

The Values of Asatrú

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With Foreword to the Second Edition by: Randy J. Milleson

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Foreword to the Second Edition:

Strong words of truth never go out of style. This can certainly be said for the words offered in this booklet.

In the years since Steve initially offered us the insight of his wisdom through the original typewritten pages of the first edition of The Values of Asatrú and its companion volume The Lessons of Asgard, there have been a great deal many who have read these offerings and discovered that there were indeed words to describe the truths within themselves that they had to that point been unable to name. Beyond that, many have gone on to express these truths in their day-to-day activities and live fuller lives as a result.

This is not to say that these pages contain all one must know to awaken the person that we all want to be. However, they do contain discussions of values and traits that we of Asatrú feel are the foundation of nobility, as well as offering sound advice on how to begin expressing these values and traits in one's life. When we say that Asatrú is a religion that must be "lived", it is partially through the continual and increasing expression of the values and traits discussed here that this "living" of Asatrú is accomplished.

Strong words of truth never go out of style. So it is our great honor to offer them, unchanged from the original, in this second edition of The Values of Asatrú.

Randy J. Milleson

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Preface:

This booklet is made up of a series of articles that appeared in *The Runestone* over a period of more than two years. These essays were designed to answer frequent questions about what we believe — not in terms of theology, but as expressed in the values by which we live.

We are a people cut off, in many ways, from our ancestral wisdom. Recovering our birthright is a task that can be approached from several angles — not the least of which is daily adherence to the moral traits honored by our forebears, those heroes of old who pleased the Gods with their noble conduct. Maybe we cannot all be heroes, but all of us can live better, more elevated, and more fulfilling lives. The Values of Asatrú is a tool toward that end.

There is a companion volume to this book, The Lessons of Asgard, which studies the stories of the Gods and Goddesses and offers an analysis of just what they have to tell us about the essential code of Asatrú. Together, these volumes give a solid grounding in the principles of our religion.

Stephen A. McNallen
Breckenridge, Texas

Strength

Only in a world as rotten and degenerate as the one in which we live would it be necessary to state the obvious: strength is better than weakness. Yet there are those who say that it is better to be weak than strong, even those who say that to be strong is to be evil and that to be weak, is to be somehow virtuous.

Asatruarar are not counted among that number!

The prophets of weakness are not always forthright in proclaiming their message. It may be hidden beneath banners of pacifism or in the curbing of normal childhood aggressions or in the smirking pride that some few actually take in their lack of physical capability. In its muted form the worship of weakness finds its purest expression in personalities who seek to pull down all greatness, all strength, all the exceptional elite who would rise above the herd. The sickness does not discriminate on the basis of sex: “traditional” women who, unlike their sisters in the sagas, are told that they are weak and incapable, carry it in their breasts. Likewise men who use the “it’s okay to cry” cop out and who eschew anything remotely related to classical male strengths are also badly contaminated by the virus. The philosophy of weakness naturally thrives in a decaying social body; after all, it’s easy to be weak — until you compete with the strong.

Where did all this start? The weak have always been. But weakness as a virtue seems to be strongly linked with the coming of Christianity. Obviously, not all who profess Christianity are, or were weak. Christ may or may not have been the pallid peace monger modern liberals worship, but he did seem to display a proclivity for masochism. Anyone who could make the famous statement about turning the other cheek is — far from being some enlightened guru — badly out of touch with his own instincts and hence cut off from wisdom. Many modern Christians seem to suffer from this same lack of wholeness. The spiritually lifeless wights, who forgive monsters who have murdered their own sons and daughters, and who do so in the name of Jesus, are an extreme example. More common are the stalwarts in their daily lives, but who excuse their lack of action at times of crisis by appealing to Christian love, or Christian charity, of Christian tolerance.

Noted Christian writer Malcolm Muggeridge was expressing a many-leveled opinion when he said that “We are henceforth [since the crucifixion] to worship defeat, not victory; failure, not success; surrender, not defiance; deprivation, not satiety; weakness, not strength.”

More to our liking were the fiery Crusaders who, for all their faults and follies, were still untamed. The primal instincts of the Northern European soul lived in them, despite, not because of, their belief in Christianity. They were still Nietzsche’s “blond beasts”; their lips called out to Jesus but Oðin owned their hearts.

