

Odin's Way in the Modern World

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I am an Odinist. Odin has been my patron, my guide, for many years now. In the course of my long relationship with him, I have come to understand some things about him: who he was in the ancient world, who he is in the modern world. I have come to learn some things about walking the Odinic path, and have come to see that, newly reborn as our faith is, we are as yet lacking certain understandings and practices that are important to it. We have begun to reconstruct his ancient practices from the ruins they fell into after the Conversion, but we have not as yet truly adapted them for use in the world we find ourselves in now.

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Odin is a god of many things. I mean that in the sense that he presides over them, or is the cause, or effector of them. Chief amongst them, perhaps, is death. Odin is the psychopomp, the ferryman who conducts souls from the land of the living to the land of the dead. He is the one who hands out death. As such he is the one who apportions victory in battle, as the one who controls death also controls the victory. From this he is also god of battle itself, and we see this function in the war-strategies he gifts certain of his chosen humans with, as well as in the berserker gang, the internal-style martial art his devotees fought with. He is god of poetry, and is the apportioner of inspiration. He is god of wine (and probably many if not all mind-altering substances). He is the god of seidh-craft (a vaguely shamanic sort of practice; however, NOT identifiable with shamanism). He is god of sex, in that where Thor boasts of jotuns slain, Odin boasts of women slept with. (This is sex for its own sake, rather than having to do with relationships.) These last two things also come together in a third way. Seidh practice may have involved various trans-gendered practices, such as cross-dressing or passive homosexuality. (This is not a certain thing. There are arguments both ways about it. But male seidh practitioners were often referred to as seidhberendur, and berendur was a coarse term in Old Norse for female genitalia, and was used to refer to homosexual men, amongst other things.) Thus Odin can also be seen as god of various transgendering practices.

There is something that all of these things have in common. Death is the destruction of the physical self. Battle is the transcendence of the self in the moment. Poetry writing in particular, and inspiration in general involve the loss of the self as it is caught up in the information coming in from outside the self. Wine brings about loss of the self through dulling of the hugar, or mind. Sex is loss of the self in another, and in the moment. And seidh involves spiritual death and rebirth in a different form. Transgendering practices of course involve loss of original gender-self. All of Odin's functions at heart relate to the same thing. He is a god of the loss of the self, the death of the ego, in all the many ways that can happen.

Odin fulfills a god's role found in certain other religions as well. He is much like the Celtic Lugh, as well as a sort of combination of Hermes and Dionysos in Greek mythology. He is like the Slavic Volos as well, the Baltic Velinas, and possibly the Hindu Vata.

It seems that Odin began as the ancient Germanic god Woden, or Wotan. This is not *precisely* the same god. You could say their minnis (memories, subconscious natures) are the same but their hugrs (conscious minds, personalities) are, while related, a little different. This is because a god's hugar is affected by the way his people perceive him. Woden was originally a god of storm, and of the Wild Hunt (the train of the dead who ride through the night sky during the winter half of the year). He was a wanderer of the nine worlds, and was a creature of the Out-Worlds, the wild dangerous places outside the habitations of men. His aspect as Lord of Death was primary. He was a bloodthirsty god, completely uncivilized, and people were often sacrificed to him (though these were mostly condemned criminals and prisoners of war). As Adam of Bremen said, "Woden; that means fury."

But this form was not the only one the god took. It seems that at as the worship of Woden spread outside of Germany, the perception of the god changed. He became known as the father of the runes, and as such became the father of magic. He became associated with the practice of seidh as well, possibly through contact of the ancient Norse with the Saami, a highly "shamanic" people. As these things happened, he began to take over many of the functions of and nature of Tiwaz, the Germanic god Snorri gives us as Tyr. He took over his position as All-Father, and largely seems to have replaced him as god of war. He became more worshipped by the aristocratic classes. He became more civilized (though at heart he was still drighten of draugs, lord of the dead), and those who pursued the intellectual arts appealed to him. Human sacrifice played a much lesser part of his worship, and in some areas was ceased altogether. In this form he was viewed as an exemplary model for those who would obtain wisdom. He was god of eloquence, a lawgiver, king, and judge. He also came to be worshipped as a god of crops, of the fertility of the land. In this form he was known as Odhinn (pronounced Oth-in, where the th is soft as in "the").

The modern spelling of "Odin" is due primarily to researchers' ignoring the distinction between the Icelandic letter for the soft th and the Icelandic letter for d. This is the way the name is rendered in modern times, in myth and folklore. For this reason many modern worshippers are returning to the spelling Odhinn. I would disagree with this practice, for the reason that the god we know now as Odin is not precisely Odhinn, just as Odhinn is not precisely the same as Woden. The minni is the same, but the hugr is a little different. For one thing, when the god was last worshipped, the world and his worshippers were both very different. They did not see things as people today see them. Exposing infants was still regarded as a necessity during famine. Prisoners of war were routinely executed. One had little if any moral debt to strangers. Going viking, which included murder, rape, and theft was considered acceptable. And for another thing, the knowledge we have of Odin, coming from such sources as myths written for children and scholarly works by modern authors, is changed by the long tradition of literature and folklore that has preserved the stories. A whole period of Germanic Romanticism produced works of art, poetry, opera, and more that painted and repainted Odin in different ways, as times changed. It could be argued that this is a corruption of Odin's nature, but as the changes are sprung from the evolution of the Germanic cultures, I think it much more appropriate to think of them as the way in which Odin himself has evolved.

The Odin of modern times continues the process begun in the transition from Woden to Odhinn. The intellectual is much more pronounced. He is god of the runes, and of seidh. He is god of death, but the psychopomp aspect, as well as the seidh-related aspect of death and rebirth are emphasized. He is still god of battle, but as the culture of the warrior is gone, and warriors with them, he is now more a god of the martial arts. Sacrifices to him are still of blood, but it is the blood of he who does the sacrificing. He has become a god of the individual, and individual development, especially for those who seek wisdom and personal power. (At the same time he is a god of society, as the chief of all the gods.) He is seen as a god of transcendence, as his death upon the World Tree relates, as does the story of the sacrifice at Mimir's well. In this way he is god of the berserk and seidh-man both. He is the giver of inspiration and he who overcomes adversity. And he is still the mad leader of the Wild Hunt, and the Grim Reaper.

Odin had many, many names. These were called heiti. Each of them corresponded to a different part of his nature. Indeed the name "Odin" itself (as opposed to Odhinn, Wotan) could be seen as one of the god's heiti, the one for the modern world. Some of the heiti seem extensions of him that are so well developed they have a near independent existence. In this sense they are hypostases. Some of his more common ones are:

Vegtam: this name means "Way-tame", and is the name under which Odin journeyed (or journeys) to Hel for the purpose of summoning a dead seeress to learn from her the future. This could be seen as a necromantic form of Odin.

Gangleri: this name means "Way-weary", and may refer to his nature as a wanderer.

Har: "One-eyed", referring to his sacrifice at Mimir's well. In this way he can be related to as the god of transcendence. This name also means "High", but more on that below.

Herjan: "War-god".

Galdrfadhir: "Father of Magic".

Bolverk: "Evil-worker, or Harm-worker", refers to his winning of the poetic mead from the giants, and the evil he had to do to obtain it. But it should be kept in mind that it was a necessary evil, in that the worlds could not survive with the mead in the hands of the giants.

Harbarth: "Greybeard", this one could be seen as a term indicating the wisdom that comes with age. This was the form in which he appeared to Thor - in disguise - in the funny yet revelatory poem *The Lay of Harbarth*. It may, for reasons relating to the same poem, also have to do with his role as the Ferryman, the psychopomp.

Alfadhir: "All-father", Odin as the creator of the worlds, creator of men, and as chief of all the gods. In this way he is worshipped by some as a sort of symbol for the pantheon of gods as a whole.

Svipal: "The Changeable". Well, just look at all these names.

Hroptr: "Hidden", Odin as lord of the concealed, or the occult, and thus also of its discovery.

Sigfadhir: "Victory Father", the giver of victory in battle and, by extension, in all contests.

Ofnir: "The Entangler", which may refer to his battle-gift of the war-fetter, by which enemies are bound by magic, unable to move or attack..

Svafnir: "Luller to Sleep, or Dreams". As visions are a type of waking dream, this might be a way for the visionary to relate to Odin.

Oski: "Fulfiller of Wishes", Odin in his most benign aspect. This is the Odin that Santa Claus comes from, who rides around the world at Yule leaving presents and punishments alike. In this sense he is served by wishmaidens, who fulfill his will in the world.

Gagnrath: "Giver of Good Counsel".

Drauga Drottin: "Lord of the Dead, or Undead". The one who leads the hosts of the dead upon the earth in the dark half of the year.

Sanngetal: "Truth-finder".

Helblindi: "Hel-blind". No explanation of this name is recorded. In this aspect, Odin is said to be Loki's brother.

Wod: "The Furious, or Possessed". This is Odin as battle-god, and as lord of poetry and inspiration. Also as the leader of the Wild Hunt.

Hattr: "The Hooded, or The Hat-Wearer". This may refer to the seidh-practice of gaining visions by sitting for some time under a hood, effectively blind and cut off from the outside world. Also another common term by which Odin is known as leader of the Wild Hunt.

High, Just-as-High, Third: Three forms met by Gylfi, a man who sought wisdom. Under these separate yet interdependent aspects, this Odinic trinity can be worshipped as the hidden teacher of the mystic or the martial artist, the god whose lessons are revealed through intermediaries or hidden sources.

Wordwolf: This one is not ancient. This is one of the ways in which I have come to know him, and the name he gave me. This is Odin as a force of intellect that is not cold, dispassionate, or removed but raging, fiery, and immediate. This is Odin as the Intelligent Brute. An analogy of what this name means to me would be Odin as Dr. Jeckyll and Mr Hyde both at once.

One of the first things that strike the student of Odin is the relationship Odin has with women, both in general and in certain particular instances. Indeed, his life and power are almost totally defined by the feminine.

Odin is married to Frigga, who is said to know all things but keeps her own counsel. She advises him, and is ruler of his household. A couple of stories survive that show her getting the better of him when they are divided on an issue. It seems probable, as the majority of the goddess' lore did not survive to modern times, that these were part of a larger, partly humorous body of folklore that show that even Odin cannot stand against Frigga. Frigga has the nickname "Rival of Iordh", so Snorri tells us, as well as the nicknames "Rival of Rind" and "Rival of Gunnlodh", who are some of Odin's other women.

Odin is also married to Iordh, who is the Earth (a goddess grown from the earlier tradition of Nerthus, Eartha). In this way Odin has a partner as god of crops and the fertility of the land. Related to this connection is the bond they share as parents of Thor, whose lightning bridges the storm and the earth. She may be identical with the goddess Fiorgyn, according to some scholars, and as such would be the mother of Frigga. Iordh is called by Snorri "Rival of Frigga", "Rival of Rind", and "Rival of Gunnlodh".

Odin is said to be married to Freya, under the name Odhr. His roving nature forces him to periodically leave her and wander the nine worlds. When this happens Freya follows after in her chariot, searching for him.

Another of Odin's wives is Saga, goddess of history, who dwells in Sokvabek, where cool waves murmur. There she and Odin spend some time each day joyfully drinking from golden cups as he listens to her songs about olden times.

Odin is married as well to Rind, a human princess who only submitted to his advances under threat, and who bore his son Vali, who avenged Baldur.

Odin had a brief affair with Gunnlodh, when he swindled the stolen mead of inspiration away from her. She became the mother of Bragi, the most eloquent of gods. There is a rune (mystery) in this.

He is also married to the wave-maidens; Gialp, Greip, Egia, Augeia, Ulfrun, Aurgiafa, Sindur, Atla, and Iarnsaxa, who were the mothers (yes, all of them) of Heimdall, guardian of the Bridge Bifrost.

He is also said to be married to the giantess Grid, who is the mother of Vidar the Silent, who never speaks and will survive Ragnarok and avenge Odin's death. She also gave Vidar the giant shoe with which he will do this.

No account of the rivalry between Frigga, Iordh, Rind, and Gunnlodh remains in the surviving fragments of the old lore, but it seems likely to once have existed. It seems also likely that most of Odin's time must be taken up by his many relationships and the group dynamics referred to above.

And additionally, each of these relationships produces something integral to Odin and his plans, anything from children that can fulfill certain roles to the wisest of counsel.

Odin also seems, as he mentions in the *Lay of Harbarth*, to have many other relationships as well, particularly with seidh-women or prophetesses. This would potentially be a good way for modern female practitioners of those arts to relate to him.

When Odin wishes to learn that which is unknown he summons up a dead seeress, a woman. When he sought the runes, the other mystery he is known for besides seidh, he died and went to Hel for it, the realm of the goddess Hela. It was Freya who taught seidh to Odin in the first place. He is served most closely by the valkyries, female warrior spirits. And the possibility that Odin engaged in transgenering rituals makes even some of his internal nature feminine. It seems that in every way, large and small, Odin's power comes from, is defined by, and even limited by the feminine (especially as the Norns, to whose laws of cause and effect even Odin is subject, are female).

There are three myths, I think, that best show Odin's nature, and the path he has taken to attain the knowledge and power that are in his nature to seek. The first of these is his sacrifice on Yggdrasil. He hung himself on the tree for nine days and nights, wounded by his own spear. The *Havamal* relates this tale as "*I know I hung on that windswept tree, / Swung there for nine long nights, / Wounded by my own blade, / Bloodied for Odin, /*

Myself an offering to myself: / Bound to the tree / That no man knows / Whither the roots of it run. / None gave me bread, / None gave me drink. / Down to the deepest depths I peered / Until I spied the runes. / With a roaring cry I seized them up, / Then dizzy and fainting I fell. / Well being I won / And wisdom too. / I grew and took joy in my growth: / From a word to a word / I was led to a word, / From a deed to another deed.” In this way Odin won the runes, and the knowledge they brought into the worlds of gods and men both. In this way he brought galdr into existence. In this way he gained a symbolic understanding of all things. And it may be that he had to die for other reasons as well. After all, what's the use of a *living* god of the dead?

