

# Skylands Report



The e-newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

No. 7

[www.skylandsasatru.org](http://www.skylandsasatru.org)

May 2017

## Celebrating Sumarmál

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship celebrated the start of summer with the traditional Summer-meal. The day began with a blót to Odin for victory and success in the coming year. Those gathered performed a ritual procession into the vé with drumming and chanting. Participants then read excerpts of the tale of Odin granting victory to the Winnili tribe who were engaged in a war with the Vandals. A sacrifice was offered to Odin including a knife (purposefully broken for the occasion), several colored eggs, and a small silver horse. As the sacrifice was consumed in flames, the assembled folk cheered and danced around the fire to the jubilant music of Faun.

There was much comradery and snacking throughout the afternoon with plenty of mead to be shared by all. The Summer-meal itself was outstanding. Members of the cooking team (Lisa C., Alli W., Randi R., and Jeremy G.) really outdid themselves. All feasted on delicious pot roast and several side dishes including potatoes, asparagus, and macaroni and cheese – not to mention delicious bread with whipped honey-butter.



*The Ritual of Sumarmál*



*Don V. leads sumbel*

In the evening the group came inside to celebrate sumbel. Don V. led a spiritual but light-hearted event in which members toasted the Gods, absent members, and relatives. During sumbel Don V. announced that Alli W. became the newest member of Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship. All were thrilled to welcome her to our ranks. A final highlight was the gifting of a Finnish knife by Wick M. to Erik R.. Erik's joy was evident to all and put a nice cap on a wonderful evening.



*Erik R. is gifted a knife from Finland*



*All enjoy the Summer-Meal*

## Explore One of NJ's Beautiful Trails with SAF

Join the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship as we explore one of New Jersey's many wonderful hiking trails.

Enjoy the day appreciating the simple joys of nature and honoring the spirits of the land, who dwell in springs, stones, trees, and rivers.

While the Gods are the beings that we honor on special occasions, the spirits of the land are the ones we interact with on a much more frequent basis. Since the land-spirits are much more "local," they can relate to us much easier than the Gods, as they are much closer to our level. Thus for everyday problems we turn to these spirits and forge bonds of friendship with them.

We will explore some of the beauty of the Sussex Branch Trail, make an offering to the land-spirits and then have an early dinner at an area restaurant. The trailhead is near Route 206 in Andover, just north of the intersection with Limecrest road. There is ample parking.

Last year's nature hike was one of our most talked about events. We're sure that this year's will surpass even last year's trip.



## Change to the Board of Directors

On April 9, 2017 a meeting of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship Board of Directors was held to address our vacant Vice-President role.

Following a vote of Board members, Don V. was appointed Vice President of the Board. In addition, Randi R. was appointed to the Board and made Secretary. We offer many thanks to both for their willingness to serve the tribe.



## Beyond Blót and Sumbel

From the early days in the Ásatrú revival in the 1970s and '80s, the ceremony of blót, or sacrifice, has predominated. It has lost its original primary meaning of an animal sacrifice, although the practice has not entirely died out, and many of the more traditionalist groups within Ásatrú embrace it, but on the whole, the blót remains the primary ritual within Ásatrú in North America, and I daresay around the world.

And what does that blót entail? Usually, based on the early works of Edred Thorsson and Kveldulf Gundarsson, it consists of a sacrifice of mead, which stands in for the original blood of the animal sacrifice. Often, the participants are sprinkled with the sanctified mead, in emulation of the description of the disablót in *Heimskringla*.

Also often, the participants will make a toast to some god, often the god to whom the blót is dedicated, in a circle:

"Hail Thor!" (drinks from a horn)

"Hail Thor!" (drinks from a horn)

"Hail Thor!" (drinks from a horn)

Over, and over, and over (and over, and over, if you're in a large ritual with a large group of people). I've personally seen it go on for half an hour. Shoot me now.

This sort of blót / sumbel hybrid has been christened a “bumble” by certain wags in the early 2000s, as it is a combination of the rituals of blót and sumbel, and is entirely ahistorical.

At some point in the late '80s and early '90s, the ritual of sumbel came into fashion within Ásatrú. My personal theory is that the Theodish emphasis on sumbel had an influence on its adoption within Ásatrú. This is the ritual drinking of toasts as described in *Beowulf* and other sources. The “toasts to three gods” described in *Heimskringla* was somehow morphed into three “rounds” of toasts, where the first round consists of toasts to gods, the second round is toasts to ancestors and/or heroes, and the third is an “open” round for various other sorts of toasts, gifting, and so forth. And no food is to be eaten; it's all about the drinking.

