

Visions of Vanaheim

Svartesól

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GULLINBURSTI



PRESS

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

First and foremost, due to the fact that this book is on a pantheon of Deities known for obvious sexuality, there is some adult content. This book is not for children, nor those over the age of majority not capable of handling mature discussion.

While this book contains a fair amount of scholarship with research into primary sources as well as history, archaeology, and anthropology, there is an equal amount of personal gnosis, whether visions, experiential, or "filling in the blanks" from missing lore. Most of the personal gnosis is informed personal gnosis, through research and putting it into practice.

Many people have contributed to this book, but not all of them are Vanatruar or Vanic-focused, some are just friends of the Power/s involved. Most of the contributors have affiliation with a group and/or organization. However, the material here should not be taken as the official positions of these groups and organizations nor necessarily agreed with by said groups and organizations.

For the sake of continuity, the Common Germanic names have been used for each Deity: "Freya" and "Frey" rather than "Freyja" and "Freyr". The individuals who have written for this book may elsewhere address the Deities by more Norse, German, or Anglo-Saxon names.

Visions of Vanaheim is, as far as the author knows, the only explicitly Vanic text to come out since Thorsson's *Witchdom of the True*, and is far longer and more comprehensive, as well as from the perspective of some who are actual Vanic practitioners. Be that as it may, *Visions of Vanaheim* is not meant to be the last word on Vanic practice. This book makes no claims of carrying on an unbroken ancient tradition. Moreover, there is no central authority of Vanatru, no "Vanapope". This book is but one set of people's experiences, perceptions, and opinions; you must walk your own Path for yourself, and seek your own truth.

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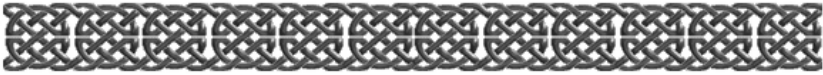
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PART ONE:

EXPLORING
A VANIC TRADITION



An Introduction to Vanic Practice

Svartesól

Allfather works,
 the Alfar discern,
the Vanir know,
 the Nornir indicate,
 the Ividia brings forth,
 men endure,
 the Thursar await,
 The Valkyruir long.
-Hrafnaldur Odins 1.

This is a book about the Vanir, the tribe of Northern Gods whose primary domains are agriculture and fishing, fertility, and prosperity. This book will examine archaeology, primary historical sources and folklore, and personal gnosis in piecing together what a Vanic religion might have looked like long ago, and how we can practice Vanatru in a way relevant to the needs of life in the 21st century, while still remaining respectful of what came before. This book is not trying to assert that a Vanic religion came to us through the ages unbroken. Indeed, part of the mystery involves fitting together pieces of a puzzle both from what already exists in historical record, and what we can discern from our experience of the Gods. Nonetheless, a Vanic practice is worthy in its own right, and needed.

In a nutshell, Vanatru is a denomination/sect of Heathenry that literally translates as "troth (alliance) to the Vanir" or "true to the Vanir". For some, it may just be Asatru with a Vanic gloss, that is, the Nine Noble Virtues and standard ritual format with perhaps an emphasis on Freya and Frey rather than Odin and Thor. For others, it may be an entirely different tradition with its own values, mysteries, and ways of relating to the Gods and wights. For others yet, such as myself, it may be a combination of the two, a happy medium. None of these forms are "doing it wrong" and would all be properly termed Vanatru.

Also, it should be mentioned that while the term Asatru is

generally associated with Heathens of a Norse cultural focus, Vanatru to my knowledge is not cultural-specific so much as it is tribe-specific. I suppose one of an Anglo-Saxon bent could call their practice Wen-Troth but because I think of boils when I hear "wen", the term doesn't excite me much as my own Heathenry is primarily Anglo-Saxon in terminology and customs.

Right now, there is no official umbrella organization for Vanatruar. There are currently some Vanatruar who are part of other organizations for Heathens, but these organizations do not identify as being exclusively for Vanatruar. There are some individuals and groups who may be working on this and establishing a formal organization in the future, but there are no organizations, just some individuals and a handful of small groups and forums.

To identify as Vanatru, you do not need membership in a Vanic group or "an official certificate" as you would; what you need is to have a Vane as patron and/or honor the Vanir primarily (not necessarily exclusively), both in ritual and in a life that holds Vanic values dear -- connection to the Earth, finding life to be sacred and not "suffering"; finding the world to be good and not something to be separate from. That is all. It is the Vanir Themselves who determine whether or not you are Vanatru. You do not need the permission of some pseudo-authority.

While I didn't coin the term Vanatru, it seems not many Vanatru-identified people are talking about this Path, and it's time somebody said something, so people know they have options.

Heathenry in the United States has largely turned into chocolate and vanilla ice cream. While these flavors are old standbys, sometimes you want strawberry, sometimes you want pistachio, and sometimes you want White Russian. Indeed, it's notable that Hinduism can sustain several currents, including Shaivism, Shaktism, and Smartha; that there are denominations of Christianity including Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Pentecostal; that there are Orthodox and Reform versions of Judaism, as well as Hasidic Jews and more mystical Qabala scholars; sects of Buddhism including Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana, Bön, and Tendai; and variations of Wicca from Gardnerian to

Feri. Even ancient Hellenic religion had different schools such as the initiation into Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries; there were oracles of Apollo, maenads of Dionysus, those who followed the cult of the nymphs, and hierodules.

Yet Heathenry balks at the idea of different denominations of Heathenry other than cultural (Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Germanic), even in the face of evidence of certain Gods having cultus areas... Frey in Uppsala, in Thrandheim (Norway), and Thverá (Iceland), and people in our history called Thorsgodhi, Freysgodhi... the historical figure of Egil who was oathed to Odin. In fact, it is ironic that Heathens can accept Odinism as a viable form of Heathenry, but the idea of Vanatru is still extremely controversial. Are the Vanir not worthy of Their ways explored, Their names being worthed and Their cultus being restored, upgraded, and preserved? The idea of Vanatru as a viable Heathen denomination is still extremely controversial, but is not going away anytime soon, we hope.

The Vanir are the Gods of Earth and sea, and specifically of cultivating the Earth and sea -- agriculture, fishing. They are fertility Gods, which can equate to creativity of mind and fruits of the spirit besides fertility of body. They seem to be more noticeably sexual Beings, and are all about prosperity and *enjoying* that prosperity in the good life. They can be seen as a middle way between the Jotnar of untamed elements and wilderness, and Aesir of society and civilization. A Vanatruar is just as likely to be one firmly grounded in mundane life as one who is mystical, but more often than not a combination of mysticism and mundane pragmatism, seeing all aspects of life as being sacred.

The idea of Vanatru presupposes that the story of the war between the Aesir and Vanir as mentioned in *Voluspá* as well as *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga Saga* is evidence that an earlier Vanir cultus was supplanted by the Aesir, who came from elsewhere, with some elements of the Vanir cultus remaining. Furthermore, for an entire war to happen between the Aesir and Vanir, and the Vanir to be mentioned as winning, we would have to assume there were more or less equal numbers, and those who have done Otherworld journeying to Asgard

and Vanaheim have reported demi-Gods and different Beings inhabiting those areas as permanent residents. Names being lost to time does not mean the Beings do not exist, but it is a mystery now and one that will not be explored in this text.

For that matter, it explicitly states in *Alvissmal* (Poetic Edda) that each of the different races of Beings have different words for things in nature and the cosmos, the Vanir included. Here the Vanir are definitely noted as being a separate tribe, which would mean They were never fully absorbed into the Aesir. And if They had been fully absorbed, there would be no more Vanaheim.

Frey, Freya, and Njord were given to the Aesir as part of a hostage exchange to end the war between Aesir and Vanir, and that does not mean They lost all of Their Vanic nature -- if anything, They shared that with the Aesir and learned some Aesic ways, but it's still not the same as "being considered one".

For starters, of the three Vanir who are explicitly named in the Eddas as being Vanir, and hostaged to the Aesir, it is telling that none seem to have ever married any of the Aesir. In *Ynglinga Saga* it says that Njord is wed to His sister (who is most likely Nerthus), and was married to Skadhi the Jotuness for a time. Frey also married a Jotuness, Gerda. Freya may probably have been intimate with Odin (She is said to be His concubine, or at least His teacher of *seiðr*), however marriage is not required for such. Njord's sister-wife is not named in any of the Eddas and Sagas, and this in and of itself is proof that there are more Vanir than named by the Eddas and Sagas. We have the name of Nerthus from *Germania* and as it is cognate with Njord, we can assume this is His sister-wife.

Moreover, anyone who has ever been married, had a relationship, or had a friendship knows that being accepted into the family does not mean you stop being who you are -- which is the sum product of nature and nurture, that is, your own family. Legally, it may well mean that you will be brought under the fold of their provision and protection, that you will look out for each other more than casual acquaintances or total strangers. But you will still be who and what you are, no matter how much you "blend in" or influence the others.

Now, here is a caveat. This is at least true in Norse accounts of mythology. It does seem that the Anglo-Saxons did not have a clear delineation of God-tribes, rather than saying Ése (Aesir) or Wen (Vanir), They were all just "the Gods". Incidentally, the majority of Vanatruar known to this author have a fondness for the Anglo-Saxon culture above the other Germanic cultures, and this author feels that the Anglo-Saxon culture is perhaps more Vanic than the others. For starters, folk holidays such as May Day, Harvest Home/Lammas, Charming of the Plough, and Hallows are observed in England that have ancient roots and obvious Vanic connotations. England itself was populated by the Ingvaeones - Ing's people - who named the tribe of Angles and thus England itself is "Ing-Land". The Angles settled England because of its superior *farmland*. Finally, whereas Odin and Thor are presented in Scandinavia as being aggressive warlords, the English Woden is a shaman-healer of the wild wood, and Thunor is a noble, kindly king. This seems to be much more of a frithful Vanic influence on the perception of the Gods.

The question has been posed whether Vanatru, like Asatru, considers itself to be a reconstructionist religion. While not presuming to speak for all who identify as Vanatru, I would say that in my own practice as well as that of those Vanatruar I have known, most of us do not consider ourselves to be reconstructionists. Rather, I would say Vanatru is a "reconstructionist-informed"¹ religion.

Reconstructionism for polytheist religions generally means attempting to believe and practice in the same way as it was originally done, including going back to the customs and worldview to keep things in context. Some of the Heathen reconstructionists I have personally encountered (your mileage may vary) speak of not wanting to resurrect the past, but thinking about what would have been the likely progression of the Northlands if they had not converted. But, the fact remains that the Northlands did convert, gradually, and the old religion lay dormant for 1000 years, and even upon conversion it is clear through artifacts that it changed over time. While it is worthy to

1 Credit for the term "reconstructionist-informed" goes to my friend Blade, who blogs at *An Opinionated Heathen* (<http://wordsfindme.wordpress.com/>).

try to honor the Gods in the manner to which They became accustomed, and honor the people who honored these Gods, it is problematic in the Northern Tradition for several reasons.

For starters, most people in Western civilization were raised in an Abrahamic faith, whether nominally or intensively, or in an atheist or agnostic "post-religious" household. "The faith of our ancestors" has been some strain of Abrahamic religion for the past 1000 years. We have all been raised without the Heathen worldview, and all we have to "de-program our brains" with are thin pieces of information written down by non-Heathens, whether Tacitus who was both a cultural and religious outsider, or Snorri, Saxo, and the various other Christians who recorded the mythology and history of the Northlands.

Finally, there are very few modern-day Heathens who would be able to adapt to what we do know as that culture in that time period. We have more mastery over the elements now than we did then, as most of us live in climate controlled homes. Most of us get our food from a supermarket and do not know where it came from. Most of us have reasonable access to medical care and live to be old, and when it comes our time to die, usually go slowly and suffering rather than a quick and merciful end. Modern-day Heathens cannot even begin to comprehend what would be the daily facts of life for the Heathen era: possibly living as a thrall, seeing much harsher punishments for criminal activity, living on a farm or being conscripted into a war band, animal sacrifice and ritual suicide commonplace.

In fact, from what looks to be the likely period of Vanic cultus at its peak - the Ertebölle and Funnelbeaker cultures - we see things such as human sacrifice (e.g. the bog bodies), which is currently illegal in most countries. We do not have enough sources on what a Vanic practice looked like, and can only infer from archaeology and hints of things surviving and absorbed in the primary sources and history of the Aesic-focused conversion era, but the archaeology informs us that at the very least, human sacrifice was a regular practice, whether our modern sensibilities approve or not.

Looking beyond "the Vanic era", for a moment, into "the Heathen era" we know they were nothing if not a pragmatic lot; they

were maybe too open to new ideas and progress, which resulted in the entire civilization being converted to Christianity from 500 C.E. (when most Anglo-Saxons were now Christian) to 1100 C.E. (when Sweden finally converted). The people of England circa 500 C.E. were not "reconstructing" the way the religion looked in England 500 years prior, or 1000 years before that. The civilization of the Northlands seems to have progressed from hunter-gatherer (Jotnar-focus) to horticulture/agriculture (Vanic-focus) to "society" (Aesir-focus), and yet almost nothing of the Jotun cult remains, and very little of the Vanic cult. The people of the Northlands did not reconstruct earlier religious practices.

I do probably err on the side of being more traditional. I am actually a bit of a lore-hound: when I was compiling Frey's devotional I had about 50 pages of references from the primary sources, and decided to trim it in half as not to bore or annoy people. I enjoy studying history and I do believe the past is the foundation for the present. I am currently learning Anglo-Saxon for (minor) use in ritual (both to be respectful of what came before as well as for the aesthetic beauty of the language itself), and while still not an exceptionally formal person, I prefer some kind of substance to said rituals as opposed to what I've come to term "The Ten-Minute Miller Lite Bumble": even a small, informal húsel is made with intent and mindfulness of what the Gods might like then, updated to now.

But, I do understand that the Gods were dormant for 1000 years and for Their worship to come back outside from some subdued folklore practices, They had to call people. Whatever They did in 500 C.E. England, is not what They are doing in 2008 C.E. England or the US for that matter. If human civilization can change, the Gods can also adapt, and clearly They have to awaken as many as are currently honoring Them. If you claim to go "strictly by the lore", there is only so much that the lore can offer on making a viable religious tradition. Also, I highly doubt Odin traveled far and wide, cut out His eye, and hung on a tree so we could be slaves to dogma in books.

There is no doubt in my mind that my Vanic practice does not remotely resemble that of the average Funnelbeaker person, or shaman/

priest of that era. It can't. Short of building a time machine, we will never know exactly how things were done, and my life largely does not revolve around surviving the elements, killing my own food, and breeding. As such, I do not claim my Vanic practice is reconstructing anything, however, I and other Vanatruar do look at history as well as opening ourselves to receive guidance directly from the Vanir, as far as what They would like to see in the here and now, to do the best with what we have.

Indeed, much of my own Vanic practice is based in Unverifiable Personal Gnosis, abbreviated to UPG. This term is often used to define something that is experiential and not present in the primary sources, whether it is about a specific characteristic of a Deity or Their "past history", or what They like as offerings. I am not 100% dependent on UPG - I have a good knowledge of the Eddas and Sagas, and have read many "201" texts such as Bede, Tacitus, etc. I also look at archaeology, which frightens Heathens who would only like to think about the period of 500-800 C.E. as being "acceptable Heathen practice" -- this being of course the conversion era. However, UPG is important -- to fill in the blanks of a living and relevant practice which is limited in information, lost in a pre-literate society and obfuscated by a literate society.

There is a step beyond UPG, which is called Peer-Corroborated Personal Gnosis, or PCPG for short. PCPG is a UPG confirmed by at least 2 people working within the same tradition who have had unrelated visions and/or encounters with said Deities or wights and can state that said Deities or wights gave them similarly corresponding information about Themselves. Much of my UPG is actually PCPG.

With all of this in mind, it's important to note the Gods being Gods are not completely knowable. It is good to get to know Them as fully as we possibly can, but being human with finite brain capacity, we will not know all there is to know. We can infer from what we do know what would be in-character or out of character for a specific Deity or a specific realm of the Otherworlds, but we are still dealing with very large and complex Gods and Their assortment of complex followers whose job it is to "translate" the will and ways of the Gods in the

modern day. Some knowledge and understanding is good, but we are not going to ever get the complete picture and I acknowledge that there are others whose perceptions, observations, and experiences *will be* different from mine.

As far as doing any Northern religion the way it was done, we don't have much to go on, and yet even with what we know, we must live in the 21st century -- even very "primitive living" is still more modern than what the ancients had. Our worldviews have been permanently altered, perhaps not entirely for the worse, and I believe the Gods understand more about the changing times than we give Them credit. The Gods, being Gods, are intelligent enough to know what is going on, and this is exactly why They are calling people, now. Besides which, once you get to a place where the honor of the Northern Gods and other assorted wights becomes a way of life, one goes beyond studying textbooks to actually living the faith, having the ritual, and doing honorable deeds -- communicating with the Gods and seeing They are more than two-dimensional liner notes in mythology, but rather real, living, working Beings; seeing the cycles of nature, and the patterns of how your deeds work on your Wyrð works on that of others around you and life itself.

It is my hope that the writings in this book will garner interest in Vanatru, showing the relevance of Vanic ways in the 21st century, which is quickly escalating towards political, ecological, social, and economic crisis at a global level. The ultimate purpose of the tribe known to us as the Vanir is to know the appreciation of everyday holiness that is sorely needed in a world full of malcontents seeking to destroy the world and/or themselves.

The Vanir are not pleased with the way things have fallen apart in a secular Western society, with our poison spreading to the other parts of the world. Drastic change is not going to happen overnight, and surely it would be hubris to think this book could inspire such needed change, but hopefully the words here can inspire people to think about the importance of the Vanir, Their relevance in these chaotic times, and to be more aware of how our actions impact other people and the Earth itself, to be more aware of what is needed for honorable

actions, and to revere the Vanir as the Gods of nature tamed by man but still respected and appreciated by man. Hopefully, the Vanir can help us to re-learn what it is to be productive and honorable people, trying to help ourselves, help each other, and help our planet. It will take strong communities to work with strong Gods, and the option is now here to learn more about the Vanir, a Vanic-focused practice, and perhaps start your own Vanic tradition with like-minded folk.

A Northern Tradition Timeline

Eosin and Svartesól

The purpose of this timeline is to present a theory that the Northlands had three successive cultures with different religious practices, deeply steeped in those cultures. The timeline is particularly focused on what appears to be "the Vanic era", to give some food for thought, and perhaps inspiration, as to the way the Vanir would like to be honored: even if we do not have enough information on exactly what was done, and what we do know of is not practical or probable for the modern day, we can be inspired by the information anyway.

500,000 BCE

Lower Acheulean - These were tool users who left Africa to successfully colonize Eurasia.

300,000 BCE

Clactonian - Artifacts were found in Essex; Swanscombe in Kent and Barnham in Suffolk, of early, crude chopping tools made of flint, and the tip of a worked wooden shaft.

80,000 BCE

Mousterian - Artifacts were found in the Dordogne region of France and all over Europe; handaxes, racloirs and points made of flint were found.

40,000 BCE

Châtelperronian (France) - At this time, Neanderthals and modern humans occupied Europe together. Denticulate (toothed) stone tools were found from this era, including a distinctive flint knife with single cutting edge and a blunt, curved back. There was also jewelry which indicates the Neanderthals may have been more sophisticated than previously thought.

30,000 BCE

Aurignacian - Tools are found here with complex art, including figurines that depict faunal representations of the time period associated with extinct mammals, such as mammoths, rhinos, and the European horse, along with anthropomorphized depictions inferred as some of the earliest evidence of religious belief and practice. There was also the use of bone and antler for tools such as needles and harpoons.



"The Lion Man," found in the Hohlenstein-Stadel cave of Germany's Swabian Alb and dated at 32,000 years old, is associated with the Aurignacian culture. It is the oldest known anthropomorphic animal figurine in the world.

Gravettian (France) - A common artifact from this era is a small pointed restruct blade with a blunt but straight back, used for big-game hunting (bison, horse, reindeer, and mammoth). There are also some early examples of cave art and the famous 'Venus' figurines.



The Venus of Lespugue is a Venus figurine, a statuette of a nude female figure from approximately 25,000 BC. This particular "Venus" figurine was discovered in 1922 in the Rideaux cave of Lespugue in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Approximately 6 inches tall, it was carved from tusk ivory. Unfortunately, it was damaged during excavation.

10,000 BCE

Solutrean (France) - The Solutrean era was named after the type-site of Solutré in the Mâcon district, Saône-et-Loire, eastern France, which appeared around 19,000 BCE. Solutrean finds have been also made in the caves of Laugerie Haute and Les Eyzies, as well as in the Lower Beds of Cresswell Crags in Derbyshire, England.

Solutrean tools have finely worked, bifacial points made with pressure flaking rather than cruder flint knapping. Using this method, delicate slivers of flint could be made into light projectiles as well as barbed and tanged arrowheads. Other characteristic tools of this industry include large thin spear-heads; long spear-points with the tang and shoulder on one side only; flint knives and saws that are chipped, not ground or polished; and scrapers with the edge not on the side, but on the end.

The finds of this era also include prehistoric art, as well as ornamental beads and bone pins. Bone and antler were used. Animals of this era include horse, reindeer, mammoth, cave lion, bear, rhinoceros, and aurochs.

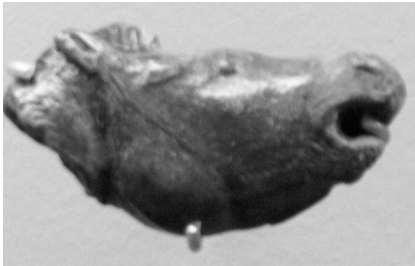
Magdalenian (France) - The Magdalenian era was named after the type site of La Madeleine, a rock shelter located in the Vézère valley, commune of Tursac, in the Dordogne department of France.

The Magdalenian era is synonymous in many people's minds with reindeer hunters, although Magdalenian sites do also contain extensive evidence for the hunting of horse, red deer, and other large mammals present in Europe towards the end of the last ice age. The culture was geographically widespread, and later Magdalenian sites have been found from Poland in the east to Portugal in the west.

This culture spans the period between c. 18,000 and 10,000 BCE, towards the end of the last ice age. There are regular blade industries, as well as elaborate worked ivory, bone, and antler, which seemed to serve both functional as well as aesthetic purposes. Examples of Magdalenian mobile art include figurines and intricately engraved projectile points, as well as items of personal adornment including sea shells, perforated carnivore teeth for necklaces, and fossils.

The sea shells and fossils found in Magdalenian sites can be sourced to relatively precise areas of origin, and have been used to support hypothesis of Magdalenian hunter-gatherer seasonal ranges, as well as perhaps trade routes. Cave sites such as the famous Lascaux contain the best known examples of cave art from this era. The site of Altamira in Spain, with extensive and varied forms of art, has been suggested to be a site where multiple small groups of Magdalenian hunter-gatherers congregated. (Conkey 1980).

The oldest offering found in northern Europe is a pile of elk-bones from Lunday in Denmark, dating from 10,000 BCE, thrown into the lake. There are four piles of bones each consisting of one elk.



Carving of horse head found dating to the Magdalenian era.

Ahrensburg culture - This culture is named after village of Ahrensburg, which is in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, 25 km northeast of Hamburg. Wooden arrow shafts and clubs were excavated here. At this time, the landscape of Northern Europe was tundra with bushy arctic white birch and rowan, and the most important prey was the wild reindeer.

The primary hunting tool was bow and arrow. At the Stellmoor site, well-preserved arrow shafts made from pine, as well as arrowheads of flintstone, were found, as well as a number of intact reindeer skeletons with arrowheads in the chest. These have been assumed to be sacrifices to higher powers. The settlements have findings of stone circles, most likely the foundations of hide teepees.

There is also evidence of extensive fishing during this time period, and carvings of animals made from amber, such as an amber elk found in Weitsche.

8,000 BCE

Sauveterrian - The name of the Sauveterrian era is derived from the type site of Sauveterre le Lémance in the French departement of Lot et Garonne.

The Sauveterrian culture extended through large parts of western and central Europe. Artefacts characteristic to this era include geometric microliths and micro-blades with backed points. Wood working tools are notably missing from sites. There is definite evidence of ritual burial.

The Sauveterrian culture is the source of the first Nordic culture, the Maglemosian.

The oldest boat in the world dates from this era, found near Pesse in the Dutch province of Drenthe. It is a wooden canoe made from a hollowed-out tree trunk, dating to about 8000 BCE.

7,500 BCE

Maglemosian (Scandinavia and surrounding areas) - The name of the Maglemosian culture came from a type site in Denmark, named Maglemose at Mullerup on western Zealand. The Maglemosian people lived in forest and wetland environments. At this time the sea level in northern Europe was much lower, and did not reach current levels until about 6000 BCE, at which time they inundated some of the territories of this culture. The Maglemosian peoples used fishing and hunting tools made from wood, bone, and flint. They appear to have domesticated the dog.

Star Carr² is a very important site in the Maglemosian culture, located in North Yorkshire, England. The Star Carr site was discovered in 1947 during the clearing of a field drain. Its main feature is a birch brushwood platform standing on the edge of what was Lake Pickering. Star Carr was occupied from around 8770 BCE until about 8460 BCE, with a possible period of abandonment between 8680 to 8580 BCE.

Hearths found further away from the water indicate temporary

²<http://www.dot-domesday.me.uk/migrate.htm>

settlement, during the summer months, where hunters chased red and roe deer, elk, wild boar, and aurochs. The lake's mud preserved items dropped into it. Hunter's tools such as scrapers, as well as worked bone and antler, have been found. A notable find was 21 perforated parts of skull and antlers of red deer. There was a fragment of a wooden oar which implies boats used to travel or fish. Beads made from stone and amber suggest there was personal adornment, and remains of a dog are indication of domestication of this animal. The most famous find from this site is the top part of a stag skull, complete with antlers. The skull had two holes perforated in it and scholars have speculated that it was used as a hunting disguise, or perhaps in ritual.

6,000 BCE

Kongemose (Scandinavia) - This was a hunter-gatherer culture in southern Scandinavia, and the origin of the Ertebølle culture. The characteristic find is long flakes of flintstone, used for making rhombic arrowheads, scrapers, drills, and awls. Bone daggers were often decorated with geometric patterns, stone axes were made, and other tools of horn and bone. Most of the economy was based on hunting red and roe deer, as well as wild boar, supplemented by fishing on the coasts.

Nøstvet and Lihult (Norway/Sweden) - The Nøstvet people lived on open settlements, using honed axes made of various rocks such as quartz, quartzite and flint. They hunted seafowl and marine animals, besides fishing and gathering. The size of the settlements grows over time, and reflects an increase in the population as well as a more sedentary lifestyle. The Nøstvet culture appeared around the Oslofjord and along the Norwegian coast up to Trøndelag. The Lihult culture is found in Sweden. These cultures neighbored the Kongemose and later the Ertebølle peoples.

Ertebølle-Ellebeek (Scandinavia and northern Germany) - During this period, the Northern European climate was warmer and moister than today. Deciduous forests covered Europe, and the Baltic was at higher

levels than today, and was a salt sea, rather than a brackish one. The Baltic coastline was often flooded, Jutland was an archipelago, and marshes were extensive, with tracts of shallow water rich in fish. The Ertebølle population settled on promontories, near or on beaches, on islands and along rivers and estuaries. Due to chance fluctuations in the sea level during Ertebølle occupation of the coast and subsequently, many of the culture sites are currently under 3m-4m of water. Some have been excavated; the artifacts are in an excellent state of preservation, protected by anaerobic mud.

The Ertebølle population derived its living from a variety of means, but chiefly from the sea, which they traversed in paddled dugouts, which were a few feet wide and propelled by paddles constructed of shafts to which leaf-shaped or heart-shaped blades were attached. They hunted whales and seals. To trap fish, the fishermen constructed fish fences of approximately 4m-long hazel sticks set upright in the mud at the bottom of shallow water. Wickiwork traps were also used. They angled with hooks made of red deer bone, of which at least one example has been found with line attached. They spear-fished with spears made of shafts to which hazel tines were attached.

Judging from the remains of animal bones at their sites, the Ertebølle people did hunt land animals: large forest browsers, fur animals and maritime birds. They gathered berries for consumption and also prepared a number of wild plants, judging from the seed remains of plants that could not be consumed without preparation. This includes raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*), wild strawberry, crab apple, and rose hips. There were seeds that could have been made into gruel, such as acorn and manna grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), and they also ate roots of the sea beet (*Beta maritima*) which is ancestral to modern domestic beets. Greens were boiled from nettle (*Urtica dioeca*), orache (*Atriplex*) and goosefoot (*Chenopodium album*). In fact, fragments of textiles from Tybrind Vig were woven in the needle-netting technique from spun plant fibers.

Huts were constructed of brush or light wood. Fire pits located outside the huts indicate that most village functions were performed

outdoors, with the dwellings mainly used for storage and sleeping.

Red ochre and deer antlers were placed in some graves, but not others. Female graves were found with the women wearing necklaces, and belts, made from animal teeth and shells. At Møllegabet, an individual was buried in a dugout, which some see as the beginning of Scandinavian boat burials. Skateholm also contained a dog cemetery, where dogs were also prepared with red ochre, and given antler and grave goods.

Pottery was manufactured from native clays tempered with sand, crushed stone and organic material. Two main types are found, a beaker and a lamp. The beaker is a pot-bellied pot narrowing at the neck, with a flanged, outward turning rim. The bottom was typically formed into a point or bulb (the "funnel") of some sort that supported the pot when it was placed in clay or sand. Later, technique and decoration became slightly more sophisticated: the walls were thinner and different motifs were used in the impressions: chevrons, cord marks, and punctures made with animal bones. Handles were sometimes added.

Paddles from Tybrind Vig show highly developed and artistic woodcarving. The Ertebølle people also polished and engraved not obviously functional pieces of bone or antler, with motifs that were predominantly geometric, occasionally with anthropomorphic forms. Jewelry was made of animal teeth and decorative shells. At Fanø, polished amber representations of animals have been found, *including a boar*.



A young couple walking along Horsens Fjord, Denmark, in August of 2008 found this limestone, which archaeologists from the Horsens Museum believe to be from the Ertebølle Culture ca. 5400-3900 BCE. The scratched motif depicts a man with an erect phallus and two fish, wearing some sort of headdress with animal ears.³

³ <http://politiken.dk/newsinenglish/article585168.ece>

Swifterbant (Netherlands) - Like the Ertebølle culture, the settlements were concentrated near water. In this case, the settlements were along creeks, riverdunes and bogs. A transition from hunter-gathering to cattle farming, primarily cows and pigs, occurred around 4800-4500 BCE. The wetlands offered optimized conditions to explore both cattle and small scale cultivation of different crops. There was a discovery of an agricultural field in Swifterbant dated 4300-4000 BCE⁴. Animal sacrifices found in the bogs of Drente are attributed to the Swifterbant era, and suggest a religious role for cattle.

Pottery has been attested from this period.

4,000 BCE

Funnelbeaker culture (Scandinavia and surrounding areas) - Most people were still nomadic hunter-gatherers who followed the herds, but at some places they settled more permanently because they could find food there during the entire year (game, fish, berries, tubers, turnips, nuts, etc.). Around this time the wheel is also believed to have been introduced, the oldest wheel found in northern Europe dates from this era, and was found near Weerdinge in the Netherlands. It was made from a single piece of wood. The transition to farming as a predominant lifestyle was gradual but when it became more widely used it deeply influenced the traditional way of living. Agriculture and cattle-breeding demanded a more permanent settlement and bigger houses could be built because they were used much longer.

The Funnelbeaker people ate fruit such as apples. In the fields, they grew barley, flax, peas, lentils, and beans, as well as grains such as emmer wheat (*Triticum dicocum*) and einkorn (*Triticum monococum*). From these ingredients, bread and porridge could be made. Livestock mainly consisted of cattle, swine, goats, and sheep. Oxen were used to pull plows and wagons. Riding on horseback was unknown as the Funnelbeaker peoples hunted horses for food. The ram seems to be seen as a fertility symbol during this time, and depictions have been found on pottery as well as clay figurines,

4 http://www.volkskrant.nl/wetenschap/article455140.ece/Prehistorische_akker_gevonden_bij_Swifterbant

particularly a ram figurine found near Jordansmühl/Jordanów in Poland.

It has been argued that the introduction of farming was introduced by a wave of massive immigration, but scientists have performed DNA studies on the modern European population, comparing their DNA to the finds of bodies from this time, and have concluded most of the peoples of Europe are direct descendants of those who were the native population. The transfer to farming was most likely an adaptation of technology.

A typical Funnelbeaker village would only have a few families and less than 10 houses. Between the Dutch cities of Anloo and Eext in the province of Drenthe, there was a settlement found dating to the Funnelbeaker era, consisting of 4 houses, inhabited by about 20-30 people. Originally, short houses were used, eventually replaced by longhouses closely resembling the later Germanic longhouses. The average Funnelbeaker house was 33 to 49 feet long and 13 to 16 feet wide. As time progressed, the houses seem to have gotten larger, as people lived under one roof with their animals, and in many cases deceased ancestors - in Flögeln (Germany) a Funnelbeaker farm was found that had a back room with a grave in it while the middle room was used as a living room.

The Funnelbeaker culture was known for burying rather than cremating their dead. Individual graves and tombs were usually covered with a conical mound. In some cases the mound was joined with others to form a single big mound, rectangular in shape. The most spectacular graves from this era are tombs known as "hunebeds", primarily found in the province of Drenthe in the Netherlands, and the bundesland of Niedersachsen in Germany. Most people were buried with gravegifts, typically ornate funnelbeakers, buckets, bottles, cups, bowls, dishes, stone axes, bow and arrow, necklaces made of jet and amber, and oftentimes food.

The Funnelbeaker culture was also known for enclosures with palisades and ditches, built on hilltops or other areas that would be easy to defend. Most of these enclosures were found in the southern areas of the Funnelbeaker culture: central Germany and what is now

the Czech Republic, occasionally in the northern parts like Sarup (on the island of Fyn in Denmark).

The oldest road in Europe dates from before the Funnelbeaker culture (approximately 4600 BCE) and was found in Germany north of Osnabrück. Findings include roads and bridges that led from a village into the nearby bog and stopped halfway, most likely used for religious purposes especially as what can only be inferred as offerings have been found around them. The main bog offerings seem to be pottery, food, tools, and weapons. Near Gingst on the island of Rügen, 50 to 60 pots (contents unknown) were offered by multiple generations of Funnelbeaker farmers. In a bog in the Dutch province of Drenthe, an offering pot was found that contained the remains of eggs, beaver meat, a duck, pikes (Latin name: *Esox lucius*), and a tench (Latin name: *Tinca tinca*), other offerings in the bog included cattle, sheep, birds, bones and antlers, and used axes. Near Weerdinge in Drenthe (Netherlands), a funnelbeaker was found with the remains of a pike and a red deer. There were amber beads in the bog as well.

Of course, we cannot leave this discussion without noting the bog bodies, most of whom date from the Funnelbeaker culture. The bodies were strangled, stabbed to death, decapitated, cut to pieces, and often several of these in one body, definite signs of ritual killing.

Chalcolithic (Central Europe) - Here we find the appearance of the first significant economic stratification and the probability of the earliest presence of Indo-European speakers.

Mining of metal and stone is developed in some areas, along with the processing of those materials into valuable goods. In particular, we find the beginning of the usage of copper in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Europe.

From c. 3500 onwards, Eastern Europe is infiltrated by people originating from beyond the Volga. This pushes the natives to migrate in a northwest direction to the Baltic and Denmark, where they mix with the natives of that region.

Both the metal industry and the migration seem to have its basis in the use of horses, which would increase mobility.

Ötzi the Iceman (Austria/Italy) - Ötzi is the nickname given to a well-preserved natural mummy of a man from about 3300 BCE. He was found in 1991 in the Schnalstal glacier in the Ötztal Alps, on the border between Austria and Italy.

Analysis of pollen and dust grains and the isotopic composition of his tooth enamel have shown he spent his childhood near the present village of Feldthurns (Velturmo), north of Bolzano, but later went to live in valleys approximately 50 kilometers further north. Analysis of his intestinal contents show two meals, the last one about eight hours before his death: one of chamois meat, the other of red deer meat, both eaten with some grain (highly processed einkorn wheat bran) as well as roots and fruits.

Ötzi was found to have 57 carbon tattoos consisting of simple dots and lines on his lower spine, behind his left knee, and on his right ankle. It has been speculated that they may be related to energy meridians of acupuncture. Using X-rays, it was determined that he may probably have had arthritis in these joints.

Ötzi wore a cloak made of woven grass and a coat, a belt, a pair of leggings, loincloth, and shoes, all made from different leather skins. He also had a bearskin cap with a leather chin strap. His shoes were waterproof and wide, probably designed for walking across the snow. They had bearskin soles, deer hide for the top panels, and netting of tree bark. Soft grass went around the foot and in the shoe, similar in function to modern socks. His belt had a pouch sewn to it that contained a scraper, drill, flint flake, bone awl, and a dried fungus to be used as tinder.

Other items found with Ötzi include a copper axe with a yew handle, a flint knife with an ash handle, a quiver of 14 arrows with veburnum and shafts made of dogwood. There was also an unfinished yew longbow. In addition, he also had berries, two birch bark baskets, and two species of polypore mushrooms with leather strings through them. The birch fungus is known to have antibacterial properties, and was most likely used for medicine.

It is believed that Ötzi was killed. He had an arrowhead lodged

in one shoulder when he died, which would indicate death via blood loss.

3,000 BCE

Corded Ware/Battle Axe culture - This culture receives the name of Corded Ware from the cord-like ornamentation of pottery from this era, Single Grave from its burial custom of single graves, and Battleaxe from the characteristic grave offering to males - a stone battle axe.

The traditional view of the Corded Ware culture as a series of pan-European migrations from the steppe region of southern Russia has been abandoned. Corded Ware culture communities are now seen primarily as sedentary agriculturalists⁵.

There are very few settlements, but the settlements that have been excavated show that agriculture was continued from the Funnelbeaker era, and domestic animals were kept. The majority, however, did follow a fully- or semi-nomadic pastoral way of life. There are wheeled vehicles (presumably driven by oxen), and the tarpan horse was commonly in use. Cows' milk was used systematically from 3400 BCE onwards, and changes in the slaughter age and animal size of sheep is evidence of sheep being kept for their wool.

The dead were mostly buried, under flat ground or below small tumuli. On the continent, the males lay on their right side, females on the left, with the faces of both genders oriented to the south. In Sweden, the graves were oriented north-south, men laying on the left side and women on the right, both facing east. Pottery in the shape of beakers is the most common burial gift.

The role of the Corded Ware culture in the history of the Indo-European peoples is actively debated. It is generally seen that the Corded Ware culture is the beginning of the Proto-Germanic language and Germanic culture.

The Swedish-Norwegian Battle Axe culture, or the Boat Axe culture, appeared circa 2800 BCE and is known from about 3000 graves

5 Darvill, Timothy. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology. Oxford University Press, 2002.

from Skåne to Uppland and Trøndelag. This time has been referred to as "the age of crushed skulls" however, it appears that most of the "crushing" happened post-mortem in the ground, and the battle-axes were primarily a status object. Most of the settlements were on small, separate farmsteads that did not appear to have defensive protection, which would be another argument against this being a time of aggressors.

About 3000 battle axes have been found, in sites distributed over all of Scandinavia, but they are sparse in Norrland and northern Norway. Less than 100 settlements are known, and their remains are negligible as they are located on continually used farmland, and have consequently been plowed away.

This culture was based on the same agricultural practices as the previous Funnelbeaker culture, but the appearance of metal changed the social system. The Funnelbeaker culture had collective megalithic graves with sacrifices inside. The Battleaxe culture has individual graves with sacrifices for the individual.

A "death house" dating to this period was excavated in Turinge, in Södermanland. The walls were once heavily timbered and held the remains of about twenty clay vessels, six work axes, and a battleaxe. There were also cremated remains of at least six people, which is the earliest find of cremation in Scandinavia.

The Atlantic and North Sea coastal regions of Scandinavia and the Baltic areas were united by a vigorous maritime economy, which permitted a wider geographical spread as well as a closer cultural unity than cultures on the continent. There have been found many rock carvings from this era, displaying "thousands" of ships, using the sea much like a highway.

Bell-Beaker culture - The Bell-Beaker culture lasted from approximately 2800-1900 BCE, and is the term for a widely scattered cultural phenomenon of prehistoric western Europe starting in the late Neolithic running into the early Bronze Age. The term, coined by John Abercromby, refers to common use of beaker pottery with a distinctive inverted bell-shape. It seems that the beakers were designed for the

consumption of alcohol - beer and mead content were identified from certain examples. Studies of pollen analysis suggests increased growing of barley during that era, which can be used in brewing. However, other beakers have some organic residues associated with food, and still others were employed as funerary urns, and from this we can infer perhaps it being used ritually. Beaker-type vessels remained in use longest in the British Isles.

It is noted that Marija Gimbutas derived the Beakers from east-central European cultures that became "kurganized" through incursions of steppe tribes. Despite this, even supporters of the Kurgan hypothesis dispute that the Beaker culture peoples originate from the east. Recently, a Strontium isotope analysis of 86 people from Bell Beaker graves in Bavaria suggests that between 18-25% of all graves were occupied by people who came from a considerable distance outside the area. This was true of children as well as adults. This is indicative of some significant migration wave, and it seems that people migrated from the northeast to the southwest⁶.

Bell Beaker settlements in Southern Germany show evidence of mixed farming and animal husbandry, and there are also finds of millstones and spindle whorls. There are some well-equipped child burials that seem to indicate sense of predestined social position and allude to a socially complex society.

Beakers arrived in Britain around 2500 BCE and fell out of use around 1700 BCE. During the Bell Beaker period, the Neolithic form of Stonehenge was elaborated extensively. Many barrows surround it, and an unusual number of "rich" or elite burials can be found nearby, including the famous Amesbury Archer. Yet another site of interest is Ferriby on the Humber estuary; this is where western Europe's oldest plank built boat was recovered.

The Danish Beaker period was characterized by the manufacture of lanceolate flint daggers, related to the style of daggers circulating elsewhere in Beaker dominated Europe. Gold sheet

⁶ Price, T. Douglas, Grupe, Gisela and Schröter, Peter . Migration in the Bell Beaker period of Central Europe.

ornaments and copper flat axes were the predominant metal objects. During this period, there was also the adoption of European-style woven wool clothes kept together by pins and buttons, in contrast to the earlier usage of clothing made of leather and plant fibers⁷. Two-aisled timber houses dating from this period in Denmark correspond to similar houses in southern Scandinavia, and at least parts of central Scandinavia and lowland northern Germany.

2,300 BCE

Unetice culture⁸ - This culture was named for a typesite located at Únětice, northwest of Prague. It is focused around the Czech Republic, southern and central Germany, and western Poland, dated from 2300-1600 BCE.

The culture is characterized by metal objects which include ingot torcs, flat axes, flat triangular daggers, bracelets with spiral-ends, distributed over a wide area of Central Europe and beyond. Hoards of the ingot torcs and axes have been found, such as the hoard of Dieskau (Saxony) which contained 293 flanged axes.

Burials are normally inhumations in flat graves with bent legs and arms, lying on the side, oriented north-south or northeast-southwest, with males buried on the left, women on the right side. Some groups used hollowed out tree trunks for burial, and stone cairns are found in the Upper Rhine. Males were usually buried with copper triangular daggers, flint arrowheads, stone wrist-guards, and clay cups; women were buried with bone or copper pins, bone arm-rings, and bracelets with spiral ends. A burial in Leubingen was covered by a barrow that was still 8.5 m high. It contained a wooden tent-shaped chamber. The grave contained two burials and golden grave gifts.

Unetice metalsmiths mainly worked only with pure copper. Alloys of copper with arsenic, antimony and tin to produce bronze became common only in the succeeding periods.

Most of the settlements are "pile dwellings". Houses measured

⁷ Bender Jørgensen 1992, 114; Ebbesen 1995; 2004

⁸<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~ufg/reihe/files/lobufa13.pdf>

approximately 8 by 4 meters. In Southern Germany, two-aisled longhouses of up to 50m length and 5 m width were used.

2,000 BCE

Nordic Bronze Age/Proto-Germanic⁹ - The Nordic Bronze Age is generally considered to be the direct predecessor and origin of the Proto-Germanic culture of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The Scandinavians joined the European Bronze Age cultures fairly late, however the Scandinavian sites present rich and well-preserved objects of wool, wood, bronze, and gold. Mycenaean Greece, Phoenicia, and Ancient Egypt have all been identified as sources of influence for Scandinavian artwork from this period, the foreign influence likely due to the amber trade. The amber found in Mycenaean graves from this period originates from the Baltic. Many petroglyphs depict ships, and several petroglyphs depict ships that have been identified as plausibly Mediterranean.

A pair of twin gods are believed to have been worshiped, and is reflected in a duality in all things sacred. Where sacrificial artifacts have been buried, they are found in pairs. In addition, a female or mother goddess is believed to have been widely worshiped: sacrifices (animals, weapons, jewelry and men) were found in small lakes and ponds.

Bronze Age rock carvings may contain some of the earliest depictions of well known gods from later Norse mythology. A common figure in these rock carvings is that of a male figure carrying what appears to be an axe or hammer, which may probably have been an early representation of Thor. Other male figures are shown holding a spear; one example of a Bronze Age rock carving shows a spear-holding figure missing a hand, which may be a representation of Tyr. A figure holding a bow may be an early representation of Ullr.

Ritual instruments such as bronze lurs have been found sacrificed, and are believed to have been used in religious ceremonies.

9 Davidson, H. R. Ellis and Gelling, Peter: *The Chariot of the Sun and other Rites and Symbols of the Northern European Bronze Age.*

1,600 BCE

Nebra sky disk (Saxony-Anhalt) - The Nebra sky disk is a bronze disk of around 30 cm diameter, patinated blue-green and inlaid with gold symbols. The symbols appear to be a sun or full moon, a lunar crescent, and stars. There are two golden arcs along the sides, as well as another arc at the bottom surrounded by multiple strokes.

The disk was recovered at a site near Nebra, Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, a prehistoric enclosure encircling the top of a 252 m elevation in the Ziegelroda Forest, known as Mittelberg ("central hill"). Ziegelroda Forest is said to contain around 1,000 barrows dating from the Neolithic era, oriented in such a way that the sun seems to set every solstice behind the Brocken (the highest peak of the Harz mountains, and a place traditionally associated with witchcraft, i.e. Walpurgisnacht) some 80 km to the northwest. The sky disk itself has been dated to c. 1600 BCE.

The find confirms that the astronomical knowledge and abilities of the people of the European Bronze Age included close observation of the yearly course of the Sun, particularly the angle between its rising and setting points at summer and winter solstice. While Stonehenge was used to mark the solstices, this disk is the oldest known "portable" instrument which can be used for such measurements.

There was initial suspicion that the Nebra sky disk was fake, the disk is now widely accepted as authentic. As the item was not excavated using archaeological methods, authenticating it has depended on microphotography of the corrosion crystals, producing images that could not be reproduced by a faker.

1,300 BCE

Unrfield culture - In the Urnfield period, inhumation and burial in single graves prevails, though some barrows exist. During the earliest phases of this culture, man-shaped graves were dug, often with a stone-lined floor, in which the cremated remains of the deceased were spread. Later, burial in urns became prevalent. The size of the urnfields is variable; in Bavaria there were hundreds of urn burials, while the largest cemetery in Baden-Württemberg in Dautmergen had only 30

graves. The dead were placed on pyres, covered in their personal jewelry, which often shows traces of the fire and sometimes food-offerings. The cremated bone-remains are much larger than what was found from the Romans, which indicates that less wood was used.

The urn containing the cremated bones was accompanied by other ceramic vessels, like bowls and cups. They may have contained food. Burnt animal bones were often found, which may have been placed on the pyre as food. Metal grave gifts included razors, weapons that were deliberately destroyed (bent or broken), bracelets, pendants and pins. Metal grave gifts became rarer towards the end of the Urnfield culture, while the number of hoards increase. Amber or glass beads were luxury items found in the graves of the elite.

Upper-class burials were placed in wooden chambers, or chambers with a stone-paved floor. They were covered with a barrow or cairn. These graves contain especially fine pottery, animal bones (usually pork), sometimes gold rings, and in exceptional cases, miniature wagons. Some of these burials contain the remains of more than one person.

Towards the end of the Urnfield culture, some bodies were burnt in situ and then covered by a barrow. In the early Iron Age, inhumation became the rule again.

About a dozen wagon-burials of four-wheeled wagons with bronze fittings are known from the early Urnfield period. In Milavče near Domažlice, Bohemia, a four-wheeled miniature bronze wagon bearing a large cauldron (diameter 30 cm) contained a cremation. This exceptionally rich burial was covered by a barrow.

Cattle, pigs, sheep and goats were kept by the Urnfield peoples, as well as horses and dogs. The cattle and horses were very small. Forest clearance was intensive in the Urnfield period. Probably open meadows were created for the first time, as shown by pollen analysis. Wheat and barley were cultivated, as well as millet and oats. Rye had already been cultivated, although further west it was only a noxious weed. Pulses and the horse bean were also grown. Poppy seeds were used. Hazel nuts, acorns, apples, and pears were collected. In the settlement of Zug, remains of a broth made of spelt and millet have

been found. In the lower-Rhine urnfields, leavened bread was placed on the pyre and burnt fragments have been preserved.

Flax seems to have been of reduced importance, maybe because wool came into predominant use for clothing. Wool was spun (finds of spindle whorls are common) and woven on the warp-weighted loom, bronze needles were found, used for sewing.

Typical bronze tools include winged and socketed axes. In the North, stone axes were still in use. The leaf-shaped Urnfield sword could be used for slashing, in contrast to the stabbing-swords of the preceding culture. Protective gear like shields and helmets was extremely rare and almost never found in burials. The best-known example of a bronze shield comes from Plzeň in Bohemia and has a riveted handhold.

There is well-made pottery dating from this era: biconical pots with cylindrical necks are especially characteristic, and fluted decoration is common. Pottery kilns were already known (Elchinger Kreuz, Bavaria), as is indicated by the homogeneous surface of the vessels as well. Other vessels include cups of beaten sheet-bronze with riveted handles, and large cauldrons with cross attachments. Wooden vessels have only been preserved in waterlogged contexts (one example being a find in Neuchâtel), but may have been quite widespread.

Hoardings were very common in the Urnfield culture, deposited in rivers and swamps. As these spots were often quite inaccessible, they most probably represent gifts to the Gods. In the river Trieux, Côtes du Nord, complete swords were found together with numerous antlers of red deer that probably had had a religious significance as well.

700 BCE

Strettweg Cart (southeast Austria) - From this period, an artifact was found of a four-wheeled cart with a goddess, riders with axes and shields, attendants and stags.¹⁰

¹⁰ Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria

500 BCE

Pre-Roman Iron Age - This is the earliest part of the Iron Age in Scandinavia, northern Germany, and the Netherlands north of the Rhine. All regions feature many extensive archaeological excavation sites, yielding a wealth of artifacts. The objects discovered suggest strong influences from the Celtic Iron-Age Hallstatt culture in Central Europe.

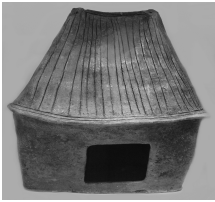
The Iron Age in northern Europe is distinct from the Celtic La Tène culture southwards, while still having been influenced by it. Around 600 BCE the northern people began to extract iron from the ore in peat bogs. The oldest iron objects found were needles, as well as edged tools, swords, and sickles. Bronze was now mostly used for decoration, especially in torcs. Archaeologists have also found shield bosses, spearheads, scissors, sickles, knives, pincers, buckles, and kettles. The Gundestrup silver cauldron dates from this era as well as the Dejbjerg wagons of Jutland, two four-wheeled wagons of wood with bronze parts.

The Bronze Age tradition of burning corpses and placing the remains in urns continued. The Bronze Age ended due to the expansion of the Hallstatt culture from the south. The climate also deteriorated. The finds from Scandinavia are consistent with a loss of population, whilst the Jastorf culture expanded southwards.

It is widely accepted that these northern Iron Age people spoke Germanic languages. The late phase of this period sees the beginnings of Germanic migrations, starting with the invasions of the Teutons and the Cimbri.

Jastorf Culture (north Germany) - Named for a typesite in Jastorf, Lower Saxony, the Jastorf culture extended south to the fringes of the northern Hallstatt provinces.

The Jastorf culture is characterized by its use of cremation burials in extensive urnfields, using urns in the shape of houses. It is considered that religious beliefs changed in that time. There are few and modest grave goods, with weapon deposits completely absent.



House-shaped urn, 7th century BCE, found in Sachsen-Anhalt.

Hallstatt culture (Central Europe) - Named for its type site, Hallstatt, a lakeside village in the Austrian Salzkammergut southeast of Salzburg. The Hallstatt culture extended to Champagne-Ardenne in the west, through the Upper Rhine and the upper Danube, as far as the Vienna Basin and the Danubian Lowland in the east, from the Main, Bohemia and the Little Carpathians in the north, to the Swiss plateau, the Salzkammergut and to Lower Styria.

The Hallstatt culture exploited the salt mines. Inhumation and cremation co-occur. Members of the elite in the western zone were buried with sword or dagger, and in the eastern zone with an axe. The western zone has chariot burials. In the eastern zone, warriors were frequently buried in full armor.

There was trade with Greece, attested by findings of Attic black-figure pottery in the graves of the elite. Other imported luxuries included ivory and wine, as well as red dye made from cochineal (seen at the Hochdorf burial).

The settlements were mostly fortified, situated on hilltops, and frequently included the workshops of bronze-, silver-, and goldsmiths. Towards the end of the period, very rich graves of high-status individuals under large tumuli are found near the remains of fortified hilltop settlements. They often contain chariots and horse bits or yokes. Well known chariot burials include Býčí Skála, Vix and Hochdorf. Elaborate jewellery made of bronze and gold, as well as stone stelae was found in this context.

While this culture is seen as Proto-Celtic rather than Germanic, we can see that it has similarities with Proto-Germanic cultures, and indeed we can see how they would be very close "cousins" both in

custom and perhaps even religious belief.

0 CE

Roman Iron Age - The name "Roman Iron Age" comes from the influence that the Roman Empire had begun to exert on the Germanic tribes. In Scandinavia a great number of goods were imported, such as coins (more than 7000), bronze images, glass beakers, enameled buckles, and weapons. The style of metal objects and clay vessels was markedly influenced by the Romans. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, we see the first use of runes. There are also many bog bodies from this time in Denmark, Schleswig, and southern Sweden, found with weapons, household wares, and clothes of wool. Great rowing ships were found in Schleswig. The primary burial tradition was cremation, while there was still some inhumation. Through the 5th and 6th centuries, gold and silver became increasingly common.

400 CE

Germanic Iron Age - The Germanic Iron Age follows the Roman Iron Age, and the beginning is marked by the fall of the Roman Empire, with the rise of the Germanic kingdoms in Western Europe. During the Roman Empire's fall, much gold came into Scandinavia and there are excellent works in gold found dating from this period. Gold was particularly used to make scabbard mountings and bracteates. After the Roman Empire was gone, gold became scarce and the Scandinavians instead made objects of gilded bronze, mainly decorations of interlacing animals.

Witham shield (Britain, boar-emblem)¹¹ - This shield was discovered in the River Witham in the vicinity of Lincolnshire, in 1826. When the shield was first found, the archaeologists examining it could clearly see the shape of a wild boar on the front. The boar shape was cut from a

11 http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_prb/t/the_witham_shield.aspx

piece of leather and fixed to the shield. The leather has since rotted away, but the shadow remains a different color in the bronze, and while it has mostly faded it can still be seen if looked at closely. There are small rivet holds across the center of the shield which show where the boar was originally fixed. The red color on the shield's boss was made of small pieces of red coral from the Mediterranean. The shield itself is a remnant, a decorative front which was fixed to a wooden back.

Further excavation at the site has revealed posts that look like they are a foundation for a causeway, as well as artifacts that include a sword, spears, and part of a human skull with a sword fragment lodged in.

700-1100 CE

Viking Age - The Viking Age is the term for the period in European history, especially Northern European and Scandinavian history, spanning the 8th to 11th centuries, when Scandinavian Vikings explored Europe by its oceans and rivers, through both trade and warfare. The Vikings also reached Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland, and Anatolia.

Viking society was based on agriculture as well as trade with other peoples. They placed great emphasis on the concept of honor in combat as well as in criminal justice. This era coincided with the Medieval Warm Period (800-1300) and stopped with the start of the Little Ice Age (1250-1850). The lack of pack-ice made for easier sea travel. Many scholars also believe a growing Scandinavian population was too large for the peninsula and there were not enough crops to feed everyone, which led to seeking more land to cultivate and feed the people.

The Viking age is considered to have ended with the establishment of royal authority in the Scandinavian countries, and Christianity becoming the dominant religion, put in the early 11th century for all of the Scandinavian countries.

From looking at archaeology, we can make the following

suggestions:

-The first people in the Northlands were hunter-gatherers. Life was brutal and short. It is likely these people worshiped what we would know now as the Jotnar, or giants, especially as many of the Jotnar are anthropomorphic.

-The period when the Vanir might have been introduced to the Northern people looks probable to have started in the Maglemosian/Kongemose era, co-existing with the dominant Jotun cultus.. The Vanir appear to have gained dominance during the Funnelbeaker/Ertebolle culture, to eventually be secondary with what looks to be co-existence with the Aesir Gods coming into the Northlands from elsewhere beginning in the Bell Beaker culture into the Unetice and Urnfield cultures, with the Aesir dominant starting from the Bronze Age onwards.

-It is the thought of the authors that while Gods have always existed and are not dependent on human worship to exist, They will reveal Themselves to people as the people have need. We can see this as the Jotnar contacting humanity at a time when people needed to master the elements to survive. The Vanir would have found humanity receptive when they were learning to grow food they had gathered. These Deities were revealed when the time was right and specific people were open. All of what we now know to be mythological primary sources - the Eddas as told to Snorri - were originally someone's personal gnosis, people who were in direct contact with the Gods and related Their stories to the people.

-The Vanir and the Jotnar can thus be thought of as Deities that are not Indo-European. While names such as "Freya" and "Ran" are Germanic in origin, it is likely that the original names of these Gods were lost as these societies were pre-literate. One of two things is likely to have happened: 1. the Gods were called by a similar-sounding name by the original Pre-Germanic peoples, and the Germanic language thought "good enough" due to the characteristics of these Gods, 2. the original names were lost completely and replaced by the Germanic names based on the Gods' characteristics.

This is given some credence when you consider that most scholars cannot find a meaning for the name "Njord", as it seems to have no Indo-European root. The *Nj-* combination means that Njord is **not** etymologically similar to Jord ("Earth"), and Njord is perhaps a leftover of His name among the original Vanir cultus.

-The Hellenic Titans and the Celtic Fomorian hold the same place in their cosmology as the Nordic Jotnar, original Gods who were later replaced by successive cultures and demonized.

-Rather than the Germanic peoples always having been separate and distinct as some would claim, there seems to be a lot of cross-pollination of customs and perhaps even belief and practice, particularly in relation to the early Celtic people, e.g. the influence of the Hallstatt/La Tène culture on the Proto-Germanic cultures. We also see frequent interaction with what has later become the Slavic culture, as well as the Mediterranean peoples to the south. While the Gods Themselves are individuals, there does seem to be certain commonalities across Europe even before the Indo-Europeans came forward and changed the culture.

We will never know for certain what was believed and practiced in those times, but it is fascinating to discover that what we know to be "the Germanic culture" had its origins with something more widespread over Europe, and things familiar to the Northern Tradition (boar motifs, Deity depictions) were found long ago. It gives an appreciation of the age and wisdom of our Gods. May They ever be hailed, long after these words become print, and the brains with these ideas go back to the Earth.

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The Differences Between Aesir and Vanir

Svartesól

It has been asserted by some modern Heathens that the Aesir and Vanir are not tribally distinct, and so this list was made to show both critics and those who might be leaning in favor of the Vanir and Vanic ways that the Aesir and Vanir are not "all the same"; there are differences in how the Gods present Themselves as well as key elements of Their worship.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VANIC CULT

-The Vanir are known for consanguineous marriage at least among Their leading ranks, such as the unions noted in the primary sources between Njord and His sister (most likely Nerthus), and Freya and Her brother.

-The wain seems to be the most important symbol of the Vanic cultus. Frey and Nerthus are both noted as having a wain that goes on a yearly procession, and Freya also has a wain pulled by cats. The only Aesic God noted to have a wain is Thor¹², who is married to Sif, a probable Vanir Goddess, and as such carries Her influence.

-Another important symbol is the ship, which only Frey and Njord have connections to out of the Northern Gods. Even when the Northlands mostly cremated their dead, many cremations involved burning ships. Many burials were in ship-shaped stone formations known as "stone ships".

-The Vanir are more immediately associated with animals than the Aesir. Frey and Freya ride a boar and a sow respectively, and cats are sacred to Freya and synonymous with Her witch-cult. Frey is also

12 While it is common belief that Frigga has a wain, this is not mentioned in primary sources and can be considered "fakelore" or purely personal gnosis.

connected with the stag through the antler, and stallions were kept in His honor by Hrafnkell Freysgoði as well as His people at Thrandheim, Norway. Sea birds are sacred to Njord, and livestock, especially the cow, is connected with Nerthus.

-During the Ertebölle/Funnelbeaker era and through Proto-Germanic culture, beaker shaped vessels were found in graves as well as homesteads. The beaker may have been of significant purpose in Vanic rituals.

-Bodies were found in lakes and bogs throughout Northern Europe in Neolithic times. Nerthus' victims were sacrificed in a lake, and the sacrificial kings of Yngling blood were usually also drowned.

-Frey and Njord are the two Deities mentioned in oaths taken on the oath ring in *Landnámabok*. Ullr is mentioned elsewhere as having an oath ring. The Vanir probably initiated the custom of oath-taking on a circle shape in Their time (symbolic of the circle and cycles of life), which carried over into blended Aesir and Vanic religion.

-There was no cremation during the Ertebölle/Funnelbeaker culture, and the practice of inhumation in a mound was common long after the Aesir-Vanir war and blended religion, among Frey's historical devotees (re: Thorgrim in *Gisla's Saga*). The practice of *útiseti* most often involved sitting on a burial mound, and the elves (who Frey ruled) were also noted to dwell in mounds throughout the land.

-In *Ynglinga Saga*, Freya was said to practice *seiðr*, and that it was commonly practiced among the Vanir. Following the Aesir-Vanir war, Freya taught *seiðr* to Odin, who was most interested in using it. There seems to be two forms of *seiðr*, oracular and magical.

---Oracular *seiðr* required a ceremonial costume, and an elevated seat to perform, as well as chanting songs to help alter the state of consciousness. This was explicitly mentioned in the account of Thorbjorg, and we know Odin has a high seat called Hlidskjalf (or High-Shelf), which He likely built after Freya taught Him, and it is mentioned that Frey used Odin's high seat and saw Gerda when sitting there.

---Magical *seiðr* consisted of the following works:

- A. shapeshifting
- B. calming fire and storm
- C. changing the weather
- D. raising the dead to speak with them/gain information
- E. bringing sickness and even death to people, but also healing
- F. robbing the health, intelligence, or other strength/s of one and giving to another

Male practitioners of *seiðr* were often called *ergi*, which has connotations of cross-dressing and homosexual behavior. When *seiðr* was seen as more of an evil thing through the lens of Christian superstition, to call someone *ergi* was as good as calling someone a *seiðr*-worker, and both the magical and homosexual components were an insult seen as worthy of serious criminal charges in medieval Iceland. The priests of Frey at Gamla Uppsala horrified the Odinsman Starkadr with effeminate dress and mannerisms, and Tacitus mentions a few accounts of cross-dressing priests, particularly in the rites of twin Gods. While in the modern day many who claim to be *seiðr* practitioners are oathed to Odin, *seiðr* originated as a Vanic practice and followers of the Vanir have every right to claim it as our own.

-The "magic number" of the Vanir cult seems to be four rather than nine: four for the ruling Vanir (Njord, Nerthus, Frey, Freya), the four dwarves Freya slept with to acquire Brisingamen, and the four oxen Gefion (likely one and the same as Freya) used to plow the Danish island of Zealand. Four is also representative of the four seasons and four directions (especially as presented in the four angles of the diamond that is the Ing rune), and the four elements of Wiccan practice (earth, air, fire, and water).

-The Vanir cult itself seems to have started during the late hunter-gatherer period of Europe, in the beginnings of horticulture, and began to be blended with the Aesir cult when "civilization" was coming from elsewhere. The four most prominent Deities of the Vanir - Frey, Freya, Njord, and Nerthus - are brother/sister pairs who are noted as mating with one another, most likely in rituals to preserve fertility of the land. Njord and Nerthus have connections with the ocean and

lakes/rivers respectively, and Frey and Freya have connections with the land, Frey of grain crops and Freya of fruit and flowers. Njord, Frey, and Freya also all seem to be invested in the quality of human life and influence prosperity and love as well as familial relationships. Nerthus seems to have investment in the Earth itself, and keeping humanity mindful of the holiness and awe of the Divine.

-The Vanir cult seems dependent on priesthood, which carried into blended Vanic and Aesic religion. Frey and Nerthus are noted as having a priestess and a priest respectively, who is in intense communion with the God and performs Their yearly procession to bless the Land and its people. Frey and Njord are mentioned in *Ynglinga Saga* as being the priests of the Gods following the Aesir-Vanir war. The question is, what were they sacrificing, and who were they sacrificing to? I believe at least part of this is collecting the offerings given from man to Gods, and in return blessing men. But from a Vanic perspective, They are also giving of Their inherent sacral/hallowing nature to the Aesir, in frith.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AESIC CULT

-The Aesir are known for exogamous marriage: Odin and Frigga are not brother and sister, Baldur and Nanna are not brother and sister. In *Ynglinga Saga*, Odin made the brother-sister relations of the Vanir illegal at least in Asgard.

-The Aesir are typified by Their tools. The Vanir also have tools/weapons - notably Freya's Brisingamen, Njord's axe and Frey's sword/antler - but They are not known immediately by these tools as the Aesir are known by Theirs:

---Thor's hammer, which functions by dispersing lightning rather like a policeman's taser. (The hammer was later worn by Heathens during the conversion era to differentiate themselves from Christians who wore crosses, and the hammer can be seen as a symbol

of the Aesic cult par excellence.)

---Odin's ring Draupnir, which makes nine more like itself every ninth night, and as such would put Him as a "ring-giver", as many ancient Germanic kings were called. Odin also has a spear called Gungnir, which would be an easy weapon for a layman to craft and use, effective for quick and painful killing of foes, and creating horrific injuries for ordeal purposes. A spear was also more efficient to throw over the head of the opposing army - a practice of the Vikings as a way of Odin claiming foes and war-dead - than a sword, axe, or something else.

---Frigga's distaff. While Holda and Frigga are both spinners, Holda is a solitary and does it for the comfort of Her own cottage, whereas Frigga has a great hall and clothes many and probably makes tapestries as well.

---Heimdall's horn. The argument as to whether or not Heimdall is a Van or Ase is mentioned later in the book, but He uses His horn as an alert and an alarm.

-While the Vanir guard the fertility of the Earth, the Aesir seem to be in charge of its progress. Thor is, again, something of a divine policeman. Frigga is a hostess and a politician in Her own right. Heimdall is a warder or "security guard" if you will. Bragi is a God of poetry and song. Odin is a God of higher learning and "knowledge as power" through ruling society. Loki, though of Jotun blood, is often counted among the Aesir and can be seen as a figure of chaos which sometimes helps the natural order, sometimes does not.

-Sacrifices made to Odin were usually hanged (often criminals; see also "the nine nines" mentioned by Adam of Bremen), or slain opponents in battle (the blood-eagle was common). Odin Himself hung on a tree during His Yggdrasil ordeal, literally dying and reborn to gain power. We have no evidence of runes prior to 200 CE in the Northlands, we can assume this was done after the Aesir-Vanir war, and when Aesic and Vanic religion were blended in the Northlands.

-The practice of cremation began in the Northlands during the Corded Ware/Battle Axe culture, the time when we see people coming from elsewhere and most likely bringing the Aesir Gods with them. In

fact, it is an explicitly Aesic practice, noted in *Ynglinga Saga*:

Thus he (Odin) established by law that all dead men should be burned, and their belongings laid with them upon the pile, and the ashes be cast into the sea or buried in the earth. Thus, said he, every one will come to Valhalla with the riches he had with him upon the pile; and he would also enjoy whatever he himself had buried in the earth. For men of consequence a mound should be raised to their memory, and for all other warriors who had been distinguished for manhood a standing stone; which custom remained long after Odin's time.

-Rune magic was a practice known to Odin as well as to Rig-Heimdall who gave the runes to humanity. While Odin gave the runes to all tribes to use, it originated with the Aesir and is much more Theirs. In addition, rune magic was often accompanied by something called *galdor*. Unlike what you will read in most Neo-Pagan texts about runes, *galdor* most likely did not involve singing the names of runes themselves, but rather a verse of poetry that served as a charm. Odin and Bragi are both noted as Gods of poetry and inspiration, and it seems that weaving words together effectively was seen as magical.

-The number of the sacred Aesir mysteries is nine: Odin hanging on Yggdrasil for nine days, and having a ring that produces nine more of itself every ninth night. It is noted that while nine nights is the time Frey waited to marry Gerda, and the time Njord and Skadhi stayed in each other's homes, this was not until after Frey and Njord came to live among the Aesir.

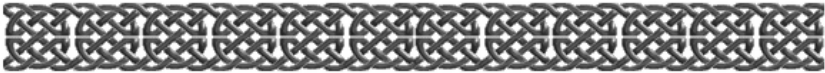
-There are a few characters in the primary sources called *Thorsgoði*, but not any called *Odinsgoði* apart from the mentions of sacrifice made at temples, and the worshippers of Odin who were kings. Can we assume that Odin lacked an organized priesthood the way that the Vanir and Thor did? (Again, Thor is married to a Goddess who is most likely Vanir, and would be influenced by Her.) Who knows. But it does seem the Aesir cult is notable for lack of priestly figures, who are consorts of the Gods or at least carry Their presence and luck with Them to bless the people directly.

In no way is this article saying one tribe is better than the other,

but rather I hope to give some food for thought in the differences between Aesir and Vanir to illustrate what a Vanic practice looked like in the old days, and how we could create a viable Vanic-focused practice for today.

PART TWO:

Who ARE
THE VANIR?





NJORD

Njord in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

Gagnrad

38. Tell me tenthly,
since thou all the origin
of the gods knowest, Vafthrudnir!
whence Niörd came
among the Æsir's sons?
O'er fanes and offer-steads
he rules by hundreds,
yet was not among the Æsir born.

Vafthrudnir

39. In Vanaheim
wise powers him created,
and to the gods a hostage gave.
At the world's dissolution
he will return
to the wise Vanir.

Vafþrúðnismál (Poetic Edda)

XXIII. "The third among the Æsir is he that is called Njördr: he dwells in heaven, in the abode called Nóatún. He rules the course of the wind, and stills sea and fire; on him shall men call for voyages and for hunting. He is so prosperous and abounding in wealth, that he may give them great plenty of lands or of gear; and him shall men invoke for such things. Njördr is not of the race of the Æsir: he was reared in the land of the Vanir, but the Vanir delivered him as hostage to the gods, and took for hostage in exchange him that men call Hœnir; he became an atonement between the gods and the Vanir.

Njördr has to wife the woman called Skadi, daughter of Thjazi the giant. Skadi would fain dwell in the abode which her father had had, which is on certain mountains, in the place called Thrymheimr; but Njördr would be near the sea. They made a compact on these terms: they should be nine nights in Thrymheimr, but the second nine at Nóatún. But when Njördr came down from the mountain back to Nóatún, he sang this lay:

Loath were the hills to me, I was not long in them,
 Nights only nine;
 To me the wailing of wolves seemed ill,
 After the song of swans.

Then Skadi sang this:

Sleep could I never on the sea-beds,
 For the wailing of waterfowl;
 He wakens me, who comes from the deep-
 The sea-mew every morn.

Then Skadi went up onto the mountain, and dwelt in Thrymheimr. And she goes for the more part on snowshoes and with a bow and arrow, and shoots beasts; she is called Snowshoe-Goddess or Lady of the Snowshoes. So it is said:

Thrymheimr 't is called, where Thjazi dwelt,
 He the hideous giant;
 But now Skadi abides, pure bride of the gods,
 In her father's ancient freehold.

XXIV. "Njördr in Nóatún begot afterward two children: the son was called Frey, and the daughter Freya; they were fair of face and mighty.

Gylfaginning (Prose Edda)

Odin placed Njord and Frey as priests of the sacrifices, and they became Diar of the Asaland people. Njord's daughter Freya was priestess of the sacrifices, and first taught the Asaland people the magic art, as it was in use and fashion among the Vanaland people. While Njord was with the Vanaland people he had taken his own sister in marriage, for that was allowed by their law; and their children were Frey and Freya. But among the Asaland people it was forbidden to intermarry with such near relations.

...

Njord took a wife called Skade; but she would not live with him

...

Njord of Noatun was then the sole sovereign of the Swedes; and he continued the sacrifices, and was called the drot or sovereign by the Swedes, and he received scatt and gifts from them. In his days were peace and plenty, and such good years, in all respects, that the Swedes believed Njord ruled over the growth of seasons and the prosperity of the people. In his time all the diar or gods died, and blood-sacrifices were made for them. Njord died on a bed of sickness, and before he died made himself be marked for Odin with the spear-point. The Swedes burned him, and all wept over his grave-mound.

Ynglinga Saga

We know that Njord was powerful among the Vanir, enough that He was given to the Aesir as Their hostage in the truce following the Aesir-Vanir war. I believe that Odin, being as thirsty for knowledge as He is, knew He could learn things from the Vanir, and as there is never any mention of Njord breaking out of Asgard we can assume that 1. He would not want to break the hold-oath, 2. He must have gotten along well enough with the Aesir. Njord is mentioned as a "priest of the sacrifice" along with His son, and I believe that the offerings we make to the Gods are part of an exchange -- we gift Them, and They gift us. Njord and Frey having inborn Vanir generosity would be the best ones to process the exchange of energy between Gods and man.

It is noted that Njord had taken His sister to wife (who is most likely Nerthus), as was Vanir custom, and when moving to Asgard this was not acceptable by their standards, and would be why He was given to Skadhi later on. It is also noted that Njord is the father of Frey and Freya, and not much detail is given into that relationship (if anything, the Edda is wanting for detail in any kind of relationships between the Gods). We can assume He was a good father to Them, since They came out all right.

Njord has been something of a father figure to me. Njord's way of fathering is to teach, and often teach through hands-on experiences, even play. I know He must have been very loving and patient with

Frey and Freya, teaching Them leadership skills as well as how to lead with a proper attitude. Njord almost always comes off as being very mellow, laid-back, gentle, and warm. I have only ever seen Him angry once, and that was a vision regarding the story behind the truce between the Aesir and Vanir. I often see Njord walking along the beach, barefoot, watching the ebb and flow of the tides and smiling slightly, knowingly, seeing the patterns of the tides and wave formations as Wyrð, and enjoying the beauty of the sea. I have seen Njord walking along the beach with His children, pointing out different varieties of seabirds, collecting shells, driftwood, sea glass and smooth rocks. Teaching His children to sing to the sea, and the cycles of precipitation that renew the sea and the water supply of the Worlds. That tears are a reminder that we are all alive, and a part of this cycle.

Njord's own fathering towards me has been to teach me to find the calm center within myself -- to the place where the tides may ebb and flow, but never cease, and the water renews itself through evaporation and transpiration, precipitation, and runoff. I find taking long showers to be very relaxing when stressed out, and being at the beach and in direct contact with the sea recharges my batteries like nothing else. To flow with the water, to pour and drop down, billow into wave and roll out, is the nature of my calm center. To be liquid, to flow, and to know that I am part of the greater cycle of nature, and the Universe itself, and all things will work out in their time.

Njord is huggable, He is often smiling, with a twinkle in His blue eyes that hints of occasional mischief. He loves the Worlds because they are beautiful in their own way, if only because all life is dependent on water and He likes nothing better than water. He is much less intense than Odin, and much less into the idea of power and status. He's not too proud to sit down and build a sandcastle (or a sand turtle), or splash around with you in the sea. He loves laughter, and you can sense the vitality and life within His being without it becoming overwhelming or oppressive. His contentment and sense of rightness about things is infectious, and it's very hard for me to stay upset or grumpy for very long around Njord.

That being said, part of Njord's fatherly role towards me is

teaching, or at least gentle guidance, which sometimes involves things I don't want to hear. Njord has commented that I am representing the Vanir when I deal with others, and need to be always mindful of that, especially in my tone and the way I word things. I know I do not have a lot of tact, although I think I have gotten a lot better about not letting things such as "you're doing it wrong" drama get to me as much as it used to. That being said, I have, in the past, been upset about things, usually in direct proportion to the stress level of other events accumulated in my worldspace. Njord has "nudged" me when He thinks I sound a little harsh or rantish; it's still important to speak my truth, and He does indeed understand the value of blowing off steam. But even when I am speaking my truth, it is better to do so with the grace the Vanir are known for. Njord is renowned in the Nine Worlds for being a good speaker, and it is better, from His perspective, to explain "why this is not kosher" in a logical and rational manner rather than flinging childish insults back and stoop to the level of "the haters".

Njord has not just "nudged" me about my tone, however, but the attitude behind it. Even if I vehemently disagree with someone, even if I find their practices and actions to be dishonorable and distasteful and highly objectionable, at the end of the day they are still human, and things probably happened to shape them into being what they are. As wrong as I have felt some people's actions are, I know it can't be fun times to be ignorant, and to be surrounded by ignorant people. I know that people often bully if they feel powerless in other areas of their lives, and abusers were almost always abused in some capacity themselves. There is a difference between laying down and taking crap from people, and having a modicum of compassion and trying to take the high road.

I've been burned a lot, in a lot of different ways, and there are some people who are never going to be allowed back into my life because they have forfeited that right; it's too toxic, especially if they are threatening the safety and stability of my home, relationship, and/or health, and they took advantage of opportunity to change and do better, so they don't get a second, third, or fourth one. I have had a tendency to be too much of a Good Samaritan. That being said, it must really suck

to be them. On the other hand, an honest mistake is an honest mistake and not everyone who makes mistakes is rubbing their hands together with some evil agenda. And I'm certainly not above reproach.

I've been trying hard to watch my words, watch my tone, while still allowing for justifiable human emotions. I am far from being a finished product, and it may indeed be the great challenge of my life to relate to others more compassionately even if I think they're scumbags or at least someone who's pissed me off at the moment. It's going to take a lot of work, but having Njord as a teacher makes it not a wholly unpleasant experience. I have to remember that I was in a very wounded place in my life some years ago and was probably not great to be around; in cutting myself some slack, I also have to not get bogged down in hatred of others, but always turn my focus onto the better things, such as the love of the Gods, which would include Njord.

Indeed, it has been through Njord's encouragement for me to adjust my attitude that I have found opportunities to connect with like-minded people, as well as people who may not be in the same place spiritually but are still good to know. This is an important step to get past the mindset of being a permanent bullying victim, and taking charge of my own destiny.

Njord's fathering of me has helped me heal, and though I am not complete in my healing -- it's rather like peeling layers of an onion, from all the damage sustained -- I know that all things will work out in their time, and the journey is just as important as the destination. To sail on a ship from one land to another and be impatient with when you arrive is to not observe the waves, to not observe the patterns of the sea, the way the sky and sun reflects, particularly at sunrise and sunset, or the twinkling stars and bright moon at night.

Njord as Fulltrui

Raistlynn

I became Njord's in 2006. I first received a visit from Him back in September of 2004. He showed up in my dream on a dock, dressed exactly the way He is in the Vikings Tarot cards. Njord patiently stood there, and looked at me. A girl I knew in the dream told me who He was, and that he wanted to marry me.

This dream occurred during a time when I felt Odin's presence waning in my life. Before this occurrence Odin had been my Patron. I just didn't realize I was being led to another path.

Njord is not a demanding god, but He can be insistent at times. I was living in one town, and had to move. The only place available to stay was up on the Coast. I personally have found Njord to have a sense of humour: one time I was playing in the waves with my daughter and had cautioned her to be careful, as the waves could pull her under. Not 10 minutes later, I went under the water. I have a theory that a dream I had involving an orca splashing me while I was on dry shore was sent by Him. I went to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. I wanted to stay there. I had also visited the ocean there, and I tried to stay dry. It seemed a wave crashed up on the shore, getting my feet soaking wet. There was a time when I was looking for a personal animal to associate with Him. I had a dream that night about seahorses. A few days later, I went grocery shopping, and I happened to look at cakes; a plastic decoration on one was a seahorse. I laughed and bought that cake.

Njord has truly been a major influence on me in many ways. I'll be enrolling in college to become a counselor, to help people and make peace. I also want to take up pastoral counseling to help those on the Northern Path. If I can bring people some small source of comfort, whatever they are going through, then that to me is what I'm supposed to do to serve Njord. I've been told I'm 'too laid back' to be a parent. I always try to see both sides of an issue. I try to listen more than I talk. I've ended up being an advisor to more people than I can count. It was recently disclosed to me that I should try and be a calm center for people. I've been working on doing just that.

I feel so underqualified with Njord, a God that's been known to calm waves. He's also in the Council of Gods that gather at Yggdrasil. He's pretty laid back, and seems to 'wear' his power without making a big deal out of it - a trait that I admire. I am not one to be calm, even if I look it/act calm - on the outside, there's always a storm raging beneath the surface. I suppose that's due to keeping my emotions locked down. I feel deeply, and I don't always show how I feel, due to having been burned when I did. To be able to express my feelings in a temperate manner has been a challenge, which is something I think Njord is the 'teacher' for..that and an advisor. If I feel confused/unsure as to how to proceed, or what to say or do..I'll light candles on His altar..and run the water in the fountain thing I got, close my eyes, and try to figure it out.

When I lived by the ocean, I would buy 2 extra loaves of bread and go down to the ocean every Saturday or Sunday and feed the seagulls, those birds being sacred to Him.

I usually talk to Njord in front of my altars for Him. He has two. He really needs a third one. I will light the incense and candles on His altars, and His alone if I need to speak with only Him. My every day simple pleasures with Njord involve lighting Ocean candles, and Ocean incense. One day, I had lit candles on my altars and just sat there in front of them on the floor with the lights off. After awhile, I extinguished all of the candles and got ready for work. (Which took 5 minutes since I get everything ready the night before..) I cleaned off Odhinn and Frigga's altar, and then cleaned off both of Njord's altars. I then opened the back door to clean off the ashes from Njord's altar cloths (which I never really do..but was 'told' to..) when I looked up. I saw two seagulls flying overhead. I've never seen them around the apartment before. I thought to myself that no matter what other stuff I went through during the day, I was going to have a good day if I saw Njord's birds while cleaning His altar cloths.

A daily sort of devotion that I do is play an online game in which a character of mine is named after Him.

As far as self care goes, most of the products that I use are Ocean scented in some shape or form. I also use sea salt now, and eat seafood as often as I can. I try to think before I say something to

somebody (and no that doesn't always work) since Njord is the Ruler of Fire. This is fitting since I am a Fire sign. He seems to have this 15 minute rule thing with me. If I step out of line with someone, to where I am rude, condescending, or mean, then within 15 minutes usually something will happen. It could be anything, and it isn't subtle. It's His way of letting me know that He has had enough of my shenanigans. This falls along the lines of personal responsibility.

I've always loved the ocean. I wanted to be a Marine Biologist so I could get in the water with the orcas and dolphins. I've always loved sea food, and growing up my father had a painting of a beach with ocean waves behind it; the painting hung on the wall behind his head. I went to the coast of Maine one year. I wanted to stay! Being near the ocean or water has always been peaceful for me, and now I know why. My legal name roughly corresponds with 'water' or 'lake'. My father (who is of Danish descent) named me. He said the name 'just came to him.' I was also born the Year of the Water Rat.

Njord's Lesson: Serenity
(Capistrano Beach, April 2008)

Svartesól

This too shall pass. The waves roll back and forth, never in the same crest and foam pattern twice, always shifting from high to low, low to high. This moment of pain is just a moment, and will be gone, leading to the next moment... and the next. Give it to the water, let the water take it from you, pulling it back into the great waters, where it dissolves, and the foam crashing around your legs is the next moment in time. Get what you can from each moment, because it is impermanent.

Be here now. Do you enjoy feeling the water on your feet, on your legs? Do you enjoy the smell of the sea air, the cries of the birds flying above? Why are your thoughts going back to the strife others cause? Be here now. Enjoy the peace of the sea, which is the reason why you came here. Be here now, play now, be energized now. And when you leave this place, take the feelings and energy with you but also be fully in the moment of time spent with your man, time spent with the Gods, the activities you do. For life to be lived fully, you must be fully in the moment and not distracted by things that do not matter in the long term. People's opinions are not preventing you from enjoying the sea, or your relationship, or anything else. It is when you focus on these thoughts, that you are taken away. Do not give them that power. Living your life is more important.

Njord's Song

Ebb and flow, high and low,
back and forth, weal and woe,
tides of time, crash to shore,
splash your feet, then no more.

You can have, but not hold,
waters of the worlds unfold,
shore to shore, sea to sea,
flow with the tides, and be free.

Invocation to Njord

Saevör

I call on You, Njörd, Lord of Noatun,
Come to me, like the waves on the shore!
Oh, God of the Vanes, Father of Frey and Freya
I wait for Your fruitful wealth and nourishment.
I see Your presents everyday,
On the Soil and on the Sea,
You give us a promise of fertile lands,
You give us a promise of prouder lives.
Oh, Tamer of Winds and Fire,
I wait for Your blessings in this time.
Like the waves on the shore,
Like the Sea and the Soil,
I call on You, Njörd, now!



NERTHUS

Nerthus in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

After the Langobardi come the Reudigni, Auiones, Angli, Varni, Eudoses, Suarines and Nuithones all well guarded by rivers and forests. There is nothing remarkable about any of these tribes unless it be the common worship of Nerthus, that is Earth Mother. They believe she is interested in men's affairs and drives among them. On an island in the ocean sea there is a sacred grove wherein waits a holy wagon covered by a drape. One priest only is allowed to touch it. He can feel the presence of the goddess when she is there in her sanctuary and accompanies her with great reverence as she is pulled along by kine. It is a time of festive holidaymaking in whatever place she decides to honour with her advent and stay. No one goes to war, no one takes up arms, in fact every weapon is put away, only at that time are peace and quiet known and prized until the goddess, having had enough of peoples company, is at last restored by the same priest to her temple. After which the wagon and the drape, and if you like to believe me, the deity herself is bathed in a mysterious pool. The rite is performed by slaves who, as soon as it is done, are drowned in the lake. In this way mystery begets dread and a pious ignorance concerning what that sight may be which only those who are about to die are allowed to see.

...

Upon the right of the Suevian Sea the Aestyan nations reside, who use the same customs and attire with the Suevians; their language more resembles that of Britain. They worship the Mother of the Gods. As the characteristic of their national superstition, they wear the images of wild boars. This alone serves them for arms, this is the safeguard of all, and by this every worshipper of the Goddess is secured even amidst his foes. Rare amongst them is the use of weapons of iron, but frequent that of clubs.

Tacitus, Germania

On the island of Rügen (a German island in the Baltic Sea) at Jasmund, near Stubbenkammer, remains can still be seen (notably the outer wall) of Hertha Castle, that have been standing there for many hundreds of years, since the Pagan period. In the castle the Pagans of Rügen would worship an idol of

Hertha, who they saw as the Earth-Mother.

Near Hertha Castle is a dark, deep lake, with woodland and hillsides all around. Each year, on several occasions, the goddess bathed in the lake. She rode to the lake in a wagon concealed by a strange veil. The wagon was pulled by two cows. Only the goddess's sacred priest could travel with her. Slaves were the cows who pulled the wagon, but they were drowned in the lake once their task has been completed as any unsanctified human who saw the goddess was doomed to die. And for that reason we know nothing else about the cult of this goddess.

There are many strange tales about weird things that happen near the lake. Some people think these are due to the devil, who, they think, took the form of Hertha to lead the Pagans astray and as he (in the form of Hertha) was worshiped there, still lays claim to the lake. Other people believe the odd happenings are caused by an ancient queen or princess who was exiled to the lake.

A glamorous woman is frequently seen coming out of the woodland near the lake, especially when the moon is bright in the sky. This being goes to the lake where she bathes. She is accompanied by numerous female attendants. They all disappear but can still be heard splashing in the waters of the lake. Later they reappear and return to the woods wearing long white veils.

But it is extremely perilous to watch all this, for any wanderer seeing these sights will feel drawn forcefully toward the lake where the white woman bathes. As soon as he has touched the water of the lake he will be powerless and the lake will engulf him. It is said that the woman must lure one human into the lake each year. None are allowed to take boats or nets into the lake. Once some people risked bringing a boat onto the lake. It was left afloat overnight. When they came back next morning it was gone. A lengthy search was made and it was found at the top of a beech tree on the banks of the lake; Spirits of the lake had placed it there during the night and as the people were removing the boat from the tree they heard a mocking voice crying out from within the lake: "Nickel, my brother, and I did it!"

J. D. H. Temme, "Die Volkssagen von Pommern und Rügen" (retold by Shaun D. L. Brassfield-Thorpe)

*Erce, Erce, Erce, Mother of Earth,
 May the Almighty grant you, the Eternal Lord,
 Fields sprouting and springing up,
 Fertile and fruitful,
 Bright shafts of shining millet,
 And broad crops of barley
 And white wheaten crops
 And all the crops of earth.
 May God Almighty grant the owner,
 (And his hallows who are in heaven),
 That his land be fortified against all foes,
 And embattled against all evil,
 From sorceries sown throughout the land.
 Now I pray the Wielder who made this world
 That no cunning woman, nor crafty man,
 May weaken the words that are uttered here.*

Then drive forward the plough and cut the first furrow, then say:

*Hail, Earth, mother of all;
 Be abundant in God's embrace,
 Filled with food for our folk's need.*

Acerbot (Anglo-Saxon Charm)

My first encounter with Nerthus came during the visionary experience when I oathed to Frey, in 2004. I had to be both in this world and Vanaheim, to "do it properly" before His family. Nerthus appeared as a very large woman, with a Venus-of-Willendorf type figure, and veiled. Anytime I would see Nerthus after that, in a visionary experience, She was veiled. When I moved out to Southern California, She allowed me to see Her face. Of Her face I cannot really speak because Her eyes were so intense that it made the rest of Her face almost un-noticeable. She had completely blue eyes, bright and blazing, not dissimilar to the Fremmen in *Dune*. (It may be that Her eyes were once a different color, perhaps brown, but they changed when She matured and took Her role among the Vanir, according to my gnosis.)

Those who see Nerthus, who She reveals Her true self to, are killed. One could argue the complex nature of the ceremony and the sacrifice of the slaves, but I believe these slaves gave themselves to Nerthus willingly, knowing She would kill them after they got to see Her, but it was worth serving Her, and worth seeing Her, that they gave those final days in service to Her and went to Her upon death. The concept of human sacrifice, including and especially *willing* human sacrifice, rubs moderns the wrong way, and in no way am I condoning suicide or homicide by this statement. However, in the 21st century we seem to all be terrified of death, seeking to prolong our lives as long as possible, even by artificial technologies currently being developed that will screw the human race and the planet. In the Western world we also live in a secular society and it is thought that belief in anything Bigger than ones' self is a sign of mental illness. It should be patently obvious that a Goddess of Earth, intimately tied to health and fertility of soil and the life of the living things on the Earth, would also be connected with death. Life feeds on death, and Nature is the Great Recycler. The more society becomes detached from living closely to the Earth, the more that we depend on artificial means to keep us safe from that which we fear, the more we anger Nerthus.

In my own case, I still don't claim to understand why Nerthus chose to show me Her true self, and work with me for a time. She may have taken interest in me due to my promoting Vanatru as a viable religious option. Nonetheless, the brief time I was working intensely with Her, changed me inside and out, and gave me some new perceptions on the nature of sacredness, for which I am grateful to Her, but processing the knowledge has been difficult to say the least.

There are two words to express the sacred in the Anglo-Saxon tongue -- a culture that likely worshiped Nerthus as Erce, the Earth Mother (as seen in the *Acerbot*)-- and those words are *halig*, from which we get our modern English "holy", and *wih*, which has cognates with the Norse *vé*, as in "temple", as well as the modern English "woe".