But why settle for such a compromise? Asatruarar can admire a long line of heroes and warriors who were proud of their strength, not ashamed of it. Feats of physical strength abound in the old sagas — the fantastic was the ideal that the common man sought to emulate in real life. Spiritual strength was honored every bit as much as might

of limb. Perseverance, power of will, total control and coolness in the face of danger and death — all of these virtues were praised, and all exemplify a kind of strength.

Look at the very Gods of Asatrú! Not one is a weakling. Mighty Thor is especially a God of strength. His sheer physical prowess is an inspiration to all who would reject weakness. Óðin epitomizes another kind of strength, that of the will and spirit.

Likewise, modern followers of Asatrú know that strength is never outdated. Most people accept the illusion, though, that there is something out there called “civilization” — that the police will protect us from all harm — that physical strength and the spiritual might to wield it are no longer necessary. But ask anyone who has been mugged or raped. Some victims can’t reply: they’re dead.

We of Asatrú know that strength is better than weakness. Furthermore, we know it doesn’t mean arrogance or crudity. In fact, only the strong can truly afford to be gentle. Strength means life and health. It means fulfillment of our potential, individually and collectively. To be strong is to be vibrant, wholly alive, on the very cutting edge of life. Why settle for less.

Let the Malcolm Muggeridges of the world worship weakness and hate all that is healthy and life giving. We, true to our ancestors, our own instincts, and ourselves will respond to life’s challenges and wax from strength to strength. We know that, in truth, the strong will inherit the Earth — we, and our descendents, will be strong!

Courage:

If most people had to state the single trait most valued by the Norsemen, the majority might unhesitatingly name “courage”. And rightly so — for once, our stereotype does us justice. Courage was a thing of inestimable value not only to the Norse, but also indeed to all the Germanic tribes and the people of ancient Europe in general. We are compelled to rank it very highly, or even first, among the values of Asatrú.

Today we live in a world where the anti-hero has won (or rather has been given) a niche of prominence. The hard virtues have softened, and the stern code of courage and its fraternal twin, honor, is out of fashion. In modern society at large, people simply are not prepared for the trials that will soon be thrust upon us by history. All the more reason that we who follow the ways of our noble ancestors should be infused with these powerful traits. Let us begin acquiring courage by first understanding it.

Quite correctly, it is often pointed out that there is a difference between courage and fearlessness. The person who does not feel fear may be able to do great deeds, but only because he or she is insensitive or unimaginative. While this may be useful, it is not especially virtuous. The real accomplishment is to fully experience fear, yet to master it. We who opt for the well-rounded enhancement of all our powers in the desire for transcendence so common to our Folk must choose the latter, for we seek awareness and fullness of perception in addition to force and mastery. There is no shame in feeling fear. To know fear is human, and to thoroughly overcome it raises one to the realm of the Gods.

Another truism is that courage comes not only in the physical variety, but manifests also as spiritual bravery. Again, some things are truisms because they are true, and the code of Asatrú would agree with this statement. We would take this somewhat superficial analysis a step further, however, and say that there is a substratum underlying both kinds of courage, and that bedrock is the heroic will. Facing an enemy’s bayonet charge and facing the threat of losing one’s job because of a belief in Asatrú have little in common — except that both instances test the individual’s mastery of self through a deliberate and unwavering will to take the honorable course.

In reading the sagas, we see such a willful adherence to this high standard of courage. Revenge for a wrongdoing was an absolute necessity, because appearing soft or defenseless meant that one’s family and one’s self became target for others who sensed an easy prey. However, retribution was not exacted instantly, in the heat of passion. Rather, the emotional fury had to subside, so that the avenger could demonstrate self-control and so that the deed could stand forth as an imperative of duty, not as an act of rashness. Courageous feats (whether of vengeance or not) were best if done deliberately and with calmness, not impulsively. It is worth noting that among the greatest of heroes were men like Beowulf and the semi-legendary Ragnar Lodbrock. Neither died in the brashness of youthful impetuosity, but in the coolness of mature, tempered courage under the mastery of will.

All very well for those of such celestial stature, you may say — but what about those of us who lead ordinary lives yet wish to honor our Gods and our ancestors?

