

Skylands Report



The e-newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

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www.skylandsasatru.com

July 2018

Hail Sunna! Skylands Celebrates Midsummer

Despite dire forecasts of thunderstorms throughout the day, Sunna shone her warmth and light down on Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship's third annual celebration of Midsummer.

The event began with our tribal Thing. The highlight of this year's Thing was that four Associate members completed applications and were recommended by the Board of Directors for Full-Oathed membership. Each spoke on their unique qualifications and how they plan to serve Skylands in the future. All four were accepted by unanimous vote of the Oathed members present. Bob C., Jess D., Maclean D., and Alex K. completed the process by swearing the oath on our tribal oath ring.

Alex K. served as our auctioneer for our Great Midsummer Auction. I thank all those who contributed to the auction. This fun event is one of our key fundraisers of the year and a great way to acquire some truly unique items.

Goði Don and



Our Fellowship gathers for Midsummer

Apprentice Gyðja Lisa led the Midsummer blót. Alex K. provided a dramatic reading of “Balder’s Dreams” (*Baldrs draumar*) from the *Poetic Edda*. An offering of a Sun Wheel was made to Sunna. As the flames consumed the Sun Wheel a large hawk flew over the festivities signaling that our offering had been accepted.

The tribe then sat down to enjoy a bounteous feast that included pulled pork, sausage and peppers, and macaroni and cheese.

The Symbel was filled with many heart-felt toasts to the Gods and the ancestors. As the event came to a close, all left feeling fulfilled. Each

understood that our commitment to Ásatrú offers a way of living that is deeply fulfilling. Ásatrú is ultimately about the honoring of our Gods, the Earth, and our ancestors. There is no time like Midsummer to remember those commitments. 



The new members grasp the Oath Ring



Accepting the Oath of Membership

Ásatrú 101 – Confirmed 2018-19 Schedule

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. All classes will be held at the Morris County Library, 30 East Hanover Avenue, Whippany, NJ 07950. Classes generally run from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Fall Semester

September 20: What is Ásatrú?
October 21: Introduction to the Norse Gods
November 18: Ritual in Asatru
December 16: Wheel of the Year: Holidays in Ásatrú

Winter /Spring Semester

January 27: Introduction to the Runes
February 24: Runic Yoga
March 17: The Afterlife
April 28: Ragnarok: Northern Eschatology



Folkish Summer Hallowing 2018

One of the highlights of the year for Ásatrúar in the Northeast is Folkish Summer Hallowing run by the Irminfolk Odinst Community. If you're available for the weekend, or even a day, this is always a great opportunity to spend time with other Ásatrúars and worship our Gods. Highly recommended! For more information or to register go to: <http://folkishsummerhallowing.com/>



May I Speak to You About the All-Father?

This month's feature article comes from the blog Tales from the Iron Wood (talesfromtheironwood.blogspot.com) written by Goði Don. It addresses an issue that many Ásatrúars seem to have – openly admitting their religious beliefs to friends and family. — Ed.

While it may be scary to attend your first heathen event, what comes next is likely even scarier. Eventually most people interested in Ásatrú take the plunge and meet up with a real group of people (as opposed to an on-line group). This may be at a “pubmoot” (essentially a meet and greet at a local area pub) or a hike in the woods, or, as in my case, a weekend-long national event to celebrate a major heathen holiday. But what happens once you go home? Who do you tell? What exactly do you say you were doing?

A friend of mine told me that he was attending heathen events several times a month. When family members and friends at work would ask what he had done on the weekend, he would respond awkwardly, “I went camping.” I struggled with this early on and many of my friends in Ásatrú have reported that they have as well. But the truth is, we’re not doing anything shameful. Our religious beliefs don’t need to be kept secret. And yet, as sensible as that may sound, announcing to the family that you’ve become a pagan can be scary indeed.

I was quick to reveal my newfound faith to my wife and children – and to my mother as well. It was more distant family members and friends that were a greater challenge. I recall one family member, upon learning of my conversion saying, “But people stopped believing that over a thousand years ago.” The inference being, of course, that the worship of the Norse gods, or any pagan gods for that matter, was debunked as some sort of



Charlemagne destroys the Irminsul (1882)

error or falsehood.