The second of these myths is his sacrifice at Mimir's well. Mimir was a wise old etin, whose name comes from the same root as minni, memory and the subconscious. Mimir tended a well which would give he who drank from it sight over all the worlds. Odin desired this sight, and so besought a draught from Mimir. This he was granted, for the price of one of his eyes. Odin tore it out, and left it in the well. There is a great rune here, for the seidh-workers and visionaries. To gain sight over all the worlds, all the places he is not present, he has to lose half his sight in the place he is present.

The third of these myths is the loss and return of the mead of inspiration. The mead was brewed out of the blood of Kvasir, a god renowned for wisdom and formed out of a mixture of the spittle of the Aesir and Vanir both. It was stolen, and ended up in the hands of the giant Suttung, who entrusted it to his daughter Gunnlodh to guard. Odin took the name of Bolverk (Worker of Evil, or Harm) in a ritual fashion, murdering peasants in a field to do so. He wiled his way into the good graces of a brother of Suttung and so got close enough to the mountain-fortress Gunnlodh dwelt in to bore a hole in it with an auger and slip in in the form of a snake. He wooed Gunnlodh, who promised him three sips of the mead if he would dally three nights with her. He then drank all of the mead, in three vast "sips," out of the three cauldrons it was kept in. Then, narrowly evading pursuit, made it back to Asgard with it, though some of the mead was lost as he fled, and fell to earth. This is called the fool poets' share, and the small amount of inspiration, and the need to write, that bad poets possess comes from it.

This shows the following things about Odin: firstly, that his heiti do not simply refer to ritual nicknames, but that he takes on different natures and personalities with them. He is not a god to do things half way. It took the cunning and ruthlessness of a "bale-worker" to win back the stolen mead, and so this is exactly what he became. This shows something important about his manner of problem solving. He takes advantage of his amorphous and changeable nature (Svipal) and becomes whatever is most capable of solving the problem at hand. This myth also shows his commitment to the worlds he has created. With that mead in the hands of the jotuns, the blind forces of inertia and destruction, the worlds could not survive, as the mead is the very substance by which anything new is learned and by which any change occurs. The story shows that Odin's ethics are purely situational; nothing has higher priority than his primary function of preventing Ragnarok, the "Fatal Destiny" that will end everything. This is the same reason underlying his "betrayal" of those devoted to him. This story is also, it might be noted, the source of the form of much of the medieval Grail myths. Compare it to stories of Percival or Childe Roland, or of the Fisher King.

Our faith is not a static thing. As we change as a people, so our mythology must grow and evolve. (Remember, Odin shows us that that which is static is dead.) I wish to present here a candidate for a new myth, for the consideration of all Asatruar who read this. Benjamin Thorpe, the eminent nineteenth century scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, law, and history, relates it in his collection of folklore from Sweden in his book *Northern Mythology*. It says that there was a barrow in Kraktorps gard in Smaland, that was said to be Odin's, and was called Hell's Mount after the advent of Christianity. Around 1750 it was opened, and reports and legends surrounding this opening say that a flash of lightning leapt out of it upon opening.

Now the thing is, this was just before the German Romantic literary tradition sprang up (in such forms as the Gothic League, of 1811, formed by Swedish poets) that saw a resurgence of interest in and development of the Germanic mythology. This is where the roots of the revival of Asatru itself come from. Also, while Thor's men are said to have most strongly resisted the tide of Christianity when those conflicts turned violent (this was often known as the struggle between the Red Thor and the White Christ), Odin's men are, near as I can tell, not known almost anywhere for this. I say this is consistent with Odin's nature. He is no wastrel, to plant seed in autumn (but it is Thor's nature to always turn aside the wolf from the door). This is part of his nature as Svipal. Odin is like the falling feather; it cannot be harmed because it does not resist overwhelming force. Like the storm winds he flows around obstacles, and so overcomes everything. I say it seems a truth to say Odin, far-seeing as he is, knew how the conflict with the new faith would turn out. He simply "went to sleep", died again as he did when he had to before, and waited until the time was right to be reborn in a new form. This was the flash of lightning from the barrow that was said, by descendants of his own people, to be his.

It is not an easy thing to serve Odin. His is the path of most resistance. Hardships that most people would sensibly avoid are embraced, for purposes of growth. He is a wanderer, never content in one place long, and his chosen often must live in the same manner, will-they or won't-they. He is grim, and silent, and capricious. He hands out rewards and victories as a matter of policy, rather than dessert. And at the end of a life of sacrifice he kills those who serve him, often at a young age. For this reason it is often said of him that he is a traitor, but this is not so. His devotees know why this is (for he needs certain people when they are at certain points in their lives, to help in the struggle at Ragnarok), and so go into his service with open eyes, striking a bargain for his service with life as the payment. This is why the symbol of Odin is the Valknut, the "Knot of the Slain," which his devotees wear. In this sense human sacrifice is still the correct offering to Odin; one offers up one's own life. This is why it is extremely dangerous for non-initiates to approach Odin too closely. This can be seen in the story of the woman who called upon Odin's aid in brewing the household's mead. He promised his aid, asking that which lay between her girdle and herself. She didn't know why he would want her dress, but she agreed. It turned out she didn't know she was pregnant, and Odin had been referring to her unborn son. But the deal was already struck. (An Odinist would have known to ask for more specific terms.) To call upon Odin is to call upon that which is holy. Holy simply means whole, and Odin is this. He is the Alfadhir. He is darkness and light both. To call upon him is to call upon unbalance, madness, and destruction as much

as it is to call upon inspiration, power, and creation. He is like the storm, which has winds that destroy and rains that nourish.

There are many ways that pagans or heathens worship: some pay worship mostly to their ancestors, others give heed more to the natural powers and the landwights (the sun, the moon, alfs, local river and mountain gods, etc.), some honor all the gods equally, giving sacrifice to each as appropriate. And some devote themselves to primarily worshipping a single god, a patron. (There is some debate in the modern Asatru community about whether or not the concept of having a patron is a paleopagan one - and therefore a fit model for us moderns. I believe it is; just read *Egil's Saga*, or the *Vinland Sagas*.)

Dedication to a particular god has its own hardships and its own rewards (doesn't everything?). When you have a particular god as a patron you have to work a little (or a lot) harder. After all, if you want to attract the deity's attention, and receive whatever it is that draws you to that deity, then you have to be a little bit special. You have to distinguish yourself in some way to merit receiving what you want. If you want something of worth from this god (be it love, power, knowledge, experience, or just a nod in your direction) then you must give something of worth. A gift demands a gift, thus says the *Havamal*. The way we humans give to the gods is through sacrifice, so a patron must always come first in the toasting, first in the offering. Your patron must be first in your heart and in your head. His or her work in this world should be done by you. Thor's men should protect others, Freya's write poetry of love and lust to inflame the passions of love everywhere. Loki's men should make sure no one ever gets too complacent or impressed with themselves, or goes too long without laughing.

Each deity has their own tasks. Likewise each god and goddess has certain standards of behavior that he or she most approves of. Thus it behooves those who look to them to adopt these behaviors to a greater or lesser degree. But this is not easy. Inaction is always easier than action, and doing your god's work requires vigilance, industry, self-honesty, and a bunch of other words that represent things that are Not Fun. And then there's no guarantee that the god will ever give you what you want or, indeed, even notice you. This is where faith comes in and faith, too, is hard. (Or possibly even worse, the god might suddenly pay a lot of attention to you.)

The rewards of working with one god as your special favorite can more than make up for all the hardships. Many are moved to a particular god out of love and respect, and the mere presence of that god is an experience of unutterable beauty. A desired afterlife, too, is a reason for such service. And even if the god interacts little with you, mere acts of dedication themselves are keys to knowledge and power, for everything presents an opportunity to learn. And then there's always the possibility the god will give you what you seek....

Odin is lord of death, and battle, and the galdric arts, as well as poetry, and inspiration, and of finding things out. Of madness, and pain, and music. He is the god of transformation, of transcendence. His way is the way of growth through death and rebirth. He has, perhaps, one gift to give and that is the gift of hardship, of challenge. Perform, he says, or die.

In three ways did he gain his knowledge and power. He hung himself on a tree (The Tree), injured and alone, till the experience pushed him over the brink of death. But he found the runes instead, and a way back besides. He gave an eye, half his sight in return for sight over all the worlds. Through cleverness and deceit he infiltrated a mountain-fortress of his enemies and won the raw stuff of inspiration itself back from the forces that would destroy the worlds of men and gods alike..

It is clear in the old sources that Odin teaches as he learns. Through trial he built Hrolf Kraki up, even going so far as to help his enemies. His gift to Sigmund brought out the best in him before it killed him. A horse he gave to Sigurd, and a sword, and these things led him through battle, and fire, and venom. In the *Havamal* Odin teaches us to always keep our eyes and ears open. To judge things for ourselves. To know, and to act from that knowledge.

How do I relate to Odin? I am a berserk, so I relate to him as Wod; the Furious, the Possessed. Under this name I relate to him as an artist and a student of science, for it also means inspiration. I am a minor sort of seidh-man, and so to me Odin is Hangatyr, the Hanged God, who died on Yggdrasil to descend into Hel in pursuit of revelation. He is thus also Vegtam, who journeyed by road to Hel to summon the dead volva. To me he is Svafnir, the bringer of dreams. He is Oski, the granter of wishes, especially to those who struggle with him, as do the farmers in the cycle of folklore concerning the Wild Hunt and the tug-of-war. He has granted many of my wishes. He is the leader of the Wild Hunt, and as such he is called both Wod and Hattr. (And the comparison this brings to the Mad Hatter is not inappropriate.) Lastly I would say that he is Gangleri to me, the Wanderer, and that he is High, Just-as-High, and Third, my hidden teacher.

My god is a solitary god, a wanderer. He sets up his own trials, he seeks out challenges. He takes advantage of all the road before him offers. I seek what Odin seeks; knowledge and the power that knowledge brings. I believe that Odin is the best example of how to attain what I seek and so I try to walk the path that he has walked. He is not my friend, for he is too remote and terrible for friendship. (Though he does love - why else is his every action bent towards preservation of the world and uplifting those within it?) He is not my confidant, though I go to him with problems when I need help. I have learned to see Odin everywhere. He is the hidden teacher, the High, Just As High, and Third of Gylfi. He is the man with the knife slipping up behind me. He is the slowpoke driving the station wagon ahead of me when I needed to be across town an hour ago. He is the cruel cop, the obstinate bureaucrat. He is the cause of the black ice that I didn't see, and the falling rocks, and I believe I heard his echoes when someone I loved and needed walked away. He is grim, and silent, and unyielding. He is in every hardship that pushes me, hurts me, makes me become something **more** than what I am now. And yet for all of this I have learned to love, respect, and even like him.

So I try to learn, setting up my own roadblocks, rushing to meet problems I might otherwise have avoided. I will not do what Odin asks of me without question, for Odin himself teaches sure knowledge, and judgment (besides which I think he wants heroes, not lackeys and boot-licks). And like him, my strength lies within myself. I need no outside reasons to act, or refrain from acting.

And for these reasons if he cared not for me I would turn away from him, look elsewhere for what I seek. It's what he would do.

As the nature of Odin has changed in the course of his evolution from Woden to Odhinn to Odin, the nature of the Odinit must also change. The world is not as it once was, and many of the old ways of walking Odin's path are no longer possible, or no longer acceptable, or have been superseded by different understandings of the world. There are many valid methods of determining what ways of walking Odin's path are best suited for the modern world. Each method gives a somewhat different set of requirements, practices, and beliefs. And none of these different ways are correct, objectively, for there is no such thing as objectivity, especially for something as subjective as religious experience. All of these different methods, as long as they are not wildly at variance with historical records, are equally valid, each for the Odinit that practices it. I present a description of the way I have found, beginning with these historical records, building up a picture of the Odinit in ancient heathen times, to show how each element of the picture so built can be adapted to modern times. This being something I have learned to do in my long relationship with the god. I present it because I think it potentially valuable for some others than myself, and because it is a way talked little of by other modern Odinites.

There is, of course, no better way of determining just what being an Odinit in ancient times was than by examining the lives of historical (or semi-historical) Odinites. Of these perhaps the best known were Hadding, Harald Wartooth, Egil Skallagrimsson, King Volsung, his son Sigmund, and his son Sigurd, Eric Bloodaxe, Jarl Hakon, Hrolf Kraki, and Starkad.

Hadding was an Odinit from a very young age, when he met a wandering Odin and swore allegiance to him. Once this was done, Odin proposed adventure, and led Hadding into war. He gave Hadding prophesies of his future, and advice designed to allow him to safely navigate the perilous path he was to walk. He taught him the berserkerang (the learning of which involved killing a lion single-handedly and drinking its blood). Hadding was taken to the afterlife, outside the world of Midgard entirely, to see Odin's realm, the lands of death. Odin met with Hadding often, giving him assistance, advice, and prophecy, both in person and in dreams. He warned him never to prefer obscure wars to glorious ones, and never prefer border wars to wars in far lands. Odin also gifted him with a battle-formation never before invented, allowing him to be victorious over almost anyone.

Hadding was something of an idealist, a rarity in the violent world he came from. He, during a time of peace, rescued a king's daughter from an undesired marriage to a giant because, according to Saxo Grammaticus, he "accounted it sweeter than any delight to repel the wrongs done, not only to himself, but to others". He also challenged and killed Toste the Wicked single-handedly because he would rather risk his own life than those of his soldiers'.

Odin told Hadding that he would die by suicide, and this is exactly what happened. A friend of Hadding's died in a manner that seemed ominous of Odin, and furthermore he died trying to honor Hadding, whom he wrongly believed had been killed in battle. Upon

hearing of this, Hadding sought to return honor to him, and took his own life by hanging, the traditional method of sacrifice to Odin.

Harald Wartooth was a king in Denmark during a violent and turbulent era. He conquered most of his rivals and established an empire of confederated sub-kingdoms that spanned Denmark, Jutland, Skane, Gautar, and Uppland. He was said to have gained this great dominion and his effortless victories by the aid of Odin. Harald became very old indeed, making some of his chiefs sense weakness and seek to do away with him in a base and ignominious manner. They came upon him while he was bathing, covering his tub with timber and stones, so that he would smother. But he said, "I know that you think I am too old. That is true, but I would rather die my fated death. I don't want to die in a bath tub, but in a more kingly way." So they let him out and the king, knowing that his time was at hand, gathered his army to oppose his nephew Hring, who was intent on conquering his lands.

