

What is **ASATRU?**



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Stephen A. McNallen

Runes are ancient Germanic symbols representing various concepts or forces in the universe - the holy mysteries. Taken together, they express our ancestors' worldview. Their meanings are intimately connected with the teachings of Asatru. Our lore tells how Odin, father of the Gods, won them through painful ordeal so that Gods and humans alike might benefit from their wisdom.

The use of the runes for meditation and divination are integral to the modern practice of Asatru. Properly used, they are powerful keys for personal transformation and upward evolution.

How is Asatru organized?

There is no all-powerful spiritual leader who speaks for all of Asatru, but there are numerous leaders who speak to and for their particular constituencies. While Asatru has definite principles accepted by most of our adherents, we generally allow a considerable degree of freedom in interpreting religious truth.

What is the *Asatru Folk Assembly*?

The *Asatru Folk Assembly* is a religious corporation in the State of California and has Federal 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Our purpose is the practice, promotion, and further development of our ancestral faith. We welcome inquiries and support from interested men and women.

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from our ancestors as instinct, emotion, innate predispositions, and perhaps even racial memory. By combining these sources of internal and external wisdom with the literature left us by our ancestors, we arrive at religious truths. This living spiritual guidance is better than any dusty, dogmatic "holy book".

I've heard Asatru described as a "Nature religion". What does that mean?

We treasure the spiritual awe, the feeling of "connecting" with the Gods and Goddesses, which can come from experiencing the beauty and majesty of Nature. Our deities act in and through natural law. By working in harmony with Nature we can become co-workers with the Gods. This attitude removes the opposition between "natural" and "supernatural", and the supposed conflict between religion and science.

For us, following a "Nature religion" means recognizing that we are part of Nature, subject to all its laws. We may be Gods-in-the-making, but we are members of the animal kingdom nonetheless!

Where did the universe come from, according to Asatru?

Our myths describe the beginning of the universe as the unfolding of a natural process, rather than an event requiring supernatural intervention. Followers of Asatru need not abandon modern science to retain their religion. The old lore of our people describes the interaction of fire and ice, and the development of life from these - but this is symbolic, and we will leave it to the physicists to discover how the universe was born.

What are the runes, and what do they have to do with Asatru?

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ASATRU FOLK ASSEMBLY
P.O. Box 445
Nevada City, CA 95959
www.runestone.org
info@runestone.org

There is also a tradition in Asatru of rebirth within the family line. Perhaps the individual is able to choose whether or not he or she is re-manifested in this world, or there may be natural laws governing this. In a sense, of course, we all live on in our descendants quite apart from an afterlife as such.

To be honest, we of Asatru do not overly concern ourselves with the next world. We live here and now, in this existence. If we do this and do it well, the next life will take care of itself.

Does Asatru involve ancestor worship?

Asatru says we should honor our ancestors. It also says we are bonded to those ancestors in a special way. One of the implications of this relationship is that the ancestors need our veneration, and that they reciprocate by looking out for us from beyond death.

We also believe our forebears have passed to us certain spiritual qualities just as surely as they have given us various physical traits. They live on in us. The family or clan is above and beyond the limits of time, space, and mortality.

Does Asatru have a holy book, like the Bible?

No. There are written sources that are useful to us because they contain much of our sacred lore in the form of myths and examples of right conduct, but we do not accept them as infallible or inspired documents. Any religion holding such beliefs of infallibility is deceived about the purity and precision of the written word.

There are two real sources of holy truth, and neither expresses itself to us in words. One is the universe around us, which is a manifestation of the underlying divine essence. The other is the universe inside us, passed down

Frequently asked Questions

What is Asatru?

Long before Christianity came to northern Europe, the people there - our ancestors - had their own form of spirituality that influenced every aspect of their culture. One expression of this European spirituality was Asatru. It was practiced in the lands that are today Scandinavia, England, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and other countries as well. Asatru is the original, or native, religion for the peoples who lived in these regions.

Nevertheless, Asatru is more than just a religion in the narrow sense of the word. It is our way of being in the world; some of us call it the "Germanic Folkway" to underline this larger concept.

What does the word "Asatru" mean?

