

Fire and the Fog

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When I first approached Asatru back in the late 1960's, what attracted me was the panache, vigor, and passionate assertiveness of the Vikings. Bold and free, it attracted my testosterone-laden teenage soul like a magnet...and it still calls to me, after all these years. My spiritual evolution has added to, rather than changed, that early, naive impression.

The Way of the North was in sharp contrast to the musty meekness I perceived not only in mainstream Christianity, but in the world as a whole. Underlying the insistent Viking freedom was a deeper validation of a heroic view of human individuality, and for me this was an essential.

Everywhere else I turned, however, the spirit of the age cried the opposite. "Merge with the Godhead, become a drop in the infinite sea"... "Take your ego off the throne in your heart, and place Jesus on it"... "We must rise from the individual to the whole"... "Humans must surrender the swords of their willful egos to the planet as a whole." From Buddhism to Christianity to New Age pabulum, just about everybody was saying that individuality was bad, and that the only remedy for the human condition was to blend into "God," by whatever name. This viewpoint wasn't limited to religion and spirituality, but underlay a great deal of political philosophy, as well. Marxism in particular, and various state socialisms in general, were manifestations on the Earthly plane of the same idea.

I didn't buy it, and still don't. To "become one with God" is to die. The deniers of self, in all their forms, constitute a fog - amorphous, drifting, surrounding, non-human. Like the fog, this mass-mentality is made up of a multitude of insignificant particles moving not of their own volition, but rather, powerless before the breeze and the rules that govern chaos.

We, on the other hand, are the fire. We burn, leaping assertively from the Earth, reaching for the heavens, passionate. The fog disintegrates where we touch it and it would smother us in its clammy coldness, if it could.

But we will not let it.

The Gods and Goddesses of our Folk do not want slaves. "They want us to grow up," as veteran Asatruar David James recently put it. We are to follow in their footsteps - not on a chain, but with our walking staffs in hand, engaged in the quest to be greater! In that respect, I suppose my personal view of Asatru is more what Edred Thorsson would call "O dian" rather than "Odinist;" I don't worship Odin so much as I want to imitate him. I don't even want to "become one with" him. I can almost imagine this great God waiting somewhat impatiently, spear in hand and hat tipped over his eye, for us to figure out that our role is to grow into freedom, might, and wisdom without end, rather than to exchange the Christian shepherd for just another master. He's ready, when we are.

Ego in Asatru

Perhaps this is a good time to reflect on the role of ego in Asatru - or even to simply think about what this word means. Is it the ego per se that we are defending here? And just what is an ego?

It's easy to say, in the words of the dictionary, that the ego is "the permanent and conscious subject of all experience" or "the self...as the consciousness of the individual's distinction from other selves." But what this means for us, philosophically, is neither easy nor simple.

In one sense, ego is transcended every time we change or grow in any way, no matter how minor. Like a flowing river, “I” am not the “I” that I was an hour ago - and that teenager in the sixties, or even the oilman of the eighties, seems very much like another human being altogether!

You and I change, and the content of the “I” is ever-evolving, but that does not mean that the concept is invalid. We are still separate entities, characterized by “distinction from other selves.”

In Asatru, we know quite well that the ego is not the sum total of our being. The unconscious lurks outside our daily awareness, yet is still part of who and what we are. Similarly, our religious lore describes the hamingja, fylgja, and soul portions or qualities such as the ond and the othr. These have been described in several books and articles, and there’s no point in launching into a mini-essay on them here. Suffice to say that the ego binds these together, making them a coherent whole. Far from denying the ego, Asatru tells us that the ego has an important role to play.

Quantum Obfuscation

Ardent proponents of the fog do not like the ego, and are constantly trying to convince us that it doesn’t exist. They draw in material from quantum mechanics, that branch of physics that deals with the nature of things below the atomic level. True, there is a sense in which everything and everyone is interconnected. Bell’s Theorem is a famous equation explaining, or at least asserting, that fact. They then tie Oriental mysticism in with science, and proclaim that the ego does not exist - and then comes the social and political implications of their ideas, which of course just happen to be the same collectivist, liberal twaddle they’ve been trying to shove down our throats for the better part of a century! Is this a coincidence? Probably not; a clear ideological agenda is at work here.

Ultimately, though, the interconnectedness of things does not mean what they say it does. “Quantum nonlocality” does not mean sameness, does not mean homogeneity, and does not deny the uniqueness of individual parts in any system. A rock is still not a pillow, and a cow is still not a horse. Whatever Asian inscrutabilities are invoked, and whatever equations are used to justify them, the evidence of our senses provides a workable description of reality once we get into the macro-world. It is noteworthy that these quantum gurus are generally firm believers in multiple realities, the equivalence of different frames of reference, and the like - until one chooses to operate in a reality that says ego is real and that all things are not, in some mystical way, all the same!

Ego works for us, in the same way that Newton’s equations work to describe motion unless one is working with the very large or the very small.

Interestingly enough, there is at least one “Eastern” school of thought which goes against the stream of ego-abnegation. In *The Serpent of Paradise*, Chilean author Miguel Serrano tells how he met the head of Suddha Dharma Mandalam, a yoga organization based in India. Its leader assured Serrano that the oldest yoga, predating Patanjali by thousands of years, taught that a strong ego was essential to enlightenment! This remarkable attitude, so different from what we find popularized in the West, indicates that we Asatruar might have some spiritual allies as we oppose the fog.

Group versus the Individual

Now, lest it need clarifying, I am not advocating unrestrained license, nor justifying random acts of selfishness. We northern Europeans are a paradoxical bunch. On the one hand, we are the world’s great individualists, stubborn and jealous of our rights, and always on the outlook for any infringements. This caused problems even in Viking times. During military campaigns, a disgruntled chieftain might well pack up and sail for home - taking with him the men and ships needed for victory. The whole idea of republican government sprang from us, attesting again to the value of the individual.

On the other hand, we are quite capable of extensive cooperation, even when that means subordinating our personal needs and desires to the success of the larger group. Some of the world's best-known utopian movements were born of our genius, too. So I am not advocating irresponsibility or raising the "me, me, me" attitude to a moral pedestal. On the contrary, I understand the delicate yet dynamic balance between the individual and his or her family, clan, tribe, and nation. But the proponents of the fog have never been satisfied with that balance; perhaps it is too heroic for them. They want the individual crushed, completely.

Fire against the Fog

All of this sounds academic, but it's not. In the realm of human affairs, the philosophy of the fog has made huge headway. All the major religions of mankind seem to have adopted it, to one extent or the other. In fact, most people cannot conceive of any form of spirituality which asserts a contrary viewpoint. But then, its basic assumptions are favorable to the weak and the dim - it says we're each as good as the other, and unconditional love reigns supreme when all are accepted despite their failings. It is a philosophy for the mass, tailor-made for the non-exceptional. Followers of the fog will always outnumber the people of the fire. Fortunately, quality is on our side!

We who love the flame must not be deceived; the fog is not tolerant. Like some soul-eating monster out of a science fiction movie, it intends to consume us. How can it tolerate that which proves it wrong? The aim is a world of fog...a world where the human ingenuity represented by the fire is smothered. They would kill Prometheus.

We are the keepers of the fire. With our enduring will and our deeds great and small, we fight for the individual, for heroic self-assertion. So long as we stand firm, the fog has no chance against us!