

Hávamál (Sayings of Hár)

Translated by James Alan Chisholm, 2005

Excerpted from The Eddas, Keys to the Mysteries of the North,
published by The Troth.

1.
Watch out and check all gates before faring forth.
One should spy around,
one should pry around.
Hard to know what foe
sits before you in the next room.

2.
Hail the givers! A guest has come
where shall he sit?
Hard pressed is he,
who tests his luck by the fire.

3.
Fire is needful for those who arrive
with cold knees.
Food and clothing is needful
to men who have fared over the fells.

4.
Water is needful, for he who comes for a meal,
drying and friendly words as well,
and, if he can get them, kindness, good words,
and welcome again.

5.
Wits are needful to he who travels far.
The dull should stay home.
He will be mocked,
who cannot sit with sages.

6.
Let a man not be boastful about his wisdom,
but watchful instead. The wise and silent
are seldom harmed when wary in the hall.
A more trustworthy friend,
a man cannot have,
than understanding.

7.
The wary guest who comes to the feast
listens in silence, casts his eyes about
and pricks up his ears.
Thus the wise ward their ways.

8.
Happy is he who gets praise
and knows liking staves.
He has it hard, who must get these things
by the help of another.

9.

Happy is he who gets praise
and has wit throughout his life.
A man often gets evil counsel
from the heart of another.

10.

A man bears no better burden on the wilderness ways
than great wisdom.
It will prove better than wealth
in an unknown homestead.

11.

A man bears no better burden,
when on the wilderness ways
than great wisdom. One can have no worse fare,
on road or field, than too much ale.

12.

Ale is not so good as they say
for the sons of men.
A man's mind knows less,
the more he drinks.

13.

The heron is called mindlessness
who hovers over men stealing their minds
I was bound by that fowl's feathers
when I was in Gunnloth's garth.

14.

I became drunk, roaring drunk,
with wise Fjalar.
The best wassail is that
which a man leaves with his wits.

15.

Silent and attentive, and battle bold
should a chieftain's son be.
A man should be glad and happy
until defeated by death.

16.

The unwise man thinks he will live forever
by avoiding battle
But old age will give him no rest
though he be spared from spears.

17.

The fool gapes when among the folk.
He mutters and mopes,
and soon it is seen, when he gets drunk,
what his mind is like.

18.

He alone knows, who has wandered widely
and has fared over the fells
what mind stirs in each man
if he himself has wits.

19.

A man should not refrain from the cup
though he drink mead in the hall let him say
what is needful or be silent. No man
shall call you ignorant if you go to bed early.

20.

The greedy man, without mind's wits
eats himself in sorrow. Often he brings
ridicule on himself when he is among
wise men who mock the man's belly.

21.

The herd knows when to go home
and leave the grazing ground behind.
The unwise man never knows
how much to eat.

22.

Ill tempered the wretch,
who laughs at everyone.
He cannot recognize, as he should,
that he is not without faults.

23.

The stupid man lies awake all night
and thinks about everything
and is tired in the morning
though all is as it was.

24.

The stupid man thinks
that all who laugh at him are friends
He does not notice how the talk goes
when he sits with wise men.

25.

The unwise man thinks
that all who laugh at him are friends.
But when he is at the thing
he finds few spokesmen.

26.

The stupid man thinks he knows all
when he is at home.
But he does not know what to say
when men test him.

27.

When the fool fares among folk
it is best he stay quiet.
No one knows that he knows nothing
unless he talks too much.

28.

Wise seems he who knows
how to ask and answer.
What goes about among men,
cannot be hidden from men.

29.

He who never shuts up
blathers powerless staves.
The speedy tongue that never stops
often brings itself harm.

30.

Do not ridicule another man,
though he is kin. He oft seems wise
who is not questioned,
and leaves dry skinned.

31.

He is wise who leaves the flyting
when guest mocks guest.
He who grins at the feast
does not know that he chatters among foes.

32.

Many a man is being friendly
when he teases at the table.
There is always strife
when guest clashes with guest.

33.

A man should often get his meal early.
When he visits friends.
Otherwise he sits and idles,
eats like he were starving without even asking.

34.

It is a long way to the false friend
though he dwell by the road.
But a straight way lies to the good friend,
though he lives far away.

35.

Then the guest should go.
He should not stay too long in one stead.
When one stays too long in another's house,
love turns to loathing.

