

Title: Conversations

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Quote:

History:

Asatru is frequently regarded as one of the Neopagan family of religions. That family includes Wicca, Celtic Druidism, and re-creations of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and other ancient Pagan religions. However, many Asatruers prefer the term "Heathen" to "Neopagan" and look upon their tradition as "not just a branch on the Neopagan tree" but as a separate tree. Unlike Wicca, which has gradually evolved into many different traditions, the reconstruction of Asatru has been based on the surviving historical record; it has been maintained as closely as possible to the original religion of the Norse people.

Some sources state that Asatru or Ásatrú is an Icelandic word, derived from the Danish word Asetro. Others state that it is a Norse word. It was "first seen in 1885 in an article in the periodical "Fjallkonan". The next recorded instance was in "Heiðinn siður á Íslandi" by Ólafur Briem (Reykjavík, 1945)." The title means "Heathen traditions in Iceland."

In Scandinavia the religion is called Forn Siðr (which means the Ancient way or tradition), Forn sed (the Old custom), Nordisk sed (Nordic custom), or Hedensk sed (Pagan custom). The religion's origin is lost in antiquity. At its peak, it covered all of Northern Europe. In 1000 CE, Iceland became the second last Norse culture to convert to Christianity. Their prime motivation was economic. Sweden was ruled by a Pagan king until 1085 CE.

Icelandic poet Gothi Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson promoted government recognition of Asatru as a legitimate religion; this status was granted in 1972. Since the early 1970's, the religion has been in a period of rapid growth in the former Norse countries, in Europe and North America.

It is not unknown for otherwise decent religions to become corrupted by incorporating racist, sexist, anti-semitic, and homophobic beliefs. For example, the Christian Identity movement is one wing of the Christian religion which has adsorbed such beliefs. During the early part of the 20th Century, The National Socialist Party in Germany under Adolf Hitler attempted to pervert Asatru by grafting parts of the religion onto the Nazi racist beliefs. This blasphemy died by the end of World War II, although some neo-Nazi groups -- largely in the U.S. -- are now attempting to continue the practice. This activity is in no way related to the restoration of Asatru as a legitimate Heathen religion. There is a very strong anti-racist, anti-Nazi stance among national Asatru groups in the Scandinavian countries. This is also found in almost all Asatru groups in English speaking countries. They typically have a clear rejection of racism written into their constitutions. Unfortunately, some anti-racism groups like the Southern Poverty law Center and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (in its Megiddo report) have mistakenly accused the entire religion of racism.

Many people are exposed to the name "Asatru" through role playing games, such as Mage: The

Ascension. Unfortunately, the Asatru of these games bear little resemblance to the real religion.

Asatru Beliefs:

Asatru is a polytheistic religion. There are three races of Deities in the Norse pantheon. They are all regarded as living beings who are involved in human life: The Aesir: These are the Gods of the tribe or clan, representing Kingship, order, craft, etc.

The Vanir: These represent the fertility of the earth and forces of nature. They are associated with the clan but are not part of it.

The Jotnar: These are giants who are in a constant state of war with the Aesir. They represent chaos and destruction. At the battle of Ragnarok, many of the Gods will die, the world will come to an end and be reborn.

Specific Gods: Some of the more important are: Thor is the Thunderer, who wields Mjolnir, the divine Hammer. His chariot racing across the sky generates thunder. Thursday (Thor's Day) was named after him.

Odin is the one-eyed God; he gave up one of his eyes in order to drink from the Fount of Wisdom. He is a magician and wise one. He learned the secrets of the runes (Northern European alphabet) by hanging himself on the tree Yggdrasil for nine nights.

Frey is the God of Yule (born on the Winter Solstice, typically December 21). He is a God of peace and plenty who brings fertility and prosperity. His father was Njord.

Specific Goddesses: Some important ones are: Freya (aka Freyja) is the Goddess of love, beauty and sexuality, and perhaps a dozen other attributes. She leads the Valkyries who take the souls of slain soldiers to Valhalla (Odin's great hall).

Frigg is Odin's wife. Her name has been secularized to a slang term which refers to sexual intercourse. She is the patroness of the household and of married women.

Skadi is the Goddess of independence, death, hunting and skiing. Scandinavia was named after her; the English words shadow, skullduggery and shade came from her name.