A two-fold approach presents itself. First, since a powerful will underlies courage in all its forms, develop that will in not just one but in several aspects of your life. Self mastery will bring with it courage. Secondly and more specifically, do the thing that you fear. One man's successful use of this method is described in the book entitled (of course) Will by G. Gordon Liddy.

Courage, out of fashion or not, is one of the cornerstones of personal behavior for those who follow our Gods. We may not all be courageous — or, more likely, we have some measure of courage, but not all we'd like. Whatever our failings or our strengths, it is our duty to try — courageously — to develop this value so prized by our forebears.

Joy:

We live in an age that is, in many ways, overly introspective. Where our axe-swinging ancestors wrought results through bold action, we often find ourselves paralyzed by excessive analysis, and fail to define and to do the deeds required of us. Many things can produce this spiritual sickness, but one of the surest will-wasters is that old enemy, guilt.

Our forebears before the Christian imposition do not seem to have been contaminated with this virus. While they might have regretted something they had done, they simply tried to put things right and resolved not to place themselves in that situation again. The gnawing, esteem-devouring feeling we call guilt, on the other hand, they would have considered not only masochistic but just plain silly. Take action! Solve your problems, or at least try to, and get on with your life! Leave the mental moaning and the breast beating for those who have nothing else to do.

Guilt, however, has its uses — not to the guilt-ridden party, certainly, but to the church and state and the special interest groups who have power in our present society. It is a very effective way to control people. By making us feel bad about ourselves, by making us believe that we are evil or fallen or sinful, the various powers-that-be can manipulate our behavior in accordance with their wills.

What are some of the things for which we are made to feel guilty? Television actresses make us feel guilty for our wealth to goad us into giving that wealth away for the benefit of people on the other side of the globe. “Docudrama” producers and writers of a particular ilk do all they can to make us feel guilty for our Northern European heritage. All our natural drives and instincts come under assault. Anger? Bad, because we’re all supposed to be “mellow”. Ambition? Dangerous, because it makes the inadequate aware of their failings. Sexuality? Nasty: God’s gonna get ya for that! Prosperity, ancestry, and instincts are all to be forbidden us by the guilt-mongers. What can be more disastrous in the long term than breeding these qualities out of a formerly free Folk? Our present thralldom has turned values on their heads. Instead of condemning that which is strong and good, we should shun that which our inner selves know to be bad — cowardice, dishonor, and the favoring of strangers over kin.

Make no mistake, guilt is a necessary tool for forging the brave new world, a globe spanning society where we are all to be androgynous, docile, and interchangeable economic units designed only to produce and consume and serve. No room there for joy in sexuality or passion or any kind of pride in our identity as a people.

So how do we fight back? With all the usual ways of devotion to our Gods and to our Folk — but animated with a joy that consumes guilt and frees the spirit for action just as the severing of the “peace strings” allows the sleek sword to fly to its owner’s hand! The best warrior is the joyous one who clasps his fate to his heart, whose merriment in the battle’s strife confuses the foe and strikes panic in its ranks. Let that joy flow into all the parts of your life, so that it suffuses work and battle and play and makes all these diverse things one. Joy IS better than guilt, and a sure antidote to its manipulating pangs!

These are hard words to heed; however easy they may be to write. Holding onto joy isn't easy because we seem to have so little to celebrate. But is it the things outside ourselves that ought to give us joy or grief, or is it the things within us? If nothing else, we can revel in our freedom from guilt, in our will to act, and in our adherence to the troth of our heroic ancestors. These are no small reasons for joy!

We have the Gods to inspire us. Oðin, pragmatically breaking the rules to safeguard the worlds of Gods and men; Thor, indulging his appetites without shame or fear; Freyr and Freyja, reveling in healthy sexuality; these are powerful, liberating models casting off the chains of restraint. By invoking them in our lives we can experience the joy of existence in a world where strength, ambition, competence, and pleasures are not fettered with alien, life-denying bonds.

Honor:

Honor is one of those words we don't see much anymore. It's a bit out of date, and to invoke it in conversation may bring cynical smiles and even a snicker or two. In recapturing the spiritual essence of Asatrú, however, few concepts could be more important.

The Oxford Dictionary uses phrases like “nobleness of mind... allegiance to what is right... reputation” in defining honor. Let us look deeper.

