

“Oh... but what about Valhalla”: Misjudgments on Heathen Afterlife and the “Nearly” Odinist “Monotheism”.

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Written by Sonne Heljarskinn

English Translation by Wander Stayner

It is totally natural that, while embracing heathenism, one brings along many habits from a Christian worldview. Don't get offended: we are a minority within an overwhelming and rooted society shaped under Christian or Catholic parameters. You and I, all of us, carry to a greater or lesser degree and on different aspects traces of this Christian way to see the world. My intent here is to elaborate on two phenomena I see quite often on internet comments: one's attachment to a metaphysical view of Valhalla, and a nearly “monotheism” of Odin.

Views on the afterlife for Heathens

As it has been said in another [article](#), Valhalla is not the only afterlife destination for the souls, according to Heathen cosmovision.

There is no guarantee, whatsoever, that you will join the *Einherjar*, if you die in battle, and not end up going to Freyja's Fólkvangr. This is the first unpredictability for those aspiring to be “warriors” nowadays. It's been the pop culture's trend to show us Valhalla as some kind of Norse paradise, where gods and warriors dwell in harmony, for all eternity, until Ragnarök comes, having Helheim as its pejorative opposite, like the Christian hell. This binary and manacheistic division is completely flawed and essentially Christian.

Besides, there are other destinations (the Vanir Palace in the sea, for those who die in the ocean), the Helgafjel mountains, and for those who don't fancy much the poor people, I regret to inform that Bilskirnir is where slaves and poor peasants would go (and among the slaves there were people of other races, even though that did not use to be the only reason to enslave someone), that way, sharing Asgaard with the gods, warriors and workers.

Living for Valhalla

FOTO

Vikings of Einherjar Attack by Casper Art

Well, we must start by destroying this binary idea of heaven/hell if we wish to understand the meaning of a Heathen existence. You do not guarantee a free pass to Valhalla by being hot-headed and dying in a foolish fight, as it has been already shown. The Brotherhood of Odin, for instance, understands that the soul leaves the body through a wound, regardless of whether it happened as a result of some battle or not; and you just won't go to Freyja's or Odin's palace if your soul comes out through your nose or mouth, which means death by illness or old age, without any wounds. Helheim is not a place of dishonor, to continue. Dying of old age and walking through the gates of Garm is not an embarrassment. If none of the extremes is worthwhile... why should I think that the Norse view is the right one and how is different or even superior to the Christian's?

Religion for Christianity and Heathenism (Ásatrú) means different things. In Christianity, a life away from "sins" is a requirement (with deeds and attitudes that preserve that, or not, depending on the edge), the mortification of "evil" desires induced by Satan in order to skew humankind from the path of salvation, of eternal life after redemption granted by death. And, the harsher, the more humiliating, the more embedded in faith has your life been, the closer you are to this God. For Heathenism, though, there are some basic differences that change all the essence of it. First, your life is not lived thinking of the day of your death, a personal salvation, or your ways to Valhalla (this vision is highly pushed on to us by pop culture, I repeat). You don't live to go to this or that place in the afterlife. Nor is your personal glory important, if it does not claim a social meaning. What is the use of becoming a powerful politician, for instance, when you mistreat your family, your wife or husband, and do not respect your forefathers, dead or alive, being a tyrant to your people? Before thinking about glory, you need to think whom/what is this glory for? If the answer is basically for individual purposes, rest assured that it has nothing to do with heathenism: "WE FIND HERE (in Germanic peoples) *a community* BASED UPON GENERAL UNITY, MUTUAL SELF-SACRIFICE, ABNEGATION AND SOCIAL SPIRIT" Vilhelm Grönbech, *Culture of Teutons, Vol. I*.

I often see people praising irrational violence as if it meant being heathen *stricto sensu*: but the preservation of friðr (peace, harmonic happiness) is considered valuable (Sögumál); "Never break the peace that good and true men build between you and the others" (Njal's Saga, c.55); "It is best for the man to seek peace through words, whenever possible" (Heitharvega Saga, c.35); "The person must expose peace (FRIÐR) wherever he goes. Even though many wish for good, evil is often more powerful". (Atlamol en Gronlenzku 34). That means, although Scandinavians truly were the people that brought horror and domination upon the Roman Empire, violence for the sake of violence was never regarded as glory, and it was always a means to an end, not supernatural, for beyond life; but for an existential need in a given historical moment, and for a tribe (or a group of them) in specific. It is worth remarking that all that "barbarity" attributed to Germanic peoples that invaded the Roman Empire was carried out at a greater level abroad, by the very Romans, who

completely subdued the peoples they overpowered, while the Germanic, to a certain extent, even “mingled” with Roman nobility.

