grief and the very death groweth from out of such things.
- (8) To give kind heed to dead men: straw dead, sea dead, or sword dead.
- (9) To abide by the enactments of lawful authority and to bear with courage the decrees of the Norns.

The Charges are based on the rules of life indicated by the High Song of Odin and in the Lay of Sigurd in which the Valkyrie gives counsel to Sigurd.⁸⁰

The strong sense of family and community are to be noted.

A word needs to be brought up here about the word 'race' in Charge #5 above. These 'charges' were originally drafted in the late 1960s at a time when civil rights were a major public issue and newly formed anti-discrimination policies were being handled in such a way that non-minorities were scared of becoming jobless, losing quality of education, at a time when the USA was morally

⁷⁹Presumably, this should read "My foes will I fight in the field; I will not be burnt in my house" or "My foes will I fight in the field [they'll] not be burnt in my house."—*BL*

⁸⁰Taken from the *The Religion of Odin: A Handbook*, 1978, published privately by the Ásatrú Free Church, Viking House, in Redwing, Minnesota.

divided over the VietNam conflict, and at a time when Charles Manson, the Watts' riot, and the Detroit riot were major headlines. A large percentage of the population believed *those people*, whether they were Jews, African-Americans, hippies, military, corporate, or government were the cause of the nation's ills. A large number shouted *we* [name of a group] are not the problems, it is *those* [name of other group] who are causing [name of problem]. Indeed, remarks such as #5 above resulted in attracting separatists, segregationists and, a little later on in the 1980s, neo-Nazis, but these have generally remained in the minority, nevertheless it angered or scared non-Ásatrú to think that a 'race-war' might be in the brewing stage.⁸¹ For most Ásatrú, though, the phrase simply meant decanting "Germanic cultural heritage" from the American and English melting pots and sorting out the Germanic from the lees, and then maintaining the purified spiritual heritage once attained. It was basically felt that "If we know where we hail from, we can know and celebrate who we are." The racial issue still haunts the Ásatrú email list to this day.

Taking a lesson from Native Americans who have been exposed to the insensitive neediness of the melting pot American who has been taking from Native America for purposes of either imitation, exploitation or both, to truly bring Germanic spirituality into its own, it is necessary that one understands the very foundations of the Germanic culture because the blót, the sumble, and seiðr are *expressions* of that culture, and the building blocks of the Germanic worldview begin with understanding the relationships between family and community. The relationships between the family and its ancestors or between the community and the gods, then is a natural expression of the culture. Without culture there is no religion.

Early Germanic communities were agrarian, for the most part, supplemented by fishing and hunting with industry being primarily metal-working, boat and house building; specialization was developing but was still at a fairly primitive level. They were basically collectives of independent, and self-sustaining estates, and each estate was essentially a small community unto its own with its own class system, sets of rules for interacting between classes complete with repercussions for infractions. And, communities were geographic with real physical boundaries (rather than *like-thinking*) and often were of mixed religions (heathen cults and Christian) and dialects. The primary form of rule with a community was the *byalag*, the community elders, or were sometimes lorded over by a king. Each community was separate from the next, for the most part, with its own sets of conduct, codes for proper dress, action, art, and punishments for infraction.

A single, extended family lived on a piece of land held by the entire family but governed by the elders. Its livelihood was dependent upon the family's proper interaction with the land from an ecological standpoint. It was also realized that the family also was dependent on good decisions having been made by the generations gone before, the ancestors, and its continued existence would be dependent upon good decisions being made in the present. This is the basis of a very real but

⁸¹Although white supremacists make up a minority of the followers of Ásatrú as they do in any other religion in the United States and Europe, it should be noted by the reader that the percentage of Ásatrú who were also white supremacists may have been as high as 20% at one time (probably between 1975-1980). The high percentage has angered many Ásatrú and does even to this day and these often are vehemently and verbally anti-Nazi. This author maintains that followers of Ásatrú should remain ever vigilant regarding any form of discrimination based on such irrational ideation as race, creed, gender, or cultural heritage. Attempts to disentangle the Germanic cultural heritage from the current melange will automatically generate a fine line between the celebration of cultural heritage and discrimination, recognizing that line and avoiding rash generalizations/ discrimination is the personal responsibility of each individual.

unamed Germanic spiritual philosophy which in modern Ásatrú has come to be known commonly as *wyrd*.⁸²

Rather than discuss the derivation of the term, *wyrd*,⁸³ it is far more practical to speak in terms of “luck” which appears to be how the ancients viewed the concept. For the early Germanic people “luck,” i.e. ‘good fortune,’ was not mystical, for the most part, but was the direct result of one’s starting point in life modified by the quality of one’s actions during life, and that one’s starting point in life was dependent on decisions made by and actions taken by the generation before. If one’s father was fairly wealthy and was highly respected in the community, one’s starting point was good so long as one carried on those traditions left by the father. However, if one’s father was a poor scoundrel, one’s starting point might have been ‘poor,’ but luck *could be reversed* through the taking of proper action during life.⁸⁴

The *high-mystical spiritual life* of a family appears to have been quite a bit different and much simpler and plainer than newcomers to modern Ásatrú would have it. Since the conversion to Christianity a millennium ago, it is quite customary for individuals to think that they retain the right to pray directly to a god: this was the gift of Christianity to the lowly heathen. Reading through the sagaic literature, however, reveals that most families were directly beholden to their ancestors, *disir*⁸⁵ and, local land- or farm-beings; folklore recorded later.⁸⁶ Worship of gods was done as a community activity under the guidance of a *goði* chosen (by various means depending upon the bent of the particular community). Individuals during heathen times were even less inclined to go directly to a god for advice or help—this all changed with the conversion to Christianity, a religion which offered any individual *personal* salvation. Now the gift that Christianity is being carried back into heathen tradition by those unaware of the proper *relationships* between people and things.⁸⁷

Modern Americans often have a difficult time understanding *peasantry*. ‘Peasant’ for most Americans is almost treated the same as ‘slave.’ Most Americans are from a middle class rather than a lower class (especially those coming newly to Ásatrú), are from suburban or urban areas rather

⁸² *Wyrd* is a concept that is bandied about as theory and philosophy. The modern concept was basically defined by Paul C. Bauschatz in *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*, 1982, U. of Mass. Press, and has been expanded upon first by Brian Bates in *The Way of Wyrd; Tales of an Anglo-Saxon Sorcerer*, 1983, HarperCollins, San Francisco. Since that time, *wyrd*, has become the standard term for a philosophical theory which has become as complex as *karma*.