At Bravellir the armies met, and Harald rode to combat in his chariot. It was not long before Harald noted that it was not his accustomed charioteer that drove him, and upon turning around the charioteer was revealed as Odin. Odin threw Harald from his chariot and clubbed him to death with his own club. Thereafter Harald was burned on a sumptuous pyre and sent to Valhalla ritually by Hring.

Egil Skallagrimsson was a poet, a warrior (likely a berserk), and a magician. He called Odin his patron, and credited the god with giving him the gifts of poetry and eloquence, as well as wisdom and insight into the hearts of other men. He was the epitome of both the man of action and the man of knowledge. His life was violent and tempestuous, and he reflected these qualities in his own character. He was a man of turbulent emotions, driven to gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirths (to steal a phrase from Robert E. Howard). His childhood was strong-willed and independent, and his adult life was largely consumed with a struggle against Eric Bloodaxe, king of Norway, his mortal foe. He was given to strong opinions, especially of the political variety, and had a streak of idealism in him, as shown in one of his poems wherein he says, "unpleasing to me/our people's mood/each seeking his own/in selfish peace". Towards the end of his life he went a little crazy, and delighted in stirring up trouble, on one occasion heading off for the Thing with a chest of silver to throw down amongst the crowd, that he might delight in the fighting and arguing that would ensue.

His son drowned at a young age, an occurrence that caused Egil to come to resent Odin to a certain extent, as shown in a poem he wrote about it.

18.

'Odin, mighty monarch,
Of minstrel mead the lord,
On me a heavy hand
Harmful doth lay.
Gloomy in unrest
Ever I grieve,
Sinks my drooping brow,
Seat of sight and thought.

19.

'Fierce fire of sickness
First from my home
Swept off a son
With savage blow:
One who was heedful,
Harmless, I wot,
In deeds unblemished,
In words unblamed.

20.

'Still do I mind me,
When the Friend of men
High uplifted
To the home of gods
That sapling stout
Of his father's stem,
Of my true wife born
A branch so fair.

21.

'Once bare I goodwill
To the great spear-lord,
Him trusty and true
I trowed for friend:
Ere the giver of conquest,
The car-borne god,
Broke faith and friendship
False in my need.

22.

'Now victim and worship
To Vilir's brother,
The god once honoured,
I give no more.
Yet the friend of Mimir
On me hath bestowed
Some boot for bale,
If all boons I tell.

23.

'Yea he, the wolf-tamer,
The war-god skilful,
Gave poesy faultless
To fill my soul:

Gave wit to know well
Each wily trickster,
And force him to face me
As foeman in fight.

24.

'Hard am I beset;
Whom Hela, the sister
Of Odin's fell captive,
On Digra-ness waits.
Yet shall I gladly
With right good welcome
Dauntless in bearing
Her death-blow bide.'

Volsung was the progenitor of that line of vikings that are arguably the most famous, and the best representatives of the ideals of the viking peoples. He, his son, and his grandson were all men of Odin, favored by the god. Volsung began life as an orphan, but due to his great size and strength rose to become king of Hunland. He built his palace around a great tree called Branstock, and into this hall one day came Odin, and stuck a magic sword named Gram, made by Wayland the Smith, that would give victory to he who wielded it in any battle, and that it was his gift to whoever could draw it out of the tree. Only Volsung's son Sigmund proved able to do it. (Which, incidentally, was the basis for the sword in the stone story in the Arthurian myths.)

King Siggeir, who sought Volsung's daughter in marriage, wanted the sword, and after trying and failing to draw it from the tree he offered to buy it from Sigmund, who rejected his offer. At this Siggeir grew secretly wroth and swore to make an end to the Volsungs and take the sword for himself. After marrying Volsung's daughter he invited the family to his palace. Signy, Volsung's daughter, warned her father she feared the invitation was a trap. Volsung refused to heed her warning, saying

*"Yet, shall a king hear murder when a king's mouth blessing saith?
So maybe he is bidding me honor, and maybe he is bidding me death;
Let him do after his fashion, and I will do no less."*

But it was a trap, and Siggeir's greater forces overwhelmed the Volsungs. Though the battle was obviously hopeless, Volsung fought on

*"Till all his limbs were weary and his body rent and torn:
Then he cried: "Lo now, Allfather, is not the swathe well shorn?
Wouldst thou have me toil for ever, nor win the wages due?"*

Sigmund and his brothers survived the battle, captured by King Siggeir, who had them all tortured to death except Sigmund, whom Signy helped escape. He lived many years alone in the wilderness after that, and eventually Signy sent him her son to be raised, that

Sigmund and he might avenge themselves on king Siggeir. During this time they became ulfhednar (a form of berserk that relates to the wolf), and ravaged Siggeir's troops. Eventually they managed to kill Siggeir, and returned to the ancestral kingdom of the Volsung's, which Sigmund had to reclaim. Sigmund eventually came to fight a series of battles with a formal rival suitor for the hand of the woman who became his wife. Sigmund was winning, for he bore the magic sword Gram. But the Norns had decreed he must die that day, and the magic of Gram ensured he was undefeatable, so Odin himself came against him. Sigmund attacked while Odin parried with his spear Gungnir, and the sword Gram broke, and Sigmund died, ordering at the last that the shards of the sword be taken up and kept for his son.

Sigurd, Sigmund's son, grew to great size and strength, like his father and grandfather before him. His stepfather, as a gift, gave him permission to select any horse he wanted from his stable. As he went to the stable to inspect the horses he met Odin, who advised him to pick out one particular horse, telling Sigurd it was sired by Sleipner, Odin's own horse. Sigurd also had a foster-father named Regin. As foster-father Regin tutored Sigurd in all things, but there was no love for Sigurd in Regin's heart, for he sought to use the youth in a plot to gain control of a treasure guarded by his brother Fafnir, who was in the form of a dragon. He told Sigurd the history of the treasure and of the dragon that guarded it, and proposed to the youth that they would become very rich if they could win it. To this Sigurd agreed, and so Regin attempted to forge him a sword of sufficient strength and sharpness to defeat the dragon. But after Regin failed twice, Sigurd's mother gave him the shards of the sword his father Sigmund had from Odin, and Regin reforged the sword.

So Sigurd set out to find the dragon Fafnir and killed him. Regin bade him cut out the dragon's heart and roast it for him while he slept, for eating the heart of a dragon conferred many gifts, not the least of which was fearlessness. While roasting the heart Sigurd burned his finger and put it in his mouth, and the little bit of blood on the end of the finger was enough to enable him to understand the speech of the birds. From this he learned Regin was planning to betray and kill him, so that he could have all the treasure for himself. The birds also told him of a valkyrie that lay nearby, imprisoned by Odin. So, killing Regin and eating Fafnir's heart, Sigurd departed to find the valkyrie. To win his way to her Sigurd had to ride through fire, and upon waking her she fell in love with him. She instructed him in magic and the arts of combat, and gave him much other advice besides. But after some time Sigurd told her he had pressing duties to attend to, but that he would return for her. And so, pledging his love, he departed. But another woman, Gudrun, saw him in her dreams, and came to desire him for her own, and had her mother brew a potion to steal the memory of the valkyrie from Sigurd's mind. Because of this Sigurd wound up marrying Gudrun. His valkyrie, unable to stand the loss and his seeming betrayal, had Sigurd killed, and then followed him into the land of death.

Eric Bloodaxe was the son of Harald Fairhair, and king of Norway. He was the mortal enemy of Egil Skallagrimsson, though he spared that one's life upon hearing a poem Egil was forced to compose in his honor. He was not a popular king, and is reputed to have come into power by murdering kinsmen who also had claims on the throne. He was a great warrior, and popular or not, was undoubtedly a most effective leader by viking

standards, and a great man of Odin. The poem Eiriksmal tells about Eric's final battle, at Stainmore, held far from the realm of Norway, which he had been driven out of. Eric died in that battle, for Odin gave victory to Eric's foes. The Eiriksmal records Odin sending out a great retinue of valkyries and einherjar, the fallen heroes, to welcome him. So great were the honors bestowed upon him that Bragi asked Odin why he so honored Bloodaxe when other kings had died in the battle. Odin responded by saying "Because he has harried so many lands and borne a bloody sword." Bragi then asked why, if Eric was so great, Odin gave victory to his less deserving foemen. To that Odin replied "It is safer for the gods to have such a hero in their own midst as a bulwark against the Fenris Wolf."

Jarl Hakon was a devoted Odinsman, one of the only Odinsmen to fight against the Christian tyrants who sought to eradicate the old heathen faith. The grandsons of Harald Fairhair killed Hakon's father, murdered chieftains, levied unbearable taxes, and destroyed heathen temples in an attempt to force the Christian god upon all heathen lands. So unjust was their reign that the very landwights rebelled, and would not make the land fertile. Hakon allied with the king of Denmark and struck at Fairhair's grandchildren, killing them in battle. He returned the right of religious freedom to the people of Western Norway, which he came to rule. When this occurred the land again became fertile.

But war broke out between the king of Denmark, that had aided Hakon, and Emperor Otto II of Germany. Though they fought stoutly the Germans won, and Hakon was captured. Otto threatened Hakon's life if the Jarl would not convert and furthermore aid in the conversion of all Norway. The Jarl was no fool, and pretended to take baptism, knowing the gods knew what was really in his heart. Then having convinced the German emperor of his loyalty, Hakon returned to Norway with a boatload of Christian priests, there to ostensibly begin the forced conversion of his native land. But once out of range of the Emperor, Hakon offered the priests up as a sacrifice to Odin and had them all thrown overboard.

Turning immediately to the offensive, he launched war upon the Christians once again, knowing the German emperor was coming with his allies. He sacrificed his own son to Odin, so as to assure victory. As a sign of accepting his sacrifice Odin sent his own ravens to the Jarl, croaking loudly to him. After this the Christians came in great numbers to destroy the Jarl and all heathens. In payment for the sacrifice, Odin sent a hailstorm to blow against the Christian armies at the moment the outcome of the battle was in doubt, sending them fleeing. Because of the Jarl's unwavering efforts to preserve the faith and fight for his god, the old religion survived long enough to take root in Iceland, and thence seed the modern-day revival.

Hrolf Kraki was a king of Denmark. It was a long time before he was able to win its security from its numerous enemies, and to do so he took the aid of Odin, who advised him of a most unusual battle strategy. But when Odin wanted him to come deeper into alliance with him, Kraki refused, fearing the price. At this Odin turned against him and aided his enemies, calling together an awesome force of foes both human and otherworldly, defeating and killing the king.

Starkad was favored by Odin from his birth, and had the enmity of Thor from the same time, for his grandfather had giant blood and had angered the thunder god. Thor cursed him to be childless. Odin granted him a lifespan thrice that of an ordinary man. Thor cursed him to commit three dastardly deeds. Odin gave him great and powerful weapons. Thor denied him the chance to ever own land. Odin gave him great wealth, Thor cursed him so as he could never enjoy it. Odin promised him victory in battle, Thor cursed him to suffer grievous wounds in each. Odin gave him the gift of poetry and Thor made him unable to remember his own compositions. Odin gave him popularity amongst the high and mighty of society, Thor cursed him to be despised by the common man. Starkad lived out each of these gifts and curses. He was an invincible warrior and a great poet. He lived to an enormous age and committed three heinous acts: murdering King Vikar at Odin's request, fleeing battle in Jutland, and murdering King Olo, whom he served, for a bribe.

The thing that stands out most, perhaps, about each of these men of Odin is that they lived very hard lives. Hadding fought one war after another, spending his whole life in battle. He was captured by his enemies and nearly killed, and only escaped by learning how to become a berserker, which included having to fight and kill a man-eating lion in close quarters. Harald Wartooth grew up in a particularly violent and tumultuous time in Denmark's history. He became a king, but only through conquest. His life too was one battle after another. At the end of it he was betrayed by those close to him and finally he fell, murdered by Odin himself. Egil Skallagrimsson's life was one of turbulent emotions and hardship. Often forced to be on the run from powerful enemies, he was something of an outlaw. He had a great and powerful mortal foe in King Eric Bloodaxe and spent much of his life struggling against him. He fought in many battles, and in his old age he lost his son to drowning, and came to rebel against his patron Odin. Volsung's life began very hard indeed, as he was an orphan. Through struggle he won for himself a kingdom, only to have Odin's gift to his line (the sword) draw out so much envy in others that he was led into a trap wherein he met his death in battle. His son Sigmund was captured in that battle and lived most of his life on the run after escaping, a hunted outlaw. Even once he had his revenge and rewon his father's kingdom, he was killed by Odin in battle. Sigurd, his son, faced a dragon in battle, was betrayed nearly to death by his foster father, whom he thought cared for him, won a valkyrie for a lover by facing great trials, and was eventually killed by that same valkyrie in a jealous fit. Eric Bloodaxe came to his throne amidst a cloud of violence and murder, and was ever an unpopular king. His life was one war after another, finally betrayed and killed when Odin supported his enemies. Jarl Hakon began his life trying to avenge his father's murder and stop the Christian conquest and destruction of his people. From this he was drawn into larger wars, which he lost. He was captured and threatened with torture. Escaping brought more war, ensuring he spent his whole life in a constant struggle. Hrolf Kraki was known for a reign of peace and justice, but this was only won after much war and violence, and in such a way it ended too. And lastly Starkad's life was as much defined by the curses he was under as it was by the divine blessings he received. And as with all the other Odinsmen his life was one of battle.

This constant hardship is quite consistent with Odin's own nature too. Odin's own path is hard. To win the awesome knowledge and power of the runes, Odin wounded himself with his own spear and hung himself on the tree. To gain sight over all the worlds, he tore

out one of his own eyes. When the giants captured the Mead of Inspiration he went on a long, dangerous, arduous adventure to win it. Odin constantly wanders the nine worlds, even to the point of coming near to starvation, seeking knowledge, as recounted in the Prose Edda. He is god of battle, and takes part in many. He spends half of every year in an unending hunt, leading the dead upon the earth.

