Heathenry

Welcome to Heathenry, A Personal View. This course aims to bring you to a greater understanding of: what Heathenry is; what it means to be a Heathen and to clear up some common misconceptions. It will cover general beliefs within Heathenry but I will also be expressing some of my own personally held views. Doubtless there will be other heathens who will disagree with me in places; this is to be expected. If anyone has any questions I am quite happy to explain why I follow my path the way I do.

Before discussing what a Heathen believes, first it is useful to define what a Heathen is. The word Heathen comes from Old English Haeden meaning someone who was not a Christian or a Jew. This is possibly derived from the Gothic Haithi Meaning one who dwells on the Heath. Comparisons can be made with the Latin Paganus meaning a country dweller.

So what about Heathens today?

Heathens come under the general umbrella term of Pagan.  But the word refers to someone with quite specific beliefs. Heathens are Pantheistic.  That is they believe in and worship a group or family of Gods and Goddesses. In particular, Heathens follow the old pre-Christian, North European Pantheons of Gods and Goddesses known as The Aesir and Vanir. As Norse Deities are covered in another course I am only going to go into enough detail about them to illustrate any points I am making.

Heathens today honor the same Deities as our ancestors. That we worship them in the same way is highly unlikely. We do not claim a direct line of initiated pagans going back to the Viking age. However there are literary clues from various sources. We also believe as North European People that our tradition is a part of our soul. This part of our soul contains all the memories of our ancestors. It is possible through meditation to gain insights from the past, which can be useful, although I believe it more important to look to our future, and develop and evolve our tradition and our faith to fit our lives today.

**Bibliography**

**Pete Jennings:***The Northern Tradition, Capall Bann 2003.*

**Freya Aswynn:** *Leaves of Yggdrasil, Llewellyn 1990.*

**Carolyne Larrington:** *The Poetic Edda A new translation., Oxford University Press 1996*

**Nigel Pennick:** *Rune Magic, Aquarian 1992.*

**Jean I. Young:** *The Prose Edda. Translated from Icelandic,*

*University of California Press 1954.*

***Edred Thorsson:*** *A Book of Troth , Llewellyn 1992*

*Futhark, A hand book of Rune Magic, Weiser 1984*

**Arctic Wolf:** *Assorted extracts from my BOS, Temple book, and rune study course. Unpublished.*

**Reading list**

I would recommend the Pete Jennings book above to any who are interested in looking purely at the religious side of Heathenry. Freya Aswynn is the one to go for if you want in-depth look at runes, especially for divination. Nigel Pennick talks a lot of sense about runes and magic.

Both translations of the Eddas are good for those who want to discover Norse mythology in greater depth, and it is worth remembering that these are both Primary sources for Heathens of all paths.

The Edred Thorsson books give a more North American leaning to both Runes and to Heathen practice.

**Recommended Sites sacred-texts.com**

**Autobiography**

I was born in Namibia in 1969, the son of missionaries working in the local school. I came to England aged about 19 months. My father became ordained into the Church of England, so my early childhood was rather unsettled, as he moved from parish to parish.

My parents had an interest in history, so I got to see Stonehenge, Avebury, Maiden Castle and countless tors, burial mounds and churches with old Yew trees. As a Christian I was forever searching, something in me just wouldn't lie still. When I left home at 19 to do my nurse training I wandered from one denomination to another, getting more disillusioned and depressed. Not knowing what I was, but realizing that I couldn't in all honesty call myself Christian.

My way into paganism began with runes, they still have a large influence in what I practice. A close friend who I feel sure I must have met in a past life had a bunch of us round in her room and someone found a set of runes with a little book telling you what they meant. The runes made complete sense of the universe to me, in a way nothing ever had. I searched of bookshops to find anything about runes and fortune telling. I also tried the I ching, which I always found to be a reasonable oracle in its own tradition. I also studied Western Astrology.

As I became more experienced with using runes I delved deeper into the myths and legends behind them and I came to realize I was a Heathen and always had been, I just didn't know it.

I had a very strong contact while invoking Freya for healing. Freya touched me on the arm, I know it was her, because she told me. I felt like I was holding a huge static charge, I was calm and yet elated at the same time.  Another person also felt and 'saw ' an image of her. This prompted me, some years later, to accept Freya as my personal Deity. Secondly, more and more I feel she has called me to be her priest.

Beltane 2007 in the centre of the Solar circle at Avebury, I took an oath to be true to her (Freyatru) and to be her Gothi (Priest)

I have taken apprentices and at present teach runes on line via Sedna rune group.

I attend two local moots, and am a member of a local eclectic Hearth. I make wands, staffs, and sets of runes.

I am also a founder member of the Order of the Skylark and Hawthorn, which organizes pilgrimages to, and promotes respect for sacred sites.

I saw the advert for witch school on a web site, and something (Freya) prompted me to sign up for the First Degree course.

I believe while the path we are on says where we have come from, none of our journeys are over.  The travelling is more important than which path you are on, or how far along it you are.

**Short Glossary**

Aesir: One family of Gods descended from Odin.

Asgard: The home of the Gods (Aesir)

Edda: One of two documents of Icelandic origin containing tales of the Norse Gods.

Gothi/Godhi: A Heathen priest.

Heathen: Someone who has **Troth** with the old Gods of the Vikings Saxons.

Midguard: Where you are now. Created from the body of **Ymir**.

Rune: An ancient symbol, used for writing and magic. Literal meaning a secret.

Skald: A Poet skilled in a particular style of Norse poetry. (Skaldic)

Troth: Remaining true and faithful. This can be to the Old Gods or to other Heathens.

Vanir: A Family of nature and fertility gods descended from Niord and Nerthus.

Vanirheim: Home of the Vanir family of Gods.

Vitki: A rune magician, someone skilled in the use of runes.

Wyrd: A fate, which you have control over. Also web of wyrd Woven by the Norns.

Ymir: A primordial giant whose body parts were used to create Midguard.

In this lesson we will be looking at how Heathens view the universe. We will cover the creation of the universe, the nine planes of existence, life after death, Ragnarok and what follows it.

