

Race and Religion

Asatru is not a racist religion. Anyone who wants to be in Asatru should be in Asatru. And the word "anyone" means just that: anyone - regardless of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, language, sexual orientation, or other divisive criteria. Today, we live in a multi-ethnic nation (not to mention a multi-ethnic world). As Asatru advances, it will inevitably become more and more a multi ethnic religion.

But, unfortunately, some people seem to think that Asatru is a racist religion. Why? Probably because there have been some people in Asatru who were racists and some of these have tried to use Asatru as a front for their racist views, claiming that it was somehow an exclusively "Nordic" religion, only open to those of "pure Aryan" descent. However, the existence of a few racists does not make Asatru a racist religion. Almost every religion has had some racists in it at one time or another. In Sri Lanka, for example, there are some Buddhists who are so racist that they have recently been killing the ethnic-minority Tamils in their country, but that does not make Buddhism a racist religion.

Another reason some might think that Asatru is a racist religion is confusion and misunderstanding about the "Scandinavian Connection" of Asatru. The truth about this is simply that the Aesir and the Vanir were followed longer in northern Europe than elsewhere, and thus we know about them from there. That is the reason why we use the Old Norse names for the Deities and other terms, and are so interested in pre-Christian Scandinavia. It is fine for those of northern European descent to seek out their cultural roots, but no single ethnic group "owns" the Gods of Asgard.

Some people have suggested that the ancient inhabitants of northern Europe believed in racial exclusivity, in other words that they were racists. I do not believe this. However even if it was true - it does not matter. Just because a person's remote ancestors might have been racists is no reason for that person to be a racist today. If one's great-grandfather was an arsonist, one need not and should not follow in his footsteps. (Those interested in the racial attitudes of the Viking-age Scandinavians should read the article "Race, Religion, and Asatru Today," by Kveldulfr Gundarsson that appeared in Mountain Thunder, Number 5, Summer 1992. This article shows that European descent is not necessary for full participation in modern Asatru.)

The characteristics we admire so greatly in the Vikings came about because the Vikings followed the Aesir and the Vanir - not because they had blue eyes or blond hair. These same characteristics are available today to anyone who wants to develop them by following the way of Asatru. It is important to remember that admiration for these attributes is not Eurocentric, it is universal. Every culture that has ever existed in the world has inherently esteemed the virtues esteemed by Asatru, including: courage, honor, hospitality, independence (and liberty), individuality (with self-reliance, and responsibility), industriousness (and perseverance), justice (including an innate sense of fairness and respect for others), loyalty (to family, friends, and the society of which one is a part), truthfulness, and a willingness to stand up for what is right.

What makes the Asatru way of life different from that of other religions, is that the Asatru "Code of Conduct" supports and encourages these virtues far more strongly than do other religions -

some of which actually discourage several of these ideals. People who have the characteristics we admire acquired them because their culture contains values similar to those of Asatru (in some cases because their culture was rooted in Asatru. Conversely, people who have characteristics we dislike come from backgrounds that lack those values because they are no longer taught. This is a social problem, not a racial one. It has to do with the breakdown of the family, and the resultant crumbling of all cultural values. It has nothing to do with eye shape, or hair texture, or skin color.

Asatru is a multi-ethnic religion - not because that might be "politically correct" at this point in time, but because multi-ethnicity is fundamental to the theology of Asatru. Asgard, home of the Gods, is multi-ethnic. For example, Magni and Móðhi, the sons of Thorr, are also the sons of their mother, Jarnsaxa, who is a Jotunn. Who will tell Thorr that his sons should not participate in something because they are not of "pure" descent? And what of the Vanir? Since the Gods of Asgard do not worry over these things, the Asatru people of Midgard certainly have no need to do so.

In the Prose Edda there is a passage about the many names of Odhinn that says:

Tha segir Hair: "Mikil skynsemi er at rífa þat vandliga upp, en thó er thér þat skjótast at segja, at flest heiti hafa verit gefin af þeim atburdh, at svá margar sem eru greinir tungnanna í veröldinni, þa thykkjast allar Thiódhir thurfa at breyta nafni hans til sinnar tungu til ákalls ok baena fyrir sjálfum sér.

(Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning, XXXII)

Then said High One: "It would take a vast amount of knowledge to cover them all, but it is swiftest to say, that most of these names have been given (to him) because, the many different nations speaking different tongues in the world, all wanted to change his name into their own tongue in order to address and pray (to him) for themselves."

As for the so-called "ethnic descriptions" of the Deities sometimes encountered in the literature, these resulted from people trying to visualize the unvisualizable. Those who, for example, wrote about the red beard of Thorr did so because they knew men who had red beards. Does a God have a beard of any color? (Theologically speaking, the answer is "yes" but only if and when the God wants a beard, and it would then be any color the God desired. A God does not have human ethnicity of any kind, and is far more different from any particular human than is that human from any other human on earth.) A comparison can be made with the "Asian faces" on Japanese statues of Buddha, who was an Indian, or the blue-eyed paintings of Christ that were so popular in the European middle ages.

All humans, we believe, descend ultimately from Ask and Embla, who were created by the Gods. What color were Ask's eyes? What color was Embla's hair? Such questions are ridiculous. Since all humans are related to each other by blood, (have the same inherent source-potentials - and the same instinctive longing for the Gods of Asgard who watch over all the peoples of Midgard, not just some small group of them. Any thinking person, whether or not an Asatru believer, can logically see that there is no place for racism of any kind in Asatru. Nor has there ever been.

Racism comes from two sources:

1. A psychological fear of anyone who is "different" in any way.
2. A psychological need to find someone to blame (a "scapegoat") for whatever misfortunes happen to occur.

Neither of these attitudes is logical. In the Old Stone Age, little groups of 20 to 30 inbred humans lived their lives separated by vast distances from all others of their species. On the rare occasions when humans from another group happened to be seen, they looked different, and the reaction was to kill them, or at least to drive them away. Times have changed. We no longer shave with stone axes. But for some people the Paleolithic mentality lingers on.

In the Modern Age, racists will become more and more isolated from mainstream society (and reality), living lonely, bitter, and paranoid lives.

Those of us who have spent our lives fighting both alongside and against many of this world's diverse ethnic groups learned to appreciate the essential similarities of all humans, and to ignore the superficial differences. Every life is filled with combat situations; physical, mental, and spiritual. When facing combat, it is always better to pick allies who share with you the Viking values of Asatru than those who share with you only your skin-color.

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