This, too, is a somewhat inaccurate interpretation of the sumbel as a ritual, but perhaps not as wayward as the blót as it is currently practiced.

As might be surmised, I'm not a fan of either the bumble or the sumbel as it exists today, from an historical perspective. But what I'm really aiming at here is that this emphasis on the blót and sumbel has blinded most modern Ásatrúar to other forms of ritual that are no less traditional and historical, but which have largely been ignored for the last forty-plus years of the modern Ásatrú revival.

### Processions

English, Scandinavian, and German folk-practices are replete with procession ceremonies. But what strikes me is that the goal of the ritual isn't to process to a specific place, where another ritual will then be held, but the procession itself is the ritual. This recalls the mentions of

perambulations of god-images in Tacitus's *Germania*, as well the *Sagas of Icelanders* and *Heimskringla*.

In more modern times, we see this sort of procession-ritual in the parades of Krampus and his associated figures in the Alpine regions. The parade and its associated customs are the point of the ritual. There are specific skits, or short plays and readings that accompany these visits by the performers. It's not difficult to draw a line between processions of god-images in pre-Christian times and processions of pagan-like figures in post-Christian times.

This is likely linked to ritual guising, wassailing, and visiting traditions that have endured for more than a millennium after the conversion.

### **Ritual dramas**

That some of the poems that survive to us in the *Poetic Edda* might be recordings of “scripts” for ritual dramas is an old theory, and one that is not only well-supported by an examination of the poems themselves, but which has been embraced by modern scholarship as a whole. The use of present-tense case in some of the poems (“Freyr says” instead of “Freyr said”), and the inclusion of what could be termed in modern parlance as stage directions in the text, leads to this conclusion.

Several years ago we did a three-part ritual drama enacting the exile of Odin, the rape of Rindr, and the return of Odin, linked to the tale of Balder's death, and leaning heavily on the account by Saxo Grammaticus. But the possibilities for modern dramas around mythological themes are nearly endless.

### **Dances**

We know for a fact that the pre-Christian Germanic peoples danced in a religious context, and we know it precisely because the Christians wrote extensively about how awful it was that people were still engaging in such awful pagan practices. Obviously, we don't know what the dances themselves looked like, but there is a full and vibrant tradition of folk-dance from England, Scandinavia, and Germany to draw upon.



*Ritual dance at SAF Yule Celebration*

There's a whole “code,” almost, of telling stories through the dances themselves, as we see in English Morris dancing particularly. There are also images from pre-Christian Scandinavia that show sword-dances and spear-dances, performed by warriors in animal guise. The theory is that this is somehow linked to the ulfedhnar and berserker cults, but the practice is

widespread enough in pre-modern times, especially because of the many, almost hysterical, Christian prohibitions, to warrant assuming that ritual dance was a part of pre-Christian religion.

### **Rites of Passage**

These sorts of rituals can take a whole array of forms. Water-sprinkling of newborn children to give them a name. Weddings have several distinct steps, none of which particularly involve a sacrifice. Funerals have a whole other series of rituals, culminating in the arvel feast. Each of these has a whole rhythm and structure to it, beyond the standard blót format into which everything seems to be squeezed nowadays.

### **Conclusion**

There's so much out there that our ancestors did that don't fall into the neat categories of blót and sumbel. It's a shame that modern Ásatrú seems so fixated on blót, and to a lesser extent sumbel. There's so much more that we could be doing that is just as much a religious ritual as a blót, and it all seems like it could be so very engaging. Much more so than standing around a field saying "Hail Thor!" over and over again...

*By Joseph goði 3 April 2017*

Copyright © 2017 Jön Upsal's Gardener

## **Tribal Milestones**

Joseph B. celebrates a birthday on May 25. Happy Birthday Joseph!

Karen B. celebrates a birthday on May 24. Happy Birthday Karen!



# Skylands May Calendar

## Ásatrú 101 Class

Interested in Ásatrú, but not sure where to start? Got questions, but don't know who to ask?

Well, have we got an event for you!

Our Ásatrú 101 classes are designed for both the beginner who wants to learn the very basics, to the advanced Ásatrúar who is interested in hearing new perspectives, and learning how we at the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship do things.

Each class will have a different topic, but they're all designed to be completely stand-alone. Don't worry if you miss one - you can still show up to the next and get just as much out of it.