What I am going to present here is merely a potted version of the myths contained in the Eddas. In Particular From the prose Edda The Deluding Of Gylfi, and from the poetic Edda The Seeress’s Prophesy and Grimnir’s Sayings. To anyone who wishes to delve further into Heathenry then these are prime readings. You can only gain so much from reading what someone else has written about what is contained in the Eddas. It is much better to go to the original source and form your own opinion of it.

At the very beginning was Ginnungagap a formless void of nothingness. Niflheim to the north of it and Muspell to the south.

There was a great well in Niflheim from which flowed many rivers. As they neared Ginnungagap they began to freeze and harden into rime and ice.

One layer formed on another till all of the Northern part of Ginnungagap was full of ice and mist and drizzle.

To the South was Muspell, a land of Heat and Light. No creature not of Muspell can bear to live there. The guardian of Muspell is called Surt, he has a flaming sword and will come at Ragnarok to fight against the Gods.

Just as the northern part of Ginnungagap became cold, the southern part became warm. In the centre it was mild and windless. Where the warm air met the cold frost it thawed and life appeared in the drops formed.

The drops grew together into the likeness of a great man, and he was called Ymir, and from him all the frost ogres originate.

As Ymir slept there grew from his left armpit a man and a woman. Also his legs begat a son who was a Frost Giant.

As the Ice thawed more it turned into a great Cow called Audhumla. She lived by licking the salty Ice blocks. Four rivers of milk flowed from her Udders; from this milk Ymir drank.

As she licked there appeared a man’s hair, and then a man’s back and on the third day of licking a whole man was there. He had a son called Bor, who had three sons called Odin, Vili and Ve.

Odin and his brothers kill Ymir and create the land from his body the mountains from his bones and the sea from his blood. The out flowing of blood was so great that it drowned all the Frost ogres except for two who escaped. Then the sons of Bor took Ymir’s skull and made the sky with it. The sky is held up by four dwarves called north south east and West, and the sun was created using sparks from Muspell. With Ymir’s brains they created clouds and from his eyebrows they created a stronghold and called it Midguard.

The first man was created from an Ash tree and his name was Ask, the first woman was made from an Elm tree and her name was Embla. Odin gave them spirit and life, Vili gave them understanding, and the power of movement and Ve gave them form, speech, hearing and sight.

Odin took a wife: Frigg daughter of Fjorgvin, and from them came all the family that inhabits Asgard, which are called Aesir. For this reason Odin is known as the Allfather.

Odin next caused the ordering of Day and Night, and set two chariots to circle the earth every 24 hours, he also set two wolves to chase them.

*High one replied: There was a man called  Mundilfari who had two children. They were so fair and beautiful that he called one of them Moon and the other, a daughter, Sun. The Gods, however were angered at his arrogance and took the brother and sister and put them up in the sky. They made Sun drive the horses which drew the chariot of the sun that the Gods had made to light the world from a spark which flew from Muspell. The horses are called Arvak and Alsvithr (Early-waker and All-strong). Under the shoulder blades of the horses the Gods put two bellows to cool them, and in some poems that is called iron-cold. Moon governs the journeying of the moon and decides the time of its waxing and waning.*

Prose Edda. Trans: Jean I Young P38. (University of California Press first published 1954)

For this reason in Heathenry the Moon is masculine and the Sun is seen as Feminine.

The Dwarves came in to being first as maggots crawling and delving into the body of Ymir, but the Gods gave them human form and understanding. Still they lived in Earth and in rocks though. It may be of interest to Tolkien fans that the Prose Edda gives a quote from Sibyls Vision; naming one of the Dwarves as Gandalf, which translates as Sorcerer Elf.

There are nine ( although some Heathens will argue and say seven) worlds all connected By Yggdrasil. Yggdrasil has been seen as an Ash tree, though more correctly most Heathens regard it as a Needle Ash, or Yew.

These worlds are as follows:

Asgard, Vanirheim, lightalfheim, Svartalfheim, Midguard, Muspell, jotunheim, Hel, Niflheim. Various of the Gods and Goddesses and other beings live in the different worlds.

There is also a dragon called Nidhogg which gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil and an eagle who sits in the branches, a squirrel named Ratatosk runs up and down the trunk with messages, possibly insults, from Dragon to Eagle. There are also four Harts, which nibble at the higher branches. Thus Yggdrasil is under constant attack.

Lightalfheim is home to the elves, Svartalfheim is home to the dwarves, Vanirheim is home to the Vanir and Asgard is home to the Aesir. There are many halls in Asgard, which are home to the different Gods and goddesses. Thrudheim is home to Thor, Valhalla is Odin’s hall where the Einherjar feast. It has spear shafts for rafters and is thatched with shields. The Einherjar are warriors fallen in battle who spend their time feasting on a boar which is eaten at night and comes alive next day. The rest of their time is spent in battle, practicing for Ragnarok where they will fight on the side of the Aesir. Folkvang is home to Freyja. Noatun is home to Niord. Midguard is home to humans and is surrounded by the Midguard serpent; Muspell and Niflheim I have described already. Jotunheim, which here I equate to Thrymheim in some other texts, is home to the giants. Hel is the Underworld, a place of the dead ruled by Loki’s daughter Hel. Pictured as half white and half black and decaying. But Hel is not a terrible place of fire and torture like the Christian Hell. There is Gold, mead and feasting there.

Finally I want to describe the events of Ragnarok, sometimes known as the twilight of the Gods. Where the whole Earth will be destroyed in fire and many of the Aesir slain. Interestingly I can't remember reading about any of the Vanir taking part other than Frey; and in Vafthrudnir’s Sayings we are told that Niord will go home to Vanaheim once the Aesir are vanquished.  By far the most coherent account comes from the Prose Edda, but the Poetic is older in origin and is what Snorri was basing his tales on. The main account is in the Seeressâ€™s Prophesy and uses many kennings which are more difficult to get a good understanding from until you have read Eddas more widely.

