

DEVELOPED BY THE OPEN HALLS PROJECT

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ADDRESS: No central address. Heathens worship in autonomous groups called kindreds or hearths. Some Heathens are affiliated with regional, national, or international organizations.

OTHER NAMES BY WHICH KNOWN: Heathen is the most common blanket term for this faith, but other terms used by some groups include: Asatru, Forn Sidr/Fyrnsidu, Theodism

SUGGESTED READING LIST: These books are not central holy texts but do represent works that influence and explain basic heathen concepts and are accepted as useful by a large majority of heathens.

1. Poetic Edda
2. We Are Our Deeds
3. Culture of the Teutons
4. Road to Hel
5. Sacred Gifts (Kirk Thomas)

LEADERSHIP: No central leadership. Organizational bodies hold internal elections for a number of positions parallel to those in churches and fraternal organizations including religious leaders, secretaries, mentors, and various officiates.

MEMBERSHIP: Accurate membership cannot be estimated because Heathenry does not require formal membership in an organization. Results of a 2013 survey suggest there are nearly 20,000 people in the United States who identify as Heathen and that a large percentage of those people have served, or are currently serving in the US military.

HISTORICAL ORIGIN: Heathenry is a reconstruction of the religious customs of pre-Christian Europe with a particular focus on the Germanic, Norse, and Anglo-Saxon cultures. It shares many similarities with traditional religious practices from around the world (e.g. ancestor veneration, community focus, polytheistic worldview.) The modern revival can be traced back to the early 1970's and has significantly evolved due to archeological discoveries and re-examined historical contexts that have improved modern understanding of fundamental traditions. Some revivals occurred prior to this, however most modern groups do not trace any connection to earlier movements or groups.

BASIC BELIEFS: Heathenry is a polytheistic faith with a variety of holy powers. Gods such as Odin, Thor and Freyr are worshiped alongside goddesses including Frigg, Sif and Freyja. The deities are known by a variety of names from various Northern European cultures; Thor is also called Thunor (Anglo-Saxon) and Donar (German).

Heathens also venerate a variety of beings known as vættir or wights. These local land-spirits inhabit the natural world and are treated with honor and respect. A wight may represent a specific natural feature (such as a river or waterfall) or a larger geographical area. House wights are believed to watch over one's home.

Heathens place great importance on the relationship with one's ancestors. Individual and communal rituals regularly include spoken tribute to deceased forebears ranging from immediate family to

ancient ancestors. Following Old Norse sources, some Heathens think of distant ancestors as Álfar (Elves) that continue to interact with the living.

Heathenry is a world-accepting religion; emphasis is placed on right action in this life rather than focus on an otherworldly afterlife. Heathens commonly assert that, “we are our deeds,” meaning that the sum of one’s actions is of primary importance. They place great emphasis on personal responsibility and place significant value on how they are remembered by their family and community.

PRACTICES AND BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS:

Heathenry derives ethics and morals through allegory from historical texts, but does not have a codified moral system or standard of conduct in the same way that Christianity and Islam do. Some heathens use a codified list of values as a basic code of conduct similar in some ways to the Army Values: the Nine Noble Virtues: courage, truth, honor, fidelity, discipline, hospitality, self-reliance, industriousness, and perseverance. These virtues were codified by Heathens early in the modern movement and have fallen out of favor in many groups.

Reciprocity is one of the central ethical standards of Heathen thought. The process of regular and consistent gifts and favors builds a solid relationship that must be maintained. In practice, as a Heathen soldier interacts with his fellow soldiers, they will become bound in a web of responsibility and respect. Heathens may be slow to make new friends when moving into new units because being careful around new people is considered a virtue. However, once they have begun to do so they will often be intensely loyal and expect the same in return.

