

What is Ásatrú

What is Ásatrú?

Ásatrú is a Norse term meaning literally a faith or belief in Gods, specifically the Old Norse and Germanic Gods known collectively as the Æsir. Ásatrú has its roots in ancient customs and beliefs, although it is best known from the Viking age when the old world view and the emerging Christian faith clashed and which was the period that the stories and customs were written down. As with many other ethnic or folk religions there was no specific name for the religion, although Ásatrú, Vor tru, "our faith," or Forn Sed, "ancient customs/ways" are phrases/words that are used in the modern world to describe this faith. The religion was part of the culture, and the beliefs revealed not only in the mythology, but also in the customs, ethics, and laws, much of which has survived as a cultural ethos.

Agreed to January 24, 2001

Who are the Gods and Goddesses of Ásatrú?

Then spoke Gangleri: "Which are the Aesir that men ought to believe in?" Hárr said: "There are twelve Aesir whose nature is divine." Then spoke Jafnhárr: "No less holy are the Asynjur, nor is their power less."

These are the words that introduce the gods and goddesses of the Norse and Germanic people to King Gangleri in Snorri Sturluson's Edda. Here we find the a listing of the Aesir (gods), Asynjur (goddesses) and other beings of the Norse mythology and brief stories presented from the ancient mythology in an account written down at the end of the Viking Age. First named is Odin, his son Balder, Thor and his wife, Sif; Tyr, Njord and his son and daughter, Freyr and Freya, Bragi, Heimdall, Hod, Vidar, Ali, Ullr, Loki, Aegir and his wife, Ran. Also named are many of the goddesses, who include, among others, Frigg, Freya, Lofn, Var, and Skadi The mythology also preserves an account a story of two warring groups of deities, the Aesir and the Vanir who pledged a truce with one another and are referred to now collectively as the Aesir.

In English speaking countries four of the days of the week are named after these gods. Tuesday comes from Tiu's day who is also known as Tyr. Wednesday comes from a compound meaning "Odin's day," Thursday from "Thor's day" with Friday from "Freya's day." Throughout Scandinavia and northern Europe we find places that were dedicated anciently and named for the gods and goddesses who are still honored in this day and age.

1/30/01

What are the beliefs of Ásatrú?

Ásatrú beliefs are rooted in the past and in the sacred mythos and cosmology of the Old Norse and Germanic people. As an ethnic or folk religion the authoritative source of belief that can legitimately be considered Ásatrú are the precedents found in the traditions, myths, folklore, literature, laws, customs, and cultural concepts which were shaped by belief in the Æsir and other supernatural beings and powers. There is no historical founder or prophet who made revealed pronouncements of law or belief. There is no central authority that lays down dogma or tenets. There is no injunction to proselytize, or any precedent for intolerance of other beliefs.

This deep respect for tradition and custom is based on a underlying concept, *ørlog*, that is central to the cosmology and belief system of the old Norse and Germanic people, as well as Ásatrú today. . The word is a compound, 'ør,' something that is beyond or "primal" or "above/beyond the ordinary" and "leggja," "to lay," "to place," or "to do." It has the meaning of primal or earliest law, the earliest things accomplished or done. These things are sacred and provide the foundation of the Old Norse beliefs and rites of Ásatrú. They are symbolized in the mythology by the World Tree, which grows at the Well of Urdh or Wyrð. The norms water the World Tree with the water from the Well of Urdh which deposits layers of sediment over the roots, demonstrating the active, accretionary, growing nature of reality.

The perception of being is also a reflection of this basic concept. Like the tree, a person continues to grow and change through experience and study, with each new experience or knowledge growing out of that which was experienced or learned before. A particularly numinous quality called *hamingja*, "luck" or "fortune", can also be accumulated and passed on to ones descendents. In spiritual terms, this legacy can refer to wisdom, personality, or talent, while in practical terms, this can include one's wealth, reputation and external family ties.

2/15/2001

How is Ásatrú organized?

Ásatrú begins with individuals and families who may associate in small groups called *félagið*, or *lagur* (fellowships), *godhordhs*, kindreds, garths and hearths, among other historically based terms. They may be entirely independent or may be affiliated in or with a larger organization. A few larger organizations may be further allied with one another.

The most common term for an Ásatrú religious leader is *Goði* (masculine form) and *Gyðia* (feminine form), *Goðar* (plural). The word refers to a position comparable to that of a priest, but is translated from the Old Norse as chieftain, as are some similar terms such as *Drihten* that may signify essentially the same thing but with more administrative duties in larger groups.