There is a longstanding battle between the Gods and the Giants sometimes referred to in the Eddas as Ogres or Frost Ogres. While the Eddas are clearly written from the Aesir’s point of View, this enmity has its roots in the creation of Midguard where Odin and his brothers drown all but two of the Frost Giants in the blood of Ymir. So certainly on one of the Parties sides it is a blood feud from the beginning of time! Exactly what Surt is doing at Ragnarok I am unsure of. As for the kin of Loki it could be said that Loki’s imprisonment for his part in Baldur’s murder was a little harsh. This depends of course on your thoughts and feelings about Loki. My personal feeling is that he represents the force of change: things which have to take place in order to set the scene for the next event, and as such could be seen an innocent tool of fate. Either way he was another whom the Aesir made an enemy of, and it is two of his children that take the main battle to the Aesir.

Fenris kills Odin, and is avenged by Vidar Odin’s son.  The Midguard serpent: Jormungand, comes ashore, creating tidal waves and stormy seas and breathing poison as he comes. Thor will wrestle with Jormungand and kill him, but Thor will then only take another nine steps before he himself is overcome by poison and dies.

The two wolves that have been chasing the Sun and the Moon will catch them, and there will be darkness.

Surt then comes forward with his flaming sword and the world (Midguard) is consumed by fire. Many of the Aesir die and Frey of the Vanir also. However there are survivors: Vidar is one and he is joined by Baldur. Two of Thor’s children Magni and Modi also survive and we are told the have possession of Thor’s Hammer: Mjolnir.

Humans also survive; one name given is Lifthrasir, which Caroline Larrington translates as Life-persister in her translation of the Prose Edda.

The sun bears a daughter before she dies, who lights the heavens once more.

*Vafthrudnir said:*

*Elf-Disc will bear a daughter,*

*Before Fenrir assails her;*

*She shall ride, when the Powers die,*

*The girl on her mother’s paths.*

Vafthrdnir’s sayings , stanza 47. Trans: Caroline Larrington (Oxford University Press 1996)

Obviously for the purposes of this course I have briefly summarized the events of Ragnarok. If you wish to discover more, then I strongly suggest reading the books given as references in the text of the lesson.  There are also many stories told in the Eddas of deeds and journeys of the Aesir and Vanir, which are too numerous to go into here. And in any case it is much better to read them straight from the Eddas themselves rather than to rely on my interpretation of them.

This lesson takes the form of a question and answer session. These were mainly generated by my First Degree study group, so a thanks needs to be given to them for that, and also their ongoing support and encouragement.

**Do Heathens have different degrees of initiation?**

No. Even in traditions, which *are* initiatory, once you have studied to become a full member the only advancement is that to being priest or priestess. In some traditions priests are called Godhi. (The dh being pronounced somewhere between a d and a hard th sound.)

In some traditions there are also elders, though that title is usually a mark of respect for age, or length of time spent as a hearth member. Some hearths may just have a priesthood of elders who take it in turns to preside at ceremonies.

There is also a perfectly valid solitary, shamanistic path within Heathenry. Whether the shaman takes an oath of initiation, is purely a matter between the shaman and the Gods.

**Is Heathen the same as Asatru?**

Asatru gets its name from the Old Norse Aes Meaning a God and true. So it means those who are faithful to the Norse Gods. As such Asatru is a branch of Heathenry in the same way that Heathenry is just one path within Paganism. The tradition started in Iceland where it is now one of the official religions, with a temple in Reykjavik. Asatru is very heavily based on The Eddas, and tends to ignore any Anglo-Saxon influences.

There are Heathens who follow more of an Anglo-Saxon tradition: the main beliefs are similar to Asatru but some of the Gods and Goddesses may have slightly differing attributes or names. For example Odin is known as Woden, from which we get Wednesday (Woden’s Day); Thor is known as Thunar. Freya and Frigg have merged somewhat and are seen by some as a single deity known by variants of Freya and/or Frigg. Though strictly speaking Freya is a maiden goddess and Frigga a Mother archetype.

**Where do Heathens get their lore?**

The main body of lore for Heathens is contained in the Eddas. There are two Eddas: the younger or, prose Edda; and the Elder or, poetic. Many Heathens will especially look to the Havamal which is one of the poems contained in the Poetic Edda in which Odin gives advice on a range of things from women, to drink and battle tactics! I personally view The Seeress’s Prophesy as just as important.

The Seeress's prophesy is mainly concerned with the creation of the universe and the end of the world at Ragnarok and the new world, which will exist afterwards.

Here we come to what may appear to some as the main stumbling block of Heathenry. Because we take our Lore from ancient texts there is always going to be a difference in personal interpretation. This can lead to heated debate and hermeneutical wrangling. Usually the only thing actually being argued over is the terminology. The general meaning of both sides is the same. Cynics have said get two Heathens together and you have an argument! But that is the way we explore and deepen our knowledge and understanding. By constantly challenging what we believe, it is a continual learning process. As for the method, well we do take our cues from the Norse and Saxons who raided northern Europe for about seven centuries!

The surviving codex of the Poetic Edda was written in Iceland around 1270. The poems are almost certainly much older though, most likely dating from the C10th and possibly originating in Sweden. The author or copyist is not known. It contains a number of poems and fragments of poems in a variety of styles.

The Prose Edda is all the work of one man: Snorri Sturloson . He lived in Iceland between 1179 and 1241.  It is in various parts the first is the Gylfaginning or the deluding of Gylfi, which is a guide to the mythology of the Northern Peoples. The second is a textbook on Skaldic art: the skaldskaparmal or poetic Diction. Skalds were poets who wrote epics and sagas. If you lived your life with honor and did many great deeds you would have a great song written about you, which would be remembered for many generations. Snorri also wrote a long poem called The hastate written in honor of King Hakon which is an example of this.

 There are also various Poems of Anglo-Saxon origin the most well known of these is surely Beowulf. Some Heathens will also look To Tacitus who was a Roman general and diarist who wrote of his journeys in Germania and the British isles. Some will even look as far as the writings of Bede.

It has to be remembered that the later the source the more likely it is to have been censored by, or even written, by Christians.

**Do Heathens say Merry Meet?**

Not unless you want some strange looks!! A typical Heathen Greeting is Hail! and a typical parting is wassail. Though not all Heathens will follow this. Sometimes this is written as Waes Hael, which is closer to the original Anglo-Saxon. Waes Hael can be as easily used as a greeting or a parting, as a rough translation it means 'stay healthy'.