36.

One's home is better though it be small.
To each, home is hall.
Though he owns but two goats,
and a thatched roof, it is better than begging.

37.

One's own home is best, though it is small.
To each, home is hall.
His heart will bleed
who has to ask for each meal's meat.

38.

A man should not step one foot
forth in the field without weapons.
One cannot know, when on the road,
when he will need his spear.

39.

I never found a generous man
who was so free with his food,
that he would turn it down, or so generous
as to loath a gift were it given.

40.

One should not have too much need of the goods
he has gotten. Often one squanders
on enemies what was intended for loved ones.
Many affairs go awry.

41.

Friends should share joy in weapons
and clothes that are evident to one another.
Those who share gifts stay the fastest friends,
when things go well.

42.

A man shall ever be a friend to his friends
and give gift for gift,
laughter for laughter,
but give lies for lies.

43.

A man shall always be a friend
to friends and to the friend of a friend
but never a friend
to a friend's enemies.

44.

If you know that you have a friend and that he is true,
and that you will get good from him,
share your mind with him, exchange gifts,
and visit him often.

45.

If you know another and trust him not
and you want to get good from him
speak fair to him while thinking falsely
and give him lies for lies.

46.

If you do not trust a man,
and he speaks his mind with you
laugh with him, but speak not your mind
and deal fitting rewards for his gifts.

47.

When I was young, I once traveled alone
and lost my way.
I thought myself rich when I found another,
man rejoices in man.

48.

He who gives gladly lives the best life,
and seldom has sorrow.
But the unwise suspect all
and always pine for gifts.

49.

I gave my clothes to two tree-men
in the field.
Men they seemed with clothes.
Shameful the naked hero.

50.

The young fir tree dies that stands
sheltered by neither bark nor needle in the field
Such is a man whom none love.
Why should such a man live longer?

51.

Hotter than fire friendship burns
for five days between false friends.
But it slackens on the sixth
and the friendship goes awry.

52.

Give not great gifts.
You can win praise with little.
Half a loaf and half a cup
won me fellowship.

53.

A small lake has a little sand.
The minds of men are small
and not all men are equally wise.
No man is whole.

54.
Middle wise should each man be
and not over wise.
The fairest life is had
by the one who knows many things well.

55.
Middle wise should each man be
and not over-wise.
A wise man's heart is seldom glad
when he has got himself great wisdom.

56.
Middle wise should each man be
and not over wise.
He who knows not his orlog
may sleep untroubled.

57.
Brand burns brand and is so burned.
Fire is kindled from fire.
A man is known by his talk
and the dull man is known by his nonsense,

58.
He should rise early who wants to take
the life or property of another.
Seldom does the lying wolf get the lamb
or the sleeping man victory.

59.
He should rise early who has few workers
to see to his work himself.
He loses much who sleeps in the morning.
Half of wealth is gotten by initiative.

60.
Dry firewood and birch bark
for roofing
a man can measure,
for wood to last in the winter time.

61.
Well fed and washed fare to the thing. A man should
ride to the thing though his clothes are well worn.
A man should not be ashamed of his shoes and breeks,
or even less of his horse, though they are not the best

62.
The eagle snuffles and droops
when he fares over the waves of the sea.
So fares a man in a throng
where few will plead his case.

63.
Each shall ask and answer
who is wise and wishes to be called wise.
Let none know, not even a second.
All will know, if three know.

64.
All who are wise in rede
shall not be overly forceful.
He finds, who walks among the stout,
that no one is the strongest.

65.
— — — —
Words spoken by one to another
often bring an evil reward.

66.
Far too early I arrived at many steads,
But too late at others,
The ale was already drunk or yet unbrewed.
The loathed find little among the folk.

67.
Here and there they had me in their homes,
if I was not hungry for meat
or hung two hams for the true friend
for the one I had eaten.

68.
Fire is better for the sons of men
and the sight of the sun.
Good health also, if a man can keep it
and live without shame.

69.
A man is not entirely bereft
though his health is poor.
Some are blessed with sons, some by friends,
some by wealth and others by good works.

70.
Better to be alive and happy.
The quick always get the cattle.
The fire burned for the wealthy man,
but the dead man lays outside.

71.
A halt man can ride a horse. The handless
can be herdsman. The deaf can fight bravely,
a blind man is better than a burned man,
and a dead man is of no use.