In thinking about honor it soon becomes apparent that this is a virtue that sums up other virtues. It is honorable to be loyal. All the character traits held in high esteem by our ancestors, when lumped together, constitute honorable behavior. When we do these things we are being honorable. From this it follows that there are many different roads we can and must travel to lead an honorable life, and we have daily opportunities to train ourselves along these lines. Such molding of the personality is not easy because honor so frequently means placing spiritual considerations over money, personal advantage, and convenience. A standard dictionary tells me that honor is “allegiance... to conventional standards of conduct” which is only partially correct; in all too many instances the conventional standard of conduct involves lying, cheating, and betrayal of kin. A life of honor often places us in direct opposition to the major trends in our society.

Among our ancestors, honor was given an importance that would seem almost fanatical to the cynical, jaded minds of our day. To impugn a person's honor during the Viking age might have meant a battle to the death. Honor was worth life itself, and lasted after the body was a corpse in the tomb —

Cattle die, kinsmen die
Every man is mortal;
But the good name never dies
Of one who has done well

says the poet in the old Norse literature.

Honor is something we acquire by strict self-examination. Look at your actions at the end of the day — can you hold your conduct up to the light and say that your deeds have been honorable ones? If not, why not — and what can you do about it?

We can, bit by bit, strive for perfection in all matters of honor. When honor concerns mundane things easily within our control, this is hard enough but not impossible. Doing one's duty in the daily course of things, speaking truly and forthrightly — these are important for us all and they add to the spiritual stature of ourselves and those groups of which we are a part. In some matters, though, the price of honor in our society becomes desperately high.

Suppose your mother is robbed and beaten. You see the attack and chase the assailant down the street, throw him into an alley, and begin smashing his face against the sidewalk. Since you have just used “unreasonable force” beyond that needed to restrain

the criminal, you will face assault charges. If you honorably resist arrest, you will be forcibly subdued, or even shot, by the arresting officers. Dishonorable laws made by dishonorable men forbid the exercise of honor. All of us who live in the modern nation-state make compromises because we don't want to go to prison or die in a police shootout; to that extent we are all tainted by the corrupt system around us. Honor is no longer person on person, or family on family; it is person or family against a system that most obviously includes the police and courts but actually includes the very fabric of modern life — from television advertising to Christianity. So, what do we do about such a dreadful dilemma?

Saga and epic show us great men — stronger and bolder than most of us — have used deception and guile against foes that outnumbered them greatly. The Havamal, purported to be words of Oðin himself, advises us that the use of trickery is acceptable. Do we say that the soldier who uses raid and ambush is a coward because he does not meet his enemy in orderly phalanx? Should Herman the Cherusci have fought Rome's legions on flat terrain, forsaking the forested hills of Teutoberger Wald?

No, the only disgrace lies in not fighting — in surrendering while life is left. We live in a debased society where perfect honor is impossible. Let us fight then — openly where we can, stealthily where we must — to replace this system, top to bottom, with one where honor can live.

Freedom:

The idea that freedom is better than slavery is so commonly accepted that there would seem to be little more we can say. Why restate the obvious? At this point in Asatru literature, most articles about freedom resort to the staple technique of praising the liberty-loving ways of our ancestors, surveying history for appropriate documentations, and affirming our own determination to maintain that freedom. While that approach is laudable and necessary, let us try to get beyond that stage and really look at freedom in our society.

The fact is we are not free. The stark liberty of our forebears is — for almost all of us — dead. We have the illusion of living in a free society because we continually confuse the **fact** of control with the **means** by which control is maintained. To see things as they are, we must learn to make that distinction.

First, let us consider control itself. We of Asatru believe that there is an inherent human nature, an inborn set of tendencies that shape our values, motives, and actions. Left to develop organically, in accordance with our nature as a people, we would evolve a social system that would tend not to make us act contrary to our natures or impel us to do things we would not do if left to ourselves. In short, we would be free members of the Folk. A controlled, “non-free” society is one where people are made to do things that are contrary to their nature. This condition constitutes a kind of slavery, and is antithetical to freedom as we define it. Slavery, or non-freedom, is an evil in itself — regardless of the conditions that bring it about or the means used to enforce it.