**Do Heathens follow the Wiccan Rede?**

Heathens by definition are not Wiccans. There are no insistences in Heathenry to follow anything except what is written in the Eddas. Even then that is seen as advice and not followed to the exclusion of everything else. Some Heathens may follow the Wiccan Rede, but that will be a personal decision. Many do not follow the Rede or see it as relevant to their tradition at all. When you consider that much of the magic written about in the Eddas is to do with helping a warrior in battle it is easy to understand why this is. After all the last thing a berserker going into battle worries about is harming none!!

The concept of destruction as a normal process in the universe is a key part of Heathenry for me. I and many other Heathens believe that sometimes change can only take place if the old order is destroyed. Sometimes we are the agents of that change. While most Heathens will view the universe in terms of everything being connected; and that to change one part of it, to a greater or lesser extent affects it all: there is no belief that it all comes back to you three times. Most Heathens would argue, rightly or wrongly, that the rule of three is an invention of Gerald Gardiner. As such although Heathens accept that there are consequences of their actions; as long as you accept the consequences, or Wyrd of your actions, there are no hard and fast rules about what you may, or may not do, magically, or in your every day life.

**Do Heathens have any kind of moral code of ethics then?**

Certain traditions within heathenry notably 'The Odinic Rite' follow a code of ethics known as the nine noble virtues these are: Courage, Honour, Truth, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Self-reliance, Industriousness and perseverance.  These are also followed by some Heathens not of that tradition. Again there is no insistence on this. Heathens very much take the responsibility for their actions. We believe that outcomes good or bad are the result of our past actions, we term this Wyrd .  We do believe that it not for us to interfere in another's wyrd. Thus Heathens do not proselytise, it is for each and every soul to find their own way in life and make their own wyrd. However if people ask us about it, then having made the decision themselves, then we can, and do, tell them. For example, you chose to take this course.

**Where do Heathens stand on a Universalist view of Deity?**

Heathens are Pantheistic. That means they follow or honor all the Gods and Goddesses in a pantheon. In Heathenry’s case there are two pantheons, The Aesir and Vanir.  Some Heathens fit that in with a more generalized view that their Gods and Goddesses are just aspects of other god forms; some see their Gods and Goddesses as distinct and separate entities.

To Heathens their Gods and Goddesses are not just deities to be invoked or connected with in ritual. We are very much a part of their world and they ours.

They are from where humans originated. There are humans today who will claim DNA links back to the Saxons and Vikings. This is especially true in Europe. The Swedish Royal family claims a direct bloodline back to Yngvi-Frey. This is some nine hundred years after Christianity became the official religion of Sweden. Such is the strength of the bond we have with our Gods and Goddesses. As I said they are more than just our Deity they are our ancestors too. They are family.

Because of this most Heathens have a very personal relationship with their Gods and Goddesses. Most once settled on a Heathen path will stay on that path; having said that; Heathens, in general, respect the paths chosen by other pagans. They also find they have things in common with many other pagan traditions.

There is a very strong belief that your path will find you. And what is right for one is not right for others.

In addition to following a pantheon (or two) most, but not all, Heathens will have a personal or patron God or Goddess, sometimes more than one. Although this personal bond is the most important to them, they will honor the entire pantheon. This is because part of what makes up their patron is the patron’s inclusion in the Pantheon and the relationships within the pantheon. To pick one out exclusively would be like trying to do a jigsaw with only one of the pieces. Similarly leaving one out means the picture is incomplete. Thus though some would leave out Loki as evil, I see him as an agent of change and necessary to gaining the overall picture.

We do not see our Gods and Goddesses as perfect. They are just as capable of noble or cowardly acts as we are, but on a much larger scale.

**Do Heathens Celebrate the Sabbats?**

There is no mention in the Eddas of any yearly cycle of festivals. There are other sources, which have some sketchy details such from Tacitus, who mentions the worship of an Earth Goddess named Nerthus.  The word Yule has its origins in Norse. We are fairly certain there was a harvest festival in early autumn and another in November which was called Blotmonath (blood month) Where all the surplus livestock, which weren’t going to be bred from the next year, were killed. There is also evidence a festival in spring called Siggiblot. Held when the winter storms had subsided; and it was safe to travel on the open sea to go aviking once more. There is also a Goddess named Ostara but nothing in record to say that the Norse or Saxon peoples worshipped her; which in no way proves that they dint either.

Modern Heathens fall into two camps. Those who follow the wheel of the year and those, which see it as a modern invention and do not. Some of those who do follow the festivals may not celebrate them all, or may celebrate them at slightly different times. For example the Yule tide celebrations start on 20th of December which is known as Mother Night. It is a celebration of the mother Goddesses. This makes a lot of sense if you think about it; coming just before the sun is reborn at Yule. There are other festivals such as the blessing of the Dises , or Disting.   Some Heathens may keep the same festivals, but celebrate them at the next full moon after the calendar date. Some Heathens would say that only three of the festivals have any meaning: those of winter and summer finding( yule and Litha ) and Disting. Though there is some disagreement as when exactly Disting should be held it is generally accepted that it should be sometime in February. My feeling is that the equinoxes would have been important as markers between summer and winter as the Norse peoples only had two seasons: those of summer and winter.

**What is the Heathen Belief About Life After Death?**

Heathens are the one branch of Pagans who believe in Hel. Yes that is Hel with just one L.  It is ruled over by Loki’s daughter Hella. However rather than the Christian view of hellfire and eternal torture, Hel is a realm of damp and fog; where the soul lets go of all the events of the past life and prepares itself for the next.  Not all Heathens believe in reincarnation. Those who do not simply see Hel as a dead place where those who have died of illness or old age go. But it is not at all a place of sadness, according to the Eddas they have Mead there, so it can't be all that bad! Those who do believe in reincarnation believe that we are born back into the same tribe or family we left.