⁸³ *Wyrd* as a theory is discussed in depth in numerous articles in *Iðunna*, the official journal of the Ring of Troth, and in any number of books by Kveldulf Gundarsson or Edred Thorsson. Searching <http://www.google.com> with *wyrd+“Ring of Troth”* results in a large number of hits.

⁸⁴ The primary sources of information for the above two paragraphs were V. Moberg’s *A History of the Swedish People*, (two volumes), 1970, trans. by Paul Britten Austin; Dorset Press, New York and Foote and Wilson’s *The Viking Achievement*, 1970, Sidgwick and Jackson, London.

⁸⁵ Possibly related to the “Mothers” of eastern Swedish Yule tradition, the *disir* (plural) seem to have been demi-goddesses (probably female ancestors) who were worshiped within the family and were deemed to be the bearers of the family’s luck. The *kynfylgja*, a female guardian ghost, may have been closely related to the *disir* or may actually have been one of them.

⁸⁶ See Marwick (*ibid.*) or Kvideland and Sehmsdorf (*ibid.*) for anecdotal literature regarding the continued worship of land- and farm-beings. It would appear that local belief varied but that at times these beings were also regarded as ancestors and were deemed to be integral to the maintenance of the luck of the farm.

⁸⁷ One set of books that discusses very well this small but very significant detail of how the common man’s relationship to the world has changed since heathen times Vilhelm Moberg’s *A History of the Swedish People* (two volumes), 1970, trans. by Paul Britten Austin; Dorset Press, New York. What is unique about Moberg’s books is that Moberg’s family had been of the Swedish peasantry since heathen times and he makes no pretense about his family’s past.

than from the farm, are from nuclear families rather than from extended families where the elders govern, and have lived within Christian-based culture their entire lives. Additionally, American culture stresses the importance of the individual and his title rather than the importance of community or of the individual's standing within the community. Bearing the background of the average newcomer to Ásatrú in mind and also the fact that both Europe and the New World have more than a 1000 years of Christian indoctrination, it is quite understandable, then, that most worship is directed at the gods, and that if any heed be given to ancestors, *disir*, or local guardians, it is only cursory and generic in content.

If Ásatrú is to be reconstructed, the family rather than the individual must be regarded as the smallest unit. Historically, the individual is important only in the sense of how much he or she can bring to the family. Age, experience, and wisdom were the three virtues which advanced one higher into the ranks within the family. The individual was responsible for himself and the ranks below him, and was responsible *to* those in the rank immediately above him. Most importantly, the individual had know exactly *where he stood* in rank to be able to act appropriately. This is the *context* which has been lost and must be at the very foundation of the overall reconstruction process.

As the *context* of **family**, requires special attention in the modern world for the reconstruction to work, so does the concept of **community**. Germanic heathens were community minded, but special note should be taken that each community functioned with its own sense of interfamilial relationships, relationships between the individual or individual family and the community elders and the *style* in which the community would be governed whether as a democracy, representational republic, or as a kingdom. In any case, the elders of the families basically came together and formulated plans for the community (really a collective of families) much in the same manner as was done at the family level. The primary concerns again were to support and maintain the luck of the community and to protect the community from outside forces which would undermine the integrity of the community and carry away its luck. All families within a community were expected to participate.

Friðr is a concept which is quickly disappearing from modern American culture. Normally, the idea is translated as *peace* but it also carries the connotation of working together towards a common good. In fact, as an adjective of the word translates as 'good, peaceful, beautiful or fair.'⁸⁸ Sets of rules for interactions and mediation between families were necessary and these became the first legal codes in the north of Europe. Much attention was given to these codes because it was understood that the *friðr* as well as the general health of the community depended on it. Forces from the outside which sought to destroy a community were battled by all, but forces from the inside which brought discord or distress had to be either removed (through ostracization, i.e. 'outlawry,' or destroyed. Individuals and families participated in the legal system out of necessity to survival rather than by force.

The world for the early Germanic communities from the family's point of view was three concentric rings. At the center is the family, the next larger ring was the community, and the largest ring was the *wilderness*, all that which was outside the bounds of the community. It is important to note that the community itself (in the middle ring) was a large buffer zone between the family at the center and the wilderness around the outside. It is also important to note that in the sagaic literature, it did not matter, at least initially, that the community was comprised of both Christians and heathens, nor did it matter much that the community might also have newcomers or even those of lower classes.

⁸⁸Taken from Beatrice LaFarge and John Tucker's *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1992, p. 69.

For heathen communities to function then each family had to buy into the local legal system. Respect for others was high but not without reason: individual families need protection, and protection came with good ties back into a community. The individual family which could not dole out respect and share the wealth of a good harvest or the skills of craftsmen were doomed in the end to try to hold their own. Even in this modern age, the value of such tight-knit communities is known throughout America among the Amish and Mennonites as well as Native Americans, and other ethnic such as the Finnish in the upper peninsula of Michigan, the Lithuanian or Dutch in the lower peninsula, or the Hispanic communities or pueblos of the American southwest. Nothing has changed over the past 1000 years: respect is given out and respect is received.