The means used to enforce slavery might traditionally include secret police, rigged elections, slave labor camps, etc. Such methods are crude and ugly, but they are not the essence of totalitarianism; they are simply the instruments used to sustain it. Slavery maintained by any other means is still slavery. The most pleasant tools of social control do not change the essential nature of the totalitarian system, nor do they make it more morally justified.

Today, in the so-called “Free World”, we are continually manipulated in violation of our own natures, to ends not consistent with our innate tendencies or our ultimate best interests. This control permeates our society and is in many ways as absolute as that in any form of dictatorship. The means of control, however, are subtle and even sweet. While openly totalitarian systems use harsh and obvious devices such as torture and labor camps to influence behavior, the trick in the industrialized West is to shape the values, attitudes, desires, and tastes from which behavior springs — thus forming invisible bonds that control humans as surely as the cruder ones, but with less chance of revolt, for the chains are comfortable. Our “needs” are shaped by media and advertising. When the system meets these contrived needs we feel grateful, and thus remain loyal to the whole set up. We are effectively drugged by superfluous consumer goods and pacifying bovine philosophy. Real choice — that is in accordance with our healthy, life and Folk affirming instincts — is strongly suppressed. True freedom of choice becomes an illusion that the consumerist/universalist state fosters to hide the fact that we are wearing chains. It is all-

important to remember that the fact of totalitarianism is not changed by the superficially humane means of control. By our earlier definition, we are slaves.

This doesn't mean that I'd just as soon live in North Korea or Communist China. To trot the love-it-or-leave-it argument is to miss the point. Life is better here, and few of us would trade places with anyone in the gulag. But that doesn't mean we are really free here, or that we live in a healthy society; it just means the methods of control are more bearable.

With each TV commercial urging us to eat junk food or to purchase gadgets, for which an artificial appetite has been created, we are being exploited. With each news story slated to bolster a suicidal foreign policy, our slavery is made manifest. Every time we walk into a store where muzak makes us more receptive to buying, we are being brainwashed. Every magazine article, every governmental decree that lessens the will of our people to resist their continuing dispossession, is a totalitarian act. In each case, a life-affirming instinct of our Folk is being deliberately denied — not by physical force, though that option is used when other methods fail, but by the pressure of conformity, or the reassurance of buzz words, or by clever subliminal techniques.

So, how do we get free?

First, we have to realize that we are not really free to begin with. Once that fact sinks in, we see through the social mirage and perceive the mechanisms that keep us enthralled. We see television commercials and TV programming for what they really are, and then we pull the plug. We realize that Macy's and the automobile companies and countless other establishments are artificially creating needs so they can sell their stuff, and then we quit buying it. We analyze the newspapers enough to know how the media masters want us to react, and then we refuse to respond as they'd like. But all of this represents only the first tottering steps toward personal freedom. Ultimately, we must fashion a new and better society — one in keeping with the inborn aspirations and truest instincts of our Folk.

Kinship:

It is quite acceptable these days to point out that we live in an alienated society. It is also standard to offer the idea of kinship, in one form or another, as an antidote to the loneliness and separation so many of us experience in our lives. Since kinship is often praised among us who follow Asatrú, let us remind ourselves of the reasons we consider it important, and, while we are at it, let us ask ourselves why alienation seems to have triumphed in the first place.

First, what's so great about identifying with our kin, and working harmoniously with them?

Kinship is efficient. Imagine the effects on the average taxpayer if people turned to family and tribe in hardship, rather than to the government! Welfare, make-work jobs designed solely to redistribute wealth, food stamps — all could be slashed until almost out of existence if there was a supporting network of kin ready to help their own. The clumsy bureaucracy that eats up our resources and hems us in with ever more regulation could be largely dismissed. We would all benefit by better use of funds and by freedom from the petty bureaucrats who currently oppress us.

Kinship is natural. A need for it is programmed into our genes. Humans evolved under conditions that required an “in group” receiving the loyalty of the individuals comprising it. Nature wired us in such a way that we are happiest and most effective when we have a bond of kinship with the people around us. Anything less, and we are not likely to find real satisfaction.

Finally, kinship is an integral part of Asatrú. We believe that we are linked to our ancestors and descendents in a special way that takes priority over lesser relationships, and our traditions tell us that mighty spiritual properties are transmitted down the family line from one generation to the next. These intangible properties are priceless treasures carrying with them weighty duties, and many of the ethics of Asatrú revolve around these obligations.

