

WARRIORSHIP

by Swein Runestaff

There has been much written on warriorship in recent times and interest in the subject shows no sign of diminishing. As Pagans we must come to understand our warrior ancestry and, more importantly, adapt its principles to modern life. If we fail in this task, we face the prospect of becoming either meek and herded sheep, or branded outlaws, condemned as were our ancestors, for our heresy.

Although I have read widely on the historical evidence, my own understanding comes mainly from my training in a living Norwegian tradition and in the Rune-Gild. There are many academic theories and conjectures about the role of the warrior in Pagan society but very few academics who understand warriorship. We Pagans do not have the luxury of theorising, no matter how clever those theories may seem. If they are not of practical benefit to us in daily life, they amount to nothing more than intellectual wankery.

Paganism is about freedom. Freedom from dogma, freedom from our negative conditioning, habits, and inhibitions, freedom from our self-limiting beliefs. We must not think that we can improve our situation if we break the bonds of the Judeo-Christian chastity belt merely to adopt fetters forged from the twisted scrap of a bygone age. Christianity became fossilised before it reached the wisdom and tolerance of maturity, let us not make the same mistake.

Paganism has always had its strength in its diversity and fluidity, constantly adapting according to time and location. The form is always evolving but the essence remains. This fluidity is indeed part of the essence, and differentiates us from the anachronists who seek only relief from reality. To the Pagan, reality is not the tiresome mud of everyday, but colourful clay to be moulded lovingly in our hands.

Paganism is our way and warriorship is our vehicle. Without warriorship, Paganism becomes quaint anachronism. In my tradition warriorship is not about aggression, in fact a warrior has gone beyond the need for aggression. Warriorship is actually magick, the art of ma-

nifesting the True Will. An aspect of this is illustrated in our understanding of the Berserk.

The word "berserk" comes from two words, "bare" and "sark" (a shirt). A berserk was originally one who fought without a shirt, bare from the waist up. Not only did they scorn body armour, they even went without the psychological advantage of a layer of clothing between their skin and the enemy's sword.

In our tradition, the symbolism of removing the armour is of great importance, but before it is safe to do so, one must be adept at doing battle with the armour on. Whether on the battlefield or in the marketplace we all wear some sort of armour against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", or more to the point, the barbs of our fellow humans. In order to operate efficiently we must know our strengths and weaknesses, and become aware of the style and construction of our armour.

As our movements become increasingly efficient, we find that we can afford to shed some of our armour. We then find that our movements become even more efficient with the resulting freedom. Eventually we find ourselves totally open to the world. No longer encumbered with

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layers of protection we are free to be our true selves. Every act becomes a spontaneous and joyous act of pure will. We become a vortex of pure will force.

Paradoxically, while a novice stripped of armour would be instantly slain, an adept becomes impervious to steel. The berserk ceases to be a target by becoming as if devoid of gross substance. The Ynglinga Saga describes the Berserks when inspired by Odin, "They cut down the enemy, while neither fire nor iron could make an impression on them." That which offers no resistance cannot be cut. That which is flexible cannot be broken.

Anyone who has been in combat situations will realise that uncontrolled anger is rarely a friend in battle. Such emotion may well stimulate enthusiasm and fearlessness, but at the cost of judgement and precision. There is a Samurai saying- "The angry man will defeat himself in battle as well as in life." The true berserk rage is certainly not blind anger. An angry warrior may be frightening and deadly but is unlikely to come out of a battle alive, let alone unscathed.

The secret of the berserk's invulnerability is the ability to let the True Will flow unimpeded. This requires the warrior to be totally calm and centred while at the same time unleashing the destructive forces of the Will. This is a form of meditation infinitely more difficult than being calm and centred in a quiet room

(something most people find almost impossible anyway). The slightest distracting thought can be fatal. By not letting thoughts interfere with the flow of Will, the berserk is always in the right place at the right time. Action flows, there is no rigidity or predictability, there is nowhere a blade can strike.

The berserk acts without hesitation and is always in harmony with any situation. Harmony in this case means being true to the self and interacting with the situation in a way which is honest with the self. This can only be done when there is no barrier between the self and the situation. One becomes a fluid part of the situation without losing one's individuality, an indispensable and autonomous part of the whole, every movement being a vital adjustment of one's position in the universe.

It is only through warriorship that we will be able to practise our varied traditions without fear of persecution, for this fear betrays a lack of confidence in one's own magickal ability and in the power of one's tradition. Like the berserk, those who truly practise warriorship or magick will find themselves beyond the reach of any attack, and extremely unlikely to be attacked in the first place.

Judeo-Christian culture has taught us that we are powerless as individuals, that we must follow the mob to be saved. Pagan culture has always taught that we should accept responsibility for ourselves. Our power or lack of it is our own choice. Freedom is ours, taking responsibility for ourselves is the price. Many are not ready to pay it, let them join the sheep of a herd religion until they are ready, they too have a valid place in the greater whole. This is why Paganism does not seek to make converts.

Ultimately warriorship is a path of compassion. When we no longer fear others, we are free to sense their real needs. This is not sympathy or

just being nice, sometimes a harsh lesson will be far more beneficial in the long run. Only fearless openness allows one to see the best way to interact. Without fear we can be more tolerant and less defensive, less inclined to take things personally, or become offended when others do things a little differently, or moralise and interfere with others because we feel threatened by their strangeness. Only fear prevents us from achieving our potential. Only warriorship will defeat the fears which divide us.

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