Date: Sunday, May 14, 2017  
Time: 06:30 PM to 08:00 PM  
Location: Stanhope, NJ

## Nature Hike & Dinner

Join us on one of New Jersey's many wonderful hiking trails.

We will explore some of the beauty of the Sussex Branch Trail and then have an early dinner at an area restaurant. This is not the same trailhead we used last time; this is on route 206 in Andover, just north of the intersection with Limecrest road. There is parking.

Date: Saturday, May 20, 2017  
Time: 02:30 PM to 5:00 PM  
Location: Stanhope, NJ

## Rûna Workshop

Rûna Workshops are designed to focus on aspects of Germanic magical practices, including runes, divination, seiðr, trolldomr, spá, and others. They are non-religious in nature, and are open to all.

The subject of this week's class will be the first part of chapter 4 "Rune Work" in Edred Thorsson's book *Futhark*. We will be going through pages 95 (Runic Meditation) through 116 (up to "Further Talismanic Formulas.")

Please make sure you've done the reading so you can participate in the discussion. We will also be continuing our other exercises.

Date: Sunday, May 28, 2017  
Time: 06:30 PM to 08:00 PM  
Location: Stanhope, NJ

## **Full Moon Offering**

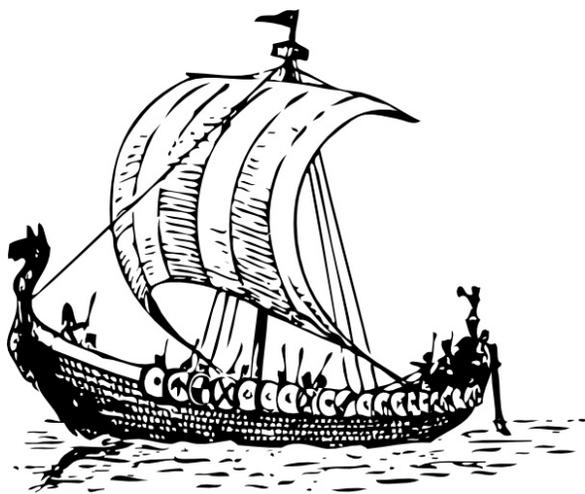
Date: May 10, 2017

## **New Moon Offering**

Date: May 25, 2017

Everyone is encouraged to make an offering to his or her local land-spirits. By making regular offerings, we increase our bonds of friendship with the spirits of the earth. Such offerings may be made on the Full Moon or the New Moon.

## **Save the Date!**



- **Midsummer Celebration** – Saturday, June 24
- **Hrattablót (Sacrifice to the river-goddess Hratta)** – Saturday, August 26
- **Haustblót Celebration (Harvest offering)** – Saturday, September 30
- **Dísablót Celebration** – Saturday, November 4
- **Krampusnacht** – Saturday, December 9
- **New Year's Eve** – Sunday, December 31

## **Help Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship**

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship runs both *Asatru 101* classes and *Rúna Workshops*. We hold celebrations for the major holidays in the heathen calendar. We run several on-line sites and produce this newsletter. All of this is possible through donations from members and friends. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Skylands Asatru Fellowship today!

Donate today! [http://www.skylandsasatru.org/?page\\_id=183](http://www.skylandsasatru.org/?page_id=183)

## **Follow Skylands On-line!**

For more information about our tribe and upcoming events, please visit our website at [www.skylandsasatru.org](http://www.skylandsasatru.org)

Don't forget to *friend* us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/skylandsasatru/>

Remember to sign up for our events on our Meetup page: <http://www.meetup.com/NJ-Asatru/>

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is also on Twitter. Follow us at: [https://twitter.com/Skylands\\_Asatru](https://twitter.com/Skylands_Asatru)

## **Submissions to *Skylands Report***

***Skylands Report*** is the official newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship (SAF). As such, it is a celebration of the accomplishments, the activities, and the plans of the SAF.

We welcome submissions of essays, short stories, poetry, and artwork. Write to us at [fellowship@skylandsasatru.org](mailto:fellowship@skylandsasatru.org). We would love to hear from you.

## **About Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship**

The Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is a recognized 501(c)(3) religious organization based in northwest New Jersey. We practice the religion called Ásatrú, which is the modern expression of the ancient religion of the people of northern and western Europe before they converted to Christianity. We hold regular gatherings, some religious, some educational, and some social.

We encourage anyone whose ancestors once worshiped the Gods and Goddesses of the North to “come home” to Ásatrú. You're welcome here!