If kinship is such a fine thing, why do we live in such an alienated society? Why don't we **have** kinship instead of writing articles about it?

We have been seduced by a Universalist ethic that insists we call everyone kin — that we love anything that walks, crawls, or slithers. Nevertheless, we have less genuine experience of natural kinship than at any in our history as a people. If all are special, none are special. “Universal Brotherhood” paradoxically destroys the meaning of kinship by indiscriminately bestowing it upon every passer-by. Again, we must ask why we ended up with such an unnatural ideology prevailing over our instinctive needs. The answer lies in one word — CONTROL.

Strong social bonds create social units that are harder to control, harder to coerce into conformity with the produce-and-consume system. Alienation, on the other hand, makes us powerless to change it, and encourages us to consume material goods. Any hint of tribal feeling, any stirring of a real alternative, must be quietly sidetracked into avenues of expression that will not threaten the official ideology or its servants. Much of

the counterculture (a very mixed bag indeed) functions as sort of a safety valve or even as a “deep freeze” where challenging ideas, good and bad alike, can be rendered harmless. Things have to be kept under control. People must not turn off their televisions and start **talking** to each other, for goodness sake. The whole artificial mess might come crashing down! While a restoration of kinship sounds fine to us who follow our ancestral Gods, it’s pretty threatening to some who like the current state of alienation. We, however, must resolutely press forward to make a better world for our people — one in which we can be free to experience both the duties and the great benefits of kinship in Asatru.

Realism:

Our ancestors were practical people in every aspect of their lives, including their religion. A glance at the *Words of the High One*, attributed to Oðin himself, shows at once that it is concerned not with pious platitudes or otherworldly lore, but with practical advice for living, for besting one's enemies, and for acquiring wisdom. This realistic approach to life was one of the greatest strengths of the Vikings and our other Germanic ancestors, and it is a trait we would do well to cultivate today.

Contrast this if you will, to the eminently unrealistic and impractical advice given to us by the Middle Eastern religion known as Christianity. What could be more suicidal than a faith that advises us to turn the other cheek to our enemies, and resist not evil? What could be more disastrous than a creed that says we should not worry about what we'll eat or drink or wear, but only trust that we will be provided for, like the birds and the beasts? Such advice is a prescription for disaster because it ignores the nature of the real world. It just does not fit and anyone who takes it literally is leaving himself or herself open to murder or rape or death by starvation and exposure. What a far cry from our practical and worldly ancestors!

"But wait a moment," some will cry, "After all, religion is not **supposed** to deal with the things of this world, but must concern itself with the world to come." **We of Asatrá disagree!** We say instead that a religion that works in the real world is preferable to one that does not. Why should we believe, as some would have us do, that there is any moral superiority in failure and impracticality? Why should a creed that fails the test in this world do any better in the next?

Asatruarar do not try to refute the existence of other realms of being, but we are aware that reports of those worlds are highly subjective and open to a variety of interpretations. The supernatural is important, but the focus of our day-to-day life must be here in **this** world. We can draw inspiration and strength from the realm of the Gods, but our struggle is here and so are the lessons of our lives. A religion that does not work on this plane just does not work at all. In this respect, we who follow the old Gods are both realists and idealists. We are less "otherworldly" than Christians in that we will settle for victory success, and health in this world rather than pie-in-the-sky promises of heaven after we die. What comes in the afterlife will come. Meanwhile, we do the best we can in the world in which we have to live.

What are the results of this way of thinking? Well, religion becomes a matter of living fully and loving life instead of dealing wholly with the non-physical realms in a promised future. Again, it is not a denial of the non-material aspects of our ancestral religion, but simply an acknowledgement that religion has to relate, and relate successfully, with the here and now. Seen in this light, all sorts of things become infused with meaning. A walk in a leafy forest becomes a religious act. So does making love, or working in your garden, or the countless other actions that make up the tapestry of our lives. Throw out the musty, muddled creeds that preach otherworldly rewards while denying life and happiness here! Life is to be lived, and lived fully!