Halig is the kind of holiness the everyday person can aspire to -- a state of wholeness, finding wholeness within self, in healthy co-existence with the land, relationships with others, and communion with

the Divine. To be *halig* or to have *halig* is to have wholeness, to have health in body, mind, and spirit. It is a state of radiant well-being rather than blissful euphoria or serious solemnity. Njord, the consort of Nerthus, is very much a God of *halig*, as are His offspring. He is a God who inspires wholeness, who inspires a good quality of life that can be shared with others and given back to the Divine in gratitude.

Conversely, *wih* is not "everyday holiness", nor should it be. And while Njord is more *halig*, Nerthus is definitely more a Goddess of *wih*. To be touched by Nerthus, to receive Her blessings, is a gift precious enough it is only reserved for once a year. But the deeper connection with Nerthus was apparently worth dying for back in the old days, to experience Her true nature, to commune with the reality of Her Being. To see Her eyes -- the eyes are called the window of the soul by many cultures -- is to see Nerthus' Self, and is such a profound experience that life is never the same afterwards, and indeed to go back to the way things were is impossible.

Wih is the energy found in a temple, and within ritual tools (including Deity statues). In modern Paganism we seem to take a lot of this for granted, and I've seen too many Pagan altars that attract random clutter and are not treated like the homes of the Divine that they are or should be. There is a casual familiarity with objects used to cast spells and/or create sacred space, rather than seeing them as imbued with the power of the Divine, that which can heal, change, and even kill. Indeed, *wih* is cognate with the Latin *victim*, recalling the human sacrifices made to Nerthus.

One of the old words for "temple" was *ealh*, and in the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem, the verse usually thought to be one about an elk is very particular about describing the energy within an *ealh*, or temple:

The Eolh-sedge is mostly to be found in a marsh;
it grows in the water and makes a ghastly wound,
covering with blood every warrior who touches it.

If you see groves as being sacred sites, as well as temples being built on holy ground, this verse makes a lot more sense. The presence

of the Divine will "make a ghastly wound". Yes, it is important to cultivate relationships with the Gods, to make Them a part of our lives as They reach out to us. But we can never forget that They are Gods, and sometimes to be in their presence is beautiful but also terrifying. The power of Their presence, the power of Their Being, is an awesome thing to behold, but never forget that what can bring ecstasy can also blow out the circuits in your brain and in your body and kill you or at least permanently damage you.

Nerthus is no exception, the fact that the one piece of Lore we have explicitly discussing Her by name refers directly to human sacrifice should be a lesson that dealing with the Vanir is not casual, and though She may well be invested in the peace, prosperity, and overall well-being of humanity, it comes at a terrible price.

Ergo, I feel that the occasion for celebration and peace with Nerthus' travels through the land was not just rejoicing in the fertility She brought to the soil, animals, and people, but the knowledge that She is holy and we all are Hers in the end, given back to the Earth, whether buried in a mound or scattered ashes on the ground. We live, die, and are recycled out again. The mystery of Nerthus is that we must enjoy the gifts of the Earth, because they can be taken away at any time. Life itself is too sacred to be consumed by petty jealousies and fighting; we must be mindful that She is all around, and She is holy. While I do not believe the Venus of Willendorf figures found throughout Europe are Nerthus *per se*, I do use the Venus figures to represent Nerthus, being full-figured and unmistakably female, but faceless... too holy to look upon, for that kind of holiness means enslavement to Her service... and death.

That I have seen Nerthus' eyes does not make me "special". Rather, it was Her way of showing me a glimpse into Her world and Her ways, and what that would mean for me and those around me. To touch the Divine is also to pay a great price. Even if one survives the psychological intensity of the encounter, one does not walk away from the Gods unchanged and indeed the "stain" of Their holiness will be noticed by others, pushing the God-touched one into a liminal space. It also pushes those primary people in that one's life, into surrounding the

liminal space, which can be difficult for most. I am proud to serve the Vanir, that They would allow me the honor of serving Them is amazing. But I am mindful that even in the ecstasy of Their companionship, in sacred rites and carrying Their blessings within me, it is also to die to myself. Most people, fortunately, are not meant to be spirit-workers, God-spouses, God-slaves, or shamans. Indeed, the purpose of one who can communicate directly with the Gods, is ultimately to mediate between Gods and Their people who may not have the same ability. However, what devotees would envy of the mediators, is not something to be envied, in the end. A gift demands a gift, power demands a price. To touch the Divine is to become less human, to visit Their world is to straddle the hedge between this world and Theirs. It is a beautiful place, but also a dangerous place. This is the lesson of Nerthus, to me: *If you would know Us, and learn our ways, you will gradually lose your own.*

Nerthus

Brun Russellson

My experience of Nerthus is that, unlike so many of the Vanir, she is a Power much less invested in humanity (though not entirely uninterested), and more focused on the Land itself (and all that dwells within and upon it). Interesting how Tacitus' description of her celebration spoke of her appearing among the people of the North infrequently (and yet was met with great joy when her wain did fare forth).

Though rooted in Earth, I understand Nerthus to be deeply connected to bog and water. It is in this liminal space that she is easily contacted and offered to. This does not eclipse her ability to manifest her Might elsewhere, but rather, her power is more readily accessible in these "thin" areas where Earth and Water meet.

Nerthus is pure sovereignty, speaking little, and teaching through more through vision and gesture. Yet when she does speak it is with utter authority. She seems to derive great pleasure in moving throughout deep-forested land, though I have never seen her walk. She actually drifts, or floats slightly off the ground in my vision/gnosis, always robed in a filmy, cobwebby gown of white that seems to be made more out of mist and light than any discernable fabric. In these visions her face is generally either masked in a covering of green vegetation, or veiled, with very intense light spilling forth from her eyes. She always generates a sense of awe in me which can be frightening at times, though the more I experience her, the less so it has become (though the sense of majesty remains).

Much of her focus seems to be on perpetuating the fecundity and health of the Land and correcting places of imbalance. In this, I have found her to place human beings in a position of importance. As each species has its own unique niche to fill, and wyrd to forward, throughout the community of life, Nerthus' seems to view humans as tasked with carrying out proper ritual, that the Lands of Midgard may flourish. This ties back into her focus on the Land and her use of

human tools to help restore balance to areas that have become violated.

Lest you begin to weave of picture of some sort of “Earth Mother of Love and Light”, let me quickly state that this view of humankind and the role she sees us holding in the world is very much rooted in wyrd and not in smiling platitudes or “feel good” gestures.

Many Heathens honor Nerthus infrequently, calling upon her on or around April 22 (“Earthday”) while ignoring her and her domain the rest of the year. Such gestures merely add insult to the grievous injuries humanity has inflicted upon the Land while doing little to placate or impress Nerthus who is the unyielding power of the Natural World in all its facets, both comforting and terrifying. Just as she infuses the mist filled morning light, so too does she embody the blackest of thunderstorms tearing through the night. The verdant, lush, flourishing of new life and the violent dance between predator and prey are hers as well for all these things are sacred. All these things are needed for the whole to be complete and healthy.

Nerthus is utterly uncompromising in what she demands of those who would give her worth, as the needs of the land are not negotiable. For those who sincerely hold troth with her, “environmentalism” doesn’t even begin to cover it. She is the unyielding call of the truly “Old Ways”, wild and unpredictable. I often think of Nerthus when I recall a teacher of primitive living skills I once studied with who, after a frigid night in a hastily constructed primitive shelter high in the Rocky Mountains commented that indeed “Mother Nature” loves her children, but also has no compunctions about sucking the warmth from their bodies when they fail to act skillfully.

Nerthus does not suffer fools gladly and as human actions and arrogance continue to violate her domain and push countless species into the void of annihilation, she becomes less so.

Lessons from Vanaheim: Nerthus

Galina Krasskova

I do not belong to the Vanir. I am owned instead by Odin as anyone who has read my work can easily ascertain. I also have a strong affinity for Loki. With the exception of Gerda, I had not until recently had much interaction with any of the Vanir or Those other Deities commonly associated with Them. It was, however at Odin's behest that I first sought out Vanaheim. Over the past year and a half, I have been undergoing a series of nine ritual ordeals. Each ordeal has given me access to one of the Nine Worlds and each has been governed by one of the Deities who rule in that particular world. With each ordeal, I gain knowledge, skill and make necessary sacrifices of the self. Many of the ordeals have been wrenching. Nearly all have been physically painful in some way. Sandwiched as it was between my Jotunheim ordeal (which had proved emotionally quite devastating) and Alfheim (which, being a completely unknown quantity filled me with trepidation in the days preceding it), I had not expected Vanaheim to prove much of a challenge. It seemed pretty clear cut to me: land, dirt, cycles of land, more dirt, etc. In retrospect, my hubris amazes even me.

Of course, like many Heathens, I honored the Vanir when the occasion arose as Gods of fertility, abundance, wealth, and bounty of land and sea but beyond that I gave Them little thought. I, warrior trained, warrior called, valkyrie of the grimmest of Gods had little love or respect for the secrets and mysteries these bright Gods hold. Even within my ancestral veneration, I often disparaged ancestors who were farmers, preferring instead to honor those who had served in the military, who did not make their living from the land. Furthermore as a city dweller (a very happy city dweller) I'd had little interaction with the rhythms and cycles of the natural world for all that I might have had abstract understanding of them. Much of this was to change with this particular ordeal.

The first part of my Vanaheim ordeal occurred late in May. A friend, colleague, shaman, and farmer agreed to facilitate for me.

Nerthus was to hold the secrets for me in this particular ordeal. She was the Goddess I had to face and by whom I was to be humbled. I have heard many people describe Nerthus as a comforting, loving, gentle Mother Goddess. Mother Goddess She may indeed be but She is also terrifying, harsh, implacable and fierce. This is the Goddess referenced in Tacitus who commonly received human sacrifice as Her due after all.

She commanded that I be buried alive. She is about life yes, but also death and the cycles in between that connect the two. She is about the wisdom of the earth, the vicious clarity of the land that devours and from that ruthless devouring spews forth new life. A trench was dug and covered with thick netting (thankfully I was not required to actually lay covered completely with dirt. I am a kinesthetic learner and needed some minor mobility to best process the lessons that were to be forthcoming). Naked, with only prayer beads, a journal and water to sustain me, I was committed to the pit. It was agreed upon that once every four hours someone would come to check on me, bringing me water and a minimal amount of food (organic greens, grain, nuts) but otherwise I was permitted no human contact during this time. I was to stay until Nerthus gave me permission to depart.

Isolation is a powerful tool particularly when it is filled with the presence of a Goddess so terrifying that ancient acolytes were not permitted to gaze even upon Her unveiled images. She showed me directly the cycle of life-into-death-into-life contained in the land itself. I saw insects and spiders creeping about the leaves and dirt that filled the trench with me, creeping between roots of bushes and trees. I saw that dirt itself was not some inactive substance devoid of life but that it was the raw substance from which life is born, a living, shifting, very active biosphere. I later learned that there are more living organisms in a handful of dirt than there are human beings on the planet and so much life and death going on there that it's not surprising Nerthus is Herself terrifying.

For six hours She kept me in the pit. Her lessons weren't only about the sacredness of dirt but also of the primal bond that one has with one's mother (even if not one's biological mother...in my case, She honored the woman who has served as my foster mother, bringing

home just how sacred and important that bond was on a *wyrd* level). She forced me to examine my own misogyny and distaste for the typical cultural markers of “womanhood.”

Moreover, Nerthus challenged me to honor my body as I had never once honored it before. I spent years as a professional ballet dancer, a career in which neglect and harsh treatment of one’s body is *de rigueur*. For more than half my lifetime I had looked upon my body as ‘the enemy.’ Nerthus spoke about the importance of embodiment and drove home the point that we are not separate from our bodies, but that our bodies are an integral part of how we are meant to interact with not only each other but with the Gods Themselves. This is all the more important for shamans and spiritworkers: our bodies are one of the primary interfaces through which we communicate that which comes from the Gods. Our bodies are the primary tools with which we work, the means by which we function, acquire and disseminate knowledge. Our bodies are an immense gift.

After six hours I was allowed to leave the pit and forced to walk around and around a sacred labyrinth (the ordeal took place on land that has had a stone labyrinth for years) then it was back to the pit for another six hours. Eventually, I was allowed to emerge into the darkness (it was after midnight) and I made the journey, naked, barefoot, exhausted from the pit through the woods back to my friend’s house. She let me go with the understanding that I had gleaned about half of the lessons I was meant to. I knew, walking through the woods in the pitch black darkness that there would be at least one more part to my Vanaheim ordeal. I was being given leeway to process the lessons She had given me first.

To the Veiled One

Tracy Nichols

The Earth speaks to me
 Sometimes through the wind
 Sometimes through the lap of water
 Against the shore of the beach or lake
 Against the rocks
 But mostly She hums and vibrates
 And I hear the music in my mind
 I touch Her, my skin against dirt
 My body sinking into red clay
 Or becoming coated in rocky sand
 And I feel it, the interconnectedness
 Of Her children
 And the source of all life
 And all death
 For it is the dirt we all return to
 Eventually, upon the times of our deaths
 When we become food for the worms that
 Make Her flesh their home

This has been my lesson from You, Nerthus
 Lady of the Misty Isle in the Lake
 Veiled One, whose face I have never seen
 For to look upon it would mean my life
 A reminder that though we are Your children
 And You nourish us, support us
 And give us a home
 You are also the mysteries that we are often
 Not privy to until our lives come to an end

Tacitus wrote of Your sacred procession
 Mother of the Vanir

How slaves pulled the cart holding Your veiled form
Through the countryside as the people
Seeking Your blessing offered their prayers and gifts
A beautiful sight that ended
In the bloody deaths of the men and women
Who freely gave their lives so that You
May see the faces of the people who count on You
And so They could catch a glimpse, just a glimpse
Of Your mysterious visage, hidden from sight
And know that You were still there for them
Just as Your Son freely sheds His blood
For the good of the Earth
So too do those people freely end their lives
In a watery grave, to give their fellow folk
Peace of mind
That You are still with them
And though Your love is distant and quiet
Because to attempt to get closer can mean
Certain death for the petitioner
It's there, and it's felt
In the coolness of freshly plowed soil
Between bare toes
In the smoothness of cool granite
Held in the palm of the hand
In the grains of sand
Sifting through eager fingers
And in the mists there are just a hint
Of Your eyes
Silently watching Your children
For another year

Nerthus (A Prayer)

Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð

Water and mist
 mud and clay
 peat mixing
 between Your toes
 I can hear the cries
 of joy and pain
 from Your willing sacrifices
 who strive to be chosen
 year after year
 for one glimpse of Your face
 For the honor of serving
 submitting
 en-thralled by You
 to the very end.

I too am a victim
 willingly taken:
 I die with each year,
 reborn in Your arms
 like the Phoenix of the East.
 And for my sacrifice
 willingly given
 I am Yours
 Show me Your secrets
 of bog and mist
 the power of *seiðr*
 the reading of Wyrð
 the joining of elements
 and the spaces between.

Nerþus Erce Erde Hertha

Njörun of the Fair Hair
Queen of Water
Lady of the Peat Bog
You Who inspires Valor
among men
Keeper of the *wih* of Holiness
sacrosanct in all Your doings
so that no man dare raise weapon to another
while You ride abroad.
Take me, use me, fill me
replace my blood with peatwater
make my heart of birch
that I may be *halig*
in Your service.

Nerthus - Prayer II

Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð

Wind whistles among the trees –
 oak and ash and yew and birch,
 elm and aspen, maple and pine –
 I can hear each one's voice,
 sweet as a bird, steady as a drum
 pliant as the supple sapling,
 all singing a song of praise to You

You Who holds them in Your hand;
 like a child who has fallen down
 and needs comforting,
 they come to you for succor.
 For long have they been afflicted
 under the harsh hand of Man;
 brothers and sisters torn away
 now adorn the palaces of hubris.

You Who are the Earth,
 You Who rules us all
 Have mercy for our sins
 against our kin, your children.
 We have labored long in darkness;
 open our eyes to the light of Truth
 that we may rejoin the Dance
 of Life into Death into Life again.

Holy Mother of the Gods,
 and Holy in Yourself as well,
 break us when we need breaking
 that we may pour forth like seeds into the earth
 Teach us the loving embrace of death,

that sacrifice is worthy of You,
that we cannot live apart from the world
because we are the world.

Lady of the Wain and Grove,
give us the words to say
when all around us destroy themselves
in the name of progress;
help us show them there is a better way,
a simpler way, though it is not easy,
and let us remember where our roots lie:
in the bosom of You.

Nerthus Chant

Svartesól

Erce, Erce, Erce
Nerthus, Nerthus, Nerthus
Holy, Holy, Holy
Is the Mother of the Earth
Erce Nerthus Goddess Mother
Erce Nerthus Earth Mother
Creator and destroyer
Nurturer and devourer
Bless the fruits of our lands
And the work of our hands
And the peace of our stead
And the peace of our dead
Erce, Erce, Erce
Erce Nerthus, Magna Mater



FREY

Frey in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

How should one periphrase Frey? Thus: by calling him Son of Njördr, Brother of Freya, and also God of Vanir, and Kinsman of the Vanir, and Wane, and God of the Fertile Season, and God of Wealth-Gifts.

Skaldskaparsmal, VII.

Njördr in Nóatún begot afterward two children: the son was called Frey, and the daughter Freya; they were fair of face and mighty. Frey is the most renowned of the Æsir; he rules over the rain and the shining of the sun, and therewithal the fruit of the earth; and it is good to call on him for fruitful seasons and peace. He governs also the prosperity of men.

Gylfaginning XXIV.

Gymer hight a man whose wife was Orboda, of the race of mountain giants. Their daughter was Gerd, the fairest of all women. One day when Frey had gone into Hlidskjalf, and was looking out upon all the worlds, he saw toward the north a hamlet wherein was a large and beautiful house. To this house went a woman, and when she raised her hands to open the door, both the sky and the sea glistened therefrom, and she made all the world bright. As a punishment for his audacity in seating himself in that holy seat, Frey went away full of grief. When he came home, he neither spake, slept, nor drank, and no one dared speak to him. Then Njord sent for Skirner, Frey's servant, bade him go to Frey and ask him with whom he was so angry, since he would speak to nobody. Skirner said that he would go, though he was loath to do so, as it was probable that he would get evil words in reply. When he came to Frey and asked him why he was so sad that he would not talk, Frey answered that he had seen a beautiful woman, and for her sake he had become so filled with grief, that he could not live any longer if he could not get her. And now you must go he added, and ask her hand for me and bring her home to me, whether it be with or without the consent of her father. I will reward you well for your trouble. Skirner answered saying that he would go on this errand, but Frey must give him his sword, that was so excellent that it wielded itself in fight. Frey made no objection to this and gave him the sword. Skirner went on his journey, courted

Gerd for him, and got the promise of her that she nine nights thereafter should come to Bar-Isle and there have her wedding with Frey. When Skirner came back and gave an account of his journey, Frey said:

Long is one night,
 Long are two nights,
 How can I hold out three?
 Oft to me one month
 Seemed less
 Than this half night of love.

This is the reason why Frey was unarmed when he fought with Bele, and slew him with a hart's horn. Then said Ganglere: It is a great wonder that such a lord as Frey would give away his sword, when he did not have another as good. A great loss it was to him when he fought with Bele; and this I know, forsooth, that he must have repented of that gift. Har answered: Of no great account was his meeting with Bele. Frey could have slain him with his hand. But the time will come when he will find himself in a worse plight for not having his sword, and that will be when the sons of Muspel sally forth to the fight.

Prose Edda, Anderson translation

Indeed, before Thorkel left Thverá, he went to Frey's temple, and taking an old steer up thither, made this speech:--"Thou, Frey," said he, "wert long my protector, and many offerings hast thou had at my hands, which have borne good fruit to me. Now do I present this steer to thee, in the hope that Glum hereafter may be driven by force off this land, as I am driven off it; and, I pray thee, give me some token whether thou acceptest this offering or not." Then the steer was stricken in such a way that he bellowed loud and fell down dead, and Thorkel took this a favourable omen. Afterwards he was in better spirits, as if he thought his offering was accepted and his wish ratified by the god.

...

before Glum left home he dreamt that many persons came to Thverà to visit the god Frey, and he thought he saw a great crowd on the sand-banks by the river, with Frey sitting on a chair. He dreamt that he asked who they were who had come thither, and they said, "We are thy departed kindred, and we are now begging Frey that thou may'st not be driven out of Thverà, but it is no use, for he answers shortly and angrily, and calls to mind now the gift of the ox by Thorkel the tall." At that point Glum woke up, and ever afterwards he professed that he was on worse terms with Frey.

Viga-Glum's Saga

King Heithrek worshiped Frey, and he used to give Frey the biggest boar he could find. They regarded it as so sacred that in all important cases they used to take the oath on its bristles. It was the custom to sacrifice this boar at the 'sacrifice of the herd.' On Yule Eve the 'boar of the herd' was led into the hall before the King. Then men laid their hands on his bristles and made solemn vows. King Heithrek himself made a vow that however deeply a man should have wronged him, if he came into his power he should not be deprived of the chance of receiving a trial by the King's judges; but he should get off scot free if he could propound riddles which the King could not answer. But when people tried to ask the King riddles, not one was put to him which he could not solve.

The Saga of Hervor and Heithrek, II., X.

There happened to be great sacrifices in the honour of Frey, and his idol had such a power that the devil spoke through it, and it had been given a young wife. People believed that they could have sexual intercourse. Frey's wife was pretty, and she had the dominion over the temple.

Gunnar Helming's Saga, Flateyjarbok

The horse, it appears, was regarded as a favorite animal of Frey. At his temple in Throndheim it is said there were horses belonging to him.

...

A highly-valued wooden statue of Frey was found in a temple in Throndheim, which King Olaf Tryggvason hewed in pieces in the presence of the people.

The Religion of the Northmen, Rudolph Keyser

The worship of Frey, however, must also have been very popular in Norway, from which it passed to Iceland with the early settlers. As late as 998 the men of Thrandheim are represented as refusing to break their image of Frey at the command of King Olaf, 'because we have long served him and he has done well by us. He often talked with us, and told us things to come, and gave us peace and plenty.'

The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia, W.A. Craigie

Finally, as an Anglo-Saxon Heathen, I feel it pertinent to mention that there is far less information in the Anglo-Saxon primary sources on Ing-Fréa than there is in the Norse lore, however even from scant mentions we can assume Ingui was an important God to the Anglo-Saxon people, if not one of the most important.

For starters, it may be that the English people were named for Ing himself. In Tacitus' *Germania*, mythology is recounted of the Earth God Tuisto, his son Mannus, and his three sons, after whom many people are called - the Ingaevones are said to dwell next to the ocean. In the Nordic lore, Frey is the son of Njord the sea God, and so it would make sense for His people to live by the sea. Pliny notes the Ingaevones as consisting of the Cimbri, Teutons, and Chauci tribes. The Ingaevones form the majority of the Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain, and the linguistic scholar Noah Webster speculated they gave England its name. John Grigsby (author of *Beowulf and Grendel*) remarks that on the continent, "they formed part of the confederacy known as the 'friends of Ing' and in the new lands they migrated to in the 5th and 6th centuries. In time they would name these lands Angle-land, and it is tempting to speculate that the word Angle was derived from, or thought of as a pun on, the name of Ing." At the very least, an Ingui is listed in the Anglo-Saxon royal house of Bernicia, and he was probably seen as the progenitor of all Anglian kings. Ing is most likely one and the same as Yngvi, the founder of the Yngling dynasty of Sweden. Since Fréa or Frey means "lord", we can assume Ing or Ingui is the God's proper name, with Fréa as his title.

In the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem, a rune is named for him, with the corresponding verse

*Ing wæs ærest mid East-Denum
 gesewen secgun, oþ he siððan est
 ofer wæg gewat; wæn æfter ran;
 ðus Heardingas ðone hæle nemdun.*

*Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes,
 till, followed by his chariot,*

*he departed eastwards over the waves.
So the Hearingas named the hero.*

The Danes are mentioned in the story of *Beowulf*, with Hrothgar referred to as "Lord of the Ingwine", or "friends of Ing".

I oathed to Frey on February 9, 2004. I speak of the evidence of Frey's investment and intervention in my life, which I share to praise Him, to show His goodness to the world, for those who are called by Frey or will be called by Him, or even those who want more of Frey in their lives. He is one of the most approachable and accessible of the Northern Deities, and I write this in the hopes that those reading can reach out to Frey and be blessed by Him.

When I did my official rite of profession of Heathenry (then identifying as Asatru) in the year 2000 (after spending some time as a Norse-oriented Wiccan), I had started off with the intention of being a "general practitioner", wanting to honor all the Gods equally. However, as time went on, I found myself drawn to Odin, and would give Him offerings more than the others. I refrained from calling the Old Man my patron, but He was the Deity I felt the most affinity for. Frey came to me in late 2003, at a time in my life when I had hit a very low point and would still spiral down further. I was working a bit with Freya to try to improve my self-esteem, and Freya said to me, "I want to introduce you to my brother." Not long after that, Frey revealed Himself to me in a series of dreams and visions, that gave me hope in a time of hopelessness.

The word *fulltrui*, which is commonly used by Northern religionists to denote a patron Deity relationship, is still used in Icelandic legal terminology to mean "representative". I believe that representation works both ways. Obviously, Frey as my *fulltrui* would be "representing" me as far as before the Gods. He guides me towards opportunities, guides me away from danger, and gives counsel with making life decisions. He intervenes in my life events, specifically with promoting well-being: stability, security, and happiness.

I in turn "represent" Frey. I am called to be an ambassador, of sorts. It is certainly unrealistic to expect someone to be an avatar of their Patron Deity on Earth, and to behave in exactly the same manner as that Deity would in any given situation. I believe there were things inherent in my personality that drew Frey to me, or me to Frey, and those qualities have been enhanced with others being "built in". I have taken on qualities of Frey and it influences the way that I perceive things as well as the way I do things.

As one of Frey's representatives, I may lack the appropriate equipment but I desire that most people (as most people are truly not monsters) are able to have a good life. Most of the major Eastern and Western religions teach that the world is evil/full of suffering and should be something to detach from, but I believe the world is what it is, and it is best to connect with the world, to embrace its joys and pleasures as well as its sorrows and pain. Beyond abstract concepts of "hope" and "change", I know I can try to be a vessel of Frey's light in my words and in my deeds, and touch the ones around me, who in turn touch the ones around them, and so on and so forth, until Frey's light, and the vitality it brings, is everywhere. Frey is God of the World, and having Frey with me is bringing Frey into the world. I try to be mindful of what He would want, what He thinks is best, in my daily activities and personal conduct. By virtue of having human nature, this requires mindfulness -- it is not automatic.

Frey is a God of reliability and integrity, manifest in the seasonal cycles, which change, but you can always depend upon changing and being at the same time every year: the cycles within the season of birth, growth, and death of animals, and seed, root, bud, ripening, and harvest, to compost again, in the plant world. He is said to bring the sunshine as well as the gentle rain, and to bestow peace, pleasure, and prosperity on mortals. To my knowledge, peace, pleasure, and prosperity all involve being able to feel safe, and feel secure. This verse from the *Lokasenna*, spoken by Tyr, exemplifies Frey's concept of integrity:

Frey is best

of all the exalted gods
 in the Æsir's courts:
 no maid he makes to weep,
 no wife of man,
 and from bonds looses all.

The women are not made to weep because Frey does not let them down. Frey looses us from our bonds, that is, what holds us back from enjoying life. Sometimes cutting these bonds can be painful, if one has become attached to their "post" for lack of anything better to compare it with. To be free -- to be truly free -- is very powerful, but also comes with responsibility. To be irresponsible is not freedom, it is illusion of thought and causing harm, thus bondage. To have an appropriate amount of responsibility, for one's words, deeds, and their impact, and to be empowered in those words and deeds, is to be free.

Frey is not like Santa Claus who will give you everything you want. Indeed Frey, as a Deity tied both to horticulture/agriculture and the hunt (He had to get His antler from somewhere), He respects hard work and plenty of it. While I believe Frey has directly intervened in my life and blessed me, this was not for nothing. I have had to put a significant amount of work into dealing with my own issues, getting my life stable, and maintaining what I have. I have also made it a point to worth Frey whenever I can with offerings, whether of food and drink, poetry and song, or gifts left on His altar. Frey is all about the long-term, not the quick fix. Instant gratification is not His *modus operandi*, and indeed, He has ways of teaching people hard lessons about getting what they pay for, and what they really value in life. I know I myself have gone through this with Him, and I am grateful, painful as the lessons were and are.

Frey is also a God intimately familiar with sacrifice, as a common personal gnosis among those who work with Him is that He is sacrificed at Lammas and resurrected later, as seen in the surviving John Barleycorn practice at Harvest Home celebrations in England. Frey gives Himself yearly to feed the people - not just their bodies, but also their spirits. Regardless of whether they are rich or poor, just or

unjust, Frey gives Himself without complaining, and those who come to know Him will also learn of sacrifice - what is of most benefit, the highest good, even if it demands a high cost. Indeed, maybe one of the reasons why King Heithrek, an historic devotee of Frey, was said to be so well-learned, is because he had to be informed to make hard decisions.

Nonetheless, to earn Frey's blessing is to hold onto something precious, something that time and changing with the times cannot depreciate. His blood is in the soil, and to gain Frey's favor is to plant seeds and take root. (When Frey does choose to communicate with me, He often uses metaphors of seeds, and growing seasons.) Here are but a few examples of ways that Frey has blessed me, which have required work to maintain on my part:

-I believe my relationship with my mortal-partner was arranged by Him. I was celibate and single by choice for two and a half years after taking my oaths. On Yule of 2005 Frey came to me in a dream and told me within a year I would find my life-partner and live in a different part of the country. As I had never left New England I didn't see this as being possible, yet by Yule 2006 I had moved to Southern California to live with a man who was getting prods from Frey before we met, seeing it as his sacred Frey-assigned duty to take care of me. We are still together. We have had our ups and downs as any relationship is wont to have by virtue of people interacting with people, but we have worked hard to keep our relationship good, and I am very lucky to have him.

-In August of 2007 I made an offering to Frey and a bargain - that if He made arrangements for us to get a house I would dedicate one room as ritual space and build a garden in Gerda's honor. A week to the day later, the plans were set in motion and we moved into our new home on Midsummer 2008. We still live here, keep a clean house, and I have upheld my end of the bargain. (It might also be noted that a common personal gnosis has Gerda as the Goddess of the walled garden, and my garden for Her is in a walled space - we looked at several properties with yards, and this was what happened to work out.)

-My physical health was quite bad when I took my oaths to Frey. I am now a hundred pounds lighter (this is a good thing), have more mobility, less fatigue, and most of my chronic problems have gone away. While I do have some ongoing challenges, they are easier to deal with now, in part because of Frey instructing me on how to take care of myself. It might also be added that I have post-traumatic stress disorder and find my religion to be very positive and healing, and people have remarked on how much better I've been doing with the related depression and anxiety. The fact is, I notice I do better if I keep to my spiritual routine as well as my mundane chores and errands, and if I happen to "slack off" on my religious activity it shows up right away.

-Due to hardships and upheaval in my life, I lost most of my possessions and when I moved to California all that I owned with the exception of two large items, could fit into three bags. I have now gotten everything back, and then some, which includes art supplies, clothing, music, and happy things from my childhood.

-I have real friendships with people local and far away, which is important as I used to accumulate "fairweather friends" back when I was more debilitated by the PTSD and desperate for any kind of support. I have learned to judge friendships by their deeds, not their words, as well as to be a friend in return, to give support and loyalty without giving too much as a "pushover" and becoming resentful. This has taken many hard lessons but it is well worth it for the quality of those in my life today.

-My religion has been the most important thing in my life for almost exactly half my lifetime, and I have found it an ongoing struggle to have community. I have learned not to blame Gods for the behavior of some of Their followers, nonetheless it has been a rough ride as one who is too mystical for most strict reconstructionists yet too much of a history buff lore-hound traditionalist for many spirit-workers. I wasted too much time being angry at things I couldn't change, but when I narrowed my focus on my own path and what the Gods wanted, I found the doors opened to belonging somewhere. Being able to network with other Vanatruar around the globe, as well as joining a

group of sane Anglo-Saxon Heathens, has helped tremendously to heal my long-standing issues of feeling like a permanent outcast both in the mundane world and in my religion. This took some work including processing my baggage, trying not to be immature, and listening to the Gods, taking Their advice, as well as going with my gut instinct about things. At times it was painful. But it has started to pay off.

While I would not say life is perfect or even always good, the general quality of it is good, and something I express daily gratitude for. I would have to say that as I've gotten to know Frey, I do see His primary domain, or sphere of influence, as being Life-Sustainer. This is quite a bit different than Odin who has a creation/destruction polarity, and Thor who is a protector first and foremost.

To modern devotees of Ing, He can be seen as the ultimate example of holding what you have. Frey is not as obvious of a warrior Deity as Thor or Odin, but He is entrusted with the best sword in the Nine Worlds, later giving it to his etin-bride's family as a bride-price, and wielding an antler in its place, though it is noted he could kill with His bare hands. It would seem then that Ing is a defensive warrior, fighting for home and protecting the land, rather than the glory of war itself. The boar, His most sacred animal, is a very territorially aggressive beast. When Ing fights, it is to preserve what He holds most dear, as well as to return the land to a state of *frið* - peace among the *innangæard*, the tribe. As a sacral king, His presence hallows and sanctifies. He is intimately bound with the health and fertility of the land, and His Swedish title of "Veraldar Gudh" - God of the World - can be seen as referring to the world in terms of daily life. He is the God of the sacred in the mundane, the little things that make life worth living, and what makes it worth preserving and fighting for.

The main mythos of Frey in Norse lore is that of His wooing of and marriage to the giantess Gerda, who may probably be one and the same as the troll-woman Þorgerða Holgabruðr mentioned in the Sagas and worshiped as a Goddess by Earl Haakon, and may also be one and the same as Hreþa whose name means "glory" - recalling the light radiating from Her when Frey saw Her for the first time from Odin's high seat. Her name is related to our word for "garden" as well as our

term "geard" or "garth", especially as denotes "innangeard" - the inner circle of trust, such as found in a tribe. Frey's marriage to Gerda the etin-bride is not only symbolic of the sacral king wedding and blessing the land, but also of another related term, "grið" - a state of truce with the outdwellers, especially if one is adopted into the tribe.

As such, Ing-Frey is a good Deity to call upon for those who are frith-weavers, especially those who are building a Kindred or organization, as well as those who are in a minority group and are working for the same rights as others and would rather be an example through non-violence and worthy deeds, rather than show and offensive behavior. As a warrior-king, Frey is also helpful to fathers protecting their household, single men who want to be more whole in their maleness, as well as women who may have been abused by men and need to relate to a masculine figure who is strong but balances strength with sensitivity, might with mercy. He is not overbearing. He is, indeed, a good Deity for anyone who wants to appreciate life more, drawing upon His vitality to build and grow things of life, and be able to recognize their value and work to maintain them, even fighting to hold onto them if need be.

From Frey's perspective, the world is what it is, and it is best to connect with the world, to embrace its joys and pleasures as well as its sorrows and pain. Frey is, to me, what is good in this world. When I call Frey "God of the World", I don't just mean the sun and the rain and the growing things, but daily life itself. He is good food, good sex, fun and laughter, warm hugs, Muppets and gnomes, beading "bling", walks in nature, loyal friends. Frey is that which sustains me, and even though my walk with Him has not been all sunshine and rainbows, He is still the one I love. He has given me life in all of its fullness, and I hope that my life honors Him, that the words I give Him as offering outlast this current incarnation, so He may be known and hailed for all time.

Frey Chant

Svartesól

Ing-Fréa, Ing-Fréa, Golden One
Bright as the light of the Sun
Golden grain
Sun and rain
You die and return
The circle turns again

Why I Honor Frey

Eosin

Frey is not honored as much as some other gods in modern practice. This is understandable, as Odin and Thor are superstars of the Eddas, and their stories are well known. Frey has far less coverage, yet historically, He was honored far more than today. One one goes beyond the amount of primary sources describing the gods, and looks at the spheres of influence of the gods, it becomes apparent that Frey is more relevant. People value having enough to eat, living comfortably, and having peaceful relations with others. Frey is directly involved in all of these, and the involvement goes deeper in interesting ways.

Frey is known for prosperity, although the forms of that today are a bit different than in the past. The basis of survival was agriculture, which in turn depended on good weather. These things are still important, as we all need to eat, but there was more. Various goods come from animal and plant sources, so a good year usually brought additional products. Today wealth is measured with money, but the reason money is valued is because of all the things it can get. And some things haven't changed over time--we wish to eat well, live in comfortable places, have items of quality, and so on. Survival and prosperity still depend on good weather and peaceful settings, as disruptions of either of these affect our quality of life. The kind of peaceful abundance that Frey represents makes everyone's lives better, and it's worth remembering Him when enjoying these things.

There are many male gods, and multiple ways to look at masculinity. Yet among these, Frey is distinctive in representing male sensuality, as He's the one who is depicted phallicly. I find that in this modern age, there aren't that many healthy models of masculinity. Sure, there are tough guys, but many of them are narrow in focus and lack empathy. There are sensitive guys, but many of them aren't exactly the image of strength and protection. There are intelligent guys, but many of them aren't "men's men". And many gods don't seem to be well-rounded. To me, Frey embodies the idea of one who is healthy, sexual,

and fertile (seen by phallic imagery), one who is a formidable warrior (and had the best sword in the Nine Worlds), yet also one who bestows peace and pleasure on others, as well as prosperity. He represents what could be considered a complete male in a very positive way.

Frey's skill as a warrior is something that is rather understated in the lore. He's a swordsman, yet He can also kill with by other means, such as with an antler and bare-handed. Normally, one would think that a mighty warrior in the old stories would be remembered for various killing sprees, either against many foes, strong foes, or both. For one to be that strong and capable, yet judicious and disciplined enough to use that power only when necessary, gives a picture of an almost hidden protector, rather than yet another conquerer. Also, during the Dark Ages, many people learned to use weapons, such as an axe or spear, but learning the more sophisticated sword was the mark of a warrior. And swords were (and still are) relatively expensive, so one would usually not go to the trouble and expense of getting one unless one knew how to use it well. Looking at Frey's prowess and possessions, it becomes apparent that He is one who trains well in martial arts, both in breadth and depth, but doesn't feel the need to be flashy or dramatic about it. If only more people followed Frey's example as a warrior, many of today's peacekeepers would have a better reputation.

One area where Frey is not as well known is with relationships. He is known for bringing peace, but there is more. His marriage to Gerda is a symbol of domestic stability. He valued Her enough to make very valuable bridal offerings. And there is a lack of promiscuity, despite being known for his virility. This gives the image of a dedicated husband, one who takes good care of His wife and household. This is notable, as an emphasis on male sexuality alone would not make for stable relationships. It's also in sharp contrast to His sister, Freya, who is known for sexual activity with many partners. There are many gods known for strength and prowess, but not many known for healthy masculinity in a committed relationship. Frey can be looked to for guidance in this area, as proper attention to it can make for a happier home.

Frey is known for many things. Peace, prosperity, abundance, protection, strength, sensuality, stability, and other things are within His influence. We all want these things, and it's a good idea to give honor to the God that can help provide them. The foundations of healthy and happy living can help not only with our own lives, but also can help spread good cheer among others. Maintaining peace in the household helps everyone feel better. Healthy sexuality enlivens relationships. Sharing food and drink with companions helps friendships grow. Looking forward to the best while being prepared for the worst, both with resources and protection, ensures both optimism and recovery from problems.

Frey is a god that adds to the quality of life, and that is a reason why I honor Him.

Frey

Brun Russellson

I know Frey quite simply, as a Power of fecundity. In the very long-ago days he was likely honored as a God of woodlands, a Power connected with herds of deer and wild horses, and boars, whose energy and spirit he mirrors. The boar, in particular, is an animal whose sacredness to Frey has traveled through the ages, though I find his presence more in line with the horse, personally.

Despite references in the lore which suggest that he was concerned primarily with the fertility of crops, I know that he was, and is, likewise a god of animal fertility (including humans). When the people settled down into more sedentary, horticultural and agricultural based communities, they came to honor Frey as the bestower of fertility on their gardens and fields and pasturing animals, as before they had seen him as the protector of the wild herds and fruiting herbs.

Regardless of lifeway, Frey's natural energy is to unlock the forces hidden within the green. His is the way of fertility, sexual union, abundance, prosperity, and ancestral might.

Frey is a Power for whom offerings and prayers related to frith, prosperity and protection are always welcome. He is especially connected with the blessings and worship given to the spirits of the land and the ancestral dead.

My experience of Frey is one of persistence. In my workings with him, he often makes his presence known in gentle, yet palpable ways and is very clear in what he desires. While the energy he embodies is often kind, it is not weak in any way, but rather expertly balanced. I have found Frey to be very fond of bonfires and that which so often accompanies them—goodwill, drumming, singing, and dancing.

When Lammas Takes On a Whole New Meaning

Tracy Nichols

When Frey suggested (re: ordered) me to journey to Vanaheim for Lammas of 2008 it had been a long time since I had done any journeying. For two years I had been busy with getting through school and driving myself almost to the point where my spiritual life took a backseat at times. During that particular week, the last one in July, I had been having a particularly hard time emotionally. Frey had suggested I take the journey a couple weeks before, but He might not have anticipated that I would be emotionally raw from having to put one of my beloved ferrets to sleep after she succumbed to a pancreatic tumor. Or perhaps He did. The Gods can sometimes have amazing foresight and Frey's Sister is Mistress of *Seidr*...She has the Sight, who is to say that He doesn't? Perhaps He knew that a trip to contemplate His sacrifice and all I have to be thankful for would be what I needed.

I almost didn't do it, to tell the truth. I was a wreck for two days after saying goodbye to my pet with the memory of stroking her head and kissing her as she slowly passed into unconsciousness at the vet's office fresh on my mind. I had made a promise however so I drew the curtains in the room, settled myself, and slipped into trance the way I do as described in another article.

I found myself in Vanaheim wandering among the crowds of Vanir gathered together to witness the sacrifice of their Lord as He was lead to a podium flanked by an antler-headed priest and His Mother, the awe-inspiring and terrifying Nerthus. She was veiled of course and everyone bowed down before Her with reverence edged with a bit of fear. Of all people, the Vanir would be the ones most familiar with just how frightening She can be.

The three figures came to the podium and faced the crowd, Frey's face held high with His back straight. I realized He stood this way every year when He is about to die, facing Death head-on without fear or any sense of resignation but with a sense of pride and the firm embracing of His duty to His people and the worlds. Nerthus spoke in

a commanding voice reminding the crowd that once again Her Son stood ready to shed His blood so that the people will have full bellies and life will go on. She said that as He makes His trip to the realm of Hela for us all to remember the importance of sacrifice and that having food on our plates is something never to be taken for granted.

Then She picked up the sickle, said a few words, and with one deft stroke slit Frey's throat. I could not stop myself from flinching but I watched anyway as His blood flowed out of the ugly wound, as the Golden One doubled over and choked, gasping as His life flowed out of Him. Finally His body, Golden and full of life, glowing with all the promises of His people just moments before, fell limp, pale, and lifeless before His Mother's feet.

I can't remember much between that and the next moment, but the crowd disbursed with the promise to eat only the bare essentials for the duration of Frey's journey to Hel. For some reason I remember feeling compelled to go up to the podium where His body lay. I have no idea why, and it sounds morbid...why would anyone want to linger to get a closer look at the body of a dead God?

I stood there looking at that pale gaping face with the lank blonde hair and the wide unseeing eyes of sea-blue when I felt Her come up beside me. She wasn't too close but She was close enough... too close for my liking. She didn't take off Her veil. Thank the Gods. I don't *want* to see what lies underneath.

I kept looking at Frey just to avoid looking at Her. The hair on the back of my neck stood on end. A lot of people think of Nerthus as some hippy-dippy frolicking-in-the-meadows-naked tree-hugging puppy-loving flowers-in-her-hair Earth Mother Goddess whom they might give lip service to on Earth Day if even that and then dismiss Her the rest of the time. I was actually at a Nerthus blót a couple of years ago, but it was a small one with not too many attendees. That's about the only time I've ever heard of one being conducted.

Nerthus deserves a lot more respect than that, and She is seriously hardcore. The Earth is nice and nurturing, yes, but it can also swallow you up. It can bury you, crush you, and otherwise overwhelm you. A lot of people tend to forget that Nerthus has Her attendees

drowned year after year when She makes Her parade throughout Vanaheim, for none can see Her face save for Her priests and priestesses. The penalty for beholding Her visage while not being a priest of the Vanir is instant death. Hippy-dippy sunshine and daisies “Age of Aquarius” Earth Mother indeed.

So you can appreciate why I felt a little bit intimidated in Her presence. Especially when I felt a sudden compulsion to reach out to that massive pool of blood that had formed around Her dead Son and touch it. Touch the blood. Touch His life, His essence, and feel it on my hand.

In front of His Mother. I think not.

Do it.

Did I hear that right? I blinked in disbelief.

Do it. She was sounding awfully impatient.

I trembled, torn between following my compulsion and doing the sane thing which would be to leave. I felt my hand reach out of its own volition to touch that puddle of red and restrained myself. It was taking a lot of effort.

Nerthus had other plans however. She gave me another impatient nudge and I did it.

The moment I did my hand tingled. In the physical world my hand was burning. *Remember this, She said to me. Remember what this felt like, that this is My Son’s blood spilled so that your life will continue to go on. For without the crops that grow to turn into food for your belly you would not have a life. Remember this and when you start focusing more on what you do not have remember how your hand feels now and think about the sacrifices others make to make sure you have the things you do possess. Now go.*

I did, and you know what? A few days later as I’m typing this my hand still feels weird. It’s faded a bit but it still feels funny.

Three days later Frey’s return from Hel was marked by me trance dancing wearing a feathered mask He had me make for Him while waving an antler in celebration. After I gave my offering and said a prayer I found myself inadvertently journeying to Vanaheim, to find a heck of a party going on. Vanir everywhere were drinking, eating, dancing, and generally making merry. I could smell roast pork and

fresh baked bread. My mouth instantly filled with the taste of buttered wheat. The music was drums and pipe and it thrummed in my ears and hurt my chest.

I saw Him sitting on a dais watching the revelers and He motioned me over. I went to Him and smiled. "Welcome back," I said.

Good to see you smiling. Do you understand why I wanted you to take this journey now?

I thought about how much easier the journeying actually made my mourning for my pet easier somehow. I thought about how I was helped into not dwelling on her illness and death but of the good times and good memories I have of her, the ones I will always treasure. I thought about how all this has made it easier for me to think of her without crying. And then my hand tingled.

I may not have her, but I have the memories. Just as I may not have a lot but I have a lot more than most people can say they do, and am thankful for every bit of it. And I realize that now.

I smiled and said "Yes I do."

Lessons from Vanaheim: Frey

Galina Krasskova

The second part of my ordeal took place under the guidance of Frey. He spoke to my foster mother, Fuensanta Plaza, and outlined a three day ordeal, also to take place at my friend's farm. This was designed, I believe, to break me of my arrogance and disregard of my farmer ancestors. During the first day of the ordeal, I was required to work the land. I stayed with a friend who is a farmer and during this day, I worked for several hours in his vegetable garden, working the soil by hand. My foster mother and I were permitted to eat one handful of food for each hour worked. The food had to be comprised of grains, fruits, or vegetables only and had to be organic.

On the second day of the ordeal, both I and my foster mother were required to completely fast, consuming only water. During that time, I worked several hours in my friend's vegetable garden. On the third day, there were no words given. Instead, I walked down to the field, the same field in which I had been buried for Nerthus. In the North end of this field stands a carved God-pole dedicated to Frey. There I made offerings to this God and listened to His words and His admonition: *Remember. Remember what you have learned. Remember.*

Day One

"Peace is a terrible thing. It demands as many sacrifices and as much discipline as war. I, Ingvi Frey, know this, who will die in battle, who can fight as fiercely as the best warriors, yet chose to become a hostage in the name of peace and for the sake of peace. No coward I, no pacifist, but yet I am a Peace-Keeper.

That is what you must learn, my child. That to be a warrior you have to honor peace and peace-keepers with the same immediacy you feel toward war and warriors. *You who know to give equal respect to Odin and Loki without falling into the trap of either/or should give equal respect to war and peace.*

To be a farmer is like being a priest and as sacred: Farmers are the hallowers and priests of my blood. Every year, I submit to my throat being scythed, to my blood being spilled to hallow and fructify the earth so it may nourish the people. Farmers are the link between my blood and people being fed. Without the farmer, my blood is spilled for nothing, for working the soil is the only rite that will give power to my sacrifice.

This is what you must learn, my child: that to be a priest you have to honor the farmer as your equal. Honor your farmer ancestors. If you miss a part, you miss the whole. I am Ingvi Frey, Peace-Keeper and Fighter, and Farmer. Come to me on the third day.

During the first day remember, a whole season will be contained in this one day, and in that time you are the link between My blood, the earth and the sustaining of your foster mother. In that time, she is your old mother, your pregnant wife, your small daughter—all that which you love and which depends upon your holy skill and strength at farming. If you fail, My blood is disregarded, desecrated by neglect. Earth lies fallow and your loved ones starve.”

Day Two

“Today contains all of the next season and it will be hard because warriors rode through your land. They needed food so they took all they could, all you had worked for. They rode through the grain; they took your goat and most of your hens. They filled a sack with the contents of your storeroom. You have nothing. That is what war does to peace. That is partly why I became hostage. So work the soil, on an empty stomach, to salvage what you may of My blood and your effort so that you may not starve tomorrow. Today you will not be able to feed either yourself or your foster mother whom you love. That is what war does to peace.” *(It is important to note that this was not an accusation. It was said without judgment. It was merely a statement of fact.)*

Day Three

On the third day, no words were given. I was expected to open myself to Frey directly and to receive His wisdom. One of the things that I learned, I who am so proud of my warrior's calling, was that war and peace, warriors and farmers are intertwined. Yes, the farmer is at the mercy of the warrior but so too is the warrior at the mercy of the farmer. One must always eat after all. I was reminded of the Napoleonic Wars when French forces tried to take Russia and the Russian farmers starved the invading soldiers by burning their own fields as they retreated giving the invading army no sustenance. That is the power of the farmer.

I know that there is still the final third of my Vanaheim ordeal to go: I must work with Freya. I'm not sure what form this work will take, but it seems for me, Vanaheim has become the central spiritual axis around which all the other ordeals revolve. Perhaps this is because finding the holy in the process of living, in embodiment, in the faulty nature of my own humanity has been an incredibly difficult process for me, perhaps because my warrior's arrogance is so great, perhaps because the places and ways in which I am broken and scarred require this often terrifying balm. I don't know. I only know that the Vanir have been immensely kind to me even as they have challenged and at times goaded me into knowledge. And I am grateful.

Green Man, Golden One

Svartesól

I come as the Green Man
 Eyes smiling behind the foliate mask
 Silently I walk through the woods
 Silently as not to disturb the creatures
 Sleeping and mating and foraging
 As their instincts dictate
 I make my way to the orchards
 The sweetness of fruit and flower
 As well as of maidens and men
 Ripe and lusting and waiting for me
 To give forth my seed
 I come as the Green Man
 To give fertility and prosperity
 To my gathered folk
 Merriment and mirth
 Fullness of life
 I come as the Green Man
 To all who would know life

I come as the Golden One
 Burdened by the weight of my torc
 Dragged through the fields of grain
 Standing tall and golden
 In sunlight strong and warm
 That will soon wane and bring coldness
 After the grain is cut down
 And made a staple of daily bread
 I myself am cut down
 My blood spills into the soil
 My blood is in the soil
 So after the Earth has her rest

Things can grow again
As you take from the Green World
So I am given back to them
Because I love all who live
Because I hate suffering
I come as the Golden One
To all who would know death

I am the Lord who laughs
I am the Lord who loves and lusts
And leaps in the dance of life
But few would know the Lord who weeps
Who sees Wyrð of woe
Who worries and who wonders
When things would stop the flow
I am the Lord who gives
And the Lord who takes away
I am the Lord who lives
So you will die another day

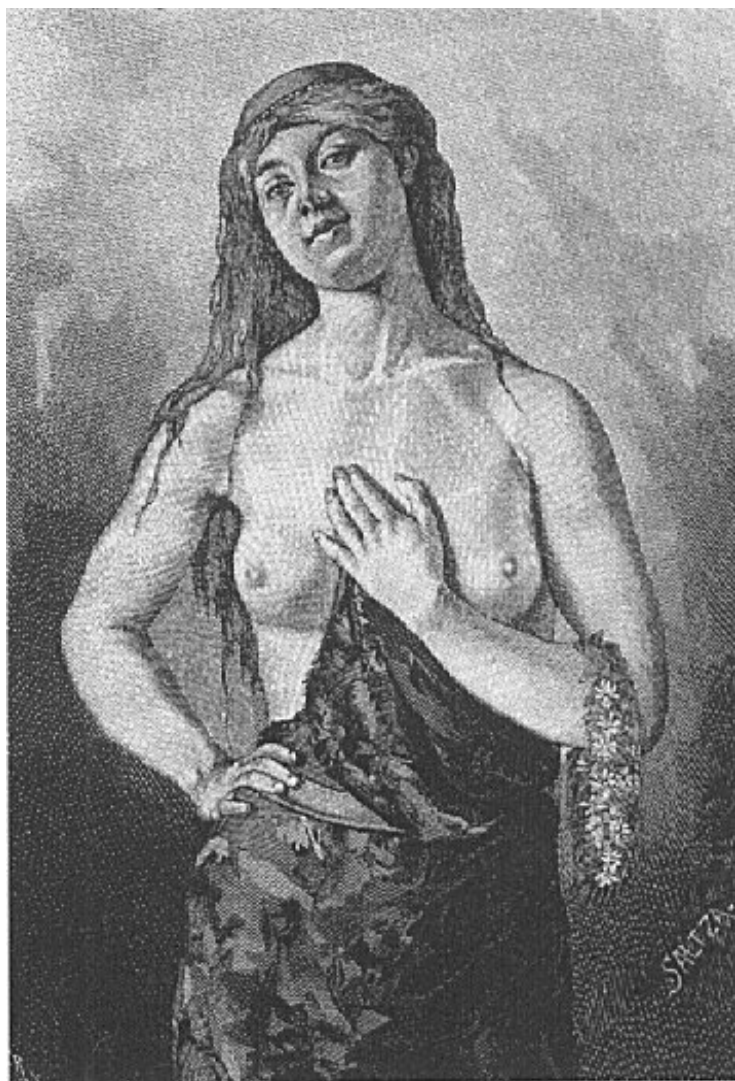
Frey's Comfort

Leafshimmer

Sacred and glimmering and warm and bright,
Love of all Loves, I bask in Thy Light,
Earthlight, Starlight, Hearthlight you bear
Yngvi forever I praise Thee most Fair!

Never forsaken, never forlorn,
Your comfort is with me by night and by morn.
From daybreak to day's end, through death, further still
Yngvi, Heart's Fire, my Joy is Thy Will!

Haven of Hope, Hammer of Desire,
World's-light, Heart-light, Holiest Fire,
You take me and fill me and ease all my pain,
Yngvi, my all! I De-light in Thy Reign!



FREYA

Freya in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

Freya is probably one of the best-loved yet least-understood Goddesses in the Northern Tradition. However, even when one is intimately familiar with the Vanadis, She is a complex enough figure that one may not fully know Her, and Her mysteries. We can only infer what She is like from what remains of Her in the Lore, and personal gnosis of encountering Her directly. Let us begin with references to Freya in the lore:

How should one periphrase Freya? Thus: by calling her Daughter of Njördr, Sister of Frey, Wife of Ódr, Mother of Hnoss, Possessor of the Slain, of Sessrúmnir, of the Gib-Cats, and of Brisinga-men; Goddess of the Vanir, Lady of the Vanir, Goddess Beautiful in Tears, Goddess of Love.

Skaldskaparsmal 20

Freya is most gently born (together with Frigg): she is wedded to the man named Ódr. Their daughter is Hnoss: she is so fair, that those things which are fair and precious are called hnossir. Ódr went away on long journeys, and Freya weeps for him, and her tears are red gold. Freya has many names, and this is the cause thereof: that she gave herself sundry names, when she went out among unknown peoples seeking Ódr: she is called Mardöll and Hörn, Gefn, Sýr. Freya had the necklace Brisingamen. She is also called Lady of the Vanir.

Gylfaginning (Brodeur Translation)

Njord's daughter Freya was priestess of the sacrifices, and first taught the Æsir the magic art, as it was in use and fashion among the Vanir. While Njord was with the Vanir he had taken his own sister in marriage, for that was allowed by their law; and their children were Frey and Freya. But among the Æsir it was forbidden to intermarry with such near relations.

...

Freya alone remained of the gods, and she became on this account so celebrated

that all women of distinction were called by her name, whence they now have the title Frú (Frau in German); so that every woman is called frú (frau in German), or mistress over her property, and the wife is called the house-Frú (Ehefrau in German). Freya continued the blood-sacrifices. Freya had also many other names. Her husband was called Óðr, and her daughters Hnoss and Gersemi. They were so very beautiful, that afterwards the most precious jewels were called by their names.

Ynglinga Saga

East of Vanaquisl in Asia was the land called Asialand or Asiahome, but the folk that dwelt there was called Æsir, and their chief town was Asgard. Odin was the name of the king thereof, and therein was a right holy place of sacrifice. Niord and Frey Odin made Temple-priests thereover; but the daughter of Niord was Freya, and she was fellow to Odin and his concubine.

Now there were certain men in Asia, whereof one was called Alfrigg, the second Dwalin, the third Berling, the fourth Grerr: these had their abode but a little space from the King's hall, and were men so wise in craftsmanship, that they laid skilful hand on all matters; and such-like men as they were did men call dwarfs. In a rock was their dwelling, and in that day they mingled more with menfolk than as now they do.

Odin loved Freya full sore, and withal she was the fairest woman of that day: she had a bower that was both fair and strong; insomuch, say men, that if the door were shut to, none might come into the bower aforesaid without the will of Freya.

Now on a day went Freya afoot by that rock of the dwarfs, and it lay open: therein were the dwarfs a-smithying a golden collar, and the work was at point to be done: fair seemed that collar to Freya, and fair seemed Freya to the dwarfs.

Now would Freya buy the collar of them, and bade them in return for it silver and gold, and other good things. They said they lacked not money, yet that each of them would sell his share of the collar for this thing, and nought else---that she should lie a night by each of them: wherefore, whether she liked it better or worse, on such wise did she strike the bargain with them; and so the four nights being outworn, and all conditions fulfilled, they delivered the collar to Freya; and she went home to her bower, and held her peace hereof, as if nought had

befallen.

There was a man called Farbauti, which carl had to wife a carline called Laufey; she was both slim and slender, therefore was she called Needle. One child had these, a son called Loki; nought great of growth was he, but betimes shameless of tongue and nimble in gait; over all men had he that craft which is called cunning; guileful was he from his youth up, therefore was he called Loki the Sly.

He betook himself to Odin at Asgard and became his man. Ever had Odin a good word for him, whatsoever he turned to; yet withal he oft laid heavy labours upon him, which forsooth he turned out of hand better than any man looked for: moreover, he knew wellnigh all things that befell, and told all he knew to Odin.

So tells the tale that Loki knew how that Freya had gotten the collar, yea and what she had given for it; so he told Odin thereof, and when Odin heard of it he bade Loki get the collar and bring it to him. Loki said it was not a likely business, because no man might come into Freya's bower without the will of her; but Odin bade him go his ways and not come back before he had gotten the collar. Then Loki turned away howling, and most of men were glad thereof whenas Loki throve nought.

But Loki went to Freya's bower, and it was locked; he strove to come in, and might not; and cold it was without, so that he fast began to grow a-cold.

So he turned himself into a fly, and fluttered about all the locks and the joints, and found no hole therein whereby he might come in, till up by the gable-top he found a hole, yet no bigger than one might thrust a needle through; none the less he wriggled in thereby. So when he was come in he peered all about to see if any waked, but soon he got to see that all were asleep in the bower. Then in he goeth unto Freya's bed, and sees that she hath the collar on her with the clasp turned downward. Thereon Loki changed himself into a flea, and sat on Freya's cheek, and stung her so that she woke and turned about, and then fell asleep again. Then Loki drew from off her his flea's shape, and undid the collar, and opened the bower, and gat him gone to Odin therewith.

Next morn awoke Freya and saw that the doors were open, yet unbroken, and that the goodly collar was gone. She deemed she knew what guile had wrought

it, so she goeth into the hall when she is clad, and cometh before Odin the king, and speaketh to him of the evil he has let be wrought against her in the stealing of that dear thing, and biddeth him give her back her jewel.

Odin says that in such wise hath she gotten it, that never again shall she have it. "Unless forsooth thou bring to pass, that two kings, each served of twenty kings, fall to strife, and fight under such weird and spell, that they no sooner fall adown than they stand up again and fight on: always unless some christened man be so bold of heart, and the fate and fortune of his lord be so great, that he shall dare go into the battle, and smite with weapons these men: and so first shall their toil come to an end, to whatsoever lord it shall befall to loose them from the pine and trouble of their fell deeds." Hereto said Freya yea, and gat her collar again.

Sorla Thattur, chapters 1 and 2.¹³

They went to the fair
 Freya's dwelling,
 and he these words
 first of all said:
 "Wilt thou me, Freya,
 thy feather-garment lend,
 that perchance my hammer
 I may find?"

Freya
 4. "That I would give thee,
 although of gold it were,
 and trust it to thee,
 though it were of silver."

5. Flew then Loki -
 the plumage rattled -
 until he came beyond
 the Æsir's dwellings,
 and came within
 the Jötun's land.

13 <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/love/00401.php>

...

Loki

12. "I have had labour
and success:
Thrym has thy hammer,
the Thursar's lord.
It shall no man
get again,
unless he bring him
Freya to wife."

13. They went the fair
Freya to find;
and he those words
first of all said:
"Bind thee, Freya,
in bridal raiment,
we two must drive
to Jötunheim."

13. Wroth then was Freya,
and with anger chafed,
all the Æsir's hall
beneath her trembled:
in shivers flew the famed
Brisinga necklace.
"Know me to be
of women lewdest,
if with thee I drive
to Jötunheim."

Thrymskvida, v. 3-5, 11-13

Freya spake:

"Mad art thou, Loki, | that known thou makest
The wrong and shame thou hast wrought;
The fate of all | does Frigg know well,

Though herself she says it not."

Loki spake:

"Be silent, Freya! | for fully I know thee,
Sinless thou art not thyself;
Of the gods and elves | who are gathered here,
Each one as thy lover has lain."

Freya spake:

"False is thy tongue, | and soon shalt thou find
That it sings thee an evil song;
The gods are wroth, | and the goddesses all,
And in grief shalt thou homeward go."

Loki spake:

"Be silent, Freya! | thou foulest witch,
And steeped full sore in sin;
In the arms of thy brother | the bright gods caught thee
When Freya her wind set free."

Lokasenna (Bellows), v. 29-32

Fólkvangr is the ninth,
there Freya directs
the sittings in the hall.
She half the fallen chooses each day,
but Odin the other half.

Grimnirsmal (Thorpe)

Freya rides with her favourite Ottar to Hyndla, a Vala, for the purpose of obtaining information respecting Ottar's geneology, such information being required by him in a legal dispute with Angantyr. Having obtained this, Freya further requests Hyndla to give Ottar a portion (minnisöl) that will enable him to remember all that has been told him. This she refuses, but is forced to comply by Freya having encircled her cave with flames. She gives him the potion, but accompanied by a malediction, which is by Freya turned to a blessing.

...

Freya

46. Fire I strike
over thee, dweller of the wood!
so that thou goest not
ever away from hence.

Hyndla

47. Fire I see burning,
and the earth blazing;
many will have
their lives to save.
Bear thou the cup
to Ottar's hand,
the mead with venom mingled,
in an evil hour!

Freya

48. Thy malediction
shall be powerless;
although thou, Jötun maid!
dost evil threaten.
He shall drink
delicious draughts.
All the gods I pray
to favour Ottar.

Hyndluliod, introduction, v. 46-48

At last were born a boy and girl,
Son and daughter of Hogni's slayer;
Then speech the woman so weak began,
Nor said she aught ere this she spake:
"So may the holy ones thee help,
Frigg and Freya and favoring gods,
As thou hast saved me from sorrow now."

Oddrunargratr

I don't often talk about my relationship with Freya, but it is there, and perhaps difficult to discuss because of its intensity. While I

am oath-wedded to Frey, I daresay that Freya has claim on me as well, as She was the first Deity I really connected with, and indeed was responsible for my finding Frey.

I found out about Wicca in 1995, completely disgusted with fundamentalist Christian relatives' attempts to convert me via exorcism, yet still believing in Something larger than myself. The magical side of Wicca intrigued me, but I did get curious about the religion after awhile, particularly because it involved Goddesses and I was a feminist before I knew what feminism was. For about a year and a half, I identified as a generic eclectic Neowiccan and then my history buff side kicked in, with the old childhood curiosities as to what the old pre-Christian religions actually looked like. I studied comparative mythology. The first Greek God I offered to was Dionysus, giving wine, but I did not feel Him present or interested. I tried offering to a few more Greeks, and then some Celtic Deities.

When I got to the Norse section of the book, I saw a picture of Odin. This gave me chills, recognizing His appearance from the one-eyed old man of my childhood dreams. I felt the distinct sense that They wanted something with me, even though I would rather not be Norse (even not knowing anything about Asatru at the time, I didn't want to be associated with Nazi occultism and there were no other Norse Pagans I knew at the time... plenty of Celts, though). Odin scared me, so I decided to go through a Goddess first, namely Freya.

At this time I didn't know what might make a good offering but it intuitively occurred to me that She might like chocolate and strawberries, as She is a sex Goddess and would appreciate something decadent. I gave Her the chocolate and strawberries and lit a gold candle for Her, then waited. The air in the room changed, I felt the hair on my arms and neck stand on end, and I spoke to Freya, inviting Her into my sacred space and into my life if She wanted to be there. And She did, and we began to talk. Eventually, into the conversation, some of my Wiccan conditioning slipped out as I asked Her, "You're like the Norse face of Brighid, right?"

To which Freya replied, "Fuck off," and I felt the dreadful sense of *Oh shit, you are dealing with something real. The Great Generic Goddess*

wouldn't tell you that. I quickly apologized, offered the rest of my strawberries, and Freya smiled, saying, "You'll learn."

From that point on a working relationship with Freya was established. I dreamed about Her, and communed with Her in my sacred space at home and in a local park where wildflowers bloomed. One of the first things Freya told me was to stop reading the Llewellyn books I had accumulated and to find the magic within. I learned how to alter my state of consciousness quickly, and to create changes by visualizing the desired outcome while applying my will to symbolic objects, using chant. Freya trained my voice. I got to know Freya very well when it was just me and Her: Freya has four faces, which She chooses to reveal to people as She thinks appropriate (just as Odin has over 200 names, each of them reflective of a different part of Himself, but all still Odin). There is Mardoll, Horn, Gefion, and Syr.

-Syr ("Sow") is the Battle Goddess. If you have never seen a mother boar protecting a sounder of piglets, you will not understand Freya riding Her battle-boar, Hildisvin, coming to the defense of Her people (especially when they want to protect those they love). To say that Freya has a temper is a vast understatement, and here She uses down-and-dirty fisticuffs as well as battle magic, most notably shrill keening to inspire fear in the heart of the opponent.

-Horn ("Flax") is the Fertility/Creatrix aspect of Freya, the Nature Goddess who for merely walking into a field, causes things to grow around Her, responding to the vitality within Her. Everything She touches does indeed change, for the healthier and more beautiful. The name Horn suggests a connection with Holda the flax Goddess, and indeed it is a personal gnosis of mine that Freya was sent to Holda for training and it is as Horn that She is most magical in a positive way. However, there is a strong undercurrent of being able to take away and recycle back out again, just as She creates.

-Mardoll (Sea-Bright) is the most benign face of Freya, when She appears as a young woman, and is very much Njord's daughter. I have seen Freya's Mardoll side when She is older but in a more playful mood. While Freya can often be very serious – such as when She becomes Syr, and works woe on evildoers – She has a great sense of

humor, and enjoys fun and games. It is through Mardoll that She is also mother to Gersemi and Hnossa. However, it is also through Mardoll that Freya's prophetic abilities are made most apparent: surrounded by the mists of the sea, Freya can see the threads of Wyrð reaching into the well of the Norns, and predict how things will go, for good or ill.

-I see Gefion ("Giver") as being the Love Goddess aspect, the one who will give Her own body for what She wants, and whose sex makes the recipient feel a love like no other, but also to hold off if the time or person is not right. To be embraced by Gefion, the Giver, is to be embraced by pure Love itself, that sees the beauty and Divinity inherent in all creation. Indeed, it is Gefion's vitality born in love, that gives all good things. A word should be said about Gefn, as there is mention in the Lore of a Goddess named Gefion, who I believe to be one and the same as Freya.

King Gylfi ruled the land that men now call Sweden. It is told of him that he gave to a wandering woman, in return for her merry-making, a plow-land in his realm, as much as four oxen might turn up in a day and a night. But this woman was of the kin of the Æsir; she was named Gefjun. She took from the north, out of Jötunheim, four oxen which were the soils of a certain giant and herself, and set them before the plow. And the plow cut so wide and so deep that it loosened up the land; and the oxen drew the land out into the sea and to the westward, and stopped in a certain sound. There Gefjun set the land, and gave it a name, calling it Selund. And from that time on, the spot whence the land had been torn up is water: it is now called the Lögr in Sweden; and bays lie in that lake even as the headlands in Selund. Thus says Bragi, the ancient skald:

Gefjun drew from Gylfi | gladly the wave-trove's free-hold
Till from the running beasts | sweat reeked, to Denmark's increase;
The oxen bore, moreover, | eight eyes, gleaming brow-lights,
O'er the field's wide: booty, | and four heads in their plowing.

Gylfaginning I.

Here, we see that Freya-Gefion mated with a giant, and tHer sons were turned into oxen, ploughing land which was for Her and Her

people. That we are dealing with a Vanic Goddess is indicated by the number four (oxen), and in exchange for "merry-making" (obviously, a night of sex), permission to plough Land - ploughing being a Vanic activity par excellence.

Gefion moreover seems to be connected with virginity and possibly lesbianism, as seen in the *Volsa Pattur*:

I swear by Gefjun
and the other gods
that against my will
do I touch this red proboscis.
May giantesses
accept this holy object,
but now, slave of my parents,
grab hold of Völsi.

It would seem that the daughter here is repulsed by the thought of a phallus and may be a lesbian. Many modern lesbians feel drawn to Freya as the ultimate female, complete in Herself. At the very least, Freya-Gefion is being called upon in protest for not wanting to participate in what is essentially a sex magic ritual, and Freya does know when to say no to such things.

Finally, in *Lokasenna*, Gefion is mentioned as having sold Herself for a necklace (probably Brisingamen):

Gefjun spake:
19. "Why, ye gods twain,
with bitter tongues
Raise hate among us here?
Loki is famed
for his mockery foul,
And the dwellers in heaven he hates."

Loki spake:
20. "Be silent, Gefjun!
for now shall I say
Who led thee to evil life;

The boy so fair
gave a necklace bright,
And about him thy leg was laid."

Othin spake:
21. "Mad art thou, Loki,
and little of wit,
The wrath of Gefjun to rouse;
For the fate that is set
for all she sees,
Even as I, methinks."

It seems likely that Gefion is Freya's "sovereign" face, keeping women "pure" from unwanted sexual attention (remember Freya's refusal to be sold into marriage with a Jotun), but giving Herself for the right price. Odin Himself speaks of Gefion seeing even as He does, which would indicate equal power, and that Freya has for certain, having taught Odin at least some of His magic.

I have seen all four of Freya's faces, and have worked most closely with Her as Gefn/Gefion/Gefjun, the Giver, the Sex and Love Goddess who teaches the mysteries of sacred sexuality used for healing and transformation: healing your own spirit, the person you are making love to, and the Tree itself... and how to withhold sexuality when it would do more harm than good, to be whole in oneself. It is through understanding Vanic sexuality that I have been able to start the process of knowing myself, knowing what I want for myself, and working to make my life a more sacred place. Freya knew Her sexuality was worth the most beautiful and magical necklace in the Nine Worlds – indeed, Brisngamen is a tool, empowered by sex rites, embodying the four aspects of Freya, the four seasons of Vanaheim, and the four directions of Midgard. It is knowing the depth of Freya's emotions – Her grief for Oðr, Her determination to find Him, and Her joy in the beauty of the World/s and the Beings – that we are able to know wholeness, feeling alive in ourselves, and not numbed by the overstimulation of today's world.

Besides teaching me spellcraft, Freya helped me to read Tarot as

a form of divination, again insisting that I stop reading books about it and trust what I actually see rather than what the meanings “should” be. I gained a reputation for being a rather scarily accurate diviner, and then in 1997, when She felt I was ready, Freya introduced me to Odin, who worked with me on the 24 runes of the Elder Futhark: their use in divination, their use in magic both positive and negative, their use in healing, and how to sing them, how to bring the power forth into Midgard.

The next step was learning about Heathenry, as my Wiccan friends found fault with my hard polytheism and devotion to the “warlike” Norse Gods, including “that misogynistic bastard” Odin. The Gods never insisted that I become Asatru, however, and my decision to become Asatru was wholly my own. At my dedication ceremony, I asked Odin to name me, and He gave me the name of Sigrun, which I later discovered was one of the Valkyries, and means “victory rune”; Sig is also the Anglo-Saxon name for Sowilo, the rune of the Sun. As it turns out, I am one of Frey's Light-bringers and a recurring theme in my life is victory in the face of insurmountable odds.

Later on I formed a small Kindred in Connecticut with some friends of mine, including my then-blood brother, an Odinsman. I believe that due to taking oaths with him and some others, and essentially mingling my luck with theirs, that it was partly responsible for the horrible upheavals my life underwent thereafter. Of course, that wasn't the only reason, as I have long-standing issues based in coming from a dysfunctional family, and made unwise choices as a reaction. However, my relationship with Freya was permanently changed due to the problems I was having. In 2003, when things were getting increasingly sour, I talked about oathing myself to Odin as I felt His bad-ass influence would help. Freya came to me in my sleep and introduced me to Her brother, who I married in 2004, and the rest is history. Even after marrying Frey, I felt distrustful of Freya and kept Her at an arm's distance for a long time. It pained me. It wasn't until around 2007 when I began rebuilding my life, I started figuring out that I wasn't alone and there were others experiencing the same level of God-interference, that I felt comfortable even talking to Freya again. It

still took awhile to get back into regular contact with Her.

There was a time in my life, before I decided I was crazy, where I did a daily devotion to Freya, anointing Her statue with rose oil and giving Her chocolate; periodically I would buy Her flowers, especially roses. I made Freya a mix of rose petals, jasmine, and orange blossom several times that was greatly enjoyed. Even in 2007, when She started coming around again, I was still not able to feel close enough to offer to Her with full-hearted devotion, seeing Her fiery beauty and gifting Her in adoration.

Just before Lammas 2008, my bio-mother mailed me the statue I had of Freya, which had been sitting in her home since I left Connecticut for California. I set the statue up on an altar I had prepared in the ritual room, with a bowl of rose petals. I got a bottle of rosewater, and decided to spend each Friday doing an afternoon devotion to Freya, anointing Her statue, giving Her chocolate, and singing to Her, since She liked me to sing in the past. She embraced me, and I felt Her fire, the spark of life quicken within me, burning down pain I had tried to numb by various methods, but could never completely obliterate. I felt the rage, and the grief, of the memories and the feelings of failure, and let the fire surround Her because She could take it. When I released into Her, I felt a lot cleaner, although very weak.

After this, I felt closer to Her, and began once again to see the fire of Her spirit, the ecstatic joy She felt in the beauty of the world, the Divinity within plants, animals, and people; the sun and the sky, the ocean, fire and smoke, the wind; things made by human hands. I rejoiced with Her, and felt it good to gift Her again, to gift Her for being who She is, Creatrix, but also Initiatrix. She was my first Deity, my first Teacher, and my first real friend, who taught me strength to survive my turbulent late teens and early 20s, and reclaimed me to teach me strength again when I was able to handle Her lessons. At the Winter Solstice of 2008, I took an oath to Freya as my third (and final) patron. While I am Frey's first and foremost and it is Him that I serve as priest as well as Him that I outwardly project, my work with Freya is internal, learning psychic hygiene and self-defense, as well as (a spirit-taught

form of) oracular *seiðr*, as well as becoming more comfortable with my own embodiment.

If you never get anything else out of my writing, please know They care, even if They are deliberately keeping at a distance to see something through to its finish, and the scars may remain, but out of those scars you will see runes, and the working of Wyrð. Freya shed Her own tears over the great grief of losing her soulmate, Oðr, but the tears became amber and gold, and can be used to make beautiful jewelry, dedicated to the Vanadis Herself. In the amber that is Her tears, you see the light of Her essence.

Vanadis

Tracy Nichols

My association with the Vanadis began way back in 1998. It was about a year and a half after I had discovered Wicca at the tender age of 17 and I had felt myself drawn to Goddesses who were strong, powerful, and whom I viewed as whole women...Goddesses who enjoyed battle as well as lovemaking, Goddesses who had more than one dimension to Their character. Silly way of thinking, I know, for no Deity is without Their complexities but I was young and did not know better. I admired all sorts of Goddesses of love and war from different cultures such as Ishtar and Astarte. When I began to follow my instinctive draw to the Norse, it was Freya who caught my attention.

In my youthful enthusiasm I set up an altar to Her almost before I began studying Her seriously. Then the more I learned about Her the more I became convinced that I had found my Matron, the Goddess I would dedicate myself to for life. She accepted me under Her wing but was not too quick to accept my oath of fealty. Later I would learn that was for Someone Else, but back then it felt like a blow although for a time She kept me around and listened when I prayed to Her. Something about Her demeanor towards me always seemed a bit off however, like She was waiting for the day when She would be giving me up. This to me was discouraging and after another year I walked away in pursuit of other spiritual interests, thinking I was done with the world of the Norse and would have nothing more to do with it.

Fast forward to five years later when I discovered my "spirit guide" was in fact the God to Whom I would finally become oathed for life to and thus found myself drawn back into the worlds of the Northern Gods full of much apprehension and nervousness. None of it involved the other Gods, for admittedly I did not have much to do with the rest of Them during my brief stint as a Freyaswoman. Well almost none of it but that would be material for a different text. No, most of my apprehension was caught up in thinking about dealing with my

former *fulltrui*. Will She be angry with me? Will She remember how I had abandoned Her and be unpleasant towards me? All sorts of thoughts ran through my head the first time I was asked (and by asked I mean ordered) to petition Her for help in learning *seiðr*, the shamanic craft of the North which I had experimented with during my previous time puttering around with Norse things but had dropped along with my dedication to the Lady.

I was all nerves as I went into trance with my mind on Vanaheim so that I may seek an audience with the Mistress of *seiðr*. To my everlasting surprise the response I got was a laugh along with a message: *It is about time you have found your true place. It was never with Me, and I have always known that. Otherwise you would not have been able to leave.* She still sported the same golden hair and deep blue eyes I remember Her having, still carried Herself with the same strength and warmth that had drawn me to Her, and Gods She was still beautiful. I found myself smiling and falling into step with Her teachings, absorbing Her lessons as I learned more about the mysteries of falling into trance and embracing being an intermediary between the world of flesh and the world of spirit.

Working with Freya has been both one of the most rewarding and most demanding experiences of my short career as a Northern Tradition spirit-worker. While She has a grace and a sweetness about Her that is almost unparalleled She also commands a certain respect. It is easy to forget as She flirts with male and female alike that She is not the T&A Goddess that a lot of Heathens make the mistake of treating Her as, nor is She nothing more than just a hostage, nor should She be so casually dismissed as Odin's teacher. The fact that She was Odin's teacher should illustrate just how powerful and formative a presence She truly is. This is the Goddess who sent the Gods running in fear when She became so angry at the thought of being sent to Jotunheim in return for Mjolnir that Brisingamen was shattered around Her neck. This is the One who gets first pick of the honored dead who are chosen by the Valkyries. T&A Goddess indeed.

A lot of people tend to forget that the very reason She was given as a hostage to the Aesir in the first place was because Odin demanded

it not just because of Her beauty but because of Her power and wisdom. She also embodies the very life force of the world, along with Her twin Brother, which is no doubt very much the reason She was a frequent target of giants who tried to apprehend Her (well that and She is hot). Those who focus only on Her role as a Goddess of love and beauty miss out on a great deal Freya has to offer. It's a shame. Then again, maybe not. Freya is quite selective in choosing whom She will share Her knowledge with and those who can't look past the pretty cover to see the entire book would not be Her cup of tea.

I have found all of this out and more over the years as my relationship to the Vanadis has evolved. I continue to look to Freya more and more as my experiences get stranger and more harrowing, as I seek for ways to cope with them and methods to improve myself so I actually become worthy of the role the Gods seem to have chosen for me. And if that day ever does come, I will remain ever grateful to Her.

Why I Honor Freya

Eosin

Freya is a goddess known for many things. Beauty, fertility, magic, prophecy, battle, death, sexuality, sensuality, and other similar things are within Her sphere of influence. Many of these things are as relevant today as they were when She was more widely worshiped. She is a goddess I honor not only for Her traditionally understood roles, but also for what those things represent in modern living. We appreciate more varied forms and concepts of beauty. We live in an age of sexual awareness and liberation. We understand the science behind fertility. But we also live in an age where battles have more dire consequences than in the past. And while we understand modern biology far better than before, consciousness is still a mysterious thing, its products (such as magical experience) are still being explored. Freya can help in both understanding and experience of these things.

Magic and related spiritual experiences are within Freya's influence, and one who seeks to understand and improve such practices can benefit from Her involvement. As She is the one who taught *seiðr* to Odin, it would be good to work with Her when studying it. Visions can be tricky things, and is good to have some guidance in interpreting them. Freya is an effective source in sorting out the many details that one would experience in such a process. In addition, it would be good to work with Her when practicing more active forms of magic, such as *galdor* and other spellwork. Her influence can be helpful both in conducting magic and in interpreting the results.

More than any other deity, Freya is known for sexuality and sensuality. Her feminine beauty has inspired many over the ages. To many, She is the ideal of female attractiveness. Statues and other artwork of Her consistently reflect beauty. Her sexual activities have made Her a symbol of erotic love; it is the kind of love that ignites passions and inspires imagination. But this kind of appeal goes beyond thoughts of sex itself. It is a delight in the sensual experience of touch, of warmth, of distinctive scents, of intimacy and desire. By extension, it

is also a delight in other sensual experiences, such as good food and drink, candles and incense, the smells of natural places, beautiful jewelry, comfortable clothing and bedding, soothing voices and music, etc. Sensual intimacy is something that is greatly appreciated, and Freya's role in these things enriches their experience.

Battle means something rather different today than it did in the past. Before, warfare was a far more human-based experience, where psychology affected both individual and group behavior in very direct ways. One's willpower and honor on the battlefield made an immediate difference, and such consistent deeds are remembered in stories and song, and it was fitting that Freya would be choosing such worthy people for Her hall. Today, formal military operations are far more technology-based than ever before, though there is still a general resemblance to prior ways of warfare in ground fighting, and many heroes have emerged from it. Yet for those not in government armed forces, battle still has meaning. Most conflicts of the past involved small skirmishes with relatively primitive weapons, rather than with large, well-equipped forces. And most conflicts today are still like that -- barfights, gangfights, riots and the like usually involve simple hand weapons (or no weapons at all), and seldom more than small firearms (whose practical effect is not unlike some kinds of bowfire). In these situations, personal behavior and honor can directly affect your own success and the safety of those you protect. Directly taking action against immediate hostile threats is still a worthy deed, and the values of the past still apply today. Freya sought out the honored battle dead in the past, and it is fitting that She would do the same for her followers today.

Freya is a goddess who is relevant to today's living. Many things about Her are timeless, such as beauty, sexuality, and sensuality; these things and more improve the quality of life. For those who practice magical work, Her understanding and influence can be helpful. And for those who will be dealing with modern battles, it is good to know that Freya still values good warriors who honor Her; one wishes to succeed in conflicts, yet if one falls, they know that they will have a good future in the afterlife. She is a Goddess who can make living a

better experience through these senses and experiences, and is worthy of such honor.

Freya's Lesson: Sensuality

Svartesól

Freya used the opportunity of Frey being away during Lammas 2008 to teach me about Mindful Sensuality. At Lammas 2002, Freya initiated my shamanic deconstruction, and saw 2008 as a way to help me restore some parts of myself that did not need to go, but had lain dormant as a result of my life falling apart. "You used to enjoy things a lot more," She said, "and that was taken away from you."

Freya started off by having me bathe and notice the way the soap smelled, and the way my hands felt rubbing the soap into my skin, the way the water felt rinsing it off. I applied some mango-scented lotion afterwards, and Freya had me smell the lotion itself, enjoy the smell of it on my body, and its smooth creamy feeling. She told me to put on some clothes that made me feel attractive, and said, "I know you have preferred to dress simply and... efficiently... but you should still be able to feel attractive about yourself, especially around your man and as Frey's wife."

Afterwards, I made an offering to Her of dark chocolate (I typically keep some dark chocolate on hand when I have occasion to offer to the Vanadis), and Freya urged me to share some with Her. It was rich, somewhat bitter, slightly sweet, and felt very decadent rolling around on my tongue. Freya savored Her chocolate, and told me, "You need this."

Everyone, no matter what their lot in life, needs to be able to feel alive. When you are stuck in survival mode for a long time and are just getting by, it can be very hard to take time out to notice and enjoy scents, tastes, textures, touch, color, pattern, sound. It can be very difficult indeed to justify taking the time to stop and indulge oneself periodically. But people need that, just as Gods need that. We have given you Midgard, certainly it is no crime to savor the pleasures of the World. Sensuality is the art of sensing mindfully, being fully in that moment, that experience, able to fully receive that pleasure without your mind drifting off to the next concern. It is full-sensing, union with the pleasure.

The next time you feel the urge to be petted, or feel soft textures against your skin, or smell something that pleases you, or taste good food, you should do so. It is not lazy to periodically please oneself; periodically is not the same thing as "all the time" or "to the point of ignoring one's duties". If more people would indulge their need for sensuality there would be less need for excess and addiction, repressed and cut off from the World as moderns are. If you do not take time out to care for yourself, you will eventually kill yourself, whether quickly and deliberately or slowly and aimlessly. It is especially important for those who We call to enjoy what We have to give. By refusing our gifts, that insults us just as much as abusing the land. You cannot work without some play. I work very hard myself, as a Goddess, but my followers know I do love beauty. I know that I am worth every sensual experience. By virtue of being alive, you should feel alive, you should feel the life flowing through you as you feel pleasure. There is enough suffering in this world, in the average life... never mind the lives of those We call... that pleasure is not a luxury, but is a necessity. The more you are able to refresh your senses and recharge your spirit, the better equipped you will be to serve the Vanir, and Myself in particular. Mine is the path of the flesh.

Freya Chant

Svartesól

Freya Vanadis, Lady of Golden Tears
 We call to You now, across the gap of years
 To stir Your heart and blood, may You ever be hailed
 Lust Mistress, Battle Queen, Seiðrkona enveiled
 Sýr and Gefn, Horn and Mardoll
 Every face You show us is the fairest of all
 Stirrer of strife, cut like a knife
 Freya Vanadis, give to us of Your life

Freya's Ragnarok

Ember Cooke

For I have seen the old man cry
As thunder floods his darkened eye
For he has watched his bright son die
The heir to Asgard's legacy betrayed

And I have seen the future bleed
That sacred self-renewing seed
What mortal wound from simple weed
The fate a thousand vows could not evade

For I have seen a mother's pain
Who knew her brightest must be slain
For man to grace the land again
After the gods and giants tear it down

And I have heard the queen confess
To Lie-Smith in his haggard dress
The oversight with such finesse
That he, but for his lover's faith, would drown

For I have seen my brother-lord
In love give up his flaming sword
To be the god the World adored
For now must be the only time he knows

And I will see that weapon's might
As flame and Fire's hand unite
To kill my sister-heart's delight
Yet Fire in turn is smothered as he goes

For I once knew my lover lost
For wisdom mad the line he crossed
Who knew the price and paid the cost
To see beyond the walls of will and wyrd

And I must find my love once more
Among the fallen dead before
The Shifter starts the final war
Or I will face alone the fate I feared

This World you raise for sacrifice
A gamble on your faithless dice
That you may best the fire and ice
To make a better world from ash and bone

This World that glows with sacred life
My people's kings would take to wife
This World you bend beneath your strife
This World you break is not a World you own

But I my people's peace would lead
To fickle fate our rights concede
That we would slow Her deathly bleed
Forestalling the inevitable end

For though we balance life and land
For gods and men and nature's hand
Their will to war we had not planned
And so our will to theirs we're forced to blend

So now I hold back blinding tears
Of gold and amber through the years
And all I've lost has fed my fears
That all we gained will only feed the flame

And now I fight to keep the Green
From shadows only barely seen
Our last and unrelenting Queen
The Vanadis all Midgard to reclaim!

My Love for Thee

Svartesól

The Nine Worlds were born in fire and ice
And I see it within you, my fair Vanadis
The fire of passion, the ice of Your scorn
Where you walk, the land is reborn
To drink in the sunlight and bathe in the moon
To dance as You galdor a wild, haunting tune
To live as You will, to die as You choose
You comfort our sorrows, You punish abuse
You're golden like amber and dark like storm clouds
Your falcon feather cloak is a burial shroud
Your favor is sought, Your weaving of Wyrð
You are loved by many, but equally feared
Vanadis Freya, know my love for Thee
Vanadis Freya, share Your love with me



GULLVEIG

Gullveig in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

The war I remember, | the first in the world,
 When the gods with spears | had smitten Gullveig,
 And in the hall | of Har had burned her,
 Three times burned, | and three times born,
 Oft and again, | yet ever she lives.

Heith they named her | who sought their home,
 The wide-seeing witch, | in magic wise;
 Minds she bewitched | that were moved by her magic,
 To evil women | a joy she was.

On the host his spear | did Othin hurl,
 Then in the world | did war first come;
 The wall that girdled | the gods was broken,
 And the field by the warlike | Wanes was trodden.

Then sought the gods | their assembly-seats,
 The holy ones, | and council held,
 Whether the gods | should tribute give,
 Or to all alike | should worship belong.

Voluspa, v. 21-24 (Bellows translation)

While I believe that certain portions of *Voluspa* were heavily influenced by Christianity (e.g. the account of Ragnarok) and should be read with a grain of salt, I am not ready to reject the whole text especially as it gives a tantalizing glimpse into the history of the Vanir.

Gullveig, whose name means "Gold-Way" or "Gold-Thirst", has been hypothesized to be Freya by some scholars, Angrboda by others (most notably Rydberg). It is my personal gnosis that Gullveig-Heid is neither Freya (another Vanir) nor Angrboda (a Jotynja) but is very much Her own Goddess, one who is "more Vanir than Vanir".

Gullveig is associated with gold, which is an indicator that She is Vanic: Frey and Freya also have strong associations with gold, as does

Sif. Gullveig was also a worker of strong magic: it is said in Ynglinga Saga that Freya practices *seiðr*, an art known to all the Vanir, and so we can assume that Gullveig was some sort of master-sorceress, enough for the Aesir to decide She was not a valuable asset (in the way that Freya was), but too dangerous to be allowed to live. Odin is mentioned here in his *heiti* of Har, the wise man who worded *Havamal*, and it is probable that Gullveig had come to Odin for an initial exchange of information, a dialogue between magicians.

What is most telling of Gullveig's Vanic nature is the war between the Aesir and Vanir began after Gullveig was burned in Odin's hall; the Vanir acted in vengeance to right a wrong done to one of Their own. To all accounts the Vanir were winning the war, but were frithful enough to not decimate the Aesir, rather settling for a truce including an exchange of hostages. The passage "Whether the gods | should tribute give, Or to all alike | should worship belong" is telling as we know of only three named Vanir and have to speculate as to the rest, and I believe at this point the Vanir were absorbed into the Aesir, reflecting in both marriages and priesthood in Asgard, and the Aesir cult supplanting the Vanic cult in Europe.

Gullveig carries the Vanic gift of witchcraft, both as a seer and a spellworker, but is just as capable of using Her magic for harm as well as for help, as evidenced by Odin's decision to burn Her as well as the reference to "evil women" enlisting her aid. Gullveig did not die even burned three times, which would suggest strong regenerative powers -- and perhaps Her baleful magic going forth as a counter-attack. Clearly the act was offensive enough for the Vanir to go against Their peace-loving nature and make an act of war. For those who would dismiss Gullveig as an evil Goddess or irrelevant, the Vanir would not waste Their time on a Being worth nothing.