Many communities by the late heathen period were democratic in structure and families were represented by elders at the council meetings. Prior to that a community might have had a king who was regarded more as the central repository of a community's luck, who was respected for the quality of his virtues of age, wisdom and experience, and who was expected to provide his community with access to the luck he held. Moberg in his *A History of the Swedish People* speaks of the *Erikskata*⁸⁹ as a yearly trek by the local king through the kingdom to bless fields and cure certain sicknesses which were under his dominion. Although the *Erikskata* continues in Sweden to this day it is a rare occurrence, perhaps one per decade, and there have been entire kingships without a single one. This is the loss of context.

More than anything, the urbanization of modern man has destroyed the *context* of community. Initially, contexts were high with the influx of immigrants. The move over the past two decades has been towards homogenization through punishment for discrimination and through what is commonly called 'political correctness' but this has also had the unfortunate side effect eliminating or suppressing *context* and within a single generation, people have forgotten their starting points, their beginning and their 'roots.' Ásatrú was not the first fight against this loss of heritage.

4.3. Reconstructed culture vs. Reality. There is a feeling of group self-esteem when a cultural group begins moving from low to a higher level of context and no longer feels a need to rely on another group for directions in how to dress, how to act, how to speak, what kind of music is appropriate, how food should be prepared, what constitutes beauty, and so forth. Over the past three decades, this feeling has been unanimously described as 'pride'— black-pride, Chicano-pride, gay-pride, etc.—and this is what the early reconstructionists were feeling; however, as soon as someone uses the term 'white-pride' a platoon of red flags go up, but, perhaps that is as it should be given North America and Europe's histories with Ku Klux Klan and National Socialists, and other so-called Aryan white-supremecy groups. The initial impetus, then, for modern reconstructed Ásatrú was a desire for feelings of pride about their past rather than shame.

There were two events in 1974 which piqued the interest of many of the early followers of the reconstructed Ásatrú:

- The airing of Alex Haley's *Roots* on national television, and
- The take-over of Wounded Knee by members of the American Indian Movement.

Among the early followers of Ásatrú, these two events carried several meanings:

- (1) That reconstruction of one's cultural past was important.
- (2) That those of Germanic descent were not necessarily 'the evil ones' but had had a cultural and spiritual heritage as important, noble and as rich as any other.
- (3) That the reconstruction that was under way was a proper and right action to take.

⁸⁹p. 56, Vilhem Moberg, *A History of the Swedish People*, vol. I, 1970, Dorset Press New York.

The early reconstructionists had a goal, a rationale, and role models of peoples who had taken a similar path. Secondly, they knew some of the enemies along the way, those, of whom they should be wary. For the simple-minded, “enemies” were of another skin color, but for those of some wit, the enemy was comprised of those “who would mix cultural heritages.” These folks, very often new age in philosophical bent, often weakened cultural heritage by watering it down. Mixing seems to destroy the all important *context* in which a cultural heritage thrives through a homogenization process; at least, this how native peoples have been describing their reasons for reclaiming their past. Some groups to prevent further watering down have chosen to reserve ceremonies and rituals dependent upon context for insiders only to the point where some tribes are even recommending a tribal laws against revealing tribal secrets and natives participating in *imitation* ceremonies conducted by outsiders which has raised the hackles of many in the new age crowd.⁹⁰

The reconstruction process, however, took a large side-step for about 20 years. Fear of becoming known as white-supremacists and with most new converts coming from the more ‘progressive’ areanas of wicca and the new age, Ásatrú reconstructionists forgot their original desire which “was to get back their roots” and focused mainly on building up a repertoire of complex and beautiful ceremonies for every stage of life complete with a ceremonial calendar rivaled only by that of the Catholic Church.⁹¹

A split took place in the reconstruction which may or may not be reparable. The converts coming from the new age side focused not only on rebuilding the religious side of things but developed theory and philosophy to the point where it no longer reflected reality. These converts often either practicing wiccans, wiccans looking for a new ‘culture,’⁹² or freshly converted from wicca or another new age sect are often fairly well educated and prefer to live in a world of abstracts, models (like the cosmological models discussed above), and theories (like that of *wyrd* above) while being quite divorced from the realities of life. On the other hand, the smaller but often very vocal albeit often less well educated groups began their campaign to ‘clean up’ Ásatrú by focusing on the more physically obvious ‘race issues.’ Aside from making mistakes regarding the Germanic worldview, their philosophy has remained closer to reality rather than drifting off into the abstract realms of theory.

“The purpose of the AHF (Allgermanische Heidenische Front) today is to be an institution for the development and reconstruction of our integral culture. This means that we seek to re-unite our peoples historical and inherited morals and ethics with the current development of our world. The problem, as we see it, is that we are loosing whatever we had of identity to the ever increasing cultural hegemony of the pop-culture, a phenomena that we regard as quite contra productive and devastating for the worlds cultural heritage. With some success, the task for saving inherited culture is carried out in other parts of the world, but it does require devotion and interest.

⁹⁰See R. Wallis’ *Shamanism/ Neo-Shamanism (ibid.)*, particularly the chapter on “Wannabes.”

⁹¹*Our Troth*, 1993, edited by K. Gundarsson has a calendar with more 30 days out of a year marked as one occasion or another.