Another thing that stands out as a common feature to Odinsmen is their ferocity. Many Odinsmen are berserkers (such as Hadding, Egil, Sigmund), those who become wod during battle. Wod means not only “possessed” but also “furious”. Eric Bloodaxe was honored by Odin above other kings because he had reddened his sword so much more than they. Egil Skallagrimsson was more open to Odin’s direct influence, arguably, than any other, and his was a life of mad, violent, tempestuous emotion. His advice to Hadding was to seek greater battles over lesser ones, and to be not content merely to defend his own borders but to bring the sword to others. Harald Wartooth desired nothing so much, at the end of his life, as a death in battle.

This too is very consistent with Odin’s own nature. Two of his names that show this are Wod, the Furious, and Yggr, the Terrifying. One of his gifts to warriors is the battle-fury. When he came to take Harald Wartooth’s life, he did it in a most ferocious and animalistic fashion, beating him to death with his own war-club. At home he surrounds himself with wild animals, his wolves Freki and Geri, and his ravens, Hugin and Munin. He takes on the form of wild animals. In old days, animals and men both were sacrificed to him. And as Adam of Bremen said, “Odin: that means fury.”

Another feature common to Odinsmen is great ingenuity. Jarl Hakon, when imprisoned and threatened with death and torture, managed to talk and act his way out of imprisonment so well he was able to completely turn the tables upon his tormenters. Hadding, when imprisoned by his foes, reached deep inside himself and found a way to bring out new ferocity and strength to help him break out. Sigmund; alone, penniless, and hunted nevertheless managed to plot, plan, and improvise a devious revenge against his enemy that took years to work itself out. Egil was faced with execution at the hands of Eric Bloodaxe. Unless he completely won his blood-enemy over within a short time with his poetry he would lose his head. But he managed not only to create a skillful poem within the allotted time limit but to create a completely new rhyme-scheme while doing so. (He named the poem “Head-Ransom”.) Harald Wartooth won his wars using clever new battle tactics, as did Hrolf Kraki.

Odin too is known for his great ingenuity. When the Mead of Inspiration was lost he won it through cunning and trickery. He manipulates his chosen heroes into the courses he wants them to follow, through intricate plans that unfold only over years. He, through trickery via Loki’s agency, manages to preserve his son Baldur through Ragnarok, the gods’ fatal destiny, enabling him to take his dead father’s place as leader after it’s all over. Similarly, instead of throwing his efforts around here and there trying to struggle in every instance against the overwhelming Christian hordes, he placed all of his effort into assisting Jarl Hakon. By spending it in the most effective way possible, he preserved the faith through the Christian conquest to be revived again now, in modern times.

Yet another feature common to Odinsmen is big-picture thinking. Hadding, Hrolf Kraki, Eric Bloodaxe, Jarl Hakon, Volsung all fought with grand visions of creating kingdoms in mind. Jarl Hakon also fought for other larger concepts, like vengeance for his father and freedom for his people. Similarly Sigmund fought to avenge his father. Sigurd fought for glory, as Hadding and Bloodaxe did. An element of this big-picture thinking, found in many Odinsmen, is a streak of idealism. Jarl Hakon fought and bled to win freedom for his people, to throw off the shackles of tyranny. Hadding “accounted it sweeter than any delight to repel the wrongs done, not only to himself, but to others”. This led him to fight to rescue the daughter of King Hakon from peril, and to fight Toste the Wicked personally, that his men’s lives need not be risked. Hrolf Kraki fought for peace, security, and bounty for his people. Egil railed against the shortsighted selfishness of his countrymen.

Odin too thinks mostly in the big picture. He could see far enough beyond the horror of what circumstances required of him enough to sacrifice his eye and to hang himself, for the long-term benefits these sacrifices brought. When the Christians conquered all he came up with a plan that looked to the long-term survival of the heathen people and himself rather than the short-term struggle. His every effort is bent to preserving the worlds, to fighting off Ragnarok, to preserving something through it. In this he shows a form of idealism as well, as what he is fighting to preserve is for others, not for himself. (He is to die at Ragnarok, in a rather more permanent sense than his other deaths.) He spends his efforts on uplifting and aiding all of humankind. Not just by helping to preserve us through the Fatal Destiny of Ragnarok, but in many other ways. It was he, along with two other gods, that created the world out of the formless chaos of the void in the first place. It was he who gifted humankind with intelligence and the ability to affect our own destinies. He builds up his chosen heroes, driving them always to become greater than they presently are, uplifting them, freeing them from their limitations. He gives the gift of poetry to some as well, not just for their own benefit but to brighten and beautify the lives of all.

Great joy in all circumstances is also a unifying theme amongst Odinsmen. Perhaps the best example of this is with King Volsung. At the beginning of a journey to visit a supposed friend, King Siggeir, he had been warned that the invitation might be a trap. He says:

*"Yet, shall a king hear murder when a king's mouth blessing saith?
So maybe he is bidding me honor, and maybe he is bidding me death;
Let him do after his fashion, and I will do no less."*

He went to king Siggeir's with a whole heart. His joy came from performing right action, not from a need of safety, of having made the correct choice. His joy depended on himself, who he knows he can rely on and not the outside world, which he may not be able to rely on. This kind of joy, not depending on outside circumstance, cannot be taken from him by outside circumstance. Sigurd, Volsung’s grandson, shared this philosophy. He is attributed with having said:

*"Ever the fearless but the fearful never will fare well in a fight.
To be glad is better than gloomy of mood, whether all fall fair or foul."*

Egil Skallagrimsson showed this attitude towards life as well, taking delight in fair times and foul, able even to compose poetry when faced with immanent death. Though his son's death certainly shook him, he was still able to recount the good things about his life and his relationship with Odin. Harald Wartooth, when faced with murder, was more concerned with the enjoyability of his death rather than the fact that he was about to die. And all of these Odinsmen were warriors, who gladly sought out battle, risking their lives wholeheartedly and without fear or reservation.

Odin shares this characteristic too with his chosen heroes. Most tellingly in the Havamal, where he describes his experiences resulting from hanging on the tree:

“Well being I won / And wisdom too. / I grew and took joy in my growth: / From a word to a word / I was led to a word, / From a deed to another deed.”

One of his heiti, his names, is Oski, the granter of wishes, and in this capacity he is served by wishmaidens. This is Odin in his lightest, most joyful aspect (indeed, the Norse words for “wish” and “joy” are etymologically related).

Self-improvement, of a sort, is also a feature of Odinsmen. (By this I do not mean the rather more limited sense of “character development” that most people mean by “self-improvement” today.) Hadding sought to improve his skills as a warrior, and so learned from Odin, striking a deal with him. He gave Odin his friendship and his life, and in return Odin taught him a superior form of battle formation for troops, and also taught him that internal sort of martial development called the berserker gang. Sigmund also developed his internal nature in this manner, becoming an ulfhednar while training himself for his revenge against Siggeir. Sigurd set out into the world for adventure's sake, seeking to learn and experience whatever he could. When he found Sigrdrifa, his valkyrie, he learned from her philosophy, martial art, magic, and right conduct. Even Hrolf Kraki, in turning away from Odin for fear of the consequences of accepting his gifts, was still engaging in self-improvement.

That Odin has this characteristic is unarguable. It could even be said to be his defining characteristic, as all his major myths are all about his unending quest for self-improvement, such as his sacrifice upon the tree, and his sacrifice at Mimir's well. He constantly wanders the worlds in search of knowledge. He questions those reputed to be wise and knowledgeable, even hazarding his own life to do so.

Another thing experienced by virtually every Odinsman is struggling against Odin. Harald Wartooth and King Sigmund are, in the end, killed by the god directly. Hrolf Kraki dies in battle against an army Odin helped raise. Eric Bloodaxe fell in battle when Odin favored his less deserving foe. Sigurd is slain by the valkyrie sent him by Odin. Even Egil ends his life feeling his path with Odin has become one of struggle and opposition, as the poem he wrote on the occasion of his son's death attests.

As Odin's men struggle with him, he struggles with them. It is not that they are considered by the god to be wrong or recalcitrant. This is shown by his acceptance and honoring of them after their deaths, such as he showed to Eric Bloodaxe. The struggle

with Odin is part of the Odinsman's path. (Indeed, even Odin struggles against Odin, for many of his hardships are those he set up for himself.)

A resolute acceptance of death is yet another feature of the ancient Odinsman. First of all, all of them were warriors, and to seek out battle over and over is to deliberately seek out death. Additionally, upon the death of his friend under Odin-ominous circumstances, Hadding killed himself, in the ritual fashion of sacrifice to Odin. He hung himself. This was not because of depression or mental illness. He did it deliberately, feeling it was simply the right thing to do, acting as if death were no big deal. When fighting in his last battle King Volsung, after killing many of his foe and proving indomitable, asks Odin:

*"Lo now, Allfather, is not the swathe well shorn?
Wouldst thou have me toil for ever, nor win the wages due?"*

Harald Wartooth, when his traitorous chiefs sought to murder him, accepted his death without comment, seeking only to die fighting rather than by suffocation. Hadding valued the lives of his men but felt his own to be of little account. Sigurd attacked a dragon and rode through a wall of fire without second thoughts.

Neither does Odin shrink from death. He hung himself on the world tree, for only in death's realm could he find what he sought. During the Conversion he went into death again, retreating into the grave until some future generation of his people should open it and reawaken him. And while he strives ceaselessly to either forestall Ragnarok or preserve something through it, he never tries specifically to evade his own death at that time though, foresighted, he knows what it shall be.

That women figure very prominently into the lives of Odinsmen is also readily apparent by study of their myths. Egil's mother was perhaps most responsible for the mad violence that in many ways defined his life, by encouraging his rage at a young and impressionable age. Jarl Hakon's initial enemies, the ones that impelled him to act, were not just the grandsons of Harald Fairhair but most of all their mother, their leader, the power behind their throne. King Sigmund's life was mostly dominated (and saved) by the actions of his sister. Hrolf Kraki was killed by a female relative's forces in battle. Eric Bloodaxe's wife was reputed to be a witch, and the secret behind much of his power. Sigurd's life was mostly defined by his winning the love and teachings of a valkyrie, and in the end he is killed by her. And seidhmen, many of whom were Odinsmen, may very well have engaged in transgendering activities as part of ritual practice.

As covered in detail at the beginning of this book, Odin's life is defined almost entirely by the feminine in one way or another.

Lastly, one other thing binds the majority of Odinsmen together in commonality. This is the commission of dastardly deeds. Many Odinsmen commit greatly baneful acts at different points in their lives. Eric Bloodaxe is reputed to have murdered his own kin to ascend to his throne. Jarl Hakon, an idealist in many respects, sacrificed the life of his son for victory in battle. Egil Skallagrimsson murdered as a result of jealousy and a bad temper. Harald and Eric were conquerors, who initiated wars of aggression on their neighbors. Starkad ran from battle, betrayed and murdered his king, and simply murdered

another king. While it may be Thor who cursed him to do those things, still on one occasion it was Odin who directly asked him to do it. Berserkers in general, all men of Odin, were widely reputed to be ruthless monsters, rage-filled bullies who roamed about victimizing the weak and the innocent. Some were said to commit such heinous acts that even they could not believe them when they recollected their senses after a gangr.

And Odin also shares this trait. He arranged for the murder of his own son. He killed innocent peasants working in a field to ritually become a new person, so as to sneak into the castle of the giants guarding the Mead of Inspiration. And he is said to betray even his own heroes in the end.

Other than these specific examples, much can be learned about Odin's chosen by considering a few general ancient types of Odin's men. One of the most notable types were the berserkers. Berserkers were a sort of warrior, practitioners of an internal style martial art that relied on altering physiology and body chemistry via self-induced religious ecstatic states, greatly increasing levels of adrenaline and other chemicals in the body to amplify strength and speed. They achieved these religious ecstatic states through ritual activities coupled with transcendental rage, resulting in a monster's mind and spirit in a man's body. They were fearless fighters, living generally only for the joys of battle, and living off the largesse plundered from weaker men and women. Though quite valued by noblemen for their fighting prowess, and often critical in defense of a particular land or territory, they were almost universally feared and loathed.

Vitkar, or rune magicians, were another sort of Odinsman. They used ritual practices built around the runes, the twenty-four sacred symbols that were the "alphabet" of the ancient heathens, to achieve change in the world around them. Generally they described the changes they made via the runes as occurring through "supernatural" forces. They sought the development of personal power and knowledge, and would sometimes work for the betterment of a larger community, and sometimes only for themselves.

Seidhmen, it seems likely, were also a form of Odinsman. (Little is known about them.) They were practitioners of a certain kind of soul-craft, like shamanism, and were known for uttering prophecy and assisting, via "supernatural" means, with such matters as fishing and hunting.

And it could be said that common to all Odinsmen, common to all the core Odinic values, is one unifying principle: relentless action. Odin's heroes, as Odin himself, epitomize activity, motion, doing.

It could, arguably, be said that certain heiti stood out above others in Odinic worship in ancient heathen times. These, I would say, would be "Sigfadhír, Valfadhír, Herjan, Alfadhír, Wod, Yggr". These refer to his roles as god of victory, of death, of war, as chief of the gods, as inspired, mad, wild, terrifying. And these names, these heiti, are very good ways of relating to the core values of Odinic worship, as described above. (Please note that I am not saying that these were the only ways he was known or related to. I merely mean that these perhaps were some of the most popular.)

But these are not the only ways of approaching Odin. These are not the only ways of expressing those core values that Odin seems to most approve of. Indeed, while they may be ancient, it nonetheless can be argued that they are not even the best ways of expressing these core values. Many modern Asatruar are very conservative when it comes to the practice of their religion. I do not mean by this conservative in a social sense, but conservative in a “venturing out on a limb” sense. Our religion is Reconstructionist, like Hellenismos, and this means that in deciding how to practice our religion, we turn first to the question “what did the ancients do?” This is because we are trying to avoid the pitfalls of creating a religion out of whole cloth, and because we tend to be hard polytheists. Believing that the gods are real, Asatruar tend to believe they also want to be worshipped in the manner to which they are accustomed and have shown a liking for already. So most Asatruar are very conservative and only include elements of ritual and worship that can irrefutably be cited as ancient. Listening to Asatru priests talk is much like listening to orthodox rabbis argue: endless citations form the bulk of the arguments.