No description of the Heathen view of the afterlife would be complete without mentioning Odin's Hall Valhalla. This is a huge feasting hall in Asgard, with 540 doors where 800 warriors can exit at once. The warriors there are chosen from the slain in battle and are known as the Einherjar, they are locked into a cycle of feasting and fighting until Ragnarok.  However it is worth noting here that Freya in one of her aspects is chief of the Valkyries and has first choice of the slain. She takes them to her hall called Sessrunir, (many seats) which is on the plain of Folkvang.

There is also a Goddess by the name of Gefjon who takes any women who die unmarried to serve her.

**What is the Heathen view of The Goddess?**

Talk to a heathen about The Goddess and you are quite likely to be greeted with a smile and a question in return: Which one?

The Correllian view that the Goddess is the higher female half of the universe and that the male half of Deity exists in the physical part that we interact with; is an alien concept to Heathenry. Heathens very much believe that there is a male and female part of everything co-existing at all levels.

Heathens have many Goddesses, it has to be said that the Eddas do tend towards mentioning the Gods but that is possibly a later Christian influence in some of the texts. After all Christians have no concept of a divine female at all. Most Heathens will see The Gods and Goddesses as having equal standing; and try to incorporate both into their worship; relative to what they are doing.

 Probably the most mentioned Goddess is Freya, followed by Frigga. Although in Anglo Saxon Heathenry they have become blurred somewhat and are often worshipped as one Goddess. Other notable Goddesses are Nerthus who is the Mother of Frey and Freya: Idun who has the apples which keep the Gods young; Sif wife of Thor who has hair of pure spun Gold, and Skadi a giantess who became the second wife of Niord, after choosing him because of his feet!

The answers to some of the questions in the exam are to be found in the introduction.

There are four magical paths recognized in Heathenry. The first, that of the Voluspa, or seeress is forever beyond me, by virtue of being born male. As I have no experience of it I shall mention it only in passing. Frigga, wife of Odin was a seer, but was unable to prevent her son Baldur’s death at the hands of his brother. In fact by trying to prevent it she became the agent by which it was brought to pass.

The second which I have an understanding of but do not practice is Galdr. Practitioners of Galdr sing or chant runes. The theory behind it is that the power of the runes can be harnessed through the vibrations in sound. Each rune has its own way of being pronounced while being chanted or sung in order to raise its energy. Galdr then is most easily taught by oral tradition. Modern practice is as a result of experiment and can be said to be a reclaimed art.

The third magical path is one, which I do have some limited experience of. Seidhr , literally means seething, it is the Northern Tradition’s shamanistic path. Odin practiced a seidhr technique when he impaled himself on Yggdrasil for nine days. He was rewarded with the discovery of the Runes. Seidhr is similar to other shamanistic paths in that the aim is to achieve an altered state of consciousness. Certainly the ancient Teutonic peoples knew of various plants and fungi which would do this. Another method of doing this is by inflicting pain. (see Odin’s method )

While in an altered state the magician will attempt to shape shift or astrally project themselves. The principal of Seidhr is that by entering the etheric plane and affecting a change there, because everything is linked, therefore a change can be brought about in the physical world.

The fourth kind of Heathen magic is that of the Vitki or Rune Master. This is my area of expertise.

*Do you know how to carve, do you know how to interpret,*

*Do you know how to stain, do you know how to test out,*

*Do you know how to ask, do you know how to sacrifice,*

*Do you know how to dispatch, do you know how to slaughter?*

*Sayings of the high one v144  Trans Carolyne Larrington 1996*

This then is the test of the Vitki. In my interpretation of this verse I shall leave out the fourth line. I said in lesson two that Heathens do not necessarily follow the Wiccan Rede. For personal reasons, I count myself in that number. However I also said that Heathens respect other people’s views and beliefs. I have a great deal of respect for the people who follow the Correllian tradition. Thus I would not show disregard for their code of ethics and talk about dispatching and slaughtering. Even if that were not the case, then I do not believe that this is something that should be taught on a public site, without being able to judge the character of the student. The Havamal in later verses says:

V145.

*Better not to pray than to sacrifice too much,*

*A gift always calls for another;*

*Better not dispatched than to slaughter too much*

The following is a development of my own handbook on runes, written as a teaching aid for my last apprentice.

Before I move on to carving runes let us first think about what you are going to carve them into.

While it is possible to create or carve runes into nearly every kind of substance I prefer working in wood. In my experience just about anything made of wood can be used to carve your runes into and the magic will work just as well. However it should be noted that others believe that you should always use live wood, cut with a single stroke. Then you should not let the branch touch the ground or it will loose its energy. You should also walk round the tree nine times chanting a blessing to the tree and a request that it give you its wood. You should then leave an offering of coins beneath the tree.

I have a few comments to make about this:

1) In my experience any branch or twig that can be cut with a single stroke is not big enough to use.

2) The tree is touching the ground in the first place so surely any energy would have already grounded. You are also touching the ground and are likely to have the same effect.

3) I have used dead wood and I found the effect just as strong.

Therefore it is my experience that the wood retains its properties long after it has been cut. Whether it touches the ground or not.

4) If you are any kind of witch at all, then a loss or gain of energy should not be too hard to rectify. You are going to charge the rune with your own energy anyway, you don’t actually require any energy from the tree. After all runes carved in stone are just as effective as those carved in wood.

5) Cutting wood wounds the tree, so you should always seal the cut limb afterwards. Remember that cutting or pruning a tree does not always harm it, in fact it can promote new growth. You just have to think about how you are cutting the tree.

6) What good are coins to a tree? If you want to leave an offering then leave a bucket of compost or some spring water from a holy well. I am sure the tree will be much more appreciative of something useful to it.

Runes can however be made from other materials. There are examples dating back over millennia carved in stone, horn, wood and ivory. Unless you have a forge in your garden then beating runes into metal is impracticality. Similarly depending where you live getting hold of bone, horn or ivory can prove difficult or illegal. There are still rocks to be found and if you possess an etching tool it is possible to carve into pebbles and semi precious stones. It is also relatively easy to obtain modeling clay and bake yourself some runes.

*I* shall however talk about using wood and mention a few trees and properties of the wood harvested from them.

**Fruit trees**: in general all fruiting trees are good for making a Futhark for use in divination, especially if the diviner is female.

