

The asatrufellowship Bifrost

Skrevet av Administrator
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Åsatrufellesskapet Bifrost, The asatrufellowship Bifrost, is a religious fellowship for modern asatru founded on norse custom, the pre-christian religious traditions. Since 1996 we have been an officially recognised religion by Norwegian authorities. Bifrost is an umbrella-organisation to blotslag (blotgroups, congregations) and single members.

Bifrost keeps aloof from all kinds of discrimination based on gender, origin and sexual orientation. We want to take back and use the old norse symbols and other expressions of norse custom, so that these shall no longer be associated to the abuse by nazis and neo-nazis.

Our goal is to gather those who want to worship the old norse gods and keep the old traditions alive. We want to create a living forum for everybody interested in asatru and to increase the understanding of art, culture and traditions with roots in the pre-christian time. We want to take care of the heathen cultural heritage and keep it alive and updated through practice based in the study of sources and innovation in the heathen understanding of history, myths and the forces.

Asatru, the way we practise it in Bifrost, is based on an individual understanding and interpretation on what it means following heathen customs. What opinions people have, how they understand the historical sources and what their personal relationship to the forces of nature are, is non of Bifrost's business. This tolerance and freedom to think for oneself is in our opinion a central part of asatru. There are no religious dogmas in Bifrost.

The religious practice is mainly maintained locally in the different blotslag. Every group has a Hovgode/gydje (priest/priestess) whose responsibility is to arrange and lead the blots. These people are chosen by their group and are normally represented in the Råd (council) who are responsible for the administration of Bifrost in-between each Ting (annual meeting).

The Umbrella organisations main activity is to keep control of the membership lists, distribute economical support from the government and to arrange the annual meeting, the Ting. The Ting is the supreme "government" of the group and all matters of importance are discussed and decided here. All members may take part, forward their causes and give their votes. The Ting is led by the høvding (chieftain) who also is the person responsible to the government.

To become a member of Bifrost you have to be a person able to take independent ethical decisions and agree to follow the laws of Bifrost. You can not be a member of any other religious group or organisation in Norway. The most common way to become a member is to contact one of the groups to show your interest and you will then be contacted and most likely be invited to a blot. You may also contact the main organisation and become a singular member. This means you are a member of Bifrost, but not a member of any blotgroup. If you are under 15 years of age, you will need your parents approval to become a member.

Since the government only gives support to religious practice, the annual hovtoll on 100,- Norwegian kroner goes to administration. This payment includes our membership magazine "Bifrost Tidene", with about four editions a year.

Ethics and Mankind

The society 1000 years ago were of course very different from today. In that respect, one can not blame modern asatruers for actions done a long time ago. Though we let ourselves get inspired by thoughts and traditions in the norse society, we are of course influenced by modern ideas and conditions. Our goal is not to recreate the code of morale that one can read for instance in the old sagas.

Heathen morale and ethics are built on the relationships between people and is not guarded by a supreme entity. Nothing is considered good or evil in itself, but actions may give good or bad consequences. Actually, there was no word for "evil" in old norse. The christians had to invent one! There are no absolute commandments, no concepts of guilt or sin, no salvation, every individual is responsible to his/her own actions and have to bear the consequences themselves. This

is the basic principle of the part of the law that is considered ethic.

If anything may be considered to be the basic thought in the heathen tradition it must be the thought of balance: the way the creative and destructive forces in the world balance and equalize each other. This principle may also be used on the interpersonal moral and as it is expressed in Hávamál, to put emphasis on a "happy medium". But here as well it is a question of balance. Don't live by the rules so strictly that they turn out as commandments, on the other hand, don't interpret them so loosely that they lose all their content and intention.

Honour is another central concept to understand the Norse way of thinking. All people have, as a basis, dignity and deserve the right of respect. However, they may lose this right by actions that limit other peoples' dignity and freedom. In our tradition humans are not separated from the rest of nature. Humans ARE nature. This view educates us that nobody can rise above nature and we all have to find a way to live in harmony with it. This doesn't necessarily make all Asatruers nature preservers, but most of us will be conscious that the ruthless exploitation of nature is an unbalanced and therefore a destructive act. We, the Asatruers, reap from nature but give sufficient back.

Traditions and religious practice.

One of the most important goals of Bifrost is to establish and carry on old customs and traditions. Traditions performed together give a sense of community. This is as much a task for every single member, as it is to the organisation. Not least because most of the activity takes place in the groups and in private. It's important that we manage to adjust the customs to our own modern everyday life, so that they become meaningful actions, also to people of today. We want to keep up the wisdom and knowledge of the old ones, for instance through customs, but we don't necessarily want to live like Vikings for that reason. Luckily Bifrost members stand united in the desire to take care of and keep up the pre-Christian cultural heritage.