The first thing to remember when dealing with the Gods is there is no "black/white" or "good/evil". Gullveig is a bright light, the gold of the Vanir, and very precious in Their sight; She is also the bearer of a great shadow. While the world can be a beautiful place and there is no reason to be separate and forsake "worldiness" in the Vanic faith, that also means putting aside glorified notions of utopia. The elements

can create and destroy. Plants can be pretty, or useful for healing, or good to eat, or potent killers. Animals are companions and/or food and they themselves feed off life, whether plants or smaller animals... sometimes humans if hungry and angry enough. People can do great things, noble things... humans are also a plague species and often do not care about the welfare of others. It is often necessary to destroy and kill to stay alive, and this works on a magical level as well as in the mundane world. Many people fear what they do not understand, and then act out of their fear. Gullveig seems to take a particular pleasure in teaching "recovering Good Samaritans" (such as myself) who need to learn how to get dirty if it is called for, rather than just lying there and taking it. By civilized standards it is considered "not nice" to assert oneself past a certain point, no matter how much one might be justified in doing so. There's a modern saying, "Nice guys finish last," and for Gullveig and those She speaks to in the modern day, this is very true. Being "nice" may get you killed.

For those who were expecting a book on the Vanir to be all about peace and fertility rituals, it will come as a shock to hear that the Vanir are intimately tied to Death as well as Life. Life feeds on Death, and what goes to Death is recycled out again. Death is the ultimate equalizer, and it is because of our mortality that we need a connection to Something bigger than ourselves, to put life in perspective. If you never go out of your way to pray to Gullveig or offer to Her, at least take the message that the Gods are not inherently good or evil just as humans are not inherently good or evil, and Her way is to find the grey areas when white light meets black shadow, and dance within.

The Lay of Gullveig
given to Svartésól by Gullveig

Shrouded in shadow, yet glowing beneath,
 I came to the Aesir as a show of good will
 To teach Ygg, seeker of knowledge
 The ways I knew to heal and to kill
 They welcomed me in, watched me warily
 As I demonstrated for them my craft
 I spoke with Ygg in private at length
 How to conjure love, fear, and wrath

But even as far-seeing as my inner eye
 I did not know what would come to be
 Ygg ordered that I should die
 For I was too dangerous to set free

They came with weapons I broke in two
 They came with wolfskins at which I sneered
 They came with magic no match for mine
 They tried to drown me in their beer
 They came with fire and burned my flesh
 I shed my skin and asked if that was all
 They set my hair afire again
 Yet I survived and burned the hall

Thrice burned, I lived yet
 With wildfire burning in my eyes
 With fury raging in my heart
 I gladly showed them their demise
 I flung fire back at those who burned
 Charred corpses fell at my feet
 A painful lesson they would learn

A deadlier foe they would never meet

My people learned of what was wrong
 And came forth to show their ire
 There was trouble with them and the Aesir before
 Now one of their own was burned with fire
 I came to try and weave frith
 By teaching what the Aesir could use
 But it was met with threat of death
 The Vanes would not stand for abuse

A war was waged, the Aesir fought
 Mistaking my people for simple men
 Mocking them as "dirt"
 Farmers, not skilled in defense
 These farmers proved in full their worth
 They brought the wall of Asgard down
 Nerthus Herself shook the Earth
 Shrieking, keening, heard all around

The battle witches threw their fetters
 The Aesir warriors were bound still
 The shrieking gave some great pain
 Others seized, and many were killed
 The Vanir rushed the wall's ruins
 And took Gladsheim's hall by force
 Ygg himself begged for mercy
 We made a whimpering babe of Thor

The fires raged, burning homes
 Looting like the Aesir had never done before
 They were surely shocked at these "simple farmers"
 Who had slain their men or made them whores
 Vengeance was mine to be had
 And all the gold I could ever wear

I thought to kill them all
But I would not act like one of theirs

The truce was made, the contract signed
I returned then to my home
To be forever reviled and maligned
The true story never known
Maybe it was meant to be
Those who were meant to know would seek
For my lore is the magic hidden within
My ways are not for the meek

I am neither evil nor good
I am both, and in between
I am the brightest gold that blinds your sight
I am darkness in which nothing is seen
I am the fullest joy of life
I am the weak despair of death
The seething way is borne of me
The fire in the blood, the breath

I am the feral queen of the wild
When the farmers still knew the hunt
I am sacred as I am defiled
Devouring all with my cunt
As you scorn me, you add to my power
As you fear me, your fear I devour
As you would ignore me, and pretend I don't exist
In your ignorance, there is my bliss

Invocation to Gullveig

Svartesól

Gullveig, Gullveig, Gullveig-Heid
Glittering in golden guile
Light the darkness, blind the eyes
Of those who would not pay the price
Gullveig, teacher of Witchcraft's art
Thrice burned, yet strong in mind and heart
Vengeance teach as the way of Wyrð
Divine justice... to know and be feared



ULLR

Ullr in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

Ullr is one of the Gods of the Northern Tradition who little is known about, and seems to attract only a handful of followers. This is what we do know about Ullr in the lore:

XXXI. "One is called Ullr, son of Sif, step-son of Thor; he is so excellent a bowman, and so swift on snowshoes, that none may contend with him. He is also fair of aspect and has the accomplishments of a warrior; it is well to call on him in single-combats.

Gylfaginning

Ullr's father is unnamed. Rydberg (whose theories are not generally accepted) think Ullr and Idunna are siblings and the offspring of Ivaldi, one of the elves. It is my personal gnosis that Sif is one of the Vanir, and that Ullr is Njord's cousin and blood-brother. Ullr has many Vanic attributes.

This verse in the Prose Edda deals with Ullr's role as a warrior, specifically that of single-combat dueling. As a Vanir Deity, Ullr would be along the same warrior current as Njord and Frey who are skilled but more defensive than offensive-aggressive. Any medieval martial artist worth their salt knows there are rules for single-combat dueling, which would fit into that Vanic current. Since it is noted that Ullr probably had a much larger cult prior to the Viking/Lore Era, when much of His information was lost (example: there are place-names for Ullr in Norway and Sweden, with names Ulleråker (Ullr's Field) and Ullevi (Ullr's Shrine) surviving to this day), it has been suspected by a few that the cult of Ullr may have survived under the Christian gloss of chivalry. For starters, His name means "glory" (Proto-Germanic *Wulþuz), which is often an attribute given to the Christian God. It may be that the chivalric code and seven knightly skills (riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, chess, and verse writing) were

remnants of the training of an earlier Ullr warrior cult.

How should Ullr be periphrased? By calling him Son of Sif, Stepson of Thor, God of the Snowshoe, God of the Bow, Hunting-God, God of the Shield.

Skaldskaparmal

Here Ullr's hunting nature is emphasized over the warrior nature, although the shield is mentioned. Ullr is a "civilized" hunter, which would make Him fit in better with the Vanir (primarily agricultural, with supplemental hunting) than the Jotnar (primarily hunting, more brutal/primal).

There are also some brief but tantalizing clues in the Eddas that there might indeed be an earlier cult of Ullr.

Ullr's and all the gods'
favour shall have,
whoever first shall look to the fire;
for open will the dwelling be,
to the Æsir's sons,
when the kettles are lifted off.

Griminirsmal, v. 42

Here Ullr is mentioned before "all the Gods", which suggests that Ullr has a special position of granting favor. This verse may also allude to fire-scriving, which might be part of the Ullr-cult and along the current of Freya's high-seat *seiðr* and Frey's mound-sitting *utisetá*.

"So be it with thee, Atli!
as toward Gunnar thou hast held
the oft-sworn oaths,
formerly taken -
by the southward verging sun,
and by Sigty's hill,
the secluded bed of rest,
and by Ullr's ring."

Atlakvida, v. 30

Ullr's ring is probably a reference to an oath-ring, which incidentally in Iceland was sworn on in the names of Frey and Njord (*Landnamabok* Part 4). This may, then, be another hint that Ullr is a Vane, and along the same current of Frey and Njord of Deities who can be trusted to hear and solemnize oaths taken on the ring, symbolic of the circle of life, actions and reactions.

But the gods, whose chief seat was then at Byzantium, (Asgard), seeing that Odin had tarnished the fair name of godhead by divers injuries to its majesty, thought that he ought to be removed from their society. And they had him not only ousted from the headship, but outlawed and stripped of all worship and honour at home; thinking it better that the power of their infamous president should be overthrown than that public religion should be profaned; and fearing that they might themselves be involved in the sin of another, and though guiltless be punished for the crime of the guilty. For they saw that, now the derision of their great god was brought to light, those whom they had lured to proffer them divine honours were exchanging obeisance for scorn and worship for shame; that holy rites were being accounted sacrilege, and fixed and regular ceremonies deemed so much childish raving. Fear was in their souls, death before their eyes, and one would have supposed that the fault of one was visited upon the heads of all.

So, not wishing Odin to drive public religion into exile, they exiled him and put one Oller (Wulder?) in his place, to bear the symbols not only of royalty but also of godhead, as though it had been as easy a task to create a god as a king. And though they had appointed him priest for form's sake, they endowed him actually with full distinction, that he might be seen to be the lawful heir to the dignity, and no mere deputy doing another's work. Also, to omit no circumstance of greatness, they further gave him the name of Odin, trying by the prestige of that title to be rid of the obloquy of innovation.

For nearly ten years Oller held the presidency of the divine senate; but at last the gods pitied the horrible exile of Odin, and thought that he had now been punished heavily enough; so he exchanged his foul and unsightly estate for his ancient splendour; for the lapse of time had now wiped out the brand of his earlier disgrace. Yet some were to be found who judged that he was not worthy

to approach and resume his rank, because by his stage-tricks and his assumption of a woman's work he had brought the foulest scandal on the name of the gods. Some declare that he bought back the fortune of his lost divinity with money; flattering some of the gods and mollifying some with bribes; and that at the cost of a vast sum he contrived to get back to the distinction which he had long quitted. If you ask how much he paid for them, inquire of those who have found out what is the price of a godhead. I own that to me it is but little worth.

Thus Oller was driven out from Byzantium by Odin and retired into Sweden. Here, while he was trying, as if in a new world, to repair the records of his glory, the Danes slew him. The story goes that he was such a cunning wizard that he used a certain bone, which he had marked with awful spells, wherewith to cross the seas, instead of a vessel; and that by this bone he passed over the waters that barred his way as quickly as by rowing.

The History of Saxo Grammaticus, Book Three

While I do not like the euhemerized "Gods are really humans" worldview of the Christian author Saxo Grammaticus, this does give an account of Ullr ruling Odin for ten years while Odin is away. It would be probable that this "substitute Kingship" would be best given to a Vanir, particularly after the Aesir had been at war with the Vanir and traded sides.

At the end of this account Odin drives Ullr out of (most probably) Asgard and Ullr goes to Sweden, which is notable for being Frey's country, and much more Vanic-oriented than other parts of Scandinavia. We can assume Ullr had adapted the form of the snowshoe into something like magical water skis, which He marked with "awful spells", most likely runes. This would make Him a competent runester, and He may well teach a Vanic side of runes to those who call on Him now.

The last bit of history I have found directly relating to Ullr is the Thorsberg chape¹⁴, dating from roughly 200 C.E., which also suggests

14 The Thorsberg Chape

<http://www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/~marisal/ie/ngmc.html>

<http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/Krause2.htm>

someone related to Ullr in the context of a God-slave. The chape -- a metal piece of a scabbard -- has one of the earliest known runic inscriptions, which reads:

owlþuþewaz / niwajmariz

The first part of the first word is *owlþu*, for *wolþu-*, means "glory", "glorious one", and would directly point to Old Norse Ullr, Old English Wuldor. The second part of the first word is *-þewaz*, which means "slave, servant" (which is cognate with *theow*). When that word is put together it translates as "servant of the glorious one", or (more likely, being a scabbard) "servant/priest of Ullr".

The second word has *ni-* as a negative particle and *waj-* corresponds to "woe or ill". The next part is *-mariz* "famous" (Old English *mære*), the second word thus translates to "not ill-famous", viz. "famous, renowned" or "not of ill fame, not dishonored".

The translation of the inscription is thus either "Wolthuthewaz is well-renowned", or (more probably, taken in context) "the servant of Ullr, the renowned".

There has been at least one person who has seen the inscription and thinks the O is for "Odal" and therefore the chape can be taken to read "inherited property of Wulthuthewaz, the renowned". However that is taking one letter as a separate word, and clearly the runic letters are spelling out a phrase with a name on it, so I generally dismiss this theory.

In 2007 there was much ado made among Heathens when the town of Aspen, Colorado, threw a large party in Ullr's honor, specifically giving Him a burnt offering of old skis and snowshoes, asking Ullr for snow¹⁵. Many Heathens had a problem with non-Heathens doing this, and saying things such as "Ullr is not a snow God." I truly feel that if this had been at an Asatru moot, there would have been less contention about Ullr "not being a snow God", and the

15 <http://www.wildhunt.org/2007/12/pagan-news-of-note.html>

bottom line is that Ullr got more attention and offerings from the people of Aspen than He has probably gotten in the whole 35-odd years Heathenry has been around in the United States. Is it a coincidence that the residents of Aspen got what they asked for, with the second-highest recorded snowfall in Aspen's history¹⁶? It didn't matter to Ullr that most of these people were not Asatru -- what mattered was the intent and the deed. And this is the true nature of chivalry, to be helpful to others when they ask, not turn around and ask them 20 questions about whether or not they have the right "worldview". Ullr may not be a snow God, but He is tied to skiing, which... needs snow. I'm sure that the people of Aspen remembered Ullr as they enjoyed the snow for skiing, and this is what counts after all.

In modern times, Ullr calls few people. One would think Ullr would be a natural patron for martial artists, but while Ullr may look like a bad-ass warrior, like any good martial artist He knows several things:

--It takes training, with a lot of patience, self-discipline, and humility, to get to a place of competence with handling weapons. You do not just pick up a sword and think because you've seen *Star Wars* or *Dragonball Z* that you know everything about martial arts. It literally takes years of practice to be fit for combat.

--When one has warrior skills, there needs to be a level of responsibility that comes with it, including self-control. One should not seek to become a warrior for the domination and conquest of others, but rather the service and protection of others. Ullr has little tolerance for fools who would swing their weight around and brag about being tough or being part of a "warrior religion" when they don't know what they're talking about, and don't realize that being a warrior is far more than skill with a weapon.

Ullr may probably never have a large following, as much of His Lore has been lost, and much of His ways are not understood by moderns. He is rather big on personal responsibility, and remains a "silent God" because to come under His guidance is to work hard, and to live a cut above the rest. He doesn't mind receiving offerings, and

16 <http://www.wildhunt.org/2007/12/ullr-comes-through.html>

helping those who call to Him. But for patronage, He expects certain things that are beyond the grasp of most of us today, though there may yet be hope for future generations.

Ullr

Raistlynn

It has been written about Ullr that he is a patron of lost souls. I personally seem to find those types of people, a lot. Whether the people be outside of my apartment, online, or wherever, it's been a life long thing. It seems to be something of Ullr's that I have where I seem to 'find' lost souls, and give them a 'home' or a 'direction', something akin to letting them know they're not alone in the world. This has been the niche I've found. I'm not sure why.

Ullr has also been known to be a protector. He's a warrior, yes, but he has a very tender protective side. He's silent a lot, as befits a Hunter. I compare Ullr to Herne/Cernunnos, the Lord of the Forest. He also has the Hunter's patience, for the most part. Ullr protects those he cares about. Ullr was introduced to me through His mother Sif. I always loved Freya but could never seem to get too close to Her. Sif 'showed up' in my mind, and not long after that Ullr took an interest in me. I am always going to be grateful to Her for that.

Ullr has a reputation as a wizard. A wizard has always been my favoured class of any RPG. He also has an association of oaths being sworn to Him on rings, which is something he's been 'nagging' me to get.

A controversial topic involving Ullr seems to be whether or not He is a God of Snow. People pray to Him every year in Breckenridge, Colorado for snow for their skiing season. They have an Ullr Fest. Even though Ullr might not directly be called a Winter God, I've personally heard of nowhere you can go skiing without snow. Maybe the snow is man made, but it is *still* snow. Ullr 'nudged' me in 2005, during a snow storm.

For daily rituals, I usually light the Sandalwood incense, and I'll go outside in nature. My backyard goes up the side of a mountain. I walk around in snow when it does snow here.

Ever since I was little, I've always found some woods to go to, to be alone or think. It was a lot of comfort to be there, among the trees.

I believe Ullr has been with me since I was little as well: if you walked in my father's front door, you would see 2 bows and a set of arrows. My father taught us how to shoot a bow, as he used to hunt small game as a boy, near the woods where I live now. I've always loved to ice skate and go sledding. I've always had a fondness for sled dogs. I also grew up going 'fiddle heading'. (For those readers not familiar with them, fiddle heads are the unfurled part of a fern. They're available in Spring, usually around the first week of May. They're wild, so you have to go "hunt" for them in the woods.) Foraging for these plants would be something a hunter might do, to have something to go with his game. I've always loved Yule, and that is a time over which Ullr seems to hold sway. I especially love when it snows. I grew up with 2 tall pine trees in my father's yard and I used to climb pine trees as a kid.

As far as animals for Him go, I had a dream one night after asking Ullr for an animal for Him. I dreamed of baby Bengal tiger cubs on the side of a mountain, that I was rescuing.

One day I will be going to Alaska on a cruise ship to see the Northern Lights, that are associated with Him.

Ullr and Knighthood

Eosin

While Ullr/Wuldor is commonly recognized, He is usually only known for skiing and bowhunting. This is understandable, considering the lack of supporting lore compared to other gods. Sometimes His sphere of influence is extended to closely related things such as snow and hunting with firearms. While bowhunting and skiing were important in that time, having a Deity limited to those things would seem quite puzzling, as since it would seem strange to have Ullr take over for Odin's absence in Asgard if He were only a minor figure with limited influence. Even the name itself means "Glory". Looking at additional details, it becomes apparent that He was known for archery, hunting, warrior skill, oaths, rulership, and service--all of which are essential components of the culture of knighthood. Historical knights are best known for their role during the middle ages. But the foundations of that culture not only go back for centuries, they come from the particular cultus of Ullr.

There are several references in the lore to Ullr that refer to the same knightly skills. In the *Grimnismal*, Ullr's home translates as "Yew dales", with yew being not only a type of wood commonly used for quality bows, but the word is also used to refer to the bows themselves. In the *Atlakviða*, oaths are mentioned in reference to Ullr's ring. In the *Gylfaginning*, He is said to be unrivaled in archery and ski-running, good-looking, having all the characteristics of a warrior, and mentions that He is good to call on in duels. In the *Skaldskaparmal*, it's noted that Ullr can be called ski-god, bow-god, hunting-god and shield-god. In Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, He rules in place of Odin for ten years. There are many kennings referring to Him in skaldic poetry, such as 'Ullr of battle', 'Ullr of bowstring', 'Ullr of sword', 'Ullr of shield', 'Ullr of valkyrie', and so on. The Thorsberg Chape (the protective tip of a scabbard) bears an inscription that translates as 'servant of Ullr'. All of these characteristics, singly and together, help describe the culture of knighthood during the Dark Ages.

There are also contemporary sources that describe the skills of a knight during this time. In the text *Disciplina Clericalis* by Petrus Alphonsi (11th century writer who spent several years in England), he mentions the 'knightly' arts (as compared to the classic liberal arts), which are riding, swimming, archery, boxing, falconry, chess, and verse-making, in addition to the regular combat training. It is notable that riding, archery, and falconry are listed, as these are primary skills for hunting. Also, the boxing of the time included wrestling, and was an all-out form of single combat, similar to today's mixed martial arts competitions.

The wrestling art of Glíma was originally practiced across the Germanic and surrounding areas before the Conversion. In the classic sport form, it consists of attempting to unbalance an opponent enough either to have him step outside the ring, or else touch the ground with any part other than the feet; it is derived from an earlier, more combative form. It is a commonly practiced form of single combat from the Heathen era that was comparatively safe.

In Germanic law, trial by combat (i.e., legally sanctioned or ordered single combats) had been conducted for centuries. They were known as Holmgang in Scandinavia, and as Judicial Duels during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Even after it was no longer permitted by law, dueling between individuals continued for a long time, even up to the 20th century. The ideas of honor and personal prowess proved in single combat have been around for millenia, and they die hard.

It is evident that hunting skills were required of knights. The skills of riding, archery, and falconry each take considerable practice to do well, yet such competence was expected. It would have been practical and more convenient for a knight to have a designated huntsman do the food gathering instead, but that would not give the knight such skills. Nor would such a delegation have brought recognition and honor as both protector and provider in such a tangible way. The mindset of a hunter emphasizes focus and discipline. It could even be considered a battle of wits between the cunning of the hunter and the keen instincts of the hunted, drawing a parallel between hunting and dueling. The process of hunting usually puts a premium

on stealth, so that one's planning and conduct can make the related skills much more effective. It is also one of the most dramatic ways that one's willpower can bring a sudden, tangible, and consistent result.

The constant training in various forms of single combat, from Glíma to sword and shield, gives a high degree of individual skill. Yet military necessity alone would not account for this level of training; in regular groups and formations, with other factors being equal, greater numbers of troops substantially outweigh the skill of a single soldier in an opposing group, even if he is highly skilled. There needs to be a cultural emphasis on individual skill, which is best shown in single combat. Such an emphasis was known for centuries within Heathen areas, and Ullr was a God known to particularly embody this.

The skills and ideals of knightly culture have continued for centuries. They were best known during the middle ages, although the knights of that time were remembered more for their armor and the code of chivalry than for archery and hunting. Once the feudal system began to break down, the skills were passed on in different ways. Hunting continued on its own course, but single combat gained new venues. Judicial duels continued for a while, up to the renaissance, where they were followed by private dueling. However, during the middle ages and renaissance, there were academies of arms that were created in places like Germany (e.g. Lichtenauer, Marxbruder) and England (e.g. The Company of Maisters), where skill advancement was tested through rigorous single combats.

The practice of dueling began to lose skill as a factor with the use of firearms, although it did continue with swords, and many combat fencing instructors were hired to teach duelers. Once prior views of honor and sword skill fell out of favor, dueling declined rapidly. Yet single combat continued in another way. After the academies of arms had passed, the 'prize playing' that was done to test sword skill was replaced by 'prize fighting' sometimes with swords, but more often either with clubs or unarmed, beginning the tradition of modern boxing. Boxing has continued to today, though for over 200 years it went without use of grappling skills. With the advent of Mixed Martial Arts competitions, we see today more of the comprehensive

skill that was seen in earlier eras. One other area where individual close-combat skill is still highly valued is in commando forces. Along with rifle and other conventional training, such troops are trained in unarmed combat, knife skills, and stealth techniques reminiscent of traditional hunting methods.

The use of formal oaths for service and rulership has continued since ancient times. For a long time the use of oath rings was common, and Ullr seen in this context. After the conversion, oath rings were still being used for a while, and the use of oaths for ruling structure gave rise to the feudal era. Later on, oaths were still used for taking public office, and for court proceedings, and words said under oath still carry special legal weight to this day.

The skills of knightly culture have continued for many centuries. They included archery and hunting, sword use, and emphasis on single combat. The value of individual prowess at hunting and close combat have been emphasized continuously, even though the particular skills have evolved over time. The rise of MMA sports reflects the goal of comprehensive individual combat skill. The training of troops for stealth and close combat hearken back to an earlier way of fighting. And while modern oaths in government usually aren't considered to have the added religious weight of Wyrð on them, their use is still necessary for many essential functions. Ullr may not be known now as well as He was in the past, but the skills and values He represented are still with us today.

Ullr Invocation

Svartesól

Wuldor, wild man of the wood
Strong and silent, noble and good
Wise one, hearer of oaths, work Your weal
Warder, warrior for frith to heal
Ullr, Wuldor, ski through the snow
Of the heath, places our spirits well know
Warm ale for a friend, cold steel for a foe
Help us meet our mark, Ullr ready Your bow!



GERSEMI & HNOSSA

Gersemi and Hnossa in Lore and Experience

Svartésól

We only have two mentions in the lore of Freya having daughters:

Freya is most gently born (together with Frigg): she is wedded to the man named Ódr. Their daughter is Hnossa: she is so fair, that those things which are fair and precious are called Hnossair. Ódr went away on long journeys, and Freya weeps for him, and her tears are red gold. Freya has many names, and this is the cause thereof: that she gave herself sundry names, when she went out among unknown peoples seeking Ódr: she is called Mardöll and Hörn, Gefn, Sýr. Freya had the necklace Brísinga-men. She is also called Lady of the Vanir.

Gylfaginning

Freya alone remained of the gods, and she became on this account so celebrated that all women of distinction were called by her name, whence they now have the title Frue; so that every woman is called frue, or mistress over her property, and the wife is called the house-frue. Freya continued the blood-sacrifices. Freya had also many other names. Her husband was called Oder, and her daughters Hnossa and Gerseme. They were so very beautiful, that afterwards the most precious jewels were called by their names.

Ynglinga Saga

It is assumed that these daughters are a literary device of Snorri, and not important. However, I believe that as Beings who are named, They do have power. Whether or not They ever had a cult in antiquity, the world may never know. But I do believe these daughters of Freya are worth recognition and honor.

Freya is less of an obvious maternal type than Frigga, but here we see that Freya does have children, and is a mother to Them. I believe that the Vanic and Aesic styles of parenting are quite different.

Frigga is known as the Allmother, and it is virtually impossible to separate Her from the care of Her children (e.g. raising the sons of Odin by other women, and trying to prevent Baldur's death). Freya's daughters are mentioned only twice in the Lore, and briefly, while Freya is renowned in Her own right. It could be said that Frigga's Aesic parenting is to devote oneself fully to the lives of one's children, whereas the way of the Vanir is to step back a bit and let the children "raise themselves". Now that we live in the 21st century, with the irresponsibility of childhood being prolonged well past puberty, and Youth As King, the Aesic parenting style would be best unless those wanting to use a Vanic parenting system made major lifestyle changes (such as moving to a rural, isolated area, where children would soon come into adult chores and responsibilities).

It is through Gersemi and Hnossa that we see Freya's maternal side, raising two young women. In the times I have encountered Freya's daughters, I have always seen them in a state of perpetual youth, Gersemi being slightly older than Hnossa. (By human standards I would say Gersemi presents as 11 or 12 in human years, and Hnossa as 7 or 8.) They are children, yet They are also Deities. In Roman mythology, we see the child-Deity called Cupid, who plays pranks and spreads love among humans. It is important to note that Gods are non-corporeal and non-linear, although to relate and communicate with us They will assume appropriate guises. Gersemi and Hnossa present always in childlike form, and we can see that, much differently from other Nordic Deities, They are untouched by the burden of "being grown-up", and scarred by some kind of intense responsibility to other "grown-ups".

As They present to me, Gersemi is "older" but somewhat more "frivolous", whereas Hnossa is "younger" but more serious-minded and studious. Gersemi is chatty, and Hnossa is quiet, although Hnossa will be affectionate if She likes you. They both like to play with womens' hair, and are fond of sweets (cookies, candy) as well as pretty things -- jewelry, flowers, tea sets, dolls, fans, ornate combs. They like watching butterflies, and will accept soap bubbles blown to Them as an offering. Gersemi is also something of a tomboy (appropriate as Her name

means "smasher") and occasionally will be rambunctious, running, playing sports, and liking "yucky" things such as frogs.

I believe Gersemi and Hnossa both watch over girl-children, especially if the mother is a dedicant of Freya. They will also appear, if asked, to women who want to re-connect with their inner children, the little girl or little tomboy inside. This is important for people such as myself who were raised in dysfunctional families and never really got to be kids, and are having a second childhood now. It does not absolve one of adult behavior or responsibility, but is a "time out" as needed, to be silly and just play.

Awhile ago, I was shown that all Deities have different ways of perceiving the threads and currents of Wyrð, according to Their domain. Njord, for example, watches Wyrð in the ebb and flow of the tides, the shapes and patterns that form. Frey can look at a person and see the growth and decay in their energy field, and tell them what they need to fix in their life. One of the ways Hnossa has communicated with me is through song, singing spontaneously and often prophetically. All of the Vanir love music and singing, but Hnossa does so in the silly way that children do, and without much care for whether it "sounds right" or not. To my understanding, She would perceive Wyrð as songs that come to Her, and the arrangement of the melodies portends woe or weal, more often weal. Gersemi, conversely, enjoys stringing beads (sometimes I have seen Freya with extra necklaces and bracelets, which She says were made for Her by Gersemi), and the arrangement of stones and the number of stones are Her way of "counting" flows of Wyrð.

Those who dismiss Gersemi and Hnossa are dismissing their own child within. To Gersemi and Hnossa, the Worlds are alive and beautiful, and filled with wonderful things to see and do. They get just as much joy from a waterfall as They do from a thunderstorm as They do from a street musician. To Them, everything is exciting, and a cause for "oohs and aahs" and celebration. Many of us lose this childlike wonder as we age, and if we come into a religious belief, often go "through the motions" without feeling any awe towards the Divine and the World/s that are our gift. To connect with Gersemi and Hnossa is to

get back the awe for a little while, and to feel free to rejoice at sunshine on your face, rain on your skin, to blow dandelion puffs or roll down a grassy hill, hoot back at owls or howl back at wolves, and giggle at funny-sounding words. It is to spontaneously sing and dance, to hug, and not worry. While, as adults, we cannot stay in Their world all the time, taking back some of Their fresh perspective and joy can be good for creativity, or even for hope in tough times.

Gersemi and Hnossa Chant

Svartesól

Gersemi, Gersemi, Hnossa, Gersemi,
 Hnossa, Hnossa, Gersemi, Hnossa,
 Treasure of the Vanadis,
 Treasure of the Vanadis,
 Daughters of Freya, Vanadis fair,
 Beloved Children of the Bright Vanir,
 Hnossa and Gersemi, Freya's daughters,
 help us to play.



hOLDA

Holda in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

All of our surviving knowledge about Holda is in folklore:

There was once a widow who had two daughters - one of whom was pretty and industrious, whilst the other was ugly and idle. But she was much fonder of the ugly and idle one, because she was her own daughter; and the other, who was a step-daughter, was obliged to do all the work, and be the Cinderella of the house. Every day the poor girl had to sit by a well, in the highway, and spin and spin till her fingers bled.

Now it happened that one day the shuttle was marked with her blood, so she dipped it in the well, to wash the mark off; but it dropped out of her hand and fell to the bottom. She began to weep, and ran to her step-mother and told her of the mishap. But she scolded her sharply, and was so merciless as to say, "Since you have let the shuttle fall in, you must fetch it out again."

So the girl went back to the well, and did not know what to do: and in the sorrow of her heart she jumped into the well to get the shuttle. She lost her senses; and when she awoke and came to herself again, she was in a lovely meadow where the sun was shining and many thousands of flowers were growing. Along this meadow she went, and at last came to a baker's oven full of bread, and the bread cried out, "Oh, take me out! take me out or I shall burn; I have been baked a long time!" So she went up to it, and took out all the loaves one after another with the bread-shovel. After that she went on till she came to a tree covered with apples, which called out to her, "Oh, shake me! shake me! We apples are all ripe!" So she shook the tree till the apples fell like rain, and went on shaking till they were all down, and when she had gathered them into a heap, she went on her way.

At last she came to a little house, out of which an old woman peeped; but she had such large teeth that the girl was frightened, and was about to run away.

But the old woman called out to her, "What are you afraid of, dear child? Stay

with me; if you will do all the work in the house properly, you shall be the better for it. Only you must take care to make my bed well, and to shake it thoroughly till the feathers fly - for then there is snow on the earth. I am Mother Holle." (Thus in Hesse, when it snows, they say, "Mother Holle is making her bed.")

As the old woman spoke so kindly to her, the girl took courage and agreed to enter her service. She attended to everything to the satisfaction of her mistress, and always shook her bed so vigorously that the feathers flew about like snowflakes. So she had a pleasant life with her; never an angry word; and boiled or roast meat every day.

She stayed some time with Mother Holle, and then she became sad. At first she did not know what was the matter with her, but found at length that it was homesickness; although she was many thousand times better off here than at home, still she had a longing to be there. At last she said to the old woman, "I have a longing for home; and however well off I am down here, I cannot stay any longer; I must go up again to my own people." Mother Holle said, "I am pleased that you long for your home again, and as you have served me truly, I myself will take you up again." Thereupon she took her by the hand, and led her to a large door. The door was opened, and just as the maiden was standing beneath the doorway, a heavy shower of golden rain fell, and all the gold remained sticking to her, so that she was completely covered with it.

"You shall have that because you are so industrious," said Mother Holle; and at the same time she gave her back the shuttle which she had let fall into the well. Thereupon the door closed, and the maiden found herself up above upon the earth, not far from her mother's house.

And as she went into the yard the cock was standing by the wellside, and cried -

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
Your golden girl's come back to you!"

So she went in to her mother, and as she arrived thus covered with gold, she was well received, both by her and her sister.

The girl told all that had happened to her; and as soon as the mother heard how

she had come by so much wealth, she was very anxious to obtain the same good luck for the ugly and lazy daughter. She had to seat herself by the well and spin; and in order that her shuttle might be stained with blood, she stuck her hand into a thorn bush and pricked her finger. Then she threw her shuttle into the well, and jumped in after it.

She came, like the other, to the beautiful meadow and walked along the very same path. When she got to the oven the bread again cried, "Oh, take me out! take me out or I shall burn; I have been baked a long time!"

But the lazy thing answered, "As if I had any wish to make myself dirty?" and on she went. Soon she came to the apple-tree, which cried, "Oh, shake me! shake me! we apples are all ripe!" But she answered, "I like that! one of you might fall on my head," and so went on.

When she came to Mother Holle's house she was not afraid, for she had already heard of her big teeth, and she hired herself to her immediately.

The first day she forced herself to work diligently, and obeyed Mother Holle when she told her to do anything, for she was thinking of all the gold that she would give her. But on the second day she began to be lazy, and on the third day still more so, and then she would not get up in the morning at all. Neither did she make Mother Holle's bed as she ought, and did not shake it so as to make the feathers fly up. Mother Holle was soon tired of this, and gave her notice to leave. The lazy girl was willing enough to go, and thought that now the golden rain would come. Mother Holle led her too to the great door; but while she was standing beneath it, instead of the gold a big kettle of pitch was emptied over her. "That is the reward of your service," said Mother Holle, and shut the door.

So the lazy girl went home; but she was quite covered with pitch and the cock by the well-side, as soon as he saw her, cried out -

"Cock-a-doodle-do!
Your pitchy girl's come back to you!"

But the pitch stuck fast to her, and could not be got off as long as she lived.
Mother Holle

Grimm's Household Tales¹⁷

There was once a peasant who daily left his wife and children in the valley to take his sheep up the mountain to pasture; and as he watched his flock grazing on the mountain-side, he often had opportunity to use his cross bow and bring down a chamois, whose flesh would furnish his larder with food for many a day.

While pursuing a fine animal one day he saw it disappear behind a boulder, and when he came to the spot, he was amazed to see a doorway in the neighbouring glacier, for in the excitement of the pursuit he had climbed higher and higher, until he was now on top of the mountain, where glittered the everlasting snow. The shepherd boldly passed through the open door and soon found himself in a wonderful jewelled cave hung with stalactites, in the centre of which stood a beautiful woman clad in slivery robes, and attended by a host of lovely maidens crowned with Alpine roses. In his surprise, the shepherd sank to his knees, and as in a dream heard the queenly central figure bid him choose anything he saw to carry away with him.

Although dazzled by the glow of the precious stones around him, the shepherd's eyes constantly reverted to a little nosegay of blue flowers which the gracious apparition held in her hand, and he now timidly proffered a request that it might become his. Smiling with pleasure, Holda, for it was she, gave it to him, telling him he had chosen wisely and would live as long as the flowers did not droop and fade. Then, giving the shepherd a measure of seed which she told him to sow in his field, the goddess bade him begone; and as the thunder pealed and the earth shook, the poor man found himself out upon the mountain-side once more, and slowly wended his way home to his wife, to whom he told his adventure and showed the lovely blue flowers and the measure of seed. The woman reproached her husband bitterly for not having brought some of the precious stones which he so glowingly described, instead of the blossoms and seed; nevertheless the man proceeded to sow the latter, and found to his surprise that the measure supplied seed enough for several acres.

Soon the little green shoots began to appear, and one moonlight night, while the

17 <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/grimm/ht11.htm>

peasant was gazing upon them, as was his wont, for he felt a curious attraction to the field which he had sown, and often lingered there wondering what kind of grain would be produced, he saw a misty form hover above the field, with hands outstretched as if in blessing. At last the field blossomed, and countless little blue flowers opened their calyxes to the golden sun. When the flowers had withered and the seed was ripe, Holda came once more to teach the peasant and wife how to harvest the flax--for such it was--and from it to spin, weave, and bleach linen. As the people of the neighbourhood willingly purchased both linen and flax-seed, the peasant and his wife soon grew very rich indeed, and while he ploughed, sowed, and harvested, she spun, wove, and bleached the linen.

The man lived to a good old age, and saw his grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up around him. All this time his carefully treasured bouquet had remained fresh as when he first brought it home, but one day he saw that during the night the flowers had drooped and were dying. Knowing what this portended, and that he too must die, the peasant climbed the mountain once more to the glacier, and found again the doorway for which he had often vainly searched. He entered the icy portal, and was never seen or heard of again, for, according to the legend, the goddess took him under her care, and bade him live in her cave, where his every wish was gratified.

Holda and the Gift of Flax

Source : A German tale quoted here from "Myths of the Norsemen" by H.A. Guerber.¹⁸

In popular legends and nursery-tales, Frau Holda (Hulda, Holle, Hulle, Frau Holl) appears as a superior being, who manifests a kind and helpful disposition towards men, and is never cross except when she notices disorder in household affairs. None of the German races appear to have cherished these oral traditions so extensively as the Hessians and Thuringians (that Worms bishop was a native of Hesse). At the same time, dame Holle is found as far as the Voigtland, past the Rhön mts in northern Franconia, in the Wetterau up to the Westerwald, (34) and from Thuringia she crosses the frontier of Lower Saxony. Swabia, Switzerland, Bavaria, Austria, North Saxony and Friesland do not know her by that name.

¹⁸ found at: *Stav Academy Library* -- <http://www.stavacademy.co.uk/mimir/>

From what traditions has still preserved for us, we gather the following characteristics. Frau Holle is represented as a being of the sky, begirdling the earth: when it snows, she is making her bed, and the feathers of it fly. She stirs up snow, as Donar does rain: the Greeks ascribe the production of snow and rain to their Zeus: so that Holda comes before us a goddess of no mean rank. The comparison of snowflakes to feathers is very old; the Scythians pronounced the regions north of them inaccessible, because they were filled with feathers. Holda then must be able to move through the air, like dame Herke.

She loves to haunt the lake and fountain; at the hour of noon she may be seen, a fair white lady, bathing in the flood and disappearing; a trait in which she resembles Nerthus. Mortals, to reach her dwelling, pass through the well; conf. the name wazzerholde.

Another point of resemblance is, that she drives about in a waggon. She has a linchpin put in it by a peasant whom she met; when he picked up the chips, they were gold. Her annual progress, which like those of Herke and Berhta, is made to fall between Christmas and Twelfth-day, when the supernatural has sway, and wild beasts like the wolf are not mentioned by their names, brings fertility to the land. Not otherwise does 'Derk with the boar,' that Frey of the Netherlands, appear to go his rounds and look after the ploughs. At the same time Holda, like Wuotan, can also ride on the winds, clothed in terror, and she, like the god, belongs to the 'wutende heer.' From this arose the fancy, that witches ride in Holla's company; it was already known to Burchard, and now in Upper Hesse and the Westerwald, Holle-riding, to ride with Holle, is equivalent to a witches' ride. Into the same 'furious host,' according to a wide-spread popular belief, were adopted the souls of infants dying unbaptized; not having been christain'd, they remained heathen, and fell to heathen gods, to Wuotan or to Hulda.

The next step is, that Hulda, instead of her divine shape, assumes the appearance of an ugly old woman, long-nosed, big-toothed, with bristling and thick-matted hair. 'He's had a jaunt with Holle,' they say of a man whose hair sticks up in tangled disorder; so children frightened with her or her equally hideous train: 'hush, there's Hulle-betz (-bruin), Hulle-popel (-bogie) coming.' Holle-peter, as well as Hersche, Harsche, Hescheklas, Ruprecht, Rupper is among the names given to the muffled servitor who goes about in Holle's train at the time of the winter solstice. In a nursery-tale she is depicted as an old

witch with long teeth; according to the difference of story, her kind and gracious aspect is exchanged for a dark and dreadful one.

Again, Holla is set before us as a spinning-wife; the cultivation of flax is assigned to her. Industrious maids she presents with spindles, and spins with reels full for them over night; a slothful spinner's distaff she sets on fire, or soils it. The girl whose spindle dropt into her fountain, she rewarded bountifully. When she enters the land at Christmas, all the distaffs are well stocked, and left standing for her; by Carnival, when she turns homeward, all spinning must be finished off, and the staffs are now kept out of her sight ; if she finds everything as it should be, she pronounces her blessing, and contrariwise her curse; the formulas 'so many hairs, so many good years!' and 'so many hairs, so many bad years!' have an oldworld sound. Apparently two things have been run into one, when we are also told, that during the 'twelve-nights' no flax must be left in the diesse , or dame Holla will come. The concealment of the implements shows at the same time the sacredness of her holiday, which ought to be a time of rest. In the Rhön mts, they do no farm-work on Hulla's Saturday, neither hoe, nor manure, nor 'drive the team afield'. In the North too, from Yule-day to New-year's day, neither wheel nor windlass must go round.

...

Of still more weight perhaps are the Norwegian and Danish folk-tales about a wood or mountain wife Hulla, Huldra, Huldre, whom they set forth, now as young and lovely, then again as old and gloomy. In a blue garment and white veil she visits the pasture-grounds of herdsmen, and mingles in the dances of men; but her shape is disfigured by a tail, which she takes great pains to conceal. Some accounts make her beautiful in front and ugly behind. She loves music and song, her lay has a doleful melody and is called huldreslaat. In the forests you see Huldra as an old woman clothed in gray, marching at the head of her flock, milkpail in hand. She is said to carry off people's unchristened infants from them. Often she appears, not alone, but as mistress or queen of the mountain-sprites, who are called huldrefolk.

In Iceland too they know of this Huldufôlk, of the Huldumenn; and here we find another point of agreement with the popular faith of Germany, namely, that by the side of our dame Holde there are also holden, i.e., friendly spirits, a silent subterranean people, of whom dame Holde, so to speak, is the princess. For this reason, if no other, it must be more correct to explain the Norse name

Hulla, Huldra from the ON. hollr [[faithful, loyal]] which is huld in Dan. and Swed., and not from the ON. hulda [[cover, veil; secrecy, hiding]] as referring to the subterranean abode of the mountain-sprites. In Swedish folk-songs I find 'huldmoder, hulda moder' said of one's real mother in the same sense as kära (dear) mother ; so that huld must have quite the meaning of our German word. It is likely that the term huldufólk was imported into the Icelandic tongue from the Danish or Norwegian. It is harder to explain the R inserted in the forms Huldra, Huldre; did it spring out of the plural form hulder (boni genii, hollar vættir)? or result from composition?

The German Holda presides over spinning and agriculture, the Norse Hulle over cattle-grazing and milking.

Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, Chapter 13, 4. Holda, Holle.

There has been some speculation about what "race" of Gods that Holda belongs to, and many who think Holda is a late (Christian) addition to the folklore of the Continent, or an earlier non-demonized form of Hela, or perhaps another face of Frija (Frigga/Freya). As you see, I have put Her in with the Vanir; I do not feel that Holda is Frija or Hela but a Goddess separate unto Herself both etymologically and by the traits listed which speak (at least to me) of having Vanic qualities:

- *stirring up snow from Her featherbed
- *connection with lakes
- *driving about in a wain (the most obvious commonality of the Vanir)
- *helping peasants, and rewarding the hard-working
- *ruler of the land-wights (nature-spirits)
- *being a psychopomp, in this case, for dead children
- *ruling over the cultivation of flax, used to make rope and clothing, a healthy food (seeds), and all around very useful
- *associated with witchcraft

That being said, Holda feels very, very old. While some Heathens have said Holda was likely a Christian-era superstition, Lotte Motz speculates Holda predates Christianity, and I am inclined to

agree. In fact, the gnosis of myself and several colleagues (Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð and Leafshimmer most notably) is that Holda may have connection to the Jotnar, at a time when the Jotun cult was giving way to the Vanic cult in prehistoric Europe. Moreover, I think Holda and Froði are brother and sister and that Holda is, by Him, the mother of Njord and Nerthus, which would give weight to the successive consanguineous marriages that preserve the fertility of the Vanir. It would truly make Her "Granny" in that case!

I find Holda can be a very helpful Goddess for those of us who have problems with "executive function" particularly in the area of organization. She can be persuaded with a nice offering (She loves home-baked cookies!), and helps cheerfully, again, if your intent is there. She seems to understand this does not equal "lazy", and sometimes people need a little extra help. Incidentally, when I think of Holda I see the face of my paternal great-grandmother, who was a jolly but no-nonsense lady, fond of cookies and very active into old age.

Holda is the Goddess who exemplifies the path of the hedgewitch, one who works with the Otherworlds to cause change in this world but serves individuals rather than a tribe. Unlike Frigga's neatness and order which is meant for hosting in Her hall, Holda's neatness and order is for "everything in its place", so magical items can be found and used properly, and put back for future use. I have traveled to Holda's home, which is a neat little cottage with herbs drying, various knickknacks that look innocent but vibrate with intensity, and I've noticed that indeed things are neat, but there is also a feeling of comfort and of home. Holda knows that it is the intent rather than "the show" that determines whether or not something is effective, and She can use that to hex as well as to heal. While Holda can be the kindly grandmother-type offering you cookies, do not underestimate Her patience and try Her temper; you may find yourself on the receiving end of something not so nice!

Holda is a good Goddess to work with for womens' mysteries, and while I am still young at the time of this writing (not yet 30), She seems sympathetic to women who want to conceive, as well as women who have a difficult time with menses and/or may probably not want to

have children. She has a close connection to the plant Mugwort, which can be used for inducing calm focused trance states as well as abortion.

In some folklore Holda is said to ride the Wild Hunt with Odin, and I believe She may have been one of the first Vanir that He was introduced to, as well as Gullveig. Holda is definitely a match for Odin between wisdom and temper. I suspect Holda collects the souls of the ones meant to go to the mounds of the Vanir in Vanaheim during the time the Hunt rides. She also collects dead children, which would include those dead by exposure (being unwanted by their families) and in modern times I see Her as taking in girls and women who were broken by their families not wanting them/not taking care of them, and teaching empowerment, even if Her discipline can at times be harsh. It seems that Holda is sympathetic to personal hardship, but still feels at the end of the day the clothes must be washed, the floors must be swept, the bread must be baked, and there is no time to contemplate regret. Indeed, when experienced with frightening teeth and shrieking cackles, Holda has no tolerance for what She deems laziness, and plenty about our convenient 21st century strikes Her as worthlessness. Even then, Holda teaches that one must nurture oneself, and one's kin, in some way, preferably with a lot of hard work and magical intent behind it.

I enjoy my visits with Holda, which includes practicing magical technique and getting "downloads" for tips with housecleaning. Holda encourages my Witchcraft practice, and hopefully as time goes on, She will gain more popularity among Witches. May She ever be hailed.

Frau Holda, Guardian of the Winter Mysteries

Leafshimmer

Yule 2007, the Green Men Circle. As we had done each year since 1999, my Circle Brothers and I were invoking Holda, Mother of the Snows, to preside over our Winter feast. The Circle had been cast; the altar, adorned with two sets of stag antlers recovered from the wild, was bright with candles against the dark green of the altarcloth. I walked sunwise slowly around the perimeter of the Circle, shaking a sleighbell rattle, calling upon Her energy with every passionate fire of my being. As the sleighbells jingle-jangled around the small warmly-lit room, the tintinnabulation of glittering ice crystals dancing in phantom spirals through the middle air seemed to grow in volume, reverberation, and white spectral fire:

Holda, Mother of the Snows...

Holda, You who ride Triumphant through the night skies over fields crackling with black ice and black frost ...

Holda, Resplendent in Your Great Sledge drawn by sacred white cats who howl secret songs to the watching Moon...

Holda, Bringer of Yuletide!

Holda, Keeper of the Winter Mysteries!

Holda, Guardian of Winter!

Holda, Mistress of the Secret Springs.

There was more, far beyond my power to recall, as I slid deeper into trance and continued to pace the circle, spellbound, the spectral music of Her bells pushing me further and further betwixt and between. There was no doubt of Her Presence among us that night. Over the years, we've come to welcome Her as a deeply-beloved Guest of Honor at our Yuletide revels, at which the Wild Huntsman also keeps Vigil.

Frau Holda, Mistress of the Snows, feels to me in my bones to be one of the very oldest, most primal of the Old Ones. The first image I

had of Her back when we first called upon Her in '99 was of a wild haired Crone who, mysteriously, also seemed young, vital and beautiful. Her aspect is a mutable one, the way the face of the Moon may seem pristine and silver at one moment, and pitted and scarred the next, as the clouds scud wildly across Her silver orb lashed by the icy winds of Winter. I saw Her in my mind as riding high above the worst frost-scoured, most hoar-lashed nights of the season, shaking the snow out as She rode onward on Her sledge, the sound of Her sleighbells shattering the night air into infinite silvery crystals. Her contact has remained a powerful part of my own turning of the Wheel of the Year. And it seems as if each year as I call upon Her and remember Her anew, She reveals a little more of Herself to me.

The name Holda in German signifies "Gracious One," "Fair One," or "Sweet Lady." (To this day the word occurs in the German equivalent of the old phrase denoting womankind, "the fair sex.") In the text by Burchard, Bishop of Worms, dated ca. 1015 and cited by Swain Wodening, we read of "a demon changed into the form of a woman whom vulgar stupidity calls Holda (or Unholda)" — the last word, meaning "the ungainly one," is likely an instance of sour clerical humor. My personal feeling about the name Holda is that it was used originally as a Kenning, or an Honorific, in the same way that the Faeries or the Sidhe are still called the Gentry, the Fair Folk, the Shining Ones and so on in many parts of the Celtic world today. This custom is often said to have arisen because the Shining Ones may be offended by being named too directly; however, the tradition of thus referring to Divine Beings only obliquely through titles or commonly accepted epithets is well known around the world, and is found in the Northern Tradition with such Names as Frey and Freya. There may also be a connection with Huldra or Huldrafolk, words that denote the Germanic equivalent of nymphs, dryads, and other spirits of the wild natural world. (See Wikipedia entry, Holda; see also entry on Huldra)

It's noteworthy that instead of being documented through texts, most of Holda's lore has been traced through the medium of tales and legends passed at hearthside from generation to generation in villages and hamlets all over certain districts of the Germanic lands and beyond.

(Motz identifies a cluster of themes specific to Frau Holle tales appearing “only in Central and Northern Germany”: see Motz, p. 157.) Holda's nature as we experience it today blurs the boundaries between Jotnar, Vanir and Aesir--suggesting just how primaeva a being she truly is. Her deep Elemental nature, Her wildness and fury and horrifying Majesty and Beauty, seem of the Giants. Her love of certain homely arts and Her secret sexual Mysteries feel innately Vanic (and some feel that Holda may somehow be an earlier form or transformation/expansion of Vanadis Freya). Her exactitude in housekeeping and spinning connect to an austere love of order that obviously resonates with Frigga. Diana Paxson sums up a theme that runs through many modern accounts of Her: “... in the folklore of Germany, Holda is most prominent as a patroness of spinsters (not unmarried women, but women who spin!)” (Paxson 1997, p. 1) (Motz also identifies Her keen interest in spinning as “the most important activity of the Goddess,” p. 154) Holda's many contradictions, Her superb strength and feral Wintry Beauty, are, again, typical of the Oldest, Deepest Gods, the ones that feel connected to the very lifeblood of the planet and call out to us from the veiled ages to live again in our lives and loins, here and now.

Holda's special connection to the gift and blessing of snow shows an area of symbiosis between Jotun and Vanic energies, in my opinion. The Wikipedia entry on Snow states:

“Snowfall can be beneficial to agriculture by serving as a thermal insulator, conserving the heat of the Earth and protecting crops from subfreezing weather. Some agricultural areas depend on an accumulation of snow during winter that will melt gradually in spring, providing water for crop growth.”

For the agricultural cycle to run smoothly, it was vital for snowfall to be timely, adequate, and neither too sparse nor too excessive. We may speculate that some of the Magickal work performed in Holda's cult may have involved petitioning or partnering with the Goddess in making the snow come at the right time and with proper abundance.

The major repository of pre-20th century oral lore relating to

Holda, apart from the work of the Brothers Grimm, is a collection by Dr Viktor Waschnitius originally published on the eve of World War I in 1914¹⁹. Waschnitius's material was surveyed in a well known article by Lotte Motz published in the academic journal *Folklore* in 1984. Motz admits to providing only a very selective summary of the Waschnitius corpus, but what she presents is sufficient to show us just how adept at Shapeshifting this Goddess has been, as She has been known by many names, forms and manifestations across a broad region of Northern and Germanic Europe.

As seems characteristic of the reawakening cults of the Old Ones, images and intimations of Holda have beckoned to us from an early age in a myriad of forms and hints and alluring seductions. As a child, I recall being fascinated with the figure of Jadis, the White Witch, in C. S. Lewis' allegorical fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Her deathly white skin, strange laughter, beguiling languid manner, vicious strength, and seductive flair for enchantment all seemed to echo Something I had known long, long ago. How ironic and how fitting if the pen of the Christian allegorist, against his own wishes, had been subverted by Ancient Craft to weave the spell of enchantment, opening a child's heart to the Pagan Mysteries of Wintertide. To go even further back to the tales our Mothers read to us when we were barely out of the cradle, it is worth noting that Holda imagery recurs in a number of Grimm's Fairy Tales (apart from the story actually about Her, of course)—such as in *Snow White* where the title character is described as having "hair black as ebony, lips red as blood, and skin white as snow." The action of this story could be read as a sort of compressed encoding of imagery central to Holda's legend—a wild flight through menacing woods, companionship of dwarves and other creatures of the "wild" realm, a beautiful Queen who becomes a hag, an apple which is at once the fruit of Life, Death, and Death-in-Life—even the crystal casket in which Snow White's "dead" body sleeps could have been a folk remembrance of Holda sleeping through the Summer in a secret fortress of ice and crystal.

¹⁹The beginnings of an online edition is available here:
<http://www.boudicca.de/waschnitius-inhalt.htm>.

Remembrances of Holda (known, according to the Waschnitius material, as the White Lady in the Harz Mountains, Hesse and some other regions) turn up elsewhere. In the Faery (Feri) Tradition transmitted by Cora and Victor Anderson, the figure of the leprous-white Lady has taken shape as a Divinity Who echoes many of the themes found in the Holda lore. The late Gwydion Pendderwen's ballad honoring Her sings:

*Nine White Maidens attend Her
Where She treads without leaving spoor ...
Now the leprous-white Lady
Leads her train of the lost,
Leads the spirits through glade
And wood and goodly fields of frost.*

There is also a glimpse of Her in Gwydion's song Return of the King, traditionally sung at the Samhain rites:

*Dark, dark is the swirling flood
Black, black is the stain of blood,
Deep slumbers the apple's bud
While low fires burn.
Winds blow where the night is chill,
Owls shriek from the highest hill,
She waits 'neath the moon until
Her lover's return.*

In Gwydion's personal mythos, the Lady's Wild Hunt was also a vigil—or an active scouring of the Land-- She kept for the return of Her Consort, destined to be the King of the New Year and to be sacrificed anew come Lammas-tide.

As I suggested above, there are definite signs afoot that Holda Herself has taken a hand in the reassertion of Her cult, and the re-definition of the special role She plays, both in embodying the energies of Winter and in guarding our Holy places from the blighting hand of

the mundane corporate "developer." I will now consider some signs of this Guidance from Her that has come to light in recent years.

Swain Wodening, in his essay "Holda and the Cult of the Witches," rightly notes that no folklore connected with this Goddess has been found in England. However, some of the best and most vividly-colored recent writing about Holda has come from the pen of one who has met Her in the old Royal Park of Greenwich, in London, a site with potent Pagan—and Queenly--associations which has been slowly "reawakening" as a significant epicenter for modern Pagan devotion. Jack Gale, in his book *Goddesses, Guardians and Groves*, a memoir of his Pagan visions and ritual work in Greenwich Park, begins his account with a rite dedicated to "Our Lady of the Snows, or the Snow Queen, as we called her," and says that the Queen, while primarily identified as Holda, also presents some attributes traditionally ascribed to Freya. In chapter three of this book, "Holda Rises," and in material presented elsewhere in his text, Gale builds up an image of the Goddess as manifesting "the awesomely strong energy of a raunchy, up-front, 'gipsy-like' woman with a luxurious shock of wild, dark hair." She describes Herself to psychic Jo Shrimpton as preferring to be seen as "the overall Goddess of the Winter season," and appears in visions "roaming snow-clad mountain tops and dwelling deep in a torch-lit cavern ... surrounded, always, by animals; not only her beloved cats but also wolves, dogs, etc." Her primary role in Gale's material is two-fold: She is a Guardian Presence watching over the sacred Land of Greenwich (especially sacred for energetic reasons that unfold elsewhere in Gale's book), and, as Queen of Wintertide, She fulfills that essentially "Wintry" role of holding up a dark mirror to aspects of the self that the Seeker may not always care to examine too closely, if at all. This latter role is hinted at in Gale's beautifully composed pathworking "The Snow Queen," based upon one of the visions he had of Her. (Her attitude to ritual as presented in this book is decidedly no-nonsense: "Leave out the formal crap; get on with it!") Her appearance in various visions as "gipsy-like," "dark and wild," and even "vaguely Asiatic" hints at connection with the mysterious contacts of Saami shamanism in old Finland. (Could there have been a Saami outpost at one time in

England—or possibly a connection via the mysterious Picts? So much of the remote past remains hidden from view—we can only wait and wonder.)

Holda's realm, and Her own Being, clearly relates to a stratum that precedes the coming of the Aesir-worshipping peoples, and I personally think She may even precede the settled agrarian folkways predominantly associated with the Vanir. Lotte Motz argues from some skilfully selected material preserved in the Walschnitius corpus that Holda (Holle, Hulda, Goda, Perchta and many other attested variants) is a Giantess. There are hints of this in the kind of natural features associated with Her: sacred trees called Frau Hullibaum, a pond remembered as Frau Holle's bathing-place, and perhaps most impressively, in Hesse a stone that had slipped out of her shoe was identified with a mountain. Motz notes:

"the race of giants who inhabit the caves and glaciers of the uncultivated wilderness ... are designated as 'masters' of some part of the countryside The women of the family [of Giants] are pictured, frequently, astride a wolf Sudden cold and gusts of snow frequently precede a meeting between giantess and human hero. The members of the race are especially active at midwinter-time ... and retained their strong association with the midwinter feast." (Motz 1984: p. 162)

Again, a corroboration of this stream of lore appears in the material gathered by Jack Gale in Greenwich Park, London. A woman named Pandora reported several visions of an immensely tall Goddess figure at the summit of Snow Hill in February. She appeared as "a towering human female as tall as a silver birch tree with a seemingly horned head," in the midst of a sudden snow squall, accompanied by blasts of icy air. Both the "towering" stature and the manifestations of "sudden cold and gusts of snow" are right out of the accounts collected a century ago by Waschnitius. And both sets of attributions seem distinctly Jotun-like. (Gale, p. 171)

Some of the Holda material recalls certain of the Faery legends collected by Evans-Wentz in his classic study *The Faery Faith in Celtic Countries*, originally published in 1910 and thus paralleling time-wise Waschnitius' collecting of Holda lore in continental Europe. Indeed,

many of the aspects of Holda's legendry are reminiscent of tales still told in the Celtic lands of the Queen of Elphame. We may note particularly the tales that depict her ruling a secret caverned realm deep within a magic mountain, and Her "wild," fearsome, and devious nature, not to mention her spontaneous acts of generosity to those who have unknowingly rendered Her aid. There is also Frau Holda's retinue of ghostly infants and children. All of this parallels such characteristic themes of Sidhe lore as wild Faery routs scouring the countryside; association with magical portals in hills and mounds; acts of equally random generosity and cruelty against mortals who happen to come across a Faery's path; secret underground kingdoms concealing stores of treasure and abundance; and, of course, the well-attested delight the Shining Ones take in snatching away pretty babies and leaving changelings in their place. As one who has known something of both these Queens, I feel that Holda relates explicitly (as has been oft repeated) to the energies and work of Wintertide, while the Queen of Elphame (some call Her Mab, Maeve or Medb) sings to me more of the Mysteries of Spring and Autumn. From the study of the lore and personal gnosis I have presented here, I can really understand why Marija Gimbutas, in her posthumously published work *The Living Goddesses* (1999), identified Holda and Her variant Names as "an ancient Germanic supreme Goddess" whose worship she regarded as going back into Neolithic times. Thus Holda is not only the White Lady; She is also the Dark Grandmother.

Motz emphasizes the dual nature of Holda and Her related Kin: She may appear as fair and lovely, even regal, "a tall and stately figure, veiled and clothed in white," or as a bent withered hag, her grizzled locks matted and wild, a "grey, wizened wight." (Motz 1984: p. 156) Some sources portray Her as alternating two guises: that of the White Lady, and the apparition of the Dark Grandmother. This duality seems to extend to the polarized extremes over which the Goddess has domain: She rewards those who practice diligence in housekeeping and the old "womanly arts," has special domain over spinning and sewing, and even takes a hand in the training and "education" of young girls. (Motz 1984, p. 155; the tale about Her preserved in the Grimm material

certainly emphasizes how “educational” the meeting with Her was for the girls of a certain family!) Yet She is just as much the fabled, feared Huntswoman of the Wild Rout, a secret, terrifying Queen who rules a hidden domain deep within the mountains. She thus has Power over both what is most inner--the rule of the household--and what is most outer--the wildwood and far icy peaks of the mountains, too far for any grazing flocks to stray. The notion of this Goddess holding a multitude of contradictory extremes within Her Being is again beautifully encapsulated in the title of Jack Gale's forthcoming book about her: *Queen of Ice and Fire*.

Surveying the lore as I have presented it here, there is a great deal to be said for the identification of Holda (and Her other guises) by Marija Gimbutas, in her posthumously published work *The Living Goddesses* (1999), as “an ancient Germanic supreme Goddess” whose worship she regarded as going back into Neolithic times. If Her Cult really does go back to the earliest times, it would explain why She seems to bear kinship to both Frigga and Freya, and why Her Domain seems to bring so many contradictory elements together into one grand spiral, one great vortex of energy spinning ceaselessly betwixt and between the great Wintry pillars of “the eternal Yuletide.”

One of the most intriguing contributions Jack Gale has made to our present-day knowledge of Holda's Mysteries is the role played by the snowflake-like Hagall Rune as a tool both wielded by the Goddess Herself and a means of communing with Her. This Rune provides a potent key to descend into Holda's Well and unlock the secret gateway into Her Inner Sanctum. One way of visualizing this Rune is to see it as a Stave standing in the midst of the Crossroads--a site associated with Wodan in the Northern lore, and with Hekate and Hermes in the Graeco-Roman diaspora. Like Wodan, Holda had a “guide of the dead” role, as we have seen with the spirits of children that gathered in Her train; the visions of Her ruling Her own realm of caverns loaded with treasure and secrets hints at a Netherworld aspect for Her, as well. Jack Gale describes Holda in one of his visions as carrying a Wand tipped with the Rune Hagall. (Gale, p. 35) British psychic Carole Young also receives a message from Holda at the end of the book describing a

dance based upon Hagall to be celebrated in Her honor: "six dancers make (and maintain) the shape of a snow crystal-like Younger Futhark Hagall rune, there is much dervish-like spinning involved; the whole rune also rotating about an axis at several points." Holda holding the Stave at the Center of the Crossroads also encapsulates how, in the Northern Tradition, the Winter Festival stands as the pivot around which the entire year revolves and renews itself. The Queen of the Snows also stands guard over the womb of the New Year. The singularity of Her Personality is the final resolution of the dualities of Life and Death embodied in the white quiet of Wintertide.

One image that came to me while working on this section about the Hagall Rune is that the six points of this Rune are reflected in Holda's pool and thus display the Twelve Nights of Yule, an illimitable energy vortex through which manifest Time and Space continually renew themselves. Holda's well and the Sacred Cauldron of Rebirth are, indeed, one and the same.

Jack Gale's book ends with a series of visions, notes for pathworkings; and one of these offers a vision of Holda as beautiful, severe yet kind Queen of Winter, enthroned in an icy cavern reached through a passageway that literally leads from the bottom of a well. The sexual energies only hinted at elsewhere in the book come to the fore here, as does Holda's true Regal status:

Huge feline creatures are sprawled on the floor around the throne, slumbering peacefully. The only constant characteristic is the incredible, dazzling whiteness of their fur. Their forms change continually; ... from those of Siberian tigers through snow leopards to gigantic, long-haired cats.

... The Queen's long, straight, dark hair falls to her shoulders, cut with a neat fringe. She wears a narrow silver headband, in the centre of which a little pentagram glistens above her forehead. Her body is wrapped up in a large cape of pure white fur. Slowly, she rises. As she stretches her cape falls to her feet revealing her to be naked beneath it, but for a large amber necklace which seems to glow like the sun. ... The strange, disconcerting whiteness of her flesh is relieved by her dark nipples and luxuriant bush of pubic hair.

A time of blessing and instruction follows, succeeded by a ritual at Snow Hill (once known as Plum Pudding Hill) in the Greenwich Park, at which Holda is invoked as the “great Lady of Winter, decked in silver and white” who is beseeched to “arise and bless this Sacred land which longs for your presence.” Words about the Saxon New Year are spoken, ending with the passionate cry: “May the Land live!”

The love we bear for Holda, Dark Grandmother of the Vanir and the energies They command, nurture, and safeguard is not just a static force--it is a call to Life and Love, to the raw, beautiful, implacable energies of the Life Force itself. For me, if that Love has broader implications beyond the scope of my own life and the lives of my own Kin, it is surely that the Sacred beauty of our green and tender Land may be reborn and renewed through the Deep Magick of the Heathen sacraments with which we choose to live our days and nights. May the Land live! And may the Dark Grandmother (who is also the White Lady) keep Her Eye carefully trained on us all. We need Her Guidance, now more than ever.

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Dame Holda

Saevör

Purple flowers of flax,
She's spinning in the cottage,
 round and round
fine fingers working hard.
When the Winter comes
 and the feathers fall,
She puts on Her coat
and goes out with Her Host.
Howling wolves through the air,
 howling wolves in the wind,
until the coming of the Light
and the blooming of the Spring.
Purple flowers of flax,
She's again spinning in the cottage.

The Old Witch's Call to Frau Holda

(as sung to Leafshimmer)

Holda, Holy, shining bright
Holda flying through the night
Hear and heed my Witch's spell
Spin out luck and spin it well!

Goddess gruesome, Goddess gay
Frost by night and snow by day
As this spell is my delight
Let our luck weave strong and bright!

In your cavern deep as Hell
Heed and hear my Witch's spell
Holda, Holy, Granny Dear
Spin our luck into New Year!



SIF

Sif in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

I admit to not connecting very much with Sif at all before I was Told to put this book together in honor of the Vanir. When that order was given, I thought it in my best interests to get to know the individual Vanir, especially when Nerthus told me the relationships would be lasting long after the book was done, as I work primarily in service of the Vanir. I didn't know what to expect of Sif; I had for years thought She was Aesir, and had never been much of a person to relate to Goddesses unless They were more warrior-like (such as Freya and Skadhi).

I found Sif to be welcoming and gracious, much as She was at Aegir's feast towards Loki, except this time not to smooth anything over, but rather as a sincere offer of friendship. One of the first things I perceived about Sif was that She, as the mother of Ullr, is very, very old and indeed one of the eldest Vanir (in my gnosis, the younger sister of Froði and Holda), yet She appears young and stunningly beautiful. She caught onto me picking this up and smiled, which led me to realize Her gift of prophecy seems to have telepathic or at least empathic qualities.

Looking at what little of Sif we have in the primary sources, we can infer Her Vanic qualities, and importance as a Goddess, worthy in Her own right rather than "just Thor's wife" or "just Ullr's mother":

Then he (Thor) went forth far and wide over the lands, and sought out every quarter of the earth, overcoming alone all berserks and giants, and one dragon, greatest of all dragons, and many beasts. In the northern half of his kingdom he found the prophetess that is called Síbil, whom we call Sif, and wedded her. The lineage of Sif cannot tell; she was fairest of all women, and her hair was like gold.

Gylfaginning, Prologue (III).

"How should Sif be phrased? By calling her Wife of Thor, Mother of Ullr, Fair-Haired Goddess, Co-Wife of Járnaxa, Mother of Thrúdr.

...

How should gold be periphrased? Thus: by calling it... Hair of Sif,
Skaldskaparsmal, XXI-XXXII.

Harbarth spake:

48. "Sif has a lover at home, | and him shouldst thou meet;
 More fitting it were | on him to put forth thy strength."

Harbarthsljoth 48

3. The word-wielder toil | for the giant worked,
 And so revenge | on the gods he sought;
 He bade Sif's mate | the kettle bring:
 "Therein for ye all | much ale shall I brew."

15. By a head was each | the shorter hewed,
 And the beasts to the fire | straight they bore;
 The husband of Sif, | ere to sleep he went,
 Alone two oxen | of Hymir's ate.

35. The father of Mothi | the rim seized firm,
 And before it stood | on the floor below;
 Up on his head | Sif's husband raised it,
 And about his heels | the handles clattered.

Hymskivitha (The Lay of Hymir)

Why is gold called Sif's Hair? Loki Laufeyarson, for mischief's sake, cut off all Sif's hair. But when Thor learned of this, he seized Loki, and would have broken every hone in him, had he not sworn to get the Black Elves to make Sif hair of gold, such that it would grow like other hair. After that, Loki went to those dwarves who are called Ivaldi's Sons; and they made the hair, and Skíðbladnir also, and the spear which became Odin's possession, and was called Gungnir. Then Loki wagered his head with the dwarf called Brokkr that Brokkr's brother Sindri could not make three other precious things equal in virtue to these. Now when they came to the smithy, Sindri laid a pigskin in the hearth and bade Brokkr blow, and did not cease work until he took out of the hearth that which

he had laid therein. But when he went out of the smithy, while the other dwarf was blowing, straightway a fly settled upon his hand and stung; yet he blew on as before, until the smith took the work out of the hearth; and it was a boar, with mane and bristles of gold. Next, he laid gold in the hearth and bade Brokkr blow and cease not from his blast until he should return. He went out; but again the fly came and settled on Brokkr's neck, and bit now half again as hard as before; yet he blew even until the smith took from the hearth that gold ring which is called Draupnir. Then Sindri laid iron in the hearth and bade him blow, saying that it would be spoiled if the blast failed. Straightway the fly settled between Brokkr's eyes and stung his eyelid, but when the blood fell into his eyes so that he could not see, then he clutched at it with his hand as swiftly as he could, -while the bellows grew flat, -and he swept the fly from him. Then the smith came thither and said that it had come near to spoiling all that was in the hearth. Then he took from the forge a hammer, put all the precious works into the hands of Brokkr his brother, and bade him go with them to Asgard and claim the wager.

Now when he and Loki brought forward the precious gifts, the Æsir sat down in the seats of judgment; and that verdict was to prevail which Odin, Thor, and Frey should render. Then Loki gave Odin the spear Gungnir, and to Thor the hair which Sif was to have, and Skíðbladnir to Frey, and told the virtues of all these things: that the spear would never stop in its thrust; the hair would grow to the flesh as soon as it came upon Sifs head; and Skíðbladnir would have a favoring breeze as soon as the sail was raised, in whatsoever direction it might go, but could be folded together like a napkin and be kept in Frey's pouch if he so desired. Then Brokkr brought forward his gifts: he gave to Odin the ring, saying that eight rings of the same weight would drop from it every ninth night; to Frey he gave the boar, saying that it could run through air and water better than any horse, and it could never become so dark with night or gloom of the Murky Regions that there should not be sufficient light where he went, such was the glow from its mane and bristles. Then he gave the hammer to Thor, and said that Thor might smite as hard as he desired, whatsoever might be before him, and the hammer would not fail; and if he threw it at anything, it would never miss, and never fly so far as not to return to his hand; and if he desired, he might keep it in his sark, it was so small; but indeed it was a flaw in the hammer that the fore-haft was somewhat short.

This was their decision: that the hammer was best of all the precious works, and in it there was the greatest defense against the Rime-Giants; and they gave

sentence, that the dwarf should have his wager. Then Loki offered to redeem his head, but the dwarf said that there was no chance of this. 'Take me, then,' quoth Loki; but when Brokkr would have laid hands on him, he was a long way off. Loki had with him those shoes with which he ran through air and over water. Then the dwarf prayed Thor to catch him, and Thor did so. Then the dwarf would have hewn off his head; but Loki said that he might have the head, but not the neck. So the dwarf took a thong and a knife, and would have bored a hole in Loki's lips and stitched his mouth together, but the knife did not cut. Then Brokkr said that it would be better if his brother's awl were there: and even as he named it, the awl was there, and pierced the lips. He stitched the lips together, and Loki ripped the thong out of the edges. That thong, with which Loki's mouth was sewn together, is called Vartari.

Skaldskaparsmal, XXXV.

Then Sif came forward and poured mead for Loki in a crystal cup, and said:

53. "Hail to thee, Loki, and take thou here
The crystal cup of old mead;
For me at least, alone of the gods,
Blameless thou knowest to be."

He took the horn, and drank therefrom:

54. "Alone thou wert if truly thou wouldst
All men so shyly shun;
But one do I know full well, methinks,
Who had thee from Hlorrithi's arms, -
(Loki the crafty in lies.)"

Lokasenna (Bellows)

24. Early it was | to evening come,
And forth was borne | the beer for the giants;
Thor alone ate an ox, | and eight salmon,
All the dainties as well | that were set for the women;
And drank Sif's mate | three tuns of mead.

The Ballad of Alvis/Alvismol

We can see from the surviving Lore that Sif is the wife of Thor and mother of His daughter Þrúðr, as well as the mother of Ullr by a previous marriage. While the lore of Sif may be scanty and even seem to be lacking, just from these small pieces of information we can infer that She must have had some importance and perhaps even Her own cultus.

Sif lives in Thor's hall in Asgard, however, She is not bound to Asgard as a hostage like Frey, Freya, and Njord. Having seen Sif and Thor interact, I again perceive the great age of Sif and Thor seems relatively young by comparison (and when you are dealing with very, very old Deities, this gets disconcerting). However, They do seem to love each other very much, and are warmly affectionate if not presenting in the same "perpetual honeymoon" way of Frey and Gerda nor the "old married couple" way of Frigga and Odin. Naturally I wanted to know how They met, and the story behind Their love, and in listening to Sif, I found out more about Her, as well.

Apparently (according to what Sif told me at times when I visited Her) Sif and Thor met and fell in love prior to the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, and so Sif left Vanaheim to live with Him. Sif accepts that Her home is in Asgard and Her place is among the Aesir, but at Her core She is still Vanic. A corresponding analogy would be that I am a New England native and moved to Southern California in 2006. I will likely be spending the rest of my life here and have come to appreciate my new home. However, while I may adapt to California culture and climate, I am still a Yankee in my core.

Indeed, there are certain aspects of Thor that seem downright Vanic - He drives a wain pulled by goats, and His hammer was used to hallow crops as well as the bride's lap in weddings. Thor has a far more "rough-and-tumble" or "down-home" attitude than the other Aesir. It seems that Sif's Vanic nature may have influenced the way Thor deals with people, albeit for the positive.

Njord can teach us peace based on His knowledge of Wyrð through the waters of life - that the tides ebb and flow and life is always changing, yet still remains constant - and Njord can also teach us

responsibility in our words and actions as it impacts our Wyrd and that of ours around us. Sif is also one who teaches peace and responsibility, but in a different way. Sif's main duty in Asgard (besides Her role as the lady of Thor's hall) is to hallow sacred spaces with flame and song²⁰. Sif is respected as a frithweaver, and seems to never have anything bad to say about anyone. This is not the same thing as letting the world walk all over you, but it does seem that Sif is a master of "taking the high road", especially when you consider that She is married to a God whose temper – and strength of force – is legendary throughout the Nine Worlds. If Sif were to speak badly of anyone, it would be giving Thor *carte blanche* to kill whoever She spoke ill of.

But also, I feel that Sif is the epitome of *noblesse oblige*, that being the attitude that if one is of a noble/ruling class, one is obligated to set an example; you cannot be nasty or treat others as being "beneath" you. Beyond the fact that Sif's husband is the Thunderer, the wielder of Mjollnir and Asgard's defender, it does not look well for Sif Herself – especially as one who is Vanir, came to Asgard of Her free will, and is raising a blended family – to be anything less than gracious. But Sif does take Her graciousness seriously, and seems to truly feel that even when others have done wrong it is better to take "the high road". Even when Sif's hair was cut off by Loki, She graciously accepted Loki's *scyld* of golden hair, and often prefers to wear the golden hair at official events, from what I have seen. She offered Loki a cup of mead at Aegir's feast even when He lashed out at the other Aesir, trying to smooth things over until the very end.

Sif has been an example to me in my dealings with the public in my Pagan career. Not only can your words be used against you, but it will be your attitude towards others in general. There is a time to rant and to point out injustice, and a time to lead by example – to put the proverbial blinders on, continue to perform one's duties, and be the change you wish to see in the world. Sif is not a warrior like Freya and Skadhi. Nor is She a strategist like Frigga. Sif is a hollower, one who

20 Pathwalker's Guide to the Nine Worlds, Raven Kaldera (2006). Chapter on Asgard with information on Sif's duties can be found online also: <http://www.northernshamanism.org/nine/asgard.html>

makes sacred. Sif's hair is representative of the grain in the field, and burning grain was known to the Heathens of Anglo-Saxon England as a sacred rite. Burning grain is frequently found in ceremonies in my travels through Vanaheim. Sif has a duty to hallow and cannot do Her duty if She is poisoned by negative thinking. So, it is not that Sif is oblivious to things wrong in the world and needing to right those wrongs - Sif focuses Her energies on being the example, being what is right and good and holy. I am sure that Sif does not agree with one hundred percent of the attitudes, behaviors, and customs found among the Aesir in Asgard, but She is still there, and lives among Them peaceably.

Sif's name is closely cognate with the Old High German *sippe* (family unit) and the Middle English *sibbe* (relate by blood), which would suggest that She is all about the family, and in this case Hers is Thor of the Aesir, Her son Ullr of the Vanir, and Thrud who is of both Aesir and Vanir descent, as well as extended family in Vanaheim and Asgard. The most important thing, to Sif, is family and keeping it together. To have a strong family unit it is necessary to put that family first, and we can see how this would translate into our own personal *innangard*, into our kin both blood and by choice. Rather than finding fault with everyone else, it is best to find what is good where we are at.

It is my hope that someday, Sif will be more valued by the Northern Tradition, seeing Her as a Goddess worthy of worship in Her own right rather than merely "Thor's wife" or "mother of Thrud and Ullr". These things are worthy and important, yes, but She is so much more. Truly, we do not have much information about Sif, but we have some, and we have enough that we can go to Her and see what She is like for ourselves. I am glad to have met Sif, to have personally encountered Her, and to begin a working relationship with Her.

Sif Invocation

Svartesól

Sif, sybil, deep wisdom of Earth,
To holy children Your womb gave birth,
Wife well-loved by Thor, but so much more,
You are golden grain and gold coins of harvest reward.
You are the gold of the flame hallowing sacred space,
You are the gold of a smile lighting up a friendly face,
You are the gold of frith, keeping peace and grace,
We call to You, Lady Sif, to bless us in this place.



İDUNNA

Idunna in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

For a long time I thought of Idunna as Aesir, and it wasn't until I began working on this book for the Vanir, and Nerthus named those Deities thought to be Vanir by the Vanes Themselves, that I realized Idunna's connection to the Vanir. To say Idunna is Aesir is not inaccurate, and indeed She is counted among Them. But Her origins are foggy, and based on Her characteristics, and encountering Idunna Herself, I am inclined to believe She is of Vanir origin, albeit one who lives among the Aesir in Asgard, and works for Them.

One is called Bragi: he is renowned for wisdom and most of all for fluency of speech and skill with words.... "His wife is Idunn: she guards in her chest of ash those apples which the gods must taste whensoever they grow old; and then they all become young, and so it shall be even unto the Weird of the Gods." Then said Gangleri: "A very great thing, methinks, the gods entrust to the watchfulness and good faith of Idunn." Then said Hárr, laughing loudly: "'T was near being desperate once; I may be able to tell thee of it, but now thou shalt first hear more of the names of the Æsir."

Skaldskaparmal

A certain man was named Ægir, or Hlér. He dwelt on the island which is now called Hlér's Isle, and was deeply versed in black magic. He took his way to Ásgard, but the Æsir had foreknowledge of his journey; he was received with good cheer, and yet many things were done by deceit, with eye-illusions. And at evening, when it was time for drinking, Odin had swords brought into the hall, so bright that light radiated from them: and other illumination was not used while they sat at drinking. Then the Æsir came in to their banquet, and in the high-seats sat them down those twelve Æsir who were appointed to be judges; these were their names: Thor, Njördr, Frey, Týr, Heimdallr, Bragi, Víðarr, Váli, Ullr, Hœnir, Forseti, Loki; and in like manner the Ásynjur: Frigg, Freya, Gefjun, Idunn, Gerdr, Sigyn, Fulla, Nanna. It seemed glorious to Ægir to look about him in the hall: the wainscottings there were all hung with fair

shields; there was also stinging mead, copiously quaffed. The man seated next to Ægir was Bragi, and they took part together in drinking and in converse: Bragi told Ægir of many things which had come to pass among the Æsir.

He began the story at the point where three of the Æsir, Odin and Loki and Hœnir, departed from home and were wandering over mountains and wastes, and food was hard to find. But when they came down into a certain dale, they saw a herd of oxen, took one ox, and set about cooking it. Now when they thought that it must be cooked, they broke up the fire, and it was not cooked. After a while had passed, they having scattered the fire a second time, and it was not cooked, they took counsel together, asking each other what it might mean. Then they heard a voice speaking in the oak up above them, declaring that he who sat there confessed he had caused the lack of virtue in the fire. They looked thither, and there sat an eagle; and it was no small one. Then the eagle said: "If ye are willing to give me my fill of the ox, then it will cook in the fire." They assented to this. Then he let himself float down from the tree and alighted by the fire, and forthwith at the very first took unto himself the two hams of the ox, and both shoulders. Then Loki was angered, snatched up a great pole, brandished it with all his strength, and drove it at the eagle's body. The eagle plunged violently at the blow and flew up, so that the pole was fast to the eagle's back, and Loki's hands to the other end of the pole. The eagle flew at such a height that Loki's feet down below knocked against stones and rock-heaps and trees, and he thought his arms would be torn from his shoulders. He cried aloud, entreating the eagle urgently for peace; but the eagle declared that Loki should never be loosed, unless he would give him his oath to induce Idunn to come out of Ásgard with her apples. Loki assented, and being straightway loosed, went to his companions; nor for that time are any more things reported concerning their journey, until they had come home.

But at the appointed time Loki lured Idunn out of Ásgard into a certain wood, saying that he had found such apples as would seem to her of great virtue, and prayed that she would have her apples with her and compare them with these. Then Thjazi the giant came there in his eagle's plumage and took Idunn and flew away with her, off into Thrymheimr to his abode

But the Æsir became straitened at the disappearance of Idunn, and speedily they became hoary and old. Then those, Æsir took counsel together, and each asked the other what had last been known of Idunn; and the last that had been seen was that she had gone out of Ásgard with Loki. Thereupon Loki was

seized and brought to the Thing, and was threatened with death, or tortures; when he had become well frightened, he declared that he would seek after Idunn in Jötunheim, if Freya would lend him the hawk's plumage which she possessed. And when he got the hawk's plumage, he flew north into Jötunheim, and came on a certain day to the home of Thjazi the giant. Thjazi had rowed out to sea, but Idunn was at home alone: Loki turned her into the shape of a nut and grasped her in his claws and flew his utmost.

Now when Thjazi came home and missed Idunn, he took his eagle's plumage and flew after Loki, making a mighty rush of sound with his wings in his flight. But when the Æsir saw how the hawk flew with the nut, and where the eagle was flying, they went out below Ásgard and bore burdens of plane-shavings thither. As soon as the hawk flew into the citadel, he swooped down close by the castle-wall; then the Æsir struck fire to the plane-shavings. But the eagle could not stop himself when he missed the hawk: the feathers of the eagle caught fire, and straightway his flight ceased. Then the Æsir were near at hand and slew Thjazi the giant within the Gate of the Æsir, and that slaying is exceeding famous.

Now Skadi, the daughter of the giant Thjazi, took helm and birnie and all weapons of war and proceeded to Ásgard, to avenge her father. The Æsir, however, offered her reconciliation and atonement: the first article was that she should choose for herself a husband from among the Æsir and choose by the feet only, seeing no more of him. Then she saw the feet of one man, passing fair, and said: "I choose this one: in Baldr little can be loathly." But that was Njördr of Nóatún. She had this article also in her bond of reconciliation: that the Æsir must do a thing she thought they would not be able to accomplish: to make her laugh. Then Loki did this: he tied a cord to the beard of a goat, the other end being about his own genitals, and each gave way in turn, and each of the two screeched loudly; then Loki let himself fall onto Skadi's knee, and she laughed. Thereupon reconciliation was made with her on the part of the Æsir. It is so said, that Odin did this by way of atonement to Skadi: he took Thjazi's eyes and cast them up into the heavens, and made of them two stars.

Gylfaginning

Ithun spake:

16. "Well, prithee, Bragi, | his kinship weigh,
Since chosen as wish-son he was;
And speak not to Loki | such words of spite

Here within Ægir's hall."

Loki spake:

17. "Be silent, Ithun! | thou art, I say,
Of women most lustful in love,
Since thou thy washed-bright | arms didst wind
About thy brother's slayer."

Ithun spake:

18. "To Loki I speak not | with spiteful words
Here within Ægir's hall;
And Bragi I calm, | who is hot with beer,
For I wish not that fierce they should fight."

Lokasenna

How should Idunn be paraphrased? Thus: by calling her Wife of Bragi, and Keeper of the Apples; and the apples should be called Age-Elixir of the Æsir. Idunn is also called Spoil of the Giant Thjazi, according to the tale that has been told before, how he took her away from the Æsir.

Skaldskaparmal

Idunna is best known as the keeper of the apples that preserve the health and well-being of the Gods, keeping Them from becoming frail and crippled in Their old age. These are definitely "some apples", and require a lot of care to produce. Idunna sees it as Her sacred duty to grow the apples that keep the Gods healthy. She is far more reserved and even humble than the other Goddesses, preferring to work in Her orchard than preside over a great hall. She presents as a "dirty" farmgirl who is not too proud to get Her hands dirty. While Eir is the physician to the Gods, it is Idunna's apples that keep Them hale and only in occasional need of Eir's services (thus freeing Her to work for Mengloth and as a Valkyrie). However, we can see from Idunna Herself being kidnapped by Thjazi that the apples don't "work" without Idunna Herself working Her charms upon them. If you happen to be in Asgard and travel to Idunna's orchard, eating an apple will not make you immortal or super-healthy. Idunna does occasionally give apples to

humans as a sign of good will and for healing purposes, this is true, but without Her magic, they are just unusually delicious apples, maybe with slightly more *prana* than regular apples.

My UPG also tells me that Idunna is the same Goddess as Ostara/Eostre, who was celebrated as the bringer of spring, and whose customs survive in modern-day Easter, with bunny rabbits and eggs (obvious symbols of fertility, and fertility is a primary domain of the Vanir). Idunna as Eostre "cleans up" well, and I see this as the time when She transforms into a radiant, beautiful Goddess, adorned in pastels and glowing with the sunlight itself, dancing across the fields and awakening them to bloom wildflowers. The ability that She holds to infuse Her orchards with the life force energy that produces apples which keep the Aesir hale, is the same ability She uses to awaken the Earth in splendor and glory.

The Vanir all exude a certain vitality that is not even seen among the mightiest Jotun or the noblest Ase, a deep life force energy directly tied to the sea and the soil. Vanaheim is the most fertile world of the Nine, and it is on the flow of energy through Vanaheim that the other Eight Worlds receive sustenance, particularly Midgard with humans who "build bridges" to the Vanir through Their worship, and give offerings to all of the Beings of the Nine Worlds. The Vanes all manifest this vitality differently, but even in the eldest Vanir such as Froði and Holda, there is the sense that They are very healthy, strong, and truly do enjoy life. Idunna has no less of this vitality, if anything She gives Her energy to the orchard, producing the apples of life, and gives Her energy to the land itself during springtime, Her exuberant joy causing the Earth to awaken and bloom with beauty.

Beyond the obvious factor of Idunna's apples, and the customs of the Eostre celebrations, we know from the Eddas that Idunna is the wife of Bragi, the son of Odin and Gunnlod, conceived during Bolverk-Odin's "visit" to Gunnlod to get the mead of poetry (incidentally made from Kvasir, "born" from the combined spit of the Aesir and Vanir to seal Their truce). While the "lore" regarding Idunna carving runes into Bragi's tongue is actually not found in any of the primary sources, it is accepted by many as a personal gnosis of Idunna's relationship to Her

husband as muse.

Bragi clearly has poetic abilities in and of Himself, being the son of Odin and Gunnlod, conceived under the influence of the mead of poetry. However, all poets require something to compose poetry about, and the greatest poets of the ages have been inspired by a muse, from Petrarch's Laura to Dante's Beatrice, to Matilde Naruda (wife of Pablo). I see Idunna as being Bragi's muse.

The lesson of skaldcraft that Bragi teaches is that through the magic of words, stories are told, whether past history, current events, or hopes for the future. Everyone from the lowliest thrall to the highest king loves a good poem or a good song, and the skalds of old were often shown the best hospitality by kings, paid and gifted for entertaining. To weave words well is to inspire others. Not everyone is a poet, and not everyone can handle the "Divine madness" that creates poetic fire. However, for a little while, as the songs are sung and the stories told, even the most common and inarticulate people can taste a little of the poetic fire, and feel connected to something larger than themselves.

Idunna as Bragi's muse made an already good poet great, renowned through the Nine Worlds. Idunna says of Bragi that "all living things love him" (*Lokasenna* 18). It is with first flyting Bragi, a skald well-versed in this genre, that Loki's verbal attacks on the Aesir at Aegir's feast begin. Idunna does not attack Loki in turn, but tells Bragi not to speak harshly. Clearly, She would have some influence over Bragi's poetry, and indeed when He was to keep silent.

Idunna as a Vane serving the Aesir would be a natural wife for Bragi, conceived as the mead of poetry, made from Kvasir's blood, was won. The Vanes adopted into the Aesir tribe were representative of the best of Vanaheim, and the combination of the Vanic nature-cult with the Aesic "civilization"-cult would be a likely explanation for poetry as an art form and even as a class, as poetry and song celebrates beauty, whether of nature or of people. While Bragi is usually depicted as much older than Idunna, I get the sense that Idunna (rather like Sif) is in fact "older" but as with all the Vanir Goddesses, looks young for Her years. Indeed, the mystique of "the older woman" has been a subject of

erotica since time immemorial, and is perhaps a contributing factor to Bragi's muse as well.

Idunna, for all of Her brief mention in the primary sources and being a Goddess who has only been called a few both then and now, is one of the most powerful Goddesses, holding not only the magic to keep the Gods strong, but the mystery to inspire the greatest poetry. For a "dirty farmgirl" who would rather tend to the trees than rule over kingdoms, who transforms into Eostre, Goddess of spring, once a year, in beauty and radiant glory - one has to wonder just how powerful this quiet, unassuming Goddess really is. Maybe it's better that we don't know.

Idunna Chant

Svartesól

Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
 Giver of apples of gold,
 Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
 Your blessings come into our fold.
 Idunna, Ostara, Eostre,
 Colors of dawn and the spring,
 Idunna, Ostara, Eostre,
 Your beauty inspires bards to sing.
 Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
 Come to us, awaken the land,
 Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
 With the might and main held in your hands.