The truth is that Christianity did not win some sort of cosmic debate. Christianity largely spread due to socio-political reasons. Chieftains often converted in order to improve trade and political relations with Rome. At times conversions and baptisms were forced. Charlemagne helped spread the faith in a particularly vile way slaughtering 4,500 pagan Saxon leaders at Verden. He also defiled religious shrines, destroyed the Irminsul, a holy structure for the German people. The Christians even had forests chopped down for these had served as holy places for the heathens.

Heathens rarely proselytize. We don't go door-to-door and attempt to convert people. I recall my son, upon learning of my new religion, offering to hide in the neighbor's bushes and record a video if I would ring their doorbell and say, "Excuse me. May I speak to you about the All-Father?" That was never going to happen. It is important however to be honest about one's faith. We don't need to convert everyone around us, but neither must we hide who we are.

Just the other day, I read the story of a family who were cleaning out the home of a recently deceased aunt. The aunt was remembered as a devout Catholic. To their shock they discovered an altar to the God Bragi complete with handwritten songs and poems to this son of Odin. The family was saddened to learn that their aunt felt the need to keep her faith hidden all those years.

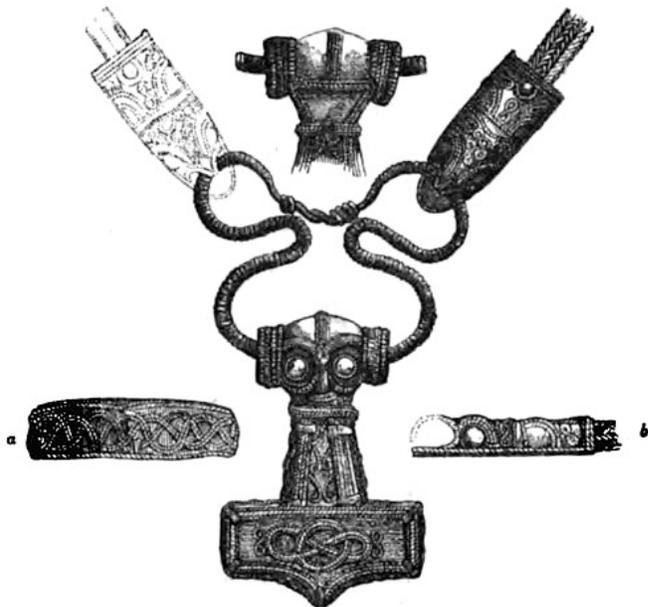


Yule Father (1848)

The faith of the pre-Christian European people was rich and complex. Far from being something to be ashamed of, it is something for which we should be proud. The pre-Christian spirituality of Europe was so strong in fact that its influence is still quite evident today. Heathenry is all around us. Its symbols abound in the major Christian holidays. Christmas, for example, is filled with such imagery; the Christmas tree, Yule log, mistletoe, Santa Claus, and even the exchange of gifts are of pagan origin. The Germanic gift-cycle repeats itself as gifts are stacked up under trees that are filled with electric lights. Our collective unconscious recalls ancestors who marked the shortest day of the year (Winter Solstice) with bonfires and the return of the Sun and lengthening of days that follow.

Christians often appropriated and repurposed pagan holidays and gods. Easter (Ostara) is the highest holy day in the Christian calendar but still bears the name of a heathen goddess. Try as they might, Easter is still celebrated with rabbits and eggs – pagan signs of the coming spring. These symbols were never fully replaced by the imagery of god crucified and resurrected.

Other remembrances of the old gods are all around us. The days of the week still bear the names of Tyr (Tuesday), Woden (Wednesday), Thor (Thursday), and Frigga (Friday). Many towns in Europe are named for the gods that the locals worshipped. Television, movies, and comic books make fortunes from the tales of Thor, *Ragnarok*, and Vikings. Audiences still thrill to the tales of our powerful gods who rather than “turning the other cheek,” slay their enemies with a blow from an enchanted hammer.