It is important to establish new customs and traditions as well. This happens all the time, in connection with blots and in other communal activities. The important thing with customs is not necessarily the age or origin, but the cultural values it expresses.

The Blot is the most important celebration of the changing of seasons and nature. It is a Feast to the forces of nature and includes both communication and socialisation with these. Through ceremonies, giving gifts, and partying, the friendship with the gods and nature is strengthened. The Blot can take many shapes, from the small ones with a short timeline and simple ceremony, to a big gathering with complex rituals and demanding involvement. It is common that both single members and the groups arrange blots, usually about 3-4 times a year. The Ting is usually opened with a Thors-blot and closed with one dedicated to Odin.

Common units in a blot is first to "lyse stedet I ve" , i.e. to invite the gods to the place where one is to perform the ceremony, then to read, sing or in another way perform something for instance from the Edda. To drink "einkjels" it's a joint toast where a horn or a bowl with, for instance mead is shared and passed around to all the participants and then everyone salutes someone or something they want to honour. Last but not least, the sacrifice. The gift can be many kinds of things. From flowers, seeds, eggs, incense, tobacco and beer. It is not common to sacrifice blood or animals, but there are no laws against it. The sacrifice has a symbolic meaning of showing sacrificial will towards the gods. The will to give and to gain. An important aspect of all blots is also a Gilde, a party in the honour of oneself, the gods and the forces of nature. In these ceremonies, as in all other things relating to the groups and Bifrost, the groups themselves have a liberty in how they choose to compose their blots and which elements they choose to include. As such there might be a great difference in the arrangements and performances between the groups and also the different blots.

The worship of the ancestors may be part of the blots held by the groups, but would perhaps more naturally be part of the family cult. The main idea is that you don't forget your dead family members, but remember them, honour them and keep contact with their knowledge and culture through rituals. It is in the code of honour that as long as a person is remembered for their deeds in life with honour and respect, they can never really die. It is therefore important to remember those who deserve to be remembered. Ancestral worship may also be an expression of gratefulness over one's own existence and creation. The private cult may have many forms and expressions, usually simpler than the bigger official blots and are totally the responsibility and initiative of the single person or the family.

Myths and Cosmology

The myths in the Norse mythology do not give reason for dogmas or doctrines. Its prime function is as a source for understanding knowledge and moral. They also give understanding of the macro-micro cosmos. The Norse myths are a tool to understand the complex system of the forces of nature and the dimensions that surround us. The gods' purpose in all of this is to arrange and maintain it. The world has its order and it has to be kept in balance. Everything and everybody has their mission. There needs to be an equilibrium between constructive and destructive forces.

One way to understand the world is that it is parted in nine "heimer", homes, or spheres, where the different appearances have their residence. These worlds are connected by Yggdrasil the world tree. The forces of fate stand outside and even decide the destiny of the world.

Bifrost have no dogmas as to how the gods should be understood, or how the world order is. Whether it is poetical description of forces trying to maintain the world order, whether they are concrete entities existing in another world or something else, is up to the single member to decide. Though the people in Bifrost have much in common with that, when we do things in Bifrost consideration, we choose to stick to the gods and forces of the pre-Christian period.

Sources of our Religion

In the different poems of The Elder Edda we find the sources to our cosmology and god lore. Among others, one can read about the world order and the worlds' destiny in Voluspá, the predictions of the Volva. About the different worlds in "Allvismál" and in "Grimnesmál" we find one of the most important sources to our images of the gods.

Our main sources of knowledge of the historical heathen religion are few and mainly written down in Christian times.

These are the most important:

- The Elder Edda, aka The Poetic Edda.
- The Edda of Snorri Sturlason (Gylfaginning and Skaldskaparmál)
- Saxo Grammaticus, the Danish kings' chronicle.
- Íslendingasagaen –Icelandic prose poetry
- Poetry of the skalds from Viking and medieval periods.

Another source is the Arabian Ibn Fadlan's descriptions of the Viking merchants' religious practice in the east. Tacitus' historical description of Germania from Roman times and Adam of Bremen's description of the practice at the great temple in Uppsala.

In folklore material it is also possible to find traces of heathen roots. There is quite a lot of material on Norwegian and Nordic folklore and it is also possible to have a look at the old fairytales from the collections of Asbjørnsen and Moe.

There are not many books available about modern Asatru, but many groups of today have published materials available if you contact them. We recommend you search the internet where one can find a lot of material, new and old, about heathen traditions and Norse mythology.