Heathens believe that doing what is best for their family and community is a high moral calling. This includes a dedication to service, both nationally and locally. Heathenry is a fundamentally family-oriented belief system, and Heathens keep close ties to their extended family and ancestors as a matter of religious belief. Heathenry is also an orthopraxic religion, depending on right action over right belief. Men and women are judged by their deeds and their word. Heathens believe our deeds affect their luck, or spiritual wealth. This luck can be transferred from generation to generation, so Heathens believe what they do will not only affect themselves, but their children, and their children for many generations.

In general, Heathens celebrate five major holidays:

- Yule begins around December 20 and lasts for 12 nights. It is the most important of all the festivals to many Heathens, and is a celebration of deep winter breaking and the start of the new year.
- Summer Finding is celebrated in late spring and the date may vary depending on local climate.
- Midsummer is celebrated on or near June 21.
- Winternights is generally celebrated near the end of October, but may be moved to more in line with local climate.
- Day of Remembrance is celebrated frequently in line with local remembrances such as Veteran’s Day.

There may also be regionally and locally celebrated festivals such as the Charming of the Plow, Eostre, Loafmas, and Winter Finding, though this is not an exclusive list.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES: Heathen groups have various organizational structures. Some organizations have distinct top-down leadership, and others are more loose democratic associations of families and extended tribal groups. The Kindred is a common model based on creation of oaths and agreements to treat members as family. Many kindreds form loose alliances with one another to create regional meetings and events. There are some heathens that do not have a large community near them; these individuals are often in contact with others at least through social media.

ROLE OF MINISTERS: The leadership of an Ásatrú/Heathen group is responsible for the group's ritual schedule, events that are attended or hosted, facilitating religious knowledge amongst its membership and its surrounding community, and mediating issues as required. There are numerous titles for these leadership positions, but some of the most common are: Goði [GO-thee] (Priest), Gyðja [Gee-thee-uh] (Priestess), and Chieftain. Often the Goði/Gyðja/Chieftain conducts the spiritual and administrative tasks.

WORSHIP: Heathen worship is based on the concept of 'reciprocal relationships'. For heathens, all relationships, be they with other humans, gods, ancestors, or wights, are reciprocal in nature. The majority of heathen worship involves gifting, or making offerings. Typical offerings include drink, bread, items the worshipper has made or grown, or incense. Heathens offer these items to the Holy Powers in exchange for favor for themselves or others. Many Heathens refer to this type of gifting worship as 'blót'. Another form of heathen worship is 'Sumbel', a ritual that strengthens both the bonds within the human community, and the bonds of that community with the Holy Powers. During sumbel, a horn of drink, usually mead is typically passed around the assembled worshippers three times. Each round is dedicated to toasting and praising a group of beings: for example, the first round for the gods, the second for the ancestors, and the third for the land spirits or community. Depending on group or occasion, there may be more than three rounds in sumbel. These further rounds may be dedicated to making oaths and boasting. There is no universal Heathen liturgy, although groups and organizations may elect to create their own standard formats. In spite of this, these ritual forms are still almost always recognisable enough that Heathens from different groups and communities can worship together with ease.

DIETARY LAWS OR RESTRICTIONS: None.

FUNERAL AND BURIAL REQUIREMENTS: Individual preferences are honored. If death occurs in combat zone, refer to service member's will for further instructions. The Thor's Hammer symbol, which is held as sacred by the majority of Heathens, is included among the VA headstone emblems.

MEDICAL TREATMENT: No medical restrictions. Casualty care should be developed on an individual basis. Each heathen has a different level of appreciation and understanding of heathenry in their own lives. Prepare probing questions for any service member receiving care to help develop an individualized plan to assist them during their recovery.

OTHER: Many involved in Asatru/Heathenry are incredibly supportive of all forms of public service, relating to the need to care for the community's welfare such as the military, police, firefighting, and EMT professions; by a wide margin, military service is often seen as one of the most honorable professions. Many pride themselves on depth of knowledge regarding religious aspects, history, and traditional crafting skills to a point where Asatru/Heathenry is referred to the "religion with homework."