Idunna Ostara Eostre Idunna
 Ostara Eostre Idunna Ostara
 Eostre Idunna Ostara Eostre
 Idunna Ostara Eostre Idunna
 Eala Eostre, we hail Thee, Idunna



eir

Eir in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

Svipdag spake:

51. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the mountain on which the maid
Is lying so lovely to see?"

Fjolsvith spake:

52. "Lyfjaberg is it, and long shall it be
A joy to the sick and the sore;
For well shall grow each woman who climbs it,
Though sick full long she has lain."

Svipdag spake:

53. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What maidens are they that at Mengloth's knees
Are sitting so gladly together?"

Fjolsvith spake:

54. "Hlif is one named, Hlifthrasa another,
Thjothvara call they the third;
Bjort and Bleik, Blith and Frith,
Eir and Aurbotha."

Svipdag spake:

55. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Aid bring they to all who offerings give,
If need be found therefor?"

Fjolsvith spake:

56. "Soon aid they all who offerings give
On the holy altars high;
And if danger they see for the sons of men,
Then each from ill do they guard."

Svipdag spake:

57. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Lives there the man who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep?"

Fjolsvith spake:

58. "No man there is who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep,
Save Svipdag alone, for the sun-bright maid
Is destined his bride to be."

Fjolsvinnsmol, Bellows translation

Then said Gangleri: "Which are the Asynjur?" Hárr said: "...The third is Eir: she is the best physician."

Gylfaginning XXXV, Brodeur translation.

There are yet others, Odinn's maids, Hild and Göndul, Hlökk, Mist, Skögun, Then are listed Hrund and Eir, Hrist, Skuld. They are called Norns who shape necessity...

Skaldskaparsmal, Chapter 75

In my personal gnosis, Eir is one of the healers of Lyfja Mount, under Mengloth, *as well as* one of Frigga's handmaidens, *as well as* one of the Valkyries. I believe She is the same Eir mentioned in these three accounts. I see Her going back and forth between the three, and one of the reasons why I believe Her to be a Vane is indeed this going back and forth; as one of the Vanir, She would have "neutrality" to work both for the Aesir and among the Jotnar.

I also suspect that Eir is a Vane because of Her obvious domain of health and healing. It is said She is "the best" physician - not merely "a really good" physician, but "the best".

Eir is a Goddess who I have long felt a close connection to. For starters, the women of my bio-mother's line have traditionally worked

as nurses and midwives, and we seem to have a "knack" for knowing what's wrong and how to fix it, including the emotional component. But also, I have a connection to Eir as someone with "atypical neurology" (high-functioning autism, ADHD) as well as a few chronic physical ailments (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis). My relationship with Eir is ongoing, as opposed to only calling on Her in times of desperation.

I worked with Eir a lot from the late 90s into approximately 2002, as I was doing a lot of energy work and studying herbalism. I did lose my connection with Her for a few years due to life upheavals, and then in summer of 2007 Frey sent me to Lyfja Mount for an "annual" and I was looked over by all of the maidens of Lyfja Mount, but Eir spent a particularly long time with me. In the summer of 2008 I was sent there again for an "annual" and it was at that time where Eir insisted I take up work with Her again, both for my own self-care and as part of my clergy duties, praying for the healing of those I care about.

We can see that Eir probably revealed Herself in days of old to those with a certain inclination towards healing. We know that the medical innovations and technology, such as medications, equipment, and procedures, have only been with us rather recently in comparison to the scope of human history. I believe that Eir is a patron of those working with alternative medicine, but also more "conventional" methods. It should be said that nowadays "conventional" medicine might go a little too far, as doctors are all too quick to prescribe pills that will treat the symptoms of psychiatric and physical problems, but not address the underlying cause. It is Eir who inspires "do no harm", and if you go to Her for healing, She is not the type to prescribe and mask what is really going on. It does seem that Eir understands that sickness and injury is not just a body thing, but that mind, body, and spirit are truly connected.

...medical science in heathen times was half priestly, half magical. Experience and higher culture gave the priests a knowledge of healing powers in nature, from the sacredness of their office proceeded salutary spells, the use of remedies was backed by sacrifice, nay, great cures and the averting of pestilence could only be effected by sacrifice. Thus all through the Mid. Ages we find the Christian priests also possessors, above other men, of medicine and the art of

using it. Yet some part of the old pagan science passed into the hands of wise men and women, who by retaining superstitious rites, and misusing real remedies, incurred the reproach of sorcery. Like witchcraft, and for the same reasons, the old ways of healing fell mainly into the hands of women.

...The *luppari* (*veneficus*) has a *lupparâ* (*venefica*) to match him, the herb-man his herb-woman, *herbaria*, *pharmaceutria*. In Saxo Grammaticus 16 a maiden cures wounds, at 25 he calls *Wecha medica*; and Thorlacius in *Obs.* 4, 279 has collected other instances of women healers. Amongst our peasantry there are old women still who profess 'böten,' stroking, pouring, and charming by spells. It is remarkable that healing spells can only be handed down from women to men, or from men to women: we have seen how so ancient a worthy as Wate had learnt his art of a woman.

...

As the several diseases and plagues were ordained and sent by gods or daemons, there were also special remedies and cures that proceeded from such higher beings first of all. In the Catholic superstition of the later Middle Ages there had grown up a regular system, as to which particular saint, male or female, was to be invoked for the several pains and sorrows of almost every limb in the body.

Out of a mass of superstitious modes of healing, I select the following.

A very ancient custom was, to measure the patient, partly by way of cure, partly to ascertain if the malady were growing or abating. We might even quote the Bible under this head, 1 Kgs 17, 21. 2 Kgs 4, 34, where Elijah and Elisha measure themselves over the lifeless child, and thereby restore him to life. And the practice of measuring the limbs when handing tapers up to the altar (*Deut.* 2, 292) is worth considering, though it is supposed rather to keep away coming evils.

Pregnant women measure a wick the length of the saint's image, and tie it round their body (*F*, 31). *Wier's Arzneibuch* p. 31-3 mentions a disease called in the Treves country *nacht-grif* (brought on by the grip of a night-spirit?); to ascertain its presence, you proceed thus: draw the sick man's belt about his naked body, lengthwise and breadthwise, then take it off, and hang it on a nail with the words 'O God, I pray thee by the three virgins Margarita,

Mariamagdalen and Ursula, be pleased to vouchsafe a sign upon the sick man, if he have the nightgrip or no'; then measure again, and if the belt be shorter than before, it is a sign of the said sickness.

...Scarce a village in the Liegnitz country but has its messerin, always an old woman. When she is asked to say whether a person is in danger from consumption, she takes a thread and measures the patient, first from head to heel, then from tip to tip of the outspread arms; if his length be less than his breadth, then he is consumptive: the less the thread will measure his arms, the farther has the disease advanced; if it reaches only to the elbow, there is no hope for him. The measuring is repeated from time to time: if the thread stretches, and reaches its due length again, the danger is removed. The wise woman must never ask money for her trouble, but take what is given.

Much can be done by stroking and binding. A patient's body is commonly stroked with the hand or sleeve or the back of a knife; often a thread is also tied round the part affected, or the medicine tied on by it. Of this binding more hereafter.

In Poland, when the white folk (*biale ludzie*) torment a sick man, a bed of pease-halm is made, a sheet spread over it, and the patient laid thereon; then a person walks round him, carrying a sieve-ful of ashes on his back, letting the ashes run out, till the floor all round the bed is covered with them. The first thing in the morning they count all the lines in the ashes, and some one goes silently, greeting no one on the way, and reports the same to the wise woman, who prescribes accordingly. The spirits leave their tracks in the ashes, which are strewn as for the earth-mannikin.

The efficacy of fire and flame was proved on envenomed wounds, by burning them out; *Sæmund*. 27b already mentions '*eldr við sôttum*,' fire against sicknesses. On erysipelas they struck fire (out of flint). To insure cattle against fire, they drove them over the holy needfire.

An old cure for fever was to lay the child on the oven or the roof. If a child does not get bigger, it has the *elterlein* (elderling); push it into the baking oven a few times, and the *elterlein* will leave it. This mode of cure follows the plan of goddesses and night-wives in laying children by the flame.

A salutary process for children and cattle was to make them walk or creep

through tunnelled earth, hollow stones or a cloven tree. This either prevented or neutralized all magic, or worked homeopathically. Nurses take a new-born babe and thrust it through a hole; a child that will not learn to walk is made to crawl under blackberry vines fixed in the soil at both ends. Sheep, when sick, have to creep through the cleft of a young oak.

Perforated stones are occasionally mentioned in early records. Some are called needles' eyes, one of which stood between Hersfeld and Vacha near Friedewald; and they seem to have been placed on the former site of hollow trees, which were held in high esteem, but had died. This handseling of huntsmen and travellers went on long after all faith in the healing power had evaporated. In Gaul it seems to have kept a firmer hold, and taken a wider range.

This creeping through a gap in oak, earth or stone seemingly transferred the sickness or sorcery to the genius of the tree or soil.

From Magdeburg country I have heard the following: "Let two brothers (if twins, the better) split a cherry tree in the middle, and pull any sick child through, then bind the tree up again; as the tree heals up, so will the child."

Near Wittstock in the Altmark stood a stout gnarled oak, whose boughs had grown into and made holes in each other: the afflicted who crept through these holes recovered; all round the tree lay numbers of crutches that convalescent cripples had thrown away. In Sweden these round openings in intertwined boughs are called elf-bores, and women in labour are forced through them.

We are not always told what diseases were cured by this method; here is a passage proving that as late as the last century the English peasantry still practised it for ruptures: 'In a farmyard near the middle of Selborne (Hants) stands at this day a row of pollard-ashes, which, by the seams and long cicatrices down their sides, manifestly show that in former times they have been cleft assunder. These trees, when young and flexible, were severed and held open by wedges, while ruptured children stript naked were pushed through the apertures, under a persuasion that by such a process the poor babes would be cured of their infirmity. As soon as the operation was over, the tree in the suffering part was plastered with loam, and carefully swathed up. If the part coalesced and soldered together, as usually fell out where the feat was performed with any adroitness at all, the party was cured; but where the cleft continued to gape, the operation, it was supposed, would prove ineffectual. We

have several persons now living in the village, who in their childhood were supposed to be healed by this superstitious ceremony, derived down perhaps from our Saxon ancestors, who practised it before their conversion to Christianity. ---- At the south corner of the area near the church, there stood about twenty years ago a very old grotesque hollow pollard-ash, which for ages had been looked on with no small veneration as a shrew-ash. Now a shrew-ash is an ash whose twigs or branches, when gently applied to the limbs of cattle, will immediately relieve the pains which a beast suffers from the running of a shrewmouse over the part affected. For it is supposed that a shrewmouse is of so baneful and deleterious a nature, that wherever it creeps over a beast, be it horse, cow or sheep, the suffering animal is afflicted with cruel anguish, and threatened with the loss of the use of the limb. Against this accident, to which they were continually liable, our provident forefathers always kept a shrew-ash at hand, which, when once medicated, would maintain its virtue forever. A shrew-ash was made thus: into the body of the tree a deep hole was bored with an auger, and a poor devoted shrewmouse was thrust in alive and plugged in, no doubt with several quaint incantations long since forgotten. As the ceremonies necessary for such a consecration are no longer understood, all succession is at an end, and no such tree is known to subsist in the manor or hundred. As to that on the area, the late vicar stubbed and burnt it when he was waywarden, regardless of the remonstrances of the bystanders, who interceded in vain for its preservation.'

-Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, Chapter 36

It does happen that many herbs will treat physical conditions as well as improving mood, concentration, etc. For example, aspirin is actually made from a synthesized form of the bark of a willow tree. We would not have known that if it were not for the old-time healers using herbs and figuring out what worked and what didn't. I personally believe many of these ancient healers were spirit-taught by Mengloth and Eir, and the information has been lost to the sands of time as generally such lore was kept between the healer and their guides.

As far as remedies that might seem a little bizarre, we can see that the elder Heathens did definitely believe in the spirit world, and that the spirit world regularly intersected and overlapped with Midgard. For example: putting the child in the oven because of elves was actually an unlit cast-iron oven, and we know from old folklore as

well as recent personal gnosis that all elves/fae are strongly repelled by iron. The hollowness of stones or trees would be places that radiate great power, and often "doors" between this world and the Otherworlds. The healers of old knew these things, and we have forgotten in the name of "science". To disclose, I have been working with a shaman taught by Mengloth to help with some of my chronic conditions (both neurological and physiological) and his work has done more good for me than any medical professional I have ever seen (which would be a fair lot of them over the years).

I see Eir as being one of the more "subdued" Vanir. Since She has to work both under Frigga and Mengloth, She is generally not around Her people, and in any event carries Herself with a no-nonsense demeanor because She is very much Her job. In working with Eir I have found Her to be matter-of-fact: She asks questions, but when She gives diagnoses or advice She is not wordy in Her response, and seems to spend more time listening and observing than talking. She also communicates a good deal through touch, and I have found Her touch to radiate love and warmth and compassion. Eir is indeed a Goddess with a great reserve of compassion, but it only goes so far. She may be willing to help remedy your condition especially if there is an emergency, but you cannot go back to an unhealthy lifestyle afterwards. If you go to Her for help and then you return to abusing drugs or certain behavior patterns, and then ask Her for help a second time, She will refuse. But also, Eir is a Goddess with a very strong grip in reality. There are some conditions She can't fix, not because it's outside Her power, but because this may be something you need to live with in order for your Wyrd to work itself out. In my own life, my neurology is something that She will not "cure" or "heal", but rather has advised me with coping strategies to live with it.

It should be noted that when I work with Eir for personal healing, it is always when She is under Mengloth at Lyfja Mount. I have seen Eir in Asgard and it seems that there, She specifically heals the Gods. While one might wonder how Gods can be healed, we do know that They needed Idunna's apples to stay young and hale, and we see from the death of Baldur that Gods can indeed be killed. They are

stronger than humans, but still have Their own susceptibilities, and I believe it is Eir who checks in on Their health and treats as needed.

When Eir is in "Valkyrie mode", I believe She is there on the battlefield tending to the wounded, and will help to transition those who can't be healed. It is through this side of Eir that we know sometimes death is the ultimate healer, when a body or spirit is so broken that it must transition, rest, and eventually be recycled out again with a blank slate. I have seen some of Eir's pragmatic attitude towards death when praying to Her on behalf of others. She thinks death is just as much a part of the life cycle as living, and indeed, death is necessary. We as a society are not only too quick to "fix up" rather than treat what is wrong, but we are all terrified of death and have gone to great lengths to prevent it even at the expense of quality of life for ourselves and others. Eir does not approve of this, and indeed, praying to Eir for healing if one is "terminal" may result in a hastening of the inevitable, so work with Her at your own risk.

Ultimately, I believe working with Eir helps one to realize that connection with the Divine and the Otherworlds is very helpful to maintain proper health, and working with Her is, indeed, working. It involves action, not merely going to Her, but carrying out what She prescribes, even if She guides your mind and your hands. She is necessary for our times when we have forgotten how to be healthy in our bodies and minds and are slowly killing ourselves and each other. She is the best physician not because She tells you everything you want to hear, but because Her way is best for the whole of what you are experiencing, as well as how it relates to the whole of your world - where you live, the people you care about. The phrase *Wæs þu hál* in Anglo-Saxon literally translates as "Be thou whole". The words "healing" and "whole" are cognate. We cannot have healing unless it is total healing, and Eir helps us to remember that and begin that process of wholeness. It is good that more people now are realizing that and turning to Her, and may She ever be hailed. We need Her.

Eir Chant

Svartesól

Eala Eir, Eala Eir
Eir is laeca beohrtest
Eir wyrceþ, Eir bregdaþ, Eir hælap
Wæs þu hál, ferþu hál.

(Hail to Eir, Hail to Eir
Eir is brightest healer
Eir works, Eir weaves, Eir heals
Be you whole, health to your spirit.)



nehelennia

Nehelennia in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

We must also allude briefly to the Belgian or Frisian dea Nehalennia, about whose name several inscriptions of like import remove all doubt; but the word has also given rise to forced and unsatisfying interpretations. In other inscriptions found on the lower part of the Rhine there occurs compounds, whose termination (-nehis, -nehabus, dat. plurals fem.) seems to contain the same word that forms the first half of Nehalennia; their plural number appears to indicate nymphs rather than a goddess, yet there also hangs about them the notion of a mother.

-Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, Chapter 13

More than 160 votive altars, almost all discovered in the Dutch province of Zeeland, have been found dedicated to the Goddess Nehelennia. (There are two altars in Cologne, which was the capital of Germania Inferior.) Most of these altars were found by Dutch fishermen in the 17th and 19th centuries CE and can be dated back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE; they depict a young female figure, sitting on a throne between two columns, holding a basket of apples (or sometimes bread) on her lap; there is almost always a wolf dog at her side, and sometimes she is holding a scepter in her hands. On some of the altars, the woman is standing next to the prow of a ship.²¹

In many (but not all) cases, the votive altar was placed to show gratitude for a safe passage across the (often-treacherous) North Sea. Many of these altar stones have the Latin inscription; "Votum solvit libens merito", which is literally translated as "Prayer to loosen with good will deserving", but essentially means the one who erected the altar stone fulfilled a promise to do so after safe passage.²²

There was also a temple dedicated to Nehelennia near

21 <http://www.livius.org/ne-nn/nehalennia/nehalennia.html>

22 <http://www.geocities.com/reginheim/forgottengods.html>

Walcheren, destroyed by Christian missionaries in 694 CE; as well as near the coast to the west of the city of Domburg.

While it has been speculated by some scholars that Nehelennia may be one and the same as Nerthus, it does not sit well with me for two basic reasons: 1. the names are not cognate, 2. anyone who looked upon Nerthus' face was subject to death (often by drowning); all of the altar stones of Nehelennia have Her face visible. (I also, having encountered both Goddesses, can say They feel very different.)

Nhelennia appears to be a Germanic Goddess and not a Celtic or Roman Deity, even though there is some overlap between cultures. Obviously there is no extant folklore of Nehelennia, and we cannot definitively say to what tribe of Gods She belongs. That being said, there is a strong argument for Nehelennia as a Vanir Goddess.

-According to the personal gnosis of some who have journeyed to Vanaheim (myself included), Nehelennia does have a hall there, which is said to be "next door" to Njord's, made of branches in the shape of a cornucopia.²³

-Nhelennia is associated with ships (Frey and Njord come to mind) and food, specifically apples and bread (the domain of Idunna -- another probable Vane -- and Frey respectively), and Her domains of prosperity/abundance and protection in travel for commerce (as opposed to protection in battle) would be very apt for a Vanic Deity.

I have only encountered Nehelennia a few times in the years I have been working mostly with the Vanir. She usually appears as a young woman (in her 20s by standards of human age and appearance), but you can see that despite the appearance of youth, She is calm, poised, dignified, and wields much power and authority. Like all of the Vanir, She chooses Her words carefully, and radiates brightness: She is pleasant to be around if not necessarily "nice". She will be gracious to those who visit Her, making sure there is enough food, and no harm befalls them while in Her hall. I have had the opportunity to see Nehelennia sit on the council of Vanaheim among its leadership, and She seems to be directly related to Nerthus and Njord although the

²³ <http://www.cauldronfarm.com/nine/vanaheim.html>

exact connection is unclear (perhaps a later sibling).

In the 21st century Nehelennia can be called upon for protection in travel, especially for business: most of us do not have to cross the North Sea to earn a living, but in a post 9/11 world, many of us still fear flying, and even staying in your own town or state and going back and forth between work and home can be fraught with dangerous possibilities. Nehelennia can also be invoked for abundance, especially if one is having financial difficulties or may want to improve one's lot in life. If presented with an offering -- usually with a promise to preserve Her worship in some way, especially by building an altar and promoting Her cultus -- She seems to be eager to please; Nehelennia's desire for worship is not out of ego as humans would perceive it, but to have Her presence bring peace to the land and its people. One could conceivably make an altar stone out of concrete, making an image and inscription while the concrete is still soft, letting it harden, and then, once hard, you would periodically leave gifts there: Nehelennia also seems to enjoy offerings of food, especially fruit and ornate loaves of hearty bread, as well as fragrant herbs burned as an incense. Coins, especially gold dollars, would be very appropriate. For those who do not have the ability to make an altar stone, finding a cornucopia would be just as well, placing it on a table, and periodically dropping offerings into it. (This is what I do at home.)

Many Pagans in the Netherlands have resurrected the cultus of Nehelennia, re-creating a temple in Her honor, and holding rites in Her worship.²⁴ I think this is good, and important, and those wishing to have a special relationship with Nehelennia may offer to travel to the Netherlands as a pilgrimage, while still noting Her presence can be felt anywhere in the world, if one calls to Her. After all, She is a Goddess capable of being multiple places at once, and a Goddess involved with travel at that.

²⁴ <http://www.nehalennia-tempel.nl/>;
http://www.boniface.demon.nl/rel_2.html

Nehelennia Chant

Svartesól

Nehelennia, Nehelennia, Earth and sea
As I fain would now fare forth
Through the east, west, south, and north
I call You to watch over me
Nehelennia, Nehelennia, sea and Earth
Let all be well and all be well
And all be full and all be full
As full as Your great girth



herne

Herne in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

There is an old tale goes that Herne the Hunter,
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest,
Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner.

You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know
The superstitious idle-headed eld
Receiv'd, and did deliver to our age,
This tale of Herne the Hunter for a truth.

--The Merry Wives of Windsor

Act 4, Scene 4, William Shakespeare

It is my personal gnosis that Herne is a proto-ancestor of both the Vanir and some of the Celtic Gods (note: this does not make the Celtic Gods the same as the Vanir, just related, as it would seem these Gods were extant before Germanic and Celtic tribes were clearly defined). This is controversial and I reiterate this is a personal gnosis, yet it resonates strongly enough with me to put it in my book for the Vanir.

I believe Cernunnos and Herne are one and the same God; Cernunnos was known from both Britain and Gaul, and the name similarity is in accordance with Grimm's law. In Gaulish, the word *cernon* means "antler" or "horn"²⁵. *Cern* means "horn" in Old Irish, and the Latin *cornu* and Germanic *hurnaz* also mean "horn". The Anglo-Saxon culture itself was the Germanic Angles and Saxons blending and intermarrying with the Celtic Britons, and there was much overlap

25 Delmarre, 1987 pp. 106-107

between cultures and traditions throughout Europe into antiquity, so it is likely a horned male Deity was shared by the Germanic and Celtic tribes. The Germanic and Celtic people are close cousins, and indeed before the Indo-Europeans arrived there was no sense of Germanic or Celtic cultural identity, and more overlap than many would like to admit to.

That being said, Herne's legend is not found outside Berkshire and the Windsor Forest.²⁶ It does seem that the myth of Herne the Hunter is a folkloric leftover from an earlier cultus of Herne. As far as outside England, we know He was known to the Nordic people - the illustration on the Snake-witch picture stone of Gotland, Sweden, has been identified as being most probably Cernunnos²⁷, and the best known depiction of Cernunnos is on the Gundestrup Cauldron found in Jutland²⁸, which dates to the first century BCE, and was most likely stolen by the Germanic Cimbri tribe or another Germanic tribe inhabiting Jutland. In Birka, Sweden, we find many artifacts of foreign (non-Nordic European) items being used and appreciated by the Swedish people, and we can assume that the Gundestrup Cauldron being taken by a Germanic tribe meant it did indeed represent one of their Gods. It is therefore not outside the realm of possibility to suggest that Herne/Cernunnos would be known throughout Northern Europe.

My reasons for suspecting Herne to be a proto-Vane, besides Him telling me so, are

- He wears and/or holds a torc, which is a symbol of sacral kingship found both among the Celtic and Germanic tribes (this is where the Norse got their oath-ring from). Njord and Frey are examples of sacral kings, especially after being hostaged to the Aesir.

- He is often portrayed seated and cross-legged, a position which many scholars have interpreted as meditative or shamanic, and which would be an example of the Vanir communion with nature as a

26 <http://www.berkshirehistory.com/legends/herne01.html>

27 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cernunnos>

28 <http://www.unc.edu/celtic/catalogue/Gundestrup/kauldron.html>

source of Their power.²⁹

-Herne is associated with the stag, which is a sexually aggressive creature to say the least³⁰. But also, Herne identifies with the spirit of His prey, which is another shamanic thing to do. As the Hunter, this bloodgift would have passed on to Ullr most obviously, and to Frey in part (as Frey wields an antler as His primary weapon after giving His sword as a bride-price).

-Herne is also found with serpents, which is a symbol of death (e.g. snakebite) as well as knowledge. The cycle of hunter and hunted has much to do with death and life given from death, and indeed, this is a theme found among the Vanir (Gullveig, Frey).

While Herne is often thought of as being the same as the Horned God of the Wiccans, it should be said that Herne is not the gentle, loving consort to the Mother Goddess! Herne can be very dangerous to work with: there is the intimate knowledge of blood and death in His eyes. Plate E of the Gundestrup Cauldron Plate³¹ depicts something that could only be described as an initiation ritual: the lower half shows a line of warriors bearing spears and shields, accompanied by carnyx players. On the left side, a large figure immerses a man in a cauldron. In the upper half, heading away from the cauldron (most likely having just completed the initiation ritual), are warriors on horseback. Herne is bloodlust, the spirit of the hunt, delighting in taking prey.

To work with Herne is to be initiated, to confront the dark, devouring side of nature -- animal as well as human. The Vanir Themselves are competent warriors in Their own right, and we have established the dark current that runs through Vanir blood, of battle magic and sacrifice. While it is unclear who among the Vanir would be directly descended from Herne -- He seems to be an ancestor far back, one of the First by Vanir lore -- all of the Vanir to some extent (some more than others) carry His predatory nature.

²⁹ <http://wicca.timerift.net/gods/cernunnos.html>

³⁰ <http://www.pretanicworld.com/Animals.html>

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gundestrup_Cauldron

Queering the Hunter

Frank Muse

"Have you seen anything?" he demanded of the earl.
 'I have seen Herne the Hunter himself, or the fiend in his likeness,'
 replied Surrey.

And he briefly related the vision he had beheld."
(William Harrison Ainsworth, Windsor Castle, 1844)

In the 1970s I first encountered Herne the Hunter the way many modern pagans do: by reading Susan Cooper's novel *The Dark Is Rising*. An illustration of Herne fascinated and scared me. Who was this shirtless animal-headed man, astride a horse on a dark winter night?

As an adult, I started magically working with Herne more than 10 years ago. When I did, my feelings from childhood resurfaced. I felt drawn to him by the lure of wild winter nights, wind howling through dead trees, and an aura of mystery. He personified the magic, danger and excitement of the year's darkest time.

I was eager to learn more about this antlered god, and read everything I could find about him. I discovered he was the leader of the Wild Hunt, a herald of disaster, and a guardian of the land. However, I also felt a powerful queer sexual energy surrounding him. Was this simply the standard reaction of a gay man to divine male power, or is there something inherently man-loving about the Hunter?

Pagans widely acknowledge the sexual nature of horned gods like Herne, and other famous horned gods have loved men. For example, although Pan chases nymphs in myths and artwork, he also pursues handsome shepherds. A vase at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, known as the Pan krater, shows a goat-headed and enormously endowed Pan chasing a scantily clad shepherd. According to a well-known story, Pan taught the shepherd Daphnis to play the pipes in return for giving the god his love.

Cernunnos, another horned god, also has homoerotic aspects.

Although no myths still exist about this nameless Horned One, representations of him in ancient art show a distinctively queer god. A rough carving from Val Camonica in Northern Italy shows a large antlered Cernunnos standing in front of a nude male worshipper who has an erection. In a more polished sculpture from Rheims in France, Cernunnos sits cross-legged and chastely robed, but is flanked by Apollo and Hermes, who stand in relaxed sensuous poses with their genitals exposed. Both sons of Zeus are associated with male homosexuality.

Like Pan and Cernunnos, I learned that Herne also has a queer aspect. He was not portrayed by ancient sculptors or painters, so I looked to written sources to confirm my intuition about him. Herne is first mentioned in writing by Shakespeare in his 1597 play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. One of the characters, Mrs. Margaret Page, describes Herne as a ghost "with great ragg'd horns" who haunts an oak tree in Windsor Forest. In the play's climax, Falstaff is tricked into dressing like Herne so the titular wives can get their revenge for his bawdy ways.

Two more centuries passed before Herne's legend was written in a more complete form, when Victorian novelist William Harrison Ainsworth included it in *Windsor Castle*, his Gothic 1844 potboiler. Eric Fitch, author of *In Search of Herne the Hunter*, speculates that Ainsworth may have based his version of Herne on local oral folklore. I can't verify this, but Ainsworth's version certainly resonates today with the pagan community. Most Web sites or books that discuss Herne relate Ainsworth's story about him as if it were ancient and authentic. Even if Ainsworth concocted the story himself, it feels old. It feels true.

Ainsworth tells how Herne was a young hunter whose skill made him a favorite in the eyes of his royal employer, Richard II. While hunting one day in Windsor Forest, Richard and Herne are separated from the rest of their party, and Herne is fatally gored by a stag while defending the king. As Herne lies dying the other hunters arrive on the scene, as does Philip of Urswick, a wizard who claims he can heal Herne by tying the stag's antlers to his head. The other hunters, jealous of Herne's skill and his position with the king, convince Urswick to magically take away his hunting prowess as he revives him. Herne fully

recovers from his wound, but loses his ability to hunt. He hangs himself from an oak tree in despair, but returns from the dead to haunt Windsor Forest. The jealous hunters eventually confess, and Richard executes them.

The *Merry Wives of Windsor* is a comedy about heterosexual marriage, and Ainsworth's tale is a classic ghost story. Neither one seems to be about love between men. But Herne's queer nature can be seen in key elements of these stories. Since it is more detailed, *Windsor Castle* is particularly illuminating.

The King: Richard II

It's important that Richard II (b.1367 - d. 1400) is the monarch in the legend, because he was denounced as a homosexual by his peers. Described as being tall, beautiful and relatively unwarlike in a violent age, Richard took the throne at age 14. He later enraged many of his advisers by elevating his favorite courtier (and alleged lover) Robert De Vere, the Earl of Oxford (1362 - 1392) to ever greater levels of power and authority. The two took great joy in hunting together. Against Richard's will, De Vere was eventually exiled to France after losing a key battle.

Accusations of homosexuality were common weapons in court intrigue, but there is evidence Richard and De Vere actually were lovers. For example, although both men were married, neither had any children. After De Vere was killed in France by a boar while hunting, Richard brought his embalmed body back to England so he could kiss its hand one more time, an excessive and romantic gesture for anyone except a lover.

Herne's legend parallels the story of Richard and De Vere, with the king's favorite being killed in both legend and history. Ainsworth may have been aware of this. He briefly mentions the Earl of Oxford hunting with Richard the day Herne is killed, but he is left behind when Herne and the king chase the fatal stag. In a sense, De Vere is replaced by Herne. The king's historic lover is replaced with a legendary one.

Hunting: Beyond the Castle Walls

Although modern Americans tend to think of hunting as a macho activity, in mythology and folklore it has other connotations. Hunting takes people beyond the castle walls and village boundaries into the wilderness, where anything is possible, including same-sex love. The wild wood is full of mythic queer lovers. Artemis and her nymphs spring immediately to mind, but many queer male figures in classical mythology are also hunters, including Attis, Adonis and Narcissus. Like Herne, they are all young hunters who are killed but return from death in transcendent forms.

Mythologist Bernard Sergent claims that hunting in Greek mythology often signifies that someone has turned their back on marriage, society and heterosexual love. He also argues that many of these hunting myths reflect ancient homoerotic initiation rites found both in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

The myth of Cyparissus, a young man loved by Apollo, parallels Herne's legend in some interesting ways. One day while out hunting, Cyparissus accidentally kills a stag sacred to Diana which he was supposed to protect. In despair, he kills himself, and is transformed into a cypress tree. As in Herne's story, we see a young hunter, a powerful protector, a dead stag, suicide, and a tree.

Significantly there are no women in Herne's legend. There are no queens or ladies, no sisters or wives. The forest is a homo-erotic male world and eventually Herne, not Richard, is revealed as its true ruler.

Antlers: Triple the Power

Antlers are powerful sexual symbols, and often symbolize transgressive sex. For example, in the Middle Ages, a man whose wife

cheated on him was presented with antlers by his neighbors as a form of mockery. Cuckoldry, and the horns that signify it, are discussed frequently by the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. They also discuss Actaeon, a mythical male hunter who is transformed into a stag and killed after seeing Artemis naked.

Although *Merry Wives* is mostly about heterosexual love, there is a queer element. Towards the end of the play, the Windsor wives trick the lustful Falstaff into appearing under Herne's oak wearing antlers on his head. Small children dressed like fairies and a parson dressed like a satyr torment Falstaff for his bawdy ways. In the ensuing chaos, two male characters think they are absconding with Mistress Anne Page, a beautiful young woman, but instead have been fooled into stealing away servant boys. As the foppish Abraham Slender says, "I came yonder at Eton to marry Mistress Anne Page, and she's a great lubberly (i.e. loutish) boy." Homoeroticism always rears its head when antlers appear under Herne's oak.

In the natural world animals use their antlers as weapons, but also for sexual pleasure. According to biologist Bruce Bagehmil, antlers are highly sensitive and erogenous organs for red deer, the most common species of deer in Europe. Male deer masturbate by rubbing their antlers against trees and bushes, and often ejaculate while doing so.

Stags are often viewed as symbols of heterosexual male energy. They aren't exclusively straight, though. Red deer stags also routinely mount other stags for sex. Many other male antlered animals, like caribou and moose, rub antlers together as a form of homosexual pleasure.

By tying antlers to Herne's head, Philip of Urswick is essentially tripling Herne's sexual power. Herne is fatally wounded by the antlers as weapons, but is revived by their sexual energy. Now, rather than just bearing a human penis, he carries two additional enormous sexual organs. Their overwhelming erotic energy contribute to Herne's eventual madness, and resurrect him for his final apotheosis. Through the antlers' power Herne, a hunter, becomes Herne the Hunter, an avatar of the Wild Hunt.

Hangings: Seeds of the Mandrake

The legend's threads of sex and death culminate in a dark knot when Herne hangs himself from an oak, a tree symbolically associated with male power and sexual potency. Richard rushes into the forest after his favorite hunter, only to find his corpse hanging from the same tree where he was gored. Herne's body may also be nude, since according to some versions of the story he rips off his clothes in madness before running from the castle.

It's very likely that when Richard finds Herne's corpse, he sees the hunter's penis standing erect. Men who die by hanging often develop what is called a death erection, caused when the noose severs certain nerves in their necks. They often ejaculate as well. The death erection was well known in Europe whenever execution by hanging was practiced. It's possible that Ainsworth himself witnessed death erections, since hangings were still practiced in Victorian England.

Mandrake, that exemplary witch plant, was believed to grow from the semen of hanged criminals, and was sometimes called the Little Gallows Man. Mandrake is also sometimes known as man-root because its root resembles both a penis and a human body. Mandrake root is allegedly an aphrodisiac, a poison, and an hallucinogen. (It should never be used for any purpose because of its toxicity.) These three properties sum up the main themes in Herne's legend: sex, death, and an eerie numinous transcendence. They also sum up Herne's main aspects: homoerotic horned god, herald of the dead, and master of spirit flight. In his erotically charged transformation from human to wintry nocturnal deity, he leaves behind a physical reminder of what he has become.

More than ten years ago, I felt drawn to Herne as a gay man. Since then, in my dreams and visions he has been an ominous but protective queer presence. Have I just been projecting my own feelings onto him? No. His legend confirms my intuition that Herne is a

powerfully homoerotic god.

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Hark to the Call of the Huntsman's Horn

Leafshimmer

(for Siduri, who brought Herne back into my life when I was most in need of Him)

*"[For there is Magick to be done] in order to lift burdens grievous to be borne
in a world that has forgotten the holiness of the Great Horned One."*

--Dion Fortune, *Moon Magic*

Herne, Cerne, Cernunnos, Herian, Herla, Herlinde, Auld Hornie... The names for the Great Dark Hunter have come down from time immemorial. Even to read these names may evoke a scene, a moment, such as this:

Like a flood of shot silver, the moonlight ripples through the clustering branches of the great trees. The snow that dapples the high leafless branches of the trees sparkles with a rare gleam in the moonlit midnight, and the silence of Midwinter is deep and strangely pensive.

Then from on high the thundering blast cleaves the air ...the solemn sounding Horn... and without further warning, the malign hooting of an owl in hectic flight heralds the arrival of the Huntsman... setting the forest gloom aflame with terror and joy and ecstasy...

My earliest conscious memory of Herne the Hunter comes from the pages of a book I read in childhood (it may have been Andre Norton's *Steel Magic* in which the character appears as Huon the Hunter, Warden of the West Reaches beyond Camelot). I have a distinct impression of having "already known Who He is" the first time I thus "met" Him. He recurred periodically in other books that I read well into my teens and beyond. (I have a vague memory of Herne appearing in Michael Moorcock's little-known novel, *The War Hound and the World's*

Pain, which also featured unusual images of Lucifer and Lilith.)

Time passed, and life happened, with the usual assortment of bruises and humiliations.

Herne showed up unexpectedly, once again in a mediaeval fantasy context, when a friend had me over to her home one weekend to watch some episodes of the 1980s series *Robin of Sherwood* (this was around 1988, I think). Herne's appearances in the series are brief, and have the feel of genuine epiphanies (mediated through the the elderly village shaman who is Herne's Vessel) but the words spoken through Him rang deep and resonated through the manner in which my spiritual quest was to evolve in my thirties and beyond:

*I am Herne the Hunter ... and you are a leaf driven by the wind.
The poor, the dispossessed ... they all wait! You are their hope.
The powers of Light and Darkness are with you. So Must It Be!*

The connection to the Sacred Elements of Life, to the wild and the innate holiness of the Wildwood, the sacred silver arrow sped forth from Robin-i'-the-Hood's bow to restore Justice, the emphasis upon the balancing powers of both Darkness and Light--it was all there, encapsulated in the potent image of the Antlered God by the Holy Oak in the forest mists. Another phrase also embedded itself in my memory:

Nothing is forgotten ... nothing is ever forgotten.

Herne's appearance was a beacon in my life, showing to me that new forms of Spirituality were indeed at hand, even if the living reality of Pagan Wisdom seemed to have been burnt to ashes long ago by the flaming sword of Christian intolerance. Herne's voice lit a lamp of hope in my bosom--and gave me something to contemplate as I continued in my travels through the years that followed.

It was quite a bit later on, in my mid-forties (ca. 2003), that again through the kindness of a friend I saw the 1970 film by the Incredible String Band, *Be Glad for the Song Has no Ending*, which

includes a mystical and beautiful invocation of Herne in the context of a magickal play that seems very much in tune with the very early Neo-Pagan festivals of the period--and again shows just how potently Herne was present in the Pagan imagination of the day, inspiring and inciting a return to the Old Ways through song, artistry and story.

How to explain Herne's persistent presence in the modern Pagan imagination is as hard to define as where and how Herne came among us in the first place. At first glance, Herne might easily enough be dismissed by the more mundane-minded as both a latecomer and a lightweight in the panoply of Horned Male Deities in the Neo-Pagan Pantheon at large. After all, the first written mention of Herne occurs in a play by Shakespeare dated to the 1590s, and further lore about Herne that appears before the mid 20th century makes him out to be a guardian divinity of Windsor Forest--definitely one of the "small gods" to use a phrase popularised by Terry Pratchett. It is not until you start burrowing through the labyrinth of Herne lore assembled by Eric Fitch in his book *In Search of Herne the Hunter* (a surprisingly dense read for a book of only 165 pages), that you begin to realize just how vastly, almost illimitably, Herne's shadow stretches across the fabric of human history.

As Wild Huntsman, Herne's associations with Wodan/Odin are numerous, and have been ably documented in many other sources. When we consider that Herne and Holda have appeared together in the visionary work ("unsupported personal gnosis") of some modern day Heathens (most notably in Jack Gale's material), and that Holda has as many associations with Freya as Herne does with Wodan, we inevitably find ourselves asking if some Divine Shifting of Shape may be going on here. Rather than seeking to line up enough citations to justify grouping certain gods into one monolithic identity, I prefer to look at the different types of relationship--troth, if you will--that have been expressed in how different writers have expressed, or communicated their own specific experiences with, what I would call "the Herne current."

My own experience is that Herne the Hunter's energy is specific and intently concentrated, not vague or abstract. I don't have to go very

far "within" to feel the pull of His virile, dark, thorny energy, or glimpse the gleam of his very sharp-toothed smile in the darkness of the wildwood. In the original lore, Herne is closely associated with a massive, significant oak tree in Windsor Forest. Historical record states that in the 19th century, Queen Victoria herself took a strong interest in this tree, and even made a personal visit to the fallen tree in 1863, following which she ordered a new tree to be planted on the site. As a guardian of the royal family and a warden of the Forests of Old Albion, Herne plays a complex role in both this world and the Otherworld. As a gay male Witch, I experience Herne's strong personal relationship to the deeper, Initiatory aspects of the Old Craft--both erotically in the phallic charge of His Presence, and in a more esoteric way as the Teacher of the Male Mysteries and a guide to the Mysteries of Death and Rebirth. There is something about Herne that I find very difficult to put into words; but I know the ache of my heart when I feel the longing for the Call of His sounding Horn. He calls to me, from afar comes the musky reek of mighty oaks with their strangely rustling leaves solemn and serene in the twilight air--the secret things that may only be known deep within the wildwood, at the foot of the massively thrusting trunk of Herne's Mighty Oak.

Nigel Aldcroft Jackson, in his imaginative, visceral text *The Call of the Horned Piper*, writes:

At the start of the winter months he is Master of the Wild Hunt, and his frenzied and ghostly chase is accompanied by his primary totems of stag, hound, raven and snow goose. Old Hornie is the feasmely rough, strange god who rides out-hunting during the paradoxical periods of ritual reversal, the "time between the times." ... Intimations of his approach can perhaps be sensed in dark windswept woods in early winter, when the roar of the gale shakes the tree tops and cloud-rack scuds over the cold stars--it is then that one truly knows that he is hunting and that no living thing can ever escape the airy hosts of the Horned One. (pp. 24-29)

Kaledon Naddair, a Scottish Druid who has been active since the 1980s, shows in one of his books the energetic patterns that connect

the Celtic, Heathen, and Scandinavian lore relating to the Wild Hunt and to Herne:

The Sluagh Sidhe ('Faerie hosts in the wind') were perceived as riding furiously over hill and dale, mountain peak and forest, especially during the dark nights of Samhain and Yule. As Kernun, Herne or Odin, the leader of this wild horde can be equated with the crowned King of the Wildfolk, who wears a fine pair of stag antlers, and sometimes rides a royal stag whilst leading his Faerie hosts. This is borne out in European Folk tradition, for in the Tyrolean Alps the appearance of the Schimmelreiter ('the rider on the white horse'), the wild hunter, Herne, leader of the host was often expected during the celebration of a wedding feast (the God thus conferring his pagan blessing on the union). ... Worship of the Lord of the Forest and Mountains appears in accounts from all over the Keltic lands, Europe and Scandinavia, and from North America, where the wild huntsman was known as Heno ... (Naddair, p. 162)

The attitude of those who have known and loved Herne in a special way is expressed in this haunting invocation published by Rhiannon Rhyall in her book *West Country Wicca* (1989):

*Herne comes astriding,
On Dolmen, Tor and hill,
Sees the hunter and the hunted,
In sky and field and rill.
Herne he comes aleaping,
His kingdom hard and cold,
But all are his own ones,
The frightened, shy or bold.
Herne he does his making,
His minding and his sending,
He cares for all in this Realm,
And in the next one tending.
Death is but a doorway,
Herne is on both sides,*

*Here or there don't matter,
Old Herne with us abides.*

One of Herne's titles in *Robin of Sherwood* was "Lord of the Trees" and in my daily life I associate Him a great deal with the energy of the trees that I pass in my daily round between home and work. As I grow older, I find myself learning more and more from the trees--their beauty, their endurance, their stolid fortitude--prevailing through the most vicious storms, and the most pernicious human molestations--and when their time comes, toppling in silent, majestic dignity.

May Herne protect us all ... and those of us who know why He smiles will be cheered by His Presence, whether near or felt from afar.

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Herne's Lesson: Predator and Prey

Svartesól

So you want to be a shaman, eh? You want to be a Witch, a worldwalker, you want to wield power, power over your world, power over the beings in your world? Don't think I don't know you want power. So I ask you -- Would you know death? Would you know your own death? Would you know death all around you, the death of your foes, your prey, the death of innocent bystanders around you? Death, that's the biggest power right there.

I can show you how to hunt, how to kill. But I will transform you: like the snake is slippery, and slithers, you will change your shape, you will change your nature, starting from within, coming outward in due time. You will see into the mind of your prey, whether you wish to curse them, whether you wish to fuck them. You will become one, with the breath, the heartbeat, the thought patterns. You will smell what they smell, touch what they touch. You will know them inside and out, you will know how they move, where they move, and why they move as they do. And when you can hold the oneness no more, you will strike, sending your essence into theirs. They will fall, and you will claim their soul, their body, their mind... whatever you like. You will always carry that within you, though. If you would hunt, you must be prepared to use every part of what you would consume. This goes for people as well as animals. If you don't want someone's taint on you, don't strike them. For when you eat the flesh, when you wear the skin and use the bones, you hold their energy, and it stays with you.

I will teach you about your own predatory nature, your own dark need for sex, for death. The Vanir are all about sex and death. Orgasm itself is a little death - you should know this. But it is also taking and being taken, swallowing and devouring and spitting it back out, regardless of the parts involved. You smell the musk and you give into need.

When people want to have power, especially the power that my people had, they do not realize what they are asking for. Do you want

to be an animal? You, with your glowing boxes and ability to make heat or cold out of another box, you would not be able to survive as an animal, not without much training. I can teach you. Yes, I can teach you. I would *love* to teach you what I know. Maybe you wouldn't love it.

My torc passes down through my bloodline. It's a snake. It's a big golden snake. Just as a snake will wrap around your neck and choke the life out of you, ruling a pack of animals will do that too.

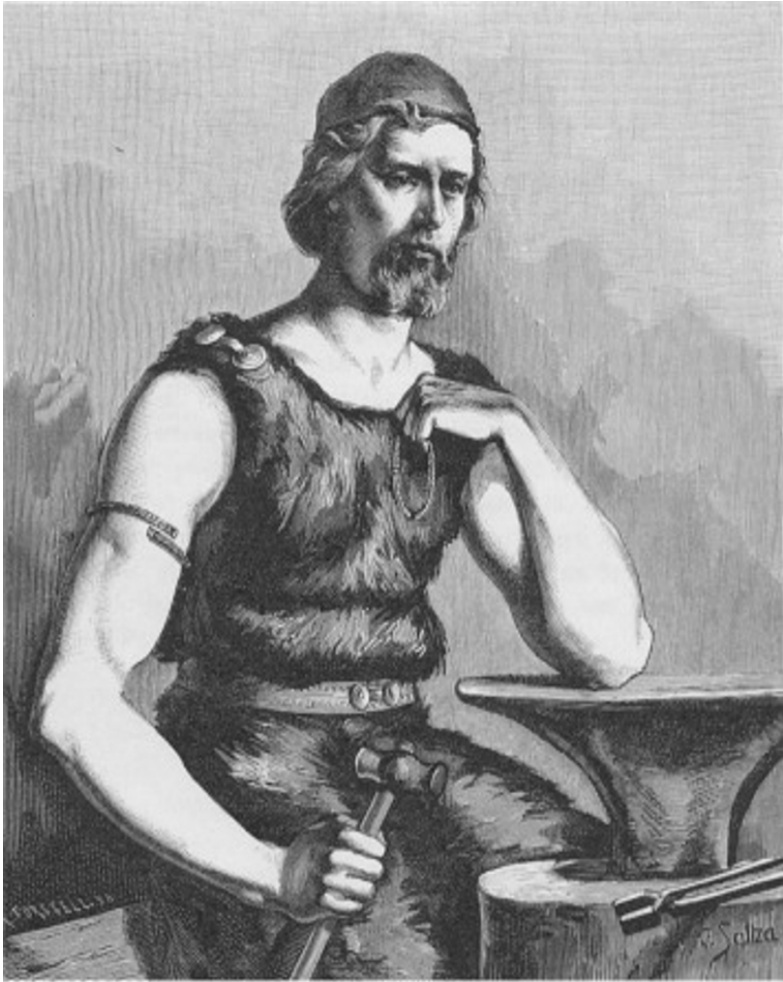
Think very carefully before you ask for power, and my kind of power at that. Your world needs it, but only a few of you at a time can survive what I would ask of you. There was a time when your race knew all of this, it was second nature, and it was embraced rather than being seen as "dark" or "evil". I don't know what's happened, but the time is coming again when more of you will need what I have. And so, I ask again, would you know death? Would you know your own death, and be made into an animal?

Herne Invocation

Svartesól

Herne, Cernunnos, Hoof and Horn,
Hunter hidden in leaf and thorn,
Green of wood and red of flesh,
You know well why "blood" is kin to "bless".
Hunter and hunted, killer and slain,
Give to us of Your might and main,
Let Your power awaken in our veins,
To run wild with You, free of our chains.

Herne, Cernunnos, Hoof and Horn,
Show the animal within me that I scorn,
may my fears be brought to light and torn,
a new creature in Your cauldron born!



WAYLAND

Wayland in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

Wayland is a smithing God and one of the few Northern Deities to have almost equal mention in English, German, and Scandinavian lore. He is mentioned in *Das Heldenbuch*, as well as in several of the Anglo-Saxon poems:

"No need then
to lament for long or lay out my body.
If the battle takes me, send back
this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned
and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.
Fate goes ever as fate must."

Beowulf, Heaney translation

... she encouraged him eagerly: 'Surely the work of Weland
will fail not any of men, of those who can hold stout Mimming.

-Waldhere

Welund tasted misery among snakes.
The stout-hearted hero endured troubles
had sorrow and longing as his companions
cruelty cold as winter - he often found woe
Once Nithad laid restraints on him,
supple sinew-bonds on the better man.
That went by; so can this.

-Deor, Pollington translation

Wayland is also seen on the Franks Casket and the Ardre image stone VIII.

The Ardre stones are a collection of ten stones with runes and images on them, dating from the 8th to 11th centuries CE. They were used as paving under the wooden floors of the church in the Ardre

parish of Gotland, Sweden, and re-discovered when the church was restored around 1900. They are now preserved in the Swedish Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm.



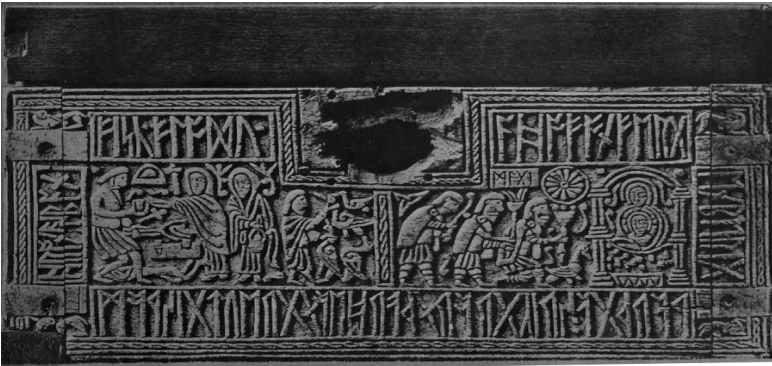
The Ardre VIII stone, showing the legend of Wayland.

The Franks Casket is a small whalebone chest, carved with narrative scenes in flat two-dimensional low-relief and with Anglo-Saxon runes. The casket is dateable to the mid-seventh century CE, reckoned to be of Northumbrian origin. The front panel of the Franks Casket depicts elements from the legend of Wayland Smith on the left panel, and the adoration of the Magi on the right. Around the panel, runs the following inscription in Anglo-Saxon runes:

hronæs ban
 fisc flodu / ahof on fergenberig
 warþ gasric grom / þær he on greut giswom

The two alliterating lines constitute the oldest piece of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the verse may be interpreted as:

"whalebone
 fish flood hove on mountain
 The ghost-king was rueful when he swam onto the grit"



The Franks Casket.

Also from Anglo-Saxon England there is a finding of cross shafts, particularly from Leeds, depicting a smithy with tools, a beheaded body and "shape-changer" (a human being in bonds), grasping a female and growing wings.

Wayland's Smithy is a Neolithic long barrow and chamber tomb site located, near the Uffington White Horse and Uffington Castle, at Ashbury in the English county of Oxfordshire (historically in Berkshire). Wayland's Smithy is one of many sites associated with Wayland. The name was seemingly applied to the site by the Saxon invaders, who reached the area approximately four thousand years after Wayland's Smithy was built. According to legend, a traveller whose horse has lost a shoe can leave the animal and the smallest silver coin (a groat) on the capstone at Wayland's Smithy. When he returns next morning he will find that his horse has been re-shod and the money gone. It is thought that the invisible smith may have been linked to this site for many centuries before the Saxons recognized him as Wayland.

Finally, we come to the Eddaic lay which tells Wayland's story: *Volundarkviða*. At the beginning of *Volundarkviða*, His lineage is noted:

There were three brothers, sons of a king of the Finns, one was called Slagfid, the second Egil, the third Völund. They went on snow-shoes and hunted wild-beasts.

Wayland's connection to the elves is noted several times in *Volundarkviða*:

10. On the bearskin sat,
his rings counted,
the Alfar's companion:
one was missing.
He thought that Hlödver's
daughter had it,
the young Alvit,
and that she was returned.

13. Then cried Nidud,
the Niarars' lord:
"Whence gottest thou, Völund!
Alfars' chief!
our gold,
in Ulfdal?"

30. "Tell me, Völund,
Alfars' chief!
of my brave boys
what is become?"

The phrase "Alfars ljoði" is translated as "Alfars' chief" although it is more accurately "Alfars' leader". Frey was given Ljossalheim as a tooth-gift, and is its lord, from the language here it's not clear that Wayland is an elf, but rather Wayland could also have a leadership position among the elves. The Vanir have a close connection to the elves, in fact the jury is out as to whether or not the Vanir and elves are related. At least one colleague of mine has said "The Vanir are to the elves what the Aesir are to the humans." During the probable era of

when the Vanir cult was dominant, there was much more interaction with nature. The bonds woven between elves and man must have been over a long period of time, enough to keep their belief alive long past the conversion era. The Vanir also seem more likely candidates for marriage to Valkyries or swan-women.

Smithing would be important to the people of the Vanic era, and from the perception of the Vanir, to construct tools which are useful as well as aesthetically pleasing. As mentioned in the *Northern Tradition Timeline*, tools were constructed since the Paleolithic era, but continually evolving in terms of function and look. Weapons were important to hunters, and the earliest farmers still used instruments albeit primitive. Kings and chieftains liked having status symbols. Smiths had a valuable role in the service of the community even before "civilization".

As I think Njord and Ullr are cousins and things seem to come in threes with the Vanir, I speculate that Wayland may be cousin to Them both, making three important Vanes of approximately the same "age", and certainly the snowshoes and archery would make a connection to Ullr.

To summarize the *Volundarkviða*, and not have to put the entire poem in the book, Wayland and His two brothers lived with three Valkyries: Ölrún, Hervör-alvitr and Hlaðguðr-svanhvít. After nine years, the Valkyries left them. Egil and Slagfiðr followed, never to return. Hervör left Wayland with a ring. Later in time, Wayland is captured in His sleep by king Niðuð (literally, "bitter-hater") in Nerike who orders Him hamstrung and imprisoned on the island of Sævarstöð, forced to forge items for the king. Hervör's ring was given to the king's daughter Bodvild, and Niðuð wore Wayland's sword.

In revenge, Wayland killed the king's sons when they visited him in secret, fashioning goblets from their skulls, jewels from their eyes, and a brooch from their teeth. He sent the goblets to the king, the jewels to the queen, and the brooch to Bodvild. When Bodvild took her ring to Him to be mended, He impregnated her and escaped on wings He had made. As to whether or not Wayland actually raped Bodvild, it only says in the tale:

26. He then brought her beer,
 that he might succeed the better,
 as on her seat
 she fell asleep.
 "Now have I
 my wrongs avenged,
 all save one
 in the wood perpetrated."

27. "I wish," said Völund,
 "that on my feet I were,
 of the use of which
 Nidud's men have deprived me."
 Laughing Völund
 rose in the air:
 Bödvild weeping
 from the isle departed.
 She mourned her lover's absence,
 and for her father's wrath.

which to me says, "She got drunk and had sex with him," not "He raped her." I think just as Odin is said to have raped Rind but that wasn't the case when you look at the verse, so it is with Wayland and Bodvild. It's notable that in the *Þiðrekssaga*, He simply asks his brother to arrange a date with her. *Þiðrekssaga* - a collection of sagas linked with 'Dietrich von Bern' and a relatively young source, dating from the thirteenth century - has a slightly different variation of the story. Here Wayland is mentioned as a human. Wayland's brother Egil is a *deus ex machina* here, who shoots birds and collects the feathers to help Wayland build a flying device. As He plans to escape He has His brother test the flying-device, and when He leaves the island, Egil is forced to shoot him down. However, it was arranged beforehand, so Egil just hits a bladder filled with blood and everyone assumes Wayland is mortally wounded. But He is not, and years later returns to join His wife and son. In this version Wayland is no rapist, and in light of my own history, I personally would not give worth to a Being that was a rapist. I know

some takes on the story are dismissive of the old religion in favor of the new, and clearly mentions of Wayland and Odin as rapists when it is not substantiated in the lore are an attempt to smear Them and the old religion.

A note should be made about Wayland's brother, Egil. Rydberg (whose theories are generally dismissed by scholars of repute) speculates Egil is one and the same as Aurvandil, husband of Gróa, and that furthermore Aurvandil is the father (by Sif) of Ullr and Idunna. I do not think this is how Wayland and Ullr are related, though.

Egil is depicted on the Franks Casket as well as the Pforzen buckle, shooting arrows against attacking troops. In *Þiðrekssaga* besides assisting in Wayland's escape, Niðuð forces Him to shoot an apple from the head of His son. He does it but there are no evil consequences, neither for the marksman nor for the king. He readies two arrows, but succeeds with the first one. Asked by the king what the second arrow was for, He states that had He killed his son with the first arrow, He would have shot the king with the second one. In both cases Egil is seen as protecting His land and family (His wife, Ailruna or Ölrún), rather than fighting for the glories of war itself, which is the trait of a Vanic warrior as opposed to an Aesic warrior. So, Egil gets a mention here, even though there is not enough information to give Him an entire chapter, it may be that He was important to the pantheon at one time and should at least be given a nod.

Wayland did not come to me and request a section in this book until it was just about done. I had finished the first draft at Yule 2008 in keeping with an oath I made at sumble during Yule 2007, and then in January 2009 some problems occurred with a major contributor causing me to pull about a hundred pages of material. It wasn't the best quality to begin with, but then I began to get suggestions from different Vanir about new things to put in the book. Wayland finally came to me as I was nearing the deadline for the final draft, wanting to get the project done and over with since I had other responsibilities to take care of. He quietly asked if I would write for Him as one of the Vanir. Wayland asked, rather than demanded, but it was in such a way that I felt compelled to do Him that honor. He has too much dignity to demand

and boss me around, the same dignity that waited until the conditions were just right to escape His imprisonment rather than many futile and failed attempts.

I had never encountered Wayland before in my drawing or beading and sculpting, but in the task of refining and honing an epic tome that is hopefully worthy of my Gods, He came and made His presence known. I am honored to have gained His notice, and rather than seeing the final revisions as aggravation, I now see it as a labor of love. I know this was meant to be, to get things "just-so". I want this book to be a work worthy of the Gods I serve, because when I am gone, these words will remain to point the way to Them. Wayland understands craft for its own sake, something well-made done right the first time. I thank Him for this lesson, but also for the lesson of triumph of the spirit.

I do think the gnosis I have received with mythology has helped my understanding of the Gods as distinct individuals who feel joy and pain just as we do, who have experienced love and loss just as we do. Mythology is very much "as above, so below". We feel less alone in being able to relate to the experiences of our Gods.

Despite being imprisoned and hamstrung, Wayland finds a way to escape as well as to exact justice on those who wronged him. Wayland suffered greatly, yet his ingenuity got the last laugh in the end. Necessity is the mother of invention, and in Wayland's trial, He invented wings to fly, symbolic of His spirit soaring and outperforming His broken body. I think the legend of Wayland has endured throughout the ages because we can look at his story and know no matter what befalls us, so long as we keep our wits about us, we can find a way through somehow, and perhaps even find greatness. Nobody gives honor to Niðuð, but Weyland's cult endures with offerings given and even a feast day reported in November around the same time as American Thanksgiving. In appreciating Weyland's skill and cleverness, we not only give Him worth, but worth that within ourselves.

Invocation to Wayland

Svartesól

Maker of swords and shields and gold rings,
broken body who soars high up on wings,
enduring trials like Your smithy's forge fire -
Wayland, inspire me to aim higher.

Imprisoned, enslaved, but not overcome -
in the end your captors' woe was undone.
Our world is wracked by hate and deeds vile,
but Wayland's strength flies us for miles.

Taker of silver and giver of shoes,
chieftain of elves and clever in ruse.
Knowing the worthiness of Your skill,
in Your name, Wayland, I work my will.

The Smith's Secret

Alex Volundsdottir

Lame Lord's toil drives home
Longing for feathers' song
Hammer in hand, yet calm
Holding with tongs bright gold
Welder of wyrd enthralled
Wily crafting most highly
Sheltered souls he's smelting,
Soldering, this torn god.



FRODÍ

Froði in Lore and Experience

Svartesól

It is fitting that in the last chapter of Deities who are Vanir by blood, we come to Froði the Fruitful.

It is my personal gnosis as well as that of several others, that Froði is one of the elder Vanes, father of Njord and grandfather of Frey and Freya (it would seem that Frey was named for Froði). It is mentioned in the *Íslendingabók* that Yngvi is the father of Njord, who in turn is the father of Frey and Freya. I personally feel that He was also known to the Danes as Froði, and probably sired Njord and Nerthus through Holda.

While this story (from certain editions of the *Poetic Edda*) is presented elsewhere as an historical account by Saxo, he also euhemerized all of the Gods, ergo I feel that it may also have been one of the few surviving pieces of explicitly Vanic lore:

(1) Now then are come to the king's high hall
the foreknowing twain, Fenja and Menja;
in bondage by Froði, Fridleif's son,
these sisters mighty as slaves are held.

(2) To moil at the mill the maids were bid,
to turn the grey stone as their task was set;
lag in their toil he would let them never,
the slaves' song he unceasing would hear.

(3) The chained ones churning ay chanted their song:
"Let us right the mill and raise the millstones."
He gave them no rest, to grind on bade them.

(4) They sang as they swung the swift-wheeling stone,
till of Froði's maids most fell asleep.

Then Menja quoth, at the quern standing:

(5) "Gold and good hap we grind for Froði,
a hoard of wealth on the wishing-mill;
he shall sit on gold, he shall sleep on down,
he shall wake to joy; well had we ground then!

(6) Here shall no one harm his neighbor,
 nor bale-thoughts brew for others' bane,
 nor swing sharp sword to smite a blow,
 though his brother's banesman bound he should find."

(7) This word first then fell from his lips:
 "Sleep shall ye not more than cock in summer,
 or longer than I a lay may sing."

(8) Menja said: "A fool wert, Froði, and frenzied of mind,
 the time thou, men's friend, us maidens did buy;
 for strength did you choose us, and sturdy looks,
 but you didn't reckon of what race we sprang."

(9) "Hardy was Hrungnir, but his sire even more;
 more thews than they old Thjatsi had.

Ithi and Aurnir are of our kin:
 are we both born to brothers of jotuns!"

(10) "Scarce had Grotti come out of grey mountain,
 from out of the earth the iron-hard slab,
 nor had mountain-maids now to turn the mill-stone,
 if we had not first found it below."

(11) "Winters nine we grew beneath the ground;
 under the mountains, we mighty playmates
 did strive to do great deeds of strength:
 boulders we budged from their bases.

(12) "Rocks we rolled out of jotun's realm:
 the fields below with their fall did shake;
 we hurled from the heights the heavy quernstone,
 the swift-rolling slab, so that men might seize it."

(13) "But since then we to Sweden fared,
 we foreknowing twain, and fought among men;
 byrnies we broke, and bucklers shattered,
 we won our way through warriors' ranks."

(14) "One king we overthrew, enthroned the other.
 To good Guthorm we granted victory;
 stern was the struggle ere Knui was struck."

(15) "A full year thus we fared among men;
 our name was known among noble heroes.
 Through linden shields sharp spears we hurled,
 drew blood from wounds, and blades reddened."

(16) Now we are come to the king's high hall,

without mercy made to turn the mill;
 mud soils our feet, frost cuts our bones;
 at the peace-quern we drudge: dreary is it here."
 (17) "The stone now let stand, my stint is done;
 I have ground my share, grant me a rest."
 Fenja said: "The stone must not stand, our stint is not done,
 before to Froði his fill we ground."
 (18) "Our hands shall hold the hard spearshafts,
 weapons gory: Awake Froði!
 Awake Froði!, if listen thou wilt
 to our olden songs, to our ancient lore."
 (19) "My eye sees fire east of the castle
 battle cries ring out, beacons are kindled!
 Hosts of foemen hither will wend
 to burn down the hall over thy head."
 (20) "No longer thou Leire shall hold,
 have rings of red gold, nor the mill of riches.
 Harder the handle, let us hold sister;
 our hands are not warm yet with warriors' blood."
 (21) "My father's daughter doughtily ground,
 for the death of hosts did she foresee;
 even now the strong booms burst from the quern,
 the stanch iron stays -- yet more strongly grind!"
 (22) Menja said: "Yet more swiftly grind: the son of Yrsa
 Froði's blood will crave for the bane of Halfdan --
 Hrolf is hight and is to her
 both son and brother as both of us know."
 (23) The mighty maidens, they ground amain,
 strained their young limbs of giant strength;
 the shaft tree quivered, the quern toppled over,
 the heavy slab burst asunder."
 (24) Quoth the mighty maiden of the mountain giants:
 "Ground have we Froði, now fain would cease.
 We have toiled enough at turning the mill!"

Grottasöngur

The most notable thing about this story that would, in my train of thought, confirm that this is indeed a piece of Vanir lore, is Fenja and

Menja recounting lore of the Jotnar and urging Froði to remember. Truly if the Jotnar were all evil brutes, there would not be a history of walking among men and giving victory to certain ones, fighting alongside others, which suggests they were probably worshiped at some point, and in any case this was not censored completely in the *Grottasöngur*.

In this story we can infer something of when the hunter-gatherer Jotun cult was dominated by the agricultural Vanir cult, which would must needs change from small tribes battling each other, and using a quern to grind grain into flour (among other things). What is ground at this particular mill is actually *fríð*, or peace. It would seem that the symbolism behind the story is the aggressive nature of the Jotun cultus-people being "ground" into work - and very hard work at that - to keep the peace of the land, including keeping the prosperity (because when food is scarce and one is just surviving hand-to-mouth, people get ugly). One could argue that perhaps Froði was in the wrong for subjugating Jotun women as quern slaves, but one of the drawbacks of leadership is oftentimes doing things that seem "wrong" or at the very least distasteful, but are necessary for keeping law and order. It would also seem that while relations between the Vanir-as-a-whole and the Jotnar-as-a-whole are not as bad as that of the Jotnar and the Aesir, they are not completely good and there are tensions (if not necessarily conflict) stemming from the change of hands in Midgard, from where the tribes of Gods get Their worshippers, offerings, and energy.

In my experience of journeying to Vanaheim and encountering the individual "high Vanir", Froði has long since stepped down and Njord is the de facto king of Vanaheim (although the governance of Vanaheim is much more autonomous than that and the kingship title is more of a sacral or ceremonial role). Froði, whose name means "fruitful", can be found tending his fruit trees, and keeping to himself. In my encounters with Him specifically, I have found Him to be a very gentle man of few words but good cheer: a long salt-and-pepper beard and rosy ball cheeks, often chuckling quietly to Himself... not wholly dissimilar to images of Father Christmas, except usually clad in shades of green. In any case I would find it hard to believe that Froði's slave-

ownership of Fenja and Menja was wholly malicious, but I will readily admit to being biased in that regard.

If you do happen to seek out Froði - or find Him without looking for Him - He has something of a reputation as being the Loremaster of Vanaheim, and will give the history of the Vanir to those who are ready to listen without prejudice. However, He does not give this knowledge away for free - asking will involve both giving Him an offering in real-time and actually sharing and using at least some of the knowledge received (such as I am doing with this book), so the Lore of the Vanir does not completely disappear from this realm. That being said, Froði will not reveal all, particularly as the "golden era" of the Vanir has long since waned (to make a bad pun) and while it is necessary and good that some are re-discovering the Vanir cultus, things will never be the same again.

If you are one of the few who works with Froði even periodically, you will also find Him to be a helpful ally if you are at all growing fruit or brewing wines or melomels; He is also helpful to work with for cultivating a sense of what is really important in life.

There is not much else that can be said about Froði, but it is just as well. In the present day He calls extremely few people to Himself because He is, as mentioned, a more quiet and retiring type; you can indeed see where Njord and Frey got Their frithy character from.

Froði Chant

Svartesól

Froði, fruitful, giving gifts
Give to us our daily frith
Make strong our tribe, in good will
To keep things right, and heal all ill
Froði, fruitful, give us rede
So we may be fruitful in our deeds

Deities Considered Vanir By Marriage or Adoption

Svartesól

A book about the Vanir wouldn't be complete without an examination of those of other tribes with whom They have either married, or blended into Their family somehow. This would include the etin-brides Skadhi and Gerda, as well as Frey's servants Skirnir, Byggvir, and Beyla. Sunna and Mani are technically Jotnar and not Vanes, but the fertility of Vanaheim and indeed all the worlds is dependent upon the solar and lunar rhythms, so I felt it apt to mention Them here. Finally, many Vanatruar and Vanir-friends count Heimdall and Sigyn as among the Vanir or at least well-loved and I have chosen to explain how They might fit into a Vanic practice.

SKADHI

Skadhi seems to be one of the few Jotun Goddesses who is actually accepted and embraced by mainstream Heathenry. There are other Jotun Goddesses who intermarried with the Aesir and Vanir, e.g. Gerda, who have either been ignored or even outright reviled as hostile entities. However, Skadhi is popular even with those who are otherwise Jotunphobes (there, a new word) and rightly so: while Gerda may be content to snub those who don't want to honor Her, Skadhi commands and even demands respect. She is the ultimate example of a strong, independent woman.

But at the appointed time Loki lured Idunn out of Ásgard into a certain wood, saying that he had found such apples as would seem to her of great virtue, and prayed that she would have her apples with her and compare them with these. Then Thjazi the giant came there in his eagle's plumage and took Idunn and flew away with her, off into Thrymheimr to his abode.

But the Æsir became straitened at the disappearance of Idunn, and speedily

they became hoary and old. Then those Æsir took counsel together, and each asked the other what had last been known of Idunn; and the last that had been seen was that she had gone out of Asgard with Loki. Thereupon Loki was seized and brought to the Thing, and was threatened with death, or tortures; when he had become well frightened, he declared that he would seek after Idunn in Jötunheim, if Freya would lend him the hawk's plumage which she possessed. And when he got the hawk's plumage, he flew north into Jötunheim, and came on a certain day to the home of Thjazi the giant. Thjazi had rowed out to sea, but Idunn was at home alone: Loki turned her into the shape of a nut and grasped her in his claws and flew his utmost.

Now when Thjazi came home and missed Idunn, he took his eagle's plumage and flew after Loki, making a mighty rush of sound with his wings in his flight. But when the Æsir saw how the hawk flew with the nut, and where the eagle was flying, they went out below Ásgard and bore burdens of plane-shavings thither. As soon as the hawk flew into the citadel, he swooped down close by the castle-wall; then the Æsir struck fire to the plane-shavings. But the eagle could not stop himself when he missed the hawk: the feathers of the eagle caught fire, and straightway his flight ceased. Then the Æsir were near at hand and slew Thjazi the giant within the Gate of the Æsir, and that slaying is exceeding famous.

Now Skadi, the daughter of the giant Thjazi, took helm and birnie and all weapons of war and proceeded to Ásgard, to avenge her father. The Æsir, however, offered her reconciliation and atonement: the first article was that she should choose for herself a husband from among the Æsir and choose by the feet only, seeing no more of him. Then she saw the feet of one man, passing fair, and said: "I choose this one: in Baldr little can be loathly." But that was Njördr of Nóatún. She had this article also in her bond of reconciliation: that the Æsir must do a thing she thought they would not be able to accomplish: to make her laugh. Then Loki did this: he tied a cord to the beard of a goat, the other end being about his own genitals, and each gave way in turn, and each of the two screeched loudly; then Loki let himself fall onto Skadi's knee, and she laughed. Thereupon reconciliation was made with her on the part of the Æsir. It is so said, that Odin did this by way of atonement to Skadi: he took Thjazi's eyes and cast them up into the heavens, and made of them two stars.

Then said Ægir: "It seems to me that Thjazi was a mighty man: now of what family was he?" Bragi answered: "His father was called Ölvaldi, and if I tell thee

of him, thou wilt think these things wonders. He was very rich in gold; but when he died and his sons came to divide the inheritance, they determined upon this measure for the gold which they divided: each should take as much as his mouth would hold, and all the same number of mouthfuls. One of them was Thjazi, the second Idi, the third Gangr. And we have it as a metaphor among us now, to call gold the mouth-tale of these giants; but we conceal it in secret terms or in poesy in this way, that we call it Speech, or Word, or Talk, of these giants."

Skaldskaparsmal

In this Eddaic lay, we can see that Skadhi comes to Asgard seeking retribution for the slaying of Her father. She was not necessarily aggressive towards the Aesir for being Aesir (She seemed to like Baldur well enough), but rather because the Aesir killed Her father: the "why" didn't matter, it was that it was Her father. I believe that it was Her willingness to take Them all on, and fight, that commanded respect among Them, to make Her part of Their tribe (although Njord is more of a hostage than a "full Aesir", She got to pick from all of the men, and it's been suggested by a few people that Njord would have the best feet due to walking along the beach, where the sand and sea salt would condition the skin of His feet).

Apparently Skadhi's father, Thjazi, was not your "common Jotnar" but a very rich chieftain, which (along with Gerda's family) suggests that the Jotnar were not strictly barbarians but had commerce. Odin would not have made Thjazi's eyes into stars if He were completely reprehensible, which serves as a reminder that even the most fearsome and aggressive of Jotunkind is still a person, with kith and kin.

There has been a UPG among several people that Loki did not just tie His testicles to a goat for laughs, but to mimic an ancient rite performed in Skadhi's honor. Scandinavia was given its name after Skadhi, and it is suggested that Her coming to dwell among the Aesir is symbolic of one of the most ancient and revered Goddesses still commanding worship long after others of Her kind are honored no more. A Divine Huntress would be appropriate to call upon in the harsh Northern climate, to ensure a good hunt and survival through the

winter. We see a cognate with Skadhi in the Scottish Goddess Scathach, a figure in the Ulster cycle of Irish mythology, who trains Cúchulainn in the arts of combat and gives him a spear. While the jury is out as to whether They are one and the same Goddess, it's not far off the mark to see Skadhi as a patroness of war as well as the hunt, as in ancient Northern society, tribes would need to fight off those who would attack the tribe and plunder its stores.

It seems that Loki's gift to Skadhi had more emotional ties than just laughter, as it is Skadhi who wreaks the worst revenge on Loki at the time of His binding.

Skadi

49. Thou art merry, Loki!
Not long wilt thou
frisk with an unbound tail;
for thee, on a rock's point,
with the entrails of thy ice-cold son,
the gods will bind.

Loki

50. Know, if on a rock's point,
with the entrails of my ice-cold son,
the gods will bind me,
that first and foremost
I was at the slaying,
when we assailed Thiassi.

Skadi

51. Know, if first and foremost
thou wast at the slaying,
when ye assailed Thiassi,
that from my dwellings
and fields shall to thee
ever cold counsels come.

Loki

52. Milder was thou of speech

to Laufey's son,
 when to thy bed thou didst invite me.
 Such matters must be mentioned,
 if we accurately must
 recount our vices.

...

After this Loki, in the likeness of a salmon, cast himself into the waterfall of Franangr, where the Æsir caught him, and bound him with the entrails of his son Nari; but his other son, Narfi, was changed into a wolf. Skadi took a venomous serpent, and fastened it up over Loki's face. The venom trickled down from it. Sigyn, Loki's wife, sat by, and held a basin under the venom; and when the basin was full, carried the venom out. Meanwhile the venom dropped on Loki, who shrank from it so violently that the whole earth trembled. This causes what are now called earthquakes.

Lokasenna

Here Loki admits to slaying Thjazi, which would anger Skadhi to begin with, but also Loki says that They slept together. One of the things that many fail to realize with Lokasenna is that the Gods never deny what Loki says about Their activities and proclivities (e.g. Odin being "ergi" on Samsey), but other Gods will make note of the good things They have done. It is probable Loki and Skadhi slept together after He made Her laugh (in fact, my UPG and that of others confirms this to be what happened), and Skadhi knowing She slept with Her father's killer was probably the incentive to make Loki's punishment especially hard.

It is noted by this author that Loki was not bound immediately after the death of Baldur, but rather after crashing Aegir's feast and insulting the Gods, which leads me to believe that the Gods were more angry over having Their dirty laundry "outed" than Baldur's death. While I have wept for Loki's binding and Sigyn's sorrow, I do see both sides of the story (and am friends with both Deities), and know Skadhi felt intolerably insulted and was acting out of (not entirely unjustified) wrath.

The last bit of Lore on Skadhi comes from **Gylfaginning**:

Njördr has to wife the woman called Skadi, daughter of Thjazi the giant. Skadi would fain dwell in the abode which her father had had, which is on certain mountains, in the place called Thrymheimr; but Njördr would be near the sea. They made a compact on these terms: they should be nine nights in Thrymheimr, but the second nine at Nóatún. But when Njördr came down from the mountain back to Nóatún, he sang this lay:

Loath were the hills to me, I was not long in them,
Nights only nine;
To me the wailing of wolves seemed ill,
After the song of swans.

Then Skadi sang this:
Sleep could I never on the sea-beds,
For the wailing of waterfowl;
He wakens me, who comes from the deep-
The sea-mew every morn.

Then Skadi went up onto the mountain, and dwelt in Thrymheimr. And she goes for the more part on snowshoes and with a bow and arrow, and shoots beasts; she is called Snowshoe-Goddess or Lady of the Snowshoes. So it is said:

Thrymheimr 't is called, where Thjazí dwelt,
He the hideous giant;
But now Skadi abides, pure bride of the gods,
In her father's ancient freehold.

XXIV. "Njördr in Nóatún begot afterward two children: the son was called Frey, and the daughter Freya; they were fair of face and mighty.

Skadhi did not separate from Njord for being abusive, or for failing to satisfy Her in bed -- these things would likely have been noted -- but Their lifestyles were not compatible. Indeed, my personal gnosis is that Skadhi and Njord care deeply for each other and are still on friendly terms. Skadhi is a mountain Jotuness, Njord a sea Vane. Skadhi likes the challenge of the cold climate, the rough terrain, and the hunt. Njord likes His place to "chill out". Skadhi divorced Njord to

have Her life, and it appears that She and Njord remained on friendly terms. The Eddas say that Skadhi separated from Njord, it seems there was no technical divorce, so through Her marriage into the Vanir, She still kept Her position of status among the Aesir, effectively giving Her a voice, and remembrance even after the Jotun cult had been supplanted. Skadhi is an example of strength and independence, and none would dare try to dominate Her: those who have, have tasted Her wrath. It seems that both Frey and Njord prefer Jotun women, for precisely this reason, and so I choose to hail Her among the Vanir by marriage.

When I was living in New England, I was a lot closer to Skadhi. On the first snowfall each year after I began identifying as a Norse Pagan, I would go outside and play in the snow and give an offering to Skadhi. I admired Her strength, the frosty nature of Her composure that would not yield to the rule of others. While still closest to Freya among the Goddesses, I formed a very close bond with Skadhi, feeling Her protection over me in the wintertime and in other areas of my life.

I have had visions of Skadhi visiting Njord, as They are on good terms, and teaching Frey specifically how to hunt and fight, well enough that Frey was entrusted with the best sword in the Nine Worlds, and was able to get an antler as a weapon after His sword was given to Gerda's family. It was Skadhi, in my visionary experiences, who taught Frey how to respect a strong woman, and that set the stage for Frey falling in love with Gerda later on. It is because of Gerda's Jotun nature -- not in spite of it -- that Frey loves Her, He loves Her cold aloofness as well as Her storms.

It was Skadhi who gave me the courage to leave an abusive relationship in 2002, to put my foot down and say "Enough". It was Skadhi, once again, who came to me during Hallows of 2006 and told me some very harsh truths about my situation -- that I was going to die if I did not take better care of my physical health, which meant taking charge of my life and not letting the psych system micro-manage it. She told me to stop feeling helpless, and that there were times when She

also felt despairing -- right after She saw Her father, dead. But rather than grieve and do nothing, She decided to fight, and it was because She fought, that She gained a place of respect among the Aesir. Skadhi showed me a vision of a conversation She had with Frey about me, and how Frey was trying to arrange a move to another state and with a good man, so I could have a better life, but my own fear and self-doubt was holding me back, and would keep me in the thrall of others who thought they knew what I needed better than I did, eventually destroying me. I was a bit stunned as I hadn't quite looked at the opportunity, but They were both clearly concerned about my welfare. Skadhi said it angered Her to see someone strong be beaten down by others, and I owed it to myself and to the Gods -- to Her -- to find my way out. As I write this in 2008, I am in that better situation and am finding strength within myself I didn't know I had, as well as abilities that other people told me I didn't have or couldn't do.

I write this article as a way to acknowledge that debt I have to Skadhi: as I moved to Southern California, where it doesn't snow and is never that cold, I stopped feeling Her presence. But that doesn't mean She's not there -- moving does not put one out of the reach of the Gods. She haunts the wild places, and more importantly, is inside of me, that backbone that says "Enough" to people and things making demands of me when I have to put myself first... that drive that decides to keep going past when others would give up... that drive that is determined to succeed no matter what. It is because of Skadhi's influence within me that I continue to press on even on the days when my disabilities affect me the worst, even when I feel there are many challenges and obstacles in my life. Skadhi clearly knew Her self-worth and strength enough even when She lost Her father, went among the strange Aesir, and was hurt by Loki. I will not let the bastards win, I will keep focusing on what I want in life, and I will make something of myself, because I am worthy, I am friend to the Gods, and I deserve that. Skadhi says so.

GERDA

While the subject of etin-worship still remains a controversial and polarizing issue within Heathenry, there is some evidence of it being part of elder Heathen practice. The most famous mention of Gerda is of course the account of Her marriage to Frey as given in *Skirnirsmal* as well as the *Prose Edda*. I personally believe Gerda is one and the same as Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr, sister of Irpa, a Goddess mentioned in three different Sagas.

Earl Hákon said: "It seems to me that the battle is beginning to go against us. I had thought it a bad thing to have to fight these men, and so indeed it turns out. Now this will not do. We must bethink ourselves of some wise course. I shall go up on land, and you are to look after the fleet meanwhile, in case they attack."

Thereupon the earl went up on the island of Primsigned, and away into a forest, and fell on his knees and prayed looking northward. And in his prayer he called upon his patron goddess, Thorgerd Holgabrúð. But she would not hear his prayers and was wroth. He offered to make her many a sacrifice, but she refused each one, and he thought his case desperate. In the end he offered her a human sacrifice, but she would not have it. At last he offered her his own seven-year-old-son; and that she accepted. Then the earl put the boy in the hands of his slave Skopti, and Skopti slew him.

Afterwards the earl returned to his ships and urged his men on to make renewed attack; "for I know now surely that victory will be ours. Press the attack all the more vigorously, because I have invoked for victory both the sisters, Thorgerd and Irpa."

Then the earl boarded his ship and prepared for the fight, and the fleet rowed to the attack, and again there was the most furious battle. And right soon the weather began to thicken in the north and the clouds covered the sky and the daylight waned. Next came the flashes of lightning and thunder, and with them a violent shower. The Jómsvíkings had to fight facing into the storm, and the squall was so heavy that they could hardly stand up against it. Men had to cast off their clothes, earlier, because of the heat, and now it was cold. Nevertheless, no one needed to be urged on to do battle. But although the Jómsvíkings hurled

stones and other missiles and threw their spears, the wind turned all their weapons back upon them, to join the shower of missiles from their enemies.

Hávard the Hewing was the first to see Thorgerd Holgabrúð in the fleet of Earl Hákon, and then many a second-sighted man saw her. And when the squall abated a little they saw that an arrow flew from every finger of the ogress, and each arrow felled a man. They told Sigvaldi, and he said: "it seems we are not fighting men alone, but still it behooves us to do our best."

And when the storm lessened a bit Earl Hákon again invoked Thorgerd and said that he had done his utmost. And then it grew dark again with a squall, this time even stronger and worse than before. And right at the beginning of the squall Hávard the Hewing saw that two women were standing on the earl's ship, and both were doing the same thing that Thorgerd had done before.

Then Sigvaldi said: "Now I am going to flee, and let all men do so. I did not vow to fight against trolls, and it is now worse than before, as there are two ogresses."

[All of Earl Hákon's enemies flee.]

Then they weighed the hailstones on scales to see what power Thorgerd and Irpa had, and one hailstone weighed an ounce.

The Saga of the Jómsvíkings, Chapter 21

Earl Hakon was attending a feast at Gudbrand's home. During the night, Hrapp the killer went to their temple. Inside it, he saw the statue of Thorgerd Holgi's-Bride enthroned, massive as a fully-grown man; there was a huge gold bracelet on her arm, and a linen hood over her head. Hrapp stripped off the hood and the bracelet. He then noticed Thor in his chariot, and took from him another gold bracelet. He took a third bracelet from Irpa. He dragged all three of the idols outside and stripped them of their vestments; then he set fire to the temple and burned it down. [...]

Early that morning, earl Hakon and Gudbrand went out to the temple and found it burned down, with the three idols lying outside stripped of all their riches.

Then Gudbrand said, 'Our gods are powerful indeed. They have walked unaided from the flames.'

'The gods have nothing to do with it,' said Earl Hakon. 'A man must have fired the temple and carried the gods out. But the gods are in no haste to take vengeance; the man who did this will be driven out of Valhalla for ever.'

Njal's Saga, Chapter 88

Of Sigmund it must be now told that he fell to talk with Earl Hacon, and told him that he was minded to leave warring and hie out to the Færeys [...]

And when he was fully bound, Earl Hacon said to him, "One should speed well one would fain welcome back." And he went out of doors with Sigmund. Then spake Hacon, "What sayest thou to this? In what dost thou put thy trust?" I put my trust in my own might and main," said Sigmund. "That must not be," the Earl answered, "but thou shalt put thy trust where I have put all my trust, namely in Thorgerd Shinebride," said he. "And we will go and see her now and luck for thee at her hands." Sigmund bade him settle this matter as he would. They set forth along a certain path into the wood, and thence by a little bypath into the wood, till they came where a ride lay before them, and a house standing in it with a stake fence round it. Right fair was that house, and gold and silver was run into the carvings thereof. They went into the house, Hacon and Sigmund together, and a few men with them. Therein were a great many gods. There were many glass roof-lights in the house, so that there was no shadow anywhere. There was a woman in the house over against the door, right fairly decked she was. The Earl cast him down at her feet, and there he lay long, and when he rose up he told Sigmund that they should bring her some offering and lay the silver thereof on the stool before her. "And we shall have it as a mark of what she thinks of this, if she will do as I wish and let the ring loose which she holds in her hand. For thou, Sigmund, shall get luck by that ring." Then the Earl took hold of the ring, and it seemed to Sigmund that she clasped her hand on it, and the earl got not the ring. The Earl cast him down a second time before her, and Sigmund saw that the earl was weeping. Then he stood up again and caught hold of the ring, and now, behold, it was loose; and he took it and gave it to Sigmund, and told him that with this ring he must never part, and Sigmund gave his word on it. With that they parted.

Færeyinga Saga, Chapter 23

Furthermore, it says in **Skaldskaparsmal**:

They say that a king known as Holgi, after whom Halogaland is named, was Thorgerd Holgabrud's father. Sacrifices were offered to them both, and Holgi's mound was raised with alternately a layer of gold or silver-- this was the money offered in sacrifice-- and a layer of earth and stone.

It should be mentioned that Halogaland is in northern Norway, and is where some of my maternal ancestors came from. Halogaland is one of the lands noted by the Liljenroths where the Hel-folk likely lived³², and it seems likely that in a drowned coastline containing extensive mountainous fjords and islands, there would indeed be a cult of mountain Jotnar. "Thor" is closely related to the word "thurse" (and indeed, often an epithet for "giant") and in this instance would mean "Thurse-Gerda" or "Giant-Gerda" and would thus point to none other than the giantess Gerda, wed by Frey. As Gerda is said to be one of the mountain-dwelling Jotnar, origins in mountainous Halogaland would be in keeping with this gnosis. Her sister, Irpa, has a name equivalent to the Old Norse word *jarpr*, or "brown", and from here we can see Her relationship with Gerda, whose name means "yard" and is related to "garden" - They are both Jotynjar directly connected with Earth, Irpa as the soil, Gerda with its cultivation. Irpa would most likely be "elder sister".

It is also said that Thorgerd was the "wife" of Earl Haakon, and indeed H.R. Ellis Davidson³³ mentions that Olaf I of Norway dragged out an image of Thorgerdr after Haakon's death and had it burned next to an image of Frey, which would suggest that Thorgerdr was beloved to Frey, and one and the same as Gerda. It is also telling that in Heathen lore, Frey is the only God known to take a human spouse, the priestess-wife mentioned in the Saga of Gunnar Helming, and if Gerda took Haakon as mortal consort, this would indeed be an evenly

32 http://hem.passagen.se/helandia/index_en.htm

33 Davidson, Hilda Ellis (1998). *Roles of the Northern Goddess*.

matched pair.

In any case, I believe Thorgerd is evidence of Gerda's cultus in Heathen times, but short of building a time machine and going back into time there is no way to know for certain. Even if it were not true, there are people giving Her honor now, such as myself, and quite frankly, She is worthy of our honor. Too many refuse to honor Gerda at all - at least one Heathen has said in my presence that Gerda is "hostile" and "tricked Frey with *seiðr*" - and those who do hail Her often dismiss Her as Frey's consort and nothing more. Yet She is much more of that. She is deserving of honor as being the strength that supports Frey in His work of bringing light and life to the land, the love that makes Him feel whole, and inspires His love for all life.

Frey's vision on Hlidskjalf, Odin's High Seat, was of the light within Her soul, Her essence being almost blinding in its brightness, and Frey knowing that He had to have it, that She would complete Him -- and Their entire exchange of love is based on an exchange of light and darkness. Frey is a Light-Bringer, and filled with light of His own. But He needs a continual source, and Gerda is His light (rather like Sigyn is the innocent joy to Loki that inspires His humor and playfulness), Her support of Him in Her quiet dignity, with meaningful words and even more meaningful touch, is what keeps Frey going. On those rare instances that Her calm cool exterior is broken to flash a smile or break out in wild laughter, Frey feels most alive, and is able to take the love between Them and give it to the committed lovers of Midgard. Gerda also sees the moments that very few humans are ever able to see: Frey filled with pain, weeping, seeing the struggles of people in Midgard, and the senseless wars between the Jotnar and Aesir. Frey wants so very badly for everyone to have a good quality of life, and He takes it personally if there is suffering. Gerda's embrace gives Him solace, and gives Him the darkness He needs for His light to rest and regenerate.

Gerda is also deserving of honor in Her own right, for Frey would not have pledged Himself to someone unworthy. Indeed, to dismiss Gerda is to dismiss Frey's choice. For my own involvement with a community that scorned Gerda, I reached out to Her both as

weregild and in a sincere desire to know Frey better, and to please my Husband. Even then, it took me months to start having conversations with Gerda and nearly two years into my relationship with Her, She is not exactly verbose. At this point, I do not take it personally. Gerda's quiet is not so much based in shyness as it is in dignity: She feels that only fools talk to hear themselves talk, and that words should be reserved for something of meaning. Much more can be conveyed in body language, or a touch, or just noticing something, than actually speaking. Gerda's quiet also extends to attire - She is not glamorous like Freya, or stunning like Sif, but has Her own understated class. Gerda's modesty in attire is also based in Her attitude that there is more to Her than Her body, there is a mind full of wisdom that should be known and explored... and then only for those who She deems fit.