Ostara, is a Goddess of fertility who is celebrated at the time of the Spring equinox. She was known by the Saxons as Eostre, the Goddess of Spring, from whom we have derived the word Easter. Ostara's symbols are the hare and the egg.

Other Entities Other Deities are Aegir, Balder, Bragi, Forseti, Heimdall, Loki, Njord, Ran, Tyr, Ull and Vithar. They also honor the Landvaettir (land spirits) of the forest, earth and streams.

Life Values: They follow the Nine Noble Virtues: Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance and Perseverance. The family is greatly valued and honored. They reject any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, race, sexual orientation, or "other divisive criteria".

Origins: Humanity is literally descended from the Gods. Three brothers, Odin, Vili, and Ve created people from two trees and gave them the names Ask and Embla. One deity, Rig visited the earth and established the social classes.

Od: This is the gift of ecstasy provided to humans by the Gods. It is what separates humanity from other animals, and is our eternal link with the Gods.

Creation Story: A poem Voluspa (Prophecy of the Seeress) contains an Asatru story of the creation of the universe. Between Muspelheim (The Land of Fire) and Niflheim the Land of Ice was an empty space called Ginnungigap. The fire and ice moved towards each other; when they collided, the universe came into being. Odin, Vili and Ve later created the world from the body of a giant that they

had slain.

After death: Those who die in battle will be carried to Valhalla by the Valkyries. There they will eat Särimner (a pig that is daily slaughtered and resurrected) with the Gods. Those who have lived very evil and treacherous lives go to Hifhel, a place of torment. The remainder go to Hel. This is a place of calmness and peace, and is unrelated to the Christian Hell.

Asatru Rituals and Practices:

Their local religious communities are called Kindreds, Hearths, or Garths. Priests are called Gothi; priestesses are Gythia

The Blot: (pronounced "bloats") This is their most common religious ritual; it is a sacrifice to the Gods. In olden days, as with almost all ancient religions, an animal was consecrated to the deities and then slaughtered. This was not seen as a bribe or as a method of capturing the power of the dying animal. It is simply the way in which the ancient Norse shared their bounty with a gift to the Gods. Currently, the animal sacrifice has been replaced by the offer of beer, juice or mead.

Afterwards, those present are either sprinkled with the liquid, or drink it in sequence.

The Sumbel: This is a ritual drinking celebration, in which a horn filled with a drink is passed around the group. Each person delivers a greeting; a toast to the Gods, ancient heroes, or one's ancestors; or a story, song or poem. He or she then drinks from the horn.

Profession or Adoption: This is the act of making a commitment to Asatru to the exclusion of other faiths, by solemnly giving an oath of allegiance and kinship to the Gods of Asgard, the Aesir and Vanir. It is a simple ceremony usually done in the presence of a Gothi or Gythia and the rest of the Kindred, Hearth or Garth. It is taken on an oath ring or some other sacred object.

Seasonal Days of Celebration

In common with most Neo-Pagan faiths, their main holy days are:

Summer Finding, at the spring equinox, typically March 21. This is dedicated to Ostara.

Winter Finding, at the fall equinox, typically September 21

Midsummer, at the summer solstice, typically June 21

Yule, which starts on the winter solstice (typically December 21) on the Mother Night of Yule. It lasts for 12 days or more. This is the most important day of the year. Many Norse symbols have been adsorbed by the Christian celebration of Christmas: evergreen trees, Yule logs, holly, etc.

Many also celebrate days between the solstices and equinoxes. Various traditions within Asatru observe them on different dates:

The Charming of the Plow on February 1st weekend, a celebration of Freya and the Disir

Merry-Moon on May 1st weekend, celebration of spring dedicated to Njord and Nerthus.

Harvest or Freyfaxi on August 1st weekend, the first harvest and celebration of Frey and his horse

Fogmoon on November 1st weekend, a celebration of war-dead and Ragnarok Dedicated to Odin and Freya.

Einherjar is held on November 11 and coincides with Armistice or Veterans Day. It honours those who have been killed in battle and have joined Odon's warriors in Valhalla. Some groups hold a feast on the 9th of each month to honor Norse heroes. Other groups hold rituals at full moons. Additional

days are celebrated at other times during the year by different traditions.