But this view of the gods presents two problems. One is that we have little enough of the old lore left. The Conversion was hard on our traditions, and many of them, especially those concerning the goddesses, are lost entirely. So by definition sticking *entirely* to the old sources in matters of religious lore will guarantee we cannot practice our religion as the ancients did. We don’t know how they did, we only have clues and hints.

The other major problem is that the world has changed dramatically in the millennium since the symbolic end of the old faith. (Or the centuries since the end of actual practice.) We cannot see the world the way the ancients did, and we would not want to. Our understanding of certain things has changed for the better, as we see it. In the ancient world one had little if any moral debt to strangers. This led often to such activities as the murder of the Native Americans the Vinland settlers found sleeping in the open. (This was done so that they could test these strangers’ natures in case battle broke out later.) It led to considering the practice of going viking acceptable, where people from foreign towns or countries were killed, driven away, raped, and robbed. It led to human sacrifice as an acceptable (though not normal) form of worship. (Though usually the sacrificed were condemned criminals.) Acts of aggression and of naked greed were considered to be not only acceptable but laudable, and conquerors of other lands were admired by all. During times of famine, infants were left outside to die of exposure so that there would be fewer drains on family/community resources. All of these things, by our modern sensibilities, would be considered reprehensible. No one today who is not some kind of monster could find such things acceptable. We are not the ancients. We are their heirs, and we have changed and grown, putting out branches from the roots they gave us.

And this means that the tendencies of many modern Asatruar in their religious worship lead to an irresolvable dichotomy. Clinging too tightly to what ancient lore we have available prevents us from introducing new concepts, new views, and new understandings. This is creating a rather fractured view of Odin in modern times. When many modern Odinsmen talk about him, they talk about him in terms of the ancient views of him, fearing to say anything too radically different from what the ancient lore says of him. But in practice they emphasize only certain aspects of his, usually more so than they likely were in ancient times, while suppressing others that were more popular to the

ancients. I feel this sort of practice does not help Odin himself in any sense, and it does not help us either. We need, if we are to continue to be a people after this current generation, to understand our beliefs, to develop them, and to make them ever more relevant to the times we find ourselves in. Too often, otherwise promising Odinsmen end up slipping off into some sort of superficial spirituality best described as a continuous live action role-playing game. And often enough, even where this does not happen, said promising Odinsmen become little more than walking encyclopedia entries. The lore of such Odinsmen may be on par with that of any professional folklorist, but the practice lacks heart. It has no real meaning for such practitioners, and is rarely, if ever, reflected in their day-to-day lives. I feel these things are largely because we have been refusing to look at what the implications of modernizing our understandings really entail, and so our spirituality in general is remaining at a rather superficial level. This is shown by our modern books on our religion. Plenty of “how-to” descriptions of ritual detail. Plenty of “Asatru 101” style books that give a very basic and simplistic overview of general religious ideas, a paragraph on each god, and a sample list of some ancient holy days. But where are the works of passion, depth, and intellect that other religions are capable of producing? Where is an Asatru G.K. Chesterton? An Asatru C.S. Lewis? Where is an Asatru *Screwtape Letters*? Many Asatruar look down on Christians in general, but the amount of real *living* many Christians do for their faith would shame many in Asatru. This is not doing us any good.

In modern times, Odin’s intellectual nature is more pronounced in actual practice. He is seen more as a god of good advice, and science, and knowledge. He is seen more as a god of transcendence, a god for seidhmen and martial artists. (Many in Asatru say “warrior” when they discuss their martial practices. But warrior is a word of the old world carrying connotations of social caste, freedom from drudge work, maintenance by others’ money, and other things not found today. What most Asatruar actually mean by saying Odin makes them “warriors” is that Odin makes them martial artists.) And these things can all be found in various others of Odin’s heiti, his other aspects, in such ways as to well reflect the core values of his ancient practice.

As I said above, the ancient ways of walking Odin’s path can be argued to have not been the best ways to go about it. Saying this will strike many modern Asatruar as nearly heretical, but I feel I can offer a rather compelling argument for it, in terms the ancients themselves would have approved of. What did Odin value more than anything else, as the ancient sources tell us? Might. Strength. Power. It is what all of his sacrifices were about. It is what he sought to bring out in his chosen champions. It is why he selects the mightiest to reside with him in Valhalla. The ancient Odinsmen, in many ways, epitomized might. They were indomitable warriors. They were ruthless and fearless, and in such ways they saw their god. But in some ways they were weak, too. And insofar as they were weak, they did not epitomize the very values they seemed to strive to attain as well as they could. Their understanding of Odin was imperfect. How dare I call them weak? How dare I call their understanding imperfect? Because they’re all dead. They lost to the Christian conquerors. They lived in a “survival of the fittest” world, and they did not survive. They were unfit. It is by their own terms I judge them weak. And while a big part of this weakness that caused their defeat was in just a few areas, these areas proved in the end to be a sort of Achilles heel.

Those same things that I mentioned above as differences between the ancient and modern worlds were their weaknesses, they were the things that caused them to lose. By owing no moral debt to strangers, almost everyone viewed all strangers with distrust, even those we moderns would call "their own kind". Thus, when the enemy came, they were unprepared and worse: they were unable to prepare. The conquerors knew the value of unity and fought as one. The ancient heathens could form no meaningful alliances with each other because of this simple philosophical error. Viewing greed as a laudable motivation also contributed to our ancestors' defeat. (I mean, of course, cultural ancestors. Race is no part of this religion.) Too many kings and chiefs were too easily bribed by the Christian foe, and betrayed their own people into the hands of their enemies in exchange for a loftier title, more power, and more wealth. Also, the unrestrained fury of the berserks, their propensity to be ruled by their inner beasts, left them in the end with no friends or allies even amongst surviving heathens. This allowed the Christians to so effectively outlaw the practice that it was extinguished, and the last of the Odinic cults was destroyed. Selfishness, lack of empathy with (or concern for) others, greed, ungoverned fury; these are the weaknesses that defeated us. Odin's way is one of strength, not weakness. The ancients, in clinging to these beliefs, were not well understanding Odin's nature. But we can understand now.

That certain things must change (indeed have changed) is obvious. Human sacrifice is wrong. It need not be seen that way just because our modern morals are different, but it can be understood in Odinic terms as well, by considering the fact that we must now, as a matter of strength, consider the moral debt we have to others. Also consider this: an offering of life to Odin is obviously an appropriate form of sacrifice for him. He is after all a god of death. But by offering one's own life instead of another's, and by cultivating a resolute acceptance of death, one is still offering life to Odin without violating the debt one owes another person. And, in addition to this, by swearing his or her life to Odin, the Odinit is learning to transcend all fear of death. This is a matter of great strength, for one who does not fear death does not fear anything, and no doors are closed to such a one. Thus restricting the only form of human sacrifice to Odin to be the offering of the Odinit's life, to be taken when the god wills, the Odinit is cultivating a great strength that cannot be gained by trying to offer the life of another. Strength is better than weakness. Thus this, it can plainly be seen, is the superior form of Odinic offering. Yet another thing that is changed in our modern philosophy is that acts of pure greedy aggression, such as going viking, are unacceptable. But these are already changed things. There are other things that still need changing in the practice of Odin's way.

I would here like to make an argument for something almost heretically new. I say this because I wish to make it clear that what I am about to say is not to be taken in any way as being an old way of looking at Odinic practice. This is due entirely to my own insights and interpretations. It is one of those things that I think needs changing about the way we look at the Odinic path. Though I might say, and I will quote from a man referenced in *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic* to do so: "Everything that I do, think, say, perceive, or whatever is passed through that belief system. And because it is filtered through that system, everything I practice is authentic."

Now it seems to me that payment of one's debts is an important concept of honor and rightness, both to our paleopagan ancestors and to ourselves. It also seems to me that it is Odin's nature to make use of everything, hardships and oppositions included. It could be said that Odin teaches that "everything furthers". Everything is a tool for betterment. The nature that anything or anyone has is determined by its entire environment. For this reason we owe as much of who we are to our enemies, as well as to strangers as we, of course, do to our friends and families. We would not be who we are without the hardships we have suffered, the enemies we have fought, the imperceptibly small but numerous influences of strangers. If we take any pleasure at all in our lives, I say that we then owe all of these a debt. And where does this debt end? There is no ending to it, for everything that is, affects all of us. This is then an argument for the Odinit to develop a compassion for ALL things, in payment of that debt. This is of benefit for the Odinit to do for several reasons. One is that it is simply a matter of good orlog to do so. It is a great truth, both mystical and simply scientific, that we reap what we sow. Plant an acorn and you get an oak in return, not a pine. Treat all with compassion and receive back more immediate good than bad. This Odinic compassion is a source of strength, and so something the serious Odinit should not overlook, and I think it is appropriate to Odinic (as opposed to Odhinnic or Wodenic) nature. This is an argument for cultivating a sense of compassion for others from purely logical, selfish motives. As an example the ancient berserks, men of Odin, were able to be destroyed because they had alienated everyone, become feared and hated everywhere. And so they reaped what they sowed. Had they cultivated this sense of Odinic compassion, they would not have engaged in such activities as cut them off from all potential allies. Indeed they would have had allies ready to hand. And another thing: in a very practical sense, that which you respect you are less likely to underestimate, so treating all respectfully helps ensure you can never be taken by surprise by an enemy. And to feel anything at all for all things is to have a connection with all things, an awareness of all things, on some level or other. And here again is knowledge and power, which can be used in practical senses such as martial art, politics, negotiations, sales, understanding of others, winning friends and influencing people.

But how to simply describe the ways in which our concept of Odin has changed, and the ways in which Odinic worship has changed to a certain respect already? How to describe a manner of Odinic path that is both not at variance with our new modern understandings of strength and not at variance with the ancient core Odinic values? This is best done by beginning with a simple summary of those values:

- 1) Hardship is embraced.
- 2) Ferocity is cultivated.
- 3) Ingenuity and cleverness are cultivated.
- 4) The big picture is the guiding principle in decision making (includes idealism).
- 5) Joy in all circumstances is cultivated.
- 6) Self-improvement.
- 7) Striving with Odin is right practice.

8) Resolute acceptance of death is cultivated.

9) The feminine forms a large part of the Odinic path.

10) Dastardly deeds often go hand in hand with such embracing of extremes as comes with the Odinic path, whether intentional or no, whether justifiable or no.

Number 10 is not to be read as a justification of ill-doing, but simply an acknowledgement that it seems to be a danger common to Odinsmen and, one way or another, it must be faced up to. It must be guarded against. It is an imperative to learn the way of dynamic balance, wherein opposite extremes of emotion and behavior are *simultaneously* embraced so as to avoid such behavior occurring even unintentionally.

These core values encouraged the Odinsman to cultivate ceaseless activity, to strive to become as a force of nature. In ancient days this was often done via the way of the warrior, the conqueror, the viking. Today we do not have to simply give up certain of these values just because the old ways of expressing them are found now to be inappropriate and inadequate. I feel it misses some of the point of the Odinic path to leave ferocity out of one's character because there are no longer enemies all around to express it on. I feel it misses the heart of the path to never deliberately approach death, to never risk life and limb, just because there are no longer such readily available battlefields. I feel that mere study, such as of folklore or other forms of science do not equate to reaching out for knowledge by the road of transcendence of the self. I feel that the road of common modern culture, freely dispensing on every hand as it does ease and luxury, does not lead over the Rainbow Bridge. And, in dispensing with certain elements of the old views of Odin and the Odinic path, without acknowledging the ways in which the god and his path have changed in this modern world, I fear that many modern Odinists miss the opportunity to learn and grow in the ways Odin has shown himself to approve of. By no means do I think that all who approach Odin should approach him as I do. I do not think that the particular path I lay out here is a necessity for Odinic worship. But I do feel that even if the particular adaptations I propose are not adopted in any particular case, still they serve as a means of pointing out that there are needs of the path to the ancient goals of Odinists that are too often ignored today, needs that can be met without resorting to the sorts of ancient practices we now find unacceptable.

All of these core Odinic values can be fully met via either one of two paths, or both. One is that of the martial artist, the other is that of the mystic. Not just any sort of martial art path is appropriate. Not just any form of mysticism will do. More specifically, the martial artist route along the modern Odinic path must meet certain particular requirements, including the adoption of a creative/spiritual pursuit complementary to the physical martial art, such as poetry or music. Specifically, the mystic path runs the road of the vitki (rune magician) or of the seidh-worker. And of course the path of the berserker blends the paths of the seidh-worker and the martial artist, and is perhaps the fullest expression of the various core Odinic values. (Of course, I could just be saying that because I'm a berserk!)

But how, if the ancient berserkers were such animals, is that practice suitable for modern times? Well, the practice has already been taken up again in these modern times. I know

this because I am one of those who have done so. And we have learned from the mistakes of the ancients. We have learned other techniques for triggering the change in physiology that gifted the ancient berserks with their fighting prowess. Our rituals rely on emotions such as joy to counterbalance the rage of the gangr. The berserker gang, as it is practiced in modern times, does not produce monsters, though it still confers the benefits of the altered body chemistry.

Similarly it might be wondered how relevant mystical practices such as those of vitkar and seidh-workers are for modern times. After all, most people regard the supernatural terminology the ancients used to describe these practices as mere superstition and ignorance. But it is in fact this that is the ignorant belief. After all, the ancient mystics developed their terminology well before the modern intellectual/scientific revolution. They were unconcerned with describing such matters from an objective point of view. Instead they simply used subjective terminology to describe what they were experiencing. Modern psychologists explain much of what such magicians and seidh-workers called supernatural activity as elements of unconscious psychology. Seidh-workers and magicians used ritual to alter their own consciousnesses, which left them capable of taking certain actions that would otherwise be outside the range of their abilities. In a highly altered state of consciousness the individual ego is often displaced, leaving the mind MUCH more influence-able by the subconscious. This allows such mystics to more sharply focus the attention, to more efficiently use instinct, call up memories, and do all sorts of things it normally can't. It is irrelevant whether the supernatural terminology of the ancients is used, or the psychological/biological terminology of modern science. The distinction is purely one of philosophy and is entirely academic. When it comes down to practical matters both the ancient mystic and the modern scientist would describe the same things: certain rituals are engaged in and certain results follow.