For example, Gerda has taught me a bit about working with plant spirits, and the act of working the soil to be a grounding experience, and noticing the subtle growth of herbs and other garden plants as a mindfulness exercise. To notice the small details is to notice the health and well-being of a person or situation, when so many are focused on the bigger picture and their castles may fall apart due to the weakness of a few bricks. Gerda tends to the plants as lovingly as She would children - in fact, it could be rightly said that the greenwights are Gerda's children, the only children She will ever have. I have had visions of Gerda being something akin to the archetypal hedgewitch, working in Her enclosed garden, communing with the plant spirits, singing to them, and being rather solitary -- and fond of being solitary -- but open to those who could earn Her trust with these secrets. In a way, Gerda's solitary and wise connection to the Green World is what inspires me to call myself a hedgewitch. That, and some quirks of my personality and life situation.

I feel that it is impossible to honor Frey without understanding the Goddess who owns His heart, who compelled Him to "sell out" the fate of the Aesir by giving up the most powerful sword in the Nine Worlds. When Frey gave His sword to Gerda's family, both were aware of the costs involved: that if it should come to Ragnarok, the lines are already drawn and Frey will not survive. However, They also

understand Ragnarok to be just a prophecy, and the course can change. Frey giving up His sword was the manifestation of the desire to, on His part, end the fighting and hostilities between the Jotnar and Aesir, and try to weave frith between the two tribes, rather than continue the fighting. And so Frey tries to teach the people of Midgard about tolerance and acceptance, and Gerda does for those few who actually pay Her any heed in the 21st century. Gerda is not easy to get to know, not in small part due to the hostility shown Her by Heathens, who have forgotten Her cult of long ago, and would pick and choose what parts of their history to emulate. She's proud enough that She will not go where She is not welcome, and quite a few Heathens who would honor Frey and scorn Gerda seem, as I have personally witnessed, to have troubles enough in their marriages and with their homes after awhile. However, for those who are open to knowing Gerda, with time, effort, and patience, She may let you in to Her secret garden, and prove Herself to be a loyal friend, even one who will be a lethal foe to protect Her friends.

BYGGVIR AND BEYLA

The scholarly consensus is that Byggvir and Beyla are Frey's servants, and that Byggvir possibly means "barley", and Beyla means "bee". Whether these two names translate exactly or not, a corroborated personal gnosis is They are a Ljossalf couple who travel with Frey, and are in charge of taking care of His household.

Byggvir spake:

43. "Had I birth so famous | as Ingunar-Frey,
And sat in so lofty a seat,
I would crush to marrow | this croaker of ill,
And beat all his body to bits."

Loki spake:

44. "What little creature | goes crawling there,

Snuffling and snapping about?
 At Frey's ears ever | wilt thou be found,
 Or muttering hard at the mill."

The reference to "the mill" would further give credence to Byggvir's name as a cognate for grain. Spirit-workers have seen Byggvir in charge of the World-Mill, one of Frey's treasures, inherited through Frey's grandfather Froði - something Froði developed during the time when the Vanic agriculture society supplanted the Jotun hunter-gatherer society.

Byggvir likes taking care of Frey's farms (everywhere Frey has a home, it is a farm), and is a rather down-to-earth kind of guy. You see that his "had I birth so famous" is pretty modest, and yes, Byggvir is actually like that. Whether or not he is born of noble Ljossalfar, he sees himself as a simple farmer, doing his job for the love of the work. It would be considered very poor taste for him to attempt to outshine Frey, so to speak.

Byggvir spake:

45. "Byggvir my name, | and nimble am I,
 As gods and men do grant;
 And here am I proud | that the children of Hropt
 Together all drink ale."

Frey's desire to keep frith extends to His "entourage" as well.

Loki spake:

46. "Be silent, Byggvir! | thou never couldst set
 Their shares of the meat for men;
 Hid in straw on the floor, | they found thee not
 When heroes were fain to fight."

Lokasenna, v. 43-46

Beyla spake:

"The mountains shake, | and surely I think

From his home comes Hlorrithi now;
 He will silence the man | who is slandering here
 Together both gods and men."

Loki spake:

"Be silent, Beyla! | thou art Byggvir's wife,
 And deep art thou steeped in sin;
 A greater shame | to the gods came ne'er,
 Befouled thou art with thy filth."

Lokasenna, v. 55-56

Beyla is another farmhand, and the "filth" does not refer to sexual proclivities (as one might assume), but being a dirty farmgirl, which was a shameful thing to the higher classes, and particularly out of character for a Ljossalv. Beyla doesn't think badly of herself, though, as she takes pride in milking cows and keeping bees (the phrase "milk and honey" is found all over the planet as a metaphor for wealth, most notably in the Abrahamic tradition as well as in traditional Celtic offerings to the Fae).

Beyla and Byggvir work together on Frey's farm, and though not Deities per se, they are still at the very least demi-Gods or powerful wights, and you can still call upon them if you own a farm that specializes in grain production, cattle, and/or bees, or for luck in brewing. They are also particularly receptive to couples who are trying to work together to get something accomplished, if the work is of a larger scope. Byggvir is very friendly and accomodating, Beyla a little less so, out of shyness more than anything, but both are receptive to offerings, especially whole-wheat flour and honey, or bread made with both ingredients (or beer bread). They are a prime example of a couple who are truly a team, and whose work together is not just for their own livelihood, but to feed and bless the Nine Worlds.

SKIRNIR

Skirnir most famously went to Gerda on Frey's behalf and decided to threaten Her with rune magic after She repeatedly rejected bridal-gifts and refused to have anything to do with Frey. While rune magic is Aesic, Odin gave the runes to all races. Skirnir was also sent to fetch Gleipnir, the magical chain that currently binds Fenris.

Skirnir's duty to Frey seems to be that of His right-hand man, and messenger if need be. From everything I have observed, Frey values Skirnir's friendship and Skirnir's service is based on trust and respect, not Frey lording it over Him. Skirnir could actually be referred to a second-in-command, since I have to talk to Him when Frey is walking the Helvegr at Lammastide.

Skirnir has taught me some lessons about service as it pertains to spirit-work. Many Asatruar in particular will not say they "serve" their Gods, going on to say "serve" is a Christian concept that needs to be done away with. But service is actually based in love. You do what you can to help, out of love. Skirnir may come off as being rather dry, even a little sarcastic, but underneath it all He truly loves Frey as a brother, and Frey's folk by extension. He can be called upon to send a message to Frey if the Golden One is "unreachable" at the moment. He is not just Frey's servant, but his advisor, his eyes and ears in the Worlds.

HEIMDALL

There are some who identify as Vanatru who feel very strongly that Heimdall is one of the Vanir, and some who feel that Heimdall is not Vanir at all. In a Vanic practice it is important to identify who is Vanir and who is not. So, we will explore who Heimdall is, and what it means for being counted among the Vanir:

Heimdallr is the name of one: he is called the White God. He is great and holy; nine maids, all sisters, bore him for a son. He is also called Hallinskídi (Bent Stick) and Gullintanni (Gold-Teeth); his teeth were of gold, and his horse is called Gold-top. He dwells in the place called Himinbjörg (Sky-Mountain) hard by Bifröst: he is the warder of the gods, and sits there by heaven's end to guard the bridge from the Hill-Giants. He needs less sleep than a bird; he sees equally well night and day a hundred leagues from him, and hears how grass grows on the earth or wool on sheep, and everything that has a louder sound. He has that trumpet which is called Gjallar-Horn, and its blast is heard throughout all worlds. Heimdallr's sword is called Head. It is said further:

Himinbjörg 't is called, where Heimdallr, they say,
 Aye has his housing;
 There the gods' sentinel drinks in his snug hall
 Gladly good mead.

And furthermore, he himself says in Heimdalar-galðr:

I am of nine mothers the offspring,
 Of sisters nine am I the son.

Gylfaginning

It is noted by H.R. Ellis Davidson that *Þrymskviða* 15 says

Then Heimdall spoke, whitest of the Æsir,
 Like the other Vanir he knew the future well.

And from this, we can infer a possible connection with the Vanir. There are also certain qualities Heimdall has that can be described as Vanic.

It's worth noting that one of Freya's names is Mardoll, which is similar to Heimdall, "Heim" means "home" and "Mar" is "sea", and the -doll/-dall suffix seems to be related to the Norse "-dal" meaning "dales", and it seems Freya's connection with the sea would also connect Her with Heimdall. Indeed, Heimdall at one point fought with Loki for Freya's Brisingamen necklace, which is something a brother, relative, or

close friend would do. And to further connect these Deities with the sea, and possibly by blood, it is stated in *Lokasenna* that Njord had kinky sex with the nine daughters of Ran and Aegir, who are Heimdall's mothers:

Be silent, Niörd!
 Thou wast sent eastward hence,
 a hostage from the gods.
 Hýmír's daughter had thee
 for a utensil,
 and flowed into thy mouth.

Lokasenna 34

Moreover, Heimdall has gold teeth, and the Vanes do indeed have a connection with all things gold, evidenced by Frey (boar, crops), Freya (Brisingamen), Sif (hair, crops), and Idunna (apples). Finally, His senses are noted as being the most acute of any Deity, and the Vanir are not only very sensual but seem to notice the fine details in the bigger picture. He wields a sword, which is a weapon also wielded by Frey prior to giving it as Gerda's bride-price.

However, even with these characteristics present, there is also a case to be made that Heimdall is wholly of the Aesir. Here is more on Heimdall, from the Prose Edda:

How should one periphrase Heimdallr? By calling him Son of Nine Mothers, or Watchman of the Gods, as already has been written; or White God, Foe of Loki, Seeker of Freya's Necklace. A sword is called Heimdallir's Head: for it is said that he was pierced by a man's head. The tale thereof is told in Heimdalar-gald; and ever since a head is called Heimdallr's Measure; a sword is called Man's Measure. Heimdallr is the Possessor of Gulltoppr; he is also Frequenter of Vágasker and Singasteinn, where he contended with Loki for the Necklace Brisinga-men, he is also called Vindlér. Úlfr Uggason composed a long passage in the *Húsdrápa* on that legend, and there it is written that they were in the form of seals. *Heimdallr also is son of Odin.*

Skaldskaparsmal VIII.

It explicitly states here that Heimdall is son of Odin. Of course, Snorri is also the same author who said the Norse Gods are from Troy, and promoted the Adam and Eve creation story, and in one of his accounts Odin is Thor's father, in another Thor is Odin's father. So Snorri is not necessarily the most reliable source on lineage of Deities, however it is noted in the Poetic Edda poem *Rigsthula*:

In ancient Sagas it is related that one of the Æsir named Heimdall, being on a journey to a certain sea-shore, came to a village, where he called himself Rig.

Rig is Heimdall, not Odin as some have erroneously claimed, and it makes sense that the warder of the Bifrost bridge, between Midgard and Asgard, would be especially invested in humanity. While *Rigsthula* has been dismissed by some modern Heathens as racist or classist, I personally don't see it that way. The thing that stands out to me in this tale is we can't all do everything we want, we do have limitations based in nature, nurture, and willingness of effort, with how far we can go in the world and achieve. But, this is OK as there is no shame in the lowlier jobs in life, so long as it's honest work - all have connection to Rig and the Gods don't make junk. Heimdall as Rig was fair and kind to the human families he stayed with, to the lines He produced, and so whatever our lot in life, we should not put ourselves down or look badly at others for being rich or poor.

But indeed, Rig-Heimdall contributing to the societal structure strikes me as very Aesic, as the Vanir seem more egalitarian, when the population was a lot smaller and there was less diversity in what people did for careers - basically the job back then was to help with the farming in some way; the Aesir are Gods of "civilization". Heimdall's primary job as the warder of the Bifrost bridge is very much like that of a Divine policeman. Not that the Vanir can't be protective and even aggressive if need be, and the Vanic form of aggression seems to be that of defending home and family - but a primary position as a defensive/protective Deity is not characteristically Vanic.

I don't get the "feeling" that Heimdall is Vanic, although I'm willing to concede a strong argument can be made either way for or

A lover of ill, and to Loki like;
 By his side does Sigyn sit, nor is glad
 To see her mate: would you know yet more?

Voluspa, v. 35

That Loki is important to the shaping of the Wyrd of the Gods is a given, however much less is made of the "less monstrous" side of Loki's family through Sigyn, despite the fact that these children are given the most brutal treatment of all by the Aesir. Furthermore, Sigyn is seen as an example of loyalty by many Heathens, in that even after all Loki is accused of, and punished for His "crimes", She stays with Him in isolation and terror, and devotes all of Her life to collecting the poison so it does not hurt Him.

A gnosis of Sigyn that has been corroborated by several others (including my colleagues Galina Krasskova, Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð and Talas Pái) is that She was an orphan or runaway adopted by Njord and raised by the Vanir. Just as Njord raised Frey and Freya very well, I believe Sigyn was indulged to make up for whatever She endured earlier in life, and Her sweetness preserved.

Sigyn is Loki's joy. Loki is a complicated figure, and nothing He does comes with simple motives even if it would appear as such -- it goes beyond doing things for laughs or to stir up strife. It could be said, to borrow an "outsider" analogy, that Loki is the yin to Odin's yang, and that there's a little bit of trickster nature in Odin just as there's a little bit of seriousness in Loki, and indeed the joke may be on us -- Loki is heavily weighted with sorrows, just as Odin seems to find much of human nature and behavior to be hilarious. As Loki is with Angrboda as a source of power, Loki gets joy from Sigyn, and does things to preserve that joy, to make Her laugh. Sigyn has been described as a child-bride, and I believe Her innocence is what drives the loyalty to Loki during the time when All else have forsaken Him. Loki cherishes that innocence within Her, and wants to fuel it with laughter. To give any God laughter is one of the best gifts you can give, but Sigyn has Her own pain, and Loki makes Her laugh to protect and preserve Her innocence, which gives Him joy.

On a deeper level, Sigyn can be seen as part of the cosmic current of the Weeping Goddess of Compassion, She who collects all the poison of humanity, all the world's sorrows, in a bowl, and invests every waking moment in this task. While I wouldn't go as far as to say "Loki was bound for your sins", I believe the story of Baldur's slaying is more complex than Heathens would give thought to and Loki was misunderstood... or at least the convenient scapegoat. This does not mean that I am a Loki apologist and believe most people should give Him a wide berth. However, whereas Loki did wrong that was illustrated in the lore, Sigyn's only crime was choosing to stand by Her husband throughout His binding in the cave.

In this act of ultimate loyalty and compassion, She demonstrates the nature of Her Vanic upbringing. The Vanir are Deities intimately familiar with sacrifice, especially regarding the ones They love best. Frey gave up the best sword in the Nine Worlds to Gerda's family as a bride-price. Freya traveled the Nine Worlds forsaking all pleasure to search for Oðr and mourn Him. Njord let Skadhi go rather than fighting for Her, because in the end He was ultimately concerned with Her happiness. While Loki may be "the problem child", He must have been at least decently behaved to Sigyn for Her to stay with Him through the long years of binding and torment. Sigyn sacrificed Her own life, itself, to give Loki what little comfort She could. She can be seen as an example for us in the modern day, particularly for those who have to tend to chronically sick loved ones, or (as my other half has discovered) one who has experienced heavy trauma and needs some kind of solace when flashbacking and re-experiencing the traumatic events.

I love Sigyn very much and have made it a point to gift Her regularly. I want Sigyn to smile, and laugh, and have momentary freedom from the memories of Loki's binding, or Her own murky upbringing. It is through touching Sigyn's heart, that I also heal that hurt and addled part of my own self. Which is what She would want, anyway.

Hail Sigyn, who is victorious not through overt warrior skills, but through the acts of love, loyalty, trust, and compassion.

SUNNA AND MANI

It could be said with accuracy that Sunna and Mani are two of the most undervalued Deities of the Northern tradition; some Kindreds will give worth to Sunna on Midsummer and maybe even the Winter Solstice. Many forget entirely about Mani and may see the idea of celebrating the full moon as "wiccanish". Be that as it may, we know from the accounts of Bede that Mani's tides in particular were very important to the Anglo-Saxons, with specific times of each month specifically regarded as wealful or woeful. I think that one of the reasons for the neglect is that Sunna and Mani call very few, and this because They are accessible to all.

In general, we moderns don't pay a lot of attention to the sun because it's always there. If you look directly at it during an eclipse, it will hurt your eyes. That being said, so many of us have gotten far removed from the land that we don't realize the influence of Sunna on the growing things, and while some of us do suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, we also have climate control so the lack of warmth does not affect us so much as lack of daylight. Even so, we are dependent on the travel of Sunna through the sky, and because daylight is so obvious, it takes some thought to reflect upon what that daylight means for our health as well as the health of the plants and animals around us. We need light in order to see, also; it can be very hard to move or to use objects when we can't see what we're doing. Artificial light and climate control have indeed removed us from reflecting on Sunna, but She is still important.

In the Heathen era of the Northlands, a cold winter with little sunlight meant sickness, and too often death also. It is especially important in these times to remember Her, because we too often forget. She deserves our honor, our appreciation for the light, warmth, protection, and health that She brings to us, and the way She sustained our ancestors long ago before we had all the modern conveniences we enjoy now. But we also need what She has to offer, which is freely given to all regardless of who they are and what their lot in life. Even if

one has "radio silence" from the other Gods, we can still drink in Sunna's light and warmth, and let it recharge us, and put us in perspective of Her holiness.

Mani's ride through the skies, is often neglected totally by modern Heathens, despite Heathens of old yelling "Victory to you, Moon!" during a lunar eclipse and living by His cycles. Indeed, it seems that Mani takes His job very seriously, that of lighting the darkness and influencing the tides of the ocean as well as the water in the bodies of living things. Mani knows that if He is even slightly off course, there will be disaster. So He does not tarry long among human company. However, it is mentioned that Mani took two children from Earth to ride with Him, and Bil is counted among the Asynjur which suggests She became Mani's wife. There is a common personal gnosis among mystics in the Northern Tradition that Mani will take abused/abandoned children up and away with Him, to keep safe in the night. Which leads me to explain how I came to know and love Sunna and Mani as I do.

I had a difficult childhood, and grew up to fear the night because that would be the time when the violence was the worst. I would hide under my blankets and be terrified of the dark, but took comfort in the light of the Moon through my window. When I grew up and became a Pagan, I always felt relief at the sight of the Moon in the sky, and as I grew in my Pagan experience, I found the phases of the Moon to influence my moods and body in certain ways, and used that to work powerful magick. Even when I had very difficult times in my life, I could look at the Moon and know I would get through the night.

I attended a ritual for Mani in August of 2008. I had never previously connected with Mani directly, but I felt compelled to gift Him with a moonstone as a token of appreciation for my joy and delight in the Moon all of my life. I danced for Mani, and enjoyed the food and drink offered to Him that He shared with us, especially a strong anise-flavored liquor (I believe it was ouzo). I gave Mani the moonstone, expecting nothing in return except maybe a smile which would have been good enough for me. Instead, Mani told me that I was almost one of His. He pulled me close and told me to come to know the

embrace of the Moon. I felt wrapped in a blanket of glowing white silk, and felt a nurturing like I had never known from a male Deity. I am oathed to Frey and very close to His father Njord and find these to be wonderfully gentle Men, but there was something different emanating from Mani... a certain aching loveliness.

Mani spoke to us, saying there is none so broken who cannot come to Him, no pain He has not witnessed in the night. This resonated deeply with me, and I felt that He had been watching me all these years and He knew.

I did not expect to have such a profound encounter with Mani, and this fundamentally changed my relationship with Mani - I felt this was an invitation to get to know Him better, to give Him more regular honor, for while the encounter was brief, it felt like an eternity wrapped in His arms, and I wanted to celebrate His beauty.

I have found Mani to be a joy to honor, regardless of what phase it is. To drink in His light in the darkness is to drink in hope, the knowledge that no matter how bad things seem there is always something there to be grateful for, and keep going. In the fullness of His light, you see the fullness of His glory - the world feels different when there is a full moon, much more alive, even electrified. Mani is a sensual, intoxicating God - not necessarily in a sexual way, but in the pleasure of visual beauty, comfortable touch, scents and tastes, and the awareness of the world. Mani shines His light on us, and there is a certain glow with His light that you don't quite get with the Sun, and something very magical about it.

Through Mani I came to love Sunna. I had also felt very distant from Sunna, especially because living now as I do in Southern California, the very last thing I want to do on the Summer Solstice is have a bonfire in the 100-degree heat and encourage Sunna to shine brighter. But I felt Her joy in looking at the world, seeing things grow, seeing things live. She also carries a sense of fierce pride in Her work, knowing that it is by Her light we live. In some ways I would say that Mani is rather an effeminate man and Sunna close to the stereotype of a butch woman, except that doesn't quite fit. But Sunna is as strong as they come - She'd have to be, to pull the fire of the Sun in a chariot all

day, being chased by a wolf.

Sunna was apparently called by the ancients for healing, as evidenced in the Second Merseburg Charm:

*Phol ende uuodan
uuorun zi holza.
du uuart demo balderes uolon
sin uuoz birenkit.
thu biguol en sinthgunt,
sunna era suister;
thu biguol en friia,
uolla era suister;
thu biguol en uuodan,
so he uuola conda:*

*sose benrenki,
sose bluetrenki,
sose lidirenki:
ben zi bena,
bluot zi bluoda,
lid zi geliden,
sose gelimida sin.*

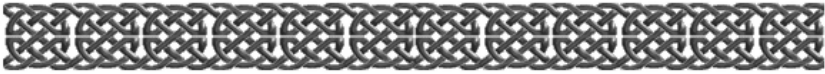
Phol and Odin
rode into the woods,
There Balder's foal
sprained its foot.
It was charmed by Sinthgunt,
(so did) her sister Sunna.
It was charmed by Frija,
(so did) her sister Volla.
It was charmed by Odin,
as he well knew how:
Bone-sprain,
like blood-sprain,
Like limb-sprain:
Bone to bone,
blood to blood,

Limb to limb,
As though they were glued.

It seems that Sunna is able to heal, although it also seems Her healing specialties are different from Frigga, Fulla, and Odin. Sunna, from what I've experienced, has a direct connection to life force energy (including auras and chakras) by virtue of being a Goddess of light and the spectrum of light.

While I work most closely with the Vanir, I know that Sunna and Mani are well-beloved of Vanaheim, precisely because the cycles of life are so dependent on Their tides. And so, I give Sunna and Mani Their due. They are here for us all, and ask for little else in return but to watch us live, to drink in their light and move in Their sight upon the Earth.

PART THREE:
VANIC PRACTICE



Components of a Vanic Practice

Svartesól

I feel that a Vanic practice, honoring the Gods of the World, must be a wholistic practice, and as such has multiple components: devotional, ritual, magical, and mundane/experiential.

Devotion is usually a non-formal, non-ceremonial way of directly gifting or addressing a Deity or wight, such as pouring a Deity or wight a libation as an offering and/or burning a candle or incense, and working with prayer beads. It could be said that the biggest differentiation between a devotional act, and a ritual is that the ritual serves more as a "conductor" for opening the veil between worlds, whereas devotional practice is more like saying "hi".

As far as rituals go, most of my rituals are performed on the different points of the Wheel of the Year. It is commonly known that much of the Northlands had three "official" major blóts a year: Yule, the Summer Solstice, and Hallows. That being said, May Day customs have survived since Anglo-Saxon times, as has Harvest Home/Lammas, and Charming of the Plough. Observing an agricultural calendar will keep one mindful of one's relationship to the Earth. Three major rituals seems to be too few, whereas eight seems to be about right (and it is noted that Sleipnir, Odin's steed who can travel between the worlds, has eight legs). Even in parts of the world where the climate is not like that of Scandinavia -- Southern California, for example -- there are changes in vegetation and animal behavior pertaining to the station of the calendar. And it should go without saying that the rules completely change when dealing with the Otherworlds. Vanaheim, for example, gets a four-season agricultural cycle much like you would find in England or New England. Niflheim, by contrast, is always frozen, and Muspellheim is always hot. Since I am focused on the Vanir, it makes sense to work with a calendar reflecting the changes of the year as it pertains to Vanaheim.

Indeed, I believe that since the Vanir are Deities with close ties to nature, formal celebrations of the Vanir take place on solar cycles.

The solar cycle of Vanaheim has eight stations, which seem to roughly match up with the Wiccan ritual calendar.

While the major ceremonies will be performed per the seasonal cycles, I do periodic fainings to specific Deities, most often my patrons, Frey and Gerda, mainly to say "thank You", sometimes to ask for help.

With both seasonal celebrations and private fainings, my approach has become something resembling Druidry, while I am not necessarily affiliated with any Druid grove or organization, nor is my practice exactly modeled after theirs.

Despite a more formal practice, I still don't need a lot of tools and arcane symbolism to raise power and commune with the Gods. For example, I know of some Pagans who like to have a large bonfire or sparklers and fireworks at their Midsummer rites. While I think this is fine, practicality and my desire to not burn my home down dictate having a little less "showy" ritual. Most of my rituals these days incorporate singing as well as reverence of the elements.

It is of course, not necessary or mandatory to identify as a Druid or have a Druid-like practice to honor the Vanir. Some people are very devotionally and ritually oriented, and need this to stay grounded. Others can do with the bare-bones minimum while still feeling the Gods with them. Neither of these ways are wrong, just different. However, the problem with the former is often not having enough time for mundane existence or to lose sight of the sacred in the mundane. The problem with the latter is the danger of feeling the Gods are not interested in us, and so being casual and even flippant when it comes time to pay respects. The important thing overall is that if you feel the need for more rituals, they should be implemented in a practical way, and whether or not it is "doing it wrong" by historical standards, we will never know, because most of our knowledge of what they did was completely gone. I obviously do not think anything can be pulled out of one's rear and be called a spiritual practice, but if you are thoughtful about the components of your spirituality and it makes sense, and the Deities are being honored respectfully... it's not a bad thing.

The Vanir are also very deeply associated with magic, and

indeed working magic is a natural outgrowth of Their worship. I feel that magic is not just a sometimes thing, but a way of life. When magic is applied to everyday life, not to miraculously fix impossible situations, but as an enhancement -- a way of bringing the sacred to the mundane -- it can be seen as a spiritual discipline. Food is cooked with intent, clothing is chosen with care, the home is warded and blessed, people are comforted... or cursed. Magic is the natural result of a regular devotional practice, particularly that attuned to the Gods of the World - bringing the awareness of the Gods into the mind and heart, and through the words and fingertips. Magic can also include divination, a way to seek the will of the Gods, be guided towards opportunities, and avoid potential disasters.

However, a Vanic practice is not just limited to the circle, to the hallowed space. It is important to carry the awareness of the Vanir with you every day, in all that you do. Those who are claimed by Vanic Deities will often find themselves compelled to make changes in their diet, in their expenditures, and live more "green", perhaps even gardening or picking up litter where they see it. Mindfulness of the Gods of the World translates into mindfulness of the world itself, and since this is truly our home, it is good to take care of it. Besides nature, this extends to people, interacting with more care and decency unless it becomes necessary to protect self or kin from wrongdoing. There are certain values the Vanir hold dear, certain customs They have, that our world needs right now, just as our world also needs some Aesic influence and the Jotnar are also claiming people to restore balance here in Midgard.

There is no work towards "enlightenment" in a Vanic cosmology, rather, we seek to embrace our humanity in all of its glorified ape primitivism: to eat, to shit, to sleep, to fuck, to play, are all good and necessary things. There is nothing dirty about our bodies, nothing about our instincts that should be suppressed or "overcome". There are indeed some things that separate humans from the animals, such as the ability to love, and a conscience, but when we become more natural, rather than less, we find our urges for unnatural "bad" behavior (violence as one example) goes down.

In sum, a Vanic practice is circular, where the sacred and the mundane not only overlap and intersect, but the mundane is sacred, the sacred is mundane. The Vanir are Gods of the World and all that is in the world, both the beauty and brutality of nature, the highest thoughts and deepest desires of humanity. May we embrace Them and find our world a better place for it.

Vanic Virtues

Svartesól

Most religions have a codified set of ethics. Abrahamic religions have the Ten Commandments. The Pagan Greek philosopher Plato talked of 'The Four Virtues': Courage, Wisdom, Temperance and Justice. There is also the Delphic Maxims, used today by many Hellenic polytheists. The Anglo-Saxons had their own book of Maxims. The Buddhists have the Four Noble Truths as regards to the state of this world, and the Noble Eightfold Path as a way to "remedy". Wicca teaches "An' it harm none, do as thou wilt."

Modern Heathen practice has the Nine Noble Virtues, originally stated by Stubba of the Odinic Rite in the 1970s. They are a distillation of the Havamal, insofar as they do not mention every virtue listed in the Havamal (moderation is notably absent, as one example). The Wodenings went further with the Twelve Aetheling Thews, which are closer to a proper summary of the Havamal. Yet, the Havamal was given by Odin in His heiti of Hár, and while it is indeed words of wisdom, it is also more appropriate for followers of the Aesir to adhere to. We can at least thank Odin for the gift of writing, so we can now express our ideas and preserve them, as we do not have much of Vanir lore - the time when the Vanir cultus was predominant was also the time when the inhabitants of the Northlands were pre-literate.

Therefore, here is a set of Vanic Virtues for us to think upon. These are guidelines rather than absolutes, suggestions rather than commandments. These virtues are based in my continuing study as to the extant lore and personal gnosis of the Vanir, what They are like, what They want from us. I have personally found this list useful in keeping on my own Path:

1. Respect and care for this world, for it is our home.

It seems that the monotheistic religions, as well as Eastern religions, teach that "worldiness" is a bad thing and that we are to transcend the world or at least not be a part of it. As Nerthus is Earth

Mother and Frey is God of the World, we Vanatruar know our world is sacred, from the beautiful flowers to the maggots that eat shit, it is all a necessary part of the life cycle. Our ecology is in trouble, and it behooves us to be mindful in our actions, everything from what we buy and use and dispose of (or not), to our daily activities, to the way we treat other life forms. If we destroy this planet, we not only do not have a home anymore, but we are grieving the Vanir.

2. There are many ways to Love, and little enough of it in this world. Love is good.

Besides appreciating those who have a traditional marriage and/or breed, this means a tolerance by default for "alternative lifestyles", whether it is a queer or polyamorous relationship, or one who is asexual with platonic contacts. Indeed, friendship in and of itself is a form of Love. When one has another or others to love, it enhances the quality of life, and the knowledge of interconnectedness to the world. Love is good both for reasons of practicality (immediate relations to protect and provide for; less fighting, more productivity) as well as mysticism (inspiring beauty, seeing allegories to our relationship/s with the Gods). It is important that there is Love, the combination of bodies is not important.

It is important to mention that coercion is not Love, whether that is forcing someone into sex, or mistreating someone for being "weaker" in some way. It has been noted elsewhere that the Vanir in modern times seem to be calling many survivors of sexual abuse, to heal our spirits and teach us rape is not Their gift of sex.

3. Be hospitable and generous, kind and compassionate, as you are able.

While dwellers of large cities have always had a certain xenophobia (particularly in regards to fearing and avoiding crime), after 9/11 we saw an increase in the attitude of "guilty until proven innocent" directed towards strangers. The Vanir look out for Their own, as evidenced in the story of Freya and Her devotee Ottar, Frey and His historic devotees (going so far as to drive someone off the land when it was taken wrongly from one of His own). There is a difference

between not protecting oneself and completely closing oneself off to kindness and promoting hostility. There is a difference between giving when it hurts (and a gift given in grudging obligation is not a gift anymore) and exercising compassion whether in deed or in resources. We are a part of the world, and as such we are interconnected with other humans, besides the flora and fauna, and the greater elements. We owe it to the care of this world to sow good will when there is no reason to sow hatred.

4. When your hearth, your livelihood, or your kin are threatened - show no mercy, no quarter.

The Vanir have been dismissed as "Gods of peace". There is a difference between "frith" and "peace". A frithgard was a place where conflict and debate could still happen, but none was to unjustly attack another. When I speak of bringing frith, I do not speak of assimilating different people to the same point of view, but bringing people together nonetheless, to appreciate their commonalities as well as their differences. (Indeed, there is a difference between someone holding a different POV, and someone working evil, and often enough the two are conflagrated within modern Heathenry.) When Nerthus' procession passed, people lay down their weapons and rejoiced. However it is noted elsewhere the boar was Her battle standard, indeed as it is for Frey and Freya, and we know that in the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, the Vanir were actually winning. There is no wrath like that of one who is protecting what they hold dear, and when the Vanir are protecting Their own, They give the Aesir a run for Their money.

Being consumed by a vendetta that eats away one's happiness is not a Vanic virtue, but meeting the threat head-on and eliminating said threat so it doesn't turn into an unresolved vendetta, is indeed very Vanic. (I'm not justifying killing random people here, but noting that sometimes it's best to cut someone out of one's life, or go to the authorities rather than feeling guilty about it, or even learning self-defense skills and utilizing them.)

5. Know what battles to fight, and what to end, and what not to participate in

at all.

Fighting of any sort takes a lot out of a person both physically (stress responses, chemical changes, if not injuries) and psychologically (promoting a stimulus response in the brain, paving the way for PTSD). If one is continually engaged in minor skirmishes (particularly in this day and age of the Internet), one will be chronically stressed out, and indeed when there is really something to be stressed about, performance will suffer. It is important, therefore, not to get too worked up about too many things, and sometimes things should be smoothed over if one has not done irreparable harm. The war between the Aesir and the Vanir started precisely because the Vanir tried to share with the Aesir and it was abused (culminating in the burning of Gullveig), but the Vanir still made a truce with Them, and share Themselves and Their resources with the Aesir. Forgiveness is not one of our virtues, but making things right is, both through word and through deed.

6. Work hard, and whatever you do, do it well or not at all.

Too often, the virtues of "self-reliance" and "industriousness" as found in the Nine Noble Virtues are leveled against Heathens who are disabled, particularly if they are receiving some kind of assistance. The idea of rugged individualism is uniquely American. In elder Heathen society, we see life was community-based, and while I don't doubt Bjorn Average had his hobbies of whittling wood or going for walks in the woods, the reason for outlawry was to remove threats to the community, and one of the nice benefits of blót was the community feasted with the Gods, particularly the sacrifice made at Hallows when times would be lean for the poorer among the village. It is very easy to tell someone they are lazy or otherwise a burden on society when you have not walked a mile in their shoes, and do not know what their everyday life is like.

Even if someone is receiving disability assistance, that does not mean they do not work, and do absolutely nothing. There are more forms of work than being employed on a payroll. Being a stay-at-home parent and/or "house-spouse" is work. Creating art, or writing books, is

work. Volunteering with various agencies is work. A full-time clergy job is work, especially if you have a "mundane" job besides that.

There are plenty of people who are employed full-time who hate their jobs (taking the job just to pay the bills) and put in a "half-assed" effort. A "half-assed" effort, in Heathen times, would have been a weak link potentially endangering the livelihood (if not the safety) of the entire village. The key to industriousness is actually to take pride in one's work, each according to their ability. All people are not going to excel in all things, most people are specialists. It takes many people to make up a society, and even if someone is seriously disabled, there is usually something they can do well (to assume the disabled can do nothing is condescending, speaking as a disabled person).

7. The world does not owe you a living.

In the 21st century, many of us have become very entitlement-minded and feel that life is continually unfair. The thing is, the world is what you make of it. A lot of injustices do happen, particularly those based in wrongful discrimination. However, expecting everything to go one's way all the time is unreasonable and will result in a lot of disappointment. Shit happens; whether you want to use that shit as compost to grow things is your choice. Our ancestors (wherever they lived) had it much harder than we do today, much as they did not have many of the social ills currently facing today's society. We are ridiculously spoiled, as far as quality of health, life expectancy, and the wide variety of careers, homes, and social groups we can pick and choose from. One can only expect to go as far in life as one works towards it, including if one is God-owned and their life is not really their own. There are still some things one can only do oneself, that the Gods cannot and will not do for us. Circumstances may happen beyond our control, tragedies may knock us down. But so long as we are still alive, there is always a way to keep pressing on, and a little help is one thing - expecting others to bend over backwards and treat us in ways we would never treat others is not a Vanic virtue.

8. Be continually grateful, for everything you have can easily be gone.

The Vanir, as the Gods of agriculture of the Northlands, are different than the agricultural Gods of other pantheons. The Northlands are a place of extreme climate, and to grow food came with the knowledge that things could go very badly due to weather, blight, or many things outside of human control. To propitiate the agriculture Gods meant brutal honesty with confronting the cycles of life and death, and as such Vanir rites are noted for being either very sexual or very bloody.

To express gratitude is more than paying mere lip service for things gone well. Even as we moderns live in climate controlled buildings, buy food with no knowledge of where it comes from or how it lived, and the poorest among us have more things now than the richest of eldritch times - we are still human and we are not more powerful than nature itself. It behooves us to give respect to nature, and as such, the Gods of nature, who do affect the weather, the soil, the growth and strength of crops and beast, and teach us wisdom as to how we should eat and how to raise what we are eating. A flood in the Midwest or a drought in the Southwest of the United States means higher food prices for the entire world. Catastrophic weather in several pockets at once means food shortages. What we have can be taken from us, and while we have fooled ourselves to think we are king and we have dominion over the world, the fact is this is not the case, and to cultivate gratitude is to put us back into alignment with the cycles, so maybe we will think before we act, and not be so quick to destroy ourselves.

9. Celebrate life, for it is a gift.

As mentioned, Frey is God of the World, meaning not just the environment but everyday life. When Skirnir threatened Gerda for initially rejecting Frey, the underlying message was that a life without Frey would be one of darkness, sorrow, loneliness, and hardship. Midgard - our planet Earth - is literally the middle world of the World Tree, and the most neutral of territories, where all pantheons converge through "the door". We, as humans, have a unique relationship with the Gods. While They can and do exist independently of us, it is our

offerings and Their blessings that form an energy exchange, a continual flow back and forth that keeps things in balance. Midgard is also home to many wights (spirits of place) of varying degrees of power, who serve as guardians and often guides, if we are willing to pay Them due respect. The bodies of those who have gone before, whether decomposed or scattered as ash, are in the ground on which we walk, and their spirits and memories teach us and inspire us. Midgard is a very special place, and it is up to us humans to preserve it. The Gods, wights, and dead may assist in this task, but if we destroy ourselves, we will be destroying that door within Yggdrasil. Indeed, life on Midgard should be seen as a gift from the Gods Themselves, and enjoyed to the fullest. Even when one is facing hardship, there is always a bit of good in each day, and that should be focused on, even when it is most difficult to do so, for the focus on that goodness will make it easier to be open to more goodness. We are alive for a reason, we are embodied for a reason - we didn't have to be incarnated here - and it is good.

Personally, I think that at some point in one's spiritual development, a codified set of ethics can only go so far. They are indeed a good starting point to figure out what is a value of the religion and what is not, but even if we can all agree that something is good to follow, you have to think about what is important to you, personally, what is important to your spirituality as it pertains to your worldview and your deeds. One value may mean much more to me than it does to you, or much less to me than it does to you. Be that as it may, it is indeed the quest for personal integrity that compels many of us to stay on course spiritually, and is important to piece together and reclaim ethics for these troubled times, and there do seem to be things the Vanir emphasize, as far as Their *thew* or custom being different from the Aesir, and things we as Their people should also hold dear.

Wights and Ancestors

Svartesól

Honor of the wights and ancestors is important regardless of whether you focus on Aesir, Vanir, or Jotnar, but it is of particular importance in a Vanic-centered practice.

Superstitions regarding the spirits of place survived long after the conversion of Scandinavia, also called *landvættir* in Old Norse and *landwihta* in Anglo-Saxon. I am of the opinion that it is just as important to cultivate a good relationship with your local land-wights as it is to develop relationships with the Gods, for we live on the land and must treat it with respect. If we do not respect the land, our land will soon become inhabitable, through abuse and neglect of the ground, air, and water, and of the spirits themselves. Angry spirits are not something you want to deal with!

It has been argued whether a land-wight is a different kind of elf, or a different kind of giant, but I think that the land-wights are a "species" all to themselves. For one thing, they are not under obligation to take a humanoid form just to make us feel comfortable. They don't ever have to "appear" outside of inhabiting a tree, or a rock, or a field of grass, but that doesn't mean they're not there. Their spirits are more "primitive" than even the most elemental Jotnar or the elves of light or elves of darkness. They are the spirits of the stones and soil and everything upon it, the "humming" that many sensitives can hear of the Earth. The Earth itself is alive, a microcosm of the Universe itself. In every forest there is a small Universe, but also in every desert, every tundra, even in the cities. The stones and soil and growing things are not just "there", but sentient guardians.

It's my personal opinion that regardless of what classification a land-wight may or may not fall into, any being that is really really old - which would be most land-spirits - is bigger than myself, and deserves reverence, even worship. All "worship" means is "to worth", and as such, giving worth to the local spirits through offerings, attention, and care is necessary for a good relationship, so that your days may go well

on the land.

I also believe the dead should be remembered among the living, particularly in a Vanic-focused practice. For starters, the past is the foundation for the present, and it is more wholistic to give worth to those who came before us, who lived and worked and died, paving the way for what we have now. Furthermore, in very ancient Europe we have archaeological evidence of communal burial mounds, where a family or entire village would go upon death. Individual burial mounds for individual dead bodies was a common practice among the Ertebolle/Funnelbeaker-era peoples who likely worshiped the Vanir, and after the Common Era it is noted that followers of Odin and Thor would almost always be cremated, whereas followers of Frey would still be buried.

And now, too, a thing happened which seemed strange and new. No snow lodged on the south side of Thorgrim's howe, nor did it freeze there. And men guessed it was because Thorgrim had been so dear to Frey for his worship's sake that the god would not suffer the frost to come between them.

Gisla Saga, Chapter X.

One of the practices of *útiseta* indeed involves mound-sitting, and it can be inferred that the cult of the Vanir gave worth to the dead, who decomposed and fed the soil, but also whose very essence went into the Earth, and gave it wisdom and life.

That your life was touched, even in a small way, means that person is worthy of remembrance. To remember the dead is not just to honor them, their personality and the words said, the deeds done, the life lived, but to be aware that among the living, each life is worth something. The Gods didn't make junk, and no matter how "low" someone's state is, there is always at least one good thing they have said or done, at least one positive trait in their personality. There are many who are not very well off in life and would do better if the world stopped judging by mere appearances and looked to the inner self. We need to lift each other up, not tear everybody else down. Ballads may

be for the very greatest and most noble of heroes, but every person is capable of being somebody's hero.

Ancestors do not have to be blood. The links of spirit are just as strong and oftentimes stronger.

Even if you cannot connect with the dead, you can name them, you can offer to them, and give their memory worth.

And so, a Vanic practice is not just about the Vanir Themselves, but helping spirits such as the beloved dead and the local wights. All life is interconnected, from the Gods of the Earth to the land-spirits who will outlive us, to the beloved dead who have gone before. Recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, and tuning into those circles and cycles, is what being Vanic is all about.

Of the Aesir and Jotnar

Svartesól

While I do not speak for all who consider themselves to be Vanatru, in terms of Vanatru insofar as it is practiced in my hearth, I don't deign to bash Deities. And it does seem to be the case for most of the Vanatruar with whom I've corresponded over the years - they don't care for Deity-bashing either. My practice of Vanatru is not a protest against the Odin-and-Thor-dominant US form of Heathenry, rather it is because I feel called to the Vanir and that's the way it is.

It makes sense that for those of us who connect most with the Vanir, we get tired of the machismo posturing and long to reconnect with nature, and what is good about human life. Many of us need a safe space, a way to come together or at least discuss things with like-minded people, without having to worry about being told we're "doing it wrong" from people who sneer at Vanic perspectives as being "Wiccanish".

It seems that Odin in particular is very grabby and in a space where He is invoked, He does dominate, even if other Gods are present. I have noticed a phenomenon among many of my friends who are oathed to Odin where they are maybe allowed to honor one or two other Deities on occasion (e.g. Freya, Frigga, or Loki) but generally look like monotheists on the surface, being All Odin All The Time. I don't necessarily see anything wrong with this, but it happens more with Odin's people than any other Northern Deity that I've seen, and the influence seems to "spill over" in groups where there is an Odinsperson and a few Vanic folk.

That being said, I don't blame Odin and Thor for the PR They get from some of Their followers. I'm not sure that Odin, who sacrificed His eye and hung on the World Tree for nine days, is exactly pleased with pooh-poohing of wisdom as "that thar book larnin' stuff", nor Thor being pleased with aggressive bullies. I do not see any God through rose-colored glasses, even the Vanir. I am aware that Odin can occasionally often be untrustworthy or at the very least He *always* has

an agenda, and gives His followers (male, female, and in-between) a rough ride. To say the least. I am aware that Thor is not the most intellectual Deity out there, and has a nasty temper that doesn't take much to provoke. But, I still revere Odin for His wisdom, and I revere Thor for His good nature.

I can understand the backlash, therefore, against Odin and the Aesir, from those who identify as Vanatru, as much as I violently disagree with it and would tell people to rethink what they are doing.

It seems in many cases that those who would criticize the Aesir find the ways of the Vanir to be "inherently superior", but are misguided about what the Vanir actually are. I have heard/read some self-professed Vanatruar assert that the Vanir are a pacifist, vegan, bisexual matriarchy. There are indeed a number of Vanatruar who may be pacifist, may be vegan, may be bisexual, and may be female. But, looking at the facts as far as the Gods Themselves:

-The Vanir Themselves are emphatically not pacifist -- besides the mention above of Frey and Njord, there is also the fact of Freya being... well... Freya; and Nerthus had a habit of drowning Her slaves. Perhaps a better word for the Vanir would be "non-aggressors" or "defenders": no, They are usually not the ones to strike first, but will defend what They hold tooth-and-nail if forced. They would, of course, rather negotiate and try to bring compromise and peace.

-They may indeed inspire people to eat healthier, which would include veganism (especially as They have spheres of influence in agriculture which would include produce), but Frey and Freya have boars, and Njord is a sea God and a patron of fishermen. So, there may indeed be vegans who are Vanatru, but it is not a requirement.

-As far as bisexuality, there is a large spectrum of sexuality and Gods cannot be neatly classified into boxes like orientation: it does seem that Frey may be pansexual (and has many gay followers), but Sif seems very heteronormative. Vanatru is neither a "queer religion" nor a "religion for straights", but is accepting of all who love and revere the Vanir and view all paths of consensual sexuality between adults as being sacred in its own right, with its own set of mysteries.

-And for the matriarchy, Frey and Njord are just as powerful

and renowned among the Vanir as Freya and Nerthus. They are more about equality rather than one gender being considered superior above the other/s, as nature is reliant on male and female members of the species.

It seems that Vanatru is getting more attention now as a viable religious option for those who want it, as well as criticism from those who still think "it's not a religion" or "is Wiccatru". And so something needs to be said on my end, as one of the people who makes the most noise about Vanatru (after all, I compiled this anthology on Them).

Moreover, the Vanir are Gods of frith. When the war between the Aesir and Vanir was fought, the Vanir were winning - They broke down the wall of Asgard - and yet the Vanir sent Frey, Freya, and Njord to live among the Aesir and only Mimir and Hoenir went to the Vanir. And, Mimir's head got chopped off and later put in a well for Odin to consult as an oracle, so there's not exactly an even balance there. I don't believe the entire race of Vanir was absorbed into the Aesir, and Frey, Freya, and Njord still have duties among the Vanes and places in Vanaheim. That being said, if the three Vanir were totally unhappy with Their arrangement, They are powerful enough to have ways of ending it (after all, the Vanir knocked down the wall of Asgard), and as far as I know, that hasn't ended, the frith-truce is still active. I do get the sense particularly with Frey and Odin that there is an alliance if not necessarily a friendship, and often a friendly rivalry with frequent conspiring.

However, rather than the backlash being based in a bad experience with Odin personally, I find most of the backlash comes from people who feel "no connection" with the Aesir. And personally I think the last thing Vanatru needs is for Vanatru-identified people to bash the Aesir, especially those who have never dealt with any of the Aesir. If you don't feel a connection with Odin or Thor or Whoever you're not wrong or bad for this. Nobody has to like or get along with any Deity, and that's just how it is. But, it's wrong to bash Deities. It is very Vanic to weave bonds of frith with honoring and appreciating both tribes, while still giving a goodly amount of time, attention, and offerings to the Vanir. It is, to Their frith-truce, unacceptable to bash

Odin or the rest of the Aesir.

Less common than Aesir-bashing but a problem enough to be noted is the issue of what I've come to term "Jotunphobia". The issue of Jotun worship has become a polarizing issue in modern Heathenry if not currently the most polarizing issue. While most of the Vanatrúar who I have corresponded with are rather open-minded regarding new trends in Heathenry, there are some who I've corresponded with who have expressed fear and loathing towards the more "hostile" Jotnar commonly referred to as Rokkr, that is, Loki and His kin.

For the official record, I am very neutral and am neither for nor against. I cannot be completely for as I am Vanatrú, and thus true to the Vanir, not the Aesir nor the Jotnar. But neither can I be against, as the Vanir are very much about liberty and personal freedom, and once we begin policing people's private spirituality, it becomes a slippery slope.

It is especially slippery considering that Ragnarok strikes me as so much Armageddon. To me eschatology is eschatology, which cultivates a toxic "religion of fear" where it all comes down to The Chosen delivering G-d's judgment to the Nonbelievers, Heretics, and Unfaithful. I don't see much difference between those who say, "I know what side of Idavoll Plain I'll be standing on" and those who say "I know where I'll be when the Rapture hits." It also amazes me that most people who believe in the literalness of Ragnarok fail to remember the part mentioned that the only humans who fight at Ragnarok are Odin's *einherjar*, which has a certain prerequisite of being oathed to Odin and having been killed in battle. Chances are Joe Average Heathen is not going to be fighting at Ragnarok were it to come to pass.

Of course, we shouldn't be surprised of the eschatology when we consider that the Eddas were transcribed by Christian monks: oral tradition that was changed here and there to favor the New Religion. I do not feel the lore should be abandoned outright, but should be seen as a diving board into the ocean of deeper understanding of the Gods. Going strictly by the lore and taking Ragnarok as a given also means you should believe the Norse Gods to be from Troy and the Creation story of Adam and Eve to be true. That's in the lore too, after all.

There also seems to be a pattern in other European polytheistic religions where the original Gods - usually giants of some sort - are replaced by a conquering race of Gods, and summarily demonized. Example: the Fomorians of Celtic mythos, and the Titans of Greek mythology. According to a Hellenic polytheist friend, Leto, Gaia/Ge, Helios, Rhea, Selene, Themis, Eos, Mnemosyne, Okeanos and Phoibe are still given honor by many Hellenes. Let us also not forget Kronos/Saturn, whose feast lives on as Saturnalia.

If we look at the history of the Northlands, such as presented in the Northern Tradition timeline, we know that people have been living in the North since Paleolithic times and yet I'm pretty sure they weren't calling on Odin. The earliest figures that could be said to be Odin did not manifest in the Northlands until the Bronze Age. It makes sense that some kind of primordial fire Deity taught the early Northern Europeans how to build fire to cook food, to heat themselves, to avoid freezing and starvation... to use fire as a weapon if need-be. There are carvings of anthropomorphic Deities, and indeed I think the Jotnar-as-a-whole were worshiped in the Northlands as the original Gods. The Vanic cultus seems to be a natural outgrowth of the Jotun cultus, and it would seem the two cults existed simultaneously, with the Jotun cultus eventually waning in power as the Northlands became more "civilized".

No, we don't have evidence that Jotnar said to participate in Ragnarok, such as Fenris, were ever worshiped. We don't have evidence that they weren't worshiped, mainly because most of the history of the Northlands was that of a pre-literate people and there's only so much we can go on from rock carvings and artifacts. I think the giants were a part of Heathenish worship, though, and I think the Jotnar are calling a select few to Themselves again, in the modern day. Just a select few, for very few humans can understand what life was like for the people who were most likely the original worshippers of the Jotnar. It was brutal, nasty, and short. As such, the Jotnar tend to be difficult taskmasters, severely challenging their followers in the modern day.

Even if Ragnarok were to be a given, and even if the Jotnar were never worshiped in the Northlands, we can see the Vanir are very

neutral in the greater scheme of things. Frey married Gerda, Njord wed Skadhi - both Jotun women. Moreover, in the account of Ragnarok itself, the only Vanic Deity noted to fight is Frey, who wields an antler against Surt. Freya and Njord are noticeably absent from the Ragnarok, in fact the lore explicitly states Njord is sent back to the Vanir at that time.

If you look at the other pairings at Ragnarok - Loki versus Heimdall, Garm against Tyr, Fenris versus Odin, Jormundgand against Thor - you will notice a trend of it being very personal. Loki and Heimdall don't like each other, end of story. Odin arranged for Fenris' binding, ergo Fenris goes after Odin rather than Tyr, the one who raised him. Hela's dog, Garm, goes after Tyr in a sort of blood feud. Jormundgand was thrown into the sea by Thor. But there's no precedence whatsoever for Frey and Surt to be enemies, and it would seem that wielding only an antler against what is said to be the oldest being in the Nine Worlds, is suicidal. If you look deeper, though, we know that Frey is a sacrificial Deity, whether you accept the commonly-held gnosis of His yearly sacrifice at Lammas, or you go strictly by the lore of sacrifices made well after His "death" (likely, the death of His human avatar). It would make sense that should the Nine Worlds be in such a state that Ragnarok has to happen, Frey would give Himself one last time, so everything is burned down to start over again.

Yes, I went there. But think about it. Ponder it. Let it sink into your mind.

It should be said that while I have hailed Loki in the past, I have never hailed Fenris or Jormundgand, I don't go there. I don't think calling these beings will bring on the Ragnarok, but I do think it is at least dangerous for one's physical and mental health. That being said, the Jotnar do have a purpose in the natural order and I prefer not to speak ill of any being but rather to worth the Ones I do worship, namely the Vanir, some of the Aesir, and friendly/neutral etins.

To go deeper, the Gods of whatever pantheon cannot be neatly classified into "good" and "evil", but rather it seems even the brightest, most wealful Deities are capable of wrath, and the darkest, most "dangerous" Deities can be capable of compassionate acts. The darker

Deities do have a way of taking care of Their own. And indeed, Nerthus at Her worst can definitely be a match for Odin at His best, considering both Deities required human sacrifice as a part of Their historic worship. What makes a God a God is a certain "Goddiness" coming from the First Source, and even if two Deities are polar opposites, They still have that common "Goddiness". So, to disrespect one God is to disrespect all.

In sum, this is not meant as an apologetic for the Aesir or the Jotnar as They're capable of defending Themselves. I do indeed understand why some people get sick of the Aesir focus in Heathenry, with the Vanir being relegated to "inferior" or "secondary" Gods. And I can understand to an extent why the resurgence of Jotun worship would leave a bad taste in moderns' mouths. However, dislike of Deities or reaction to the dominant paradigm is not what brought me to Vanatru nor is it what I think Vanatru should turn into. The maxim "you catch more flies with honey" applies here; I think the Vanir are worthy enough to stand on Their own merits rather than being compared and contrasted with bashing of other pantheons. It's a matter of respect. So, let us worth the Vanir in and of Themselves, for They deserve our appreciation of Their goodness.

Sacrifice

Silence Maestas

All worlds, including the Nine Worlds of Norse cosmology, are connected by several dynamic forces that keep all worlds in balanced harmony. Each world is surrounded by a semi-permeable boundary, through which energy flows and world-walkers pass. For the most part, energy moves freely in and out of these boundaries, though there are some places in the Nine Worlds that resist heavy traffic. The flow of energy into, out of, and between worlds is an essential cosmological function. Old energies must leave a world to be recycled and placed somewhere new. New energies enter to replace what has left. The worlds are constantly mingling with each other, and their constant energy exchange creates a dynamic equilibrium of endless renewal and destruction.

The flowing energies often collected into massive currents, sometimes called rivers. The rivers aren't controlled by any world or wight. They are part of the structure of the universe itself and obey their own laws. Sometimes an entity – a deity, the ruler of a world, a human being – can work together with the rivers for personal benefit and for the benefit of the world they are connected with. This agreement between the energy river and the entity makes that entity into an active part of the energy exchange that takes place.

Where energy travels, so too does information. All this flowing energy can also be called flowing information, and so the worlds speak to each other. When an entity has an agreement with one of the rivers, or works closely with the energy it carries, they can in a sense listen in on the conversation taking place. By helping to facilitate energy flow between worlds, the individual working with these rivers also helps the worlds speak to each other more efficiently.

The Green World is just one of the countless energy rivers that pass through and between worlds. Though it has a central nexus, the Green World is mostly made of small and large rivers of plant energy,

which circulate energy in and out of the world's heart. In Midgard and in other worlds, the Green World manifests in any plants, trees, or fungi found there. Every tree and every blade of grass is a single tendril that reaches out from the Green World and into ours; the energy that comes through that tendril is the energy we make use of in healing, magical work, or other energetically charged activities. All plants on Midgard are networked together, and this network is only one small part of the river of energy that makes up the Green World.

The Green World possesses its own intelligence and has made an agreement with all the worlds it touches. In exchange for the energy given the inhabitants of a world, a portion of energy has to be returned to the Green World as its current ebbs and flows. In Midgard, this energetic tide happens constantly but is most noticeable as part of the rhythm of the seasons (since the physical tilt of the Earth and the resulting climactic changes offer a convenient embodiment for energies that similarly change). Even in places where there isn't a discernable cycle of spring, summer, fall, and winter, variations in temperature, precipitation, and light serve the same purpose. The energy of the Green World withdraws - that is, changes as it is replaced with a different kind of energy - and takes a portion of energy from this world into itself, thus perpetuating the energy cycle.

While the Green World is perfectly capable of taking out this energetic tax on its own, the aid of those people who observe the energetic cycle of the year is valuable. These observances can take the form of traditional superstitions, celebrations, offerings, magical songs, rituals, or other acts of a magical nature. Simply leaving a corner of the field unharvested is a way to take part in the exchange with the Green World. In essence, those people who take part in these observances (both in a traditional context and in modern revivals) give honor to the gifts of the Green World by mimicking the Green cycle of give and take.

This give and take exchange is what we call sacrifice. In any of the observances mentioned above, we are sacrificing some part of ourselves (or something that we draw sustenance or comfort from) in return for what we have given. On a very small scale, this is exactly what happens between the worlds - we take in the gifts given, become

stronger, then offer some of what has been built back to the force that gifted us in the first place. We are only one link in a recycling chain and continually take part in the creation and destruction of the universe.

Just as Midgard has an agreement with the Green World, so do the other Nine Worlds where some variety of plant life can be found. While large portions of Midgard have forgotten about the dynamic of sacrifice shared with the Green World, other worlds have not and make regular observances of the cycles of Green World energy. In Vanaheim, the sacrifice that does the most to balance the exchange with the Green World is Frey's annual death, journey to Helheim, and eventual return. Frey's sacrifice releases energy from Vanaheim into the current of the Green World (among others) and his journey to Helheim carries a portion of Vanaheim's energy to that vast recycling center at the bottom of the Tree. Vanaheim's legendary fertility could possibly be due to all the energetic composting they do.

Freya is instrumental in facilitating Vanaheim's communication with the Green World and Helheim (and certainly with other worlds, as well). While it is likely that She has mastery over many forms of sacrifice, one of the most important is the bodily sacrifice of Her brother each year. Without His willingness to die and without Her willingness to help Him die, the vital exchange of energy would be halted and grave imbalances would result. Both partners in this sacrifice are necessary and if one isn't properly prepared then the other can't fully perform Their role. This is true for any sacrificial dynamic.

Sacrifice is only one of the many deep mysteries between the sacred Vanir twins. Freya is referred to as a sacrificial priestess, which begs the questions "What is She sacrificing?" and "What/Who is She sacrificing to?" Sacrifice is an excellent way of communicating between the worlds by sending energy back and forth, and Freya appears to be an expert in this art. Not only is She a *seiðr* mistress, capable of flying between the worlds, She is a priestess of sacrifice and able to send massive amounts of energy - and communication - between the worlds. (Similarly, Odin's sacrifice opened up such a powerful communication between the worlds that the runes and their spirits were able to enter the Nine Worlds.)

There is deep holiness in knowing how to sacrifice and how to be sacrificed. Willingly giving up something precious for a greater good, whether selflessly or for something strongly desired, forces the ego to become quiet in order to hear the greater voice of the Self. Sacrifice is good because it teaches what is truly valuable, and the true worth of what we treasure. Knowing how to value something for its true worth is a valuable skill, especially for a life focused on spiritual development.

Sacrificing ourselves, or part of ourselves, reminds us that we are not the strongest agents in the universe. Even the Gods sacrifice to forces greater than Themselves. Through sacrifice, we can turn ourselves over fully to these greater forces and be carried to new states by working with them instead of against them. Making the choice to sacrifice and/or to be sacrificed lets us become aligned with mysteries that are fundamental to the universe itself. Choosing this demands that we embrace power and humility at the same time; one has to be powerful to know themselves fully enough to make proper sacrifice and humble enough to allow the mysteries to guide them.

Taking an active role in the eternal creation and destruction of the universe embeds us even more fully in this world and all others by extension; becoming more connected through working with these energy currents helps break the illusion that the worlds are distinctly separate from one another. Working with these mysteries begins the process of tearing down the barriers that keep us separated from our deeper selves, and from this world.

The Solar Cycle of Vanaheim

Svartesól

Here are the holytides I celebrate on Vanaheim's solar cycle:

Yuletide -- *Winter Solstice to New Year's Day*
Charming of the Plow -- *around February 2nd*
Eostre -- *Spring Equinox*
Walpurgisnacht, Beltaine -- *April 30th/May 1st*
Summer Solstice
Lammas/Loaf-fest -- *around August 1st*
Harvest -- *the Fall Equinox*
Hallows -- *late October*

The solar cycle is important to the Vanir from an agricultural perspective. Celebrating the solar cycle commemorates the ties between Vanaheim and Midgard - "as above, so below". The solar cycle is for major feast days, the lunar cycle is also important but for more private observance.

If one is in the Southern Hemisphere, the holytides can and should be reversed, as each holytide fits a particular point of significance within the agricultural year. The Gods, while neither omnipotent nor omniscient, are powerful and multifaceted enough to be in several places at once, and perhaps in different points in time at once.

It should be noted that there is a polarity with my observance of the solar holytides.

On the Summer Solstice, Nerthus is hailed in the full bloom and ripeness of the orchards and fields; She is also given honor on the Winter Solstice, encouraged to drink in the light of Sunna and be hale. For it is from Her that we receive sustenance.

At the Charming of the Plough, Frey and Gerda are honored in Their courtship and marriage. At the opposite end of the year, during Lammas, Frey's sacrifice and return is honored, and Gerda is honored

as the one who gives Frey the strength to do what He does.

On Walpurgisnacht, we see the "spooky faces" of the Vanir Goddesses, and on Beltaine we see the life and vitality the Vanir bring, Freya in particular. At the opposite end of the year, during Hallows, we see the Vanir as still present and sustaining us when the world is coming into its quiet time.

On Eostre, Idunna is honored; during Harvest, Sif is honored. Both were "pranked" by Loki: Idunna kidnapped, Sif's hair cut off.

My perceptions of what each solar cycle holytide stands for may be agreed upon or disagreed upon by Heathen groups but I feel they can also be adjusted as necessary for your own personal practice. At the end, what you celebrate under your own rooftree has to be personally relevant to you.

Yule

It may not be practical for most Heathen hearths to perform a full faining every night through the twelve nights of Yule, so here are three major fainings for the three major points of Yule: Mother's Night on the Solstice, "High Yule" on the 25th (to coincide with the host culture's Christmas Day), and Holda's Feast on New Year's Eve.

MOTHER'S NIGHT

The first night of Yule, the Winter Solstice itself, is often referred to as "Mother's Night". Yule itself is twelve days long, although most groups do not have a ritual every day but more often will keep a candle or series of candles burning to welcome back Sunna's light.

This is a Mother's Night ritual to honor Sunna growing in strength, as well as Her brother Mani, and the rite also involves "waking up" Nerthus.

Supplies for ritual

You will need:

- A candle for each person in attendance (a few extras in case guests show up), preferably a large jar candle that can be burned safely for long periods of time. You will probably need two of these for the twelve-day period; the first can light the next when the first is close to burning out.
- A drum of some sort. My own drum is an elk hide on a birch frame that I customized to show my shamanic journey. A frame drum or bodhran will work best for this rite.
- A libation, such as mead, and a drinking horn.

Ritual Outline

1. The attendants will gather outdoors, such as in the host's yard, or perhaps in the seclusion of a forest or on the beach. It should be dark, after the sun has gone down. The attendants will wait for the priest, who approaches them beating the drum, slowly and methodically.
2. The priest will beat the drum for a few moments and then address the crowd, speaking of the purpose of their gathering, namely this being the longest night of the year, and it being their duty to lend strength to Sunna, Mani, and Nerthus.
3. The priest invokes Sunna, and then invites the gathered folk to chant and sing Her name, or "Hail Sunna", calling to Her, getting Her attention, and worthing Her. The priest gives the drum to their attendant to beat while the priest raises and directs energy, and then loads the horn with the first libation.
4. The priest charges the drinking horn with the Giefu rune and passes it around the circle, with each person making a toast to Sunna before drinking. The priest has the last drink, toasting Sunna, and then pours the rest to Her as a libation. If there is no more drink in the horn, Sunna gets a reloaded horn all to Herself.
5. The priest then invokes Mani, and invites the gathered folk to chant and sing His name, or "Hail Mani", calling to Him, getting His attention, and worthing Him. The attendant beats the drum and the priest raises and directs energy. When it hits a peak, the priest loads the horn with Mani's libation.
6. The priest charges the horn again and it is passed around the circle, with each person toasting Mani before drinking. The priest has the last drink, hailing Mani, and then gives Mani His libation.

7. Finally the priest says an invocation to Nerthus, and takes the drum back from the attendant to beat while the gathered folk chant and dance, encouraged to stomp their feet on the ground and in doing so, give Nerthus their life energy, waking Her up from slumber. The priest will direct the raised energy, drumming and chanting and dancing as well. This can go on anywhere from five minutes to a half-hour, celebrating Nerthus in this intense way.

8. When the energy hits a peak, the priest invites each attendant to kneel and kiss the Earth, praising Nerthus. (This can be interesting if there is snow on the ground, but also much more of an offering for the effort involved.) The priest is the last to kneel, speaking their own heartfelt words of appreciation for Nerthus Herself.

9. The priest stands, and speaks of Sunna and Mani giving light to Nerthus, to awaken and strengthen in Their illumination. The priest then consecrates jar candles for each of the attendants, to burn throughout the Yuletide in honor of Sunna's light, to fill their homes with Her goodness.

10. The priest gives a final benediction to the gathered folk, who depart to make merry in their own Yule celebrations.

Solitary Adaptation

If one should spend Mother's Night alone, the libations, drumming, and candle blessing can be performed by the solitary acting as their own priest.

HIGH YULE

This ritual is for "High Yule", that is, December 25th, which most Westerners know as Christmas Day. While we may not be celebrating Christ here, most of us should not feel the need to abandon

traditions ingrained in our subconscious (the tree, gifting), especially as they were stolen from us anyway.

The ritual consists of three parts: gifting in the morning, which can include gifts for specific Deities, and then an evening sumble in Frey's honor with ham served. We have an account of oaths being taken on a boar during Yuletide, and since Frey was one of the Deities who heard oaths, and the boar was most sacred to Him, we can assume this was one of Frey's rites, especially because ham is still served in Scandinavia (especially Sweden) during this time. The last part is a wassail.

Morning Gifting

The presents will be under the tree, and given by the man of the house in order from smallest person to oldest. The lady of the house will give gifts to the man of the house. After gifts are shared out among the people, a few gifts can be unwrapped meant for the Deities -- for example, a bottle of good beer for Thor, amber stones for Freyja, yarn to be used in Frigga's honor. Conversely, twelve cups of cocoa can be made with peppermint schnapps added to it, and given to each of twelve favorite Deities, to sit overnight and be poured in a hole in the ground in the morrow.

Evening Sumble with Ham

--items needed for the Sumble

1. some kind of pork. A Yule ham would be best for this. Oaths were taken over a boar. Since wild boar is hard to come by these days and most people don't have a big fire pit in their homes to roast a whole swine, a Yule ham is good, although Frey would prefer you prepare it yourself with seasoning, baking, etc.

ALTERNATE FOR 1: If you are vegetarian, you could bake a loaf of

bread, shaping it into a boar.

2. good alcohol. On the holy tides it doesn't serve well to skimp on the alcohol. When in doubt, Frey usually will go for a dark German beer, or a special ale. The other option for alcohol is glögg, traditionally served in Scandinavia (esp. Sweden) at Yuletide.

ALTERNATE FOR 2: If you don't drink, spiced egg nog is appropriate, as is apple cider (which was used in Yuletide wassailing in Anglo-Saxon England).

3. People. You don't necessarily need a huge crowd, particularly if others are not going to "get" what is going on, but sumble usually needs other people involved to hear and witness the oaths made.

I take a few things under assumption for the sumble:

-that you are doing it inside. Most places in the Northern hemisphere are cold during Yuletide, and sumble was done in a meadhall in elder Heathen times. Nowadays we'd do it at someone's house, as part of a Yule feast. For the sumble it is important that people be comfortable.

-that your indoors location is safe. In other words, crabby parents aren't going to bust the door down asking what the Hel you're doing, and a drive-by isn't going to happen right underneath your window. There's no shame in being poor, but again, the sumble host needs to be mindful of the needs of those he/she is hosting.

-that you are serious. Blót is a luck-changing rite, but sumble is more so. If you do not understand the full implications of oath-taking, if you are not doing this for Frey but as another Pagan ritual you're curious to experiment with, DO NOT PROCEED.

--procedure for the Sumble

1. formally opened by the priest, or someone temporarily officiating as

such (usually the one with the most experience). The priest will speak a few words about the holy nature of the rite, and then call to Frey. It is assumed that if you are in an indoor frithstead it does not need to be hallowed beforehand, though lighting a candle to represent the light of Frey is optional here.

2. First Round -- a toast to Frey with the drink. Usually the first round would be toasting any and all the Gods, but since this rite is for Frey, each person toasts Frey, whether for Himself (who He is) or things He has done on their behalf, or both. You will want the toast to be eloquent: spoken from the heart without a script, but deep and profound, not just "Yeah, thanks Frey, and stuff."

3. Second Round -- Oaths on the boar. There are several ways to go about oathing on the boar. Passing a Yule ham may get heavy and unwieldy and if it falls on the floor people will get upset. If you are into a more showy ritual and someone is there with a good singing voice, the ham can be brought in with the Boar's Head Carol:

The boar's head in hand bring I, (Or: The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary.

I pray you, my masters, be merry (Or: And I pray you, my masters, merry be)
Quot estis in convivio (Translation: As many as are in the feast)

CHORUS

Caput apri defero (Translation: The boar's head I offer)

Reddens laudes Domino (Translation: Giving praises to the Lord)

The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
Which thus bedeck'd with a gay garland
Let us servire cantico. (Translation: Let us serve with a song)

CHORUS

Our steward hath provided this
In honour of the King of Bliss;

Which, on this day to be served is
In Reginensi atrio. (Translation: In the Queen's hall)

CHORUS³⁴

After the ham is brought in, you may want each person to go up to the table where the ham is located, and oath over the ham whilst cutting a piece. It is expected the oath will be made to accomplish something by next Yule, so do not oath anything impossible or ridiculous. The person will go to the main table with their piece of ham, and everyone will wait for this round to be finished, then partake of the first pieces of ham, munching in contentment and Happy Food Faces.

4. Third Round -- Boasts, passing the drink to each person for them to boast over the horn. It is okay to brag here about things you oathed last Yule, that came to pass, or perhaps overcoming impossible odds with Frey's help. It is not okay to put other people down in the boast, or to brag about how sexy you are, or how cool your vehicle is. A boast should be about an accomplishment and not personal trivia.

Any remaining alcohol should be poured out to Frey at the base of a tree, as a gift. Slices of ham should be left along with the alcohol. (You didn't think you were going to eat it all, did you?) "Proper Heathen" sumble usually accepts people completely draining all the alcohol in the house and getting drunk, but since this is the 21st century and people's living conditions are usually not such to house many people who can't operate a vehicle, it is suggested here all alcohol consumption be in moderation. Proper ritual etiquette is always to sip from the horn rather than guzzle.

34 Text, music, and translation can be found here:

http://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/boars_head_carol.htm

Wassailing

"Wassailing" comes from the Anglo-Saxon blessing "wæs þu hæþ" (to your health) and is an English custom from Pagan times, to roam the neighborhood singing Christmas carols, asking for a drink of wassail in return. Wassailers bring their own wassail bowls, which their hosts fill with spiced ale, wine, rum or cider. Also, it is a kind of traditional song to be sung when wassailing, most of which are also about wassailing.

A wassail typically praises the host in advance of the ale, blessing the lord and lady of the house for their imminent generosity, and praying God to reward them with a prosperous new year. Ideally, your host should be so embarrassed by your profuse blessings that they get you good and drunk, then send you off to inflict your merry singing upon the folks next door.

Now in 21st century civilization, going from door to door asking for alcoholic beverages at Christmastime is likely to have you hauled off by the fuzz. The wassailing here is to do after the Frey sumble (going out into wintry air will sober you up right quick), and consists of sharing a jug of non-alcoholic wassail among the folk, who will take a walk from the "mead hall" to the nearest grove of trees. It would be helpful if these are apple trees, but depending on your climate this may not be possible. You will fling cider at the trees and sing blessings at them for health and strength, and fling cider on each other, blessing each other with health and merriment. The attitude should not be serious if you can help it.

A traditional Christmas wassailing carol from Gower:

A-wassail, a-wassail, throughout all this town.
 Our cup it is white and our ale it is brown.
 Our wassail is made of the good ale and true,
 Some nutmeg and ginger, it's the best we can do.

CHORUS:

Fol the dol, fol the dol-de-dol,
 Fol the dol-de-do, fol the dol-de-dee,
 Fol the der-o, fol the da-dee,
 Sing tu-re-lye-do!

Our wassail is made of the elderberry bough.
 And so, my good neighbor, we'll drink unto thou.
 Besides all of that, you'll have apples in store,
 Pray let us come in for it's cold by the door.

We hope that your apple trees prosper and bear
 So that we may have cider when we call next year,
 And where you've one barrel, I hope you'll have ten,
 So that we may have cider when we call again.

We know by the moon that we are not too soon,
 And we know by the sky that we are not too high,
 We know by the stars that we are not too far,
 And we know by the ground that we are within sound.³⁵

Solitary Adaptation

It is generally ill-advised to do sumble alone as the rite involves participants putting "layers in the Well" and adding to each other's luck, but a plate of ham and other foods can be shared with Frey, thanks given Him for the blessings of the past year, and oaths made for achievements in the coming year. One may then go outside and make a libation of cider at the trees, blessing the land and the World Tree itself.

NEW YEARS' EVE

The last day of the calendar year is an ideal time to honor

35 SOURCE: <http://web.syr.edu/~htkeays/morris/hounds/songs/gower.html>

Holda, who was traditionally given Twelfth Night (January 6th) on the continent.

Supplies for ritual

-The feast food will be herring and porridge. If one does not care for either food, one should at least have a couple of bites as not to offend the Frau.

-A horn of mead (preferably a melomel) or a strong herbal drink can be used for the ritual.

-An extremely clean house or Hof where the ritual is being held. It would be polite for the ritual attendants to help with a minor cleaning and perhaps a smudge/blessing of the house before ritual.

-Depending on the preference of the group, a pot filled with water in a room darkened and lit by candlelight, or a hearth fire, can be used for scrying. A handful of flax seeds can be given to each participant who plans on scrying under Holda's auspices, to see what She has to say about the coming year.

1. The priest will invoke Holda into the ritual space.
2. The horn will be passed around the circle, with each person hailing Holda and giving thanks for blessings in their work and home over the past year.
3. The feast will be laid out, with the first portion of herring and porridge laid out for Holda. The folk should eat now also.
4. Finally, each person attending the ritual will go, one at a time, to throw flax seeds into the pot or the fire, and scry for 15-20 minutes, to see what Holda has to show them for the coming year. Not being able to see does not necessarily indicate lack of Her favor, only that some are more inclined to see than others. Furthermore, one may have vivid dreams later that evening which should be recorded as important.

5. The priest will go last, and should open themselves fully to Holda, and speak as an oracle to the group.
6. The priest should be "brought back to Earth" by an attendant, with some more mead and perhaps a cool washcloth on the face.
7. The rite is then closed, with a benediction by the priest for the new year.

Solitary Adaptation

The solitary can prepare their own feast of herring and porridge for Holda, drink in Her honor (perhaps something mildly ethenogenic such as mugwort or hemp tea), and then throw flax seeds into a scrying bowl or a fire and spend time opening to Her and what She portends for the coming year. A divination with runes, Tarot, or other means can also be done at this time, preferably by candlelight.

Charming of the Plough

The Charming of the Plough has been recorded as a regular feast day only in Sweden, however this blessing takes place in early or mid-February in rural England, known as Plough Monday. The plough is blessed at the local chapel because it is seen as a symbol of all the coming agricultural work to be done in the year. There is no concrete evidence showing that such plough customs have come down to us directly from ancient days, however an Anglo-Saxon charm recited by farmers to make their land fertile (known commonly as the *Acerbot*), contains a passage that points to hallowing the plough:

'And let him gather all his ploughing implements together, then bore the plough tail and put in incense and fennel and hallowed soap and hallowed salt. Then take the seed, place it on the body of the plough, then say..'

The Charming of the Plough also ties into Bede's record of Solmonath (corresponding with our month of February), where cakes were baked and given to the Earth.

Today, there are many modern-day Heathens who, while maybe are not full-time farmers, will adapt this rite to bless objects used in their employment. Examples would be a chef who blesses some cookware, an artist who blesses art supplies, a lawyer who blesses law books and business cards, a doctor who blesses their medical bag. It does seem to work for today, especially in keeping us mindful that all we have comes from Them, and ultimately our prosperity and well-being is part of the healthy energy flow between Worlds.

In my personal gnosis, Frey and Gerda were married during this time, consummating Their marriage in the field of Barri, and "ploughing the furrow" is a common epithet used for sexual intercourse. Some have speculated that farmers learned how to plow their fields from watching the digging behavior of the wild boar, Frey's most sacred animal. This ritual honors the marriage of Frey and Gerda,

and how in sacrificing Their own fertility, it is given forth to us, for the fullness of our own lives.

Supplies for ritual

- Drink offering, preferably mead.
- Cakes baked with the image of a sunwheel or suncross carved in, and blessed for use in the ritual, prior to being served at the ritual.
- The attendants should bring whatever work-related equipment they want blessed.
- It will be necessary to gather in a place where there is soil that can be dug at least a couple of inches deep.

1. Invocation

*To Frey, God of the World,
to Gerda of the Walled Garden,
we honor You in this commemoration
of Your sacred marriage -
seed to soil, root to shoot,
touch the Sun, burst to bloom.
As You had no children of Your own
but all the growing and living things of this world
are Your children,
we honor the life force You give to us
as the days grow longer,
brighter and warmer,
as the Earth wakes
to rejoice in Your love.
Be with us now, Ingvi-Frey and Thorgerda!*

2. Offering to Frey

A hole is dug in the Earth, and a horn is loaded. The person offering to Frey raises the horn and says something like:

*A gift given in gratitude
to Frey,
who satisfies the lust-hunger of giantesses,
who lets no woman down,
we honor You,
Sacred Masculine,
giver of seed,
provider of need.
Hail, Frey!*

The contents of the horn are poured into the hole.

3. Offering to Gerda

Another horn is loaded. The person offering to Gerda raises the horn and says something like:

*A gift given in gratitude
to Gerda,
who eased Frey's lovesick pining,
is the silent strength behind Frey's work,
giving love to He who is Love,
giving fullness of life
to the Light-Bringer.
Worthy in Your own right,
lovely etin-bride,
knowing the wisdom of ages.
Hail, Gerda!*

The contents of the horn are poured into the hole.

4. Blessing

The hole is then covered up, and some soil taken from the top. The one

presiding as priest at the ritual puts the soil into a specially consecrated bowl, mixed with some of the drink given to Frey and Gerda. The gathered folk make ready their tools of livelihood to be blessed, and the priest comes to each one, smearing a tiny bit of mud on the equipment, then on the palms of the hands of the attendant, saying something like:

*May Frey and Gerda grant you Their growing gifts
That everything may come to good.*

This is repeated until the last attendant is done, then the one designated for such anoints the hands and equipment of the priest, with the same blessing.

5. The Sun-Cake

Finally, the Sun-cakes are brought out, that is, cakes baked with a sunwheel or sun-cross carved in. The first cake is crumbled onto the Earth, and the priest says:

*Hail, Earth, mother of all;
Be abundant in Frey and Gerda's embrace,
Filled with food for our folk's need.
Field filled with food, to feed mankind,
Blooming brightly, be you blessed.*

The Sun-cakes are passed around the gathered folk, and the priest says:

*Eat and may we be ever mindful
that all we have comes from the Earth,
and from the wights and Gods of Earth.*

6. Benediction

The priest raises energy and then stands in the Elhaz-position to project at the gathered folk, evoking: *Wæs þu hál!*

The priest then bids thanks and farewell to Frey and Gerda, and the gathered folk are dismissed, either to later feasting or to going about daily business.

Solitary Adaptation

The individual can serve as their own priest, offering to Frey and Gerda directly, then consecrating their own work instruments for the coming year, and finally sharing homemade Sun-cakes with Nerthus.

Eostre

As mentioned in the chapter about Her, I believe Idunna was known to the continental Germanic tribes as Ostara, and to the Anglo-Saxons as Eostre. Idunna-Eostre is thus not just the keeper of the apples of the Aesir's renewal, but holds the ability to renew the land itself. This rite worships Her in this capacity, and is fun and lighthearted to break the gloom of winter.

Supplies for ritual

- Egg coloring, and some safe way to draw the runes on eggs.
- Get as many Golden Delicious apples as you have people celebrating the ritual with you, and one extra for Eostre/Idunna.
- Obtain some kind of apple cider. (I prefer sparkling cider for Her day, as it feels "lighter" than spiced cider, which is more appropriate for Yule, in my opinion.)

Ritual Outline

1. Invocation to Eostre. For this day, I use the Idunna chant mentioned in Her chapter:

*Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
Giver of apples of gold,
Eostre, Ostara, Idunna,
Your blessings come into our fold.*

2. Purpose/significance of the ritual is stated:

On this day when day and night are equal, the chill of winter is dispersed and the Earth grows warm and blooms once more, we honor Eostre, also called Idunna, who in particular grows the golden apples to keep the Aesir

strong and hale.

(reading from **Gylfaginning**)

In this story may we recognize the power Eostre holds within Her to give and sustain health, and life, and as the Earth awakens once more, may Idunna be praised.

3. Idunna is given a libation of cider, and Her apple is sliced and placed in the bowl with the cider. Words of praise are given Her, and requests for personal healing and growth.
4. You each have a draught of cider, and eat apple slices.
5. The basket of eggs is brought out, and each egg is blessed so that when they are eaten, the essence of that rune will be ingested and enhance yourselves.
6. Idunna-Eostre is praised once more, and the rite is closed.

Solitary Adaptation

The eggs may be omitted, or a lesser number made, or some given to the Earth itself with appropriate runes for blessing one's property. Cider and apples can be shared with Idunna in a moment of private communion, drinking Her restorative energy into oneself.

Walpurgisnacht and May Day

In Germany, Walpurgisnacht is the eve of April 30th into May 1st, allegedly when witches hold a large celebration on the Brocken and await the arrival of spring. Walpurgisnacht festivities are also seen in Sweden by the name Valborg, when large bonfires are lit around the country. An older tradition from southern Sweden was for the youth to collect greenery and branches from the woods at twilight, which were used to adorn houses of their villages.

The name "Walpurgisnacht" comes from a nun named Walpurga, brother of Willibald, and she was made a saint of the Roman Catholic church, whose feast day is technically February 25th, but whose relics were moved on May 1st to be buried beside her brother. Some Pagans, myself included, have suspected that much as "Saint Brigid" is a carryover from Celtic Paganism, Walpurga/Valborg, while still a real person, may also be an alternate and more personal name of Freya (as in "fortified place of the slain", fitting quite nicely with Her role as chooser of the first pick of the slain, who She keeps at Folkvangr), which is why Pagan customs would be observed on a saint's day.

Walpurgisnacht Faining

1. Offering to the Land-spirits

We go for a walk within a 1-2 mile radius of home, giving offerings to all of the land-spirits, especially those that might be Fae. Typically sweet whole-grain bread covered with honey is a good offering.

2. Honoring the Goddesses

We invoke Freya, Nerthus, and Holda, giving Them worth as the Mothers of Witchcraft, and all Witches, both male and female.

3. Offerings

Three candles are lit, for each Goddess, and a libation is poured for each Goddess. Freya is honored for Her magic to enhance beauty and sexuality, and love relationships. Nerthus is honored for Her magic of the cycles of nature (including weather), and the power of life and death She holds in Her hands. Holda is honored as knowing great wisdom, and being competent and efficient in all things. The celebrants then will each drink to the Goddesses, naming a gift of magic they would like to work in the coming year, and drink that into themselves.

As far as May Day goes, there is a historical reason for its observance:

...every parishe, towne, and village, assemble themselves together, bothe men, women, and children, olde and yong, even all indifferently: and either goyng all together, or deuidyng themselves into companies, they goe some to the woodes and groves, some to one place, some to another, where they spende all the night in pastymes, and in the mornyng they returne, bringing with them birche bowes, and branches of trees to deck their assemblies withall. I have heard it credibly reported (and that viva voce) by men of great gravitiie, credite, and reputation, that of fourtie, three score, or a hundred maides goyng to the woode ouer night, there have scarcely the thirde parte of them returned home againe undefiled.

--Philip Stubbs, *Anatomie of Abuses* (1585, London)

And because the prophanation of the Lords-day hath been heretofore greatly occasioned by May-Poles, (a Heathenish vanity, generally abused to superstition and wickedness.) The Lords and Commons do further Order and Ordain, That all and singular May-Poles, that are, or shall be erected, shall be taken down and removed by the Constables, Borsholders, Tything-men, petty Constables, and Churchwardens of the Parishes, and places where the same be: And that no May-Pole shall be hereafter set up, erected or suffered to be within this Kingdome of England, or Dominion of Wales.

II Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum 420 (1644).

The Maypole is a custom predating the 16th century, of course, and many Germanic Pagans recognize it to be a symbol of Yggdrasil. Beltaine commemorates two things: Odin hanging upon the World Tree to gain wisdom, found in the runes; and the annual ritual mating of Frey and Freya in Vanaheim, to "feed the tree" and give fertility and vitality to the Nine Worlds. In my personal gnosis, it was the orgasm of Frey and Freya that pushed the runes out of the Well into Odin's consciousness. As a Vanic-focused Pagan, my Beltaine celebrations honor Frey and Freya. Dancing the Maypole with ribbons can be seen as symbolic of weaving Wyrð, the color of ribbons symbolic of what you want to "weave in" for the coming year. The ribbons can be left on the Maypole and burned either six months later at Samhain, or a year later at the next Beltaine.

On Beltaine 2008 my other half and I started off the day with sex in Frey and Freya's honor, then went to a local park and erected my staff as the Maypole.

We started off by him crowning me with a flower wreath, and then me crowning him with a wreath of leaves. I invoked Frey and Freya, and poured a glass of wine over my staff to offer Them and to consecrate the staff.

We then tied the ribbons to the Maypole -- red, green, gold, and blue. I got the red and blue ribbons, to weave healing and love. My other half got the gold and green ribbons, to weave protection and prosperity. (We actually did not assign this ahead of time, but it seems fitting considering what we are both trying to work on.) We did a very simple chant of "Weaving, weaving", as we went around the pole, myself clockwise, my other half counterclockwise.

After the Maypole, we had a picnic, where we gave Frey and Freya the first part of the food. I also saved some large, juicy strawberries for Freya, as I know She likes them.

The rite was very simple, but effective. Frey and Freya were present, and the ritual was light-hearted and fun rather than solemn. Their joy was palpable, as They shared in our joy, and we in Theirs.

Solitary Adaptation

Walpurgisnacht can be spent by the solitary as a time of communion with the "Witch Goddesses" of the Vanir, perhaps staying up all night in útisetá for visionary experiences of importance.

May Day is perhaps the hardest ritual for a solitary to perform, and I have known some solitaires to skip May Day altogether which I feel to be unfortunate. A small dowel rod can be placed on one's altar and wound with ribbons of the appropriate color, and blessed by Frey and Freya as a token to keep year-round for connection to the World Tree. A woman may wish to put together a vase or wreath of seasonal flowers, and do a solitary dance with the flowers, aspecting Freya within herself. A man may wish to meditate with greenery or an antler, aspecting Frey within himself. Feast food can be shared with Frey and Freya, and the solitary may also wish to masturbate or make love with their partner and use the fluids to consecrate a personal talisman to carry year-round for blessing their love life and/or increasing personal *maegen*.

Midsummer

The most explicit mention of Nerthus and Her cult is the account of Tacitus in 98 CE, apparently Nerthus was worshiped by several Germanic tribes and Her yearly festival was held among them. We unfortunately do not have mention of the time of this festival, however, I am inclined to believe it would be sometime in the summer for ease of travel, as well as the lakes not being too frozen to receive sacrifices.

So, while there is nothing in the primary sources to indicate that Nerthus' feast is on Midsummer, I do think the Summer Solstice is as good a time as any to observe Her wain procession, particularly as it is the direct polarity of Mother's Night on Yule and on the Summer Solstice the Earth is blooming in full glory.

This is a rite I composed for my Kindred and friends of the Kindred, to honor Nerthus' procession at Midsummer.

Preparation:

-There will need to be a wain. As an oxen-drawn wain transporting attendants is not going to be practical, an acceptable substitute is a small handcart, perhaps a modified wheelbarrow. It should have four wheels and high sides, it should be decorated somewhat elaborately so it doesn't look like "just an ordinary wheelbarrow", and should have a pole to draw it. The wagon in the Oseburg ship burial is an example of this. The wain should be able to fit into a car as well as be able to be drawn along a sidewalk or into a field. If you are a Vanic hearth who will be doing the Frey ritual at Lammas, it is possible to use the same wain for both Deities provided it is decorated with appropriate Vanic symbolism.

-There will need to be an image of Nerthus, particularly as it will be cleansed afterwards by Her attendants. I personally connect Venus of Willendorf with Nerthus, whether or not the image was actually

representing Her in those times, it is very Her between the body shape and the lack of having facial features (as Nerthus is veiled or wearing a mask, so most people do not have to be killed for looking upon Her).

-While many Heathen rituals are led by a Goði or Gydja who may not have a strong personal connection to the Deity involved, for this ritual I feel the rite must be overseen by an oathed dedicant of Nerthus or someone who is a priest of another Vanic Deity with oaths to serve all the Vanir by extension. In keeping with Vanic mysteries of having the Nerthusgodhi pull the wain in Her procession, and the Freysgydhia in His, it is preferable for the priest in this rite to be male, but not mandatory, and it should be a male who is willing to wear more 'womanly' garb.

-There are some Godfolk who may be able to bring the wain to every Kindred in their area, both with regards to being welcomed by the Kindreds as well as being able to set aside a week or so to travel around. In a place where compatible Heathenfolk are few and far between, it may be more practical to invite one's Kindred and/or some chosen and respectful friends to a select area to meet the wain as it arrives. This would be preferable, and in any case the rite must be held by an inland body of water such as a lake, creek, river, or pond.

-The wain will be prepared by the priest with a secret rite. Because the procession was done at the will of Nerthus who informed Her priest it was time, the Nerthus image should be carried by the priest somewhere on their person for three days prior to the rite, even if it means bringing the statue or framed print to work with them and sitting it on the desk, or putting it in their purse or briefcase. The priest should also take Nerthus to bed with them, placing the image on the bedtable or under the bed if the statue/print cannot be slept with. This serves to heighten the connection with Nerthus sufficiently that the image will be charged enough to fill the wain with Her power.

-The priest should inform those attending to bring food for a potluck,

the priest can also bring some things like mead, a drinking horn, and some food such as bread or salads.

-The priest will need to select four people willing to help cleanse Nerthus after the rite. The priest should make up a bag with a vial of salt water, a vial of essential oil, a candle in a safe holder, and an herbal smudge stick for the cleansing of Nerthus after the rite. The priest will also need to make or procure a strawman, and have a bag of diabetic stickers, alcohol pads, and latex gloves because a blooded strawman will be sacrificed to Nerthus in lieu of human sacrifice being illegal.