⁹²Wicca is very unique as a pagan religion in that it is in its basic form devoid of a culture. Most traditional pagan religions, i.e. not related to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, are the by-products of specific cultures. Wicca, on the other hand, like Christianity, is a blank slate when it comes to culture and therefore is able to parasitically subsume any culture that it come in contact with. Although no studies have been done that the author is aware of, it would be interesting to actually study the process which a wiccan group goes through during the ‘culturing process’ as well as the type of trappings also taken over. Most certainly, there is a pattern yet undiscovered.

Our goal »to try to influence the path of our culture« may seem an overwhelming task, but influential movements have existed before, and still do today, as for instance the movement against globalization; ATTAC.

As any new born movement has to do, we work close to the ground, on the grass root level of society. Our goals can only be reached by enlightenment . . .”⁹³

Their mission statement from their web-page is not particularly offensive to anyone and is very close to the reconstruction’s starting point. It should be noted by reading through their forums, bulletin-boards, and mailing-lists that most members of these and other similar organizations are very much white-supremacy aligned. How is it that a good idea becomes so easily perverted?

Actually the perversions continue to occur on both sides. The new age side perverts by removing *context* and focusing on pomp and ceremony. Because the context of culture has been lowered, it is necessary for this group to generate fantastic ceremonies and rituals based on the *religious philosophy* of Ásatrú but like a jazz melody one permutation from the original leads to the next and so on until folks are engaging in ritual which no longer reflect reality but rather the most current *permutation*; further permutations without input from the original *melody* of Germanic culture will lead Ásatrú down the road to complete homogenization until it is indistinguishable from any of the other alternative religions. The *whites-only*, commonly known as ‘folkish Ásatrú’⁹⁴ have similar problems with reconciling the reality of historical fact. Their brand of fantasy neglects the facts that most slaves in early Germanic culture spoke a Germanic dialect; in other words, slaves were often fellow countrymen;⁹⁵ difference in race or culture wasn’t ever considered a problem; and, communities were already becoming ‘mixed’⁹⁶ during the late heathen period. While it is true that modern communities are certainly far more mixed than the early Germanic predecessors, the mixing never has been a real problem: rather it has been loss of *context* and the idea that most modern American Ásatrú are more comfortable living within fantasy than dealing with reality.

Rebuilding a sense of ‘geographic’ community will more than anything else help orient Ásatrú back towards reality. Although it may be difficult to understand a different culture completely, it is not difficult to accept that different cultures exist nor to work with them in community to help stabilize against both inside and outside forces which would seek to destroy healthy working relationships. Maintenance of the family and the building and maintenance of the physical community are completely consistent with Germanic cultural heritage and neither require the loss of context nor of culture. Refocusing of attention to the *real* world, rather than to an internet community of Ásatrú, and onto *real* problems in an attempt to find *real* solutions rather than dealing only with imagined correspondences between gods and men or with imagined enemies is probably the greatest spiritual act that one can engage in.

4.4. The Real “Trappings” of Ásatrú. Rebuilding the Germanic worldview and the sense of relationships is a project that is well underway by a large number of individuals and a small number of groups. Currently, as stated above, these folks will be labeled as ‘fundamentalists’ by many but they continue to grow in numbers. Those who have converted to Ásatrú to justify and support

⁹³Taken from the index page at <http://heathenfront.org/>

⁹⁴The term *folkish* seems to have originated with the reformation of the disbanded Ásatrú Free Assembly into the Ásatrú Folk Assembly. The word is often regarded as a perjorative by its opponent, the religious Ásatrú (who are often perjoratively called *universalists* by the folkish). The use of either or both terms in a discussion is almost certain to result in verbal altercations and is often forbidden on modern email lists.

⁹⁵Taken from Foote and Wilson’s *The Viking Achievement*, 1970, Sidgwick and Jackson, London.

⁹⁶Christian families, monks, and priests were a ubiquitous presence in most early communities and foreign trade was encouraged.

their 'white-supremacist' or segregationist politics, also find fault with the 'fundies' mainly because of their willingness to continually self-criticize and their unwillingness to blame another group for the problems of the world. But revitalizing Germanic spirituality is what Ásatrú started out to do and is now back, at least partially, on track with the original agenda.

Since culture and context are the first things a child learns in life, it would seem prudent that these should also be the first recommendations to new converts as well. As it stands, in most groups and organizations, learning how to conduct a blót or sumble properly is of top priority and very little attention is given to development of culture. Were this the case, Ásatrú would no longer be subjected to borrowings as discussed earlier in this paper, and most of those brought in early on would have disappeared. It was stated above that religious ceremony is the *expression* of a culture within context, spirituality is little more than proper action within the same, so it seems reasonable then that understanding of culture must come first.

Spirituality, then, will be the determiner of the "trappings" of the religion. Through interaction with the community, and families, items will acquire *meaning* and it is these items then which will receive central focus during the *expression*. Drawing a wiccan magic circle at the beginning of a blót has no meaning for the culture other than it is borrowed and foreign. On the other hand the author is aware of one *seiðman* who practices a form of healing which utilizes a lasso which was found on an herb gathering trek. He claims that the lasso is to keep the patient's soul protected while the healing is taking place. The community setting is in the American southwest where such ropes are still laid on the ground surrounding a person while he sleeps to keep rattlesnakes away. The rope through the way it came into the *seiðman's* possession, then, has acquired an extended *meaning* that has become part of this individual's expression. It is quite conceivable that Ásatrú in Hawai'i, or Florida might "acquire" a certain palm or fruit or animal part or fish in a similar fashion.

