

ASATRU AN ANCIENT, BUT EVER NEW RELIGION
(C) Íslendingur Ásatrúarfélagið- Íslensku, Reykjavík,
Iceland

THE BEGINNING: Twelve people founded the Pagan Association of Iceland on the first day of summer 1972. This being the only remaining pagan holiday officially celebrated in Iceland Official recognition came a year later and by that time the membership had increased to 70 Although this is not a large portion of the population the Pagan Assembly is the fastest growing religious group of Iceland. In the first six months of 1994 the increase was over 40%.

HISTORY: Paganism or "Our Way" as this religion was called in ancient times is a branch of Indo-German paganism with some influences from Asian shamanism and the religions of the middle-east.

MICROCOSM MACROCOSM: The whole of creation is reflected in the smallest. The course of the year reflects the life-span of the Earth. The Sun is reborn at Midwinter*s. All plants are reborn in the spring, only to die in the fall. This cycle is repeated every year and so things will go while the world stands. So is the life of man. We are born, reach our prime, age and die. But life goes on That is the promise that is fulfilled every time a child is born.

THE CREATION: In the beginning there was the void, Ginnungagap, ice-cold on one side and burning hot on the other. In the middle where the ice and fire met there came into being the two primeval beings The giant Ymir and the cow Audhumla who nourished him. Audhumla licked the rocks in the void and thereby formed a man, his name is Bun. His son was Burr the father of Odin (Wotan) Vili and Vei. The brothers kill Ymir and form the world from his body. From his bones they made the mountains. From his blood the ocean. From his hair the trees. His skull is the dome of heaven and from his brain the high-flying clouds were made.

THE ASH: In the middle of the world stands the Ash, Yggdrasill, the mighty tree of life The roots of the Ash stand far and wide. One among the Gods, another among the giants and the third one in the world of men. Under the Ash sit the three fates Urd Verdandi and Skuld, Past Present and Future, they control the fate of men The gods hold their assemblies under the Ash.

HUMANITY: Odin and his brothers found on a beach two splinters from the tree of life. The great Gods gave them human form, life. Intellect and purpose. They are named Askur and Embla and they are the ancestors to all mankind.

THE FINAL TWILIGHT: The world shaped by the Gods is not eternal. In Ragnarok the final battle between the gods and the giants both are annihilated. So is the earth and all life except for two humans that take refuge in the great Ash. They re-populate the new earth that rises from the sea greener than ever

THE CYCLE: Our religion is based on the eternal cycle of nature. All things succumb to the negative forces in the end, even the gods. We must fight on never the less, that is our destiny and has to be accepted.

RITUALS: Modern pagans keep one eye on the past when setting up their ritual. Most of our inspirations originate from the Edda the ancient book of divine poems. However we live in a twentieth century environment and that shapes all our actions.

BLOT: The word blot is used for all religious ceremonies. It indicates both offering and strengthening through solidarity between Gods and man.

SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS: These are four and are determined by the old Icelandic calendar. They celebrate the continual creation through stages of increasing complexity and higher order, from the primitive beginning to the complex final creation of the great Gods.

THE BEGINNING: The first blot celebrates the creation of matter. It is held in the autumn, the beginning of the new year according to the old reckoning.

YULETIDE: The second blot is held at Yuletide on the 21st of December, the shortest day of the year. This is the celebration of the creation of light and the birth of the new sun.

LIFE: The third blot is the celebration of life, the highest form of the creation. The Gods, human beings, the Earth and all that lives has one beginning and all life is sacred.

THE PARLIAMENT: The fourth blot is dedicated to the law, civilization, society and other rules in the world of man. This blot is held at Thingvellir around the 20th of June on the opening day of the Althing, the old Icelandic Parliament.

THE CYCLE COMPLETED: The fifth blot is to give thanks for the fruits of the Earth. It also reminds us of the inevitable end of life and all creation. This blot falls together with the first. All is renewed. There is the promise given in the rainbow, the bridge between men and Gods. While the rainbow stands there is order in the world.

THE EARTH: Our way is an ecological way. We are expected to revere the earth and respect her. She is our mother and deserves all our respect.