Besides this affirmation of life, there is another result of the Asatrú pragmatic approach — a remarkable scarcity of dogma. A religion that gives due importance to this world deals largely in matters that can be proven and tested. Things that can be demonstrated need no blind faith to enforce them. Perhaps as a result of our pragmatism, even the supernatural aspects of our religion are not encrusted with dogma. There are certain supernatural beliefs in Asatrú that are essential, but discussion and debate on these tenets is encouraged within fairly wide boundaries. After all, our religion is not a revealed one handed to us as a complete kit on some holy mountain, but is natural and organic, springing from the soul of our people. It is eternally becoming. It is a tree, not a rock.

We see Asatrú as a religion that makes sense in Miðgard. Asatrú does not ask you to accept its worth on the basis of blind faith; its value is plainly visible in the “real” world. It is a belief that can be lived by practical, proud people too free to accept unquestioning dogma.

Vigor:

It has become almost a truism to say that our ancestors were an energetic and vigorous people. The sagas and history books give us pictures of a race full of life and eager to express that. Our heroes and Gods have always valued this particular virtue. And what about us, their descendents? How have we lived up to these stringent standards?

One still meets energetic people, but they have become more and more a rarity. Modern society, which takes pride in its openness and freedom, is actually very restricted in some respects. We live in a closed system — a sort of spiritual feudalism — that promotes inertia and the status quo. For example, we lack vigor so we watch television. Watching TV makes us flabby and tells us through commercials to eat junk food. Because this makes us operate at a fraction of our potential, we accept as true the propagandistic pseudo-world we see on the tube, and incidentally become still more lethargic. The cycle continues. How do we break the chain?

We are afflicted with two sorts of inertia — the physical and the mental. As you might expect, they are related. Physical sluggishness can be overcome by exercise and diet, but mental sloth is harder to combat because it is not as easy to observe. We must be mentally active, thinking beings if we are to live up to our whole potential.

Much of our inactivity, both of body and of brain, is a result of the convenience ethic that permeates modern life. Fast food is more convenient than a home-cooked meal. Driving is more convenient than walking. Believing the news commentary is more convenient than digging out the facts on current issues. Not thinking is more convenient than thinking. It is true, there is an attractiveness to taking the easy way. But what a price we pay! Because we are willing to eat less nutritious food, our health suffers. The automobile has coated our lungs with pollutants, made our lives nerve-wracked, and littered our landscapes with junk yards. Television has washed our brains to a smooth, shiny finish. As bad as these effects are, the price of taking the sanitized and standard mouthings of our mass media as truth is even steeper — World War III, for example.

We have to be willing to inconvenience ourselves to make an effort to regain control of our lives. Shattering manacles is work that has to be done if we are going to be a free, vigorous people again. At every step of the way we will hear the seductions of those who have a financial or political interest in keeping us lethargic. Slothful voters are easier to control, and sheep-like consumers buy more merchandise. Social pressures operate continually to keep us in line.

To fight this tendency to inertia, let us remember the positive benefits of leading an energetic, vigorous life. Exercise is not just duty performed — it makes you feel better. A home-cooked meal tastes different from a fast food burger. Having original thoughts is more satisfying than accepting the *Establishment's* canned opinions. By living this way, we can be happier, more fulfilled individuals, even as we live up to the high standards of our forebears. The choice, as always, is ours. Remember that not making a choice — ignoring the problem — is just another way of choosing lethargy. You are in charge! What will you choose?

Ancestry:

Anyone who has spent much time reading about Asatrú knows that we place a great deal of emphasis on the idea of ancestry. Indeed our religion is largely based on this concept. Is this mere sentiment and nostalgia on our part, or are there deeper reasons why we are continually referring to our forebears?

The ancient lore of Asatrú makes it plain that this is no modern notion. Continuity of the clan has always been important to our people, and the God Freyr seems to have been specially associated with this principle. The sagas include plentiful genealogies that are much more than mere literary devices. After all, Icelanders were known for their ability to recite their entire lineage back to the settlement of their ice-threatened island. Clearly, these were folk to whom ancestry meant a great deal.