What is the difference between "borrowing" and "acquiring," then? One of the defenses often used by the new age converts when accused of engaging in a plug-and-play approach to Ásatrú is "Well, had Ásatrú survived continuously over the centuries, it would have evolved and adapted to new developments!" The problem with the argument should be obvious, however. The accused is charged with transferring meaning from one world and placing intact into a second. The key words are "evolved" and "adapted." With both words, the implication is that the *meaning* was generated by interaction between the object and the follower(s) of Ásatrú. Lifting a ceremony lock, stock and barrel and placing into an Ásatrú context bypasses evolution completely (although its "use" may require *some adaptation*); imitation is not much better. Culture, in a borrowed situation, is being forced to *express* itself at the whim and religious background of the controller, and neither case has moved beyond Norse colored [name of originating religion]. Reconstruction stops at this point, and the homogenization process takes over.

If Ásatrú is to continue its course as a reconstructed religion rather than being absorbed by the ever-growing wiccan movement, adherents will need to maintain very clear boundaries about who is Ásatrú and who is not. Judgements will necessarily be made, and, as in the past, feelings will be trod upon. Followers, like Native Americans have had to do, will need to start denying entrance to those who come from the outside wishing only to imitate rather than understand, but they will also need to start policing themselves drawing into question those things, behaviors, beliefs, or actions which might have been borrowed, tossing out that which clearly is.

- (1) Accept that Ásatrú as a worldview is probably complete (but not fully interpreted) and can stand on its own.
- (2) Accept that Ásatrú as a religion is the expression of the underlying culture.

- (3) Ásatrú spirituality is based on interacting with the real world in a way which supports the well being of family and community.
- (4) “Final rewards” for the Germanic are directly correlated to the memories left behind after one’s death.
- (5) The family is the smallest recognizable unit in Ásatrú; the individual is but one part of the family. ‘Rugged individualism’ is both a foreign and a modern concept.
- (6) The geographic community is the last line of defense for a family, and even though it may be ‘mixed,’ it should always be handled with respect.
- (7) The land upon which a geographic community is built and supported is sacred.
- (8) The community is naturally divided into three classes; each is expected to worship appropriately—individuals praying directly to gods was borrowed from Christianity a millenium ago. Ancestors, land-ghosts, and ghost of the home should be rightfully reinstalled.
- (9) Develop new “trappings” that are
 - (a) meaningful locally
 - (b) unborrowed
 - (c) consistent with the Germanic worldview.

5. CONCLUSION: 21STCENTURY ÁSATRÚ

Conclusion 1. There are enough adherents to Ásatrú that the religion’s way of life can reasonably be expected to continue to develop for several more decades. Additionally, there are other reconstructions taking place such as Romuva,⁹⁷ Hellenism, the Coptics,⁹⁸ a reconstruction of the ancient heathen Russian religion, Native American religions,⁹⁹ etc. which are in the various stages of the process of reconstruction so that Ásatrú is not standing alone. Such company is necessary because one of the major threats to reconstruction comes from the eclectic arena. Ásatrú, for reconstruction to be successful, must protect its worldview until the reconstruction is stable. To do this, Ásatrú will of necessity present the illusion to the eclectic crowd as being exclusionary; this, of course, is untrue since Ásatrú remains open, but the illusion will nevertheless be present and will and, indeed has been viewed as offensive by some.

The definition of Ásatrú is “the reconstructed religion of heathen Scandinavia of the Viking era,” but it has been shown that *religion* itself is the expression of an underlying worldview. Converting to a different religion is simple, but converting to a different worldview can be very difficult, but not impossible, because it requires constant vigilance at a personal level. The bulk of this paper has been a presentation of how both intentional and unintentional intrusions from competing worldviews have come close to changing the worldview underlying the reconstruction process. For reconstruction to continue, one must of necessity be completely honest about the background one carries into the

⁹⁷Reconstruction of the heathen Baltic religion.

⁹⁸Ancient religion of the Egyptians.

⁹⁹Although many Native American religions were not completely obliterated, they have been seriously distorted by intrusions from Christianity and some of the new age beliefs.

conversion.¹⁰⁰ It will continue to be necessary to question all experiences underlying interpretations of sagaic, eddaic, and folkloric literature.

Up to this point, such questioning has occurred rarely. Groups such as Northvegr and the Theod have explored the idea that religion is bound to worldview, but their popularity as representing the appropriate approach to reconstructionism has, for the most part, been ignored by most. Although this seems unfortunate, this author feels that the process of exploring *all avenues* was probably necessary so that the effects of eclecticism on Ásatrú could be properly documented and placed into perspective.

A primary complaint that has been lodged against reconstructionists is that by staying close to the worldview as represented in the sagas, eddas, and other related writings is that Ásatrú will become dogmatic and lack the overall flexibility needed for survival in the 21st century. This contention, however, lacks good support. The original predecessor to Ásatrú had never been actually codified into a religion in the manner of Catholicism, for example. Because regional and temporal variations were part and parcel to the original upon which modern Ásatrú is reconstructed, flexibility is built into the system. This does not mean that Ásatrú cannot become dogmatic, but that dogma is not built into the system.

A secondary complaint has been that the Germanic worldview as represented in the sagas and eddas is incomplete. This may or may not be true, but until good complete investigation of the worldview has been done the contention is rather premature and inconclusive. Much new information has developed in the area of better interpretation over the past two decades, and the overall indication is that the worldview is not incomplete but has been poorly interpreted by comparing to other worldviews which are significantly different such as Native American religions, the Judeo-Christian religion, the Hindu religion, and neo-pagan religions. Much new information has surfaced through experiential anthropology. By trying to recreate through the actual experience of recreation based on available sources such as the various groups who have rebuilt and sailed Viking Age vessels or through the living history museums, the need for interpretation is often bypassed. This is an approach which should continue to be encouraged.