72.

Better to have a son, though born late
after the father has passed away.
Stones seldom stand by the roads
unless raised by kin for kin.

73.

Two take on one. The tongue is the head's bane.
I expect fists under every fur coat.

74.

Night is joyful if provisions are adequate.
The cabins of ships are cramped.
Fall nights pass
and weather changes many times in five days,
even more in a month.

75.

He who knows nothing does not know
that many men become apes.
One man is rich and another poor.
There is no blame in that.

76.

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
and you yourself shall die.
But fair fame never dies
for the one who wins it.

77.

Cattle die and kinsmen die
and you yourself shall die.
But I know one that never dies
that is the doom of each one dead.

78.

The store rooms of Fitjung's sons were full.
Now they bear the beggar's staff.
Thus flies wealth in the twinkling of an eye,
the falsest of friends.

79.

The unwise man only grows arrogant
when he wins himself wealth
or a woman's love.
His wisdom never increases, only his pride.

80.

It is found when you ask the runes
which are known to the Regin
made by the Ginnregin
drawn by Fimbulthul,
it is best to keep silent.

81.

Praise the day in the evening, a torch when it is burned,
a sword when it is tried, a maid when married,
ice when crossed, ale when drunk.

82.

Hew wood in the wind, row out to sea in good weather,
play with a maid in the dark, for many are the eyes of
the day. Look for speed in a ship, and for cover from a
shield. Get a sword for hewing and a maid for kissing.

83.

Drink ale by the fire, skate on the ice,
buy a lean steed, and a rusty blade,
feed your horse at home and your hound at home.

84.

Let no man trust a maiden's words,
nor the talk of a woman,
for their hearts were shaped on a spinning wheel,
and falsehood lurks in their breasts.

85.

A brittle bow, a burning fire,
a grinning wolf, a singing crow,
a grunting boar, a rootless tree,
a swelling wave, a boiling kettle,

86.

A flying arrow, a crashing wave,
night old ice, a coiled snake,
a bride's bed talk, a broken sword,
the play of bears, a king's son,

87.

A sick calf, an uppity thrall,
the pleasant talk of a volva, the fresh fallen warrior.

88.

Early sown acres should no man trust,
nor too soon a son.
Weather ruins the acres, and stupidity the son.
Each of these is a risk.

89.

Your brother's slayer, though met on the road,
a half-burned house, or too swift a horse.
A steed is worthless, if it breaks on foot.
One must not be so trusting, as to trust in these.

90.

Such is the love of a woman whose heart is false.
Like riding unshod horses over slippery ice,
or poorly trained two year olds,
or drifting rudderless on heavy seas,
or like a halt reindeer on a slippery fell.

91.

I say this openly, for I know both.
A man's heart is false with women.
Our hearts are most false when our words roost fair,
which deceive the hearts of the wise.

92.

He shall speak fairly and deal wealth
who will win a woman's love.
Praise the looks of the bonny lass.
Win by wooing.

93.

No man should ever ridicule
another's love.
The lure of a beautiful woman often snares
the wise while leaving the fool.

94.

A man should not heap abuse
on another for something
that happens to many men.
Powerful love makes fools of heroes and sages.

95.

Only your own mind knows what is dearest
to your heart. Each counsels himself.
There is no worse illness for a sage
than losing love for himself.

96.

I found that out, when I sat in the reeds
and waited for my heart's delight.
The heart and body of the wise maid were dear to me,
but I had not my will with her.

97.

Billing's daughter I found on her bed.
The sun-white maid slept
and a Jarldom seemed nothing to me
if I lived without her love.

98.

“Come back near evening Odin,
if you would speak with me.
It would be entirely unfitting
unless only the two of us know of this deed.”

99.

I went back thinking she loved me,
but I was misled.
I thought that I would have
great pleasure and all her heart.

100.

So I came the next night
and the warriors were all awake
bearing bright brands, their torches alight,
I worked not my will.

101.

Near morning I went in again
when the folk were asleep.
But I found a bitch bound
to the fair maid's bed.

102.

Many a good maid proves false hearted
when you get to know her. I found that out
when I lured the wise woman in lust.
The clever maiden had sport of me
with all manner of mockery,
and I had not my way with her.

103.