From a common sense viewpoint it's not hard to see why we should have an affinity for those of our own line. Heredity influences not only obvious things like hair color and the shape of the ear lobe, it also helps determine more subtle physical factors — our personal chemistry and neurology — which shape our tastes, feelings, attitudes, and needs. We are quite simply going to resemble our ancestors in these ways more than we are likely to resemble people who are not our ancestors. Some thing of this sort is what Dr. Carl G. Jung meant when he said that the archetypes, or symbolic content of the unconscious mind, were hereditary rather than cultural. It's only natural that we should most identify with that which is most like us.

To those who follow Asatrú, however, our links to our ancestors encompass and go beyond this. A part of our native belief tells us of certain components of the soul that are transmitted down the family line from generation to generation, hopefully growing in quality and strength as they pass from one clan member to the next. One such soul component is the *fylgja*, a sort of mobile magical force. Each individual has a *fylgja* (a *mannsfylgja*), but a group of people — like a family or tribe — could have one as well (a *kynsfylgja*).

Another element of the soul is the *hamingja*. It receives the actions of the individual and combines them with the accumulated actions of the person's forebears to produce a resultant *fate*, or more appropriately, *orlog* (meaning "primal layers" and referring to the layers of deeds done by the ancestors of the individual). Thus, a person is directly connected to those who have gone before him/her in the line of descent through these very special, inherited soul components.

These esoteric-sounding theories are strange to our twenty-first century ways of looking at things, but, unfamiliar or not, they are being confirmed by theories on the leading edge of our scientific knowledge. New ways of thinking about human memory indicate that we are influenced not only by our personal memories, but also by those belonging to our ancestors — all stored in some extra material realm called *transform space*. Beyond this are studies that seem to show that genetically similar beings can interact with each other at a distance, as if their DNA molecules served as an antenna responding to the same frequency, or, alternatively, as though their individual memories

and deeds were poured into a common pool. This particular phenomenon — called the *hundredth monkey effect* — does not require direct lineal descent but nonetheless does deal with specific sets of genetically similar beings. Our religious conviction that there are special bonds between kin are magnificently confirmed by these theories.

Ancestry, then, is special. We are connected to our ancestors, and to all others descended from those ancestors, in a special way. Common sense, the metaphysics of Asatru, and modern science confirm this. These holy ties give us special duties in regard to our kin, and justify the loyalties that we extend to them in preference over the rest of humanity. This way of looking at things is contrary to the dogma of this day. Nevertheless, we know in our hearts — as it was known to our forebears in the distant past, and as our growing knowledge of nature confirms — ancestry is better than schemes which would deny these truths and propose a formless, alienated, and unnatural universalism.

Summary:

STRENGTH IS BETTER THAN WEAKNESS...

Let others revel in their vulnerability! We are not ashamed to be strong. The cult of the anti-hero will find no support in us, and the Gods we follow are not for the weak.

COURAGE IS BETTER THAN MEEKNESS...

By facing life's struggles with courage, we constantly extend our capabilities. Without courage, nothing else can be done!

JOY IS BETTER THAN GUILT...

Let us take pleasure in our humanity, rather than being ashamed of who we are. Misplaced guilt — because of our sexuality, our strength, or our greatness — has enslaved us long enough!

HONOR IS BETTER THAN DISHONOR...

We must be true to what we are, and we must insist on acting with high nobility rather than baseness. Our internal standards must be banners held high in our hearts.

FREEDOM IS BETTER THAN SLAVERY...

We have no masters! Those who would enslave us, whatever their excuse, are our enemies. The totalitarian ant nest is repugnant to us. We demand the free, bracing wind of the Northlands.

KINSHIP IS BETTER THAN ALIENATION...

The isolation and loneliness of modern life should be foreign to us. We call our Folk to return to kith and kin — to family, clan, and tribe.

REALISM IS BETTER THAN DOGMATISM...

Blind faith has no place in Asatrú. Our ancestors may have been sublimely mystical, but they were at the same time severely practical. No pie-in-the-sky; we must act in this world rather than calmly wait for the next.

VIGOR IS BETTER THAN LETHARGY...

Let us dare to be all that we can be! Let us take risks and taste the richness of life. Passivity is for sheep. We refuse to be mere spectators in life.

ANCESTRY IS BETTER THAN UNIVERSALISM...

Asatrú is not for all. It is a product of the soul of the Northern peoples and is suited by its very nature to our needs.

**For more information on the Northern
European indigenous religion of Asatrú,
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