2/17/2001

Are Ásatrú and Odinism the same thing?

There are Ásatrúar and Odinists who feel that they are the same religion, while many others who are Ásatrúar or Odinist feel there are distinct differences. The term "Odinist" refers to an individual who is primarily dedicated to Odin, and as such could also consider themselves Ásatrú,

Wiccan, Neo-pagan or simply Odinist, depending on the rites, fellowship and beliefs that they express their dedication to that deity (and associated deities) in.

What are the rites and ceremonies of Ásatrú?

The rites and ceremonies of Ásatrú are based on cultural observances of the old Norse and Germanic people, many of which continued in the culture and societies that followed without a recognition of the sacral aspect that they were imbued with in the beginning. One such ritual is the highly ceremonial toast following a formal meal, which parallels the sumbel (ON sumbl). The sumbel is a ceremony that includes drinking communally and offering up inspired speech that was binding in terms of oath and intent, as illustrated in Beowulf and other Norse/Germanic literature.

A blót, sacrifice or blessing, is an offering to deity or other supernatural beings. The offering may be a simple sharing of food or drink by an individual to a more elaborate community ceremony. These ceremonies may be performed indoors, or outside in a natural setting.

Additional ceremonies include the naming of a child and its acceptance into the family (ausa vatni), burials, healing, blessings in time of need and divination among others.

2/25/2001

Is there magic in Ásatrú?

Like many other ethnic or folk religions there are magical components in Ásatrú based on a perception of an interactivity and interconnectivity between the natural and supernatural world that can be effected by men as well as gods through various methods. In the Eddas, sagas, and other literature we find both men and gods depicted using and teaching galdr (magical chants and songs), seið (a shamanistic magic involving altered states of consciousness and communication with spirits and gods) and runes (referring to the Norse/Germanic alphabet which had magical associations). Divination and auguries were also an important part of the spiritual and religious views of the Old Norse and Germanic people.

In modern terms, seidh, galdr, and runes are incorporated in various ways and to varying degrees in both personal and community practice of the religion. As in the past, many do not practice nor necessarily believe in magic or see it as a necessary expression of the faith today.

3/1/01

How does one become Ásatrú?

As with any religion, the answer to this question depends more on the individual asking it than anything else. Essentially, you are Ásatrú when you feel yourself to be Ásatrú. Others will

recognize you as Ásatrú when you behave in a manner consistent with a belief in the Aesir, and indicative of a desire to meet their standards for a "good person". Some feel that a rite of passage, an oath, or a formal renunciation of your previous life is necessary to indicate your new devotion. Others feel that this is not necessary at all - that the gods know the sincerity with which somebody claims to be Ásatrú. In general, if you can say "I am Ásatrú", and really mean it, you have become Ásatrú.

3/23/01

Ásatrú FAQ

The Ásatrú FAQ was produced in a consensus discussion with the participation of the following individuals as part of an effort to create a moderated newsgroup. While the newsgroup is far from being a reality, I'm sure that many of you will recognize the level of cooperation and effort to produce such a document. Please forward and use as appropriate.

Regards,
Gydhia Susan Granquist

The FAQ, as published here, was produced by consensus collaboration among and by the following individuals and representatives of various Asatru and heathen organizations:

Susan Granquist, Irminsul Aettir, Greg Shetler, Nik Warrenson, New Zealand Ásatrú Fellowship Ásatrúfellesskapet_Bifrost, Hraesvelg Odinsson, Eagle Kindred, Asatru Alliance Rorik Radford, Steven McNallen, Ásatru Folk Assembly, Valgard Murray, Asatru Alliance Jenny Blaine, The Troth. Bil Linzie, Steward, The Troth, AFA Laurence Hiner Wodalf@aol.com Dirk Buere, Mike Dodd

The FAQ archived on sra_thing@yahoogroups.com as part of an agreement to write a FAQ to be used in the effort create a moderated Asatru newsgroup. The proceedings, discussions and reasoning, are archived in the mailing list files, which are public. It is hereby placed in the public domain as our gift to to the Gods and the community of Asatru.

Distribution is welcome; please include the above notice

For more information contact the Pagan Pride Project – www.paganpride.org - (317) 916-9115.
PMB #119, 133 West Market Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2801