If Ásatrú, as suggested in the above paper, is to remain true to its devotion to reconstructing the Viking age way of life, then rather than emulating the neo-pagans of the 20th century who are really little more than a worldview à la Pirendello in search of a culture, lessons could be learned from the *conversos*, the “hidden Jews” of the Spanish-American southwest who were able to retain their original worldview and spiritual way of life while at the same time completely integrating themselves into their local communities. Of course, the suggestion is not to “hide” as was necessary for Jewish immigrants as a way of protecting themselves both from outside influence as well as protecting themselves from anti-semitism, but rather to utilize the process of complete integration into local community life. Such integration *is* common to the early Germanic worldview. Protection of the worldview can be accomplished perhaps through knowledge of the worldview itself, thorough education of others into that worldview, and through.

¹⁰⁰It was quite common during the early days of wicca for the individual to generate a personal history of either a direct lineage “back to the days of ancient wicca” or an indirect lineage of “being reincarnated from a witch in a former lifetime to a witch in the present.” Such generated personal histories exemplify the general dissatisfaction that a good portion of the population of the industrialized nations have been feeling towards the lack of a “spiritual life” in the 20th century.

APPENDIX A. SUBSTITUTE FOR THE HAMMER-RITE

That the Hammer-rite is in imitation of the wiccan “Circle-casting” which in itself is a 20th century imitation of the ceremonial of the centuries from the middle ages onward is not in question; it is simple fact. The rationale for borrowing the rite is also not in question since we basically have clear admission from the originators (actually, the original borrowers) as to where it came from and why it’s done. What has been overlooked, on the other hand, is that the original concept most likely continues to exist in secular form and is utilized by most countries where common folk participate with the the legal system or the legislature.

That grounds were temporarily laid aside for special purposes by the ancient Germanic communities is well-known. This fact surfaces again and again in sagaic literature in descriptions of the *holmgang*, the *friðr* associated with the *Ping*, local courts, etc. Even the process of land-taking as described in the *Landnamabók* is a form of marking the boundaries of and legally declaring the purpose of a plot of land. In fact the tradition of “declaring grounds” continues to this day in modern countries populated by Germanic peoples prior to any official function, such as the formalities of the American courts, the the US Congress, the House of Commons, Parliament, and most importantly dedications of monuments, parks, and other public pieces of land. The tradition has never died, but has rather been overlooked as being too commonplace.

Legal declaration has always been important for those of Germanic heritage because it is an agreement by a community to

- (1) Respect the demarcated boundaries;
- (2) Understand the division between that which is deemed “inside” vs. “outside” the law;
- (3) Understand that that which is *inside* is to be handled with respect as prescribed by the community;
- (4) Understand the nature of and reason for the singling out of the plot of land;
- (5) Understand that those *inside* are participants in the event and are to act accordingly;
- (6) Understand that infraction of the community made rules will result in “outlawry.”

Often there are enforcers of the declaration itself depending upon the importance of the event taking place in common English parlance, a Sargent-at-arms.¹⁰¹

If the above can be acceptable as common to Germanic peoples throughout the Germanic realm and over the course of centuries, the format for generating a opening ceremony consistent with the Viking worldview might be similar to the following:

- (1) The leader or *Goði* orders a member of the community to set the boundary markers. The decision should be made jointly by those leading the blót taking into consideration the number of people involved.
- (2) The leader or *Goði* then orders that the community attend while the boundaries are marked. In the past this has been done with hazel rods and ropes as described in Tacitus, but Germanic people have always been practical so that anything including benches, natural markers, rocks put in place could be used. At any rate acknowledgment by the community of the markers and their meaning is crucial. Carrying of the fire around the boundaries can also be a nice touch since this will also help the greater community remember the location of the boundaries.
- (3) The *Goði* may the begin the declaration “We are gathered here for

¹⁰¹Most of the above sound almost redundant because most readers have grown up with this type of legal declaration. What is interesting is that in Ásatrú, in spite of knowing the above, groups continue to build their “opening ceremonies” around the borrowed wiccan format.

- (a) the actual reason for the gathering;
 - (b) who may attend (which will include the living, dead, and non-corporeal beings);¹⁰²
 - (c) who are considered “free-class” or “insider” and who are under the responsibility of another (this is especially important for children below the age of majority and non-Ásatrú guests who may have a difficult time with protocol;
 - (d) any special protocols which need to be in place (no weapons, cursing, fighting, interactions between designated groups, special titles, or the proper manner for addressing a task or designated people);
 - (e) the level of outlawry should an infraction occur by a member of the “free-class” or one of his wards (this may also be partially handled by a law speaker who is able to cite past decisions made)
- (4) Once the Declaration has been made it must be declared legal by the greater community through some show of assent. Dissenters made need to be dismissed at this point.
 - (5) Lastly, a fire should be struck. Any kind of fire may be built depending on the reason for the gathering. In the case of the need for purification (during a season of sickness, deaths, or ill luck, for example) a need for may be built, but from a practical standpoint “A piece of of land is a field, but a piece of land with a cooking fire is a home.” A cooking fire still universally means social interaction, sustenance, conviviality, comfort and cheer. It will remain a focal point throughout the gathering.

The similarity between this format and a simple land-dedication ceremony of today should be very obvious. Differences between this which seems to be more consistent with Germanic ideals and the borrowed wiccan ceremony are

- (1) The lack of the “quarters.”
- (2) That the space is “man-made” by the community.
- (3) That law and order are expected to reign within the “micro-community.”
- (4) That outlawry can occur upon infraction.
- (5) That all insiders are to be held responsible for his or her own behavior and their recognized underlings.

The look and feel of such a ceremony is very much different than that of the “Hammer-rite.” The author had the opportunity to participate in a regional Ping put on by the Irminsul Ættir in Seattle, Washington, in 2001 that was such a complete departure from the standard rite as outlined in the early Ásatrú Free Assembly materials or in *Our Troth* so as not to be recognizable at all as a ‘loan-rite.’ The feel was completely Germanic with a fire building and procession to the blót grounds.