Glad in his household and cheerful with guests
and wise let a man be.
He should be thoughtful and eloquent
if he wants to be learned in lore and praised as such.
The man who has little to say is deemed an idiot.
That is the lot of fools.

104.

The old ettin I sought, now I am back
I would have gotten little, had I been silent.
I spoke many words to work my will
in Suttung's hall.

105.

The auger bored and made me room
gnawed through stone,
over and under were
the ettin ways.
Thus I risked my head.

106.

Gunnloth gave me, as I sat on her golden seat,
a drink of the dear won mead.

An evil reward I dealt her afterwards,
for her goodwill, and her heavy-heart.

107.

Dear bought, I put it to good use.

For the wise little is lacking.

Othroerir has been brought up
to the ve of the gods.

108.

I would hardly have come out alive
from the garth of the ettins,
had I not enjoyed the good woman Gunnloth
in whose arms I lay.

109.

The next day rime Thurses
strode out to ask rede
of Har in Har's Hall,
asking about Bolverk, whether he was among the Gods
or had been slain by Suttung.

110.

I know that Odin swore an oath on a ring,
How shall his troth be trusted?
He robbed Suttung and took his sumble.
To Gunnloth he brought sorrow.

111.

It is time to sing on the sage's seat
at Urth's well.
I saw and was silent, I watched and thought.
I heard the speech of men, I heard talk of runes.
They were not silent at council.
At Har's hall, in Har's hall
I heard them speak.

112.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
Do not rise at night, except to spy,
or to find the outhouse.

113.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well.
You will use it if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
Do not sleep in the arms of a woman skilled in black arts
such that she locks her limbs with yours.

114.

She will work it that you will not want
to go to the thing or care about the talk of the folk.
You will not want food or any pleasure
and you will seek your bed in sorrow.

115.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Watch that you are not lured to bed
by another's wife.

116.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
If you fare veil
on fell or fjord, bring food.

117.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Never tell your hardships to foemen,
for you will never get a reward
for your good wishes
from evil men.

118.

I saw a man sharply bitten
by the ill words of a woman,
Her false tongue brought his death,
and her attacks were unjust.

119.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
If you have a true friend
fare to find him often.
Shrubs and grass grow
to cover the untrodden path.

120.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
Draw a good man to yourself with staves of joy,
and you will have healing songs while you live.

121.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
Never be the first to forsake a friend.
Sorrow eats the heart
of he who can no longer speak
his mind to anyone.

122.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good, if you understand it.
Never bandy words
with stupid apes.

123.

You will never get any good
from an evil man.
But a good man will get you
the love and goodwill of many.

124.

When each can speak all his mind to the other,
friendship is shared.
Anything is better than fickleness.
He is no friend, whose words are always fair.

125.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will do you good if you understand it.
Bandy not three words with a lesser man.
Often the better man fails
when the worse gets hostile.

126.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well,
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Be not a maker of shoes or a shaper of shafts,
unless they are for yourself.
If the shoe is ill shaped, or the shaft is not straight,
they will wish you ill.

127.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
If you know that someone is evil, say so.
Never give friendship to your enemies.

128.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
and it will get you good if you understand it,
Never rejoice in evil,
but always do good.

129.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
and it will get you good if you understand it.
Do not look up in battle.
Sons of men become like hogs,
when warriors enchant you.

130.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
and it will do you good if you understand it.
If you want a good woman, speak pleasure runes to her,
Pledge your troth and hold fast to it
if you want joy from her.
None loathes good if she gets it.

131.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
and it will do you good if you understand it.
Watch yourself, but don't be overcautious.
Be especially wary of ale
and of another man's wife.
Thirdly, see that you are not tricked by con-men.

132.

I give you rede Loddfafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Never make sport
of guests and travelers.

133.

Often those who sit inside
do not know the kin of those who have arrived.
No man is so good that he has no faults,
none so evil that he is not worthy in some way.

134.

I give you rede Loddafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Never laugh at the hoary sage.
The old often speak wisely and clearly.
Wise speech oft comes from the dried skin
that hangs with the hides,
dangling with the furs
and swinging among the bushes.

135.

I give you rede Loddafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
Do not abuse a guest, or drive him out the door.
Instead, do well for the wretched.

136.

The beam must be sturdy, that is unbarred
for all who ride up.
Deal out rings or he
will wish you all sorts of trouble.