ODIN is the father of the gods. He is the god of poetry, the runes and the occult. Those who die fighting dwell with him in Valhalla. His steed is the eight-legged Sleipnir. He is accompanied by two wolves. He owns the two ravens, Huginn and Muninn (Mind and Memory). They tell him tidings from all worlds.

FRIGG is the wife of Odin. She is the protector of the home and manages.

THOR is the son of Odinn and Earth. He is the protector of all men and of Midgard, the central world, man's abode. Thor is the most popular god both in past and present.

TYR is the god of war or rather the god of valour and bravery. He lost his right hand to the monster-wolf Fenrisulfr so that it might be bound to make central world a safer place for us all.

FREYR is the god of fertility. He is also the god of the corn and of all plants that grow upon the Earth.

FREYJA is the sister of Freyr. Direct to her your prayers for love, both men and women. She is also the goddess of war. It is said that she looks for OD, her lost lover amongst us mortals. Unable to find him she cries, her tears that fall upon land turn to gold, but those that fall in the sea are amber. Freyja is the most popular of all the

goddesses today as she was also in times past.

NJORDUR the father of Freyr and Freyja is the protector of seafarers, both fishermen and merchants.

RELIGION OF THE SETTLERS: The majority of the Nordic people that settled Iceland, in the ninth century, were pagans, but many were also Christians. These were probably the followers of Arianism and other sects deemed heretics by the Catholic Church. These groups were closer to paganism than the Church of Rome. In any event the two groups seem to have lived together in harmony for over a hundred years

CHRISTIANITY was accepted by the Icelandic Althing, or parliament, in the year 1000 under considerable pressure from the king of Norway and the Christian minority. Thus Iceland became Christian, but with considerable rights for the adherents of the old Gods.

Ásatrúarfélagið: The Asatru Pagan Fellowship Association

EXTRACTS FROM THE CODE OF CONDUCT

We base our religion on the belief in AEsir (the Gods of old Pagan Iceland) It is permitted to worship other gods and other sacred beings. Everyone is responsible for himself and all his actions. Statues may be dedicated to the gods, but no one is obliged to worship them. All forms of worship are permitted, within law and order. Those that deem themselves pagan and reside in Iceland can join the association. We promise to honor the religion and culture of our ancestors.

ASATRU -NATURE RELIGION

Asatru, or den forn sed (the old traditions) vor vegR (our way), is a religion that is based on the living nature, that part of the creation of the Gods that our senses perceive.

The gods did not make the world from nothing, but created it from the eternal energy of the cosmos, according to the laws of the World Tree, Ash Yggdrasil. According to Our Way the gods do not rule the universe but are part of it and subject to its laws, just as we humans are. Creation and destruction are an endless process

The final creation did not take place in a distant beginning and so there is no sudden end. Creation and destruction are a continuous cycle that maintains time and space. All things are transient. The universe, the gods, the Earth and all mankind are subject to the perpetual cycle.

All things are transitional but at the same time reiterative. Eternity forms a spiral. All is restored but never repeated. Every cycle is new, unique. We not only worship the Gods, We revere them and place ourselves on their side in the eternal struggle between Gods and Giants, light and darkness, life and death.

The Tree of Life, the Ash is the middle of the world. In it come together all the threads of existence. In the Ash are united past, present and future. Also birth, being and death. As well as Gods, Giants and humanity.

In the Ash there live four stags that graze on its limbs. Every life is but a leaf on the Tree of Life. When one is bitten, a new bud is formed. In this manner the world is maintained. One event leads to another. This promise is fulfilled every time a child is born.

All existence is an interaction of two opposites. The creative forces of the Gods and their adversaries, the destructive horde of Giants. This interaction creates time and the human consciousness. We have an obligation to revere the Gods and their masterpiece, nature itself. We have an obligation to revere Mother Earth and respect her resources. All exploitation of the Earth is wrong, but total preservation is not the answer. Both tend to upset the balance. All things are part of the eternal cycle.

Death is as integral part of life as is birth. All life is nourished on life, directly or indirectly. All disruption of this balance is equally dangerous and only results in quickening the inevitable judgement of the Gods and their handiwork; the RagnarökR. The RagnarökR is however only a transitory phase akin to the night between two days, such as the winter between two summers or like a death that sustains another life.