The above is a very skeleton of an outline. It is hoped that regions will develop their own variations.

APPENDIX B. THE CALENDARS

As discussed in Section 3.2 the calendar has been borrowed lock, stock and barrel from wicca. What makes such a borrowing odd is that it reflects neither the Germanic sense of a year nor

¹⁰²Quite commonly, in the cases of haunting, unpeaceful ghosts in Germanic countries up to this past century were laid to rest by legal declaration. The idea that non-corporeal beings fall under the law of the community is very old and is well-documented in the folklore of all Germanic countries. Even diseases, in Pennsylvania Dutch country of the United States, are expected to respond appropriately to a declaration of outlawry. Several charms against disease with this format can still be found in John George Hohman’s *Pow-Wows: Long Lost Friend* or *Der Verborgene Freund*. The book is still published although publishers of it change frequently.

<i>Heimskringla</i>
Yule—ca. December—unspecified range
Summer-finding—mid April
Winter-finding—mid October

TABLE 8. Germanic calendar of sacrifice dates according to Snorri.

the Germanic sense of pragmatism. The only good calendar that exists is taken from Snorri's *Heimskringla* and unlike other calendars seems to have been pan-Germanic, at least through the northern branch of languages. This seems to be a good place to start.

Secondly, the wiccan calendar as it stands is solar which does not appear to have been the case with the northern year. In actual practice, farm people have a tendency to divide the year in two ways:

- (1) The agricultural year (which basically corresponds to the solar year)—which is marked locally by such things as
 - (a) when a certain mushroom appears
 - (b) when a specific bird shows in the spring
 - (c) when a specific plant blooms
 - (d) the first thunder of spring
 - (e) the first frost in the fall
 - (f) the first 'V' of geese migrating either north in the spring or south in the summer.¹⁰³
- (2) The moon, which in the northern region is an excellent predictor of weather which is of primary importance to farming.¹⁰⁴

The Germanic lunar month ran from fingernail moon to new moon (the 'dark' of the moon) with the full marking the mid-month point much in the same way that days were reckoned from sundown to sundown. The use of a solar month was the least important method for reckoning the passage of time, mainly because events in a farm community are highly dependent upon weather conditions.

To set the celebratory cycle of the year and to remain within the *germanische Erbe* it would seem prudent to place the month of Yule back into the calendar as the 'lull' in the work year, that is, during the month after all the harvest, food preservation, hunting, slaughter and the curing of meat, wine making (mead or beer as well), sausage making, and spinning are finished and before the tool and farm equipment repair season, and domestic animal birthing season begins. This is most reasonable between the modern months of December/ January. The year divisions during mid-October and mid-April coincide with the season of animal husbandry (winter) and the season of farming (summer). The celebration of Midsummer although a very big celebration in most Scandinavian countries today was an early church holiday (St. John's Day) which appears to have

¹⁰³All the above examples are taken from the author's childhood in a rural German-American town in Michigan. Certain events happen usually within a range of just a few days on an annual basis, but the markers are important because any farmer can read the 'signs' and know what jobs need be done next.

¹⁰⁴The author's own father and grandfather both of who were farmers were well-known predictors of weather in a small German-American farming community. Weather prediction was based primarily on the phases of the moon and secondarily on modifiers such as rings around the moon, movement of animals and cloud formations (which were the least accurate). The reason for the importance of such tight predicting was because certain crops needed 'dryness' for harvest (such as tomatoes which are subject to 'dry-rot' or blight) and wetness was crucial to planting. Additionally, hunting and collecting wood for fire (both of which were still of primary importance) required specific weather conditions.

been picked up by many heathens between 750 CE and 1000 CE as a good time for celebrating as well, but there is no indication of a summer festival that is heathen in origin in any writings either originating in Scandinavia or in foreign writings describing heathen holidays in Scandinavia.

There are a good number of *blótar* described in the primary sources which appear to have been celebrated at a local level. *Our Troth*¹⁰⁵ contains good descriptions of these but lists them together with major blóts. It is probably good to keep these at a local level and allow them to be region-specific. The *álfar-blót* comes to mind which is a giving to the local land-ghosts, the hlaf-messe is a celebration of the first breads made from the new grain harvests. Since these events *are* region-specific, it would seem prudent to blót at times specific to the region in question. For example, mid-August in New Mexico when the first crops of grain, blue corn, and chilis are at their high point and it would seem reasonable then to celebrate this fact at the same time as the rest of the non-heathen community. Because of the late changing of the seasons with the first blizzards in November an *álfar-blót* coinciding with Thanksgiving seems reasonable.

There is no reason that German holidays, Scandinavian holidays, Icelandic holidays could not be celebrated as local or regional blóts to help groups retain the Germanic tone. Since the ancient Germanic year does not appear to have been bound to solar markers, celebrating July 4th as an American Ásatrú summer festival would be as appropriate as the original heathens laying claim to the midsommer or the Sonnenwende. As far as is known to this author, this area has remained relatively unexplored since the general modern heathen acceptance of the wiccan solar calendar and may be worth exploring at this time.

APPENDIX C. GUIDELINES FOR INVESTIGATING SEIÐ, HEALING PRACTICES, AND MYSTICAL ARTS

- (1) *The investigator should thoroughly steep himself in the Germanic worldview/ cosmology first!*—This is probably one of the most serious errors of new converts; much baggage is being brought in by converts from other magical systems. However, magic like religion, art or music is *how a worldview expresses itself*. Just as one needs to know vocabulary/ and grammatical rules first before expressing oneself in another language, so does one need to know a worldview **before** expressing oneself through religion or magical arts. It is this more than anything which has caused many Native Americans to close their doors to non-Natives.