Heathenism and Violence

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The image of Berserkers and Ulfhednars, as an extremely powerful and violent elite of mercenaries, warriors of Odin in search for victory, blood and glory, impresses many (if not all) of those who get involved with heathenism.

The battle has, indeed, its importance (literal or symbolic) in the life of those ancient peoples of the North, and also in ours, while heathens. However, is everything minimized into death, war and destruction?

The Scandinavians pledged allegiance and established colonies in many places, blending with the locals, all over Europe and even with Native Americans, when they tried to settle there. That means, the ethnic cleansing of local population was never a necessity in their battles – in other words, subduing *all* the enemies, whatever the reason, was not one of their war goals. “THUS VIOLENCE, HERE, IS NOT A MERE EXTRAVAGANCE OF POWER”, SAYS AGAIN Grönbech, and continues, presenting us with the difference between a view of passive life towards personal salvation, misplaced from the ancient context (Christian), excessive (and unnecessary) violence, and the authentic way of life of the Germanic peoples:

“The violence is organised from the depths of the soul. It is energy, that keeps the spiritual life awake and athirst, and thus creates the single-minded, firm-set personality of the Northman. These men are not each but an inspired moment, fading vaguely away into past an future; they are present, future and past in one. A man fixes himself in the past, by firm attachment to past generations. Such an attachment is found more or less among all peoples; but the Northman makes the past a living and guiding force by constant historic remembrance and historic speculation in which he traces out his connection with former generations and his dependence on their deeds. His future is linked up with the present by aim and honour and the judgement of posterity. And he fixes himself in the present by reproducing himself in an ideal type, such a type for instance as that of the chieftain, generous, brave, fearless, quick-witted, stern towards his enemies. faithful to his friends, and frank with all. The type is built up out of life and poetry together; first lived, and then transfused into poetry”.

The man from the North is not only the man of war, yearning for death and Valhalla; he is the one who seeks the integrity of his acts for the sake of his community, his descendants and to honor his ancestors. It is not just an “unintentional joke of superiority” in the *nietzschean* style (ÜBERMENSCH IS OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR THE TRUE NORSE-HEATHEN), in Nietzsche there is no moral or honor pattern: only the *will to subdue* (WILLE ZUR MACHT); in the North there is the community and the

need for a moral code which is not oppressive (like the Christian), but, above all, liberating, to ensure that the people from the tribe build their lives on solid and non-contradictory foundations, that way turning to violence only when the situation calls for it.

I dare say that fighting an unfair war and defend absurd ideas would justify not being worthy of Valhalla, but maybe NÁSTRÖND, because such wars often involve acts of treason and breaking one's word. Even Hitler (with whom many odinists, unfortunately sympathize) was a master at not complying with agreements and making treaties he did not mean to comply, and that was the reason for his initial victories, just like for Spaniards in their invasions to indigenous pre-Colombian empires. Modern politics is made from the instability of alliances among elites and the volatility of enemies against which people turn; thinking only about private interests and not the people's.

The figure of Odin

FOTO

Odin God of Magic by Darkjimbo

Finally, there is one more thing to go over. I, myself, have Odin as the main divine reference. Odin is a god whom I seek to honor and impersonate; I try to make his acts mine, transmute my essence into his; reach out to him as much as the honor of my deeds allow (and I struggle to make that happen as strictly as possible). But I am totally aware that all other deities are necessary and they influence many aspects of our lives.

Nevertheless, I don't regard myself as an Odinist. There are some reasons for that. The first one is that Odinism, as a political-religious movement (with a strong focus on the first term), has a very different history from that of Ásatrú, not only in its origins, but also in the daily practices and goals as a "religion". The Icelandic Ásatrúarfélag has always been driven by the lessons that the Eddas had to teach us, by the importance of ethics, and by a way to see the world (*Weltanschauung*) that was different from the one we got used to, if not superior to it. It is not only about not having *one* only god, but about the way we relate to all those gods who are not in a reality apart, who may even be by our side, showing themselves at all times, through us, nature, our ancestors and who do not only try to protect or judge *us* (because they have plenty to do for themselves, rather than just keep getting involved in human schemes).