Thor's hammer from Sweden buried around the year 1000 CE

Many heathens today wear a Thor's hammer amulet around their necks. This practice is historical with relics found and preserved in various museums in Scandinavia. Several historians suggest that the Mjolnir amulets were worn in response to the Christian crosses worn by missionaries. In fact, this would be an active outward sign of defiance. Our heathen ancestors were courageous, defiant, and proud. At times they were even brutal and behaved in ways that can best be described as barbaric. But they were certainly not about to hide their altars and be fearful of a crucified god or his followers.

One popular heathen t-shirt is emblazoned with the slogan, “Your god was nailed to a cross. Mine has a hammer. Any questions?” We don't need to offend those of other faiths, but we can speak of the value and virtues of our own. And we can celebrate Yule / Christmas and Ostara / Easter with our Christian family members. At one of those family gatherings, we might just comment that Yule-Father (*Julfader*) was one of the names of Odin, or that Ostara is the goddess from which Easter got its name. When we sit down at Thanksgiving, we might just point out that Thursday is named for Thor – and that our ancestors would give thanks to him for the weather and the bountiful harvest that resulted.

Perhaps this would be a good year to serve a healthy draught of mead with the Thanksgiving turkey --and with family gathered, give thanks to our ancestors and to our Gods. 

9 June 2018

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Skylands July Calendar

Kutztown Folk Festival

We'll spend the day at the wonderful Kutztown Folk Festival, the oldest continuously operated folklife festival in America. The event provides valuable insight into the traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch and their way of life.

There are interesting lectures; the largest quilt sale in America, as well as plenty of children's activities. Let's not forget about the food that is available. There's nowhere else on earth where you can find as many Pennsylvania Dutch delicacies than the Kutztown Folk Festival! This event is open to all and is a great opportunity to meet the members of Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship in an informal setting. For more information see: <http://www.kutztownfestival.com/calendar>

Date: Saturday, 7 July 2018
Time: 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Location: Kutztown, PA

Full Moon Offering

Date: 27 July 2018

New Moon Offering

Date: 12 July 2018

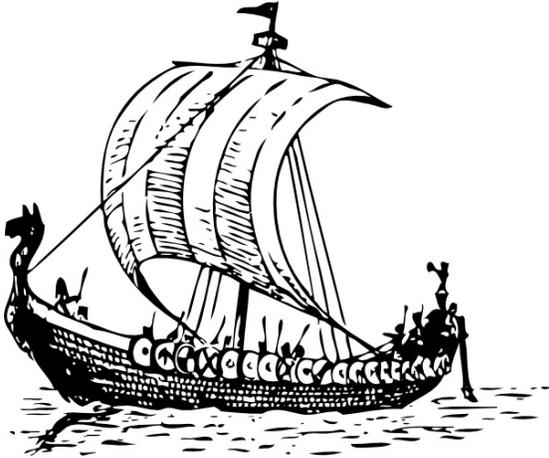
Everyone is encouraged to make an offering to his or her local land-spirits. By making regular offerings, we increase our bonds of friendship with the spirits of the earth. Such offerings may be made on the Full Moon or the New Moon.

Tribal Milestones

Randi R. celebrates her birthday on 2 July. Congratulations Randi!
Alli W. celebrates her birthday on 11 July. Congratulations Alli!



Save the Date!



- **Kutztown Folk Festival** – Sat., 7 Jul.
- **Folkish Summer Hallowing** (*hosted by the Irminfolk Odinist Community*) –
Thur-Sun, 16-19 Aug.
- **Scanfest** – Sun. 2 Sep.
- **Haustblót** – Sat., 22 Sep.
- **Winter Nights** – Fri.-Sun., 12-14 Oct.
- **Krampusnacht** – Sat., 8 Dec.
- **Yule Celebration** – Sat., 5 Jan.

Help Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship teaches a variety of classes including our popular *Ásatrú 101* series. 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 Ásatrú Fellowship.

Donate today! <http://www.skylandsasatru.com/donate/>

Follow Skylands On-line!

For more information about our tribe and upcoming events, please visit our website at www.skylandsasatru.com

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

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!

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

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We welcome submissions of essays, short stories, poetry, and artwork. Write to us at skylands@skylandsasatru.com. We would love to hear from you.

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