**Birch**: Use for new starts, fertility, rebirth, growth.

**Blackthorn**: For protection, also possibly for Futhark creation since it does bear the sloe berry. I have to say that not everyone likes using this wood, it does have its darker side and some people have problems working with it, to the point of not having it in their houses at all. I have found that, with care, it is an exceptionally powerful wood to use.

**Hawthorn**: Just as good for protection as the Blackthorn but without the darker overtones.

**Willow**: For purification, rebirth, also for turning psychic or magical attacks. After all not everybody follows the Rede!

**Yew**: May be used by males for creation of Futharks. Also a good protective wood. Yew is exceptionally hard to carve but will last you a lifetime. King Henry VIII lost his flagship HMS Mary Rose in the Solent. When they went down to it some hundreds of years later the divers found barrels of yew longbows, some which still had a pull of over 100 pounds. Modern competition bows have a pull of about 40 pounds. This more martial side to yew should give a clue to one of its other uses. Yew can also be used to aid psychic or spiritual journeys.

**Oak**: For strength and endurance. Some people, notably Druids, also say Oak is good for gaining wisdom.

**Pine**: Pine can be used to gain knowledge, which is not always the same as wisdom.

So let us assume that you have your wood ready and prepared, be that a stave for carving a bind rune, a staff, or 24 staves ready to carve a futhark. There is a course already, which deals with runes under the heading of divination. Those descriptions are broadly applicable here. However I use the Elder Futhark not the 20th century 25-rune version. Which is purely the invention of one man, and in my opinion the addition of the 25th rune shows that the person who added it did not fully understand the other 24. The meanings I give to the runes for use in magic follow.

1st Aett

Fehu: Use for wealth, luck, creative energy, beginnings, to bring about a successful conclusion for time and energy put into a project.

Uruz: Healing, to add energy to a bind rune, for stamina, strength, perseverance, to pass exams or tests.

Thurisaz: Primary protective rune, may be use to bind, represents the power of mjolnir, Thor’s hammer.

Ansuz: For knowledge, to restore order, poetic creativity and shamanic trance.

Raido: To give focus and control to magical energy, May also be used as a blessing on vehicles for a safe journey.

Kenaz: For gaining knowledge, especially of magic or the occult, for astral travel, to gain a creative spark of an idea, to cast light on unknown situations.

Gebo: for binding, to create balance or to re-set the balance, for partnerships, sex magic.

Wunjo: To bring about wishes, the realization of our dreams, Happiness.

 2nd Aett

Hagalaz: Creates confusion and destruction, can be used to turn someone’s past against them, to invoke his/her wyrd, binding, Shamanic travel to the underworld.

Nauthiz: Defensive magic, to constrain or bind, to bring about what you most need, to obtain a lover.

Isa: defensive magic, to hold a situation static, to cause delays, to end a relationship.

Jera: To create gradual but long lasting changes if sun wise, to delay or slow things down if widdershins, Fertility, Harmony.

Eihwaz: Hunting, seeking , searching, Soul hunting, Shamanic traveling to the nine worlds, Protection.

Pertho: To gain knowledge, to access hidden knowledge and memories, to expose secrets.

Algiz: Protection and defense, to shield from magical backlash if one is expected, good luck.

Sigel: Healing, energy, to empower a bind rune, success, victory.

Third Aett

Tyr: To gain justice, Victory in battle, the power of sacrifice in order to achieve the desired effect.

Berkana: Growth, regeneration, creativity, Useful in alleviating troublesome female hormones, New beginnings, birth.

Ehwaz: To create or break links between people, to assist in lifestyle changes, bonds of trust/loyalty, soul travel.

Mannaz: Increases verbal communication and debating skills, success in exams, to increase mental powers.

Laguz: To gain access to someone else’s unconscious, to attract love, used to clear restraints and fetters, to accelerate change, for increase in the life force.

Inguz: To integrate other runes as part of a bind rune, fertility issues, acts as an astral doorway, to access past lifetimes.

Othilla: To strengthen family ties, to bring like-minded people to work together, to centre a working on the physical plane, acquisition of wealth and property,

Dagaz: To bring about rapid change, to block attacks, to render something invisible.

And so now you have an idea of what to use to carve your runes into; and the magical uses of the Elder futhark; let us proceed with carving them, or *risting* as it is known. It is worth noting here that the magical uses and the divinatory meanings are not always exactly the same.

Risting as I have discussed earlier is part of empowering your magic to work. It is not a case of carving, then empowering. Risting is empowering as you carve and the simple act of risting a rune is sufficient on its own to give the spell power. Let us take a simple thing like a bind rune to pass an exam.

Looking through the list above you can see that Uruz and Ansuz from the first Aett or possibly Wunjo may be useful. From the second Aett there is Nauthiz especially if it is a qualification required to do something else and Sigel to give energy. Mannaz may be useful in oral exams from the third Aett.

The first thing to do is decide on a main rune that you are going to use to be a focus for what you want to bring about. In this case either Mannaz or Uruz. Let us choose Uruz. Then let us decide that we need some extra energy to help us and to power up the bind rune so let us use Sigel for that. This would give us:

  OR 

It is worth trying out various shapes of bind rune on a scrap of paper first to see which shape you like the best, especially if using three runes, but this is purely for cosmetic reasons. The magic will work just the same in any case. I would suggest that bind runes are kept to a maximum of three runes, any more leads to some complicated carving!

So now we have our wood, we know what runes we are using and what shape the bind rune is going to take. Next take your wood and mark in pencil the bind rune you want to ristr. Take time to think about what it is you want to achieve, when you are focused on that you are ready to start. Using a craft knife cut at 90 degrees to your wood. Follow the pencil lines, carve one rune then the other. As you do so repeat the name of the rune either aloud or in your mind. Be careful! If your tool is sharp enough to cut wood, it is certainly sharp enough to cut your finger if you get careless. Then go back over each cut, and cut at 45 degrees, both sides of your 90 degree cut making a V shape. Continue to concentrate on the rune you are carving and to repeat its name.