1) Odin was god of seidhmen and vitkar. Seidhmen were practitioners of soul crafts not unlike shamanism indigenous to the Norse peoples. Vitkar were rune magicians. Both of these are a kind of mystic, a form of spiritual practitioner who seeks to transcend the natural limits of the self. Both of these practices contain much hardship. Proper rune work involves regular sacrifices of the blood of the vitki. It also requires endless exhaustive hours of study, contemplation, memorization, meditation, and character development. Seidhmen take part in ritual hardships such as exhaustive dancing, privation, and shunning and marginalization by the larger society. Passionately embracing either of these paths should develop the Odinit's nature in much the same way that the sorts of hardships the ancient Odinsmen endured did. Additionally Odin is god of the arts of war. The martial artist who is truly dedicated to the art can claim to be following Odin's path and embracing hardship as well, for the practices of the martial arts include, if done properly, rigorous physical training. And, of course, the path of the berserker necessitates the hardships endured by both the martial artist and the seidhman.

2) The path of the seidhman and the path of the martial artist as combined in the practice of the berserk is the most obvious way to meet the Odinic ideal of ferocity as well. The berserker gang was an internal form of martial art/spirituality wherein the practitioner ritually transformed his spirit into that of a wild animal, like a bear or a wolf. This involved cultivating the animal within. Berserks were thus known for their ferocity on the

battlefield. There are those in modern times that cultivate the path of the berserk and have discovered ways of cultivating the fury without becoming such monsters as the ancients did.

But the path of the berserk is not for everyone. This attribute can be cultivated by poets as well. After all, *wod* is the word for poetic inspiration as well as the other things it is used for. A poet that learns, through diligent practice of his or her art, to enter into a state of wild raging inspiration while composing, a true divine madness, is well cultivating this trait. And, besides poets, others can cultivate ferocity via other forms of martial art, sport competition (though it must not get out of hand, that is a form of weakness), and such things. After all, the one thing necessary to win at any sport or in any fight is a winning spirit, a ferocious determination to win no matter what the personal cost. Emotion is energy, and ferocity is a deep well of it indeed.

3) Rune magicians practice a rather intellectual sort of spirituality, one that relies heavily upon ingenuity for best effect in altering the *vitki*'s consciousness. The *vitki* alters the nature of his mind, body, and spirit, unifying them in order to transcend his or her natural limits by means of clever intellectual constructs called "spells", involving runes, the proper use of which involves packing maximum meaning into a minimum of symbols. Seidhmen, including berserks, are forced to develop ingenuity along slightly less intellectual and more instinctual lines, by striving to attain ever deeper states of altered consciousness via such means as dance and fasting. Poets that strive ever to develop their art to more complex and sophisticated forms are cultivating this trait as well. (Especially through practicing the ancient art of using kennings.) And of course the key for *any* martial arts competition, whether sport, training, or actual fight, is the ability to outwit the opponent. Strength, speed, and experience are all irrelevant unless the martial artist can deliver the blow at the proper time, and so most of any fight is strategizing to set the opponent up for a moment that can be taken advantage of. Thus a martial artist who is a true Odinsman will seek to develop his cleverness and ingenuity as much as possible.

4) Seidhmen strive to live their lives in an attempt to merge inner and outer worlds, usually for the betterment of their communities, as well as for themselves. This is a form of big picture thinking of the sort that many ancient Odinsmen were driven by. It is even a sort of idealistic manner of living. This sort of attempt at betterment of the larger community is possible for the seidhman even today. Though a seidhman's help should never replace traditional medical assistance where such is needed, a well trained seidhman can be of great benefit to those with problematic psychological issues. *Vitkar*, rune magicians, are often motivated by large, abstract spiritual concerns, and so the path of the *vitki* naturally follows this sort of Odinic thinking. Poets live their lives for a larger, more abstract concept than themselves. Some poets conceive of it as beauty, others as truth, others as service to their fellow men, and others regard it as a completely self-involved interaction with larger abstractions. Whatever the interpretation, poets too naturally live in a "big picture" world. And of course whatever is said of poets applies to art, music, writing and all such creative endeavors. Martial artists who are Odinsmen are thus advised, if their philosophy does not naturally run to idealism or big picture thinking, to seek to develop such creative tendencies as these artistic practices use.

5) One of the defining features of altered states of consciousness reached by religious/spiritual ecstatic practices is a sense of joy, and/or of ecstasy. In its pure form it lasts only for the duration of the state of altered consciousness, but a great part of the practice of such soul crafts as seidh and rune magic (galdr) is the cultivation of a perpetual joyful state unperturbed by doubts or fears. Especially in the modern practices of berserkers, the emotion of joy largely accompanies the rage of that state, as it is a major part of the way the problems caused by transcendental rage are nullified. And of course the cultivation of joy is a major benefit in other, more external forms of martial art, for it brings the absolute confidence necessary to keep the winning spirit. It also prevents the loss of temper that is the surest way to lose a fight, for rage is blind and imprecise. (Note: loss of temper is NOT the same thing as the state of the berserker. That is an ecstatic state, operating with an altered physiology. The usual drawbacks of high levels of adrenaline are overcome in the berserk trance.)

6) The purpose of such soul and mind altering arts as seidh and galdr is to transcend the limitations of the self. In some cases this transcendence is for purposes of seeing reality more clearly, as when seeking visions of gods, or performing runic divination. In other cases it is the physical self the practitioner wishes to transcend, as in the case of the berserker, who seeks to accentuate his or her senses, increase his or her strength and speed by altering mind and spirit in such ways as to alter body chemistry and physiology. The purpose of the practice of true poetry is to transcend the limits of the self enough to be inspired with a new manner of beautifully putting words together. And even aside from these types of practitioner, others can find a more limited form of transcendence through ritual consumption of the sacred entheogen of the Norse peoples: alcohol. To the ancient heathens it was no mere recreational drug. It was the sacred substance of Odin. It was the blood of a god. When consumed in groups (in moderation) it leads to transcendence of social fears and inhibitions, and can create an almost magical bond between all who imbibe. This is a sort of ritual transcendence of the self into a larger social unit, and was a part of the social glue of ancient Norse societies. Thus responsible drinking is a significant part of Odin's path!

All of these types of transcendence of the self are done for reasons of gaining some advantage, information, or experience not normally possible. Thus all of these are forms of self-improvement.

7) One of the practices of seidh is faring forth, separating the soul from the body and sending it out to other worlds. Thus can Odin be met, if he is willing, through attaining such visions. In doing such, a wise seidhmen have the opportunity to strive against Odin himself, to learn through struggle in visionary realms. This sort of struggle results in learning, and transcendence of limitations. Such vision-battles are excellent opportunities for genuine spiritual death and rebirth experiences, wherein the seidhman can accomplish in as little as a night, what would take normal methods of learning and practice years to accomplish, completely breaking his or her entire self down and rebuilding it along better, more efficient lines. (And this of course is also an excellent way of embracing hardship, for such things are not easy to do in the same way the sea is not above the clouds.) Berserks such as myself practice this sort of vision-battle too. Vitkar have the opportunity for a more indirect sort of struggle: with the runic forces, which are taught

the vitki by Odin. These runic forces are different and highly specific altered states of consciousness, each of which can potentially reshape the vitki's nature much as the seidhman's death and rebirth experience does. And this invariably, even in the most talented vitkar, leads to great psychological problems and struggles.

Even the martial artist who practices more traditional external forms of martial art (that is to say, is not a visionary or trance worker) can strive against Odin, pushing him or herself ever harder, using Odin (as the study of the martial artist has come to reveal his nature and experiences) as a measuring bar. This bar is high enough that a martial artist would be driven to ever improve in trying to reach it.

Odin is god of death. He is the god who uses hardship as a tool, as a way of transcendence. The ancient stories show how he teaches his people in such a fashion too, leading them to just those hardships that will try them the most. He is the best source of inspiration. It thus only makes sense that the most efficient way to learn is to strive directly with him.

8) The key that lies at the heart of true **martial art** (as opposed to sport forms) is the cultivation of a resolute acceptance of death. This involves both an understanding (held deep, at the bone level) that everything, including the artist's own self, will inevitably die sooner or later, as well as an ability to throw away concern for his or her own life when circumstances require it (such as to save the life of a loved one). One who does not fear death does not fear anything. This means the martial artist who practices such cultivation can approach, without a possibly fatal hesitation, straight into an enemy's attack in order to land first a better one. A fighter who can do this has an advantage over any fighter who cannot, no matter how much experience had by the opponent. Resolute acceptance of death can be cultivated even by non-warriors, even by those who have never seen a fight. After all, an acceptance of death leads to a bravery that is a source of strength for anybody, in any circumstance.

It was quite easy for the ancient heathens to practice the cultivation of the resolute acceptance of death. They lived in a violent age and there was usually a battle one could become a part of fairly close by. And even if not, the personal duel was an accepted social custom, both to first blood and to the death. Simply seeking out any of these periodically would amount to such cultivation. But while these opportunities are relatively rare in the modern world, this cultivation is still particularly easy for seidhmen, vitkar, and martial artists of all sorts to achieve, via ritual. That is to say, rituals that bring the seidhman, vitki, martial artist, etc. into a close approach to death in some way or other. Closeness to death is closeness to death, and the fact that it occurs in ritual, rather than a battlefield, matters not at all. Such rituals are serious and weighty matters, and should be seen as foci of periods of spiritual development. They should be practiced infrequently, and only at times of great need or great import. Indeed, doing such a ritual once would certainly suffice for most Odinsmen. Examples of such practices: throwing a knife or sword into the air and, standing under it, catch it on the way down. (Successful practice includes ducking and running if the attempt even begins to go badly. I doubt Odin admits to Valhalla those who die of terminal stupidity.) Practicing leaping martial arts or physical training at great heights above the ground. Stand with a dagger tied,

horizontally, on a line overhead. Give it a push and keep it deflected with manual parries. Other ideas will suggest themselves upon reflection.

Now let me make it **absolutely** clear that this sort of ritual practice is not for everyone. And even those for whom it is a viable, useful method of practice, must take care. Such practices as described here must only be pursued with careful forethought. The way I embraced them was to start off slow, taking only the smallest risks at first, until I learned of my capacities, what I could and could not do. Only once I was sure of my knowledge of my self did I start to pursue the larger-risk practices. Professionals like circus performers do such things as these practices. So do such individuals as are often seen on Ripley's Believe It Or Not. Soldiers, of course, similarly and deliberately risk their lives. These people can do such things because they are professionals. They have dedicated their lives to understanding the risks involved, and the mechanics of the processes involved, as well as their own capabilities. Any Odinit who adopts such practices must approach it like these people do, and similarly dedicate him or herself.

There is still another benefit, beyond what has already been described, in cultivation of a resolute acceptance of death. And this is that a truly deep acceptance of the inevitability of death loosens the hold the ego has over the practitioner who holds it. This tendency can be exploited to truly obliterate the ego and allow the true inherent nature of the practitioner's self to come out. This allows the practitioner to become as Svipal, the Changeable. Having no attachment to any particular ego, to any particular self, means that the practitioner can become any self at all, and thus can become whatever the present circumstances most require. The practitioner of any of these arts, the vitki, seidhman, berserk, or martial artist who manages the true obliteration of the ego (which is, anyways, only a false *image* of the self, an illusion often mistaken by the conscious mind for the real thing) experiences being able to be any self he or she ever was; the most recent self, the six-year-old self, the teenage self, even (and most importantly) the Ideal Self. Loss of the ego, the symbol of the self, allows the practitioner to become more his or her self than ever. (The map is not the territory.) And I am not, by the way, claiming any particular great accomplishment in such lofty spiritual pursuits as true obliteration of the ego. But I have seen some, and read the works of others, who have done much more, and the benefits are obvious, and the logic of it speaks for itself.

9) The ninth principle of Odinic practice, that the feminine forms a large part of it, is obviously easiest to fulfill for female Odinites. Next of all it is easiest for seidhmen. After all, while it will be forever impossible to know how seidh was actually practiced, some suggestion exists that seidh practice meant, for men, a sort of internal or spiritual feminization. This, whether ancient practice or not, makes sense on several levels. The most obvious is that the man who develops the feminine parts of his nature is more fully developed, and thus more capable in general, than the majority of men who do not. This is from the nature of balance, and from the fact that such a one will obviously have more points of view, more knowledge, about everything in general. And knowledge is power. This practice also makes sense because seidh is inherently (spiritually) a receptive state, wherein control is surrendered to beings (or concepts, depending on language and philosophy) outside the perceived self, and such receptivity is traditionally held by Western culture to be symbolically feminine. The path of the vitki, too, can readily lead

the male Odinst into the desired intimacy with the feminine, as many runic practices are designed to lead to contact with the vitki's fylgja also called, in folklore, the fetch-wife. And of course anyone can develop, through study of Jungian psychology and introspection, that Archetype which is called the Anima.

10) The thing for any Odinst to do is to seek the path of relentless action, of eternal change. It involves embracing extremes of emotion, extremes most people would (with some justification) shy away from. These extremes of emotion can very easily lead to extremes of behavior, and these sorts of extremes of behavior can readily lead to tragedy, both of the intentional and unintentional varieties. The Odinst must understand that this is what he or she is getting into. Knowledge *is* power, and the more the Odinst is aware of this pitfall the more he or she can avoid it. Furthermore, the Odinst can well benefit from the energy and drive given by these extremes without having the risks of detriment that comes from an extreme emotional nature. This is by fully embracing extremes, all extremes. At once. It is a sort of path of running balance. Embracing joy along with sorrow, love along with rage, despair along with euphoria, rage along with detachment. By embracing all extremes (that means ALL, not just the ones the Odinst favors best) the Odinst is able to benefit from the path of balance, such as Eastern paths like Buddhism practice, the Middle Way, while also benefiting at the same time from the experience of the extremes, which imparts rapid change and incredible energy. To follow this path truly makes even great extremes of emotion and behavior mostly safe, for the practitioner will simply not be inclined to do anything unbalanced, wrong, monstrous, or stupid because it will simply not be in the practitioner's nature to do so. But it is truly difficult to practice this path properly, and so it is very risky, both to the Odinst's own self and to those nearby, as the above stories of the ancients show. This path is NOT for everyone.