It means, roughly, "belief in the Gods" or "those true to the Gods" in Old Norse, the language of ancient Scandinavia in which so much of our source material was written. (A more literal translation would be "gaining experience of the ancestral sovereign gods.") Asatru is a name given to the religion of the Norsemen, but we use this term to include the spiritual worldview of all the Germanic peoples, not just the Scandinavians.

When did Asatru start?

Asatru is thousands of years old (though it is practiced in a modern form today, to meet the needs of our age). Its beginnings are lost in prehistory, but it is older than Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or most other religions. The spirit it expresses, though, is as ancient as the northern European peoples themselves because it is an innate expression of who and what we are - not merely a set of arbitrary beliefs we have adopted.

Why do we need Asatru? Aren't most people who want religion satisfied with Christianity or one of the other "established" religions?

People are attracted to the better-known religions because they have genuine spiritual needs which must be filled. People are looking for community, fellowship, and answers to the "big questions": the purpose of life, how we should live it, and what happens after death. For many people today, the so-called major faiths do not have answers that work. Asatru does. Once seekers realize that there is another way - a way that is true to our innermost essence - they will not be satisfied with anything less than a return to the Way of their ancestors.

Why is the religion of our ancestors the best one for us?

Because we are more like our ancestors than we are like anyone else. We inherited not only their general physical appearance, but also their predominant mental, emotional, and spiritual traits. We think and feel more like they did; our basic needs are most like theirs. The religion which best expressed their innermost nature - Asatru - is better suited to us than is some other creed which started in the Middle East among people who are essentially different from us. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are alien religions that do not truly speak to our souls.

Why did Asatru die out if it was the right religion for Europeans?

Asatru was subjected to a violent campaign of repression over a period of hundreds of years. Countless thousands of people were murdered, maimed, and exiled in the process. The common people (your ancestors!) did not give up their cherished beliefs easily. Eventually, the monolithic organization of the Christian church, bol-

lieve without questioning when the teachings of their religion conflict with reason or with known facts about the nature of the world ("You must have faith.").

Of course, many people believe in the values of Asatru on a gut level. After all, they're instinctive, passed down to us from our ancestors. We want to believe that the better-known religions espouse those values, so we see what we want to see. Most people just haven't yet realized that the major religions are saying things that conflict with the values we know in our hearts are right. To find European virtues, one has to look to a religion truly consistent with those virtues - Asatru.

What do you have to say about good and evil?

Good and evil are not constants. What is good in one case will not be good in another, and evil in one circumstance will not be evil under a different set of conditions. In any one instance, the right course of action will have been shaped by the influence of the past and the present. The result may or may not be "good" or "evil," but it will still be the right action.

In no case are good and evil dictated to us by edicts written by an authoritarian deity. We are expected to use our freedom, responsibility, and awareness of duty to serve the highest and best ends.

What does Asatru teach about an afterlife?

We believe that there is an afterlife, and that those who have lived lives of virtue and power will go on to experience greater fulfillment, pleasure, and challenge. Those who have led lives characterized by vice, weakness, and a low level of consciousness will be separated from kin, doomed to a vegetative state of dullness and gloom. The precise nature of the afterlife - what it will look like and feel like - is beyond our understanding and is dealt with symbolically in the myths.

seeking their blessing through formal rites and informal meditation. Actually, living a full and virtuous life is a form of prayer in itself. Our religion should affect all parts of our lives, not just some fragments that we choose to call "religious."

Don't you worship stones and trees and idols?

No. We know that trees, wooden statues, the Sun, and other natural or man-made objects are not Gods, so we don't worship them. We do sometimes use these items as reminders of a God or Goddess, but we would never confuse them with the actual deity!

You mentioned certain standards of behavior taught in Asatru. What are these?

Some of the qualities we hold in high regard are strength, courage, joy, honor, freedom, loyalty to kin, realism, vigor, and the revering of our ancestors. To express these things in our lives is virtuous, and we strive to do this. Their opposites - weakness, cowardice, adherence to dogma rather than to the realities of the world, and the like - constitute our vices and are to be avoided. Proper behavior in Asatru consists of maximizing one's virtues and minimizing one's vices.

This code of conduct reflects the highest and most heroic ideals of our people.