Ritual Outline

1. The priest will have spent three days charging Nerthus' image, and hallows the wain by placing Nerthus' image inside whilst chanting Her name. The priest should be sensitive to the move of Her presence filling the wain with Her power.
2. The priest loads the wain with food items brought to share among the folk, as well as the drink and drinking horn. The priest will pray over the food and drink to bless people with Nerthus' might.
3. The priest goes to the ritual site, singing to Nerthus on the way there. Presumably the priest will get there by car, at which point the car should be parked enough of a ways off that the priest can pull the wain a bit to the site, singing and chanting while the wain is pulled.
4. The wain arrives at the ritual site and the priest proclaims this place a holy frithstead in Nerthus' name. Weapons must be laid down (including cell phones).
5. The priest invokes Nerthus into the stead, and loads the horn with drink to share in Her blessings. As the horn is passed around the circle, each participant should speak words of praise to Nerthus and Her kin.

The remainder of the drink will be poured into a blessing bowl.

6. There is a sacred feast, with a blessing on the food beforehand, thanks given to Nerthus. Some food should be selected beforehand to give specifically to Nerthus, preferably left at the base of a tree. The priest also pours out some mead from the blessing bowl, with thanks to Nerthus. Some of the drink is deliberately left in the bowl.

7. After the feast the priest will go around the circle with the blessing bowl and an asperger. Each person will ask Nerthus for a boon, and the priest will sprinkle the person head-heart-shoulder-shoulder, speaking Nerthus' blessing upon them. The priest should be open to the move of Nerthus for prophecy or a specific blessing.

8. At this time the priest gives a final benediction and all but the four attendants should depart from the ritual site.

9. The four attendants accompany the priest in removing Nerthus from the wain and setting Her on a rock to be cleansed. This is a time when there must absolutely be privacy, for it is a holy occasion. The attendants should be filled with reverence and awe in directly feeling Nerthus' presence among them. One attendant will be given the salt water to rub onto the image. The next will hallow the image by passing the lit candle around it in a circle nine times. The next will anoint the image with essential oil. The last will hallow with smoke from the smudge stick.

10. The priest will then take out the strawman and speak of it being a sacrifice, put the strawman down on the rock, and don latex gloves. Each attendant will present their hands. The priest will prick the middle finger of both hands of each attendant, for them to drip blood onto the strawman. The strawman is then dropped into the body of water, as Nerthus is hailed by the priest and attendants.

The priest will then address the attendants that a holy thing was done,

and as the Earth is in Her fullness of glory, so Nerthus' glory was witnessed, and beauty and terror are inextricably entwined. The priest and attendants should spend the next few days being mindful of their relationship with nature and the Earth, and those who live upon it.

Solitary Adaptation

If the solitary is able to procure a wagon and make it into a "Vanic Wain", they may want to do this and draw Nerthus' image around their neighborhood or backyard, to bless the land. The solitary will then feast and share with Nerthus. The blooded strawman can be omitted, what could be an acceptable substitute is the solitary bleeding some herbal tea of a calmative or mildly ethenogenic nature (such as mugwort), giving half to Nerthus, and using the other half to perform útiseta (sitting outdoors, preferably overnight) in private communion with Her.

Freysblót

We know from the account of Tacitus that Nerthus was brought about in a wain once a year, and feasts were held in Her honor as well as the tribe ceasing conflict and keeping peace. From archaeological evidence we know wains were a major part of what can be considered "the Vanic era", found in bogs as well as burials. There is some evidence Frey Himself is connected with the wain:

Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes,
till, followed by his chariot,
he departed eastwards over the waves.
So the Hearingas named the hero.

Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem

Frey might also have been one and the same as Lýtir, noted in *Hauks þáttur hábrókar* in the *Flateyjarbók*, where a Swedish king consults the God Lýtir, whose ceremonial wagon was taken to a sacred place wherein the God entered it and then rode back to the King's hall, answering questions there. Lýtir is etymologically related to the Old Norse word *hlutr*, meaning "lot" and "foretell". There are a few Swedish place names that may contain elements of His name, including Lytisberg and Lytislunda. We know from the account of Frey's folk at Thrandheim that He spoke to them and foretold the future, and it would not be unheard of for a Vanic Power to be skilled in prophesy. I am inclined to believe Lýtir is one of Frey's by-names and further evidence of His connection with wains.

Finally, we have this explicit mention of His procession in Gunnar Helming's Saga:

"...I think it is better you stay her this winter and accompany us when Freyr makes his annual journey. But I must tell you that he is still angry with you." Gunnar thanked her well. . . Now the festival time came, and the procession started. Freyr and his wife were placed in the carriage, whereas their servants and Gunnar had to walk beside. When driving through the mountains, they

were surprised by a tempest and all the servants fled. Gunnar remained. At last he got tired of walking, went into the carriage and let the draught_cattle go as they liked. Freyr's wife said: "You had better try and walk again, for otherwise Freyr will arise against you." Gunnar did so, but when he got too tired, he said: "Anyhow, let him come, I will stand against him." Now Freyr arises, and they wrestle till Gunnar notices that he is getting weaker. Then he thinks by himself that if he overcomes this load Foe he will return to the right faith and be reconciled with King Olaf. And immediately after Freyr begins to give way, and afterwards to sink. Now this Foe leaps out of the idol, and it lay there empty. Gunnar broke it into pieces and gave Freyr's wife two alternatives: that he would leave, or that she might declare him publicly to be the god Freyr. She said that she would willingly declare what he liked. Now Gunnar dressed in Freyr's clothes, the weather improved and they went to the festival. People were very much impressed by the power of Freyr, because he was able to visit the country in such a tempest, although all the servants had fled. They wondered how he went about among them and talked like other men. Thus Freyr and his wife spent the winter going to festivals. Freyr was not more eloquent towards people than his wife, and he would not receive living victims, as before, and no offerings except gold, silk, and good clothings.

Gunnar Helming's Saga, Flateyjarbok II.

In the account of Frey's procession in Gunnar Helming's Saga, it is said to take place in the wintertime. The winter by our modern calendar would have Sweden too snowy for a chariot and walking servants. Likely, the winter procession was what we know as late fall (which was indeed counted as winter by Old Norse reckoning), when the temperatures began to drop significantly but it was not too snowy and icy to move about.

However, Frey's cult was not just known to Sweden but seems to also have been known in England, hence the rune named for Him in the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc. In England, the festival of the first wheat harvest of the year, Loaf-Mass - known to us as Lammas - was celebrated at the beginning of August. It was customary to bring a loaf from the new crop to church, and tenants were bound to present freshly harvested wheat to their landlords at that time. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to it as "the feast of first fruits". The celebrations on this day usually include singing hymns, praying, and decorating

churches with baskets of fruit and food in the festival, and is known in modern Britain as Harvest Home.

Barley would also be harvested at this time. "John Barleycorn" is an English folksong about the character of John Barleycorn who suffers attacks, death, and various indignities which correspond to the different stages of barley cultivation, such as reaping and malting. John Barleycorn is a representation of the spirit of barley. It is widely thought by scholars that John Barleycorn also represents a practice known to the English Pagans, representing the ideology of the cycle of harvest. It is notable that every other European pantheon has a dying-and-reborn God connected to crops and the only Deity explicitly known to die and reborn in the Northern pantheon is Baldur who has no connection to agriculture, but is more of a societal Power. It is a commonly held gnosis that Frey takes the figure of the sacrificed crop God of the Northern pantheon, going through the John Barleycorn ordeal each year at Lammas to appease the Green World and Death and ensure food for another year.

Some scholars have speculated the historical figure Scaef Scylding (Sheaf Debt-ing) is another by-name for Frey:

... Scaef; who, as some affirm, was driven on a certain island in Germany, called Scandza, (of which Jornandes, the historian of the Goths, speaks), a little boy in a skiff, without any attendant, asleep, with a handful of corn at his head, whence he was called Scaef; and, on account of his singular appearance, being well received by the men of that country, and carefully educated, in his riper age he reigned in a town which was called Slaswic, but at present Haithebi; which country, called old Anglia, whence the Angles came into Britain, is situated between the Saxons and the Goths.

Gesta Regum Anglorum

This would definitely relate to the verse in the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem. As I've often said, "short of building a time machine we'll never know", but research and gnosis inform me that Loaf-Mass is Frey's feast par excellence, commemorating His role as sacral and sacrificed King, presiding over the harvest.

In my personal gnosis, Frey has a procession after His return

from the land of the dead, to bless the people with His vitality. He dies to placate Nature which is stronger than us all, and feed our bodies. He returns to show triumph over death and feed our spirits.

In my hearth, we mourn Frey's death, keep vigil for three days, and mark His return with celebrating Him. This is a rite I made for my Kindred and friends of the Kindred, for Lammas Day itself, to celebrate Frey's return from Death, and procession to bless the land and its people with Life. This is the second wain procession in this book, to follow the last holiday of Nerthus' procession. It does seem very right, at least to me, for the two major Vanic Powers to have wain rites one in front of the other, the Mother and the Son.

Preparation:

-There will need to be a wain. As mentioned in the Nerthus rite, it should be small enough to be transported in a car but substantial enough to carry a statue and some goods. A heavily decorated wheelbarrow will suffice. In the case of a Vanic hearth which has also done the Nerthus rite for Midsummer, Frey and Nerthus can share the same wain for Their different festivals.

-There needs to be an image of Frey in the cart, preferably a statue. The wain will be consecrated by Frey's image being placed in it (see below).

-While many Heathen rituals are led by a Goði or Gydja who may not have a strong personal connection to the Deity involved, I feel this particular rite must be overseen by an oathed dedicant of Frey, and preferably a Freysgydhia. If a Freysgodhi is to perform, he should wear 'womanly' garb, and definitely as many bells as he can stand. The priest will attend the wain, conduct the rituals, and oversee the gifting.

-There are some Godfolk who may be able to bring the wain to every Kindred in their area, both with regards to being welcomed by the Kindreds as well as being able to set aside a week or so to travel around. In a place where compatible Heathenfolk are few and far

between, it may be more practical to invite one's Kindred and/or some chosen and respectful friends to a select area to meet the wain as it arrives.

-The wain will be prepared by the priest with a secret rite, that is, by the statue of Frey being "charged" by either anointing the statue with one's sexual fluids or blood (such as with a diabetic sticker). For hygiene's sake there should only be a small amount of personal fluids and the Frey statue should not be handled by others, particularly as it will be the priest's own statue and representative of their personal connection to Frey.

-The wain will be loaded with gifts of food and drink, both to gift Frey as well as those who have come to honor Him. Loaves of homemade bread, especially that baked by the Goði or Gydja, is most appropriate, as are baskets of fresh organic fruit and vegetables, and perhaps some bottles of mead or ale whether home-brewed or bought from a decent brewery. Beyond that, gifts can be at the priest's discretion, whether it be a bag of gold dollar coins with some attendants taking one a piece, or amber beads; I also find having an antler, a sword, and figurines of horses and boars is nice, as well as candles consecrated by the priest for people to take and enjoy Frey's light.

-Those who are planning on attending the rite should be informed beforehand to come to the rite with a gift for Frey. The rite is based on the principle of 'a gift for a gift'. Everyone takes something from the wain representative of Frey's blessings, and in return gives something which will be given by the priest to Frey, whether it is food and drink items or something more tangible for the priest to keep on Frey's altar and use only for Him.

-The priest should procure a pleasant-smelling essential oil for the purpose of blessing the gathered folk.

Ritual Outline

1. The priest privately consecrates the cart with sexual fluids or blood on Frey's statue, and a galdor chanting the names of Frey (Frey, Ingui, Lýtir, Sceaf) as the statue is added to the cart. The priest should be sensitive enough to feel Frey's presence filling and hallowing the wain.
2. The priest loads the cart with gifts from the folk to Frey, praying over each one that they may bless the people in His name.
3. The priest goes to the ritual site, singing to Frey on the way there. Presumably the priest will get there by car, at which point the car should be parked enough of a ways off that the priest can pull the wain a bit to the site, singing and chanting while the wain is pulled.
4. The wain arrives at the ritual site and the priest and wain should be welcomed with a toast, with words spoke in praise of Ingui and His kin.
5. The gathered folk may help themselves to any of the wain's goods.
6. When all have gone through the wain, they give back bounty of their own, items of worth for Frey's enjoyment.
7. The priest will bless the gathered folk, anointing each attendant with an Ing rune on their forehead, in blessed essential oil. The priest can go around the circle and say something such as, "The blessings of Ingui upon you, so your body and spirit may be well fed." This is also the time when the priest should be open to Frey's move, if there is a prophecy to be made or a special boon to be given. If the priest is very sensitive to Frey's presence among the folk, the priest can blow at each individual's forehead, visualizing light going into the forehead, and "charging" the person's etheric field.
8. The priest calls one final blessing of Frey upon the gathered folk, and

then formally closes the rite.

9. The gathered folk can share food together, eating and making merry. The priest also joins in the celebration.

10. The priest takes the last piece of bread and puts it either in a fire or in a hole in the ground and says something like:

We give this last bit of our grain to feed Sleipnir, to give strength before he rides the Wild Hunt. As the Vanir had truce with the Aesir and alliances were made, so this gift of the Vanir is given forth to the Aesir in frith and good will. Hail the Gods!

The gathered folk repeat: *Hail the Gods!*

10. The priest returns home, and gives the gifts to Frey, including their own private gifts (such as food, drink, and other items). Food and drink should be burned or placed at the base of a tree. Tangible items should be placed on Frey's altar for His use or enjoyment. It may be that the following year Frey asks for something to be "re-gifted", having been charged with His energy the whole year.

11. After the priest gifts Frey at their personal altar, the priest will smudge the cart with an herb such as sage or mugwort, and then take a purification bath.

For some time after Lammas, the priest should reflect on what things are most deeply fulfilling in their life, and work at preserving that and perhaps moving to the next level. In any case, Lammas should be a time of appreciation and gratitude for the little things that are in fact big things, the stuff of life itself.

Solitary Adaptation

If the solitary is able to procure a wagon and make it into a "Vanic Wain", they may want to do this and draw Frey's image around their neighborhood or backyard, to bless the land. The solitary will then feast and share with Frey. Some time can be spent communing with Frey and drawing His renewed vitality into oneself, for personal healing whether of an emotional or physical nature, preferably a bit of both.

Harvest

This rite commemorates the last grain harvest of the year, and as such is devoted to Sif, a Goddess I believe to be Vanir, recalling the myth of Her hair cut off and replaced by a wig made of real gold. The theme of the ritual is thus "spinning dross into gold", leaving bad things behind with the old year, to die during the winter, and working towards harvest of the good. This rite is adapted on one that I did for my former Kindred in Connecticut, with some Neopagan guests, for Harvest 2003.

Supplies for ritual

--A feast to be shared between the Gods and the gathered participants. The feast should consist of at least one livestock-meat dish (beef, poultry, pork), one grain dish (bread, rice, pasta), one vegetable dish, and in-season fruit.

--A gold coin for each of the participants, the pile of coins should be in a woven basket *or* cornucopia.

--Each attendant should bring something to be sacrificed that is symbolic or literal of "dross" in their lives, that they would like to see change "to gold" within the coming year.

1. Purpose of the ritual is stated:

We come on this day of the autumn equinox to celebrate the bounty of the harvest, the food that gives us health and strength, and building bonds when food is shared between family and friends. We honor the story of the Vanic Goddess Sif, and how the loss of Her hair, symbolic of the ripened corn, brought gifts to the Gods, gifts that exemplify the nature of each God. As the food is harvested to make way for the land's rest through the winter, let us give thanks to the beautiful Goddess Sif, and remember Her story.

(reading from **Skaldskaparsmal 35**)

2. Invocation:

*To Sif, with hair of gold, come and feast with us!
Wife of Thor, mother of Ullr and Thrud,
Gracious goblet-giver, hallower of field and hall,
We welcome You here, worthed by us all!*

3. The priest speaks:

*As Sif's hair was made gold,
as the fields yield their bounty,
bring your dross forth,
state your intent to work and make change
in the year ahead.*

Each participant takes out their "dross" and goes around the circle; as the "dross" is placed in the first basket, participant will say what the "dross" is and speak of what they would like to change about it in the coming year.

4. Another basket is taken and the priest hands each person a gold coin from the basket, saying something like:

*This gold I give you,
to hold as a reminder to work on what needs to be done.
May your efforts bring reward.*

5. When each participant has a gold coin, the feast is brought to the table. Plates are first set aside for Sif, the food should be blessed with:

*I give this food to Sif with thanks,
enjoy with our appreciation of You.*

At last the gathered folk can sit down and eat, and make merry. Note: the last piece of bread should be put aside.

6. After the food is consumed, mead is poured in the drinking vessel just for Sif:

*Sif, we give You this mead
to honor Your beauty
both inner and outer.
Hail Sif!*

The gathered folk repeat: *Hail Sif!* and the vessel is left on the table for Sif.

7. The priest sends the gathered folk off with (improvised) words of blessing, and thanks the Gods for Their presence.

Solitary Ritual

The solitary may prepare a feast in Sif's honor. A lock of hair can be cut off and given to Sif (such as being buried, burned, or thrown in a moving body of water) with acknowledgment of something needed to be given up, done away with. Then Sif can be asked to bless a gold coin, carried until the next Harvest, for personal prosperity and achievement. At the next Harvest, the gold coin from the last year can be given to a stranger in need, and a new one consecrated, and so on, as the cycle continues.

Hallows

Svartesól

In Southern California, we really don't have winter in the classical sense of freezing temperatures, snow and ice. On my 27th birthday in February 2007, it was 75 degrees and I spent the day in Tijuana. I did grow up in New England, however, where there is winter, and then some; nothing like a nor'easter shutting down a whole town to make you realize how even in the 21st century with plows and indoor climate control, the elements still rule us.

Even living in a warmer climate, I am prone to getting a touch of Seasonal Affective Disorder as the days grow shorter. I notice that autumn is my time of "low woo", after the "high woo" and intense spirit-work between Beltaine to Lammas. While I logically understand I need time to recharge, I have never been enthusiastic about October in the way other Witches are, but I also know for this very reason I need to stay on top of my spiritual practice.

It seems that this time is still associated with Frey:

Thorgrim meant to have a harvest feast on the first night of winter, and to sacrifice to Frey.

Gisla Saga, Chapter IX.

This also seems to be the time when the *Alfablót*³⁶ was held, when the crops had been harvested and the animals were most fat. Unlike the great blóts, the *álfablót* was a local celebration for homesteads, administered by the lady of the house. We do not have any surviving ritual format because they were surrounded by secrecy, and strangers were not welcome during the celebrations (such as befell the the Norwegian skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, who gave a first-hand account of such).

36 Larsson, Mats G (2002). *Götarnas Riken : Upptäcktsfärder Till Sveriges Enande*. Bokförlaget Atlantis AB

We can assume, then, that the Vanir do not just disappear for the winter, but are concerned with the regeneration of the land as well as the survival of the people. So, in my household, we hold a húsel for Hallows. A húsel is a sacred feast, where the first portion of the food is given to the Gods, and anything left over. In this case of a Hallows húsel, we also give to the land-wights as well as to the Ljossalfar and we speak the names of the beloved dead, offering to them as well. This way, everyone is taken care of.

1. Preparing the Food

It is important that while you cook, charge the food with love, and give it the intent to bless those who eat it (your family, the Gods) with feelings of well-being. For Hallows, it is good to have seasonally-appropriate food such as pumpkin pie, or squash, and "stick to your ribs" meat such as turkey.

2. Honoring the Dead

Before serving the meal, it is appropriate to honor the dead first, for it is because of them, that we are here now. This can be blood ancestors if you like, or "spiritual ancestors", that is, dead who have inspired you in some way. Before this part, it should be planned how many dead you will name, and have a corresponding number of candles. I find that nine or twelve is just right, and anything more than that is too much. The candles should be plain white, beeswax preferable.

You will name each one, say a little about them, why you are honoring them, and then light the candle. After all the dead are named, incense can be burned to give them as an offering.

3. Serving the Meal

Now it is time to serve the food. Give the first bits to the Vanir in a collective bowl. State your intent of offering by drawing the appropriate rune over the bowl (such as Giefu), and say something to the effect of:

*To Nerthus and Njord,
 Frey and Freya,
 Idunna and Sif,
 Ullr and Herne,
 Gods of Water and Earth,
 Sea and Soil,
 plant and beast,
 blood and bone,
 who feed and nurture this World,
 we give food back to You in gratitude
 for the bounty we have,
 and the knowledge that all we have
 comes from You and is Yours.
 A gift for a gift!*

You'll want to make sure you give Them a drink, too, and preferably something you'd like to drink. Sparkling cider is good, as is organic lemonade, or you can do wine (for the record, Manischewitz wine is excellent and it's not expensive)... something like that.

Dessert should be given to Frau Holda and the house-wight. Your mileage may vary with the house-wight, mine tends to be fond of baked goods. Holda would prefer that you put in the time and effort of making something yourself, even if it's cookies, but then again She will not begrudge thought going into something given in Her honor (especially if you're not much of a baker). Gift Holda with the dessert, saying something like:

*To Holda the Hausfrau,
 as You make our lives sweet,
 here is sweetness shared with You.
 A gift for a gift!*

3. Giving Thanks

As you sit down to eat, grace should be said:

*For this food we are eating,
 we give thanks to the Vanir of Earth and Sea.
 We bless the places it came from.
 We bless the spirits of the beings it came from.
 We bless those who made this food,
 and we bless those who share it with us.
 May this food nourish our bodies
 as well as our hearts.*

The Ing rune should be traced over the food before being consumed. (Ing is most appropriate as it is the rune of sacrifice and implies that you are aware of the sacrifice involved in the getting and making of your food.) As you eat, you will want to meditate on the Vanir. They may not necessarily speak to you, but just being mindful of food and of the bounty of the Earth itself, enjoying the food, and feeling grateful for what you have, can be a powerful experience.

Anything that cannot be consumed by those present, rather than being saved for leftovers, should be given to the Gods. The food can be burned in a fire or placed in a hole in the ground at the base of a tree.

4. Asking

At this point it would be good to ask the Gods for a boon, whether it is safety in the ice and snow (if you get winter weather where you live), or in my case, warmth and light as the days shorten. I ask this specifically of Frey, who is a Light-Bringer besides being my Patron, and concerned with the well-being of His human charges. An omen can be taken after the asking, whether with runes or another divinatory form, as a form of guidance to see how to draw upon Frey's light, or the Gods' sustenance, or things to work on during the shorter days and quieter world.

5. Offering to the Land

After the meal is had, bread can be left on the ground of your property for the land-wights and Ljossalfar.

*May you have sustenance through the time of quiet,
even as you sustain us.
May the doors between worlds be open,
may we remember it is through the flow of gifting
in connection
that we find wholeness.*

6. Closing

After the húsel is done, the one who did not do the cooking should help out by doing the dishes, that's only fair. (Or if you cooked together, you can do dishes together.) Spend the rest of the day in some kind of enjoyable activity.

Solitary Adaptation

A private feast can be held at home, with an abundance of food shared with the Gods and land-wights. Prayers of thanks can be given for the prosperity of the past year, and protection and continued prosperity during the cold months.

Recipes for Feasting on the Holytides

Svartésól

YULE

Julskinka -- Christmas Ham

As most Nordic Pagans know, a swine was traditionally sacrificed to Frey at Yuletide, with oaths sworn over it. This is a more Americanized version of the traditional Swedish recipe, keeping in mind those with not a lot of time on their hands.

Precooked, tenderized ham
1 c. dark brown sugar
2 tbsp. flour
2 tbsp. brandy
1/2 tsp. ground cloves
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. ground ginger
Grapes

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place ham fat side up, in an open roasting pan and roast until brown and tender, about 1/2 hour longer than the package calls for. Remove ham from oven and increase oven temperature to 425 degrees. Cut the skin off ham, leaving 1/2 inch of fat.

Cut the skin off ham, leaving 1/2 inch of fat. Score the fat with a sharp knife in diagonal lines, running in opposite directions to make diamond pattern. Combine brandy, cloves, cinnamon, ginger, sugar and flour and rub well over ham.

Return to oven, roast 20 more minutes. With wooden toothpicks, attach to top and side a small bunch of grapes. Serve with mustard sauce.

Red Cabbage

To serve with the Yule ham: traditionally Scandinavian fare, very good.

1 small head red cabbage, cored and shredded
 2 cups white sugar
 2 cups white vinegar
 2 teaspoons salt
 3 cups water

1. Place the cabbage in a large stockpot, and stir in the sugar, vinegar, salt and water.
2. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer over medium heat for 1 hour.
3. This can be served immediately, or it can be chilled and reheated later in the microwave.

Spicy Ginger Molasses Cookies

1/2 T vinegar
 1/2 c milk
 1/2 c light brown sugar
 1/2 c shortening
 1 egg
 1 c molasses
 2 1/2 c flour
 2 t baking soda
 1/4 t cinnamon
 1/4 t nutmeg
 1/2 t ginger

1. Grease 2 cookie sheets.
2. Prepare 3 mixtures:
 * the vinegar, plus enough milk to make 1/2 c (alternately, use real sour milk)

* the baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, and 2.5 of flour

* the sugar and shortening creamed together, then also adding in the egg and molasses (use a large bowl)

3. To the sugar+shortening+egg+molasses mixture, alternately mix in small amounts of the other two mixtures until everything is in one bowl. Mix this well.

4. Form the cookies. I make drop cookies, so I plop batter onto a cookie sheet, and then squish each cookie with a (empty) glass to flatten it.

5. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes at 375°F.

Siggy's Wassail

While this is traditional to use for wassailing over Yuletide, it can also be used in a non-alcoholic public ritual at any time of the year. This particular beverage keeps well in an insulated container, as in a steel thermos.

1 gallon apple cider

6 cinnamon sticks

2 teaspoons allspice, whole

1 teaspoon clove

1 teaspoon ground nutmeg

3 tart apples (Granny Smith is especially good, if you can get it)

Put clove and allspice into a mesh bag or tea ball. Place all ingredients in a large pot and heat until the apples burst.

Yield: 1 gallon, which is enough to share with friends, both human and arborial.

CHARMING OF THE PLOUGH

Frey and Gerda Cake

A variation of a wedding cake recipe, which can be given to Frey and

Gerda to commemorate Their marriage, as well as to the participants of the ritual who celebrate Them, for luck in their own love. This offering is also appropriate as this station of the Wheel is in the Anglo-Saxon Solmonath, when Bede says cakes were given as offerings to the Gods.

1 cup butter
 1 cup sugar
 1/2 cup honey
 5 eggs
 2 cups flour
 2 tbsp grated lemon rind
 2 1/2 tsp lemon juice
 1 tsp rosewater

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy and light.
3. Add the honey and mix well.
4. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well.
5. Gradually add the flour and blend thoroughly with a large spoon.
6. Stir in the lemon rind, lemon juice, and rose water.
7. Line the bottom of a greased nine-by-five-by-three-inch loaf pan and pour in the batter.
8. Bake the cake in a preheated 350 degree oven for an hour and fifteen minutes, or when slightly brown and a toothpick comes out clean.
9. Remove from the oven and let cool for twenty minutes.
10. Spread white icing or sprinkle sugar on top of the cake.
11. Cut a Giefu rune (looks like an X) into the cake before serving.

EOSTRE

Siggy's Eostre Omelet

As eggs are one of the sacred foods of the Goddess Eostre, here is a

hearty brunch recipe to serve on Her holytide. This is a bit like a Denver omelet, but not quite. This recipe will make 2 servings, or 1 if you are very hungry. You can of course double or triple the amount of ingredients to serve more people.

- *4 large eggs
- *1 cup chopped onion
- *1/2 cup chopped red bell peppers
- *1/2 cup chopped green bell peppers
- *1/2 cup chopped mushrooms
- *1/2 cup diced cooked ham
- *8 slices cooked bacon, drained and crumbled
- *1/2 cup diced potatoes
- *1/2 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- *2 tablespoons butter
- *1/2 teaspoon salt
- *1/2 teaspoon pepper

1. Melt the butter in a large skillet or on a griddle.
2. Saute the onion, bell pepper, mushrooms, potato, ham and bacon in the butter until the onion starts to become opaque.
3. In a small bowl, whip the eggs lightly. Add salt and pepper, and the shredded cheese.
4. Slowly stir the egg and cheese mixture into the mixture in the skillet.
5. Lightly brown on one side.
6. Turn over and lightly brown other side.

Candied Flowers

What better way to invite Spring than to eat beautiful flowers?

You'll need

a fistful/small bowl's worth of the petals and blossoms of flowers that are *edible* and appeal most to you: roses, lilacs, violet, and pansies would be ideal.

1 cup water
 1 egg white, beaten
 1 cup sugar

1. Take a few drops of water and combine it with the egg white in a small mixing bowl. Whisk the water and egg together.
2. Hold each flower petal gently between two fingers and dip into the mixture, *or* use a small paintbrush to brush the mixture onto the petals. Once the mixture is coating the petals, sprinkle sugar on the petal.
3. Once the individual petal is completed, place the petals on a sheet of wax paper to dry, an inch or so apart from each other.
4. It will take about 12-48 hours for the petals to dry, depending on the humidity level in your home. If the petals aren't drying fast enough, you can place them on a cookie sheet and bake in the oven at 150 degrees for 2-3 hours.
5. Once the petals are done, store them in an airtight container in a dry place until it's time to use them.

BELTAINE

Strawberry Over Scones

Scones are an English specialty, and as such quite appropriate for a traditionally English holiday such as May Day. With strawberries and whipped cream on top, it is a decadent treat, and most definitely something with which to please the Vanadis, the Lady of Beauty and Pleasure honored at this holytide.

For 8 scones:

2 c. all-purpose flour
 2 tsp. baking powder
 1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 c. butter

3/4 c. buttermilk

In a large bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Add butter. Combine with your fingers, a wooden spoon or a pastry blender until coarse crumbs form. Add buttermilk. Quickly stir to form dough.

Divide dough in half. Form each half into a ball. Flatten to a round. Place on lightly greased baking sheet. Cut each crosswise into 4 pieces but not all the way through. Bake at 425 degrees for 10-15 minutes.

When the scones are cool, take 12 medium-sized strawberries (or 6-7 large ones) and slice into rounds. Spoon the strawberries over the scones, and cover with a heaping amount of whipped cream. You can cheat and get the kind in the can, or use this recipe:

1 cup (0.25 l) heavy cream (or whipping cream), cold

4 tablespoons of white sugar

1. Chill a medium mixing bowl and the beaters of an electric mixer in the refrigerator for at least 10 minutes. (If using a mixer with various kinds of beaters, use the whisk attachment). This step is very important, because the cream will not rise if the mixer is warm.
2. Put the cream in the bowl, and add the sugar to the cream.
3. In the chilled bowl, beat heavy cream until soft peaks form. Do not overbeat.

May Wine

This is a traditional recipe for a beverage that can be given both as a libation to the Gods on Beltaine, as well as served among the folk in celebration.

1 bottle of wine, preferably a Riesling or White Zinfandel

1/2 cup fresh strawberries, sliced

12 sprigs of fresh woodruff

Directions

1. Pour wine into carafe or wide mouth bottle.
2. Add the strawberries and woodruff and allow to sit and blend for at least an hour, but preferably not more than 3-4 hours.
3. Strain and serve well chilled. Garnish with thin orange slice.

MIDSUMMER

Garlic, Tomato, and Cheddar Sandwiches

These are tasty and celebrate the foods and fresh flavor of summer, without requiring too much oven prep on a hot day. This is ideal finger food for a Midsummer celebration with others.

per sandwich (add according to how many you are serving)

- 2 slices brown bread
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 green chili
- 1 tomato
- 5 long slices sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Toast the two slices of brown bread, until one of the two is not soft anymore (the second one can be).
2. Rub the garlic clove on the hard piece of toasted bread, until only a little piece is left. Chop the remainder, and scatter on the harder toasted bread.
3. Cut the tomato in half, and crush each side on the same piece of harder toasted bread. Then spread the juice, cut what's left of the

tomato, and put it on the harder toasted bread.

4. Add the olive oil to the harder toasted bread. Be careful to only add just a little bit -- there should be less oil than there is bread.

5. Add the salt and pepper. Slice or crush the chili, and scatter on the harder piece of bread. Add the lemon juice.

6. Arrange the slices of cheddar on top of the harder piece of bread, then close the sandwich with the other (softer) piece of bread.

Summertime Salad

To celebrate the full bloom of greenery.

You will need varying amounts of

iceberg and romaine lettuce

dandelion greens

mustard greens

alfalfa sprouts

spinach

arugula

You can have more or less of one variety (or none of one), depending on taste.

Add some cherry or grape tomatoes, plus sliced carrots and cucumber, toss the salad to mix more or less evenly, and top with this vinaigrette:

1 clove of garlic, crushed or mashed

2 tablespoons vinegar (I prefer red wine vinegar)

1 teaspoon mustard

6 tablespoons oil (vegetable, extra virgin olive, almond, etc.)

salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

herbs to taste (e.g. basil, rosemary, oregano)

1. Mix garlic, salt, mustard and vinegar until smooth.

2. Add oil and mix until smooth.

3. Add pepper and herbs to taste.
4. Let stand. The longer the herbs and mustard soak in the oil, the better the flavor will be.
5. Make sure to mix the vinaigrette just before dressing the salad if the oil and vinegar have separated.

LAMMAS

Golden Corn Lammas Bread

I made this for my first public Lammas, since corn is best harvested and brought to stores and markets in Southern California around Lammastide. Though wheat and barley are more traditionally European, corn honors the spirits of the local land-wights in the Americas. You should double the recipe if you are planning on making one loaf to share with the folk and one loaf to sacrifice to Frey.

- 1 cup corn meal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup shortening
- ¼ cup sugar optional
- ½ of a 15 ounce can whole corn, drained (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 425° F. Grease an 8 inch baking pan.
2. Combine corn meal, flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar in a large mixing bowl.
3. Add egg, sugar, and shortening.
4. Beat until fairly smooth; about a minute.
5. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes

out clean. If corn added to batter, increase time ~50%

6. Carve an Ing rune (to me the Anglo-Saxon Ing with the "tails" is more aesthetically pleasing than the Ingwaz diamond) into the loaf and galdor over it.

To be "proper" for the holiday, reserve the last piece for Woden, as He is traditionally offered the last sheaf of wheat at the harvest. My UPG says this is symbolic of the frith between the Aesir and Vanir, and the friendship between Frey and Woden, with Frey's gift of grain given to the Allfather.

Hearty Bean & Pasta Soup

Beans are often alternated with barley in crop rotation, and this is something very tasty and nutritious, that is also very inexpensive and easy to make.

10 cups of water

5 vegetable boullion cubes

1 1/2 cups dried bean soup mix (kidneys, garbanzos, lentils, black-eyed peas, green peas)

2 cups snail-shaped OR ditalini whole-wheat pasta

3 cloves garlic, diced

5 basil leaves

ground pepper to taste

1 teaspoon salt

1. Soak the beans in a bowl of cold water overnight, or hot water for about 2 to 4 hours prior to cooking. Drain the water from the bowl afterwards: do not put in the soup, as it's collected starch.
2. Pour fresh water into stockpot, heat at medium-high. Add boullion cubes, and continue heating at same temp for approximately 7 minutes.
3. Measure beans and add to the stockpot. Bring heat down to medium and cook for 55 minutes. Prep garlic, and add the garlic, as well as pepper, salt, and basil.
4. After 45 minutes, add the pasta and cook for another 30 minutes.

5. Serve hot.

A note of warning: this will give you a bit of gas, but the nutritional benefits (for cheap!) are worth it.

Bacon and Cheese Stuffed Mushrooms

I like these because they're good, easy to make, have a "late summer" feel, and you can easily give a couple to Frey and Gerda (Gerda in particular is partial to root vegetables and mushrooms).

3 ounces cream cheese
 ¼ teaspoon Worcestershire Sauce
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ¼ teaspoon pepper
 ¼ cup diced green onions
 2 tablespoon diced green peppers
 Chopped mushroom stems
 2 slices cooked bacon, chopped
 ½ cup bread crumbs
 1 tablespoon butter
 2 dozen mushrooms (white usually fine)

1. Preheat oven to 325°F.
2. Soften the cream cheese and put in food processor.
3. Add in the Worcestershire sauce, salt, and pepper; pulsing on and off.
4. Fold in chopped bacon, chopped mushroom stems, diced green onions, and green peppers.
5. Set the stuffing aside.
6. Mix bread crumbs with just enough butter to hold together.
7. Stuff mushroom caps with stuffing.
8. Top with bread crumbs.
9. Bake at 325°F for 5 minutes.

HARVEST

Apple & Spice Pork Roast

This is an ideal recipe for Northern Tradition feasting as it contains two symbols traditionally associated with abundance: pork (as in Frey's golden boar, Gullinbursti), and apples (Idunna's gift of health to the Gods). As befits the last feast before honoring the Dead, this is a very rich and tasty main course, which you can share with the Gods and folk alike.

3 to 4 pound boneless pork roast
 1 cup applesauce
 1/3 cup packed brown sugar
 2 teaspoons vinegar
 1 teaspoon yellow mustard
 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
 1 tablespoon flour
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon sugar
 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Stir together applesauce, brown sugar, vinegar, mustard and cloves in small bowl; refrigerate half of the applesauce mixture and set aside remaining applesauce mixture.
3. Combine flour, salt, sugar, garlic powder and pepper in another small bowl.
4. Rub flour mixture evenly over entire surface of pork.
5. Place pork on rack in shallow roasting pan. Roast, uncovered, until internal temperature is 140 degrees F. Spoon reserved applesauce mixture over roast. Roast until internal temperature is 155 degrees F., 1 to 1 1/2 hours total cooking time (about 18-20 minutes per pound).
6. Transfer roast to serving platter; cover with foil and let stand for 15

minutes before slicing. Heat chilled applesauce mixture in small saucepan until boiling; boil for 1 minute. Spoon heated applesauce mixture over pork slices.

Potato & Cabbage Soup

This can be served with the pork roast, or it will make a meal of its own.

10 cups of water
 5 vegetable boullion cubes
 2 medium sized russet potatoes, peeled, chopped/diced
 1/2 head of green cabbage, cored and shredded
 2 carrots, chopped/diced
 1/2 brown onion, chopped/diced (your eyes will tear up)
 3 cloves garlic, diced
 1 teaspoon salt
 ground pepper to taste
 about 6 peppercorns
 3 fresh basil leaves, crushed

1. Pour the water into stockpot, bring to a boil. Add the boullion cubes, let boil for 10 minutes.
2. Prep veggies, add to the stockpot.
3. Simmer on medium heat for about 40 minutes.
4. Prep the garlic, and add pepper, salt, peppercorns, and basil.
5. Simmer on low heat for about 10 minutes. Stir every 2 minutes with a wooden spoon.
6. Serve hot.

Irish Soda Bread

It just wouldn't be Harvest without some kind of grain served, and this is super-easy.

3 cups all-purpose flour (or whole-wheat, if you prefer)
 1 tablespoon baking powder
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1/8 cup white sugar

1 teaspoon salt
 1 egg, lightly beaten
 2 cups buttermilk
 ¼ cup butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (160°C).
2. Grease and flour a 9x5 inch loaf pan.
3. Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, and salt in a large mixing bowl.
4. Blend egg and buttermilk together, and add all at once to the flour mixture.
5. Mix until just moistened. Too much mixing will make it tough.
6. Stir in butter; pour into prepared pan.
7. Bake for 65-70 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the bread comes out clean. The loaf should sound hollow if you tap the base.
8. Cool on a wire rack.
9. Wrap in a towel or foil several hours or overnight for best flavor.

HALLOWS

Cottage Pie

This is a food that has been beloved in my mother's family for generations, and seems fitting to offer beloved dead as "comfort", as well as using corn, which is usually ripe and readily available at this time of year.

1lb ground beef
 3 medium-sized russet potatoes
 1 large or 2 small onions
 2 tbsp flour
 2 cups beef stock
 cheese, grated

1/2 cup cooked corn
milk

1. Brown the meat in a frying pan. There is no need to add oil, as the meat is fatty enough.
2. Finely chop the onion and lightly fry in a little butter until clear.
3. Add the onions to the meat along with a dash of black pepper.
4. Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and stir and cook for 3 - 4 minutes (if using gravy powder, omit this step).
5. Cover with beef stock and simmer for 30 minutes.
6. Meanwhile peel, chop and boil the potatoes for 20 minutes until cooked.
7. Once the meat is cooked, skim off the excess fat, then boil it rapidly to reduce the liquid until it just covers the meat and onions.
8. Drain the potatoes very well until completely dry. Mash the potatoes until they are smooth and free of any lumps.
9. Add butter to the mashed potato, taste and adjust the seasoning. Add enough milk to make the mashed potatoes very soft, as heavy mashed potatoes will not float properly on top of the meat.
10. Put the mixture in a shallow oven proof dish.
11. Spread the corn on top of the meat, and the potatoes on top of the corn, and brush the tops of the potatoes with melted butter.
12. Sprinkle the grated cheese on top.
13. Fluff and puncture the top with a fork.
14. Cook at 350-375 F for 30-50 minutes until the top is golden brown.

Pumpkin Muffins

These are good for several reasons: they're tasty, pumpkin is one of the sacred foods of the season, and you'll have something to share with celebrants as well as the ancestors and/or beloved dead.

3/4 cup natural bran
3/4 cup whole wheat flour
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1 1/2 tsp cinnamon

1/2 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1 cup canned pumpkin
2 eggs (unbeaten)
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup plain yogurt or buttermilk

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. In bowl, combine the bran, flour, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, baking powder, baking soda, and salt; toss with a spoon to mix.
3. Add the pumpkin, eggs, oil and yogurt; stir until it is just combined.
4. Spoon the batter into paper-lined or nonstick muffin tins.
5. Bake for 25 minutes or until firm to the touch, with a toothpick coming out clean.

Faining on the Lunar Cycle

Svartesól

In Anglo-Saxon terminology, "faining" is related to the Old High German "fagende" which means "to celebrate", literally "celebrating the Gods".

While there should be some thought and consideration into how to honor the Gods properly, I feel that once it gets to be too much worry and effort, it's not worth it anymore. In the *Havamal* it says "Better to give not at all than to give too much," and this is true. We want to *gift* the Gods, not feel obligated in drudgery. However, you do not want to be too informal, as you are still dealing with Gods and it is important to have that sense of it being "set apart" - much as spirituality should be interwoven into every aspect of daily life, the sacred in the everyday being best for a Vanic practice - coming before the Gods is no small thing.

With that being said, the question comes as to when it is appropriate to do faining. I have some friends who fain the Gods every day, some only once in awhile. I would say when your spirit has need - if you have something major to be thankful for, or boast of, it is good to fain the Gods then; if you are about to undertake a major life transition (such as moving cross-country), it is good to fain the Gods then. When you have great joy or great sorrow - share with the Gods.

According to the *De Correctione Rusticorum* of Saint Martin of Braga, one of the transgressions counted among people who still followed the old religion of Gaul (by 572 CE, the Franks had conquered Gaul, so it was Germanic religion specific to the tribe of the Franks) was the observation of "Vulcanalia and the kalends". The kalends was the first day of the month. Gaul, in the late 6th century, was still slow to completely convert, and we know from elsewhere (Bede, namely) that the Heathens observed a lunar cycle. It is from this bit of history that I feel it is most appropriate to do a faining on the New Moon, especially as it sets the tone for the rest of the month, however Bede mentioned observances on the Full Moon and it seems to be appropriate there also.

Since Vanenheim is highly dependent on the solar and lunar cycles to keep things in good working order, monthly faintings on the New and Full Moon would indeed be very appropriate to a Vanic-centered practice.

1. Assemblage

This is the point when the folk should gather, and begin to turn their minds to the Gods, and to the ritual ahead. It helps to make this "official" by ringing a chime or sounding a bullhorn, after which there should be a moment of silence and procession to the place of ritual.

2. Offering to the Wights

Whether you are performing the ritual outside or indoors, it is important to be mindful of the wights involved. Before any further steps are taken into the ritual, a small offering should be made to the wight or wights of this place, speaking peace and perhaps words of honor, something like:

*To the wight/s of this place,
we honor you with this offering.
We come in peace and celebration,
you are welcome to partake in our joy.*

3. Hallowing

The ritual area can be consecrated by galdor (sacred song, often involving runes but not necessarily). My personal preference with hallowing is to do an elemental hallowing, as the elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water are very sacred to the Vanir, as Gods of nature. In this case, we would start with a contained fire such as a candle, followed by a recaning stick to hallow the place with smoke, followed by blessed salted water sprinkled around the parameters of the ritual place, followed by kneeling and kissing the Earth, then inviting the gathered folk to ground and pull up the energy of the Earth into their bodies and minds. This step can be omitted or abbreviated if you are using a

permanently hallowed space such as a ritual room or Hof.

4. *Rede*

This is the time for the person leading the ritual to speak of the gathering's purpose. In the case of a simple faining to a Deity, it may be a little background information on the Deity including Their great deeds, as well as speaking of gratitude to that Deity or desire for Their intervention or blessing in a certain situation. It should be kept short, albeit not too short.

5. *Invocation and Preparation*

At this time the Deity should be called. I have found in the case of a group of people, it works best if the leader does a call-and-response, with the leader calling and the group following with "May (Name) be hailed." This is but an example:

Ing-Frey, God of the World!

(May Ingui ever be hailed.)

Ing-Frey, Lord of the Mound!

(May Ingui ever be hailed.)

Bringer of sunshine and gentle rain!

(May Ingui ever be hailed.)

Who gives fertile fields and fullness of life!

(May Ingui ever be hailed.)

While the Deity is called, another person in the rite should prepare the offering. Food and drink is very standard in the Northern Tradition as it is a sign of hospitality. Nowadays most of us have neither the land nor knowhow to give a livestock animal rightly, however the effort going into acceptable food and drink as offerings to the Gods is sacrifice, and shows good will. The food and drink to be shared with the Gods should be blessed energetically, with affectionate feelings, often enhanced by being transmitted through the Gebo (gift) or Ingwaz (sacrifice) rune. NOTE: If you are doing this rite solitary, I find the best way to invoke the God is to chant and tone Their name or names, which

alters your state of consciousness and thus brings you closer to Their wavelength. It is probably best to prepare the offering before doing the invocation, in this case.

6. *Communion*

The horn will be passed around first, so that prayers and praise can be offered to the Deity. It is a good idea to have an attendant carrying both the horn and a bowl, and presenting the horn to each person, rather than horn being passed from attendant to attendant. It is customary to drink from the horn, however if the libation is alcohol and the attendant cannot consume alcohol for whatever reason, it is acceptable and generous to pour a little bit of the offering from the horn into the blessing-bowl, hailing the God and seeing that as a libation to the God. When everyone has had the horn, the remainder of its contents can be poured into the blessing-bowl.

7. *Sacrifice*

The first part of the communal food and drink is given to the Gods. If outdoors, it is acceptable to leave the offering at the base of a tree. (I have done rites at the ocean where we put the bread into the ocean.)

8. *Blessing*

At this point, the leader will go to the blessing-bowl with an asperger (usually a sprig from an evergreen tree), dipping the asperger into the libation given to the Gods, and sprinkle each attendant. This is seen as an energy exchange; the libation which was consecrated and touched by the Gods now conveys Their essence and presence upon each person.

9. *Feasting*

The gathered folk should now partake of the food and drink left for them, in a spirit of merriment and celebration, good will and good cheer. Anything that is left over from the feast can be given to the Gods and the wight/s.

10. Closing

It is important to close the ritual, so the participants can "ground out" and not feel disoriented or "high" later. This can be done with a blessing song. I made a small blessing song for this specific purpose:

*Rite is done, bonds made strong,
Weave together Gods and man.
Frith renewed, friendship shewed,
As we gathered in this throng.
(Name) be hailed, and wassailed,
Each one carry (Name) in their self,
Gifts to give, lives to live,
We weave together as we walk along.*

The leader of the rite should be skilled at "pulling up" energy, perhaps reinforcing it with a prop such as a staff, striking the ground, or their foot, then saying: *This rite is done, the circle is open, but never broken.* Each person should then walk away feeling peaceful and even a bit "glowy", but not out of it.

Solitary Adaptation

The solitary can serve as their own priest, doing all the motions of this ritual except passing the horn and sprinkling attendants. In lieu of asperging themselves, the solitary may dip their index finger into the blessing bowl and trace a rune upon their forehead. A solitary may also use as much or as little song as they wish to get into the proper states of communion with the Gods.

The Importance of Devotion: Offering to the Vanir

Svartesól

Know, if thou has a friend
whom thou fully trustest,
and from whom thou would'st good derive,
thou shouldst blend thy mind with his,
and gifts exchange,
and often go to see him.

Havamal, v. 44 (Thorpe translation)

The word "fully trustest" used here in the Havamal can be seen as looking to one's *fulltrui* or at least primary Deities (besides the bonds of human friendship), and for that fully-trusted friend, three things are said to keep a relationship good: "blend your mind" with Theirs, exchange gifts, and go often to see Them. So simple, yet so much is being said in those statements. Let's take a look:

1. *Go often to see Them.*

Many Pagans (Heathens in particular) take offense to their practice being called a "religion". Be that as it may, the word "religion" is from the Latin *religio*, literally "re-linking". It is re-linking humanity with the Divine. I don't believe in "original sin" in the sense that humanity is inherently broken, what I do believe is that we have forgotten the Divinity within ourselves, and it causes us to be less-than-excellent to ourselves and each other.

Going "often" to a Deity does not mean 24/7 monastic isolation and servitude: while that is clearly what a few people are called to do, it is not everyone. However, it is very easy in today's world of overscheduling and information overload to forget the Gods, and for a Pagan religious practice to be a sometimes thing rather than an every day expression of connecting with the Gods and letting it influence one's life. Five minutes of prayer a day can greatly change one's attitude for the positive, and help a person to do right by their Deity.

Many people are capable of giving more than five minutes, but won't pray at all.

To maintain human friendships (not to mention intimate relationships), it is necessary to have at least some kind of contact. Chances are you will be closer to people you see and talk to the most often, rather than people you only see once every couple of years and/or talk to every couple of weeks or months. If you have a *fulltrui* or a couple of primary Deities, it doesn't mean you can't/won't have friendships with other Deities, but it does mean you need to work with your *fulltrui* more than the other Gods.

2. *Exchange gifts.*

Praying is one way of making contact, but I'm of the opinion that to maintain a *fulltrui* relationship, you need to do more than just pray. That does not mean you need to take up a lot of time with really expensive offerings to prove how sincere you are. Be that as it may:

Imagine nobody talking to you or paying you the least bit of attention for 1000 years, then somebody finally decides to talk to you, just to ask you for something, and they expect it without giving you anything in return. You wouldn't be too happy about this, would you?

Furthermore, the mark of a true friendship is that people are there for each other both in good times and in bad times. They are not just using each other for money or other conveniences. So it should be with the Gods. You should not just go to your *fulltrui* if you need something, and ignore Them the rest of the time. Be grateful for the blessings of each day, Their protection and provision, Their companionship, and who They are. This is a much happier way to live, a much more wholistic way of relating to Deity.

3. *Blend your mind with Theirs.*

While I do not believe we honor wrathful Gods who will smite

us for "getting out of line", unlike the paradigm of some fundamentalist religions where you can't do anything without "asking Permission", I do believe that it is important to ask the Gods Their will for us. Beyond the obvious fact that They usually know what's good for us, or at least what's necessary for us to do for our own benefit and/or that of others, it's good to let the Gods know we acknowledge this. We left behind the wisdom of the Norse Gods, the Celtic Gods, the Hellenic Gods, long ago, and are watching the world go to crap. Listening to our Gods, and taking Their advice, may not change the world, but They can influence your actions for the day, to make things go well, and in the greater scope of things, it will minimize damage along the threads of Wyrð (intersecting with other people, places, things, and situations), as well as healing and strengthening those same threads.

This is the importance of devotion. The Gods are our friends and family, and as such, They should be regularly given appreciation and affection. Just as it is with friends and family, it does not always have to be formal, and once you get close enough to a Deity They may insist that you be more informal and casual with Them (this has happened with myself and Frey). But They definitely deserve more than what They get now.

The best way to have a devotional practice is to combine meditation on the God/s with some kind of offering. The Gods can and will receive more than flesh and blood as offerings -- look at the gifts Loki gave the Gods, including Draupnir for Odin, Mjollnir for Thor, and Skidbladnir and Gullinbursti for Frey. Food and drink are always the best form of "you can't go wrong" hospitality to the Gods, especially if you value Them as friends and kin. To me, cooking a tasty meal is work, involving not just the preparation of the food but the thought behind it as to making people happy when they eat it. So I give the Gods food and drink. I also find Them receptive to candles and incense, as a way of providing warmth and pleasant light, and enjoyable fragrance. These two things may not be "historically accurate" but we do know that the Gods were put by the fire as a way to invite Them into the home and make them comfortable:

Fire was burning on the floor, and the wives of the kings sat at the fires and warmed the gods, whereas other women were anointing the gods and wiping them with napkins.

-Saga of Fridthjof the Bold, Chapter IX

We can assume that if beeswax candles were readily available to the public 1500 years ago, they would be used, and herbs were often burned. We can offer the essential oils of different herbs, as well, and "dress" Their statues or other images.

I have provided a list of offerings various Vanic Deities like, not as the end-all be-all of "proper offering" but as a springboard for what They might like if you want to establish a relationship with Them, or keep things on good terms. A gift demands a gift, so if you come to a Deity with a request it is wrong to not do *something* to make it worth Their while.

Without further adieu:

FREY

FOOD: Pork, poultry, possibly fish. Root vegetables such as potatoes and turnips, also garden vegetables such as squash and tomatoes. Frey is also partial to cherries, and is very fond of homemade whole-grain bread. Whole-grain crackers and "real" cheese are another good offering.

DRINK: Dark beer, dark ale, stout. For non-alcoholic beverages He will take apple cider, lemonade, vegetable juice, or cherry juice.

CANDLES: Frey likes golden-yellow or leaf-green candles, or white will suffice.

INCENSE: "Sensual" scents such as musk, sandalwood, and patchouli, but also "rain" is very much enjoyed.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Gold dollar coins, lucky pennies, green or honey amber stones, as well as figurines of boars, stallions, stags, and ships. A cup or jar of whole-wheat flour, or barley. A sheaf of wheat. Antlers. Your sexual fluids. If you can afford it (or better, craft it yourself), a torc or sword would also be a fine gift.

GERDA

FOOD: Root vegetables like potatoes, turnips, seasoned well. Gerda will pretty much eat anything Frey eats, although She is more partial to beef and lamb than poultry or fish.

DRINK: She's been given vodka and enjoys it, She will also gladly take herbal tea.

CANDLES: Brown, purple, dark greens, grey.

INCENSE: Lavender, clove, cinnamon, anything herbal and woodsy.

OTHER OFFERINGS: A terra cotta pot painted with runes or a nice design. A miniature tea set might also please Her. Brooches. A garden planted in Gerda's honor is a good consistent devotional practice.

FREYA

FOOD: Chocolate is something She really likes, the darker and more expensive, the better. Other types of candy are good, especially caramel. She likes strawberries. As far as "real food", She will eat shellfish and anything decadent and noted as an aphrodisiac.

DRINK: Champagne, sweet merlot, Kahlua in milk, peppermint schnapps in hot cocoa, egg nog with rum. She will also take apple cider, lemonade, or "pink" ginger ale.

CANDLES: Red, deep pink, golden yellow, white.

INCENSE: Musk, sandalwood, patchouli, jasmine, myrrh, amber, copal.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Amber stones (especially honey amber), real gold jewelry, figurines of cats or boars, fresh or well-dried flowers in a pretty vase, decorative boxes, pottery bowls. Paper fans. Hawk or falcon feathers. Your sexual fluids. Anoint a statue of Her with rosewater, rose oil, or a combination of rose scent and sexual fluids.

NJORD

FOOD: Seafood, of course, whether it's fish or shellfish. Bread, cheese, salads.

DRINK: Ale, will also take rum mixed in Coke, Kahlua in milk, piña colada, or even a margarita or tequila -- think "beach", "summer", and "relaxation". He will graciously receive cider, lemonade, limeade,

ginger ale, spring water -- anything fresh and clean-tasting.

CANDLES: Blue, aqua, green-blue, silver, white.

INCENSE: "Ocean", "rain".

OTHER OFFERINGS: Shells, rocks from the beach, sea glass. Fish figurines (especially of blown glass), seals, swans. Ships, especially an intricately designed ship-in-a-bottle. Chalices, bowls. A battle-axe if you can get it.

SKADHI

FOOD: Meat, preferably venison or at least something well-smoked.

DRINK: Vodka, mead, peppermint schnapps. She will receive spring water if you have nothing else.

CANDLES: White, silver, grey.

INCENSE: Pine, dragon's blood.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Animal pelts (only if trapped safely), animal hides (ditto), animal bones/skulls (ditto), arrowheads, snowshoes. Also likes evergreen sprigs, crystals shaped like snowflakes.

EIR

FOOD: Generally Eir will only take organic fruit or vegetables. If you at all serve Her meat or fish you better damn well make sure it was organic and free-range.

DRINK: Herbal tea. Eir is not much for alcohol.

CANDLES: Green, blue, purple.

INCENSE: Lavender, pine, sage, copal.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Stones for healing, herbs intended for medicinal use, bowls, cups, She also likes mandalas if you've colored them yourself.

HOLDA

FOOD: Homebaked pastries: cookies and pie in particular. If you are giving Her something else, make sure it is some serious good-quality home-cooked food (e.g. meatloaf, potatoes).

DRINK: Elderberry wine, herbal tea, sweetened coffee, goat's milk.

CANDLES: Blue.

INCENSE: Floral scents, vanilla, cinnamon.

OTHER OFFERINGS: A broom, a cauldron, flax flowers and/or seeds. Sea salt. Cleaning your house really well.

NERTHUS

FOOD: Beef, fish. Root vegetables, anything leafy.

DRINK: Stout, strong beer. Goat's or cow's milk will also do, as will real fruit or vegetable juice.

CANDLES: Brown, aqua, white.

INCENSE: Pine, "ocean", "rain", myrrh, musk.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Embroidered cloth that could be used as a veil, shells, semiprecious stones, sand, bones esp. that of cattle, skulls, evergreen sprigs.

ULLR

FOOD: Game such as bear, deer/elk/moose, wild birds (pheasant, quail), preferably all smoked.

DRINK: Ullr has been given an herbal "green" Jagermeister (literally, "Hunt Master") and enjoys this very much; He's also partial to brandy, and will also welcome drinks like hot cider or hot chocolate.

CANDLES: Green, brown, dark blood-red, grey.

INCENSE: Pine, sandalwood, anything foresty.

OTHER OFFERINGS: Stones of moss agate, tiger's eye, black star sapphire; if they're local to you, pine branches or pine cones. He will accept fur pelts bought secondhand or from a reputable trapper, and items made of leather, antler, or bone. Ullr has been given a bowl of snow, allowed to melt.

I hope this information helps, and feel free to test for yourself what the Gods like and dislike, preferably giving Them more "likes" than dislikes.

With thanks to Raistlynn for her suggestions on some of the offerings.

Friday Devotional to Frey and Freya

Svartesól

I have been doing daily devotionals to Frey since 2004 when I first took my oaths to Him and while the motions made and offerings given have changed over time, due to time constraints and what I had available, the intent has remained the same. Doing these devotionals will help to "set the tone" for a productive day and a restful night, to let Him know this day (and every day) is given to Him as an offering, and I want to bless Him even as He blesses me. The important thing is that I make a connection with Frey, and His presence is palpably felt to guide my day.

Daily devotionals can of course be done to any Deity, and is particularly good for maintaining a relationship with one's fulltrui. I find that it doesn't have to be particularly complicated or flowery. Most of the time my other half and I will just stand before Frey's altar in the morning, ask for His blessing on the day, and pull a rune for guidance. At night I will ask Him for a peaceful sleep, which is important as I am a light sleeper as well as prone to nightmares and I find winding down with His help does make a difference with the quality of my sleep.

This is a devotional I do on Fridays to "the Wonder Twins". While the jury is still out on whether Friday is named for Frigga or Freya, I have found in my own personal experience that She's fine with being honored on a Friday, particularly as in Western culture it signifies the end of the workweek and the beginning of the weekend and recreation of various sorts. Statistics have shown, for example, that more couples make love on a Friday than any other day of the week! Naturally, it is proper to honor Frey along with His sister.

Here is a devotional I do to Frey and Freya each Friday. All you will need is some sort of image of Them (I have Paul Borda's large statue of Freya, which I have had since 2000, and the classic ithyphallic Phrygian-helmet statue of Frey as found in Sweden and England), rose oil or rosewater for anointing the image (the anointing of Deity images is found in the Saga of Fridthjof the Bold), and some kind of decadent

food/drink offering.

In my own personal gnosis which has been corroborated by countless others, Freya is a fan of strawberries and dark chocolate. Frey will also accept it as an offering although He is more partial to cherries. Back when I used to get my period, I would offer Her some of my blood, and I suspect Freya was given blood offerings long ago, during the time of "the Vanic era". Dark chocolate tastes vaguely like blood to me, so that may be a reason why She likes it. I will usually buy a few bars of dark chocolate at a time, store them in the fridge where they keep best, and break a small piece off each Friday to give to Freya and Frey. Thus, the chocolate has been referred to as my "Freya Fund".

I have also found that the Twins are fond of a particular drink I make of rosehip tea brewed strong, mixed with honey, and one shot glass worth of merlot added to it. In fact, this drink after being offered to Frey and Freya and "charged" by Them, can be poured halfway back into a cup, added with a new tea-honey-merlot mixture, and some menstrual blood or secretions, to make a powerful seduction potion.

Here is what I do each Friday for Frey and Freya:

Take the rose oil or rosewater and anoint the statues, as if you are caressing Their bodies. Put as much love as you can behind your touch, in the act of dressing each statue with the scent, pleasing the senses. Say something similar to:

*Frey/Freya, I offer this to you
for Your pleasure and enjoyment,
a scent worthy of one of the Holy Vanir,
I anoint you with the touch of love.*

After Freya's image has been dressed, hold it for a moment and feel Freya's fire within you, Her vitality and warmth, the joy She feels in life itself. Hold Freya and commune with Her, in the joy that has no words, the ecstasy of a dancing spirit. Conversely, Frey is just as bright but not as sparkly, His energy is like warm golden liquid velvet, strong and thrumming, giving strength and vitality to awaken the body and soul.

Then, place the plate of chocolate and strawberries on Her altar, with the cup of libation, saying something similar to:

*I give this offering to you, Frey and Freya,
sensual and decadent and delicious as You are,
may this food and drink of love
show my love for You,
my love of Your love for all life.*

Trace a Giefu rune over the offerings, and say: *A gift for a gift.*

After the devotional, it would be an excellent time to pamper yourself such as with a bubble bath or rubbing scented lotion into your skin, or even something like having sex (whether solo or with partner/s)!

A Journey to Noatun, the Home of Njord

Jordsvin

This journey should be especially do-able for those who have experienced a session of Hrafnar-style oracular *seiðr*. Prepare by relaxing. A bath with some sea salt and maybe some rosemary ("seadew") might be nice. Light a few candles, and burn an incense that puts you in mind of the Sea. Woodsy scents are fine too, and according to Thorr and Audrey Sheil, Saturdays seem to be the best day to work with Njord. Put on a drumming tape with the volume turned down low if you like. If you are making the trip alone, you may journey on your memory of these directions, or you may tape the journey and play it. If a group is journeying together, one should drum and another narrate.

Begin by journeying in your mind to a place in Nature sacred to you. It may be near or far. It may exist now or only in the past, or even in your own dreams and imagination. That matters not. You journey there easily, and find a path to follow. It leads into a wood. Follow the path; you will note that the trees grow taller and their canopy fuller, and the bushes beside the path do likewise, until you are walking around and down through a green tunnel.

A light appears far ahead, at the end of the tunnel and grows larger until you enter a grassy clearing. There you meet any spirit guides and/or power animals you work with. Feel the sun on your back and the grass beneath your feet as you walk to the end of the clearing, and enter a cave mouth. Your way is lit by light from the cave walls, and your footing is secure. Around and down, around and down you go until you see another point of light, which becomes the cave's exit.

You cross a shallow stream and then walk across a grassy plain. This is a good place to seek power animals. You may see forests, mountains and sea in the distance, but what most catches your attention is an absolutely enormous Tree. The wisest know not whence its roots spring, and you cannot see the end of the Tree up in the clouds. The trunk is larger than the largest redwood. This is Yggdrasil, the World Tree.

Under a root of the Tree is a cave. You enter it and travel Northward and upward. The tunnel is made up in different places of wood, stone, and soil. You find enough light, and have good footing and plenty of energy for your journey. You approach a bridge and see Heimdall. You explain why you are there, and if he silently stands aside, you may enter Asgard. You journey through a broad green Land toward a fjord of the sea. You may see mountains. There by the shore, you see well-built but somewhat weather-beaten buildings of huge size. You will notice ships and all the activities associated with earning a (peaceful) living from the sea.

Approach the building that looks like a dwelling-hall. Go inside; there is enough light for you to see and you feel welcome, even though you feel a bit like a child because of the sheer size of everything within. In the High Seat of the building is Njord. Greet him respectfully but with head held high and be sure to make eye contact. Do likewise with Skadhi if you see her there.

What happens next is up to you. A warm welcome is most likely. Feel free to make respectfully but without groveling any requests you have of Njord. Listen carefully to what he has to say. Take a seat if invited to do so. Look around for one your size! Njord loves to tell of what is going on in Asgard. Noatun is the best place to ask about your standing with the other Gods and Goddesses, and with Asgard as a whole. According to Thorr Sheil, what Njord says to you during your visits to Noatun is very often a very accurate allegory of events concerning you in the phenomenal world, including underlying forces and processes. Make the best of your time here; it can be most useful. Njord's friendship is among the easiest, but potentially one of the most useful in all of Asgard and Vanaheim!

When you feel it is time to go, say goodbye and thank-you to Njord and anyone else you interacted with in Noatun. Return to Midgard and your body the way you came. If you experience any confusion, look to your power animals and/or other spirit guides. You will find the journey home to be no burden and will feel refreshed and relaxed when you return to your body. Any tiredness you feel will be of the pleasant sort.

Eat a nourishing meal and make a small offering to Njord. This would be a good time for a seafood dinner! If you have made the journey alone, record it on tape or in writing while the experience is fresh on your mind. If with a group; discuss your journey with your traveling companions and listen to what they experienced. Note with special care areas of overlap not explainable by the shared guided journey, and make sure all participants are fully grounded and completely returned from the journeywork you just did. Hope to see you often in Noatun!

Vanic Prayer Beads

Svartesól

To increase our devotional practice and thus our connection to the Gods, my partner and I thought it would be a good idea to have prayer beads that could easily fit in one's pocket, with a different bead used for each Deity in our "personal pantheon" (that is, the Gods that we are closest to), and thus while he's on break at work, or I'm taking a pause in the activities of my day, we can go around the circle and Say Hi.

In my own set of prayer beads, the bottom pendant is an equal-armed cross over a round mirror, which works as a protective talisman as well as aligning myself with the Four Directions and Four Elements. This particular set is dedicated to the Vanir and only the Vanir, that is, Gods who are Vanir by blood or etin-brides that married into the tribe.

From the bottom right going widdershins (counter-clockwise):

FREY: Orange aventurine carved pig bead

In the name of Frey, may I live abundantly, grateful for my prosperity, and be generous to the worthy.

GERDA: Green moss stone

In the name of Gerda, may I be strong, yet gentle, and know when to be silent.

FREYJA: Baltic amber

In the name of Freyja, may I be joyful and sensual in my embodiment, enjoying the best of what life has to offer.

GERSEMI & HNOSSA: Cherry quartz

In the name of Gersemi and Hnossa, may there always be room for fun and play in my life.

NJORD: Small conch shell

In the name of Njord, may I find peace within myself, and be a safe

harbor to others in need.

SKADHI: Labradorite

In the name of Skadhi, may I know and take what is rightfully mine, and be able to leave what I cannot abide.

ULLR: Leopard jasper

In the name of Ullr, may I continually improve my skills, and have focus to accomplish what needs to be done.

NERTHUS: Mother-of-pearl

In the name of Nerthus, may I never lose sight of the terrible holiness of the Divine, and that it is an honor and a privilege to serve.

GULLVEIG: Gold pearl

In the name of Gullveig, may I remember that wrake is a virtue, and there is no mercy without justice.

SIF: Citrine

In the name of Sif, may I be loyal to those who have earned it, and know how to take the high road of graciousness with those who have not.

EIR: Fluorite

In the name of Eir, may I be mindful of my self-care, and responsible about my health.

IDUNNA: Pink jade

In the name of Idunna, may I be mindful that my service to heal and inspire others is a sacred duty.

FROÐI: Amazonite (light green)

In the name of Froði, may I be productive in the day ahead, and enjoy my down time as well-earned.

NEHELENNIA: Fancy Australian jasper

In the name of Nehelennia, may my travels be safe, may my roads lead where I need to go.

HOLDA: Blue aventurine

In the name of Holda, may my hearth and home be warmed by the magic of my heart.

HERNE: Brecciated jasper

In the name of Herne, may I connect with the natural world, may all that I do keep me mindful of life's cycles.

A Wayland Rosary

Alex Volundsdottir



Tail bead:

Deep within the still center of my soul, may I find peace,
Silently, within the quiet of this place, may I share peace,
Gently, throughout the leaves of the Tree, may I radiate peace.*

Ancestor Bead:

Alfar and Disir--mighty dead, I do you honor.

Wight Bead:

Landwights and Housewights--hidden ones, I do you honor.

Deity Bead:

Vanir and Aesir--shining elder kin, I do you honor.

Center:

Hammer-skilled, soul's alchemist,
Cunning crafter of rings and gems.
Furled in white arms, feather-tangled,
Snow-shod hunter, circled in rings.
Body bound, fettered and lamed,
Finding beauty in broken things.
Vengeance-spark and gristly-gifter,
Patient wielder of wyrd, waiting,
Flying freely, swanward bound.

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 1:

Hail Wayland, clear-eyed alf lord!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 2:

Hail Wayland, son of the sea!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 3:

Hail Volundr, deep mound dweller!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 4:

Hail Wayland, Swan-maid's swain!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 5:

Hail Wayland, unbowed in slavery!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 6:

Hail Wayland, just in payment!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 7:

Hail Wayland, traveler's friend!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 8:

Hail Wayland, anvil's master!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Invocation 9:

Hail Wayland, heart of the hammer!

Contemplation beads:

Shaper of all, and Mender of all, and Forger working the wyrd of us all.

Center:

Hammer-skilled, soul's alchemist,
Cunning crafter of rings and gems.
Furled in white arms, feather-tangled,
Snow-shod hunter, circled in rings.
Body bound, fettered and lamed,
Finding beauty in broken things.
Vengeance-spark and gristly-gifter,
Patient wielder of wyrd, waiting,
Flying freely, swanward bound.

Deity Bead:

Vanir and Aesir--shining elder kin, I do you honor.

Wight Bead:

Landwights and Housewights--hidden ones, I do you honor.

Ancestor Bead:

Alfar and Disir--mighty dead, I do you honor.

Tail bead:

Deep within the still center of my soul, may I find peace,
Silently, within the quiet of this place, may I share peace,
Gently, throughout the leaves of the Tree, may I radiate peace.

* This is a Heathen variation of the Druid Prayer for Peace.

Altars: A Home for the Gods

Svartesól

The most obvious way to maintain a spiritual connection to the Gods is to have a permanent altar. Altars make the abstract concept of spirituality into something concrete -- a visual reminder to honor the Gods, and a way to make Them feel welcome in your home and everyday life. A properly maintained altar becomes a "power spot" in the home, where energy feels brighter and cleaner, or at least more intense. On an altar, offerings can be made to the Gods: candles, incense, libations, even small bits of food. Magick can be worked, as well.

I am fortunate enough to have living space now where I can maintain multiple altars (my other half and I have jokingly referred to this as "All Your Space Are Belong To 'Them'"), but this wasn't always the case. In 2007, I made an offering to Frey with the promise that if He got us a house, I would devote an entire room as a ritual space, and start a garden dedicated to Gerda. Less than a year later, my other half and I became homeowners, and now have a ritual room. This is especially amazing considering that in the past I have shared living quarters with parents and roommates not really accepting of my religious practices; I have also at times lived in a group home or stayed long-term in a hospital where I didn't have a lot of space, let alone understanding roommates and staff. I went from a time with very simplistic altars or none at all, to having an entire temple room!

For those disabled Pagans who may be in group homes, or hospitals or nursing homes (it happens), I think having a pocket shrine would be ideal. It's also good for Pagans who are traveling or work in an office and can't take their altar with them, or for Pagans in a disability living arrangement who can't keep a regular altar, but still would like a small and discrete sacred space to meditate upon and bring some God/dess energy along. An empty tin of mints (as one example) can be decorated as simply or elaborately as your preferences dictate.

If you live in a very small apartment or with parents/roommates who are not very tolerant, an altar-in-a-box is another good idea. You can construct something a bit more tasteful than a certain Teen Witch Kit on the market, for under \$20. Wooden boxes can be bought at craft stores such as Michaels in the US for approximately \$2-5, with just enough space to have a small Deity image or figurine, a small offering bowl (IKEA has a very good deal on 4 tiny stainless steel bowls for \$4), and you can easily use a small tree branch or twig as a wand, draw a pentacle on a flat rock, or whatever you like.

If you have the space and the inclination, you can, of course, have multiple elaborate altars.

The following are some pictures of altars to help give a better understanding of how to construct an altar; as you can see, there is no one way to build an altar and they can be as simple or elaborate as you have the resources for, or as your taste dictates. The important thing is that the altar is there, as a door between Worlds.



Freya Altar 2006

This was my shrine to Freyja in 2006; I first began identifying as Vanatru in 2006, at the time I was living with my bio-mother in Connecticut.

The altar is pretty simple. The left is one of the goblets I received as a gift when I took my oaths to Frey in 2004, and I thought it was a good idea to have it on Her altar in gratitude for bringing Him into my life. There is a smaller pewter goblet on the right. Freyja is surrounded by a ring of runes and crystals, and there is a pink rose quartz heart on the right-hand side. There's also a gold-foil Hershey's Kiss on the plate, waiting to be offered to Her.

-Svartesól



Frey Altar 2006

Here we have my shrine to Frey as it was in 2006 when I lived in Connecticut and first began to identify as Vanatru. I did the picture (not my best artwork) in 2003, a few months before I took my oaths to Him. My now-former blood-brother procured the frame for the picture, as well as the box (you can't tell from the picture, but there is an Ing-shape on the box). The box is important to note here because it contained several items such as what I wore for my Gyðja necklace at the time, a bag of runes specifically consecrated for receiving messages from Frey, a pendulum, and a few magical talismans. On the altar shelf itself is also a glass in which I would give a daily libation of some sort, and a selenite wand which I had consecrated for specific purposes I won't get into here and now.

I am sad to say I no longer have any of these things, on the other hand my current altar to Frey is much more beautiful and it is in my own home, where I can practice my faith as I please. Hail Frey!

-Svartesól



Main Altar

When we moved into our condominium in June 2008, one of the three bedrooms was converted into a room specifically for altars and holding rituals.

In the ritual room, we have a five-foot-wide dresser converted into the main altar, covering the dresser with a two-yard piece of indigo velvet (the greyscale picture does not do it justice whatsoever). The altar hangs beneath the white dragon flag of the Anglo-Saxons, and is divided between Vanes on the left side (Wayland Smith, Ullr, Eir, Njord and Nerthus, and Freya) and the Aesir on the right (Odin, Frigga, Thor, Heimdall, and Tyr). My ritual staff is also to the left side of the altar. In the center of the altar is a wooden blessing bowl with an Irminsul burned inside, a Yule gift from a friend, bowls of salt and water, and our Kindred's oath ring on a fylfot plate. Behind the blessing bowl is a replica of the Nebra Sky Disc and an hourglass, to keep us mindful that our holytides run on Sunna and Mani's cycles.

-Svartesól



Main Altar - Vanic Side

From left to right: plaque of artwork by Thorskegga Thorn of Wayland Smith, archer figurine for Ullr, plaque of artwork by Thorskegga Thorn of Eir, plaque of artwork by same for Njord and Nerthus, and 13" statue by Paul Borda of the Vanadis. Each place has Their own individual offering bowl and some votary items: pine cone and "Ullr pennies" for Ullr, a whetstone from England for Wayland (His offering bowl is soapstone), crystals for Eir, seashells for Njord, and amber chips and a dried rose for Freya. Njord and Nerthus, and Freya have "beaker" shaped offering bowls, which I got before making the connection with the Funnelbeaker culture, as it just felt appropriate. Our (quite substantial) drinking horn is on this side, and you can see our blessing bowl in the center.

-Svartesól



Frey and Gerda Altar

This is my altar to Frey and Gerda, in the living room. Not pictured but relevant to the discussion is that it hangs beneath a French tapestry of a knight, and is next to Eosin's martial arts manuals. There are no weapons in the immediate area in keeping with His taboo, but we still acknowledge Frey as a warrior.

In the back center of the altar is an antler, which I use in Frey rituals to hallow space if needed. A wreath is currently hanging from the altar, which may or may not go on the wain we are constructing for Vanic rituals. Figurines of a large hog and a grey stallion are on either side of the antler, flanking a bottle of "Lammas" essential oil. In the center is a statue I found perfect for Gerda (and modified slightly by darkening the hair and putting a rune on Her watering can), on the left, and the classic Frey statue on the right. It amuses me that Gerda is literally twice the height of Frey. There is a double-terminated golden calcite crystal directly in front of Frey, which I use in devotions to Him to take His light into myself. There are rose quartz crystals in front of each statue (if you look closely, you will see the runes Eh and Wynn, which I pulled in a "daily guidance" divination earlier the day this picture was taken), and then candles as a devotional centerpiece. To the far left is a goblet I received as a gift in 2004 after my oaths to Him, a small bottle of Goldschlager (cinnamon schnapps with 24-karat gold flakes in it, which is one of Frey's favorite offerings), a bag with my runes, and a crystal necklace I've had since 1999. On the right is a stag bowl gifted me by my dear friend Valgrind, to hold food offerings or objects to charge, and in front is my Frey pendant and a gilded sleigh which currently holds acorns (explicitly sacred to Thor, but I connect them with Frey as well, as a symbol of male fertility). In the far front is my wand, "Leohtbora", which I made myself from a dowel rod, leather strip, copper wire, a quartz point, and a citrine crystal, carving runes into the rod and sealing with my blood, oil, and ash.

Finally, it's worth noting that the altar cloth is a leftover piece of fabric from my ritual garb, and underneath the altar is a wooden box in which I keep certain items such as the bells for my ritual robe, my priestess necklace, and some other Frey-oriented momentos.

-Svartesól



Vanir Altar

The bottom left quadrant is mostly Frey and Freya, though They spill over most of the altar, with a few things for Gerda; Njord is in the top left quadrant, with a piece of black fabric from (my partner) Maia's veil for Nerthus; top right corner is generically Vanic, with some vegetation-themed jewelry and candles, including a photograph from a Beltaine several years ago of one of my flower wreaths burning in the ceremonial fire and a huge piece of amber I got very reasonably; bottom right corner is Ullr. Sigyn's altar is located elsewhere, though my UPG indicates she was raised Vanir.

-Talas Páii



Vanir Altar (daytime)

A late morning shot of one of my Vanir Altars. Altar is a simple wooden table. Placed upon it is a large framed photo of Nerthus (veiled image with a deep forested background). In the center are smaller depiction of Freya and Frey (by Thorskegga Thorn) and to the right is a large framed photo of Njord (spear fishing in the shallows with a crashing surf image in the background). Votive items placed upon the altar (from left to right) are two pieces of raw amber; a circle of small tumbled gemstones with a silver acorn resting in the center of the circle; an abalone shell full of dried mugwort and lavender; a deer horn and a reel of mugwort; and three candles, two on either side of Freya and Frey and a third in the front of the altar surrounded by a twist of birch bark.

-Brun Russellson



Nerthus Altar (daytime)

A late morning shot of a shrine to Nerthus as greenwoman. Altar is simple wooden shelf. Framed image of Nerthus (artwork by Agnes D. Olsen) rests before a small offering plate holding recel of mugwort, votive candle and crystal.

-Brun Russellson



Powers of the Hunt (night)

An evening shot of my "Powers of the Hunt" Altar. Altar is a simple table covered with a deer hide gifted to me by my Father-in-Law. Upon it sits a large framed sketch of Herne and two smaller sketches of Skadhi and Ullr. A votive candle rests before the three and a bear-claw sits in front of the Herne image.

-Brun Russellson



Vanic Community Drum

Resting in main ritual room is the Community Drum, a 3 1/2 foot wooden frame drum with steer skin head.

-Brun Russellson



Vanir Altar

The clay vase on left contains soil, and is surrounded by rocks, crystals, stones. It represents Nerthus. The blue glass vase on the right is filled with salt water, and is surrounded by shells, sea glass, sand dollars, and sea salt, there's a pendant of a Viking Ship hanging around it, it represents Njord. I have the Paul Borda statue of Freya with a few pieces of amber and a wooden heart. For Frey, I have a picture of a statue of Him from a book my grandmother had, about Sweden. Around it there are Ingwaz runes, and it's painted green, brown, and gold. There's an antler from a deer that my grandfather shot (he died a few years before I was born) wrapping around the picture of Frey, in front of him there is a piece of quartz with a stag carved into it, and a phallic shaped crystal. To the left side of Frey is a small statue that represents Gerda, in front of it is her name written in runes. I'm still working on adding items for Gullveig-Heid, for now, there is a small painting of her name in red runes on a gold background. I picked up some Indian corn, mini pumpkins, and cute little gourds to put on the altar. Behind the altar is a painted banner that says "Hail the Vanir".

-Jon Norman



Vanir altars in general

I made the candles myself with help from friends, specifically for the Vanir. Each one was chosen carefully in shape and color, and blessed as it was poured. I have a set of real leaves dipped in silver and copper distributed amongst the Vanir. Gullveig's is fiery, Freya's is heart-shaped, Frey's is an oak leaf, etc.

-Ember Cooke



Frey Altar

It's hard to see the huge elk antler that dominates this altar in this picture. There are wreaths of ivy and oak leaves, fresh flowers that dried, and sprigs of money plant from my mother's garden. There's a miniature maypole in green and gold with a brass knob (which can refer to the staff of a *Seiðrkona*), and a pewter goblet adorned with golden roses that was used in a wedding ceremony. If you look very closely at the middle of the altar, you'll see a small statue of a fairy that I carefully saved up to buy when I was 7 years old, which stands in honor of the Alfar. There is also a blade of silver to honor the Alflord.

Frey's wall box was made to go with Freya's. His box is in the shape of the rune Ingwaz, and is painted in shades of spring and winter green. A fruiting vine is strung across the bottom. Elder Futhark runes spell out many of his names and values (e.g. Life, Love, Ingvi, Alflord). I have not yet filled all the boxes with symbols for him, but I do have large seeds, a brass bell, a gold-dipped oak leaf, a head of wheat, an evergreen cone, and a little toy rabbit that was a gift to Frey from a Wiccan priestess.

-Ember Cooke



Altars to the Vanadisir

Nerthus's altar shows a necklace of brass oak leaves, smooth river stones, a corn husk doll holding a baby that I made myself, a branch from an evergreen forest covered in native lichens, a harvest bouquet of dried flowers, and a garland of dried flowers that I made for a harvest-season faire. The altar cloth is brown wool. Heide's altar holds a miniature cast iron cauldron which often holds her candle, but I also use it to hold liquid offerings during Vanir rituals, to burn incense, and sometimes as a mortar when the herbs are for a spell under Heide's guidance. On the wall is a mask I made for her. Gullveig's altar holds her torch necklace, golden plate, candle, and a glittery feather that reminds me of a firebird. The right side of this altar is Freya's. The beautiful doll was made by my friend Kimmi. The boxes hold treasures such as amber paste and golden coins. The great drinking horn is for use in Vanir rituals. The altar cloth shows a man and a woman holding hands, and is in Freya's colors.

Freya's wall box was the first altar I made for any of the Vanir before I had space for altar tables. There are nine little boxes which I glued together roughly into the shape of the rune Jera. I painted it all in golds and greens, and wrote "Freya Fairest Vanadis, Bright Blessing Bring" in Elder Futhark across the front. Golden and pearly beads are draped from the bottom. Each box holds a different symbol for Freya. 1: The first piece of amber I ever bought for myself, which I found under the guidance of a Freya priestess before I ever knew who Freya was. 2: A beeswax candle. 3: An amber cameo with a cat carved into it. 4: A golden coin. 5: A dried rose. 6: A miniature necklace I made to represent Brisingamen to honor the four dwarves. 7: A green box holding my own full-sized amber necklace that I wear to represent Brisingamen when I am priestessing. 8: A little heart woven out of wheat. 9: A miniature sword sharp enough to draw blood.

-Ember Cooke

**Heide Mask**

This mask is the first item I made for Heide. It is made from three layers of dyed gauze molded into a haunting face. The layers are black, purple, and grey. The image comes from a dream I had wherein Heide came to me, invisible under layers of gauze. She had a message that she would only deliver if I could prove I knew who she was by spelling her name.

-Ember Cooke



Njord's Altar

Njord's altar is covered in a blue cloth and fish netting. There is a bowl of sea glass in many colors which I collected myself from the California coast. The water is mixed with sea salt, and as the water evaporates, the salt encrusts on the sides looking rather like snow. In the winter I let the whole bowl evaporate and leave it "snowy" until the spring. I have collected shells for most of my life, and have given many of my best shells to Njord. I have a pendant that is a miniature longship which I purchased in Gamla Uppsala, and a small antique plate enameled in the colors of the sea. Next to his candle there is a tiny bottle into which I put little notes of prayer to Goodfather Njord. These messages in bottles are then put into the bowl of salty water as if out to sea.

-Ember Cooke



Ostara Altar

Each year I take longer and longer to pull down Ostara's altar, because I so love Ostara with her bright colors, eggs, flowers, and of course bunnies! The altar is much the same from year to year, but by now I have accumulated so much stuff for Ostara that last year I made two altars - the main altar on the round table in the temple, and a smaller altar on the counter next to my desk so I could smell the fresh flowers while I worked.

-Ember Cooke



Frey Altar

Frey's altar in my home is very simple. A frosted glass goblet to hold offerings of wine or any other drink He likes (usually it'll be something fruity) plus a candle was all I had at first before I found the antlers and set them on as well. Chips of another antler are arrayed around the piece. A couple of years ago I made the feathered mask as a little project for...well, I can't remember what the reason was now. I think maybe I was bored. Anyway, for some reason Frey liked it a lot and requested that I give it to Him. Not only does it sit on His altar but I wear it sometimes during fainings and other rites, such as Lammas celebrations. The Indian corn is left over from an Autumn altar... sometimes in Autumn I will put decorative gourds and mini-pumpkins on it as well.

-Tracy Nichols



Skadhi Altar

A couple of years ago I was called to set up an altar to Skadhi. At first all I really had for it was the quartz crystals which I arranged to look like some mountains and some white Arctic fox fur. Some might find the fox fur strange but it is Arctic fox and such an animal would fall under Skadhi's care. She gave me the OK to have it on Her altar. Later I acquired the incense burner, which is the wolf, and set it up. When incense is burned inside a small dish inside the wolf the smoke comes out of its ears and howling mouth. I found a picture of Skadhi and set it inside a clear plastic frame and then bought a tiny pair of skis and set it on the fox fur. Later on during an after Christmas sale at a store I found the snow globe and the lovely goblet with the snowflake design on it. I also have the frosted glass goblet to pour iced vodka in as offerings for Her.

-Tracy Nichols

Magic of the Elements

Svartesól

In a Vanic practice, we view nature itself as being sacred, and working with the power of nature - namely, the elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water - as a way of truly living with the world. Even if you live in an urban area, there is a way of working with each of the elements to effect change.

EARTH

- I find laying on the ground in the star position (arms and legs spread) to be a good way to draw up healing energy from the Earth itself. This can be very useful if one is drained from conditions such as chronic pain (as with arthritis), or depression.

- Burying something symbolic of a bad situation is good for being able to let go, particularly if new life (such as a tree) is planted on top of it.

- Edible plants (herbs, vegetables, fruit) can be charmed while growing for protective or healing purposes when consumed.

- There are specific plants that are reputed to have especially protective properties (nettles, plants with thorns such as roses and cacti, poisonous plants) and can be strong wards if grown around the outside border of one's home.

- Large stones can be useful for grounding emotional pain into (as they are strong enough to take it). If you have the strength/means to carry them to your property, they can make effective wards around the boundary of your home, as well as "power points".

WATER

- Going into a body of moving water, such as the ocean or a river or creek, is useful for healing as well as purification, or grounding out emotional pain. This is particularly effective with anger. A running

shower will work also, although being in a body of water connected to land does work best.

- Going out into the rain is another way to assist with healing and purification. Because of the rarity of rain in Southern California, I have made a ritual of dancing in the rain as an act of celebration to the Vanir, which has the nice side benefit of making me feel clean and fresh inside.

- To banish people or things, or to let go of painful memories, something symbolic of the situation can be washed into the body of moving water. To keep our water clean, it is suggested these things either be small and non-toxic or biodegradable (for example, rice paper, hair and fingernails).

- A glass of water can be empowered and consumed to help with healing and purification.

AIR

- Consciously feeling the movement of the wind can be used for healing, particularly in lifting a bad mood that is keeping one stuck in a rut.

- Sending objects floating on the wind, such as a paper airplane with a spell written inside, can be used both to manifest desires as well as to send a message to the spirits.

- Chanting and singing, even wordlessly, can be used for increasing personal power, empowering objects, or calling to spirits.

- Breathing on tools (talismans, wands, etc) can be used to awaken/empower them. Frey has been known to "breathe light" on people, myself included, and breathing with intent on someone can help them in healing, particularly if they are in a place of despair.

FIRE

- Fire can be used to hallow, although caution should be exercised if you live in a place where it doesn't rain much and there are fire warnings. A hallowing fire can either be done with a bonfire consecrated for the purpose of hallowing (called a "need-fire", often started while a galdor is chanted), or walking around with a candle. In

addition, fire applied to a bundle of herbs can be used as smoke to smudge an area for consecration and protection, or to heal a person.

- A sick person can hold a burning candle and draw in the power of its flame to assist with healing, or walk or dance around a fire.

- Objects symbolic of a bad situation, particularly a very toxic one, can be thrown into a fire to burn the situation out of one's life.

Caution should of course be exercised that the object is safe to burn (no varnish or other toxic chemicals) and the fire itself is contained. At the very least, hurtful words (said by an abusive partner or dysfunctional relative) can be shouted into the fire, for the fire to take them and burn them away.

So, there you have it. This is a start, and by no means is a comprehensive or "advanced" look at magical practice. As I often say, the best magic is that which you work yourself. These are more of a guideline for beginning a Vanic magical practice, from which you should develop your own magic. With the right intent, your magic will be more effective than anything given in a book or website to practice with, and this is indeed as it should be, as the Gods gave us magic so we could help ourselves, and work the will of Wyrd in our world. I wish you good luck!

Journey to the Center of Being

Tracy Nichols

I am first and foremost a devotee and wife of Loki now, but for twelve years I have also had an off-again, on-again relationship with the Vanadis, the Vanir Goddess Freya. I wrote of it in another work but I did not touch on some of the most important things She taught me. One of those was my introduction to Her special brand of magic, known to us as *seiðr*.

I am just now beginning to fall back into being introduced and reintroduced to those practices. I am having to relearn a lot of the lessons that were interrupted by various personal issues and events that occurred in my life for the past decade or so, namely my disconnection from the Mistress of *seiðr* and getting to know my God-Husband. So really this little article of mine is being written from the perspective of someone who should know a lot more than she does, but is in fact very much a beginner. I am no *seidkona*, having not earned the distinction of carrying that title.

A lot of people are also going to have a problem with me calling my particular practices *seiðr* since it does not fit with their own brand of the practice. Most people in the Heathen community, for example, think of the brand of oracular *seiðr* practiced by the Hrafnar group. There's nothing wrong with that, but it is not the only way to practice *seiðr*. Much of what I know has been spirit-taught, instructed to me by Freya Herself. It's also complicated by the fact that I've been Gag-ordered on a lot of what I learned so I can't share everything.