The next stage is to color your rune. You will need a fine brush and some red paint. Red will work for any kind of magic, you may use other colors for specific kinds of magic if you wish. If you have cut yourself you may also use your blood to stain your bind rune. This is not to everybody’s liking especially if you are a little squeamish. There are also others who have ethical problems with the use of blood in magic or ritual. They feel that use of blood in any amounts and for any reason are akin to blood sacrifices; and view it as on the darker side of magical practice. However if you want to empower a rune for your own personal use, I feel that there can be few more powerful ways of doing so than using a little of your own blood. You get nothing for nothing given. The analogy I use is that if you needed an injection to make you better, you would put up with the pain because you would see that there was a good reason for it. You only need a drop or two of blood. I would suggest you get a sterile needle if you want to do this. There is a well documented sacrifice in Heathen mythology. Odin sacrificed one of his eyes to gain knowledge from the well of Mimir, and Tyr Sacrificed his hand in order that Fenris could be bound. Mostly I find I am clumsy and cut myself anyway. In this case I view it as a waste not to use the blood when I am already cut. I know of women who use menstrual blood, again you have already lost it so might as well use it. It really just depends on how badly (or well) you want the magic to work, and your ethical stand point. I would only ever use blood for risting runes on something for my own personal use. The Runes do work well without using blood at all. After all runes cut into stone are just as effective, as I have said before. In fact it is quite possible to do rune magic with nothing more specialist than a scrap of paper and a ballpoint pen.

Let us say you now have your coloring medium. With the brush paint one rune shape at a time with single strokes along the V shape you have cut. Continue to repeat the name of the rune you are staining, hold in your mind the effect you would like it to have and make sure you paint each rune one at a time.

 

The bind rune above has three runes of protection incorporated into it: Algiz, Eihwaz and Thurisaz. Each of these runes shares the upright. Each rune should be carved and colored separately. That means going over the centre upright three times. If you do not do this then you will not make all three rune shapes.

That’s it you’re done. The bind rune is empowered, your magic is complete. You just need to wait for the coloring medium to dry. It is worth noting that if you do use blood it will dry to nearly black. If you want to keep the red color then mix a little paint and blood together. You could possibly even get away with mixing blood with other colors too. One drop mixed in is all that is needed for symbolism. I use acrylic model paints for my colors. They are water soluble when wet and fairly fade resistant when dry. You may want to add a coat of polish or varnish to your wood to protect it once the color is dry.

Your magic is now done. If you wish to do so then an appropriate God or Goddess may be called upon for help. To continue with our exam theme Odin would be the God to call on.

The Aesir and Vanir are covered by another course so I won't duplicate things by giving in depth attributes here. This though is invocation, or prayer, and is an entirely different process from the magic you will have just done. It is not required for the magic to work, but I am not about to be so dogmatic as to say you can’t or shouldn’t do both. It is entirely your choice.

You can make a small hole in the upper end of your bind rune and hang it on a chain or leather thong. That way you can wear it so that it is working for you constantly. Alternatively you could make a small bag for it and carry it in your pocket. Certain workings require you to leave the bind rune in a specific location.

I do not agree that it is possible to go through life harming none, but there are those reading this that will follow that Rede. My feeling is that magic can be used for so many different things. If you have let the situation get so bad that cursing is the only way out, then you have most likely let slip an opportunity to do something less drastic earlier on. It is an indication of poor judgment on behalf of the Vitki rather than a definite: Thou shalt not enshrined in the heart of Heathenry.

In this chapter I want to explore what all this means to heathens practicing today. The things that make us Heathens in our every day lives, and in our rituals.

**Wyrd and Orlog**

I have touched on the concept of wyrd in a previous chapter but here I look at it in a little more detail. The closest meaning to Wyrd would be fate or perhaps Karma. This is a fate we make for ourselves, we have control over it. Therefore if you are sitting moaning and complaining that life is not fair: then it is only yourself you have to blame. If you don’t like your life: take charge, and change it. All the time you spend in self pity, is time wasted, that you could be using to your advantage! There are of course some things, which you cannot change. For example what has happened already cannot be changed. You cannot always have a noticeable effect on the actions of others. You may have a medical condition or other health related problem for which has no cure at present. However in all these cases it is still your choice how to approach the problem. It is still up to you to shape your future, within those set boundaries, no-one else can do it for you.

Heathens apply this concept to other people too. It is not our responsibility to make decisions for others. So we do not proselytize or go out and preach our religion to others. If we are asked questions then we answer, but the aim is always to educate people about what we believe rather than to say that this is the correct way for them. That is the choice they have to make for themselves.

Wyrd is often seen as a web, you can bend your thread and stick it to others and even bend other threads by your actions but you cannot break them or deviate from your own thread.

Orlog which is another kind of fate. It is the belief that some things are fixed. For example some believe that we all have a day to die. Not even the Gods and Goddesses can change that day, Frigga tried to do this with Baldur but ended up being the unwitting means to his death. So we cannot change the time of our death. What we do have power over is the manner of that death. And by that we also have a choice over the manner of our life. It also means that you might as well go charging into battle and fight your best. If it is your day to die and you take some others with you then that is more drinking partners in Valhalla. If it isn’t your day to die then you have no fear of battle because you won't die anyway. And this philosophy can be translated into everyday life as well.

Some Heathens also believe that Wyrd and Orlog have wider meanings too within the tribe and family or even the nation to which you belong.

**Troth**

Troth can be defined as being true to or faithful to the old Gods of the North. As well as having Troth with the Aesir and Vanir it can also mean having Troth with other Heathens who you know, or have been in the same hearth with. In fact taken to its widest extent you could say that heathens all have Troth with each other.

It means having a common cultural and/ or spiritual identity with other Heathens because we all share a similar vision of the way the Universe works. It means living a life in which you are also true to yourself. If you cannot be true to yourself then how can you realistically hope to be true to anything or anyone else?

Troth also relates partly to the noble virtues of Fidelity and honor, in that to have troth is to remain faithful, and in so doing act in an honorable way.

Another way in which Troth is seen is in Oaths. To be betrothed still has this meaning today. Indeed an Oath was often made on a ring or torc given by a lord or Earl to a servant or loyal warrior. Others are not given lightly, the Goddess Var who rules over oaths has a way of taking vengeance on those who break their word.