137.

I give you rede Loddafnir, heed it well!
You will use it, if you learn it,
it will get you good if you understand it.
When you drink ale, call on the main of the earth,
for earth is good against ale, but fire against diseases.
Oak is good against costiveness, grain against wizardry
bearded rye against feuds. They say the moon is good
against hate. Alum use for rabies and runes against evil.
The earth draws off floods.

138.

I know that I hung, on a wind swept tree
for all of nine nights,
wounded by spear, and given to Odin,
myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
from what root it rises.

139.

They dealt me no bread, nor drinking horn.
I looked down, I drew up the runes,
screaming I took them up,
and fell back from there.

140.

Fimbul spells I got from the famous
Son of Bolthor the father of Bestla.
I had a drink of the dear mead
that was drawn from Othroerir.

141.

Then I began to grow
and waxed well in wisdom.
One word led me to another,
one work led me to another.

142.

You will find runes, meaningful staves,
very powerful staves,
very strong staves,
that Fimbul dyed,
that the Ginnregin shaped,
that the God Hropt carved.

143.

Odin among the Aesir, but Dain for the elves,
Dvalinn for the dwarves,
Asvith for the ettins.
I carved some myself.

144.

Know how to carve them, know how to read them,
know how to stain them, know how to wield them,
know how to ask them, know how to bloody them,
know how to send them, know how to sacrifice them.

145.

It is better not to ask, than to sacrifice too much.
A gift always looks for a gift.
It is better unsent, than over sacrificed.
So Thund carved before the doom of mankind.
He rose up and came back after that.

146.

I know those magical songs, not known
by the wives of kings, or any human.
One is called help and will help you
in all sickness, sorrow and affliction.

147.

I know another that is needed by the sons of men,
who want to be leeches.

148.

I know a third for the event
that I should be in dire need of fettering a foe.
I can dull the blades of my attackers
so that they can strike by neither weapon or wile.

149.

I know a fourth,
so that if bonds bind my limbs,
I can get free.
Fetters spring from my feet,
and bonds from my hands.

150.

I know a fifth. If a foe shoots a shaft
into the host, it cannot fly
so fast that I cannot stop it,
if I catch sight of it.

151.

I know a sixth. If some thane attacks me,
with the wood of a young root,
he who says he hates me will get hurt,
but I will be unharmed.

152.

I know a seventh. If I see
a fire high on the hall
around my bench companions,
I can help them by singing the spell.

153.

I know an eighth. It is useful
for all who know it,
Whenever hatred flares up among warriors' sons,
I am able to quell it.

154.

I know a ninth. If need arises,
to save my ship on the flood,
I can still the wind, and calm the waves,
put the entire sea to sleep.

155.

I know a tenth. If I see ghost-riders
sporting in the sky, I can work it
that the wild ones fare away.
So their shapes (ham) shall fare home,
so their spirits fare home.

156.

I know an eleventh: If I lead
old friends into the fray,
I sing under the shield
and they fare into battle mighty and whole,
they fare from battle whole,
they are whole, wherever they go.

157.

I know a twelfth: If I see a hanged man
swinging high in a tree,
I can carve and stain runes,
so that the man walks
and speaks with me.

158.

I know a thirteenth: If I sprinkle a young thane
with water, he will not fall,
though he goes to battle.
He will not be cut down by swords.

159.

I know a fourteenth: If I talk of the gods
before the folk, I can speak of Ases
and elves. Few of the unlearned
know these things.

160.

I know a fifteenth, which Thiodrorir the dwarf
sang before Delling's door.
He sang might to the Aesir, power to the elves,
and understanding to Odin.

161.

I know a sixteenth. If I want the heart and pleasure
of a winsome lass, I turn the mind
of the white-armed lady to me,
and wend to bed with her.

162.

I know a Seventeenth to keep her
from shirking me for any other man.
Mind this Loddafnir,
long will you lack it,
but it will get you good, once you learn it,
it will be useful to you when you understand it,
and needful if known.

163.

I know an eighteenth that none know,
neither maid, nor man's wife.
It is always better kept secret,
except to the one
who lies in my arms,
or my sister.

164.

Now are Har's sayings said, in Har's hall
needful for the sons of men
unneded by ettins' sons.
Hail the one who speaks them, hail the one who knows them
useful to he who gets them
hail they who heed them.