It should also be noted by the newly converted that early Germanic peoples had a tendency to offer respect to those things of *worth*. It is not, then, terribly uncommon to here of families carrying on some familial folk tradition which differs from those of the rest of the community, for example, leaving offerings “gifts” in certain places for ancestors or land-ghosts, avoiding certain places as familial taboo, or either engaging in or avoiding certain actions in specific environments such as *not* urinating in particular places or maintaining silence through a particular stretch of woods deemed “sacred” or “special” by the family.

- (2) *Avoid explaining sagaic description of magical practices, healing practices, and seið through foreign systems like ceremonial magic, Native American ceremony, or archeo- or neo-shamanism*—All foreign systems by their nature are part and parcel to other worldviews. Trying to explain the expression of one worldview through another necessarily leads to incorrect interpretation. Examples of nonsensical interpretations would be trying to explain, justify or refute Papuan or Jívaro cannibalism, Afghanistan’s tribal female circumcision,

¹⁰⁵*ibid.*

or Chinese foot-binding or female infanticide through the modern American moral/ ethical system. Doing so, brings **no** understanding as to native logic behind such acts; generally, clouds any *real* interpretation from occurring; fosters the acceptance of the *false* interpretation as being true, and generally leads to the stronger side forcing an abolishment of the tradition (which is really a form of racism). Germanic practices should as much as possible be accepted on their *own terms*.

The most recent spate of interpretation error or *overgeneralization* has been the overlaying of the Native American vision quest onto the *útisetá* (“out-sitting”) of the Germanics. The former is a ceremony to connect a young person, usually a man, with the spiritual side of his community so that a path or direction in life is made clear; the latter, however, seems to have been a way for an individual to connect with his ancestors who now live beyond the grave in the seeking of advice. The former is more of an initiation-type ceremony, while the latter is primarily for those who already have a deep understanding of the Germanic worldview.

- (3) *Pay strict attention to descriptive wording in the sagas or folklore*—The *Greenland Saga*, for example, has been used as the basis for the development of Oracular Seið as explored by the California based group, *Hrafnar*. Many modern Ásatrú have been trained through conditioning to think that the Little *Völva* was in trance making a ‘journey’ to the Gates of Hel. In fact, however, the wording would indicate that only the singer (a serving woman) was making seið—in this case calling spirits to the home—and the seeress, a woman with second-sight, i.e. ‘could see spirits,’ was speaking with them. Her skill was that of *spá* and there is absolutely no indication that she was entranced. The current common interpretation is really a confabulation all funneled through a wiccan/ neo-shamanic worldview, finished off nicely with a Germanic veneer. Gríma and Kotkell in *The Læxdalasaga* also do not ‘journey’ in a neo-shamanic fashion when they make seið. It is mentioned in the *Ynglingassaga* that Óðin has the ability of *hamfarir*, but the only descriptions resembling neo-shamanic soul-travel is attributed to *Finns* (possibly *Sámí noaides*).
- (4) *Find good sources for information regarding such practices: avoid new age publishers and/ or authors*—Of course, primary sources are always best when available. In general, the absolute worst offenders of Germanic heritage are sold by new age book publishers and are sold in the new age section of the local bookstore. A good book will generally deal with one or two aspects of Germanic culture which will usually be presented in context.
- (5) *It is wise to approach personal spiritual evolution through the family community as is fairly well outlined in the Hávamál and as underlies actions in the sagaic literature*. It is worthy to note that the Germanic concept of “self” was that one is defined (i.e. *known*) by one’s relationships, one’s abilities especially as they reflect back on family/ community, and by one’s immediate environment. Modern America tends to lay more importance on external trappings—job title, dress, quality of possessions (clothing is particularly susceptible to this), certification (especially *written certificates*), etc.
- (6) *The Germanic worldview does not prevent one from exploring the mystical side of life, but rather demands that personal mysticism is exactly that, personal, and secondly, that the community at large is always the final judge of the value of personal spiritual enlightenment as it pertains to the community*. It is all too common for someone to “receive” an idea that a particular rite needs to be performed in a certain way, but as soon as the idea is expressed to fellow Ásatrú, it is thoroughly shot down and dissembled. This is the community, then, acting upon its heathen right to defend itself from foreignisms. For a personal form of

enlightenment to be accepted by the community at large, it must be shown to be of value, of *weorþ*, to the community. Farming folklore would indicate that although there were few interactions between the individual and the gods on the one hand, that interactions between the individual and ancestors or the individual and land-ghosts were fairly commonplace and the veracity of these interactions were accepted variously by other members of the family and other members of the community which often resulted a family developing its own body of folklore separate from that of the community.¹⁰⁶ The community is not obliged to *believe* any of the tales, however.

- (7) *Mysticism is not the main reason to become Ásatrú, but is rather an extension of Ásatrú.* Unlike wicca, Ásatrú started out to be and remains *a way of living* rather than a *mystery path* which
- (a) allows one to participate as part of an ancestral spiritual lineage,
 - (b) allows and guides one to best align themselves with the powers that govern the world all the way from the gods down to community leaders and family elders,
 - (c) guides one to his or her level level of function within family, geographical- and religious community setting which is always deemed as a position of *weorþ*,
 - (d) guides one into giving the proper respect to peers, elders, one's wards, and one's environment, and, as a result of the above,
 - (e) lends a sense of wholeness and well-being to the individual.

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(Write "re: Spirituality article" on Subject line. Thank You)

¹⁰⁶Many of the stories in Kvideland & Sehmsdorf's *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* are of the family-folklore type. This is also very common in America as of the 21st century mostly in the rural areas but still noticeable at the urban level.