**Social Values**

Unfortunately it is true that the victors get to write the history. In this case Christian monks writings have been preserved in far greater number than the runic inscriptions of the ancient Gothi. The time between the Romans occupying Britain and The Norman conquest is known as The Dark Ages. It is assumed that the Viking and Saxon raiders were less cultured and less advanced than the Christianized peoples who were being raided. I would like to make a few points that perhaps expose that standpoint as less than accurate

The Pre-Christian Icelandic people had a form of democracy; equal rights for women in property ownership, marriage, and divorce; and a system of Law. Meanwhile in Christianized Europe it was a case of: no rights for anyone accept the nobility; Women were seen as property; and the majority of the population scraped meager livelihoods in the slavery of serfdom.

Wonders of craftsmanship like the Dragon prowed Longboats, which were the most technically advanced boats in Northern Europe; a reliable system of navigation using lodestones, stars and moon; and the Norse discovery of Newfoundland in North America some few centuries before Columbus. Show how adept and adaptable these peoples were. There has been Norse or Viking remains found in Constantinople, Ireland, Kiev, Spain, the Faeroe isles Greenland and France.

The workmanship and skill of the Saxon goldsmiths evident in the treasures found at Sutton Hoo led historians to look again at their preconceptions of the Saxons Angle Jute and Norse peoples as crude and cultureless savages. It is also worth noting that the Vikings used knot work as decoration, which influenced the Celtic style in Ireland.

So how about other attitudes in Heathenry? How about disabled people?

Sayings of the High One has this to say:

Stanza 71

The Lame man rides a horse, the handless man drives herds,

The deaf man fights and succeeds;

To be blind is better than to be burnt (dead):

A corpse is of no use to anyone.

Brackets are my own, the rest comes form Caroline Larrington’s translation.

So we can see from this that the Norse did not see a normal state of health and people who fell below that level as disabled rather they saw people who had differing positive contributions to make to society, and different roles to play. Everyone was expected to earn their keep and work at feeding themselves and their family.

That the Norse believed working hard was the way to wealth and that even if you owned only a little; the work put into keeping it was valued, is shown in Stanza 59 and 36

Stanza 59

He should get up early, the man who has few workers,

And go about his work with thought;

Much he neglects, the man who sleeps in the mornings,

Wealth is half-won by the vigorous.

Stanza 36

A farm of your own is better, even if small,

Everyone’s someone at home;

Though he has two goats and a coarsely roofed house,

That is better than begging.

**Ritual and celebration**

We do not have books to tell us how to practice as Heathens. Much can be gleaned from the Eddas and other sources about some of the practices, such as the worship of Nerthus recorded by Tacitus. However not all the practices are appropriate today: You can hardly strangle the person pulling the holy cart then throw them in the lake in this day and age. Well, you can, but not without incurring the wrath of the organizations of Law and Order.

It has been suggested that Heathens need only use two elements in rituals Fire, from Muspell and Ice from Niflheim.  I would say that Earth needs to be added at the centre to represent Midguard.

Some Heathens do use the normal four elements in their most common attributes: East = Air, West = Water etc. Some use five elements but Earth to the north is replaced by Ice and spirit in the centre is replaced by earth.

Some Heathens like to use Old Norse or Anglo Saxon in their rituals, which is a bit like Catholics using Latin. For some I suppose it helps them get into the feel of the ritual and if it works for them, then that is all very good for them.

When Freya decided to contact me she spoke modern English. What makes you think that the Gods and Goddesses haven't kept up with syntax changes over the years?  The whole purpose of ritual is that it should be relevant to those participating in it. And a ritual in a language which you do not understand is for me a total non starter.

In terms of what I do in ritual and comparing it with the Correllian way of ritual, I tend to combine casting the circle calling the quarters and calling on God and Goddess in one invocation. I give here an example from a ritual I wrote for Yule 2006

North:  Holds crystal aloft, Circles sun wise around the circle holding crystal aloft and replaces it to the north.

By the Earth Mother Nerthus, I do sanctify this circle. Bless it and all within it that they may grow in health, peace and love.

All: Face North

Hail Nerthus, Earth mother!

Bow

East: lights incense from candle on Harrow

Circles sun wise around the circle boundary with the incense and replaces incense to the East.

By Odin, Allfather, the all seeing, I sanctify this circle and bless it that all within may grow in thought and noble words!

All: Face East

Hail Odin, The Allfather!

Bow

South: Light candle or lantern and raises it up.

Circles sun wise around the circle boundary of the circle. Then replaces candle or lantern to the south.

Hail Baldur, the beautiful one, The Shining Ase. Reborn with the sun. By thee I sanctify this circle.

All :

Face south.

Hail Baldur! Reborn with the returning of the sun!

Bow.

West: Takes the small bowl of water and raises it up. Moves sun wise round the circle. If outdoors may sprinkle water to mark the boundary of the circle.

By Freya, Falcon cloaked Goddess of witchcraft, do I sanctify this circle and ask her guidance in all our workings here.

All:

Face west.

Hail Freya! Falcon cloaked Goddess of witchcraft

Bow.

N, E, S, W

We have marked this circle with earth, air, fire and water. Let it stand till our work be done! See how within each quarter call is also the marking out of the circle with that element and also calling on a god or goddess? But also using an aspect of that God or Goddess, which is, appropriate to the type of ritual being performed. So although the order of ritual taught by Corellianism and mine are different they still contain almost identical elements.

There is another aspect of Heathen ritual known as a hammer working. This invokes the power of Mjolnir as a protection. From a runic point of view this is represented by Thurisaz. You would make the sign of Thurisaz at all four quarters as well as above and below. The words you use are less important, indeed because you are using a rune there is no need to say anything at all. The rune itself will provide protection. Indeed it is perfectly possible for speed or simplicity to create a sacred space with just a hammer working and a short prayer to the Aesir and Vanir.

I hope that you have enjoyed this course and have at least some idea now of what Heathenry is. I wish you luck in your final test which follows. Waes Hael!