

Do Heathens Believe in Gods?

Heathenry is a polytheistic tradition, which means that we honor many gods and spirits who guide and inhabit the world around us. Collectively, we call these beings *wights*. The greatest of the wights are the gods, called the Aesir or Ese. Some of them are still well known today, like Odin, Thor and Freyja. Together, the gods work to preserve order and balance in the world. We also honor many spirits of the air, earth, and water, such as the elves, dwarves, and land spirits. These wights animate the skies, grant fertility to crops, animals and humans, and we strive to live in harmony with them. Finally, every person is guided by the line of their ancestors, whose wisdom and strength they carry into the present.

Is Heathenry Racist?

No. There is nothing in Heathen lore or theology that advocates for any kind of discrimination based on race, sexual orientation or gender. Unfortunately, the gods and sacred symbols of Heathenry have been co-opted by racist and other hate groups since at least the 19th century, especially during the Nazi regime in Germany, and this continues into today. This misrepresentation of our tradition is one that we are actively fighting against in an effort to reclaim what has been taken from us and misused.

What do Heathens Do?

Heathenry is usually a communal tradition, with groups called *hearths* or *kindreds* gathering regularly to perform rituals together. The basic ritual that Heathens share is called a *blot*, where we give offerings of gratitude to the gods and spirits. These offerings usually take the form of mead, food, or votive items. It is a time for us to commune with the powers of the world, speak to them, and listen for their responses.

The other ritual most Heathens share is called *symbel*, which is a ritual of toasts given before or after a feast. Passing a horn of drink around the table, this ritual gives each person the opportunity to speak and honor the gods, ancestors and heroes whose strength and wisdom they admire, give gifts to other members of the community, or even boast about their accomplishments. Heathenry emphasizes personal accomplishment, and boasting is an important way to ensure that our achievements are recognized by the community and by the forces of Wyrð (fate).

Heathens hold every spoken word as sacred, shaping the path into the future – never more so than in the practice of taking oaths. Whether of marriage, blood-siblinghood, alliance, or simply swearing to fulfill a personal challenge, oaths sworn before the community can increase a person's luck and spiritual might, helping to direct the evolution of their Wyrð.

Where can I Learn More about Heathenry?

Several organizations have websites with helpful information about Heathenry, including:

The Troth
www.thetroth.org

Raven Kindred South
www.ravenkindred.com

Chase Hill Folk
www.chasehillfolk.org

Good beginning books about modern Heathenry and Norse Mythology include:

Essential Asatru
by Diana Paxson

Norse Myths
by Kevin Crossley-Holland

Travels Through Middle Earth
by Alaric Albertsson

Heathens base much of their practice on primary source material – words written down soon after the dissolution of ancient Heathenry – including:

The Poetic Edda
trans. Carolyn Larrington

The Prose Edda
trans. Anthony Faulkes

Beowulf
trans. Seamus Heaney

What is Heathenry?

Heathenry is the modern revival of the ancient Germanic spiritual traditions. In Northern Europe, before the conversion to Christianity in the Middle Ages, people who lived in Scandinavia, on the Continent in modern-day Germany, and later in Anglo-Saxon England shared a similar culture, including religious beliefs and ritual practices. These interrelated cultures are today referred to as Germanic or Teutonic, and they are one of the roots of modern Western Culture. When Europe was converted to Christianity, sometime between 1000 and 1200 CE, the last official practice of ancient Heathenry died out. Now, 800 years later, modern practitioners are seeking to revive the spiritual wisdom of these tribes.

What do Heathens Believe?

Heathens believe in community, family, the land, and the importance of the words and gifts we exchange in order to reinforce those relationships with honesty, trust, and recognition of each other's achievements. The way we build these connections and the choices we make every day in our lives is called Wyrð, or fate. Every choice we make sets our path into the future, and we carry the consequences of our words and deeds with us throughout our lives. Heathens look to sacred stories, myths and legends of heroes, and the deeds of great people of the past to challenge ourselves to live to our fullest and conduct our lives with integrity.

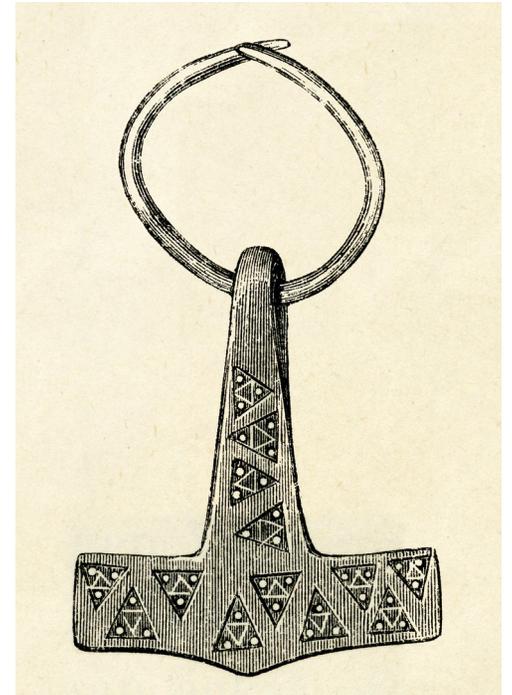


Written by Trey Wentworth
heathenhearth.blogspot.com
Updated May 2018

for Chase Hill Folk
www.chasehillfolk.org
contact: chasehillfolk@gmail.com

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pamphlet unchanged*

What is Heathenry?



“Hail to the gods! | Ye goddesses, hail,
And all the generous earth!
Give to us wisdom | and goodly speech,
And healing hands, life-long.”

– *Sigrdrifumál* 3, trans. Henry A. Bellows