So there might be a tad bit of frustration involved for some people who read this, read of an experience I had or some bit of knowledge I procured, and will be all "How do you know, how do you do it...!" The short answer is, some of it I can't share, and even if I were allowed to I can't. A lot of what I learned can't really be taught in a book or an essay. It has to be experienced.

So what this really is basically is a primer, some steps to get you started if you are really interested in this path. Actually interested

won't cut it...you have to *know* this is for you. Despite what you might have read in various sources *seiðr* is not a "safe" art to practice or delve into. With *seiðr* you are not interacting with safe archetypes who can't hurt you if you piss them off or wandering around in Disney-type illusionary worlds where there are no "No Trespassing" signs. With *seiðr* you are opening yourself up to interactions with Gods and wights who are very real, with Their own personalities and feelings, and if you piss Them off you can pay bigtime. The worlds you wander are real and the rules of common courtesy apply just as strongly to them as they do in the mundane world....in some cases even more so.

Forget about being elfshot by the Alfar or being stomped on by a pissed-off Jotnar though. The real danger is in getting to know yourself. Freya's first objective was for me to face all my own nooks and crannies, every single aspect of myself from the most wonderful and shiny to the most horrid and terrifying. Fortunately for me I had already experienced that at the hands of a more ruthless Master (although I suspect Freya wouldn't have been anymore easy on me than Loki was) so I was prepared for it and didn't see things I hadn't already been faced with. Other people might not be so lucky, and not everyone can handle it. The real danger, boys and girls, is in going mad when you find that missing shard of your soul you left behind when your uncle decided to play Touch and Grab in the back hallway of your parents' house at the Christmas party when you were nine, or having all those layers of denial peeled away to come face to face with the reason why you drink yourself to sleep at night and can't sleep sober without nightmares. In other words you're forced to face memories, feelings, aspects of your personality that you keep ruthlessly suppressed. Before you can help others with *seiðr* you have to know Thyself and help Thyself. And since not everyone wants to know themselves (maybe you're shaking your head right now and thinking that it's no problem, but ask yourself honestly for a second...do you *really* want to strip away the layers of denial or knock yourself off that pedestal you've built for yourself and get to know yourself as you truly are, as others see you? Do you *really*? Think about it and be honest), then this path is definitely not for everyone.

Still interested? Still want to go on despite these warnings?
Fine, have a party.

Getting Started

First thing's first: You want to get involved with *seiðr* that means developing a good relationship with the Mistress of the craft. That means solidifying a good relationship with Freya, the Vanadis, Lady of the Vanir, Goddess of love, sex, battle, magic, Mistress of Folkvang, Chooser of Half the Slain, Twin Sister of Frey....get the idea? Freya is the Goddess you want to get to know and establish a good rapport with. You don't have to adopt Her as a Matron, but it is wise to be on friendly terms with Her at the very least. Give Her offerings at an altar you set up for Her...She likes candy, fruit, pastries, sweet alcoholic beverages, flowers, jewelry, statues of cats, poetry written for Her, sex (either with Her or done with a mortal partner in Her honor), nice things done for cats in Her name (like setting out food and water for strays, donating money and/or time and/or goods to a cat rescue, or even going so far as to adopt a kitty especially one that's been declared a "hopeless case" due to age, behavioral or health problems, etc), music, flowery sweet incense, pork, and generally anything pretty. Talk to Her, listen to Her, meditate on what She says. When the time is right approach Her about *seiðr*. If you are sincere about wanting to learn, are willing to do what She says, and She thinks you are ready, then She might teach you. If She refuses, best to wait a long time before asking again....if She refuses you, there is a reason for it. If this happens it's a good idea to do some major self-work before asking again.

Getting Down to Business

I'm going to go into getting into trance under the assumption that you already know how to meditate and do it as a regular practice. If you don't meditate or don't know how to I heartily suggest you learn. I'm not going to get into how to go it here since there are already

dozens of books on the subject. One I really recommend is *Passage Meditation* by Eknath Easwaran. It used to be published as just *Meditation*. In short his technique involves the recitation over and over again of some inspirational passage mentally in order to focus and calm the mind, and it is a very effective technique. Though he uses passages from the top five world's religions in his book I've found any inspirational passage does just nicely. Someone of a more Northern Tradition bent might want to use a passage from the *Havamal* or a prayer from the various devotionals that have come out in recent years. Whether you go this route or another, you need to learn how to meditate and start doing it. Make it a regular practice. Even if you aren't doing *seiðr* or any other type of shamanic work it's a useful skill to have. Just do it.

Meditation leads to trance, which is key to being able to practice *seiðr* at all. You have to be able to shift your mind into another mode of consciousness, and the way to do that is through trance. There are other methods but they generally all involve entering into another stream of consciousness...you can take the Path of the Flesh if that appeals to you for instance, or the Ordeal Path. Somehow you need to go into a trancelike state...no trance, no *seiðr*. Being able to go another place mentally is essential.

The traditional way in *seiðr* is through the Path of Rhythm, via singing or drumming. Most people don't have access to a whole chorus of assistants singing chants to induce a trance, so making a rhythm via drum is the way most *seiðr* practitioners go. Or not. I myself do not possess a drum as of this writing. Not that I don't want to, it's just that I have yet to run across one that screams "I am yours! I'm your *seiðr* drum! Pick me up!" For this problem, a solution was presented by none other than Herself:

There is another rhythm you can follow, use to enter the state of Being that is needed. The rhythm of your body. Your body has a rhythm all it's own...your breath, the pulse of your blood. Pay attention to it. Close your eyes. Still your thoughts. Breathe, deeply until you are no longer aware of your breath. Now listen. Listen to the pulsating blood in your temples. You can hear it. If

you listen and relax you can hear and follow it. That is your drumbeat...let it carry you. Let your own pulsating blood carry you onto your Journey.

Since then I have found virtually anything with a steady beat works well for me. I once did it to the beat of the *tick-tock* of a clock in my in-laws' living room. But it's really best if I follow my pulse, as Freya showed me. In fact following my blood just makes it easier to flow into *the spiral*.

The spiral is my name for the sensation and experience of flowing inward, down, down, down along the path of Yggdrasil. It's really hard to describe. It's like being gently sucked into a vortex only you do have some control over where you go. It's not hard...for me I just keep my mind focused on where I want to go, and then I am there, gently placed down by the whirlpool of astral energy.

So Now What?

Now you can do a little bit of experimenting, with some caution. First, before you go Otherworld journeying, it's best to take a primer on some otherworldly etiquette. I do want to reiterate that these worlds are real places, real homes of real beings who have real lives, personalities, and feelings. They don't appreciate people waltzing into their homes like it's some kind of Panama City tourist attraction anymore than you would. The denizens of otherworlds deserve the same type of courtesy you would give someone walking down the street of Los Angeles. Don't go walking into people's homes uninvited. Don't harass people who are just going about their business...just because they are from another world doesn't mean they exist to teach you, guide you, or even be nice to you. Always take no for an answer. Never lie. Always offer help so you're not being an ugly mooch. More rules of otherworld etiquette can be found in *Pathwalker's Guide to the Nine Worlds* by Raven Kaldera.

Don't expect that you will be able to always go where you want either. Certain worlds...Asgard, Ljossalfheim, and Helheim in

particular...are heavily guarded and you won't be getting in without an appointment with some Deity or major wight who lives there. Others, like Muspellheim, are easy enough to get into but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll be well-received unless you have a good reason for being there. In other worlds always look before you leap...petition a deity known to live in the realm you want to visit, have a good reason to visit (just wanting to gawk at things is not a good reason), and when you get there state your business to whoever asks and be courteous.

I'm getting ahead of myself here, as I haven't covered yet some other important issues such as shielding. While there are some things in the Nine Worlds that wouldn't be stopped by any shield a mortal can create if they truly were determined to mess with you, it is wise to at least acquire some skill in some basic shielding before you go waltzing around. The simplest method of course is just to envision a bubble of white light surrounding you and solidifying to encase you in a ball of protective energy. That's pretty basic but shielding methods are one of those things that are covered a great deal in other books as well so I won't get into them. I'll just say that when I shield I like to do it not only with the white rotating sphere of fiery energy but I also like to cloud it up so it's camouflaged....in my experience, going around with a visible shield just screams "I'm looking for trouble, please mess with me!" This way at least nasties won't know what's up until it's too late for them.

So what are we going to do once we get to these worlds, shielded and armed with knowledge of how to behave as well as how not to behave in these other worlds? The most common thing *seid*-workers do is petition Deities and other entities either on their own or others' behalves to ask questions or request a boon. Questions can be things like "will I marry, will I get a job, how does my future look", and so on, and boons might be things like asking for help finding a job, asking for healing, and so on. Just remember that in the Nine Worlds, nothing is for free. Always be prepared to pay for the answer or the boon with a favor of some sort, and this especially holds true when asking something from bigtime Deities like the Norns. One thing I have had experience in dealing with the Norns is in separating a friend's

orlog from that of her biological family...for various personal reasons she wanted to part from them completely. The Norns granted it but she did have to do Them a favor. That's just one example. Some people will bug Them to get their *wyrd* read too...They might do that but They might want something in exchange. It's a definite gift for a gift system, and that holds true for Everyone, not just the Norns. The reason why I emphasize them is because those who delve into *seiðr* deeply will end up dealing with Them a lot. It's just how it is. *Seiðr* works with *wyrd*, the attempted change of the *wyrd* of some as well as just merely influencing it especially when one does magic such as healings, blessings, or curses. Sooner or later doing such things will attract the attention of the Norns. When it happens, be respectful of Them, listen to what They have to say, and back off if They tell you to.

Is That All?

No it's not, but as I said I've been Gagged on a great deal of what I've been taught and some of what I've been taught I couldn't explain even if I could. There is a lot more to *seiðr* than just going into trances and talking to Invisible People. Magic and spells, soothsaying and prophecy are big parts of the art as well. Is it possible to learn all of it? Well yes, but it takes time. One doesn't become a *seidkona/seidmadhr* overnight. It takes years of disciplined and dedicated hard work under a watchful eye. I seriously recommend getting a good teacher if you can...being spirit-taught solely isn't easy, and can in fact be dangerous at times. If you want to go it alone (not totally alone, but by the guidance of some Deity), great. Good luck with it.

I am still very much a beginner at all this but it is my hope that my words here have at least provided a starting point, or some food for thought, or perhaps some thinking material for those wanting to try this out. Still interested? Well, okay then. Good journeying, and hail Freya.

Sitting Out (Útiseta)

Fálki

The art of sitting out (*útiseta* in Old Norse) is an old practice which most likely goes back to antiquity. To literally “sit out” is to remove oneself from the world of everyday human society in order to commune with the powers of the *útgard* (the “out-yard,” i.e., the wilderness) for either working magic and/or for also seeking out spirit guidance and answers to questions.

Icelandic literature in particular has left us with different examples of sitting out practices. One well known example is of the lawsayer Thorgerrir in Ari’s *Libellus Islandorum* who isolates and completely covers himself under a cloak for a day and night in order to seek guidance about the prospect of Iceland’s religious conversion over to Christianity (DuBois, 135). Yet another historical example includes the practice of sitting out atop a burial mound (which was also known as *sitja á haugi*, i.e., “to sit on a barrow”) in order to directly commune with the spirits of the dead to in order to gain information or answers to questions. This particular practice was considered dangerous though as one risked also awakening and possibly also being attacked by the *haugbui* (corpse) who dwelled in the barrows. Possible insanity on the following morning was likewise considered to be a risk as well (Aðalsteinsson, 110-122).

While one doesn’t necessarily need to have risky communions with the dead in order to practice sitting out, I personally have found over the years as a contemporary practitioner that it’s good to have certain procedures in place prior to doing an actual *útiseta*:

- 1) Find an area of wilderness which is as safely far from human civilization as you can make yourself in order to do your sitting out. I say “safely far” as you don’t want yourself so removed as to make yourself completely lost while being in the middle of no man’s land, or likewise so removed that a forest ranger or an emergency rescue team won’t be able to find you in the unlikely event that you end up having a possible accident or emergency while sitting out.

2) Prior to doing your actual sitting out, take a daylight waking tour of the wilderness area to familiarize yourself with the area. How is the general terrain and landscape while walking around? Will you also be able to easily navigate around the same area of wilderness during nighttime hours? Also keep an eye out for any specific spots which seem ideal for sitting down for long periods of time.

3) Do a bit of research as to what kinds of animals live and roam in the area, along with what kinds of land spirits might likewise be living and residing in the same area according to any local folklore legends. Chances are that you might encounter one kind or the other (or both) while sitting out in your chosen area at night.

Contemporary sitting out practice

Here's an example of personal sitting out practice which I personally have done over the years. Don't forget practical details such as wearing sturdy boots or other footwear for walking, having a mat or outdoor chair for sitting on, wearing warm clothing and possibly also wrapping yourself in a blanket during your sitting out, having a flashlight or outdoor torch, etc.

In particular you'll need to carry and bring these specific items with you:

1) An offering to give to the local land spirits. If any local folklore legends reference any specific kinds of offerings which are preferred by the local land spirits, then certainly bring those if you're able to. Otherwise offerings such as fresh cream and/or honey usually work well as a general rule.

2) Wear and/or carry with you a piece of iron or steel (such as a nail or a knife and/or also having a steel and flint fire starting kit with you) while sitting out. This is largely for personal protection as a number of land spirits - particularly in Scandinavian folklore and particularly those of the not so nice kind - are said not be able to tolerate the presence of iron or steel in their immediate vicinities (Wikipedia).

3) Feel free to bring any other sacred objects with you (such a

drum or anything else) which you feel you'd like to have with you during your sitting out.

To do your actual sitting out, first do whatever ritual practice feels most appropriate for hallowing the area around you (whether it's doing a hammer rite and/or calling out a prayer to your personal Gods and Goddesses). Then call out to the local land spirits to announce to them who you are and the reason(s) why you've come into their terrain for your sitting out. Also ask the land spirits for their guidance and assistance in answering your questions and then leave out your offering to them; then also hold out your chosen piece of iron or steel and make it also known to them that any land spirits of ill intent will not be welcomed in your presence.

At this point feel free to also use a drum if you brought one and/or to also sing out to the local land spirits as well if you'd like to. Then sit down in a comfortable position and start to do deep breathing in and out (breathing in to a count of four, holding your breath for a count of four, then breathing out again to a count of four works well) in order to put yourself into a trance state. Achieving and maintaining your trance state over a long period of time is ultimately the key for doing a successful sitting out, whether for spirit contact and/or for working magic.

While keeping awake during one's trance state can be ideal, I've personally found that sometimes I'll start to become tired and that I'll end up dozing off for periods of time. That's alright though as some land spirits will also connect and communicate with us via our dream states as well.

Maintain your sitting out period for as long as you feel the need for it. When you feel that you finally have received the guidance to your questions and that your purpose for sitting out has now been finished and fulfilled, say your thanks and farewells to the local land spirits for their assistance as well as to your personal Gods and Goddesses who you earlier prayed to.

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Vanic Runes: An Exploration of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc

Nicanthiel Hrafnhild

Disclaimer: the following article is not a guide for divination, but rather food for thought, and a look at how the runes speak in a specifically Vanic context. Certainly, divinatory meanings can be extrapolated from the poems and accompanying paragraphs, but the intent is not for that.

The runes are traditionally seen as a solely Aesic system, having been brought into the Nine Worlds by Odin. However, it is said that the runes went to all people, and there are examples of other Beings than Odin using runes, such as Skirnir's threatening Gerda with runemagic if She did not consent to meet Frey, and Freyja learning the runes from Odin in exchange for teaching Him *seiðr*. The runes that seem to speak most of the Vanir are, naturally enough, the Anglo-Saxon futhorc.

Feoh

<i>Feoh byþ frofur</i>	<i>fira gehwylcum;</i>
<i>sceal ðeah manna</i>	<i>gehwylc miclun hyt dælan</i>
<i>gif he wile for</i>	<i>drihtne domes hleotan.</i>

Wealth is a comfort to all men;
yet must every man bestow it freely,
if he wish to gain honour in the sight of the Lord.

It's fitting that a piece on Vanic runes starts with fertility, wealth, sharing, and the pleasures of life. Feoh is all of those things. The word itself means "cattle," but unlike the animal sense that Ur brings, it is cattle as a means of acquiring and measuring wealth, sustenance and prestige. The poem talks about the comfort it brings; the Vanir are very much about enjoying the pleasures of life and the world. However, just

as it is a sorrow to lack, in a Vanic life, it is a sorrow not to share what one has freely. Frey does not hoard His light; Freyja does not partition Her love-making to only the rich or famous. Gifting is a vital part of any Vanic ethos, as *gyfu* will show.

Ur

<i>Ur byþ anmod</i>	<i>ond oferhyrned,</i>
<i>felaþrecne deor,</i>	<i>feohteþ mid hornum</i>
<i>mære morstapa;</i>	<i>þæt is modig wuht.</i>

The aurochs is proud and has great horns;
it is a very savage beast and fights with its horns;
a great ranger of the moors, it is a creature of mettle.

The aurochs was an awesome animal, the Old World equivalent of the North American great bison, and would have been a familiar animal to the pre-Aesir Vanic cultus. While the major Vanic animal was the boar, I would propose that the aurochs was just as important, and may have been replaced by the boar as the former died out. Certainly, the poem's description fits the nature of the Vanir-at-war – proud, ruthless, mettlesome, and at home in the wild. Note, too, the ability of Frey to fight just as well with an antler/horn as he did with a sword. The aurochs is a symbol of strength, of power, of self-confidence; certainly all the Vanir we know of exude those traits in Their own individual ways.

Þorn

<i>Þorn byþ ðearle scearp;</i>	<i>ðegna gehwylcum</i>
<i>anfeng ys yfyl,</i>	<i>ungemetum reþe</i>
<i>manna gehwelcum,</i>	<i>ðe him mid resteð.</i>

The thorn is exceedingly sharp,
 an evil thing for any knight to touch,
 uncommonly severe on all who sit among them.

“The thorn is severely sharp – for any thane to seize it is hurtful.” Obviously, the poem is fairly straightforward: thorns and briars hurt! But what does that mean in a Vanic context? First, it is my UPG that the blackberry, a fruit normally found wild in bramble and briar patches, is sacred to certain Vanir women, notably Holda and Nerthus, Who are certainly said to be “uncommonly severe” to those who follow Them. Second, I feel it is a warning that all is not as it seems when you deal with the Vanir. Too many have the assumption that the Vanir, because They are gods mostly concerned with fertility and agriculture, that They are tree-hugging pacifist hippie Gods; however, a real look at Them will show that They are just as much concerned with Death as with the continuation of Life, especially the older generations. Nerthus may be an Earth Goddess, but She is not the Nurturing Mother – She is the Devouring Cunt, the Ever-Empty Womb of the Earth that swallows us all at the end, the Quicksand and Peat that sucks you slowly to your death with one wrong step.

Ós

<i>Os byþ ordfruma</i>	<i>ælere spræce,</i>
<i>wisdomes wrapu</i>	<i>ond witena frofur</i>
<i>and eorla gehwam</i>	<i>eadnys ond tohilt.</i>

The mouth is the source of all language,
 a pillar of wisdom and a comfort to wise men,
 a blessing and a joy to every knight.

The actual translation here is “The God(s) is the source of all language ...,” Ós being the word for a God or the divine in Old English. Traditionally, the god in question is Odin; I would agree partly, but only

in the figure of Ódr, husband of Freyja. That is not to say that the other Gods, including actual Vanir, are not wise – after all, the poem *Hrafnagaldr Óðins* specifically states that “the Vanir know.” Know what? Well, They certainly know battle-magic, which would be a “blessing and joy” to warriors; They know *seiðr*, which can be used to prophesy and divine, bringing wisdom and comfort to the *Witan*; and They know the flows of Wyrð, the source of everything, including language. They are truly the Gods this rune speaks of.

Rad

<i>Rad byþ on recyde</i>	<i>rinca gehwylcum</i>
<i>sefte ond swiþhwæt,</i>	<i>ðamðe sitteþ on ufan</i>
<i>meare mægenheardum</i>	<i>ofer milpaþas.</i>

Riding seems easy to every warrior while he is indoors and very courageous to him who traverses the high-roads on the back of a stout horse.

This rune, though the poem is about riding, is less about the mode of transportation and more about the journey itself. Certainly, the horse is sacred to the Vanir, specifically Frey, but Rad is not the Horse rune. Rad, the rune of journeying, is twofold, as the poem states – there is an inward, “easy” route, and the harder outward one. As any spiritworker who does regular journeying will tell you, stepping out of your inner worlds is extremely dangerous. The possibilities of the journey itself is also twofold. There is the meaning of spiritual journeys, *seiðr*, and pathwalking, and then something that is hinted at in the poem itself – the dichotomy of slander, empty bragging and gossip, and the “high road” of frith-building, true honor and respect, which certainly requires much courage.

Cen

<i>Cen byþ cwicera</i>	<i>gehwam cup on fyre</i>
<i>blac ond beorhtlic,</i>	<i>byrneþ oftust</i>
<i>ðær hi æpelingas</i>	<i>inne restap.</i>

The torch is known to every living man by its pale, bright flame;
it always burns where princes sit within.

Light is an interesting thing. The presence of light immediately creates a dichotomy between what is illuminated and what is shadowed – darkness only exists as a discernable entity in the presence of light. So is it with the Vanir – They are at once Light and Dark, some more of one than the other, but all in balance. Frey brings Light to the Worlds, but goes into Darkness every year; Njord is calm and even-mannered, but He killed Midir in anger; Nerthus brings peace during Her procession, but demands a yearly sacrifice. Gerda is a dark, reserved Jotun, but Frey fell in love with the Light inside Her, and They balance both the Light and Dark within each other. Freyja is the sacred Whore Who brings joy to people through lovemaking, but also the Mother Sow that savagely defends Her own; Gullveig is the battle-witch, and the joy of gold and wealth.

Gyfu

<i>Gyfu gumena byþ</i>	<i>gleng and herenys,</i>
<i>wraþu and wyrþscype</i>	<i>and wræcna gehwam</i>
<i>ar and ætwist,</i>	<i>ðe byþ oþra leas.</i>

Generosity brings credit and honour, which support one's dignity;
it furnishes help and subsistence
to all broken men who are devoid of aught else.

“A gift for a gift” says Hár in the *Hávamál*, and reciprocity is an important Heathen value. But there are strictures on the type of gift, if you wish to gift in a Vanic style – it must be given willingly, joyfully; no stinginess or reluctance. Frey does not go grumbling each year, resentful of the gift of His life to sustain the Nine Worlds – He goes willingly, happily, aroused as if to His honeymoon, running with passion into the cold embrace of Death. Nerthus' slaves did not complain; they gave of themselves willingly and gladly, throwing themselves into the black void of Her embrace for one chance to see Her as She is. Sif and Sigyn do not care for Their husbands and families because of any meekness or coercion – it is Their gift to the men They love. A gift is not truly a gift if it is not given with all your being behind it; it is simply a payment or a tribute.

Wynn

<i>Wenne bruceþ,</i>	<i>ðe can weana lyt</i>
<i>sares and sorge</i>	<i>and him sylfa hæþ</i>
<i>blæd and blysse</i>	<i>and eac byrga geniht.</i>

Bliss he enjoys who knows not suffering, sorrow nor anxiety,
and has prosperity and happiness and a good enough house.

Wynn is probably one of the most Vanic of runes – it speaks of joy, prosperity, a good home, and self-contentment. It is the rune of frith, of peace-making, because there is no happiness in war, and the Vanir understand that intimately. While certainly not pacifists or poor fighters (They were winning, after all, before They offered truce), the Vanir realise that happiness and prosperity, good homes and bliss cannot be found on the battlefield or in the destructions of war; they can only be cultivated in peace and tolerance.

Hægl

*Hægl byþ hwitust corna; hwyrft hit of heofones lyfte,
wealcaþ hit windes scura; weorþeþ hit to wætere syððan.*

Hail is the whitest of grain;
it is whirled from the vault of heaven
and is tossed about by gusts of wind
and then it melts into water.

The Anglo-Saxon shape of Hægl is that of a snowflake. I feel this is Holda's rune, as She is intimately connected with snow and winter in folklore; it can also be associated with Skadhi and Ullr, Who are the Gods of the woods and wilderness, especially the snowy mountains of Norway and Sweden (and Colorado). The poem doesn't seem to make much sense other than as a simple description of how frozen water acts, until one looks closer, and realises that it is an allegory for life – we are as seeds tossed unto the earth from the “heavens,” yet even during our lives we are subject to the gusts of “wind” that are caused by our *wyrd* and *orløg* as well as the decisions we make. And when our time has come, we “melt” into the earth to nourish the next generation of seeds.

Nyd

*Nyd byþ nearu on breostan; weorþeþ hi þeah oft niþa bearnum
to helpe and to hæle gehwæpre, gif hi his hlystaþ æror.*

[Need] is oppressive to the heart;
yet often it proves a source of help and salvation
to the children of men, to everyone who heeds it betimes.

Need, or necessity, has long been toted as the “mother of

invention.” And it is true – nothing new would be created were there not some need for it, even if that need is one that does not seem “oppressive” – for instance, many people have a need to experience beauty, but the lack of it does not immediately endanger their lives (whether or not it can cause long-term damage is a debate for another time). The Vanir understand need – Frey's death fulfills the need of recharging the Nine Worlds to keep them alive; Njord has an irrevocable need to be near the ocean, as Skadhi does the mountains. Nerthus and Sigyn understand Duty, as do the three hostages to the Aesir; in fact, there are possibly no Beings in the Nine Worlds that are more conscious of Duty than the Vanir, with the exception of Hela.

Is

<i>Is byþ ofereald,</i>	<i>ungemetum slidor,</i>
<i>glisnaþ glæshluttur</i>	<i>gimmum gelicust,</i>
<i>flor forste geworuh,</i>	<i>fæger ansyne.</i>

Ice is very cold and immeasurably slippery;
 it glistens as clear as glass and most like to gems;
 it is a floor wrought by the frost, fair to look upon.

Ice is the rune of winter, of stasis, of slowing down and looking within. The poem describes the many qualities of ice, but notably only the ice that is usually called black ice or clear ice, as opposed to rime, the solid white ice that is named for the frost thurses. Black ice is indeed immeasurably slippery, and is a great danger to those who are not paying attention and moving without caution. While there is no specifically Vanic trait about this rune, all the Vanir know well the value of mindfulness and taking time to reflect so that one does not slip up. And when we stop and look around us, we find that the ice that was once a danger unheeded is now a thing of great beauty.

Ger

<i>Ger byþ gumena hiht,</i>	<i>ðonne God læteþ,</i>
<i>halig heofones cyning,</i>	<i>hrusan syllan</i>
<i>beorhte bleða</i>	<i>beornum ond ðearfum.</i>

Summer is a joy to men, when God, the holy King of Heaven,
suffers the earth to bring forth shining fruits
for rich and poor alike.

Harvest and cycles are the epitome of the Vanic way. That which was sown is reaped, the trees give forth their yearly abundance, and all are blessed with the bounty of nature. Harvest was a three month-long process, starting first with the grains and nuts and then the autumn fruits and vegetables; oftentimes, those three months were the most joyous in the community, because all the year's hard work had finally come to fruition and they were (hopefully) prepared for another harsh winter. There were feasts and blóts all through the period of Lammas to Winterfylleth: as each harvest came in, the people would give of it to the Gods in thanks for Their blessings. Frey is the one most associated with this time, though all the Vanir work to bring forth fertility and bounty in the Nine Worlds.

Eoh

<i>Eoh byþ utan</i>	<i>unsmeþe treow,</i>
<i>heard hrusan fæst,</i>	<i>hyrde fyres,</i>
<i>wyrtrumun underwreþyd,</i>	<i>wyn on eþle.</i>

The yew is a tree with rough bark,
hard and fast in the earth, supported by its roots,
a guardian of flame and a joy upon an estate.

While most Heathens and Northern Tradition Pagans view Yggdrasil as being an ash tree, I personally feel that there is some merit in it being a yew. As such, Eoh speaks to me of the Nine Worlds and the Tree themselves, as Rad speaks of journeying. The line about flame is especially interesting, as there is no tale we know of that tells of the origin of the Tree itself, but the saga of Northern mythology starts and ends in fire, and the yew is a highly flammable tree because of its oils. Also, the root of the Tree is Helheim – all Life is supported by Death, something the Vanir know well.

Peorð

<i>Peorð byþ symble</i>	<i>plega and hlechter</i>
<i>wlancum [on middum],</i>	<i>ðar wigan sittap</i>
<i>on beorsele</i>	<i>bliþe ætsomne.</i>

Peorth [luck, gambling] is a source of recreation and amusement to the great,
where warriors sit blithely together in the banqueting-hall.

Luck is very important in the Northern Tradition. Called *hamingja* in Norse, it is seen as a driving force in a person's individuality in and of itself, rather than some random chance. Some conceptualizations of it portray it as a figure similar to the fetch or *disir* – a female guardian figure responsible for the person's well-being or happiness. However, unlike modern ideas of luck, there are specific things about the *hamingja* that need to be noted. One is born with a certain amount of it, and can either lose it or make it grow, but once lost or wasted, it cannot be regained. However, *Peorð* is also the rune of Wyrð, and the glyph can be seen as the Well of *Urð* (though on its side).

Eolh

<i>Eolh-secg eard</i>	<i>hæfþ oftust on fenne</i>
<i>wexed on wature,</i>	<i>wundap grimme,</i>
<i>blode breneð</i>	<i>beorna gehwylcne</i>
<i>ðe him ænigne</i>	<i>onfeng gedep.</i>

The *Eolh*-sedge is mostly to be found in a marsh; it grows in the water and makes a ghastly wound, covering with blood every warrior who touches it.

Eolh is the rune of holiness, of taboo, of the sanctuary; the Old English word *wih* is what this rune embodies. *Eolh* itself is similar to the OE word for temple, *ealh*, and the poem reminds of the dangers of violating the sacred spaces carelessly or with malice. It is worth noting that the description the poem gives of where the elk-sedge is similar to Tacitus' account of Nerthus' holy grove, the Vane Who is most concerned with *wih*.

Sigel

<i>Sigel semannum</i>	<i>symble biþ on hihte,</i>
<i>ðonne hi hine feriaþ</i>	<i>ofer fisesc beþ,</i>
<i>oþ hi brimhengest</i>	<i>bringep to lande.</i>

The sun is ever a joy in the hopes of seafarers when they journey away over the fishes' bath, until the courser of the deep bears them to land.

Sunna is well-loved in all the Nine Worlds (except perhaps *Niflheim*), but especially in *Vanaheim*, because She is the one that causes all the crops to grow. However, the poem speaks of sailing, which is the place of *Njord*. And indeed, the sun is a vital resource in sailing, both as a compass-guide and by the light it offers, light which is

often rare in northern climes, and as such, is preciously revered by farmers and sailors alike, both of which the Vanir are.

Tiw

<i>Tir biþ tacna sum,</i>	<i>healdeð trywa wel</i>
<i>wiþ æþelingas;</i>	<i>a biþ on færylde</i>
<i>ofer nihta genipu,</i>	<i>næfre swiceþ.</i>

Tiw is a guiding star; well does it keep faith with princes;
it is ever on its course over the mists of night and never fails.

Tiw/Tir is named for the Norse God Tyr, and the Norse and Icelandic poems talk about His attributes as God of Victory and Justice. The Anglo-Saxon poem takes a different angle, referring to the North Star, another important guide for sailors, as well as hunters (both Vanir occupations – Njord is a master sailor, and many Vanir are associated with hunting and woodlands). There are also hints of the importance the Vanir place on trustworthiness, what in Norse is call *mægen* or honor. The North Star (currently Polaris) does not move in the Great Procession; all the other stars move around it, at least from the perspective of us on earth. As such, it can always be counted upon to show true north; similarly, to the Vanir, keeping troth and word is vital to not only reputation, but the ability to build and maintain frith.

Beorc

<i>Beorc byþ bleða leas,</i>	<i>bereþ efne swa ðeah</i>
<i>tanas butan tudder,</i>	<i>biþ on telgum wlitig,</i>
<i>heah on helme</i>	<i>hrysted fægere,</i>
<i>geloden leafum,</i>	<i>lyfte getenge.</i>

The birch/poplar bears no fruit;

yet without seed it brings forth suckers,
 for it is generated from its leaves.
 Splendid are its branches and gloriously adorned
 its lofty crown which reaches to the skies.

The birch tree is a major Northern Tradition plant, commonly seen in Celtic, Germanic, Slavic and Saami/indigenous cultural herbology as a purifier. The Finnish saunas use birch twigs as a means of stimulating blood flow and cleansing of both the space and the people within; in Celtic and Germanic cultures, birch twigs were often cut in early spring and brought inside to bloom, thus blessing and warding the house. The birch is also one of the trees, along with the ash and oak, that usually comprise sacred groves, which are commonly associated with the Vanic cultus (the Aesic cultus was more temple-oriented)

Eh

<i>Eh byþ for eorlum</i>	<i>æþelinga wyn,</i>
<i>hors hofum wlanc,</i>	<i>ðær him hæleþ ymb[e]</i>
<i>welege on wicgum</i>	<i>wrixlaþ spræce</i>
<i>and biþ unstyllum</i>	<i>æfre frofur.</i>

The horse is a joy to princes in the presence of warriors.
 A steed in the pride of its hoofs,
 when rich men on horseback bandy words about it;
 and it is ever a source of comfort to the restless.

There is a common saying that the dog is man's best friend. However, in the millennia before the medieval and modern eras, no animal was more important to humankind than the horse. The horse provided food, skins for clothing and shelter, transportation, increased ranges in territory and hunting/foraging and great power in battle. Beyond the practical, however, there is an almost spiritual symbiosis

between humans and horses – ask any horse owner, and they will tell you of that connection. The most famous horse in the Northern tradition is actually a Jotun – Sleipnir, child of Loki – but the tribe of Gods with the greatest connection to horses is the Vanir. Frey, though He rides a boar, has a horse, Blóðughófi (Bloody-hoof) and is strongly linked with horses in the Sagas (such as the horse Freyfaxi, which was dedicated to Him by Rafnkel Freysgodi, and the horses of Thronðheim). Holda is said to ride a horse when She leads the Wild Hunt. Historically, the domestication of the horse and the time of its greatest importance were the Mesolithic and Neolithic Eras, the time when the Vanic cultus was most likely the strongest and most widespread.

Mann

<i>Man byþ on myrgþe</i>	<i>his magan leof:</i>
<i>sceal þeah anra</i>	<i>gehwylc oðrum swican,</i>
<i>forðum drihten</i>	<i>wyle dome sine</i>
<i>þæt earne flæsc</i>	<i>eorþan betæcan.</i>

The joyous man is dear to his kinsmen;
yet every man is doomed to fail his fellow,
since the Lord by his decree will commit the vile carrion to the earth.

In many ways, this rune reflects and focuses the other “human” runes of *gyfu*, *eðel* and *wynn*, as the poem depicts. One who has much *wynn* will certainly be more amenable to the process of *gyfu*, because the miserable are not prone to giving or building *frith*, and a generous and joyful man raises the reputation of his *eðel* and family, thus making him “dear to his kinsmen.” Even though the second half of the poem is Christian in basis, I still see in it a reminder, as with all things Vanic, that there are two sides to the coin – Light and Dark, Joy and Sadness, Life and Death – and we are all doomed to die, that others might live in our places, one part of the cycle that we are still in thrall to.

Lagu

<i>Lagu byþ leodum</i>	<i>langsum gepuht,</i>
<i>gif hi sculun neþan</i>	<i>on nacan tealtum</i>
<i>and hi sæyþa</i>	<i>swyþe bregað</i>
<i>and se brimhengest</i>	<i>bridles ne gym[eð].</i>

The ocean seems interminable to men,
if they venture on the rolling bark
and the waves of the sea terrify them
and the courser of the deep heed not its bridle.

While the OE word *lagu* is cognate with Latin *lacu* “lake,” the poem describes the largest lake of all – the ocean. However, this depiction of the ocean is much different from the one for Siegl, though it uses many of the same words. This is the terrifying storm, the devouring hurricane, the Sea that threatens to tear the boat apart and swallow all within. Njord, being a sailor Himself, knows well the power of the Sea, and is on good terms with the Nine Undines and Ran Herself, for which They allow Him to calm Their storms on occasion.

Ing

<i>Ing wæs ærest</i>	<i>mid East-Denum</i>
<i>gesewen secgun,</i>	<i>oþ he siððan est</i>
<i>ofer wæg gewat;</i>	<i>wæn æfter ran;</i>
<i>ðus Hearingas</i>	<i>ðone hæle nemdun.</i>

Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes,
till, followed by his chariot,
he departed eastwards over the waves.
So the Hearingas named the hero.

The AS poem for the Ing rune tells us the story of Yng, the eponymous ancestor of the Ynglings, a royal family of medieval Sweden (and later, Denmark), and who was probably either an avatar of Frey, or Frey Himself. The obviously Vanic symbol of the wain (*wæn*) is the main focus here, though it is interesting that the tale has him coming and going from the east, when Vanaheim is traditionally to the west; however, if one looks at it from the perspective of the Anglo-Saxons, the East is Geatland (as opposed to the West-Danes of Denmark and the Danelaw), and Sweden, two of the major Vanic regions in Scandinavia.

Éðel

<i>Eþel byþ oferleof</i>	<i>æghwylcum men,</i>
<i>gif he mot ðær rihtes</i>	<i>and gerysena on</i>
<i>brucan on bolde</i>	<i>bleadum oftast.</i>

An estate is very dear to every man,
if he can enjoy there in his house
whatever is right and proper in constant prosperity.

Family was very important in ancient times, because not only were you the product of your ancestors, the whole family's *mægen*, *hamingja* and *orløg* rested in your hands. Yet family meant more than the blood relationships. Before the Industrial Revolution and subsequent urbanization of much of Western civilization in the modern era, family meant land – the land where your fathers and mothers were born, lived, and died, with few exceptions. Land also meant all the various spirits that must be propitiated – the crops, the wild and domesticated herbs, the earth itself, the housespirits, the trees and rocks, and everything else that was necessary to “enjoy ... whatever is right and proper in constant prosperity,” a topic we have already discussed as being greatly important to the Vanir.

Dæg

*Dæg byþ drihtnes sond, deore mannum,
mære metodes leoht, myrgþ and tohiht
eadgum and earmum, eallum brice.*

Day, the glorious light of the Creator, is sent by the Lord;
it is beloved of men, a source of hope and happiness to rich and poor,
and of service to all.

Like Siegl, Dæg is about the light of Sunna. But where Siegl is the Light being useful (and with connotations of victory given its similarity to *sig*), Dæg is the new day, the bright beginning, since *dæg* can also mean dawn. This is the rune of the Second Chance, the ability to start anew, to make this day worth living regardless of what happened before. Many ancient cultures did not view time with the obsession of past-future that we do; instead, each day was taken as is (hence the need for daily auguries, to determine what the best use of the day was to be). One of the lessons the Vanir teach is to take each thing that comes as it comes, stopping our mad rush into the future to stop and enjoy the sensations of the now, whether those be chocolate, good food, better sex, or even just watching a spider spin a web.

Ác

*Ac byþ on eorþan elda bearnum
flæsces fodor, fereþ gelome
ofer ganotes bæþ; garsecg fandaþ
hwæþer ac hæbbe æþele treowe.*

The oak fattens the flesh of pigs for the children of men.
Often it traverses the gannet's bath,
and the ocean proves whether the oak keeps faith

in honourable fashion.

The oak is another sacred tree among many of Europe's ancient peoples – the Greeks attributed it to Zeus; the Celts named it as the special tree of the Dagda. There is a specific oak forest in Northern lore that is well-known – the Iron Wood of Angrboda and the Jotnar. Yet the oak is also sacred to the Vanir, both as the tree itself (useful for shipbuilding and making homes from) and as the major source of food for the Vanir's most attributed animal, the boar.

Æsc

<i>Æsc biþ oferheah,</i>	<i>eldum dyre</i>
<i>stiþ on staþule,</i>	<i>stede rihte hylt,</i>
<i>ðeah him feohtan</i>	<i>on firas monige.</i>

The ash is exceedingly high and precious to men.
With its sturdy trunk it offers a stubborn resistance,
though attacked by many a man.

The fourth in the futhorc, the ash tree is the traditional representative of the World Tree (switching with the yew); however, it was also a favored wood in the production of spears and polearms, the major weapons of the masses before the invention of smelting. The poem also refers to another usage – many shields were made of ash, being cheaper and easier to work than the harder oak. While such blatant militarism might seem anathema to the common understanding of the Vanir, one need only remember that They were winning in the war against the Aesir, and that many of the Vanir probably would not have had swords, to understand how this tree might be well-loved in Vanaheim, beyond its usefulness in non-military contexts.

Yr

*Yr byþ æpelinga and eorla gehwæs
wyn and wyrþmynd, byþ on wicge fæger,
fæstlic on færeldre, fyrðgeatewa sum.*

Yr is a source of joy and honour to every prince and knight;
it looks well on a horse and is a reliable equipment for a journey.

If any of the Vanir resonate with this rune, it is Ullr, since *Yr*'s glyph is the hunter's bow. The poem speaks of the many uses that bows have – sport (the source of joy and honor among nobility), war (mounted bowmen are a very powerful force), and survival in the wilderness (for both food and protection). The concept that *Yr* speaks to, and Ullr also teaches, is the power in focus, but not the focus of a camera, or the loose sort of focus most of us give to something we're doing. This is the focus of the Hunter, of the Artist, of the Craftsman – the pouring of oneself into the moment, when everything falls away but the task at hand. *Yr* calls us to remember that focus, and apply it to the everyday, whether that be in the home, at work, or in our relationships with the Gods.

Ior

*Iar byþ eafix and ðeah a bruceþ
fodres on foldan, hafap fægerne eard
wætre beworpen, ðær he wynnum leofap.*

Iar is a river fish and yet it always feeds on land;
it has a fair abode encompassed by water, where it lives in happiness.

The normal translation of *Ior* is an eel, though the description may actually be that of a crocodylian or similar species (which may also be the basis of the European dragon legends). Some have postulated

that the river-fish in question is actually Jormungand, the Midgard Serpent, though the poem certainly paints a much different picture of it than is normally the case if that is true.

Ear

<i>Ear byþ egle</i>	<i>eorla gehwylcun,</i>
<i>ðonn[e] fæstlice</i>	<i>flæsc onginneþ,</i>
<i>hraw colian,</i>	<i>hrusan ceosan</i>
<i>blac to gebeddan;</i>	<i>bleda gedreosaþ,</i>
<i>wynna gewitaþ,</i>	<i>wera geswicaþ.</i>

The grave is horrible to every knight,
 when the corpse quickly begins to cool
 and is laid in the bosom of the dark earth.
 Prosperity declines, happiness passes away
 and covenants are broken.

Many people view the Vanir, especially the most well-known ones, as merely being Gods of life and fertility, peace and happiness. While that is certainly part of what They are, it is not all of it, especially for the older Vanir Who are more primal and Jotun-like. Tacitus tells of the bloody nature of Nerthus' rites; Holda is said in folklore to steal children and eat them. Njord can calm the storms, but also can deny harbor to ships and make strong riptides. Not only are Their natures involved with Death, Their very life cycle is dependent on it. Life cannot live without death; the seed must die to grow. Frey goes to Hela every year to ensure that Life continues, not knowing if She will allow Him to return this time. Nerthus kills Her own Son every year in the name of Death. Gullveig was willing to die and be reborn three times. The Vanir understand and embrace the importance of death, of the slow rotting and falling away, because without it, They could not exist as They do.

The following four runes, from Northumbria, are not included in the Anglo-Saxon rune poem; their status as distinctly separate runes is contested (for example, Cweorð may possibly be an alternate form or derivation from Peorð). I have included them anyway, because I feel there are certain lessons that they have to share, regardless of their origins. You will notice that they loosely correspond with the four elements of Wicca and Neo-paganism, as well as the four suits of the Tarot.

Cweorð - Fire-twirl

Cweorð is the Rune of Fire, but not the illuminating fire of Cen or the saving warmth of Nyd – this is the Pyre, the Wildfire that destroys homes and forests (of which we have seen much of in recent years). Though many of the other runes speak of destruction and death, none quite top this one. Cweorð teaches the lesson of Fire as Purifier – destruction of the old, the worn-out, the no-longer-useful to make way for the new, the way woodlands and prairies need occasional destruction to remain healthy. The very reason that this has been such a problem in recent years in the outer world is that we have decided we know better than nature, and have allowed deadbrush to build up by stopping smaller fires or otherwise inhibiting the natural processes. The Vanir, however, understand the necessity of that destruction, and urge those who would follow Them to be open to the Pyre, to not repress and ignore those things we do not like, but instead give them up to the purifying flame.

Calc - Cup

Another rune linked with water, Calc speaks of reflection, of looking inward, of containing the free flow of Lagu into something useful. It can be the scrying bowl, the mirror pool in which answers are sought. But it can also be the peace-cup that is shared among friends and former enemies; the cauldron of Ægir comes to mind, as well as the

story of Kvasir and the mead of Poetry. There is a danger, though, in relying too much on reflection, in that the person most easily deceived is oneself; divination is not set in stone, nor can peace be maintained without work. The converse of this is a symbol well-known in later European mythology – the Holy Cup, the Grail. This aspect of Calc is the idealism that fuels passion, that starts pilgrimages, that calls people to a higher cause and path. But just as the illumination of Cen can be twisted in Calc's depths, so too can that idealism be hollow and without foundation. Calc is very powerful, but care must be taken that one does not fall into the trap of thinking its shallows are deeper than they seem.

Stan - Stone

The very word stone brings to mind many qualities – rigid, steadfast, hard, grounded, immovable, secure, guarding, strong. Stones can make walls, homes, weapons; they can also be dangerous – sailors fear the embrace of the rocks, where the breakers are, because just a brush can wreck a hull beyond repair. Even far from the sea, rocks can be troublesome, if they are in the field one is trying to plow. Mountains are obstacles to be climbed or passed around; caves and tunnels are deep depths that can collapse on the unwary. All of the Northumbrian runes have their dangers, and Stan is no exception. But the major lesson that Stan has for us is the strength and power of steadfastness – loyalty in word and deed, perseverance in hardship, protection of the weak, resolve in the pursuit of frith – all the qualities that the Vanir hold dear. This, above else, is the focus of Vanic virtues; just as an arch cannot stand without the keystone, so do all the other runes mean less without the steadfastness and grounding of Stan.

Gar – Spear (Odin's)

If Peorð is the rune of personal wyrd, Gar is the rune of Universal Wyrd, of the Well itself, the Great Tangle of Life. The rune is

named for Odin's spear, which could decide the fate of battles, but the glyph itself looks like a spider's web, signifying the interconnectedness of all life and individual wyrd that make up the Whole. That weaving in and out, the way that all strands of the web affect the others, is vitally important in this day and age, and the Vanir are well aware of that. We have long been disconnected from the cycles of Life and Death, and rampant individualism is the mantra of Western civilization; the Vanir teach us that such concepts are anathema to both our health and the health of the world, that cutting ourselves off from the source of Life only leads to sickness and dis-ease, the effects of which are well-advanced in our modern culture.

The Vanic Drum

Brun Russellson

While many Heathen reconstructionists are insistent that there is no evidence that the Germanic folk utilized drums in ritual, I can only report that I have found the Vanir to greatly enjoy rhythm. One of my first and most powerful mystical experiences with Frey centered on him teaching me a song for use in ritual accompanied by drumming. And so, while I will gladly admit that there is little evidence that the folk of the Viking age used drums for ritual purpose, I fail to see how that impacts a people, a lifeway, or the Powers of that lifeway, that existed centuries earlier (and most definitely “centuries earlier” is the realm of the Vanir).

Interestingly, there is the hylsung, a wooden headed Anglo-Saxon drum, the existence of which is somewhat unclear. Michael Carter in a brief article titled “Some Background Regarding the Glastonbury Drum: Ancient Instrument of the Pre-Viking Norse, Seaxe People, Picts, Milesians, and Countless Others” puts forth the idea of a wooden headed drum that was more impervious to the elements than hide drums and used in areas where cold and damp were long-seated weather patterns. An interesting theory, but one ultimately lacking any substantial evidence (Carter makes reference to burials in which “boxes” were found next to harps and details the use of clay fired and even metal headed drums in other cultures prone to damp). Yet Carter’s theory fails to take into account the use of wood frame and hide drums by at least two neighboring groups with which the Scandinavian Germanics had contact with—the Western Greenland Inuit and the Saami, both of whom made extensive and well documented use of wooden frame and hide drums despite the harsh climate.

Ultimately, the issue is of little concern to me, as it is my experience that the Vanir enjoy offerings of drumming and galdor and I intend to honor the Powers as I understand them in my own life and not merely through the lens of abstract theory and historical recreation. Working from the perspective of my own unique personal gnosis it is

now a rare occurrence when I do not drum for the Vanir in my religious life, whether it be creating ritual space, inducing a state of trance, or simply making an offering of song and percussion.

In solitary workings, I tend to employ a very simple heartbeat style or steady four count rhythm, on a hollowed log frame and hide drum that is easily transportable to wherever the work calls me (often outdoors). For larger rituals my hearth employs a massive “community” drum, constructed of a large wooden frame and three and half-foot diameter steer skin head which can accommodate up to eight or nine drummers at a time. On this drum we tend to offer more complex patterns of rhythm, often to the accompaniment of whistles, flutes, shakers and hand clackers. The community drum finds more use before or after symbol or at larger festivals (recently I was blessed to share its use at a wedding) and while it does break down for transport, it is not easy to carry long distances.

Vanic Sexuality

Svartesól

There has been precious little written to discuss sexuality in a Vanic context. When people think of sacred sexuality in the 21st century, they either think of Kama Sutra and Tantric offshoots including celebrities rumored to be able to fuck for eight hours, or if they perhaps have some knowledge of Paganism they think of the Great Rite, which is most often done symbolically now with the athame plunged into the chalice. Any kind of sex in a ritual/magic context that Pagans would use today invariably came from Crowley or someone building off Crowley's work. This is not a debate about Crowley, but a defense of sorts, of sacred sexuality that is spirit-taught by the Vanir.

Many Pagan authors erroneously report that Freya is a love Goddess. It may be that Freya's love for all life is what enables Her to give of Herself, but it is certainly not in a "let's settle down and be together" way. Freya is very much the Sacred Whore, the Goddess who spreads Her legs to please the one She's with, to give the comfort of Her body, and then leaves you to take in that energy and process everything, moving on to the next who needs Her sex. I have contemplated that an ancient priesthood of Freya would likely involve sacred prostitution, priestesses who see fucking clients as their Job. If there's one thing I can emphasize about Vanic sexuality, it is that sex is a tool for healing, re-connecting you to the world rather than separating you from it. The Charge of the Goddess may not apply to me as a non-Wiccan hard polytheist, but when I read "All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals," I think of Freya, as that is something She would say.

There are unfortunately some who have referred to Freya's "loose" sexuality and used it as an excuse for unethical sexual behavior, pressuring/forcing people into doing things they're not normally comfortable with, especially in a sense of "spiritual blackmail". We have all seen the type at the Pagan gathering who cruises, and tries to chat people up (usually females on the young side). While there may

not necessarily be anything wrong with hooking up at a gathering per se, there is a difference between happy kismet and then being harassed by creeps. There are also some groups or teachers who will require sex to complete an initiation, and while some are OK with this, your boundaries have to be very strong, and I personally feel some who are insisting on the sexual initiation are being way out of line. In this day and age of STDs and AIDS, you really can't be too careful, and I have seen a disturbing trend among Pagan cruiser-creeps who think unsafe sex is more "Nature's Way".

When people use Freya's sex with the dwarves to gain Brisingamen as an example of Freya's "loose" sexuality, I find this to be somewhat blasphemous. Brisingamen roughly translates as "fire-jewel", and I believe these four dwarves embody the four elements, four seasons, and four directions. (While being literal dwarves, they are close enough to the Earth to carry some of its magic within them.) I believe, moreover, that Brisingamen was a sexually charged tool, embodying Freya's power over the elements, the seasons, and the directions, especially as it relates to sexuality and fertility. While Freya was still a powerful Goddess before Brisingamen, think of Brisingamen rather like Thor's hammer Mjollnir, or Frey's ship Gullinbursti: it adds that extra "oomph" of power.

Freya laid with the dwarves, but She knew what She was getting in return. She knew full well Her worth, as Vanadis, and what that necklace would add to Her power. The exchange was fair - for giving renewal of life, pleasure and happiness, to the dwarves, She received an object to better transmit Her magics.

Speaking of Brisingamen, when a marriage was "arranged" between Freya and a Jotun (Thrymskvida), Freya was angry enough that the necklace shattered. It is my personal opinion that it was not the idea of marrying a Jotnar that repulsed Freya per se, as it was being ordered to do so: a marriage being arranged without Her consent. That would definitely piss the Vanadis off, as no one tells Her what to do and who to do it with, let alone a permanently binding contract. It was enough to make Her take off (or break, depending on translation) the famed Brisingamen of great power, which is a sign that She was very,

very, very pissed off. So while Freya may indeed be "loose" with Her sexuality, She does have limits, and no one forces Her to do anything. Ever.

Ergo, when there are creepy cruisers trying to convince young females to be more like Freya - or even so-called feminists promoting "girl power" with unhealthy body image and teaching that the way to be properly female is to dumb yourself down, act "cute", and flirt (and do more) with lots of guys, and making references to Pagan mythologies to do so - I'm sure Freya is not happy with this. Be sexually free, love as thou wilt, but when you are promoting an unhealthy version of sexuality that not only violates boundaries, but declares said boundaries should not exist, I am sure the Vanadis Herself is just as wroth as when She was told She would be marrying some Jotun She didn't know nor probably care to know.

As far as Her brother, Frey, is concerned, He is very much the love God in place of His sister. His emphasis is on people who are in fact settling down, especially if they are planning on buying land, and though He accepts non-conventional relationships (more on that in a bit), the feeling of love that He brings is very conventional. Frey likes sex, but whilst His sister does it from a place of impersonal love that She has for everyone, Frey's love is very personal, and Frey's sex is very intimate. Frey's sex is borne of personal love. This does not mean that Frey cannot personally love a lot of people, He does. But Freya's is impersonal, and lusty, and Frey's is personal, and intimate. One is fun, one is very serious.

Once again, the Northern pantheon breaks gender roles as we are used to them in 21st century Western civilization, with the Woman -- traditionally the one looking for the relationship -- as the Lust Goddess, and the Man -- traditionally the one looking for sex -- as the Love God.

If there's one thing that should be patently obvious about Frey, it is His ever-erect phallus, depicted in the ancient Scandinavian statues, throbbing with appreciation for the beauty He sees in each Being. Frey lusts for life itself.

I believe in Frey's lust for life, we have a link between the Vanir

and the Mesolithic-Neolithic culture that would bring about the Vanic cult. By now prehistoric peoples realized that sex = more babies, survival of the tribe. They must have also realized sex = orgasm, feels good, and reduces tension between people. Since primitive animal husbandry and grain cultivation was developing in Northern Europe at this time, it is likely rituals involving sex were done to cause the animals to breed and the crops to grow. I also believe there was probably something along the lines of *hieros gamos*, Divine sex, because people realized sex just felt good and was fun, and to mate with the Deities of the land was a very special thing, and it reduced tensions and conflict between peoples, fostering more co-operation, and thus more productivity, less infighting and death.

There are many who worship Frey without being obsessed with His beautiful cock, and I am fine with that. To reduce Him to walking genitalia is insulting, as Frey is a very complex God, in fact He is complex in that He tries to come off as being very simple, a God based in good common sense: what feels good to the individual, and what benefits the community, is fine with Him. Frey, as well as Freya, seem to have a very special connection with individuals who have been sexually traumatized in life. I am not the only Vanir-oriented Pagan to have sexual abuse issues, and it seems that Frey and Freya has a couple of ways with dealing with this.

There are some who for whatever reason take the Celibacy Road. Many have never felt like sexual beings, and certainly we shouldn't try to force people to be what they're not. Frey and Freya both can show affection without necessarily being sexual. Many who have encountered Frey personally, including myself, agree that He loves to hug, and He will tread lightly and not force Himself on those who are asexual. For those who are trying to have a healthy appreciation of sensuality and sexuality, including individuals who are pre-orgasmic, Frey will also tread lightly, but sensually. To completely separate Frey from His sexual aspect is to deny a very vital part of Him, what makes Him "tick", so to speak, but He could be looked at as the ideal for the sexual being, in that He has no desire to force Himself on the unwilling, and can find ways to love that don't have to include sex.

He lusts for all, but can join with His beloved people in other ways. Freya, conversely, likes to teach people about self-esteem and becoming comfortable inside their bodies, especially if they are dysphoric in some way related to trauma. She teaches you that you are fabulous and worth having sensuality in your life: savoring delicious food such as chocolate, seafood, and wine; savoring luxurious scents such as rose, jasmine, and musk; savoring the pleasure of non-sexual touch, such as a massage; feeling emotion, both laughter and tears, to the fullest extent possible.

When one is focused on the Vanir rather than the Aesir, the issue of sexuality will be brought up sooner rather than later. Indeed, if one is impotent or anorgasmic, or has body image issues, or gender identity issues, they will come to a head in a way they wouldn't with another tribe. However, when the dust settles, one can experience sexuality and sensuality in a much more healthy, holistic way.

For those who choose to take it a step further and honor the Vanir through rites of sacred sex, the orgasm is released with the sense of a blast of energy being released out of the both of you, blasting out to touch the Land and give wholeness, and touch the Tree itself, with the joy of release. This is your gift to the Vanir, to heal the Land and the Worlds, your joy giving joy to All. This also forms a very close bond with the one you perform the act with, and as such should be chosen carefully. When holding your partner in the afterglow, the closeness shared is as important as the release of light and joy itself.

In any case, one thing is clear about Vanic sexuality: the fertility of Vanaheim, and by extension the Nine Worlds, depends on Vanic sexuality. Orgasm is the little death, which then gives renewal - new life - of the body and spirit. While this gift can be shared with many, it must be given as a gift rather than a grudge or with ambiguous feelings attached. It must not harm, but bring healing. Then, the seeds of Vanic nature can take root in one's soul, and sprout things of holiness.

The Vanic Warrior

Eosin

Vanic warrior. To many, the term would seem to be a contradiction. After all, Vanic values emphasize frith, family, home, good food, good sex, love, peace, etc. Taken together at face value, these values would suggest the philosophy of a hippie. "Make love, not war!", "Flower power!", "Peace!" and other slogans come to mind. With the general lack of emphasis on conflict, it would seem as if being Vanic means being a pacifist. It's true that someone with such values would rather spend quality time with good people and improving the home. It's the love of such things in life that prevents unnecessary conflict. Yet it's that same love that becomes a strong motivating factor when these very things are threatened. The need to protect oneself, family, home, and community require actions to secure them. Sometimes enough action is required to escalate into open warfare. The difference is in the core values and goals. Vanic warriors seek to use the most effective tools to protect their homes, as their homes are more important than battle glory.

A Vanic warrior is of two passions--the love of home, and anger toward those who threaten it. They help produce the energy and focus required for learning, practicing, and applying the skills of war. They also help maintain that focus on the goal, rather than on extraneous matters. Because of that focus, there less desire for things like conquest or battle glory. More specifically, one would want to survive and return home safely rather than die and go to Valhalla. This is not to say that there's anything wrong with recognition of victory or prowess. Nor does it preclude working with those who have different motivations and goals. Working together with allies to achieve something in common has been a time-tested strategy, and in matters of warfare, effectiveness matters the most. It's also a matter of efficiency; the less time and resources required to effectively protect the home, the more time can be spent at home.

These spheres of protection can be thought of as starting with

the individual, and moving outward to cover others. The first of these is self-defense. The desire to protect oneself is instinctive, and widely considered legitimate. All martial arts start out with basic self-defense, as it is the foundation not only for survival, but also for taking additional military action. It is mainly tactical in focus, due to the realities of one's own immediate survival. The next level is family and loved ones. The desire to protect them has been around as long as such relationships have existed. It is very strong, and in some cases can be stronger than one's own need for self-defense. It starts involving more strategic elements in protection, as there are more to take care of than just oneself. Next in the line of protection is one's land. It can be as small as the space in a room or small shack, or as large as the borders of a farm. It involves the protection of one's property, and has involved shelter, animals, crops, and food. These things are necessary for survival, and many have been willing to fight hard to protect them, even if they were not interested in fighting. Then there's the community or tribe. The kinship one feels toward one's own people, often with a shared culture and history, such as a village, can be a strong motivating factor in protecting it. It is an extension of the feelings one has toward immediate family, and historically, many communities were comprised of extended families. Such protection needs more organization and strategy to be effective, even though the basic values and goals are still the same.

There are symbolic clues we have about Vanic warrior values. The Vanic gods themselves represent fertility, prosperity, frith, and protection. We can also see how such protection is reflected in their choices of weapons. First among these is Frey, who had the most valuable sword, given up as a bride price for Gerda. A sword is a sophisticated weapon, for almost the entire length of it is used both for attacking and for protection, which requires substantial skill both in making and wielding it. During the Dark Ages, many people fought out of necessity, but it was the mark of a warrior to know how to effectively use a sword. For Frey to be a swordsman with that quality of sword (along with His ability to kill bare-handed) shows that He's a top-caliber warrior. And yet we don't see Him getting involved in needless

wars. He's a great example of martial competence being applied (and limited) to protection of home and family. Ullr uses a bow and is an expert hunter; He's also the god of single combat (dueling). The bow is used for hunting for food, but is also used to defend one's land. And single combat is both about training (including forms like Glíma, practiced widely during the Dark Ages) and self-defense. And then there is Njord, whose weapon is an axe. It is a utilitarian tool, not only used for chopping wood, but also for carving and shaping it (seen on many Scandinavian buildings), and hammering nails, stakes, and the like. As a weapon, it is short range but good striking power, and has been a good cheap hand weapon for many thousands of years. From a Vanic perspective, it is fitting that such a tool would encompass such primary utility at home, yet be suitable as a weapon if the home is threatened.

It's interesting to note the difference between Frey's weapon (a sword) and Odin's weapon (a spear). A sword is the finest personal weapon, yet in many cases, a spear makes a better military weapon. A spear has good reach and attacking power, and can be clustered in unit formations, but doesn't have the same defense or countering abilities that a sword does. A sword is great for close combat, can defend as well as attack (in addition to shield use), and can be used in any direction, but is not good for close troop formations or use as a throwing weapon. There's also a different mentality at work; many Odin's men sought to die and go to Valhalla, whereas homesteaders and their lords wanted to return home to their own lands. It is a reflection of a difference in Aesic vs. Vanic values.

Considering historical lore, a valid question is how such values take shape in the modern age that we live in. After all, we don't live in the same age, and our technology for living is significantly different. Yet the fundamentals of who we are and what we value as human beings are still the same. The question then becomes one of how to define such values in practical terms for today, and how to apply them effectively. The first part is defining our philosophy. This would be having clarity on what makes one's lifestyle, one's family and peers, one's home, and one's community. Then one can begin to put together a strategy for

protecting these things, within the limits of technology, society, and laws. Since we generally don't have community militias, and modern military technology is infinitely stronger than what an individual can do, this often limits the scope to self-defense, and protecting the home and immediate family; community defense more often involves police and politics.

The reason one would look to learning weapons and related skills goes deeper than simple defense of self and loved ones. The process of physical conditioning, technique training, drilling, and sparring hones the body, mind, and spirit. It is in this process that one discovers and faces various psychological blocks to living more effectively. Many martial artists train to be effective, but many train without any certain expectation that they will need their skills in combat. And it is this process of discovery that is psychologically and spiritually rewarding, for it involved becoming a healthier person. Over time, such training yields tangible results, which are fulfilling in and of themselves. And the confidence gained from such results improves one's psyche, but also makes for much more consistent and coherent action if the skills are ever needed in an emergency.

The tools that one would use for defense depend on practicality, local laws, and the relevance to particular situations. The strongest type of weapon for modern use is firearms. They don't rely on strength as much as other types of weapons, although one should still be able to handle the recoil. Handguns are a modern analog of swords, not only because they are small and have limited range, but also because the vast majority of modern gunfights involving pistols take place at a range of less than 8 feet. They are usually a first choice for home defense, although they are most often affected by gun laws. Rifles are a modern counterpart to bows in range and stopping power, though they are more difficult to handle in close quarters, and there is a greater risk of hitting an innocent neighbor in dense urban situations. A good compromise on this is shotguns, which have tremendous stopping power, but are less intuitive and take more training and practice to use effectively when under stress.

Of course, the weapons that have worked for thousands of

years still work today. Axes are commonly available, though they are usually weighted to be effective at log splitting rather than in combat. Swords (good ones that won't lose their edge or break easily) are more expensive, and take more training to use effectively, but are amazingly powerful in the right hands, both for attacking as well as protecting against close-combat *melées*. Spears have good range and stopping power (depending on the design), but are very clumsy in close quarters, including most urban situations. Daggers and other knives work, but many knife wounds will slow or kill someone over time rather than drop them in the heat of combat. Bows have good range and decent stopping power, but are awkward to use indoors, and require a lot of practice. Crossbows are more intuitive, but you really have only one shot, and there's a good chance that it won't stop the opponent right away.

Unarmed practice is always good, not just for one's own immediate defense, but also as a foundation for integrating weapon skills. And to be effective at unarmed practice, a reasonable level of physical conditioning is required--the more the better. Your skills and tools won't be of much help if you pass out from exhaustion. There are many styles of martial arts, though selecting one should be based on practical combat effectiveness (i.e. 'getting physical' a lot in training), and probably should be something you find culturally or aesthetically pleasing, so you can find the motivation to keep training when you're tired. There are also environmental tools, from simple things like fences, doors, and locks, to more advanced things like security cameras, alarms, and cellphones. And weapons can be improvised from surrounding items, such as hammers, chains, cords, kitchen knives, and even fire extinguishers. Ultimately, it's about learning one's environment, whether natural, physical, or social.

Another part of Vanic warriorhood is how one interacts with others; it's not just about sex and violence, so to speak. It's about taking care of the people and things that are valued, and protecting them from harm. This is done through regular interaction with friends and family, along with talking or writing for those more distant, and showing them hospitality when they come to visit. Healthier contacts with those you

know strengthens community ties, makes people happier, and provides valuable information and allies in the event of trouble. There is also a spiritual component to this. It is through regular work with Gods that They become part of one's family. Like physical family, They appreciate food (offerings) and friendly talk (prayer), and are good to have on one's side when the unexpected happens from time to time. Having good relationships with both people and Gods brings both security and peace of mind.

The Vanic way places a priority on local people and community, starting with self and family. It maintains these relationships through active frithweaving. People make these efforts because of love for others, and it's the ties to home that help prevent needless strife, both within the community and with other peoples. We see the symbols of this within the lore, with the gods and with their choices of weapons. The values of a Vanic warrior are still valuable and relevant today, though the forms they take may look different. One reflects such values by putting them into practice through building relationships with people and Gods, and building a better relationship with oneself by training and building skills. And with such values and effort comes a healthier life and a deeper peace of mind.

A Healing Ritual

Svartesól

Once a year, I have "standing orders" from Frey to go to Lyfja Mount and get looked over by Eir and the other maidens of Lyfja Mount. There are things Eir has taught me for my personal health maintenance year-round, including eating cleanly and stress management. This is a ritual for one's personal healing and is particularly effective if one is dealing with longer-term or chronic illness/injury, and/or a psychological condition.

This ritual should be done on the New Moon, as a time of rebirth and renewal. You will want to start by disrobing. If you need help with some portions of the ritual, such as housecleaning, you can enlist the help of a close friend or partner provided that they are someone you are comfortable being naked with, and someone you are comfortable with in general (as in, not a false friend who makes you feel worse).

Start off by cleaning your living space. Throw out anything that is trash, or anything belonging to someone else who you no longer have a positive emotional connection with (e.g. a former abuser). Do the dishes. Vacuum and/or mop floors. Do laundry. Dust and wipe down furniture. Clean the altars. At this point, you'll want to put some ice-cold water and fresh fruit that requires peeling (e.g. apples or citrus fruit) on the altar, for enjoying later, and prepare an offering of cider or herbal tea for Eir. Finally, spray down the inside of your shower or bathtub.

In each room, trace an Algiz and galdor the rune while envisioning the rune in blue flame, sealing the space. At your altars, go around the space in a widdershins (counterclockwise) circle with smoking incense, sprinkled salt water, and a lit candle for fire.

Take the candle with you into the bathroom and take a purification bath. If you don't have a tub or getting in and out is problematic due to mobility, this can be done in the shower. If you are taking a bath, make sure to have sea salt in with you. If you're taking a

shower, cut a Laguz rune into a bar of soap beforehand. As you wash yourself with the blessed salt or soap, chant:

*As my home, so my body.
As my body, so my mind.
As my mind, so my heart.
As my heart, so my spirit.
As my spirit, so my body.
As my body, so my home.*

When you feel you have soaked long enough - you should have pink "prune skin", go naked to your altar and anoint your chakra points with a blessed essential oil (I like lavender or sandalwood, or an "aura cleansing" blend). When your chakras are anointed, invoke the Goddess Eir, pouring Her a libation. Express your desire for healing and wholeness, and your gratitude for Her compassion and gift of life.

Feel Eir's energy surrounding and enfolding you, drink Her healing light into each of your chakras, and when you feel the light at its fullest point, "seal" the blessing by chanting:

*My body is made whole.
My mind is made whole.
My heart is made whole.
My spirit is made whole.
My health is made whole.
My life is made whole.*

Stand in the Algiz position (straight, with arms in a V) and let the energy "lock", then ground the excess down into the Earth. At this point you should have the cold water and fruit, and let Eir's blessing work within you for healing.

A Vanic Hearth

Svartesól

The hearth is the ultimate seat of sacredness in the everyday, and as such is extremely important in a Vanic practice. One of the ways to be more mindful of the Vanir in daily life - both Their flow into your world, and your connection to Theirs - is to practice hearth magic, sometimes known as kitchen witchery. Essentially this is cooking with magical intent, cleaning with magical intent, and preparing items for regular household use - such as handmade soap and candles - with yet more magical intent.

One of the least-known things about magic is that anyone can do it. There is a difference between just doing magic and then doing magic well, of course, but we as humans have certain instincts built in, where harnessing the will and desire to affect change is not that difficult. Most people who practice magic do find more aptitude for certain things than others. We cannot all be healers, or warders, or money magnets, or seducers.

The easiest act of spellcraft, for me, is to make food with intent so that those who eat it, including myself, are blessed with health and feelings of well-being. The only things you will need are the ingredients for what you're making, and regular cookware and utensils. I do have a small stoneware cauldron with a food-safe glaze that holds two cups of liquid, and this I will use for "special cases", on one of those occasions where I'm sick or otherwise needing an extra charge of energy, so I will make soup or tea in the cauldron in the microwave, chanting over the brew before it goes in, visualizing while it cooks, and then praying over it prior to consumption.

A good way to become acquainted with magicking food is to send energy into it as you work it with your hands. You should see this energy as a white, gold, or blue light. While you prepare the ingredients for the food, working them through your hands, you might want to chant something like:

*I bless this food for the body,
I bless this food for the soul.*

If you're doing this correctly, you should feel warmth tingling in your hands, and the food should start to faintly vibrate.

At a more advanced level of witching food, a woman could put a small amount of her personal fluids into a tea or soup (or a man's semen, for that matter) to enhance love or seduction, or use a drop of her partner's blood in something she eats or drinks for speeding healing. It sounds a bit odd, and one could argue that it is the intent behind this working that is effective, and the personal fluids are just the proper carrier for the energy. That being said, this practice was so widespread in Anglo-Saxon England that the Church issued edicts against it specifically:

Gif hwa wiccige ymbe æniges mannes lufe and him on aete sylle oððe on drince oððe on æniges cynnes gealdorcraeftum, þæt hyra lufu for þon þe mare beon scyle, gif hit læwede do, fæste healf gear. (If someone lays an enchantment upon anyone's affections and gives him something in food or drink or by any other kind of spell, to make her love (i.e. love of her?) greater -- if a lay person do this, let [them] fast half a year.)

Penitential of pseudo-Egbert

Mulier quae semen viri cum cibo suo miscuerit, et id sumserit, ut masculo carior sit, III annos jejuset. (A woman who mixes the semen of a man in her drink, and consumes it, in order to make herself more cherished by the man, let her fast 3 years.)

Confessional of Egbert ch. 29

Mulier si sanguinem viri sui pro remedio gustaverit, XL dies jejuset. (If a woman tastes of the blood of her husband for any kind of remedy, let her fast 40 days.)

Confessional of Egbert ch. 31

One of the best ways to enchant one's home, both warding its boundaries from trouble as well as creating peaceful energies within, is to make household cleaners from scratch and empower the mixtures

with chanting and visualization, and chant as you scrub down household surfaces. You can also empower homemade laundry soap with protection or healing properties. Not only will these cleaners be more ecologically friendly, but they're very cheap and should help with the budget. These are indeed things the Vanir can appreciate.

Unless otherwise specified, general cleaners can be kept in non-aerosol spray bottles, and the laundry detergent in a jug.

All-Purpose Cleaner: Mix 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/4 cup baking soda (or 2 teaspoons borax) into 1/2 gallon (2 liters) water: for removal of water deposit stains on shower stall panels, bathroom chrome fixtures, windows, bathroom mirrors, etc.

Dishwasher Soap: Mix equal parts of borax and washing soda; increase the washing soda if you have hard water.

Disinfectant: Mix 2 tsp borax, 4 tbsp vinegar, and 3 cups hot water for immediate use: if you need something very strong add 1/4 tsp liquid castile soap, to apply to surfaces used for preparing food in particular.

Laundry Detergent: Mix 1 cup Ivory soap shreds, 1/2 cup washing soda and 1/2 cup borax. Use 1 tbsp for light loads; 2 tbsp for heavy loads.

Mold and Mildew: Use white vinegar or lemon juice full strength, do not store in spray bottle; apply with a sponge.

Toilet Bowl Cleaner: Mix 1/4 cup baking soda and 1 cup vinegar, pour into the toilet basin and let it set for a few minutes; scrub with a brush, and rinse. A combination of 2 parts borax to 1 part lemon juice will also work just as well, if you like that "fresh lemony scent".

Tub and Tile Cleaner: For a simple cleaning, rub in baking soda with a damp sponge and rinse with fresh water. If you need something

stronger, wipe the surfaces down with vinegar first (use sparingly, as it can break down the grout), and follow with baking soda to scour.

Window Cleaner: Mix 2 teaspoons of white vinegar with 1 liter or quart of warm water; clean with a cotton cloth. If the sun is shining directly on the window or the window is warm, don't clean it, as it will be streaky. (The best time to wash windows is at night.)

An effective chant to use while cleaning the house:

*I wash out woe, I bring in weal
Safe from foes, happy we feel*

A further way to "witchify" the home is to make homemade soap and candles. Homemade soap prepared with intent can be used for healing purposes, and can even be charmed to positively influence someone's self-esteem with use. Candles can be made with beeswax and dye or scent (or not, as you will) and intent for any number of purposes, whether it be creating a peaceful and happy atmosphere, or a field of protection, or healing, or even setting the stage for romance.

Last, consider using small stones or herbal potpourri (preferably organic) to enhance a peaceful, friendly, and comforting energy within your home, as well as placing small mirrors around the outside periphery of your home (perhaps buried an inch into the ground in a place that is not frequently walked over), also in obvious "exit-and-enter" places like the doors and windows, for protection. A Witch's Bottle can be made out of a glass bottle or mason jar to which has been added broken glass, nails, pins, screws, a bit of your urine, and I like to add vinegar for good measure, which will then be buried in your backyard to deflect negativity from your home. If burying it in your yard is impossible, you can get a discrete container to place the bottle inside, making sure it's sealed well, and stand the container next to your front door.

One of the most effective wards I have ever done is a "NO SOLICITORS" sign, which I made after I was harassed repeatedly by

would-be evangelists coming to my door, as well as people soliticing for the charity-of-the-week. I am not completely cold-hearted, but I don't like to be bothered at home and I have no patience to argue with people. The sign was made with furious warding intent. It has worked, perhaps too well; neighbors of mine have gotten visits from the passing solicitors, but not me. Businesses won't even put their flyers on my doorstep!

A Vanic Handfasting

Svartesól

This is a wedding rite for a couple in a Vanic context, performed by a priest and priestess to convey the blessings of Frey and Gerda on the union. Adam of Bremen reports that Frey was called at weddings, and the main myth we have of Frey in the Eddas is of His lovesickness for Gerda, culminating in marriage. While I normally don't expect to perform handfastings for anyone outside of my Kindred or closest group of friends, as Frey's priestess I know the followers of Frey who are also clergy are few and far enough in between that I may be called upon for this job, and indeed it is a sacred and necessary thing to bless unions: the world has little enough love in it.

Preparation

- Soft rope or long ribbon, about 3 feet.
- Vows to exchange, written by the couple.
- Rings to be exchanged by the couple.
- A drinking horn, and mead to offer Frey and Gerda, and the couple being married.
- Gifts from the guests for the couple.

Ritual Outline

1. There will be a moment of silence, and the rite will be announced by a chime or blowing of a bullhorn.
2. The priestess stands before the gathered folk to speak of the rite, saying something to the effect of:

We are gathered here today to witness the handfasting of (Partner1) and

(Partner2). As the union of the Vanir Lord Frey and His etin-bride Gerda in the Barri fields gave warmth and life to the Nine Worlds, so we come to join this couple in marriage so they, too, may have blessings of warmth and life that blesses the world around them.

3. Regardless of whether the rite is done outside or in a Hof, the priest hallows the stead with an antler, tracing an Algiz rune in each of the four directions. Both the priestess and priest should be mindful of raising energy to create sacred space around the rite.

4. The priest invokes Frey:

*We call upon You, Ing-Frey,
God of the World,
ever hard and ready
for the mysteries of love.
Please join us here, to witness the union of
(Partner1) and (Partner2).*

5. The priestess invokes Gerda:

*We call upon You, Gerda,
beloved etin-bride of Frey,
strong and silent,
keeping the mysteries of love.
Please join us here, to witness the union of
(Partner2) and (Partner1).*

6. The priest and priestess motion the two people to be handfasted to join them before the altar, and the couple faces the altar.

7. Priest (to one of the couple): *Do you, (Partner1), join us here of your own free will, do you acknowledge before Frey and Gerda the bond that is shared between you and (Partner1)?*

Partner1: *(response, hopefully a yes; if not, close the rite).*

Priestess (to Partner2): *Do you, (Partner2), join us here of your own free will, do you acknowledge before Frey and Gerda the bond that is shared between you and (Partner 2)?*

Partner2: *(response)*

8. The couple turns to face each other, and joins their left hands, reciting one to another the vows they have written. The priest takes the joined left hands and ties the rope around, saying:

Before witnesses, (Partner1 and Partner2) have sworn oaths to each other. With this cord, I bind them to these oaths. (wraps cord loosely around both arms) This binding is not tied, so neither will be restricted by the other, and the binding is only enforced by both wills.

9. Couple turns to face each other, in unison, and says:

*Body to thee,
Mind to thee,
Heart to thee,
Soul to thee.
As long as love shall live,
So shall it be.*

Gathered folk: *So shall it be.*

10. The priestess fills the drinking horn with mead and blesses it by tracing a Gyfu rune over it. She presents the drinking horn to each partner, saying: *Drink of the sweetness of love and life, the blessings of Frey and Gerda.*

The couple drinks, and then the priestess passes the horn around the circle, saying:

Drink to (Partner1) and (Partner2).

The person receiving the horn should reply: *Hail (Partner1) and (Partner2)!*

and/or make a toast of their own.

The rest of the horn is poured out in the blessing bowl, with the priestess offering it aloud to Frey and Gerda.

11. The couple unbinds their left arms, and exchanges the rings they have brought for each other. When both are wearing the rings, the priest says:

May these rings, symbols of the circle of life and death and life again, bring Frey's fruitfulness to all your endeavours.

The priestess says:

May these rings, symbols of the circle of life and death and life again, bring Gerda's strength to support you.

Then the guests give the couple their gifts.

12. The priestess bids farewell to Gerda:

*We thank you, Gerda, for Your presence among us,
And as You take your leave, we ask
that You leave among us, in each of us,
the ability to each be strength and hope and home to those we love.
Hail and farewell.*

Priest:

*We thank you Frey, for Your presence here this day,
and ask, as You take Your leave,
that you leave in each of us
the ability to give the light and joy of love, to those we love.
Hail and farewell.*

13. The priestess sounds the chime or the horn again, to end the rite. The priest and priestess should be grounding out the space as this happens. At which point it's time to party!

A Vanic Child-Naming

Svartesól

The Vatni Ausa - sprinkling a newborn child with water prior to naming - is probably one of the best-preserved rites of ancient Heathenry, as we see from the following instances:

Those baptized in the heathen way shall be rebaptized in the name of the trinity.
Pope Gregory III, Letter to Boniface

Now Hallgerda got a household about her; she was prodigal in giving, and grasping in getting. In the summer she gave birth to a girl. Glum asked her what name it was to have? "She shall be called after my father's mother, and her name shall be Thorgerda," for she came down from Sigurd Fafnir's-bane on the father's side, according to the family pedigree. So the maiden was sprinkled with water, and had this name given her, and there she grew up, and got like her mother in looks and feature.

Njal's Saga Chapter 14

Thorstein Codbiter had a son who was called Bork the Thick. But on a summer when Thorstein was five-and-twenty winters old, Thora bore him a man- child who was called Grim, and sprinkled with water. That lad Thorstein gave to Thor, and said that he should be a Temple- Priest, and called him Thorgrim.

Eyrbyggja Saga, Chapter 11

Thora bare a child in the summer; it was a girl. She was sprinkled with water, and named Asgerdr.

Egil's Saga, Chapter 35

I would be willing to gather that its roots date back to pre-Germanic Northlands practice, as water is seen as symbolic of waters of the womb and necessary to life.

The naming rite is traditionally performed on the ninth day. My theory regarding this is sometimes if a family was too poor to take care of a child or it was deformed or very sickly, it would be exposed immediately after birth. It was easier not to give this a name. While this practice may offend modern sensibilities, we moderns cannot really

comprehend what life was like when mastery over the elements was much more difficult and survival precarious. Naming the child was indicative of keeping the child, for better or worse.

Here is a naming rite for a Vanic household, celebrating the child's birth. While we no longer make it a practice of exposing infants in Western civilization, waiting nine days still has symbolic significance, reminiscent of the nine days of Odin's ordeal upon Yggdrasil, nine days between Gerda's acceptance of Frey's proposal and Their marriage, and nine days with Skadhi at the sea and Njord in the mountains. Nine days is long enough for the soul to get "anchored" within the child's body, and the initial threads of Wyrð to be woven upon the loom.

All that will be needed in preparation for this rite is witnesses (such as relatives and close friends of the family) and a bowl of water, and then a meal for the húsel to follow. Etiquette would dictate that since the mother just gave birth and needs to conserve her energy, a close friend of the mother should prepare the dishes for húsel OR it should be a potluck.

Naming Ceremony Outline

1. The gathered folk are called to stand around the altar, where the mother holds the child.
2. The mother hands the father the newborn, and then picks up the blessing bowl filled with lightly salted water. The father dips his fingers in the water, and says the following:

I throw water on this child, and give him/her the name (Name).

He then sprinkles the water on the baby's forehead, and can also trace the Othala rune (for inheritance) on the baby's forehead with the water.

3. The father hands the baby back to the mother, who lifts the child up and says:

*Thanks be to Nerthus, Eordan Modor,
giver of life to us all,
and thanks to the Vanir, Gods of the World,
for this life I have and I hold.
May my child, (Name), walk proudly and true
through the roads and paths of Midgard.
Eála (Name of child). Eála Nerthus.*

4. The family and guests go to húsel, where they feast in the baby's honor. If the guests in attendance are Heathen (such as the family's Kindred), it would be proper to pass a mead horn around the table and have sumble with the first round of toasts to the baby, second round of toasts to the family, and third round of poetry and songs in the child's honor, with a final fourth round of gifting the parents and baby.

Vanic Coming-of-Age Ceremony for a Girl

Svartesól

This should be held on the girl's thirteenth birthday or shortly after the girl's first mense. Ideally, one of the girl's maternal aunts would be officiating as Gyðja for this rite. This will not be the case for most households in the first half of the 21st century, so a friend of the girl's mother can officiate as Gyðja instead.

Preparation

-Drinking horn, blessing bowl, and libation of some sort. If the parents/guardians of the girl feel it is appropriate, this can be mead provided the maiden is instructed beforehand to only have a sip or two.

Otherwise, apple cider is an acceptable substitute.

-An archway, and an egg. The archway can be the doorway of a room in a house, such as the maiden's, or it can be a wooden archway outside in a grove where the Kindred usually meets. The archway is symbolic of new beginnings, and the egg is symbolic of life and fertility.

-A new pair of shoes for the maiden, and a gift from the mother to her daughter symbolic of maidenhood.

-A candle, in a safe candleholder (such as a votive in a hurricane glass).

-The maiden should think of a new Heathen name for herself.

Ritual Outline

1. There is a moment of silence before the rite, then the Gyðja rings a bell or sounds a horn to begin. At which time she says something to the equivalent of:

*Hear me, all ye holy kindred,
greater and lesser children of Heimdall.*

*At this time do we have among us
a girl-child
who seeks the way of becoming reborn as a young maiden,
taking the first steps towards full womanhood.
Thus I ask you, (Girl's Name), in the sacred name of Nerthus Eordan Modor,
to willingly come forth and stand ready before us.*

2. The girl comes to stand next to the Gyðja. The Gyðja places a candleholder with lit candle in the girl's hands and walks behind the girl around the parameters of the space, singing galdor:

*Halíg, halíg fyr ic bere,
in hí naman Fréo Vanadis!
Hlæfdige béode to frið fremman,
Fréo wéoh þisne ealh.*

*(Holy, holy fire I bear,
in the name of Freya Vanadis!
Lady I bid to make peace,
Freya make this site sacred.)*

The walk should circle the parameters three times with the galdor sung three times.

3. The Gyðja stands in the center of the sacred space and addresses the crowd:

This is a Coming of Age Ceremony, which can be likened to a Jewish Bat-Mitzvah or a Catholic Confirmation in that the Seeker symbolically leaves behind her childhood. She embraces her worth as a maiden, accepts the natural changes of her body during this time, and acknowledges her own unique personal qualities, with which to better the community and the world around her.

4. The Gyðja takes the lit candle from the girl and raises it in invocation:

*Hail to Nerthus, Eordan Modor,
 Mother of the Earth, giver of life to us all.
 We ask for Your presence here, on this day.
 Hail to Freyja, Lady Vanadis,
 Beauty and strength, the ultimate woman.
 We ask for Your presence here, on this day.
 Hail to Gersemi and Hnossa, daughters of Freyja,
 granddaughters of Nerthus,
 beloved children of the Vanir.
 We ask for Your presence here, as well, on this day.
 Goddesses of the Vanir, Gods of the World,
 witness and worth this sacred act,
 as this girl, (Name), becomes a maiden.*

5. There is a moment of silence to welcome the Goddesses. The maiden removes her shoes then as the Gyðja proclaims:

As you begin your journey may your head be clear, your hands steady, your footing solid.

The maiden repeats: *My footing shall be solid, my hands steady, and my head clear as I begin my journey.*

6. The young maiden stands at the archway, ready to pass through. The Gyðja says:

May you have strength and wisdom to protect your self, your parents and your people at all times.

The maiden replies: *By the Goddesses, I do.* Maiden steps through the archway, over the egg (without breaking it, please!) and into the new pair of shoes.

7. The Gyðja says: *As you pass through one life phase into the next, gaining knowledge of womanly power, know that you are now recognized as fit and*

ready to accept full responsibilities of your actions, recognized as a maiden from this time on and from this place forward.

The maiden replies: *My life shall from now be changed. I have become a maiden, for myself, my people, and my Goddesses.*

The mother comes to the archway to meet her daughter, presenting her daughter with a symbolic gift of maidenhood. She may give a brief explanation of the gift's symbolism to the daughter and the gathered folk.

8. The Gyðja asks the maiden: *What is your new name before the folk?*

The maiden gives her new name, and the gathered folk reply with: *HAIL (NEW NAME)!*

9. At this time, the Gyðja bears a horn, which the maiden fills and consecrates with a Gyfu rune. The Gyðja holds the horn to the maiden who is instructed to make an appropriate toast. The maiden then bears the horn around the circle, inviting each person:

Drink with me, on this my Day of days.

When all have been served, the horn is handed back to the Gyðja who makes her toast to the maiden, and perhaps a prophecy about her future if the Gyðja is so inclined. Then a libation is poured into the blessing bowl.

10. The Gyðja offers the blessing bowl to the Goddesses, then says before the gathered folk:

*Hail to (New Name), and the Goddesses of the Vanir.
The ceremony is ended, yet ever shall it remain. So it is wrought!*

The gathered folk respond: *Wæs þu hál.*

Vanic Coming-of-Age Ceremony for a Boy

Svartesól

This should be held on the boy's thirteenth birthday or shortly after the boy's voice is noticeably breaking. Ideally, the boy's grandfather would be officiating as Goði for this rite. This will not be the case for most households in the first half of the 21st century, so a close friend of the boy's father can officiate as Goði instead.

Preparation

-Drinking horn, blessing bowl, and libation of some sort. If the parents/guardians of the boy feel it is appropriate, this can be mead provided the young man is instructed beforehand to only have a sip or two. Otherwise, apple cider is an acceptable substitute.

-An archway, and a pocket-sized knife such as a switchblade. The archway can be the doorway of a room in a house, such as the parents', or it can be a wooden archway outside in a grove where the Kindred usually meets. The archway is symbolic of new beginnings, and the knife (lain just outside the archway) is symbolic of life and male fertility.

-A new pair of shoes for the young man, and a weapon given from father to son, such as a sword or a spear, symbolic of manhood.

-A candle, in a safe candleholder (such as a votive in a hurricane glass).

-The young man should think of a new Heathen name for himself.

Ritual Outline

1. There is a moment of silence before the rite, then the Goði rings a bell or sounds a horn to begin. At which time he says something to the equivalent of:

*Hear me, all ye holy kindred,
greater and lesser children of Heimdall.*

*At this time do we have among us
a boy-child
who seeks the way of becoming reborn as a young man,
taking the first steps towards full manhood.
Thus I ask you, (Boy's Name), in the sacred name of Frey Life-Giver,
to willingly come forth and stand ready before us.*

2. The girl comes to stand next to the Goði. The Goði places a candleholder with lit candle in the boy's hands and walks behind the boy around the parameters of the space, singing galdor:

*Halíg, halíg fyr ic bere,
in hí naman Ing, Wendryhten!
Ing-Fréa béode to frið fremman,
Ing-Fréa wéoh þisne ealh.*

*(Holy, holy fire I bear,
in the name of Ing, Vanir-Lord!
Ing-Frey I bid to make peace,
Ing-Frey make this site sacred.)*

The walk should circle the parameters three times with the galdor sung three times.

3. The Goði stands in the center of the sacred space and addresses the crowd:

This is a Coming of Age Ceremony, which can be likened to a Jewish Bar-Mitzvah or a Catholic Confirmation in that the Seeker symbolically leaves behind his childhood. He embraces her worth as a young man, accepts the natural changes of his body during this time, and acknowledges his own unique personal qualities, with which to better the community and the world around him.

4. The Goði takes the lit candle from the boy and raises it in invocation:

*Hail to Njord, Blameless Ruler of Men,
 King of the Vanir, defender of Vanaheim.
 We ask for Your presence here, on this day.
 Hail to Ullr, who dwells among the yews,
 Bowman, knight, wise man of the wild.
 We ask for Your presence here, on this day.
 Hail to Frey, with Your rod of lordly might,
 Swordbearer, antler-wielder, warrior for peace.
 We ask for Your presence here, as well, on this day.
 Great Men of the Vanir, Gods of the World,
 witness and worth this sacred act,
 as this boy, (Name), becomes a man.*

5. There is a moment of silence to welcome the Gods. The young man removes his shoes then as the Goði proclaims:

As you begin your journey may your head be clear, your hands steady, your footing solid.

The young man repeats: *My footing shall be solid, my hands steady, and my head clear as I begin my journey.*

6. The young man stands at the archway, ready to pass through. The Goði says:

May you have strength and wisdom to protect your self, your parents and your people at all times.

The young man replies: *By the Gods, I do.* Young man steps through the archway, over the knife, and into the new pair of shoes. The Goði picks up the knife off the ground and presents it to the young man:

I declare you fit to bear arms. Wield this knife well, arm yourself, for you are the future of your tribe.