It is possible to live, to truly live the ideals of the Odinic path in a daily fashion, in this modern world. Our understanding of him has changed and whatever the manner in which the Odinst chooses to adapt his or her practices to reflect this change, at the least I hope I make the point that our practices must be changed, that they are by and large still surface level, largely intellectual.

To make it easier to understand where my ideas on Odinic path come from, I will give a synopsis of my personal story along this path. At a very young age my mother read me stories from various mythologies, mostly Greek and Norse. I enjoyed all the stories (indeed, became insatiably curious as to what had happened to the old gods), but one god in particular stuck in my mind, and that was Odin. For some reason, his stories resonated most strongly with me, and stuck in my mind for many years afterward. About a year after hearing his stories I had a series of run-ins with a bully twice my size, a couple years older. (He was in the fourth grade, I was in the second.) I regularly got beat up by him, both for lunch money and for the sadistic pleasure of it. Then one day he picked on my younger brother, who was in the first grade. Upon seeing him crying and running to me for help, something snapped in me. I stood my ground. I suddenly saw red. I remember being vaguely surprised at it, having thought that "seeing red" was just an expression. I felt a thrill of electric energy surge through my body. Then everything went black. I have no recollection of the next little while at all. When I came to I was on the other side of the schoolyard. I had the back of the bully's head in my hand and was

smashing it, over and over, into the brick wall of the school. We were both covered in his blood. I was, I must admit, trying to kill him. It took six older children to pull me off of him, and even then they could barely manage it, but lucky for both of us, they did. I suddenly came to myself and had no idea what had just happened. The other kids looked at me with various mixtures of awe, fear, and disgust. They said that the bully had turned and run screaming (“like a little girl”, they said) just over the *expression* that came over my face. They said I looked like a monster. Then they said I chased him three times around the school building, finally overtaking him and nearly killing him. No one ever messed with me again, at this school. The bully, after this, became my friend. But I was oddly subdued after my victory. I took no joy in the great power that had come to me in my moment of need, and I became depressed. I had always been subject to extremes of emotion, feeling everything more intensely than other people, even quite casual things. It took me years to realize that while I used the same words for emotions that others did, there was a distinct difference. I had no intermediate or low-level emotions. My emotions were either off entirely or on maximum. I was never happy. I was ecstatic and joyful. I was never nervous or anxious. I was terrified. I was never angry. I was full of hate and rage. I didn’t just like. I loved. And this experience with this bully made all of those extremes even worse. I was suddenly more sensitive to emotions than ever.

It took me a while to try to deal with all this, and during this time my “peer-group” developed in ways I did not. They formed social bonds. They developed social groups, and hierarchies, and little rituals to identify their places in such groups and hierarchies. Rituals like “fashion” and a knowledge of what was “cool”, and “in”. It involved talking in certain ways. Standing with certain postures, walking with certain gaits. My extreme emotions had always made communication with others difficult. Most people didn’t share my wild enthusiasms, and suddenly having to deal with having my whole emotional nature suddenly “rescaled” made this communication problem worse. My family moved, I went to a new school. I had no reputation there. My inability to understand or get along with anyone led to complete ostracism which made me a target for every bully in the school. All my emotions were too much to handle, even in the calmest of ordinary social situations. And I remembered what happened the last time I got really angry, and I became terrified about losing control, even slightly. I became obsessed. So I couldn’t fight back, and I ended up being picked on even worse. My daily life became one of constant terror. I slipped into what I now recognize as a major depression. And once again my little brother got in trouble with a bully, and once again I went to his rescue, and once again the change came over me. But this time I kept my memory, my awareness. I leaped for the bully’s throat though he was several times my size (both above me in grades and held back more than once). And I was actually so unpopular the mob around me sided with the bully! (Ah, childhood.) But I was not just raging. I was eerily calm. I was at peace. I was joyful. Indeed I had never felt so WHOLE. In those moments of fighting against this troll of a bully and a mob before I went down to the ground, to be kicked by thirty people until the teachers came outside, I felt on top of the world. This struggle seemed the best thing that had ever happened to me, I felt satisfied and at one with my whole life. Almost the only time I did during childhood.

Once again the “rescaling” problem occurred. I was again more sensitive to all my emotions. I started to feel I was drowning all the time. And I got further out of synch with

my peers and the problem worsened. The next several years alternated between periods of terror that became cowardice, and periods of ferocity that saw me fighting nearly every day. During another gangr against a tormentor I instinctively used my teeth as a weapon when he had my arms pinned. This too led to widespread fear and disgust, and I was daily chased home by angry mobs for weeks. I spent most of my childhood mad and out of control. I also came to have frequent visions. I saw ghost, as well as a strange woman who would comfort me when things got to be too much to handle. But, alienated as I was from everyone else on earth I began to develop a subtle way of understanding people, afforded me by my unique outsider's perspective. I began to find myself able to manipulate others, even to insane degrees. There was once an escaped convict who was hiding out in the woods in back of my school when I was in the sixth grade. (Ah, Haverhill.) The police were searching for him, but I somehow got it into my head that I was going to capture him. I wanted the challenge, and it fit into my wild fey madness. But I had to admit that even with my mad strength, an adult might be too much for me. So when lunchtime came I managed to persuade some sixty of my fellow students to follow me to the kitchen, where we armed ourselves with cutlery, and out into the woods to search for the escapee. The teachers, missing us, followed us and disarmed us before we got too far.

Eventually I shut down. My emotions got to be just too much for me. Every little thing, no matter how minor, became a major crisis. I became terrified of all change, and most especially of death. So I never let myself feel anything. I became a rabid atheist, a materialist, interested in the physical sciences. Sometimes the long grey days that resulted from this were interrupted by great depressions. I attempted suicide several times. Eventually my early childhood interest in spiritual matters was rekindled by circumstances too numerous and complex to mention. I started recalling the old stories of Odin, and I began having vague notions that he was calling to me. I took up, as many teenagers in my school were, the practice of magic. I was drawn to the runes, and learned everything I could of them. And I kept on coming close to death, in one bizarre circumstance after another. Playing tag in the lake with family and friends we strayed into deep water. The game got wild and I ended up held underwater for too long. I fought with all my strength, for my life, against friends who, laughing, didn't even know they were killing me. Another time I jumped into a lake covered with yellow pollen. It turned out I was allergic to that pollen. I went into shock. My body temperature dropped and I went into hypothermia. I shivered so hard I thought the contractions of the muscles would break my bones. The nearest hospital was half an hour away. My mother barely got me there in time, the doctors said. A date ended in being chased down a road through the woods by a pickup truck full of drunk rednecks who were trying to run the weirdos down. (She was a Goth, I was just strange.) I had to stay by her, keep myself to her slower pace to keep myself between her and the truck. And this began to lift my terror of death.

My visions got to be stronger and more frequent, and sometimes seemed to be of things that later came to pass. I also began to have the growing feeling, later a conviction, that I was somehow really a wolf.

I also started pushing myself physically, taking risks for no other reason than to see if I could. I would climb up onto the roof of our one story house and jump off. Once,

climbing Mount Katahdin I strayed off the marked path because it was too boring. I found a wonderful cave and wormed through it, on my back. There was no going back through the cave (it was very cramped) and it let out onto an abyss hundreds of feet down. The only way across was to jump for a ledge. I did. I missed. The fit came on me in an instant and I wedged my hand in between two boulders. Dangling from one arm hundreds of feet above the ground I looked down. That sight gave me the strength to pull myself up onto the ledge, strength coming from that same mad core that served me with the bullies. I got from there back onto better footing. I knew that this would forever be an object of fear and sick fascination unless I conquered that fear. So I went back to the cave, went through it, and jumped the abyss again. Five more times. Until I had completely conquered that fear.

I took my runic practices farther, and came to call upon Odin for help in my rune-workings. This led me to feel indebted to him, so I sought for ways to repay him and did so by making sacrifices to him. So I started feeling that old calling from him again, only now even stronger. I started to seriously consider him my patron. Then I found Wicca. I thought Wicca was something other than it actually was. I thought all their talk of “The God” and “The Goddess” was just a handy way of talking between different pagan traditions rather than being an actual religious belief. I called myself Wiccan and put myself through Buckland’s self-initiation system. All the time I sought to learn more of who Odin really was, and of the other gods that gave him context. I found a teacher in the galdric and seidh arts. He taught me the value of crisis learning, of pushing myself beyond my limits in order to transcend them. Typical lessons involved performing strenuous physical exercises while mentally doing math problems and/or critiquing the philosophy behind a movie that was playing while being hit with a stick hard enough to leave bruises. I became strong mentally, emotionally, and physically.

I learned to lucid dream and, not long after I did, I had the most vivid dream of my life up until that point. I dreamed a young woman, dressed like a punk, told me everything that I was doing wrong in my life and gave me her opinions on how I could do better. I laughed at her and told her she was just a dream image, and I could control her at will. At this she looked impatient and proved to me I could not affect her in the least. I came to know that she was my fylgja, a valkyrie, and that she had been watching me all my life, that she was the woman who comforted me in my childhood visions. She let me know that she was taking charge of my development. This was the first of many infrequent encounters I would have with her.

I eventually decided to formally dedicate myself to Odin. I performed a long seidh ritual that took days. Shortly after this I, while at work (assembly-line rote work) I had a strong vision of standing before Odin’s seat. It completely blocked out my sight of the mundane world (though apparently I kept doing my work). I questioned him on matters of science and occult practice. Other vision interactions with him followed. I began studying martial arts. Together with family and friends, I studied the arts of the sword and the knife, as well as some open-handed fighting.

I came down with a flu once, after my girlfriend of the time left me. For four days I lay chained to my bed, too weak to rise. I couldn’t get up for food or water so I had neither of those for four days. I couldn’t even get up to call 911. I raved most of the time,

completely delirious, feverish, hallucinating. I came close to death. But my cat stayed next to me, patiently licking my face and calling me back to myself. I think it was that that saved my life.

It was right after this illness that my valkyrie started contacting me more regularly, offering more specific instruction.

I began to get a reputation as a diviner and a priest, and I came to be a sort of counselor for a largish group of people, both friends and strangers. I eventually became involved with a seriously mentally ill woman. I helped her through a crisis and into a more stable and healthy state with seidh rituals, and this changed the nature of my spiritual life somewhat. I came to seek more benefit to others in my practice. I came to see that use of power for others' benefit was as much a part of Odinic path as the mere acquisition of it. And, because the experience had pushed me to the edges of my self, I was driven to find a closer way of relating to Odin.

I formed a coven with my family and our significant others. I called the God and the Goddess Odin and Freya. We had a Celtic Wiccan, a Greek Wiccan, and an eclectic Wiccan as well. But I came to be dissatisfied with the religion. Too much of it was too new, too made up. I thought of the gods as no mere aspects of a single pair of deities, but came to realize this was an integral part of Wicca. I thought they would rather be sacrificed to in ways they traditionally had been, ways they had shown they approved of. So I ceased being a Wiccan and took up Asatru. Our coven became a temple of Reconstructionists. Our number grew. We started publishing a small pagan magazine. Then our group fell apart, dissolved by disinterest and personality issues, as so often happens.

It took me years to find the closer relationship with Odin I sought. During these years I trained in the seidh and galdric arts, as well as keeping irregularly to a regimen of physical training. Eventually I came to recall certain old stories of my father's. Stories he had told me of some of our ancestors as well as himself. He told me that the berserker gang ran in our family line. He described it as a method of fighting used by people with a certain genetic defect that allowed us to access the strength of the insane when we needed it. I had long assumed this was what was behind my mad strength that came to my aid in times of need, but I had never known just what to do with that fact. But suddenly I realized that it was not just madness, it was not just an aid in a fight: it was a way of religious interaction with Odin. I suddenly realized that the conviction I'd developed that I was spiritually a wolf came from the same source as that mad strength, as the beast that tried to dash that bully's brains out against the brick wall. What's more I realized that, contrary to what scholars usually assumed, there *were* descriptions in the ancient sources of how to induce the gangr at will. What were usually taken to be side-effects were, in fact, triggers.

So I began research in the fields of medicine and biology. I compared what I learned to what I knew of berserks from the Sagas, and eventually I came up with a ritual that would teach me how to attain this state of religious ecstasis at will. The crux of the ritual involved a fire in which I vowed to hold my hand until the ecstasis was triggered. The

thing I had learned was that it is pain, fear, and an element of danger that most easily triggers the gangr. And I was right.

From this point on my relationship with Odin changed. Previous to this time I had worshipped in a very traditional manner. I held seven or eight blots a year (following the more common schedules of holy days). I said daily prayers when my discipline was good. I prayed during times of need. But now I could enter a state of ecstasis wherein I danced with him. And these dances brought out the wolf in me. They came to form the core of my spiritual path, though I still kept, and keep, the more traditional blots and holy days. But my religious life was now centered around the experience of communion with the god.

This communion changed me. I started taking my martial arts training a lot more seriously. I came to fear that my practice was majorly lacking in some important areas of character development. For one thing I knew that the times I had approached death closely, while most instructive and enlightening, were merely accidents. It was not the same thing as deliberately entering battle. I sought entrance to Valhalla when I died. How could I win a spot next to such legendary warriors as reside there unless I had some real value as a fighter? How could I truly know the god of death unless I stopped waiting for him to come to me and instead went to him?

So I thought on how the gangr had always been triggered for me in the past by the presence of danger, and I recalled my old teacher and what he had taught me of crisis learning. I realized I could approach Odin through approaching death in ritual circumstances. And that furthermore if done correctly this approach to death would deepen my control over the gangr, let me develop it more. I realized that I did not need a battlefield to become more the sort of Odinit the ancient heathens were.

So I began practicing with a vengeance. I practiced throwing sticks up in the air and catching them while standing under them. I learned how my body operated, what I could expect out of it and what I couldn't. When the time was right I replaced the stick with a sword. I cannot really describe what looking up and seeing three feet of sharp steel falling down towards me was like. There is no feeling like it. I made myself do it over and over again. This brought me even closer to the Valfadhir. I felt myself capable of understanding him in ways I never had. I understood myself in ways I never had.