Putting it into a clearer way: 1) *Odinism* focuses, in most groups, on a very strict concept of ODAL (see Varg Vikernes), "heritage", which they decapitate and stitch together into scattered concepts of pseudoscience, social Darwinism and genetics to justify why some can and others can't be heathens. That leads to a loss in focus on *action*, inherent to heathen. 2) Odin is not the only god in the Norse pantheon, to

whom we must draw our thoughts, almost turning Ásatrú into something like “Óðinntrú”, a substitute monotheism to Jesus, Jehovah or Allah to Odin. 3) Odin is not a “guardian” god in the sense of the aforementioned gods from other religions, who patronizes each and every one of humans:

“ONE OF THE GREATEST MISUNDERSTANDINGS PEOPLE HAVE IS TO TREAT OL' ONE EYE AS SOME SORT OF A SKY-DADDY GANDALF TYPE (AND YES, GANDÁLFR IS ONE OF ÓÐINNS KENNINGS, BUT IN REALITY THAT NAME IS NOT AS FRIENDLY AS IAN MCKELLEN - BUT I'LL GET TO THAT LATER). AS IF ÓÐINN WAS A CARING, LOVING GOD.

FOR THOSE THAT THINK SO AND WILL GET OFFENDED BY HEARING THAT HE'S NOT, PLEASE FIND THE DOOR (AND SERIOUSLY... THAT'S NOT VERY STRONG MINDED OF YOU). BECAUSE HE'S NOT. [...]

99,9% OF PEOPLE DON'T MEET THOSE STANDARDS, WOULDN'T WANT TO MAKE THE SACRIFICES NEEDED TO REACH SAID AND SHOULD MAYBE CONSIDER A GOD THAT'S LESS OF A SINGLE-BLOODY-MINDED-WARRIOR-BASTARD* THAN OL FEAR (UGGR/YGGR), SPEARWIELDER (GEIRVALDUR, BIFLINDI, GEIRÖLNIR, GEIRLÖÐNIR, GEIRTÝR, GANDÁLFUR**), FATHER OF VIOLENT DEATH (VALFAÐIR), ATTACKER (ATRIÐI), FLAME-EYED (BÁLEYGR), CURSE WORKER (BÖLVERKR, SKOLLVALDR), LORD OF THE DEAD (DRAUGADRÓTTINN). In: Óðinn – or Sky-daddy and the world of grievous bodily harm, by Einar V. Bj. Maack.

Odin is, essentially, a god of death, and thus, of war, but also a god thirsty for knowledge, who disguises himself in beggar's costumes to bargain, have fun and acquire knowledge. Odin is, on the other hand, the god of magic, involved with Galdr and Seiðr, the finder of runes, and that was not so for one human in particular, among billions who have been born in history, to be awarded with the blessings of the *Alföðr (The Allfather)*. Odin is the vitalizing impetus (along with Vili and Ve) of all humanity; besides that, he adopted light and dark elves (the latter may or not be dwarves, about which there is no consensus); having, then, much more to worry about than the human ego: Huginn and Muninn travel the nine worlds to bring news to Odin so that he regulates them, and not tend to human life in particular and award or punish them. In very rare cases the gods (and especially Odin) get involved with human's lives, but that is an exception, and when it will be of good service to the divine businesses. Using the names ODINSSON or ODINSDÓTTIR as a means to “conjure” Odin's godhood strength (or, respectively, to another god) is totally understandable, but, if for instance, you expect a 24-7 watch from that god by doing that, it will not be anything but a very Christian habit, because there is a huge difference between the Christian theology and the Northern naturalistic ritualistic, concerning the gods-humans relations.

Then... What to do?

FOTO

Our gods are more than judges of humanity. They manifest themselves in Nature, have their own lives, interests, flaws and needs. They will interact with us directly, due to our deeds, and our character.

And yes, look at the beauty of spring that Eostre carries, the power of Sunna who runs every day in the skies, the fertility that Freyr and Freyja bring, the violent fury of Aegir revolving the seas, the mighty light of Thor's thunders and remember that the world is a sum of the actions of all gods. Not only Odin's.

One part of our soul takes the side of our ancestors, then it can come back to our world in order to help the clan, and that has a meaning: that you are important, but you are part of a larger spiritual essence. Also remember that Valhalla is where all warriors want to go: but it is life down here, day by day, being loyal to all those who are close to you, relatives, friends, etc., is how the true Heathen shows why he/she follows the Norse way: for honor, to nail both feet and mind on reality and on Nature, not for promises of an afterlife or the need for divine safeguarding.

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