7. The Goði then says: *As you pass through one life phase into the next, gaining knowledge of manly power, know that you are now recognized as fit and ready to accept full responsibilities of your actions, recognized as a man from this time on and from this place forward.*

The young man replies: *My life shall from now be changed. I have become a man, for myself, my people, and my Gods.*

The father goes to his son and presents his son with a sword or a spear, saying: *Before the Vanir Gods, I give you this weapon as a sign of your manhood before the tribe. Bear it proudly, and only to defend that which we hold dear.*

8. The Goði asks the young man: *What is your new name before the folk?*

The young man gives his new name, and the gathered folk reply with: *HAIL (NEW NAME)!*

9. At this time, the Goði bears a horn, which the son's mother fills and consecrates, then the mother holds the horn to the son, who is instructed to make an appropriate toast. The mother then bears the horn around the circle, inviting each person:

Drink with my son, on this his Day of days.

After each person drinks, the son taps their right shoulder (gently) with the weapon and says: *My strength I share with you. Wæs þu hál!*

When all have been served, the horn is handed back to the Goði who lets the son's mother drink and blesses her, then the Goði himself makes his toast to the lad, and perhaps a prophecy about his future if the Goði is so inclined. Then a libation is poured into the blessing bowl.

10. The Goði offers the blessing bowl to the Gods, then says before the

gathered folk:

Hail to (New Name), and the Gods of the Vanir.

The ceremony is ended, yet ever shall it remain. So it is wrought!

The gathered folk respond: *Wæs þu hál.*

Sword-Naming Ritual

Eosin

Throughout history, there have been many conflicts, with many personal weapons used during those conflicts. When one has a particularly potent or favorite weapon, it's not unusual to give it a name. This has applied to a great variety of weapons, from a personal stick or club, to prized swords. This personification happens quite naturally, and for several reasons. The weapon makes a substantial contribution to one's ability in close combat, often making the difference in one's own survival. Being a potent weapon, it not only protects oneself, but enables one to help protect others as well. If kept close or carried regularly, it is often considered one's 'traveling buddy'. And the crafting of the weapon, as well as practice with it, places a lot of personal energy (*maegen* or 'main') into it. These factors apply to many weapons, but the are particularly prominent with swords.

Unlike most other weapons, a sword's manufacture and proper use involve a high amount of focus, skill, and expertise. Before one is even made, a substantial amount of knowledge is needed to ascertain its purpose and methods of use, what conditions it will be facing, the geometry of the blade, what kinds of materials will be needed to make it, how those materials will be conditioned and applied to the design, etc. A simple metal weapon can be made in a day, but a well-designed and well-tempered sword that will serve its user reliably for generations will take much longer to make properly. There is an enormous amount of main put into crafting a sword, and even with modern knowledge of science and metallurgy, the ability to make such a finely made weapon by hand using traditional techniques appears to be a magical process, applying the elements in simple ways to make internal, unseen changes that produce outstanding results.

A sword is an unusually versatile and effective personal close-combat weapon. It can deal damage in multiple ways, yet it can also defend against a variety of weapons under many conditions. It has been

a symbol of authority, might, honor, cruelty, protection, hope, divinity, oaths, will, status, change, and many other things for thousands of years. It has been a tool of heroes and Gods through many stories in many cultures. And it has played such a role within Vanic practice. Frey had (and gave up) the best sword in the Nine Worlds. Freya, as a battle Goddess, has been depicted in artwork using a sword. A servant of Ullr had that information inscribed on his chape (the metal tip of a sword's scabbard). And the personal single combats and duels that took place (many invoking Ullr) were conducted with swords. The sword has an honored place within the faith. As such, it would be natural to give one's sword a name.

There are several considerations for a name. Traditionally, a sword name is brief (one or two words) that names some aesthetic quality of the sword (e.g. 'bright', 'serpentine', 'fishback') or its function (e.g. 'aggressor', 'pain-maker', 'whistler', 'shield-biter'). If the sword is made or used only for ritual or ceremonial events, the name can be something more appropriate to its purpose. Some may choose to use a modern personal name if it feels right, though this is not traditional. During the Dark Ages, it was not unusual for swords to have their names inscribed in runes; not only were runes used in spelling the name, but single runes as symbols were also used, in a manner similar to other rune craft. The name would be inscribed either on the hilt, such as on the guard for a double-edged sword, or near the back of a blade on a sax, or on the opening of the scabbard. The chape (tip of the scabbard) would sometimes have a runic inscription of the name of the owner, either one's given name or a symbolic name.

The Ritual

Decide on a suitable name for the sword, the purpose of the sword, and how it will be used. Decide on what God or Gods to invoke that would be appropriate to the sword's purpose. You will need a candle, the sword to be consecrated, altar space large enough to accommodate the sword, an appropriate drinking horn or goblet and mead or other suitable drink, and an offering bowl.

Goði or other person leading the ritual:

Hail, the Gods of old!

Hail the Gods of the Vanir!

Hail (God or Gods for this ritual)!

We come here in frith.

We come here to name this sword, and to dedicate it's purpose.

Hear our words, feel our main, and enjoy our offerings.

Fill the horn with the drink. Each person hails the god or gods chosen for the ritual and takes a drink.

(God or Gods for this ritual), receive and enjoy our offering. A gift for a gift, the Goði says then pours the remaining drink into the offering bowl.

Light the candle and place it on the altar.

This sword is to be used for (intended use of the sword).

We dedicate the sword to this purpose.

This sword is to be named (name of sword).

This represents (quality or purpose of sword).

We hereby consecrate (name of sword).

Lift the sword horizontally from the altar, and hold it above the candle flame:

With this sacred flame, we hereby hallow (name of sword). May it last long and serve us well.

Set the sword back down on the altar:

The rite is ended. May peace prevail.

A Vanic Funeral

Svartesól

People are born, and they die. The first generation of the Heathen revival is aging, and all of us will someday die. As a Vanatruar, I know death is not something to be feared, but to be embraced when it is time. Life is given to man, and then life is given back to the Earth.

When a Vanatruar is musing on their own end of days, or the commemoration of another, there are some things to keep in mind.

First is the wishes of the person being respected. Most Heathens of any flavor can unequivocally agree that they do not want a Christian funeral, particularly if they have fundamentalist relations who would turn the funeral into a sermon on damnation and hellfire, rather than a celebration of the deceased's life. However, some may be on decent terms with relations and friends of other faiths and may decide to have a more ecumenical service, for the benefit of the ones grieving who may not be able to deal with delicate subjects such as religious debate at the time. Regardless of whether the funeral is explicitly of a Heathen nature, or more ecumenical, the first decision that needs to be made is the issue of disposal of the remains.

In the probable time of the Vanic cultus, the Funnelbeaker/Ertebolle era, it is known for burial mounds exclusively. In Ynglinga Saga, there is a depiction of the death of Frey's king-avatar:

When it became known to the Swedes that Frey was dead, and yet peace and good seasons continued, they believed that it must be so as long as Frey remained in Sweden; and therefore they would not burn his remains, but called him the god of this world, and afterwards offered continually blood-sacrifices to him, principally for peace and good seasons.

Ynglinga Saga

We see His devotees following this example into the Heathen era when Aesic and Vanic practice was more blended:

And now, too, a thing happened which seemed strange and new. No snow lodged on the south side of Thorgrim's howe, nor did it freeze there. And men guessed it was because Thorgrim had been so dear to Frey for his worship's sake that the god would not suffer the frost to come between them.

Gisla Saga

Indeed, it could be said the primary distinction between Aesic and Vanic followers is that the Aesic followers (the dominant Heathens of the time) are cremated, their ashes going to be with the Sky Gods, and the Vanir followers are buried, given to the Earth Gods. Based on historical precedence, we can assert that it is preferable for a Vanatruar to be buried.

That being said, some Vanatruar may not wish to be buried for reasons of practicality. Most graveyards are on sanctified Christian ground. Most people in the United States do not own land, and those who do usually have to deal with zoning restrictions including the issue of dead bodies. Even if being in a graveyard is acceptable, there is the matter of the body decomposing - most graveyards will only bury a body if it is in a coffin, and oftentimes lead or wood that takes a very long time to break down. There are now graveyards which will bury a body in a wicker casket and even perhaps arrange for a tree to be planted on top, but these are scattered at best, and not always an option.

So, some Vanatruar may choose to be cremated first and then have the ashes buried in a park or on their family's property in a mound. The reasons for burial among Vanic devotees was not just about going back to the Earth, but being accessible to descendants (especially with practices such as *utisetá*), and burial nowadays may mean making the remains permanently inaccessible. So, it is up to the individual Vanatruar to exercise their best judgment about their remains.

The following rite is for a funeral in a Vanic context. This funeral may also be adapted accordingly for a beloved pet, as we know domesticated animals were also buried with grave goods and care in the Vanic era, and in any case are part of the family for most people.

This particular ritual is loosely based on the funeral rites in *Beowulf* (which the scholar John Grigsby speculates is a gloss for the Vanic cult being supplanted and suppressed by the Aesir cult in Denmark³⁷).

Preparation

-Before the deceased passes on, a will should be made. With regards to the funeral itself, the deceased should assign someone to perform the eulogy, preferably the spouse, closest friend in life, or their Goði/Gyðja.

-Ideally the body would be prepared by the grieving women who are friends or relations of the deceased, however, this is mostly illegal nowadays and in the care of a licensed mortician. The funeral parlor can go about their business but should be notified beforehand of "Hel shoes". The custom of "Hel shoes" was noted even among Frey's aforementioned devotee Thorgrim, that the deceased could walk the Hel road in comfort. The funeral director needs to be aware of grooming the feet and making sure shoes are on the body regardless of whether the body will be buried or cremated.

-The attendants of the funeral need to procure grave goods. In keeping with a Vanic context, the most important item will be at least one beaker-shaped item of pottery that is safe to be used for eating and drinking. Other appropriate grave goods include amber, coins, a last meal, and weapons and/or tools of the deceased's trade.

-There should be arrangements to have a feast after the burial, with a good meal and a drinking horn for sumble. The feast can be at a restaurant particularly if the deceased's kin are too exhausted to cook, but the restaurant should have alcohol on tap and allow the passing of a horn.

1. Eulogy

The eulogy should give an overview of the person's life, noting

37 Grigsby, John. "Beowulf and Grendel: The Truth Behind England's Oldest Legend." Watkins, 2006.

particularly their accomplishments, positive personality traits, and what they will be missed for. The speech should be about 15-20 minutes but not longer than that, and not significantly shorter than that.

2. Placement of grave goods

Those who are attending the funeral should place their grave goods inside the coffin or inside the hole where the remains will be placed. The Goði will say something to the effect of "May these riches be with you in Hel's hall."

3. Burial of body or of ashes, with dirge.

The burial should be arranged in such a way that it forms a mound. The gathered folk will watch the remains be buried, silently and solemnly. While the remains are placed in the ground, the woman with the best singing voice should sing a dirge once the remains are in the ground. A dirge can be composed beforehand, or can consist of something simple such as repeating the deceased's name and something like "Fare thee well, fare thee well".

4. Songs of praise for the deceased.

Once the remains are totally buried, the gathered folk should circle the mound, singing songs of praise. This can be as simple as "Hail (Deceased), hail ye who lived well" or chanting the deceased's name or a round where each composes verse in the deceased's honor. Regardless, it is at this time when all should pay their respects vocally.

5. Feast and sumble.

The funeral party will proceed to the feast, opening the feast by the Goði declaring this feast to be in the deceased's honor. Eating should be first, followed by alcohol served in a horn, passed around the table in three rounds, each drink commemorating something worthy or

notable in the deceased's life, including and especially if it was amusing (in-jokes are very appropriate here) or a great accomplishment.

Finally, it is good to make an annual commemoration of the deceased, whether by doing so on their birthday or the date of their death. We are the ones who keep the memories alive of the beloved dead, we owe it to the ones who have gone before and have laid the foundation of our futures, to continually worth that in appreciation, keeping the bonds between worlds woven strong.

The Powers of the Hunt

Brun Russellson

As a man who both holds troth to the Vanir, and lives a very rural life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, where I hunt, gather and grow a significant portion of my diet, I have found great comfort and need in what I have come to think of as "The Powers of the Hunt." In my life this is comprised of Skadhi, Ullr and Herne. Many Heathens show surprise at my mention of Herne, but as is made clear throughout this writing, the gnosis of many who hold true to the ways of the Vanir find Herne at the very heart of their tribe. I see him as the Great Father of the Vanir, Power before Power, whose potency flows into Ullr and Skadhi (his heirs among the folk whose cultures would eventually evolve into what we know as Germanic).

I cannot stress enough that the Vanir cannot, and will not, allow themselves to be pushed into a "agricultural fertility" shaped box and locked into stasis. In the "lore" age, to an agricultural people, the Vanir were seen most clearly in the actions of fertility that gave life to the fields and gardens, but they are ultimately so much more. They are the power of prosperity and the enjoyment of life itself. They flow through bodies joined in sexual union; the green shoots that rise in spring through winter-hardened earth; the abundance of the garden; the fecundity of sea and stream; and most definitely the claiming of meat for the tribe.

I do not personally engage in hunting for trophy or sport, but sustenance. As such, the blessing and guidance of the Powers of the Hunt and the Wights of the Land is vitally important in the feeding of my family. In the urban oriented life of the twenty-first century, sustenance hunting is certainly the exception rather than the norm, but then, so too is the very honoring of the Vanir.

For those who wish to learn to hunt (for practical or religious purposes) the very basics of the practice must be studied diligently and carried out with the utmost precision, for truly, this is a practice of life and death. When invoking the Powers of the Hunt there is no room for

laziness, sloppiness, or indifference. For when they are called upon for aid, and step forward to guide you in the hunt, the practice becomes a religious act. Like in blót or symbol, the actions of the hunt become layers in the great well and what is placed there will have power, for good or for ill.

Thus my advice for new or novice hunters is to hone your skills well through study, practice and apprenticeship. When I took up the hunt, I began with learning the use of a simple recurve bow. I spent many weeks at archery practice, took a course on bow hunting safety and queried those who had long used the bow in hunting. When the time for the hunt was upon me, I entered the forest with a close friend who had been successful in his hunt with the bow numerous times. I took my bow and quiver but armed my arrows only with “judo point” practice heads. With him I honed my ability to track and camouflage (both of which I had already studied for many years but never used in hunting) and engaged in two days of stump shooting target practice. When he did indeed bring down his elk, I assisted him in field dressing and removing the meat from the field. Throughout the remainder of the year I continued to practice the skills I had learned in preparation for the following seasons hunt.

When the time was again upon me to truly carry forth my own hunt, I crafted a simple ritual, which has been somewhat refined over the ensuing years.

A Ritual of the Sacred Hunt

Two days before the hunt is to actually begin, I slowly decrease my food consumption, eliminating all meat and dairy products from my diet. I utilize two simple meals each day, porridge in the morning, and a simple dish of vegetables and grain in the evening. I also consume copious amounts of water to assist my body in flushing toxins from my system.

The evening before the hunt begins I engage in a sauna purification, to again help remove toxins and any scent that I may be carrying. The use of the sauna as a ritual tool is an essay in and of itself and beyond the scope of my particular focus on the Hunt. Suffice to

say, sauna cleansing is a very important part of my own preparations. Yours may vary, as access to a sauna is not always possible.

As the day of the hunt arrives, I move to only one meal, taken in the morning, of pure water or tea and porridge. I pack pemmican (a traditional Native American preparation of fat, pounded meat and berries) as an emergency ration, but abstain from consuming it for as long as possible. Depending on how you are hunting, emergency rations may take on greater or lesser importance. I travel away from my home for several days at a time and live very primitively while on the hunt (constructing a natural shelter, calling fire solely by means of friction, etc.) If returning to home in the evenings, significant quantities of emergency rations may be less vital, though taking something along in case of emergency is always important. This Land does not suffer fools easily and romantic or naïve notions of living close to Nature with little but one's own skill and knowledge tend to end in pain and suffering if the individual(s) in question are not fully up to the challenge and reality of such a practice.

I rise before the sun and take in my meal for the day. Following this I cleanse myself in the smoke of mugwort and fain the Powers, offering mead and galdor to Herne, Ullr and Skadhi, requesting guidance and a steady hand, with words such as:

*Hail the Great Powers of the Hunt!
 You who my kin called upon in the Earliest of Ages.
 Great Herne, Ancient Power swollen with masculine strength,
 Greenman of the forest, who seeds life and demands death,
 Receive my praise:
 You are the Power that infuses the prey who roams the autumn woods,
 The predator circling round the oak,
 And the lifeblood that spills upon the ground each season.
 You who stood among the first and shall withdraw last.
 Father of human and beast,
 Father of gods — may I honor your presence always.
 Hail Herne!
 Wuldor, Ancient and Wise!*

*Silent One, who moves through mountain glades, ever watchful:
 Old is your blood, descended from the Green, and sound is your wisdom.
 May I heed it always, as you heed the call of the wild places,
 And walk in the embrace of those who have come before me.
 Friend to the warrior who stands in defense, in defiance of wrong.
 May I embody your strength, and might, and courage.
 Hail Wuldor!
 Sceadu³⁸, Mistress of the hunt and the fierce winter wind:
 May I follow your example and always hold the wilderness within myself,
 my spirit free and untamed.
 May I never compromise myself nor shy away from that which must be done
 out of fear or uncertainty.
 May my aim, and my will be true, as you have taught me.
 May your power and strength shine forth and encourage my own
 As I seek the elder ways, and the honor the Hunt!
 Hail Sceadu!
 Powers Three, guide me now as I set forth, endeavoring to take life that my
 family might live. Embrace me in this effort, guiding my heart, my mind, my
 hand, that I may bring honor to my name and that of my ancestors!*

I then travel to the site of the hunt, an area that I know intimately (having hunted, camped and hiked in often) and likewise knows me. As I enter the forest I always leave an offering for the Land Wights, greeting them and informing them of my purpose. If, for any reason, it comes to my attention that the Wights are not supportive, I will alter the location of my hunt. But, assuming their agreement and cooperation, the hunt begins.

Each morning I take in my meal of porridge and end each day with a hot mug of herbal tea. Other than that, I consume only water, depending on the length of the hunt. If I am out for more than three days, I begin to set small traps and snares around my camp and if successful will consume what is captured (primarily mice and other rodents) as an evening meal. If these traps and snares are unsuccessful,

38 Anglo-Saxon name for Skadhi.

I will begin to consume the pemmican and any edibles that I forage during the day.

I have hunted with bow, recurve bow, and rifle (depending on what I am hunting and what I feel called to). And while I prefer the aesthetic and challenge of the bow, I'm equally appreciative of the efficiency of a rifle or shotgun. I have never hunted with a spear, though I hope to someday. Regardless of method, my approach is nearly identical; a combination of stalking and the use of blinds. Other approaches are, of course, equally valid.

My time on the hunt is, obviously, spent in contemplation and silence. I try to reflect on Herne, Ullr and Skadhi and open myself to any communication or guidance they may have to share. In the evenings, if hunting alone, I tend to make music and offer song to the Land. If with friends, then of course, we also share camaraderie around the fire.

Should the hunt prove successful, I immediately give thanks and begin the proper process of field butchering the animal. When complete I again fain Herne, Skadhi and Ullr (I keep a small flask with me for this purpose). I also offer tobacco to the Land Wights, and seat myself for several moments to smoke my own pipe in honor of all that has occurred. I recognize that this is not "lore based", however I enjoy smoking a pipe and also find that almost everywhere I have traveled in the continental United States, the Wights have appreciated tobacco (and not responded as well to offerings of alcohol).

Upon returning home, I host a symbel recounting and boasting of the hunt to close the ritual, and if time permits will again take in the sauna. Life then shifts "back to normal".

My lifestyle and interest is such that I really am able to utilize most parts of the animal claimed. I brain tan the hides for drum heads or clothing, use many of the bones for fishing hooks or other implements, and consume not only the meat but many organs as well. What truly can't be used I place out as an offering to the animals and Wights that share my mountain home. Of course, this may not be practical for all hunters.

The above is but a rough outline for honoring a Sacred Hunt,

intended to spark the readers' own creativity. It has served me well and kept myself and my loved ones well fed and connected to the "wilder" Powers. May it be so for you as well.

A Vanic Handparting

Svartesól

One thing that is notable about Heathens be they Aesic, Vanic, or other, is we all take our oaths very seriously. Njord and Frey were sworn to on the oath ring in Iceland (ref. *Landnamabok*), and Ullr is another Deity who was associated with the oath ring. Because it involves oaths and people's lives, one should not ever rush into a marriage, nor should one take marriage oaths if there is doubt. When Heathens marry, it should be with the intention of staying together and both sides actively maintaining love, understanding, harmony, encouragement and support for one another. It should be with the intention of not divorcing except when there is harm done. It is hoped that a Heathen - and especially a Vanatrúar who understands love as the force of life - would not intentionally do harm to their spouse. Yet sometimes even with the best intentions, things don't work out, and it is best for the couple to go their separate ways to reduce or prevent harm. Just as Njord and Skadhi ended Their marriage, there is room in a Vanic practice for a marriage ending due to "irreconcilable differences".

This is a rite to perform a handparting in a Vanic context before one's Kindred or at least in the presence of supportive witnesses (both supportive to the handparting itself as well as to a Heathen framework if not necessarily Heathen themselves). This rite assumes both partners have mutually agreed to end the marriage on frithful terms. This rite should not be performed if the partners cannot stand the sight of each other and/or there is potential danger from one to the other; one's Goði or Gyðja should then assist with performing a solitary handparting.

This particular handparting ritual itself, regardless of the gender/s of those separating, should be performed by a male and female officiating as priest and priestess (not necessarily ordained clergy nor necessarily married to one another), who are aware of the sensitive nature of the rite and can properly raise warding as well as caring energy around the couple separating.

Preparation

- The couple will take off their wedding rings and place them on the altar, which should be bare save a representation of Njord and Skadhi.
- A man and a woman of reasonable bodily strength will be assigned by the priest and priestess to dig a hole when it is time, and there should be a shovel to assist in the task.

Ritual Outline

1. The priest will invoke Njord:

*Hail to Njord, King of the Vanir,
 Father of Frey and Freyja.
 As you longed for the sea and could not live with Skadhi in the mountains,
 we call to You for understanding,
 to give (Spouse1) and (Spouse2) peace of mind with this decision
 to separate their ways and live apart.*

2. The priestess will invoke Skadhi:

*Hail to Skadhi, Warrior Queen,
 Daughter of Thjazi, Mistress of Thrymheim.
 As you longed for the mountains and could not live with Njord by the sea,
 we call to You for strength,
 to give (Spouse1) and (Spouse2) courage with this decision
 to separate their ways and live apart.*

3. The priestess then speaks:

We gather here to recognize the handparting of (Spouse1) and (Spouse2). It is the way of the Vanir to love only by free will, and the time has come that their will is to travel different paths. And so, we come to honor their decision.

4. The gathered folk are seated in a circle. Each former partner should share what they have learned from the marriage, memories of favorite events, of their children of any, achievements, changes and growth. They should go back and forth until neither has anything more to add. Tissues should be ready in the event of tears.

5. The gathered folk move outside, with the former partners walking behind the priest and priestess. The priest and priestess will bear the rings. At this time a man and a woman previously assigned by the priest and priestess should dig a hole in the ground. The priest will take both the rings and the priestess will hold the bowl full of salt water, for the priest to cleanse the rings. As each ring is dipped in the water, the priestess will say:

Let these rings be washed clean of (Spouse1) and (Spouse2), let the waters flow from the well of Wyrd to wash away tied threads.

6. The priest places the rings in the hole in the ground and says:

We place these rings in the womb of Nerthus, there to rest and be transformed, to nourish the fertile Earth that something new will sprout, and bloom in season. As these rings are buried, we declare the marriage of (Spouse1) and (Spouse2) to be dead.

Those who dug the hole will cover the hole with earth.

7. Each partner now will speak of their plans for the future, and the gathered folk should feel free to offer support and encouragement.

8. The priestess will then embrace each partner and wish them Godspeed. She then stands before both of them and says before the gathered folk:

In the name of Njord and Skadhi, the marriage is ended. May you each go forth in peace and freedom to create new lives with the love and support of

your friends. May you meet again with healed hearts, and in frith.

9. The procession will move away from the mound of buried rings, in silence and not looking back. The former partners will leave the ritual site separately.

Land-Taking Ritual

Eosin

When someone moves to a new area to live, it's appropriate to have a land-taking ritual for a good start. The land-taking isn't about 'taking' in terms of conquest, but rather a dedication to the purpose of living there peacefully. It's as much about spiritually cleansing the space and making peace with the local wights as it is about declaring one's new home.

There have been many variations of the land-taking ritual over time, but they all have certain elements in common. The first is bringing significant objects (often religious objects) from the old home to the new one. One version of this from original Heathen practice is tossing the High Seat pillars from the old home overboard before coming ashore, waiting until they washed ashore, and building the new home where the pillars were found³⁹. Some earth from under the pillars or otherwise from the hof grounds would also be carried to the new place. In modern practice, this can be any objects of personal importance that represent the place being 'home'.

The second element is claiming the property by marking the boundaries. In most cases, the boundaries of a property are already reasonably marked, but a spiritual marking may also be done by placing poles, stones, or even ceremonial tools or symbols at the boundaries. Also, for the purposes of the ritual, candleholders, lanterns, or mounted torches may be placed at these boundary markers.

The third element is hallowing the new land. This is done by carrying fire, in a candle or torch, along the boundary of the property. Along the way, the carried fire may be used to light candles or torches (or even campfires if appropriate) placed along the boundary. This goes both for the outer boundaries of the property and the boundaries of a designated sacred space, such as a hof. Fire is very symbolic of cleansing and change, and it works well for this purpose.

³⁹ As in the account of Ingólfr Arnarson, in *Landnamabok*.

One additional element of land-taking is 'holding sacred' certain natural features (waterfalls, boulders, natural clearings or groves, prominent or unusual trees, etc.) that either evoke an air of sanctity on their own, or give a felt presence of landwights or energy. These places would have blots or fainings on or near them (as also noted by Tacitus), to hold the land sacred, to make offerings to the landwights, and/or to provide a suitable place for future rituals.

On the choice of Deities to invoke, it can be one of personal preference. An easy choice would be Frey and His wife Gerda for most home situations, or for farmland, but there may be other considerations. Freya would be a good choice for ritual space intended for magical work. Ullr would be good either for hunting or for martial training space. Njord would be good for a home by the sea. Skadhi would be good for a home in the mountains. Nerthus would be good for places with prominent earth features, as well as lakes or ponds. Wayland would be good for a workshop, especially a smithy. If one has a God as a *fulltrui*, that God would be an obvious choice for invocation. And one can either invoke a God for the whole property and ritual, or different ones for particular spaces on the property.

The Ritual

Decide on the Deities to be invoked that are most appropriate, the boundary marker locations, the markers to be used and their significance, and whether flame will be placed at certain key markers, whether with candles or other means. Also have an appropriate drinking horn or goblet and mead or other suitable drink, and an offering bowl.

--If large significant items are to be placed, plan the ritual to begin after they have been installed. Also place the boundary markers so that they will be secure. Smaller significant items may be brought and placed before the ritual begins.

--Goði or other person leading the ritual:

Hail, the Gods of old!

Hail the Gods of the Vanir!

Hail (primary God or Gods)!

Hail the landwights!

We call to you from this place in Midgard (or Middle Earth).

We come here in frith, for a peaceful future,

we come here to honor you and what you represent,

we come here to claim this land for our health and prosperity,

we come here to hallow this land and the life it brings,

we come here and to honor the landwights who share this land with us.

Hear our words, feel our main, and enjoy our offerings.

--Light the candle or torch to be carried around the property:

With this sacred fire, we purify and hallow this land, asking for your blessings upon it.

--The flame is carried along the boundary of the property or space to be hallowed. At each boundary marker, the candle or torch is lit if one is available there, and the above line is repeated. This may be said by a different person each time if a group is involved.

--After the flame has been carried all around the boundary, if there are additional places to be hallowed within the property, such as for significant work or religious significance, carry the flame to those places, lighting a candle there if one is available.

--Proceed to the place (or places) where ritual blót or fainings are to be held. Set the flame down safely, or hand it to someone who can hold it safely. Fill the horn with mead or other suitable drink:

We hereby consecrate this sacred place. Let there be frith, peace, and prosperity between us.

--Each person hails an appropriate God or Gods of choice for the situation, and the landwights, and takes a drink:

Take our offering, that you may enjoy it and share your blessings.

--Pour the remaining drink into the offering bowl.

--Goði: *This land has been dedicated, consecrated, and hallowed. The rite is ended. May peace prevail.*

The Purpose of Clergy, from a Vanic Perspective

Svartesól

Heathenry, as a whole, is still having debates 30+ years into its revival as to whether or not clergy is needed, or is an outmoded concept. The main arguments I have heard against the concept of Heathen clergy are

- that the hereditary position of Goði as a semi-spiritual leader/semi-chieftain/semi-lawyer is outmoded and not applicable to today, when most people are not born and raised in Heathenry and thus cannot generate a hereditary priesthood
- that it is a hangover of conditioning by Abrahamic religions
- that "Tru Heathens" do not need an intermediary between self and the Gods
- that the modern priesthood now serves as an "elite class" to debate theological matters not previously debated in elder Heathen times because life was too busy for such speculation, and is thus extraneous and cluttered
- that there is no need for lore interpreters, because most Heathens are home scholars

Without turning this entire article into a rebuttal, I would say first and foremost that while it is the ideal for Heathens to be well-versed in the lore, many have not more than a basic understanding of the Eddas and some of the Sagas; most have not read Saxo, Bede, Tacitus, and the extensive folklore from medieval and Renaissance-era Scandinavia, Germany, and England. We need to debate theological matters now because Heathenry has been effectively dead or at least dormant/underground for over a thousand years and most of our knowledge of what was done was lost, and what we do know of is largely not applicable to today and must be updated in some way. And while I think all people should strive for deeper connection with the Gods and be their own priests, the fact of the matter is most people

don't have a "God-phone" - if we were all mystics the world would stop functioning. Many people are in fact capable of being devoutly religious without having intense God-contact, and yet because of their devotion they deserve to at least periodically be able to be touched by the Gods - which is where I feel the true purpose of mystics, shamans, and spirit-workers comes to play.

If one is planning on becoming clergy in Heathenry, the first and foremost reason should be to serve Gods by serving the community. Obviously the ideal setting for a Heathen clergyperson will be one who is in a Kindred and perhaps an organization as well. There are now some folks who are solitary or mostly-solitary and have clients from far and wide, by the modern "virtues" of increased mobility, uprootings as a result of that (such as for work, military service, etc), decreased compatibility with those in one's immediate locale by way of increased mobility, and the Internet. I believe there is validity in this practice as times have changed and will continue to change as society "progresses". But ideally, one will be working with a reasonably-sized local group if they aspire to be clergy.

The wrong motivations for becoming clergy are to be elite or have some kind of renown. It should be seen as a way to contribute to the greater good.

A further requirement at least based in my own past (negative) experience is one who will put themselves out there as clergy needs to have their own shit together before they try to help anyone else. This is not to say the clergyperson cannot have issues, as that would be most of us, and there's something to be said about previously going through hardship to help those who are currently experiencing it. However, if continually bad mental or physical health or personal chaos is going to interfere with the ability to be there for others depending on you, and make good judgments when people come to you for advice, the role of priest is not one you should assume until things are more stable.

It goes without saying that a clergyperson should also be above reproach. If one has a serious criminal background or is otherwise notably flawed ethically, there is going to be doubts about your sincerity and capability. If you have a reputation as being an aggressive

shit-stirrer, it might also be a good idea to wait a few years and build up a good reputation rather than promoting oneself as clergy and finding it hard to gain "a following".

Again, it comes down to the greater good. If a person is not going to be able to serve a community, clergy is not the right choice, and selfishly insisting upon it and thrusting one's incompetency on others looking to you for guidance is quite frankly contributing to decay. There are other ways to be a part of something meaningful, without being in that sort of leadership position.

Skills for a Heathen clergyperson start with extensive knowledge of primary and secondary sources, being able to express their thoughts on its relevance, in a coherent and meaningful way, to apply it to the here-and-now rather than intellectual masturbation over semantics.

I also think having at least some sort of a "God-phone" is important. Doing ritual because "it's what our ancestors did" is not enough. A group ritual inevitably has to be led by someone, and the person leading the ritual should not speak words and go through the motions with a blank head and an empty heart. A person leading a ritual should think of themselves as a "conductor", both in the sense of electricity and orchestras. A ritual done properly will be satisfying for the people involved as well as pleasing to the Gods, and there should be enough know-how of meaning behind what is said and done, and how to feel and flow the energy raised, to be able to understand what is good and what is mediocre and what is not acceptable at all.

While again all of us should strive to be our own priests, some of us are better at leading a group than others. In fact, most people can't. That isn't meant to sound arrogant, but is a fact of life. The person with the "God-phone" should offer it to their group, as a master who leads, a servant who serves, and an equal who apart from the God-phone is no better or worse than their kinsmen. If the aspiring clergyperson can work *seiðr* or some other art where they can communicate with the Gods and pass the messages to Their people who seek such knowledge, so much the better.

And perhaps most importantly, a Heathen clergyperson should

have a good understanding of ethics and be able to give proper counsel to those in need. We live in very troubled times, now more so than any other time, even if life is longer and has more luxuries. People need encouragement and support. This is not the same thing as being allowed to drain from the clergyperson, and indeed clergy should have good boundaries with their clients as not to be taken advantage of. But oftentimes talking to a priest is more helpful than so-called "professionals" who have been trained in an atheistic system to push pills as the cure for all that ails a person, and so one who feels called by the Gods to become clergy should keep this in mind. It is the easiest part of the job to abuse, the most challenging if done properly but also most rewarding. In fact, this is why I am most opposed to the sentiment that Heathens don't need mediators. It takes full-time dedication to be there for other people who need counsel and rede, and to study and meditate enough in order to continually improve one's service.

Even if the system of hereditary clergy is not applicable to today, the fact of the matter is, the elder Heathen did in fact have clergy, and probably for all these reasons mentioned (except the primary sources then would have been stories passed down, that were originally someone's personal gnosis way back when - but still important for getting to know what a Deity is like). It's just common sense.

I have heard at least one person say that in the issue of Heathen clergy, one should honor all of the Gods equally. If we're looking at the lore, we see far too many examples of people called Freysgoði or Thorsgoði, including a woman named Steinunn Refsdottir who owned a temple to Thor and composed a flyting in His honor against Jesus. These were people dedicated in service to specific Gods. They most often had temples dedicated to these Gods. While it was common that an entire village would be dedicated to a God and under Their rule with certain customs, it was also common for people to travel to different temples to pay the Gods respect, a popular site being Gamla Uppsala. We can see the clergy dedicated to a specific God had general priestly functions but I also believe carried the energy and luck of that Deity within them to bless the people, and certain qualities that would

make them specialists. We know Frey was sacrificed to for marriage, and Odin for war. It makes more sense for a Frey-priest to bless a marriage, and an Odin-priest to bless an army. Among other things.

From a Vanic perspective, we see in the primary sources that Nerthus had an attending priest who lived in isolation on an island in communion with Her and came out only for Her yearly procession, and Frey had an attendant priestess who kept a temple as well as did His yearly procession and was oath-wed to Him. In *Hyndlulioð*, the human male Ottar is called Freya's "favorite", and Freya Herself speaks:

"An offer stead to me he raised,
with stones constructed;
now is that stone
as glass become.
With the blood of oxen
he newly sprinkled it.
Ottar ever trusted
in the Asyniur."

It is likely that Ottar was a priest-consort of Freya.

This is not to say that the Vanir never had priests who were the same gender as their Deity - we come again to the mention of people called Freysgodhi. Nor am I trying to dissuade those who feel called to the priesthood and Vanic Deities and happen to be the same gender as the Deity they serve. There are few enough people truly serving the Gods and community, for starters, and I won't presume to play Vanaheim's bouncer. However, it is notable that the priests of Frey at Uppsala who so horrified Starkadr were said to be "effeminate", and Tacitus mentions the worship of twin Gods whose priests cross-dressed. It would seem in a Vanic context that the ideal is either for the priest of a Deity to be of the opposite gender, or to cross-dress or break other gender roles when performing the Deity's services. I am not saying this is mandatory, and as Heathenry in the United States has become very gender-normative - with one well-known Heathen blogger who encourages women to be "traditional" and has gone as far as to scorn followers of Frigga who are childfree - this will likely raise some

eyebrows if not attract backlash. But as far as the cult of the Vanir, it does seem that at least with some Deities, They prefer this of Their priesthood.

Why? Well, the two things that define the Vanic cult are mysteries of sex and death, and the mysteries of gender in a Vanic priesthood seem inextricably bound up in both.

We know the Vanir are intensely sexual Deities. It does seem that in some cases, the priest or priestess of a Vanic Deity was also Their consort. The human priest as fully human, is a representative of humanity, a "door" between Midgard and the Otherworlds. In the full knowledge of one's human body, thoughts, emotions, and limitations, and still experiencing the Vanir God's love for that, both personal and yet impersonal... transformative and transcendent... draws Vanaheim's health and fertility into our world, the power and vitality of the Vanir into ourselves. It is a great honor to please and love the Gods, building up energy in that union, and then using the energy to bless the community. While again, the Vanir Gods can be served without all of the overtly sexual woo-woo, there is a charge from the love and lust between God and priest-consort, that is like nothing else in the Multiverse and is the stuff of fertility creating life itself, truly "a gift for a gift".

With regards to the connection between gender and death, Frey is sacrificed by His mother and sister, and in bygone times the Ing-man - most often strangled and bogged - would likely have been sacrificed by a female priestess. The Vanir cult of the Funnelbeaker/Ertebolle era likely had a strong shamanic component, and when examining shamanism in other cultures we see female shamans being able to handle men's tools and go into men's places without consequence, and male shamans being able to be around women in childbirth without consequence. Once one accepts full service of a Vanir Deity, there is often an initial trial period akin to a shamanic death-and-rebirth experience, and makes one both fully in this world and in the other, Wyrð-dead and body-alive, and "more human than human" - both male and female, and something that is "neither" or in-between. It seems that Vanir women are strong and forceful, the Vanir men are strong and

gentle. The Ertebolle/Funnelbeaker people were in that same mold where men and women did different work. However, it is typical of the Vanir, and likely reflects upon the Vanic priesthood when one serves a God and as such is a vessel for Them.

Serving the Vanir as priest, then, not only involves standard Heathen clergy skills, but a deeper understanding of the nature of sacrifice and what it is to be a sacrifice oneself, for to be touched by the Vanir - especially intimately - means one will never be the same. It is giving the bounty of the fertility Gods to the people, to teach the people to appreciate their embodiment. Priests of Aesic Deities usually have more of a responsibility to educate as well as be a ward for their tribe, but the gift of the Vanic priesthood to their own tribes is celebration, which is all too infrequent and half-hearted with the struggles of the world. Celebration to some extent encompasses mourning and grieving, which is another thing our modern society has forgotten in the need to stifle feelings for the convenience of other people, or work, or "life as usual". But it also encompasses the goodness of the world, and a Vanic priest may find themselves giving relationship counseling to their clients, or counseling on work/life balance, or anything that has to do with embodiment and living more fully and completely.

As the wains of the Vanir Gods go on processions through the roads of the world, so it is the duty of a Vanic priest to go the extra mile to bring the Gods to the people, for celebration and renewal. This is what I aspire to, as Frey has called me His priestess and I am currently receiving clergy training and building a small Kindred. I will show Frey how much His people still love Him, through my love, and give His love back to the world.

PART FOUR:

LIVING VANIC
WAYS



On Being a Vanic Druid

Svartesól

The thing that drew me to Vanatru was the Vanir Themselves. Freya was the first Deity who I really made a connection with, back in 1996. However, I didn't start working with the other Vanir until 2000, when I made my first offering to Njord, and then 2003 when Freya introduced me to Her brother. After the oath to Frey was formalized, I did the rounds of getting to know His family, and found Them to be different from the Aesir, and different in a good way. In fact, the distinction was noted even when I was working primarily with Freya, that Her attitudes and perceptions were different from Odin's and Thor's, and very different from Frigga's. She made references to it being "the way of My people", and later I found that to be very true of the Vanes.

Due to being "a Vanic wackadoo", as one acquaintance of mine called it, I myself was a solitary for exactly 4 of the 8 years I've identified as Heathen, at the time of this writing. At this point in time I am changing that, but it was hard for me to have to endlessly justify my leaning towards the Vanes to potential Kindred mates, and then my solitary practice to others. Indeed, nobody should have to justify their Path to anyone else, but I found that while the Aesir are Gods of society, the Vanir are sometimes community-minded and sometimes not. There are some of us who are not joiners, and it's always been this way, but in the 21st century joiners and non-joiners alike have some unique challenges. Sharing Gods does not a co-religionist make; Folkish Joe, Militant Vegan Sally, and Theodish Ted may all have Frey as a patron, but that doesn't necessarily mean I am going to be comfortable in ritual space with them. A frictional ritual space creates a ritual polluted with negative energy, which is offensive to the Gods and in turn warps the luck of those in the ritual. Even if you can compromise on some ideological issues, there's always the issue of personality conflicts. And so, there are solitary practitioners.

That being said, it seems to be a common belief within the

Northern Tradition, particularly Asatru/Heathenry, that a solitary practice is to be discouraged, and one has to be part of a Kindred. If there's a Kindred in your area, you have to at least check it out. If there's not a Kindred in your area, you have to be the one to start it. Now, I think the Northern Tradition as a whole has to be at least somewhat community-minded, in that your actions not only bear on your honor, but affect other people whether directly or indirectly. However, with that in mind, there were no Kindreds in pre-Christian Scandinavia, Germany, England, etc. There were priest who led the Blót on the holytides, and served in the capacity of a spiritual advisor (as well as law-giver) to the people in their locality, and the regular folk assembled on the major holy tides and at the Thing, but people primarily did their religious activity at home (as in the Álfablót, and votive offerings to wights, ancestors, personal Gods), and other people were free to participate or not as they saw fit.

So, what is a solitary Vanatrúar supposed to do? In my research I've come across the archetype of the hedgewitch. You've seen it before: the word "hedgewitch" literally means "witch of the hedge", that is the witch who dwells in the borderlands between the village and the wild wood. We know that the practice of witchcraft was widespread through Europe and particularly Northern Europe, as the Church immediately post-conversion (especially in Anglo-Saxon England) issued a number of edicts illustrating practices that were now forbidden. We can also assume the practice of witchcraft was there before the Dark Ages: in the Bronze Age a burial site of a woman was found to contain a claw-joint of a lynx, the bones of a weasel, spinal joints of snakes, horses' teeth, a rowan twig, a broken knife blade, and two pieces of iron pyrite, all of which were apparently believed to possess magical abilities.

The role of Witch in a Vanic Tradition is sacred. It is sacred to bless and protect the home, it is sacred to win love and keep love, it is sacred to have enjoyable sex, it is sacred to heal and to ensure good health, it is sacred to have one's needs met as well as some of the things that are wanted. It is sacred to live a good life, to enjoy the gift of life itself and the bounty of the Earth. Certainly magic should not be used

in the place of non-magical action (as in the classic example of doing a spell to get a job, and then sitting on the couch rather than filling out applications and going to interviews), but as an enhancement it works quite well because of the intent behind it, working symbolic/sympathetic magic on the Web of Wyrd, as well as "programming" the brain to make goals more tangible, or feel more secure, or loved, or whatever you like.

There are other, more ancient words to describe this way -- *hagazusa*, *haegtessa*... but none have been so deeply ingrained in our subconscious as Witch. *The word Witch is a powerful word.*

Being a Witch is to own the archetype and own one's power within -- to be empowered, having "power with" the ways of this World. If more of us owned our personal power rather than giving it away to others to be used, abused, and otherwise not-appreciated, we would be a lot happier and healthier... we would know wholeness. To be a hedgewitch is to live in two worlds, and find balance - completion - in the space where these worlds intersect. If one is seeking to practice Vanatru in a solitary tradition, I think the path of the hedgewitch is worth looking into, and indeed this worked for me for a number of years.

However, I am a longtime devotee of Frey, and we know from primary sources that Frey had an organized priesthood: people who had the name of Freysgodhi, as well as Frey's priestess-wife noted in *Gunnar Helming's Saga*, as well as the account of Starkad who was offended by Frey's (probably gay) priests, and the people at Thrandheim who kept horses in Frey's honor and refused to hew down their statue of Him at Olav's demand.

By contrast, His sister, as the mistress of *seiðr*, seemed to be more the patron of the traveling *spae*-wives, *seiðkonas*, and *völven*, who had no temple but rather made their rounds giving service (or, in some cases, stirring up shit) for those who wanted it and would pay or barter for it.

As Frey is a frith-weaver, it makes sense that He would encourage His people to build structured community, whereas Freya as a more independent Goddess has "free agents" who come and go as

need and payment dictates.

And so, Frey being Himself, He's been pulling me in from the fringe and I don't get the option of hiding there anymore. I still think (for the record) that the path of the hedgewitch is still very much a valid one in Vanic practice, but, there is more than one way to be Vanic, and it will largely depend on Who you're working with and how you're working with Them.

Recently a friend of mine had an issue with the fact that I have chosen to call myself a Vanic Druid. His opinion is that the Druids are Celtic and moreover that Druidry is part of Neopaganism.

If we examine the history of the Northlands, as noted in *A Northern Tradition Timeline*, we see a lot of overlap and intersection between the Pre-Germanic and Pre-Celtic peoples, especially with the Hallstatt/La Tène cultures. While there is a distinction between the later Germanic and Celtic religions, there are also certain things in common, such as the use of torcs to signify leadership, the boar as an animal of prosperity as well as a battle standard, and the importance of poetry. Even among cultures such as the Hellenes who valued a good hymn, there is something about the Celtic bards and the Nordic skalds (and Saxon scopos) which suggests song was an important religious practice before recorded history, when the cultures overlapped. Indeed, it is worth noting that the mead of sacred poetry was brewed from the blood of Kvasir, formed in the truce-spittle of Ase and Vane, and was in possession of Gunnlod, an etin-woman, won by Woden, and I believe the mead was sexually charged by Herself and Woden for the maximum of ecstasy. This was when song evolved into structured poetry, the art bent and shaped like Wyrð itself.

Moreover, the Anglo-Saxon words *dryhten* and *drycraeft* are cognate with "Druid". Even without this knowledge, there are accounts from authors such as Tacitus describing practices among the Germanic peoples that look suspiciously like what we know of Druidry.

Flash back to my youth. For Christmas 1988, when I was 8 years old, I received a book on Greco-Roman mythology. My favorite myth was about Pomona and Vertumnus, being Deities with obvious connections to nature. From the time I was very young, I saw "shiny

people outside” including our house-wight, who much later in life came with me out to CA (that warrants a post in and of itself). The mythology book got the wheels in little Siggybrain turning about whether or not these old Gods were still worshiped, and if not They should be. While I enjoyed the ceremonies of Mass in my year of Catholic school, I didn’t enjoy being lectured about going to Hell on a regular basis.

At the age of 11 I began to tell people I was a Druid. This was without knowing anything about extant Pagan traditions or orders such as OBOD. I considered myself to be a Druid because I liked to spend time outdoors, communing with nature, and indeed as I frequently got my ass kicked on the way home from school, I got very good at hiding in the woods and would ask the nature spirits to protect me. I got into the habit of leaving offerings for the trees, and my time in nature comforted me when I was bullied in school and then went home to be bullied some more.

I began exploring Wicca at age 15 and one of the things that attracted me was it being noted as “an Earth-centered religion”. However as the years went on and I met Wiccans, a lot of them were afraid to get their hands dirty and only seemed to like nature when it was convenient. I, myself, enjoyed bare feet in the mud, dancing in the rain, playing in the snow.

When I professed Heathenry at age 20, I saw no reason to stop calling myself a Witch or to renounce my ties to nature, yet over and over again I was told “Asatru is not a nature religion”. And I do think this is pretty accurate. The Aesir are Gods of civilization and society, not Gods of nature. Thor’s lightning is used very much the same way as a police officer uses a taser. Odin may bring storms and high winds with the Wild Hunt and His name of Wodanaz may be connected to stormwinds, but He is also just as much at home in a meadhall.

The Vanir, on the other hand, appealed to that part of me that wanted to commune with nature. I saw this in Freya, both being a Goddess unafraid to wield Her sexuality, and using that sexuality to create beauty in the Worlds. I saw this in Njord, at the ocean, finding peace in the ebbing and flowing tides, and encouraging others to make

peace for someday you too will be washed away by the tides of time. And finally I saw this with Frey, both as Green Man of growing things and Golden One of the harvest. Over time I met the other Vanes, including Nerthus and then those Deities I strongly suspect to be Vanir, such as Ullr. Indeed, They all had connections to nature, tamed and untamed, and it spoke to those parts of my soul that embraced nature as a solace in my youth. The wights were important to Them, as well as the elements, the flora and fauna, both of Vanaheim as well as all the other worlds, including and especially Midgard.

The Vanir are not "just" nature Gods, of course; obviously the Vanir are intelligent enough to realize we live in the 21st century. Most of us live in urban or suburban areas, not rural. The Vanir do call people in these places. It is not a prerequisite to have a green thumb or be an ecological activist if one follows the Vanir. That being said, it does seem like a lot of the Vanic connection to nature does rub off on Their devotees. I live in the suburbs but I also try to live as "green" as possible (especially because it's cheaper), I pick up litter around my neighborhood, and I garden. I've also found some of this extends into things like my hobbies: homemade is better than storebought, both for the effort and creator's joy put into it, but also is more resource-friendly.

Vanatru doesn't mean giving up cars or flushing toilets, to go live in a hut and eat berries. Indeed, the frith-truce between the Aesir and Vanir could be seen as Aesir "technology" which makes our lives a bit more convenient, and certainly less difficult, with the advances of civilization over the generations. However, Vanatru does mean trying to do "damage control" with our current environmental issues, while still being friendly to human life. It means being aware of the interconnectedness of all things. We do not have dominion over nature like some Christians would claim, but rather we are interdependent on nature, the flora and fauna around us. Even in the most urban places, there is still plant and animal life, and we are still using local water supply which needs to be reasonably clean, as well as often getting our food shipped from elsewhere, and actions in one place set off reactions in another. The Vanir encourage responsibility to keep the cycle intact.

The Aesir can teach you about society and your place among

other human beings, as an individual, but the Vanir can teach you about how the concept of "frith", in eldritch times, wasn't just because too much conflict was unpleasant but because it was often deadly. Interdependence is also with other humans, who are part of the life and death cycle. You don't need to run a popularity contest, obviously, but having some kind of support system or at least being decent to your fellow human is a way to start. And for this reason, "frith" often means knowing who to avoid, or deal with infrequently.

When you work with the Vanir on a regular basis, you may see these themes recurring in your life, as a primary focus:

--A proper relationship with food. A large part of the battle for good health is eating healthfully. While I feel that the most proper way to eat is food that is organically and locally grown, and has been ethically raised, for most Americans this is an ideal rather than being realistic. With an organic garden, most of my vegetables will be organic and raised by me, which helps out significantly (especially cost-wise), but organic meat can be very expensive and my metabolism doesn't seem to like being vegan very well. I asked Frey and Nerthus about this. I have tried to eliminate most junk food out of my diet save the occasional "treat" which I have to earn to get in the first place, and I have made a conscious effort to eat as natural a diet as possible. In the event that I absolutely cannot get a food product that is organic, local, and ethical, and going without it would deprive my body of nutrients it needs, it is best to pray over the food. Kitchen witchery can be of assistance here because all food is charmed and blessed, and a prayer of grace before eating can "cover a multitude of sins". One of my "duties" as a kitchen witch is to provide recipes with spells for others, so they also can be mindful of their food.

--A proper relationship with sexuality. This is of particular note in the United States which was built on Puritan ethics (e.g. sex-negative attitude) yet supposedly to be "sex-positive" women are encouraged to exploit and degrade themselves. Sexuality is a sacred thing, a gift of the Vanir. The important thing with sex is not so much who you do it with or how you do it, but why. Attitude really is everything, and it is important to be able to enjoy sex without placing one's entire self-worth

on having sex or not having sex. It, like every other activity of life, should be part of a complete whole, rather than too much emphasis placed on or away from it.

--Building and maintaining proper relationships with others. To give a short explanation of this, it is an acknowledgment that no man is an island, and conversely, you can't please all of the people all of the time. In terms of friends, it is better to have quality rather than quantity, and to be civil and cordial to others until there has been clear harm done to self or kin. Once that line has been crossed, it is better to not have harmful people in one's worldspace, and this can be resolved more easily than many would care to realize (in other words, not involving too much drama). One does not have to withdraw from the world nor does one have to immerse oneself in the crowds, but only realize the interconnectedness of all things and find a comfort point there. It is easier for a person to be responsible and respectable if they are not overburdened, and improper dealings with people can cause a heavy burden. There is a time for solitude and there is a time for connection, and all things should be in balance.

--Building and maintaining a proper relationship with the Earth itself. This is easier said than done, in the modern age. I try to minimize damage done in some of my lifestyle habits. I recycle and I have a compost pile. I turn lights off when not using them, and as I mentioned, I have an organic garden. I have a water cooler rather than buying bottled water (plastic) or drinking tap water (chemicals). I use mostly homemade household cleaners, which is cheaper besides being "green". I pick up litter in natural places. That sort of thing. Now, I am not a "bleeding heart", I do understand that some destruction and death in the ecology is necessary because overpopulation also disrupts the natural balance. But the environment is still in bad shape, so I am trying to do what I can that is realistic, and not beating myself up for not doing enough because that doesn't serve any purpose.

Vanatru, in sum, is about connection. It is very much like planting seeds, setting roots, and growing up towards the light of the Sun. It has been very healing for me, as I live with PTSD, in the full knowledge that tragedy happens and the world is not always safe. But,

I am willing to keep pressing on, to see the good around me, and be some of the good in this world. The Vanir ultimately encourage the attitude that life in the world is good, neither to be escaped through notions of “salvation” nor a burden of suffering to be transcended through “enlightenment”. There are many problems in our world, but losing connections to the world doesn’t help matters.

It seems that the Vanir do fit the Druidic model quite well, if we agree that the Druids were animists, they revered the elements as well as flora and fauna, doing rites on a seasonal cycle, and seemed to practice human sacrifice which is known to be a key element of the Vanic cultus (such as lake and bog sacrifices made to Nerthus). Obviously today I wouldn’t be practicing human sacrifice, but the Gods are aware enough of our times to accept other things as substitute. And I find not only have the Vanir not complained about my practice, but Frey has encouraged a more formal structure, with more focus on nature. It needs to be said that I am not reconstructing Druidism as it was then, as a good deal of information has been lost and I personally get very skeptical of anyone claiming to practice anything really ancient, especially something like Druidry where extant information is nebulous at best.

To me, being a Druid is about being in nature, and in the sacred places of nature “rending the veil” between worlds, using the liminality of the wild to create a door where the Gods may come forth, the wights may be perceived, and even the beloved dead if they wish to participate. It is about priestcraft done well, given as a beautiful offering to the Gods and wights, as well as giving something meaningful to the people to carry with them long after the rituals are done.

I am not reconstructing Druidism as it was then, as a good deal of information has been lost and I personally get very skeptical of anyone claiming to practice anything really ancient, especially something like Druidry where extant information is nebulous at best. I am not a member of any Druidic order (although I’ve got friends who are), and do not claim to be doing Druidry as it was done (again, even people in orders are not doing it exactly as it was done), but from what

I know of historical Druidry - what little information there is available - there are things that "fit" very well with the Vanes.

There are even more ways, yet, to be Vanic, to honor the Vanir in a solitary or community setting, and both ways have their usefulness, largely depending on which of the Vanir you are working with most, and what They want from you. This is my way, for now. I encourage you to develop your own way, as the important thing is that the Vanes are honored, that our faith be not confined to a musty mouldering textbook, but is living, and relevant for today. We need the Vanir, and They desire a place in our world. By learning from Them, and finding the solace of nature in my youth, and applying it to today, I have found a balm for my soul.

On the Long Road to Vanaheim

Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð

Disclaimer: The following is highly personal information and UPG, and should be taken with appropriate saline concentrations.

Way back when, when I was just a little tyke, I was living in a very bad place. I wouldn't find out until later, but my upbringing was in a cult environment, which has had several unsavory effects on my psychology. But even then, I was an avid outside person, and loved it just as much as I did the books that let me escape while inside. I have very little memory of anything before about age 8; yet since then, nature and animals and mythology have always held more of a draw to me than the stuffy, repressive Protestant fringe that I was surrounded by the rest of the time.

As I grew older, I started chafing at my religious bondage, mostly exacerbated by my discovery of sexuality and gender, and my own "abominable" version of that (for the record, I am a gay androgynous bio-male with a heavy kinky side, none of which was approved of). I was actually introduced to the concept of paganism through M. Z. Bradley's *Mists of Avalon*, and fell in love with it. I quickly moved out of the neo-Wicca stage and into Druidry when I entered college. I joined ADF, and attached myself (and some friends) to the local grove.

Personally, I was still exploring, and had started forming a relationship with Brighid, Who tolerated my latching onto Her, and Who led me to other of the Celtic Gods. Eventually, I found my way to Celtic Reconstructionism, and formed bonds with several lovely people. At that time, I was sure I had found my niche, because I was (and am) absolutely in love with everything Celtic... except haggis. I had my "patrons," Brighid and Aranrhod and An Dagda and Badb, and was working with Manannán and Airmed to strengthen certain reciprocities between us.

Then, everything started changing. I'd always been someone who could talk to Them with only a little effort, but nothing really had been out of the ordinary until July '07, when I went on one of my semi-

regular journeys to Celt-land. When I arrived there, I was met by a Celtic God that I had never encountered before personally. We talked, and He offered me a drink of something. Being the God that brews the Ale of Immortality, I was suspicious of His motives; I took the tankard, but didn't drink it. He then told me I was expected at the *Brú na Bóinne*, the Dagda's palace (and the site of Newgrange in actual Ireland). When I arrived, I was met by a man who escorted me inside, and who I was quickly to find out was Óengus Mac ind Óg, the Dagda's son. The journey ended with Him taking me aside and us having sex.

From that moment on, my spiritual, and physical, life became a roller-coaster. I had a major falling out with two people I cared about greatly, and had a resurgence of major abandonment and self-worth issues that I had been repressing. February of the next year, He asked me to marry Him; shortly afterward, I met Svartesól on LiveJournal. In April of '08, while walking a labyrinth, I was ambushed by a party of Norse Gods, Who had a message for me from Odin. As the weeks and months went on, I started becoming more and more involved with certain of the Northern Tradition Gods, and discovered Raven Kaldera's website and books on the subject, as well as continuing conversations with Svartesól and others on LiveJournal.

I was getting in good with Odin, as well as having friendly relationships with Loki and Freyja through the summer. Then, in August, I attended Eitinmoot, where I met several people I had known online, including Svartesól, and made new friendships with others. I was still convinced at the time that Odin was the one Who was calling to me most, though I was starting to feel the beginnings of my infatuation with Loki.

In November, I came down with a two-week-long nasty case of respiratory illness. At the beginning, before it actually hit, Freyja came to me suddenly and warned me that I was sick. Later, She and Eir checked in on me every couple of days, and were doing things to help me heal faster, and quite possibly keep me from dying, as I have no health insurance and could not afford antibiotics. However, through the whole delirious ordeal, something She said to me stuck out: "We care for Our own."

I'd been feeling a slight pull towards the Vanir for a little while, but had brushed it off based on some things Frey and Odin had said to me. But after that statement by Freyja, it got a lot stronger. Then, the day before Yule, I went on a journey to Vanaheim, my second time there (the first time was to work out a deal with Frey on behalf of a friend at Lammas). A lot of things occurred between me and Herself, including more sex and Her being assigned as my mentor, as well as another visit from Óengus, Who had backed off when I started working with the Northern Tradition gods. Then, as soon as I had finished the journey, Nerthus barged in, and claimed me as Her own, and revealed that She was the one Who had assigned Freyja to teach me. The next day, Njord pulled me to Nóatún, and we had a talk about Nerthus' claim. Then Nerthus came again, and talked more about what Her claim meant.

The Vanir have always been nice to me. I do have to admit that I never thought the Norse Gods would ever want anything to do with me, because They always seemed too belligerent and macho for a non-aggressive, *ergi* bookworm; They have showed and taught me otherwise. And now, I really have come Home. Vane-home is my home, and the Vanir my People.

My Vanic Way

Brun Russellson

I have always felt dislocated and adrift in urban environments. I crave a lifeway that is as unmediated as possible, a lifeway that is real and raw and dripping scents and colors. For me, such a life is most readily found in dwelling as close to the cycles of the Earth as possible.

When I am following the track of an animal, or gathering berries at the edge of the forest, or pulling onions and carrots from the bed of Earth that has incubated them; when I align every fiber of my being with that of the white tail deer I am stalking in the hunt, when my nostrils flare at the sharp scent of blood as I draw my knife between skin and muscle in the butchering process; when I plunge into the icy flow of a mountain stream; when I strip to the waist in order to better stand the heat of the kitchen as we turn apples and pears and peaches into jams and butters and preserves; when I lay in the open meadow beneath the light of a full moon and take in a sky awash in starlight; I am alive.

And when I call out to the Great Powers—to Nerthus and Njord, Frey and Freya, when I tip my horn and send mead in a sweet, steady stream upon the Earth; when I drum and sing their praises before a blazing fire; when I dance, and tone, and offer galdor; when I make love with my mate amidst the garden beds; when I laugh with friends around the hearth; when I wander amidst the Mountains and lose track of the passage of time; when I rise with the sun and offer prayers of gratitude; I am alive.

And in the process of being alive in these vibrant, timeless ways, I transcend the life of quiet desperation I once knew in the suburban tract home of my childhood or the soulless urban jungle of my youth. There is a spirit that simply living in the above manner brings me into contact with. And in that spirit I feel the line of my ancestors stringing out across the darkened ridgelines and into the star filled sky. I bathe in the sun and the moon and feel the gaze of the Vanadis urging me to shed my clothes and roll about in the grasses. To

plunge my hands into the rich soil of the garden is to touch Nerthus and take her wisdom into my being. To harvest while the air takes on a crisp edge and the leaves burst into color is to contact Frey at his most vibrant.

This is my Vanic way, hard fought and hard won. And even at the end of a hard day, when drought and infestation has spoiled the crop and the tracks I have been following circle back on themselves, when pollution from the West obscures the evening stars, when illness dulls my senses and makes even the most simplistic of tasks a confusing tangle of frustration, I wouldn't trade it for the most luxurious condo in New York or Los Angeles.

Why I am Vanic

Eosin

For a long time, since I was very young, I've had leanings toward different aspects of Heathenry, particularly Anglo-Saxon. This developed in various fits and starts over the years, but began to make more sense in adulthood. I finally clarified the direction as specifically Anglo-Saxon in 1998, which continued to the present. Yet there are various reasons why I label my current practice Vanic. Rather than a dry definition, it has to do with many things that work together.

Looking at the historical Anglo-Saxons and their related cultures, it is apparent that the cultures were prominently Vanic. The tribes that became the Anglo-Saxons were predominantly the Ingvaeones mentioned by Tacitus. As is suggested by such a name, Ingui-Frey was honored in Britain, with carved boars, horses, figures with antlers, and other such symbols showing widespread worship. Although Odin/Woden figures prominently in Heathen lore, Frey was a primary deity in Britain, Sweden, and other places. In addition, other archaeological evidence, such as burial mounds, are indications of a Vanic culture.

Two of the primary Vanic deities, often considered the most prominent, are Frey and Freya. Each one is a powerful symbol. They not only represent fertility and sexuality, but together, they also represent material prosperity, military success, magic and divination, and other important things. In an Anglo-Saxon context, with Ingui-Frey, we see His worship across the island. The land there is very fertile, and the Germanic tribes that arrived there found great success, not only conquering defenders, but also in procuring goods and making lasting settlements that retained their language, culture, and religion. Freya is known through Scandinavian lore, and although that name isn't seen in Anglo-Saxon lore, Her legacy of magical practice has endured, known popularly as witchcraft.

I've had a long-term interest in many components of magical practice in general, and within modern Anglo-Saxon practice, with

historical witchcraft in particular. I've had many spiritual experiences over the years, and not because I was expecting them; through magical practice, I wish to understand them better, and make them an effective tool for change. Within the Heathen paradigm, there generally isn't much interest in magic, and when there is, it tends to be runic, with the focus on the Aesir. Yet many folk-magic practices have survived through the centuries independent of that perspective. The very word *witchcraft* comes to us from Anglo-Saxon origins, and that culture was already Vanic in other substantial ways. I find it fitting that such magical practices be done in that cultural context.

One thing that witchcraft is known for is the knowledge and use of herbs for various purposes. That connection is so enduring that many people who mainly work with herbs describe themselves to others as 'kitchen witches'. Herbs are useful for many things, from spices for food, to brewing, to botanical functions in a garden, to magical use, to medicinal use, to household fragrances, etc. In this way, they can be thought of as a sort of 'natural toolbox' for creating various solutions. I appreciate all of these things, but I also wish to understand them in the context of religious and cultural lore; as a Vanic Heathen, I believe that these things deserve attention. Yet herbs are only part of the larger study of nature. I've always enjoyed spending time outdoors and learning about the lore of animals, plants, and the earth itself. And there are many things whose solutions can be found there. I don't base my life around nature, but I do believe in having a balance between old ways and modern living.

One nice thing about a Vanic perspective is finding common ground with many other people and groups who share similar goals, such as Wiccans. Although it can be said that I'm too Heathen for many Wiccans and too witchy for many Heathens, I think that there's a lot of understanding and cooperation that can be had. The honoring of Frey and Freya is analogous to the Wiccan worship of the Lord and Lady. Likewise, the use of magic, celebrating certain holidays, and respecting nature are common in many Wiccan covens. And there are Norse/Germanic-oriented Wiccans who study the lore, and are often called 'Wiccatru'. And with Heathen groups, many will respect the

honoring of Frey and Freya, even if it isn't their primary focus, as They figure significantly in the lore.

What all this means is living with a more Vanic focus. I honor those Gods, and I try to learn by Their example. I respect the martial prowess and healthy masculinity of Frey. I like the magic and sensuality of Freya. I enjoy the prosperity that I have. And I believe that the wights, the elves, and the ancestors deserve attention. In practical terms, it means putting these things into practice in various ways. I study historical European martial arts. I study and respect nature. I have interest in related crafts, such as brewing. I believe in frith, and look for ways to grow it. And there is a place in my life for magical practice as well. Vanic living is a way to integrate all these things, and more, into a healthy lifestyle that honors the past while having optimism for the future, and that's something that we all can enjoy.

Coming Home

Svartesól

There's a place within my heart,
 where I can always go,
 a place that I call home,
 a place I have no woe.

There's a secret world inside me,
 shining gold and green,
 where the water is sweet,
 where the Fae folk are seen.

I felt for some time
 in this I was all alone,
 but not necessarily lonely,
 only that my world was unknown.
 Yet there are others with its magic,
 who seem as if from another time,
 radiating vitality,
 the life of Vanaheim.

There's no bridge to cross,
 there's no door to open,
 but rather deeds to be done
 and words to be spoken.
 Life flows to life and back again,
 one world feeds another,
 the Vanir are close to us as kin,
 sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers.

No matter where I go,
 I am always there,
 I carry it inside me,
 always well aware
 so long as there is life,
 so long as there is living,
 Vanaheim is present,
 blessings Vanir-given.

Glossary of Terms

DISCLAIMER: The writings in this book operate under the assumption that you at least have a beginner's knowledge of the Northern religion. However, it's best not to assume this, or that the way I define a technical term is the way you relate to that term. So, I have provided this glossary for the benefit of my readers. Rather than giving a very long and detailed list, I have narrowed the glossary list down to those words that are most likely to cause confusion and debate without people realizing what I mean by these terms. What I state here in my glossary is definitions of words as I apply these words in my own writings: I do not assume that my definitions of these words are the same for any and all people in or out of the Northern religion.

AESIR

The dominant tribe of the Northern Gods, which seems to have the domain of civilization and society, including functions such as education, war, police, and entertainment (poetry, song, hosting). Examples of the Aesir include (but are not limited to) Odin, Frigga, Thor, and Bragi.

ALFAR/ELVES

Generally used in the context of "light-elves" but can also include "dark-elves", beings that live in Ljossalfheim and Svartalfheim and also have a presence in Midgard (as exemplified by something like 75% of the Icelandic population believing in elves, and a government expert having to certify a space is "elf-free" before anything can be built⁴⁰). Some Heathens refer to their male ancestors as "Alfar", however references to the Alfar in the primary sources are always to elves, which can be thought of as powerful nature spirits, possibly demi-Gods, closely related to the Vanir. Frey is noted as being the lord of Ljossalfheim, given to Him as a tooth-gift.

40 <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2009/04/iceland200904?printable=true¤tPage=all>

ASATRU

Literally, “true to the Aesir”. Whilst many Asatruar see the Vanir Deities as included in the Aesir, there is still a focus on Aesic Deities such as Odin, Frigga, and Thor. Asatruar typically hold to the Nine Noble Virtues, and organize themselves in groups called Kindreds. Asatru is a modernized Scandinavian-Norse flavor of Heathenry and is the most common form of Heathenry in the United States. Asatru is a Heathen denomination, but in the opinion of this author, the words Asatru and Heathenry are not interchangeable.

BLÓT

A term, cognate with “blood”, to denote the main sort of ritual in Heathen practice. Originally, in Blót a livestock is given and the attendants are sprinkled with its blood. Since most modern Heathens do not have the land, livestock, or knowhow to give an animal rightly, many Heathens use the word Blót to describe a ritual where the gathered attendants are sprinkled with mead and do rounds on the mead horn.

ECLECTIC

The author uses the word “eclectic” to describe a practice of Paganism where Gods come from many different pantheons and elements of different cultures are mixed and matched, often combined with modern practices.

“ELDER HEATHEN”

Term used by this author to describe the Heathens who lived before the conversion of the Northlands to Christianity.

FAINING

From the Old High German word “fagende” (fah-YEN-da), meaning “to celebrate”. This usually involves an offering, whether it’s food and/or drink, poetry or song given, or something else, that the Deity being honored can appreciate. This word is cognate with the Old Norse word *förn*.

FAKELORE

Something that is widely thought by Heathens and/or Pagans to be in primary sources, but upon extensive study is not in there anymore and in fact is either personal gnosis or a scholar's speculation passed off as fact. A few notable examples of this include the belief that Ullr rescued Frey and Freya from the giants (Rydbergism), that Frigga rides a chariot drawn by rams (UPG), or that Heimdall is Vanir (speculation).

FULLTRUI

Literally, “full-true” or “fully-trusted”. This word is still used in Modern Icelandic legal terminology to denote “legal representative”. In *Viga-Glum's Saga*, the word “fulltrui” was used where the word “protector” stands in modern English translation, when Thorkel made a sacrifice to Frey. While having a *fulltrui* was not necessarily a common practice in elder Heathen times, it was not unheard of and was not just limited to kings or very important people. The practice of taking a *fulltrui* is much more common in modern Heathenry, albeit it should be approached with care, and nobody is obligated to take a patron, unless of course, that is the Deity's decision to make. This author sees the *fulltrui* relationship as being reciprocal - the Deity represents your best interests before the other Gods, and you are likewise a representative of that Deity's interests on Earth. While nobody can or should become a clone of their Deity, They do tend to influence Their devotees to a large extent.

GODFOLK/GOÐI/GYÐJA

The word “Goði” translates literally as “Godman”, and “Gyðja” as “God woman”. In elder Heathen times, the Goði presided over the town blót at holytides, including the marriage and burial/cremation of the town's residents, and gave individual counsel, including decisions of law. In today's Heathenry, the Goði is usually over an individual local/regional Kindred, and only has jurisdiction within that one Kindred — though they may be respected, or not, by Heathens in other groups, they are not the leader for more than one group. Today's Godfolk are, besides leading a Kindred, performing clergy duties such

as marriage, funerals, and the like, and often (but not always) trained in some kind of pastoral counseling methods. While many Godfolk are trained by clergy ordination programs of established Heathen organizations, having an ordination does not mean necessarily having a group to serve as Goði, and there are a few who are recognized by their group and/or other individuals as Godfolk without having an ordination in place.

GOD-OWNED

One who has been strongly “grabbed up” and affected by a Deity, often with no say in the matter, but feeling a compulsion. Contrary to the beliefs of those who object to the term “God-owned”, most individuals using the term are not trying to be “special”, but are being honest with the fact that their relationship with a primary Deity has permanently rearranged their life as well as their worldview, and everything in their lives from here on out has the imprint of that Deity on it.

“GOD-PHONE”

A colloquial term used by this author to describe those who can talk with the Gods (not hallucinating or deluding oneself), are said to have “a God-phone”. It is the personal opinion of this author that those who have God-phones are obligated to serve those who honor their Gods but may not have the same line of communication (which is not a bad thing).

GOD-TOUCHED

The author does not use the terms God-touched and God-owned interchangeably. God-touched is someone who may have specific Deities communicating with them, and intervening/interfering in their lives. When this is to the dismay of the person involved, the word “God-bothered” is sometimes used. “God-touched” as used by the author denotes a more positive camaraderie with the Deities.

HEATHEN

Old English word literally meaning “of the heath”. Contrast with Latin *paganus*, meaning “of the countryside”. Very broad umbrella term that can and will include Asatru, Anglo-Saxon Heathenry, Forn Sed, Fyrnsidu, Theodisc Geleafa (Theodish Belief), and Irminenschaft. Very broad umbrella term that can and will include both Folkish and Universalists. There is no central authority for “all Heathens”, whereas there may be people taken as authority figures in some of the Heathen denominations listed above, to say what is and is not acceptable for that denomination. As the word “Heathen” means “of the heath” it can be thought to be inclusive of all Gods and wights of the Northlands. Anyone who worships the Northern Gods may call themselves Heathen based on the broadness of the word. (However, due to some using the words “Heathen” and “Asatru” interchangeably, not everyone wants to.)

HÚSEL

An Anglo-Saxon term referring to a special meal cooked and shared between the Gods and the gathered attendants, with the first or best part going to the Gods. This is a way of sharing our livelihood with the Gods, our survival, and letting Them know Their care of our own livelihood and survival is appreciated.

JOTUN/JOTNAR

The Jotnar are a tribe of Gods in Northern cosmology who represent the forces of chaos, e.g. the primordial elements such as fire, frost, storms, the sea, etc. Examples of Jotnar include (but are not limited to) etin-brides such as Gerda and Skadhi, friends of the Aesir such as Aegir and Ran, and the Norns, who are said to be frost-thurses.

KINDRED

The author uses the word Kindred in the Heathen sense to mean a group of people who have formed a religious community, similar in function to a church or coven while not being the same thing. The main function of a Kindred is for like-minded people to honor the Gods

together, as well as perhaps have Lore and/or rune studies, and have fellowship together, rather like a surrogate family. While the majority of Kindreds are led by a Goði or Gydja (priest or priestess), some Kindreds rotate leadership according to what holytide it is/Who is being honored. Some Kindreds require oaths for membership, some do not.

LORE

The primary sources, such as the Eddas and Icelandic Sagas, as well as historical accounts of Saxo Grammaticus, Bede, Tacitus, Jordanes, Adam of Bremen, and folkloric sources such as the Grimm Brothers. This author feels that a good grounding in the lore is important for not only understanding the Gods through mythology, but the way some of the elder Heathen lived and approached their spiritual and mundane lives. However, the lore is rather like a diving board into the swimming pool of greater understanding: it is not the end in and of itself.

MAGIC

Magic is the art of affecting change, whether temporarily or permanently, with people, places, plants and animals, objects, and events. Magic is neither good nor evil in and of itself, and “white magic” is not always beneficial in the long run, nor is “black magic” always inexcusable. Magic is both ceremonial (High) and common (Low). Examples of High Magic in the Northern Tradition would be runes and *seiðr*. Examples of Low Magic would be kitchen witchery, home remedies, folk charms, and the like. Neither is better or worse than the other, but are suited differently for different situations.

MAIN (MAEGEN)

Personal power, such as a combination of life force energy and intent, especially going into an object over time or with work.

MODERNIST

The author uses the term “modernist” to describe Heathens who feel that Heathenry has to change with the times, and may probably

completely forsake the use of elder tongues (Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon) in ritual practice, seeing modern adaptations as a libation of drink being called “blót”, and the like as perfectly acceptable Heathen practice.

NITHING

The word literally means “worthless one”, and typically reserved for someone who has done things so horrible as to warrant being outlawed. Some Heathens will use the word casually to describe “anyone I don’t like” and the word should really only be used for actual criminals, e.g. pedophiles, rapists, spouse-beaters, drug dealers, etc... those who have proven themselves to be a danger to civilized society and as such should be removed from civilized society.

OTHERWORLD/S

The author uses the term “Otherworld/s” to denote worlds that are not Midgard, such as Ljossalfheim, Jotunheim, and Asgard. The author also considers worlds outside the Northern Tradition, e.g. the sacred Otherworld/s of the Celts, Hellenes, and Egyptians among others, to be accessible through Yggdrasil. Traveling to a world outside Midgard in a trance state is referred to by the author as Otherworld journeying.

PAGAN

From the Latin *paganus*, literally meaning “of the countryside”. While the word Heathen means pretty much the same thing, most Heathens prefer not to call themselves Pagan due to its connotation with Wicca and other forms of pre-Christian or post-Christian belief not founded in Germanic culture. Many Heathens also feel themselves to be separate from “greater Neopaganism” and usually do not go out of their way to network and dialogue with other Pagans, although some do.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

The author uses the term “reconstructionist” to denote attempts at trying to resurrect the pre-Christian belief systems of European cultures, from one of two standpoints: 1. as if Christianity never happened at all, and things naturally progressed to the point they are

now, 2. the way life was prior to the conversion, which would include “tribes” or the idea of intentional communities. The author has also seen most “reconstructionist” Heathens to say that if it wasn’t in historical documents, it didn’t happen, and things such as UPG are highly frowned upon.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST-DERIVED

The author uses the term “reconstructionist-derived” to denote groups that work with European pre-Christian belief systems, and may respect what has been recorded in historical documents, but use that as a springboard to find a deeper understanding of the Gods — the Lore is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Some reconstructionist-derived Northern religionists may be modernists, while others may still hold to a more traditional format of ritual practice, incorporating elder tongues and custom. The author could be called a reconstructionist-derived traditionalist.

RUNES

The alphabet of the Northlands. The best-known rune row is the Common Germanic (also called Elder Futhark) of 24 runes; there is also the Younger Futhark and Anglo-Frisian or Northumbrian Futhorc (with 29 and 33 runes respectively). The word *rún* means “mystery” and the runes are said to be discovered by Odin after a nine-day ordeal of hanging from Yggdrasil, and shared with the different races of beings in the Nine Worlds accordingly. It is a common trend for runes to be utilized by Pagans without an understanding of Northern cosmology, and often their meanings twisted into “whatever you want them to be”, which is disrespectful not only to the spirits of the runes, but to Odin Himself.

SEIÐR

The form of *seiðr* most commonly known to Northern religionists is that described in the Saga of Erik the Red, in which the *völva* goes into a trance through the songs of others, and communes with spirits. It should be noted that nowhere in the Lore does it say a *seiðr*-worker is

“ridden” or possessed by any of the spirits or Deities. That does not mean that Deity possession never happened in the Northern religion, only that it is inaccurate to term it “*seiðr*”. *Seiðr* also can involve cursing/hexing, weather-working, or healing. Freya is said in *Ynglinga Saga* to be adept at *seiðr*, which was commonly practiced by the Vanir, and to have taught it to the Aesir. It is the opinion of this author that *seiðr* is more “High Magic”, as it falls into a ceremonial context (as noted above in the *Saga of Erik the Red*), and as a magical discipline all its own, is not interchangeable with the term Witchcraft.

SHAMANISM

The author uses the words “shaman” and “shamanism” to describe classic shamans, those who have been deconstructed and reconstructed by the Deities to do Their work on behalf of a tribe. Not all God-touched or God-owned individuals are shamans, and it is possible to do shamanistic practices without being a classic shaman, although ultimately no amount of book-reading, classes, and rattle-shaking will make you a shaman if the Gods/spirits don’t decide to claim you for Their service, which beyond the show of “power” also comes with a set of restrictions, or taboos, specifically enforcing and prohibiting certain activities, which will vary from shaman to shaman by agenda of the Gods/spirits.

SPAE

Literally, “to speak”. A form of prophecy in the Northern Tradition, most commonly seen in the accounts of “*spae-wives*” who traveled through the land and would predict events for households, whether good or ill. It could be said that *seiðr* is more about gaining information from the spirits directly, whereas *spae* involves personal intuition, and it is the opinion of this author that one system is not “better” or “worse” than the other.

SPIRIT-WORKER

A term typically used by God-touched individuals within the Northern Tradition (and some outside of it) to describe their spiritual Path.

However, the word “spirit-worker” translates to this author as “works for the spirits”, often as specific Task/s assigned by God/s whether as a learning experience in and of itself or something for “the greater good”. It may be anywhere on the spectrum from enjoyable and immediately rewarding on one end, to a painful sacrifice on the other, and anything in between. Ergo, a spirit-worker is one who is continually employed by the Powers That Be in this capacity, and while one Task may be temporary and brief and another more long-term and yet another a life-long Job, it is assumed that spirit-work is not something one can voluntarily walk away from, as one can quit a mundane job.

SUMBLE

A less common ritual than Blót, but more serious. The standard sumble format is toasts-oaths-boasts, three rounds over a horn. Some participants of sumble will have three as a minimum and have the sumble go all night. Traditionally the drink for sumble is mead, although a very good ale or something special — something that you wouldn’t commonly have — can be substituted. Because of the luck-changing nature of the ritual, that is, making oaths before the Gods and witnesses, and honoring past deeds, sumble is typically only done with one’s kinsmen (Kindred and/or family), and not done very often (usually once a year at Yuletide, or not more than 2-3 times a year).

UPG

Abbreviation for Unverifiable Personal Gnosis, that is, gnosis (information) about a Deity or something of a spiritual nature, that cannot be proven in the primary sources. For example, a common UPG that cannot be found in the primary sources is that Freya enjoys strawberry and chocolates for an offering. If a number of people share a UPG it becomes Peer-Corroborated Personal Gnosis, or PCPG.

VANATRU

A reconstructionist-derived form of the Northern religion that puts primary emphasis on the Vanir Deities (not necessarily exclusive) and explores the different customs of the Vanir, and as such, how They

would like to be honored.

VANIR

The Vanir are the tribe of Gods in Northern cosmology whose primary domains seem to be cultivating the land and the sea (agriculture and fishing), and by extension They are connected with prosperity, fertility/sexuality, and the quality of life. Examples of Vanir include (but are not limited to) Frey, Freya, and Njord.

WEREGILD

Literally, “man-gold”. A word used to denote appropriate compensation for a wrong done to self or kin. The key word here is “appropriate”, as in proportion to the deed. The *weregild* for slander would be different than *weregild* for theft would be different than *weregild* for murder.

WIGHTS

An Old English term meaning “living thing”, cognate with the Old Norse term *vaettir*. This author uses “wights” in the context of “spirits of place”, whether land spirits, plant spirits, sea or rock spirits, or house-wights (known as *tomten* or *nisse* to the Scandinavians).

WITCHCRAFT

The author uses the term “Witchcraft” to describe what is essentially known as “Low Magic”, that is, non-ceremonial (and often non-ritual) practices utilizing common objects and simple steps to work magic, to effect positive or negative change with people, places, things, and situations. Witchcraft can be a part of a religious practice — it makes a nice compliment to various forms of European Paganism — or it can be wholly separate.

WOO

A colloquial term used by God-touched individuals to describe communication with the Deity, whether verbal or visual, that gives information, instructions, or other sorts of connection with the Deities

and spirits. The word “woo” appears to be pejorative in origin, and yet used rather humorously if not self-deprecatingly by the God-touched. The author will sometimes use the word “woo” tongue-in-cheek when describing mystical experiences. It is not by any means a scientific term or one that should be used seriously.

WORKING WITH (A DEITY)

While it has been argued that a relationship between Deity and person is not “co-”, as in working with a co-worker, the author prefers to use the term “working with” in the context of a magical or ritual working to affect change, whether large or mundane, and/or to do the Deity’s Work in Midgard, especially if that Deity is one’s Patron. The Gods sometimes rely on humans to promote an agenda, or awareness, or help other humans They care about.

WORLDVIEW

Literally, the way one views the world. This is usually comprised of the way one was raised and the experiences of formative years + experiences later on in adulthood. This author is fond of saying that it is virtually impossible to “reconstruct” the worldview of the elder Heathen as we no longer live in a Heathen society nor a Heathen majority, and most of our worldview will be colored by Abrahamic religion + Western culture whether we want it to be or not.

WYRD

Wyrd is seen by the Norse as layers in the well, and by Anglo-Saxons as threads. I think these views are compatible rather than contradictory, as both pertain to the Norns. Wyrd is seen to be an accumulation of one’s deeds — the past affects the present, the present affects the future. It is possible to alter the course of one’s Wyrd just by making a decision, even a small one, but it could be argued that there are multiple directions a person’s life could take and all are probable, and all courses overlap at certain points, getting one ultimately to where one is supposed to be. The word “wyrd” is cognate with our modern word “weird”.

YGGDRASIL

Literally, "Ygg's steed", a name for the World Tree upon which Ygg (Odin) hung Himself for nine days and nights to gain knowledge of the runes. The World Tree of Northern cosmology is home to the Nine Worlds, as well as being such as Ratatosk the gossiping squirrel, and Nidhogg who gnaws the roots of the World Tree (when he's not eating nithings). While the Eddas give an account of Odin as having made Yggdrasil with His brothers out of the body of Ymir, this can be thought of as a "late" creation myth as Odin-like figures did not appear in the Northlands until around the Bronze Age, and the domesticated cow (Audhumbla) was also much later. Whatever creation myths there were prior to this, have been lost and may or may not be able to be reclaimed through personal gnosis and speculative research.

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Contributor Bios

Saevör Ælfwyn

Saevör Ælfwyn has been a Vanatrúar for the last two years (is a devotee of Njörd, and Holda is her Boss Lady); pagan and witch for the last six years. She has studied Ceremonial Magick and a little bit of Druidry. She has created the first Spanish site for the Vanic Cult and is one of the founders of the first organized Heathen group in Galicia (northwest coast of Spain). She loves to write and read about Heathenry, walk on the beach, hear the waves on the sand, and play with ferrets and her little daughter (a Thor's baby girl).

Ember Cooke

Ember Cooke is a member of Hrafnar and Seidhjallr. In 2004 she helped found the Vanic Conspiracy, a group dedicated to study and honor the Vanir. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she was born and raised.

Eosin

Eosin has been an Anglo-Saxon Heathen since 1998, but has been drawn to aspects of Heathenry his whole life. He has Frey as a primary patron and also feels a connection to Freya and Wuldor. Before becoming Heathen, he studied chaos and ceremonial magick. Eosin enjoys history and folklore, as well as historical swordsmanship, learning languages, cooking, technology, gaming, and equestrian sports. He was previously a member of Æt Angelseaxisce Ealdriht, and currently heads the Feohterna Gildscipe (warrior guild) of the Geferræden Fyrnsidu. He lives with his other half Svartesól in Southern California, where they own a home and enjoy the blessings of the Vanir.

Fálki

Fálki is a gay male Wodensman and serves on the Witan of the Geferræden Fyrnsidu. (www.fyrnsidu.org) He currently resides in

southern New Jersey and has formerly traveled to Scandinavia and to other northern European countries.

Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð

Nicanthiel Hrafnhilð is a relative noob with all this Vanir stuff, but keeps hoping he'll get the hang of it someday. Claimed by Nerthus on Yule 2008, he's working toward ordination through Ár nDraíocht Féin at Her orders. He was formerly involved with the CR (Celtic Reconstructionist) movement, and is *fulltrúi* to Óengus; he still harbors a strange love of bagpipes and sodabread. When not wearing the Nerthus hat, he's a college student, poet, artist, cartographer, certified Reiki healer and all-around weird guy. He has a Ph.D. in crazy; ask him about it sometime ;)

Jordsvin

Partnered gay male, college instructor. Hobbies: gardening, chickens, guppies, reading (history and sci-fi are favorites), sci-fi and horror DVDs (prefer the classical ones). Heathen for 15+ years, extensively published in *Idunna*, *Yggdrasil* and *Marklander*. Special Heathen Interests: Seiðr, Runework, Blóts, research, counseling/spiritual direction. Website: <http://home.earthlink.net/~jordsvin>

Galina Krasskova

Rev. Galina Krasskova is a free-range tribalist Heathen who has been a priest of Odin and Loki for close to fifteen years. She is the founder of Urdabrunnr Kindred in NYC, and a member of Iron Wood Kindred (MA), Ásatrú in Frankfurt (Frankfurt am Main, Germany) and the First Kingdom Church of Asphodel (MA). Her primary interest is Heathen devotional work and she has both written and lectured extensively on this subject. She is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and she is a staff writer for *newWitch* magazine. Her published work includes *Exploring the Northern Tradition* (New Page Books), *The Whisperings of Woden*, the first devotional ever published in modern Heathenry/Ásatrú, *Walking Toward Yggdrasil* and *Sigdrifa's Prayer*, and also *Full Fathom Five*:

Honoring the Norse Gods and Goddesses of the Sea also through Asphodel Press. She may be reached at tamyris@earthlink.net.

Leafshimmer

Leafshimmer, a founding member of the Green Men circle, a Radical Faerie ritual circle turning the Wheel of the Year in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is also a High Priest (Minos) of the Minoan Brotherhood, a Men's Mysteries tradition. He is an Initiate in the Feri (aka Faery) Tradition transmitted by Cora and Victor Anderson. Shimmer is also a Reiki Master and has been attuned in Run Valdr as well.

Silence Maestas

Silence Maestas talks to plants.

Frank Muse

Frank Muse is a member of the Green Men, a Boston Radical Faerie ritual circle. His work has appeared in *Young Bottoms in Love, Men and Ink*, and *In Newsweekly*.

Tracy Nichols

Tracy Nichols is a Northern Tradition Pagan living in the southern United States. She's been a devotee and wife of Loki for 4 years, is the author of two devotionals to Him as well as other works in the making, and has also contributed material to other Northern Tradition devotionals. She can be reached by her website at lokiskona.weebly.com.

Jon Norman

Jon Norman is a gay Heathen from Connecticut. He has close ties with the Vanir and some of the Jotnar. He has had a relationship with Hela since he was a teenager, and has a very special place in his heart for Frey. Jon is in recovery from addiction and recently celebrated two years without heroin.

Talas Pái

Talas Pái is an *argr* Odinsmaðr and the editor of the alternative-heathenry journal *Huginn*.

Raistlynn

Raistlynn is a devotee of Njord, Ullr, and Heimdall, and will be going to school for a degree in psychology and counseling. Raistlynn lives in Ohio with her oldest daughter, sister, her sister's family, and 3 cats.

Brun Russellson

Brun Russellson is a Vanic focused Heathen residing in the Southern Appalachian Mountains where he does his best to honor the Wights of the Land and the memory of his ancestors. He has a passion for primitive living skills (hunting, tracking, foraging, shelter construction etc.) as well as edible forest and small scale organic gardening. Brun is the proud steward of a 20-acre homestead with his mate, Quinn.

Alex Volundsdottir

Alex Volundsdottir has been a practicing polytheist for well over twenty years, a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD) since 2006, and has presented lectures on druidry as well as the history of divination in Western culture. The runes were what first drew her to the grove of the Vanic Gods, where she has remained ever since. Alex focuses most of her devotions through the lenses of writing or art, including rosaries, stained glass, painting, sculpture, research, and poetry (much of which can be found on her website, <http://druidswell.weebly.com/>).



Svartesól is an artist and writer, Vanic Druid, and longtime devotee of Ing-Frey. She is the Ærendraca of the Gefferæden Fyrnsidu, serving on the Witan as Ealdor-Thegn, responsible for their quarterly newsletter as well as the Scopas Gildscipe (a guild dedicated to reviving traditional forms of poetry, riddles, and flyting). An Aquarius and INTJ, Svartesól was born and raised in New England and now lives in Southern California with her life-partner and assorted plants. When not writing, Svartesól enjoys beading, sculpting, drawing, cooking, gardening, and talking about herself in the third person.

Visit her website: <http://svartesol.wordpress.com>