Don't all religions believe in these things you've just named?

No. People may honestly believe that this is the case, but examination does not bear this out. They believe in freedom on the one hand, yet at the same time admit they are slaves to their God. They agree that joy is good, but their teachings laden them with guilt because of some imaginary "original sin." They want to accept the real world on a pragmatic basis, yet they are trained to be-

stered by threats of economic isolation and assisted by an energetic propaganda campaign, triumphed over the valiant but unsophisticated tribes.

Or so it seemed! Despite this persecution, elements of Asatru continued down to our own times - often in the guise of folklore - proving that our own native religion appeals to our innermost beings in a fundamental way. Now, a thousand years after its supposed demise, it is alive and growing. Indeed, so long as there are men and women of European descent, it cannot really die because it springs from the soul of our people. Asatru isn't just what we believe, it's what we are.

Wasn't the acceptance of Christianity a sign of civilization - a step up from barbarism?

No. The so-called "barbarians" who followed Asatru (the Vikings, the various Germanic tribes, and so forth) were the source of our finest civilized traditions - trial by jury, parliaments, Anglo Saxon Common Law, the right to bear arms, and the rights of women, to name a few. Our very word "law" comes from the Norse language, not from the tongues of the Christian lands. We simply did not, and do not, need Christianity or other Middle Eastern creeds in order to be civilized.

You say Asatru was the religion of the Vikings, among other early European cultures. Weren't they a pretty bloodthirsty lot?

Modern historians agree that the Vikings were no more violent than the other peoples of their times. Remember, the descriptions of Viking raids and invasions were all written by their enemies, who were hardly unbiased. Both the Islamic and Christian cultures used means every bit as bloody, if not more so, than the Norsemen. It was a very rough period in history for all concerned!

We keep talking about the Vikings. Does this mean that Asatru is only for people of Scandinavian ancestry?

No. Asatru, as practiced by the Norse peoples, had so much in common with the religion of the other Germanic tribes, and with their cousins the Celts, that it may be thought of as one version of a general European religion. Asatru is a natural religion for all people of European origin, whether or not their heritage is specifically Scandinavian.

What are the basic tenets or beliefs of Asatru?

We believe in an all-pervading divine essence which is beyond our immediate understanding. We further believe that this spiritual reality is interdependent with us - that we affect it, and it affects us.

We believe that this divine essence expresses itself to us in the forms of the Gods and Goddesses. Stories about these deities are like a sort of code, the mysterious "language" through which the divine reality speaks to us.

We believe in standards of behavior which are consistent with these spiritual truths and harmonious with our deepest being.

How does Asatru differ from other religions?

Asatru is unlike the better-known religions in many ways. Some of these are:

We are polytheistic. That is, we believe in a number of deities, including Goddesses as well as Gods. (We have a tongue-in-cheek saying that a religion without a Goddess is halfway to atheism!)

We do not accept the idea of "original sin," the notion that we are tainted from birth and therefore intrinsically bad.

Thus, we do not need "saving."

We do not claim to be a universal religion, a faith for all of humankind. In fact, we don't think such a thing is possible or desirable. The different branches of humanity have different ways of looking at the world, each of which is valid for the ancestral group in question. It is only right that they have different religions.

Do you consider the Norse myths to be true?

The myths are stories about the Gods and Goddesses of Asatru. We believe they are ways of stating spiritual truths. That is, we would say they contain truths about the nature of divinity, our own nature, and the relationship between the two. We do not contend that the myths are literally true, as history. Rather, myth can be thought of as "the dream of the race" or "that which never happened, but is always true."

What about these Gods and Goddesses? Are they real?

Yes, they are real. However, just as most Christians do not think their God is really an old bearded figure sitting on a golden chair in heaven, we do not believe Thor (for example) is actually a muscular, man-shaped entity carrying a big hammer. There is a real Thor, but we approach an understanding of him through this particular mental picture.

Do followers of Asatru pray to their Gods and Goddesses?

Yes, but not quite the way most people mean by the word. We never surrender our will to theirs or humble ourselves before them, because we see ourselves as their kin, not as their property. Nor do we beg and plead. We do, however, commune with them and honor them while