This sort of practice was preparation for a really big ritual, my rededication to Odin along what was to me a deeper, more serious path. I spent months readying myself for it. I offered up my life to Odin to take when he chose and in earnest of this I put myself in a position where it would be very easy for him. I went to a mountainside deep in the country with a devotee of the Greek god Dionysos, a maenad, which is a Greek form of berserk. She carried a sword. I had no weapon. I vowed to take the sword from her. She promised to truly try to kill me. Now she's no martial artist, but she is a maenad, with the super-fast reflexes of that altered state. And while I was easily three times as strong, there is no way to face a naked blade without a mad gibbering terror creeping over you, threatening to paralyze all your muscles, turning your stomach into water. She may, of course, been pulling her blows a little. But she tried hard not to pull them. I know this, for never did I have to dodge and block, to move faster in my entire life, and I was in a deep

deep gangr. (It is possible to parry a blade with an empty hand if you can strike it with the flat of the palm against the flat of the sword. This takes VERY fast reflexes.) She aimed one blow at my guts, a straight thrust. I whirled out of the way faster than I ever moved in my life. The sword barely missed my intestines. But my arm, which had been flung out behind where my stomach had been by about a foot, was not fast enough. The sword bit deep into my arm. (Interesting sight to see what's under the surface of one's own flesh.) She may not have been trying with ALL her might to actually kill me, but she wasn't that far off from giving her all either.

Eventually I took the sword from her. (And this is one of the reasons I love her, for she valued ME and what I cared about enough to try to take my life when I needed it. Such friendship is very rare indeed.) My arms, hands, and legs were covered in injuries ranging from the mild to the fairly severe. But I lived. I LIVED! Never had I felt such joy in simply drawing in breath as I did then. This was one of the truly pivotal points in my life as an Odinsman. I now knew I could walk into death's arms for no other reason than that I willed it. And I had developed a much greater control over the gangr, becoming able to induce the state with little provocation or stress, just as an exercise of will. Since then I have once or twice more conducted near death rituals (though none more with the sword). I came to work out other rituals too, rituals that involved not death but the conquest of pain, such as the sadhus of Kataragama do. I threw myself into martial arts training with a vengeance. I threw myself into my spiritual life in a similar fashion. I started to train in these things every day, hard. I came to live as a hermit, living for study, prayer, meditation, training, and communion with Odin, becoming the wolf. I sought to develop a relentless striving, ceaseless activity. I embraced every hardship I could, even those I could easily have avoided, for purposes of pushing my growth and development. Since then I have sought out the path of most resistance.

Over the years I have come to learn much from Odin. In large matters, in small matters, in all matters he has become my counselor, my teacher, my advisor. He has given me a certain perspective on what it means to walk his path in the modern world. I have tried below to summarize this lore. And because he is the god of poetry, I have tried to honor him by writing it in poetic form. I wrote in a loose form of poetry that vaguely tried to imitate drottkvaett, the court-metre. (I haven't the skill for true drottkvaett.) In an attempt to impose some form of organization on it, I have grouped different poems together under different runic headings, each poem reflecting an aspect of Odin's lore also encapsulated in that rune.

ƒ

Wealth foments greed Weal foments woe
Force always breeds its own foe.
When riches you Would reap and keep
Right action be your watch-word.

Nothing spend on Needless gilding
Never was coin spent and saved,
Yet freely give For open hands

Friend and ally will win.

᠒

Strength is needful, So with power,
Seek out all forms you may find
No matter how Mean* it may be
Might is better than weakness.

*("mean" here is used in an archaic sense as meaning "small")

Wilder wight was Never found than
When aurochs roamed the world.
Any athling Hunting for it
Advised would be to be it.

᠓

Safety can be Won with sword-edge
Slaying foes and teaching fear,
But where will bane Bring its bringer?
Better let pass what can pass.

In the end Is the end
Excess force rushes there.
Revenge an Endless road,
Resistance is bred by all force.

Overwhelming Evil comes to
Everyone before too long.
When it does What will help
Where armor proves inadequate?

Fire with fire Harm for harm
Fight the foe on his own terms.
When faced with death Falter not when
Fate forbids all other plans.

᠔

Rune to rune Run the names

Revealing, each, a facet
Each unbounded Every one
Always leading to another.

How can the Name that's heard
Hold any sort of truth?
Spoken words Start and stop,
Stagnant like the swamp lands.

Stave the shape, Just symbolic,
Sign representing mystery
Rune revealing Endless meaning,
Riddle hidden by the stave.

Midgard world of Hidden meaning
Mysteries all veiled by light,
Asgard world of All-revealing
Every rune there read aright.

Seek you therefore Thought-filled torrents
Thunderous words from far Beyond,
Inspiration All onrushing
Asgard's wisdom so to win.

The einherjar Asgard-dwelling
Understand true might's within;
Independent Self-sufficient
Strength derived from wholeness.

R

Learning lingers After teachers
Long ago have passed from sight,
And far farings Give the greatest
Gain of all life's teachings.

Every action The beginning
Of a journey with no end;
Consequences Carry forward
Cargo hidden from all eyes.

Not the wise and Not the lucky

Nor even those who read the runes
Can ever have An intimate
Understanding of Wyrð's will.

How to prepare For the harvest
Handed down by one's own works?
Unintended Actions ever
Astray lead the best-laid plans.

Stop to look and Miss the moment
Maybe leaping brings the same.
Some will suffer Others not though
Circumstances be alike.

Fewest causes, Fewest effects,
Far easier to keep all plain.
Keep it simple Cut out excess
Create no footprints in the dust.

Perform, do work, Put it aside,
Pass on to the next action.
The past is gone, Dead is dead, once
Done do not keep clinging.

Wise is he who Goes on his way
Without any attachments
Aband'ning all Becoming free
One becomes everything.

Rainbows run from Every hunter
Revealed only from far away
Every effort For to find one
Forces it to disappear.

To leave this world, To win Asgard,
One must seek the Rainbow Bridge
The Pathless Path Many-roaded
Positioned nowhere, quicksilver.



Knowledge is strength, Naturally,
Never was sword-edge sharper.
Understanding Everything brings

All-encompassing power.

Like a torch burns Beacon in the darkness, Kensaz wisdom Whatsoever the fuel.	Kensaz brightly Waxes always
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Understanding, Everything empowers. Sacred, profane, Particulars don't matter.	Ignorance too, Peace and hardship
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Embrace closely Whatsoever you perceive Distinguish not Thoughtless thought the kindling.	Become one with 'Tween this or that
--	--

Immediate Always be ensuing Unencumbered, Awakening eternal.	Awareness shall Sight unclouded,
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Greatest is the Of whatever best is loved. Less the lore from Little from whatever's feared,	Understanding Things cared not for,
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Not at all are Never seen, the road unwalked. Knowledge power; Won't face fear and ignorance.	Things despised known, Weak the one who
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Unbalanced sword Ever proves itself lesser, Unbalanced wheel Won't make the journey at all,	Unwieldy weapon Wobbles and shakes
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Unbalanced load Lifts like the heaviest thing. Balance is best Betting unweakened action.	Light though it be In everything
--	-------------------------------------

So weal and woe, Light and dark too,
Welcome all openly.
Hardship and ease, Sickness and health,
Hold on through unflinching.

Unlimited Wealth will come
When everything's a tool.
Supreme balance Needs outstretched arms,
And so embrace all extremes.

I saw something Happen and I
Sought out the root of it;
From a word to A word and from
One thing to another,

Deed led to deed Down endless road,
Drained was I ere it was walked.
Nothing is known, All things arise
In interdependent causation.

Dusty mirror Darker seems but
Does not fail its function.
Clean and shiny Can be worse, for
Clearly stands out dirt then.

Thus there's no such Thing as perfect,
Thinking such is foolishness.
Illusion not Found in Nine Worlds,
Never should you seek it.

X

Open-eyed but Blinded the same,
Brightness can be bad as dark.
Sight of *this* means Sight of *that's* lost,
Seeing so much vision fades.

Sight of Nine Worlds, Wisdom-bringing,
With Midgard blinding can't be had,
Sight of Nine Worlds Sacrifice needs;
Such only the half-blind can see.

Let go desire For fulfillment
For best-laid plans go oft awry.
Expectations Of success will
Enfeeble and enthrall.

Suffering's the Lot of all life
Late or soon it comes to all.
Accept this then, A source of strength
Through all hardships it becomes.

Be at one with All life has, the
World entire experience.
This for strength's sake; Oneness with loss
Suffers it then willingly.

A willing thrall's A witless fool
Willingly used and abused.
Let go of all Possessions held;
Owning things, one's owned in turn.

▶

Mighty oak tree: Stout, unyielding
Overcome by storm at last;
Weathervane will Resist nothing,
Won't ever end up like the oak.

Force at last meets One more fearsome,
Finite at last is all defense.
Unresisting Overcome all;
Unassailable the wind.

Cups have use be- Cause they're empty,
Caps have use from hollow form,
Wheel turns 'round It's empty center
Emptiness defines all forms.

Be unconcerned By gain or loss
Beware you all such weakness.
Right action is Its own reward;
Regardless fate, joy will follow.

In the moment, In the present,
Always be right where you are.
Future unborn, Past is past,
Peculiar to dwell where you're not.

Being at one With the whole world
Will prepare you for all things.
How to do this Half blinded and
Hampered by clinging elsewhere?

Wholeness is the Highest virtue
Having **all** strength as it does.
Perfect balance It will beget
Bringing out work from weakness.

Contented be With all that comes
Create no unneeded problems.
Disappointment's From discontent;
Don't be the source of your sorrow.

N

No such thing as Failure is there
Everything can be a tool;
Lesson learned Has its own value
Leading to better attempts.

Hardship's feared by Foolish thinkers;
Far more precious, it, than ease.
Will and might it Does develop,
Doughty confidence inspires.

Comfort's useless, Creates nothing,
Can't inspire one single thing
Save the search for Further easement,
Sapping much strength over time.

✦

Need brings out strength With steadfast will,
Ceaseless effort conquers all.
Flinching weakens, For half-measures
Fall somewhat short of every mark.

|

To hear you must Have silent mouth
Heightened senses quiet need.
Moving misses Subtle seeings;
Still, one can see everything.

Ice is tricky, Unawareness
Invites the crosser come to harm.
Its beauty lulls, Blinding vision,
Become like ice to cross the ice.

↻

Better stop short Than fill brim-ful
For such a cup will surely spill.
Angry speech is Soon regretted
Soonest sharpest edge will blunt.

What is needful One must do, but
'Ware then going much too far.
Minimal be All one's actions,
Able be to do nothing.

Mindless action's Never mighty,
Meet it is to use your brain;
Proper placement Of a twig can
Prevent the rising of a flood.

Swiftest sword-strike Sometimes misses
Same it is with slower ones,

Better is an Accurate strike;
In action, watch the timing.

When down the road One can see that
Walking it will trouble cause
One can prepare, Plan out action.
Poor foe, trouble, 'fore it starts.



Striving one sees Surface only,
Sight of Midgard comes like this,
Movement's life and One who's living
Little can see worlds Beyond.

Dead one dwells not 'Mongst the living,
Death lifts gaze from mortal coil,
So without, then, Any striving
Such death-like eyes shall see the runes.

Limited is All that's living;
Life is form and forms have ends.
To renew strength, To conquer death,
Transcend, you, die and be reborn!



Fire burns bright, is All consuming
Bane in the end of itself.
Competition Causes battle,
Kills the fighters, ending strife.

Cancer's life gone Mad, out-growing
Gathering in of nourishment,
Sword will shiver Into small shards,
Shaken by its pommel-weight.

Everything keeps Its own ending
Inside, hidden like a seed;
Creation comes From law's shaping,
Concealed in law destruction too.

Acorn planted: Oak tree growing,
Always this is what occurs.
Such a sowing Yields no pine tree,
So can be seen orlog.



Awareness is Surest armor
A warning beats out surprise.
It can be Ally true
Even when others fail.



Sacrifice Seek to make
So to feed ancestors.
They in turn True will be,
Timely aid to offer.

Learn from them Lessons all,
Let not any pass you.
Heroes offer (As do nithings)
Every sort of teaching.



Goodness gains Every aid,
Got from without and within.
Sun-like shine, Selfless acts
Soon or late will return.



Do away with Fear of death, then
Dominant you will become.
No way's barred to One who's done this,
What is left to frighten such?



Concentration Can be baneful,
Keeping too narrow a gaze.
Seeing just Straight ahead
Side-paths can be missed out.

B

Live simply	See Nature
Seek to act out her ways.	
Let all events	Unfold as they
Are by their natures meant to.	

M

Fylgja's aid	For all things
Far and away is best.	
Seek the counsel	Of this spirit;
Steered wrong you will never be.	

Everyone has	Steed of some kind,
Stalwart aid for journey far.	
Horse, or car, or	Other transport
Amplify care for its needs.	

M

Conqueror of	Others one can
Easily quite soon become.	
All it needs is	Strength and fury,
And a modicum of thought.	

One's own self	Never was
Willing as a subject.	
Much greater is	The mastery
Made from one's own conquest.	

Self control:	Boundless strength
Such as kingdoms all lack.	
Bravery	Better spent
Becoming one's own lord.	

F

Over sea-roads	One must sail who
Seeks another shore-line.	
Empty Abyss	Must be crossed by

Anyone seeking the new.

Oceans hold all Every treasure seeker knows. Risk is run of Daring needed for all gain.	Lands existing, Death by drowning;
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Strength once spent is Sparingly some dole it out. Hoping thus to Hoarding it they're always weak.	Gone for good so Hold on to it,
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By accepting Athlings can increase it much, Whole-hearted they Having rebirth after death.	Loss of power Do what's needed,
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One knows beauty Be compared to ugliness. Truth is known, Never weal had without woe.	Because it can Knowing lies,
--	---------------------------------

Hearing words Having silence fore and aft. Experience Opposites chained side by side.	Happens from Only comes from
--	---------------------------------

From this fact Find a paradox for real. Always there All-encompassing view.	One cannot Exists an
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Oft obscured is Errors hiding it from sight Caused by careless Consequence unreckoning.	One's true nature Actions taken,
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Transforming one's Take the mind down other roads.	Train of thought will
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Terminating
Inheritance will surely win.

Every error