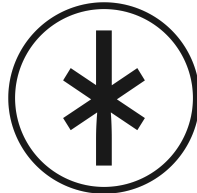

THE HEARTH WITHIN

A PUBLICATION OF HÁKONARÆTT FELLOWSHIP PRISON MINISTRY

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THE HEARTH

Keeping What Has Been Entrusted to Your Care

WELCOME TO THE HEARTH WITHIN

A hearth is more than a fire.

For those who followed the Old Ways, the household stood at the center of life. People gathered there. Food was shared, guests were welcomed, stories were remembered, and responsibilities passed from one generation to the next.

Not everyone has a hearth of their own. Being separated from home, family, community, and familiar religious practice does not mean giving up religious life.

Some things can be kept wherever a person stands: your word, your conduct, your memory, your obligations, and your relationship with the Gods and the tradition you have received.

That is the purpose of The Hearth Within.

In these pages, the hearth is both an image of what we inherit and tend, and a name for religious life gathered around that responsibility.

WORDS TO CARRY

The physical hearth may be beyond your reach today. What you keep within your care is not.

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FROM THE TRADITION

WHEN THE MIND HAS NO REST

HÁVAMÁL 23

*"The witless man is awake all night,
Thinking of many things;
Care-worn he is when the morning comes,
And his woe is just as it was."*

Henry Adams Bellows, trans. (1923)

There are burdens that cannot be settled before morning. A person can spend hours returning to the same injury, mistake, uncertainty, or question. The mind goes over what has already happened and reaches toward what has not yet come.

A NOTE ON THE TEACHING

The counsel of the Hávamál is not to ignore difficulties. Wisdom requires thought. Responsibility means considering consequences, recognizing what has gone wrong, and deciding what ought to be done.

But thought and worry are not the same thing. The man in the verse is not foolish because he thinks. He is foolish because his thinking goes nowhere. By morning he is tired, and his trouble has not changed.

Some things are beyond your power to change. Yesterday cannot be rewritten. Other people cannot be controlled. Your circumstances may place real limits on what can be done today. Yet something usually remains within your keeping: your word, your conduct, what you learn, the obligations you can still honor, and whether anger governs your next action.

For someone in prison, the line between what can and cannot be changed is drawn hard. But conduct, study, prayer, memory, promises, and the treatment of others can still remain within your keeping.

WRESTLE WITH THIS

Which concerns require action from you, and which merely consume your attention?

WHAT IS WITHIN MY CARE NOW?

Name one thing that remains yours to tend when morning comes.

THE HEARTH

A PLACE, A PEOPLE, AND A RESPONSIBILITY

For Hákonarætt, the hearth is an important image of religious life. It represents something placed within our care – but receiving something does not mean preserving it unchanged.

01 THE HÚS

Hákonarætt uses the Old Norse word *hús*, “house,” for the household as the immediate setting of religious life. We receive names, relationships, knowledge, obligations, memories, and traditions from others.

02 THE HEARTH

Within contemporary Hákonarætt practice, a Hearth is a Hús in which a place is deliberately set apart for religious life. This is a present Hákonarætt practice, not a claim that every pre-Christian Norse household followed one identical system. The Hearth also gathers the people of the Hús into a shared religious life of remembrance, reverence, obligation, and care.

03 WHEN THERE IS NO HEARTH

Religious objects may be restricted. A Þórr’s hammer (Mjölnir) pendant, an altar image, a candle, or another item may not be permitted. An altar can focus devotion, but it is not the source of devotion. Practice can continue, within institutional rules, through spoken or silent prayer, remembrance, study, ethical conduct, and reverence. Material limits change the form of practice, not the possibility of reverence.

A HOUSEHOLD WITHIN A LARGER WORLD

The household is not spiritually isolated. Human life stands within relationships reaching outward to the Gods, ancestors, *landvættir*, kin, community, and generations still to come. What is received at the hearth therefore carries both gift and obligation.

THE HARDER QUESTION

What deserves to be carried forward – and what must be repaired, refused, or allowed to end?

Inheritance creates responsibility, not automatic approval. Some things received from those before us are worthy of honor. Others may require repair. Tending the hearth means learning to tell the difference.

If what you received included harm rather than heritage, that does not disqualify you from religious life. It may mean your task is to decide what ends with you, and what you begin.

KEEPING THE HEARTH WITHIN

A SIMPLE DAILY PRACTICE

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

The following is a contemporary Hákonarætt practice, not an ancient Norse ritual. It requires no religious objects and may be undertaken quietly and individually, consistent with institutional rules. The words in italics are only examples; use your own.

1

REMEMBER

Remember those from whom you came. Ask what you received that is worth carrying forward.

Example: Name one person you came from, and one good thing they gave you.

2

HONOR

Turn your thoughts toward the Gods with reverence. Seek wisdom, courage, and good judgment for the deeds actually before you.

Example: "Gods, give me clear thinking and steady courage for today's work."

3

EXAMINE

Ask what is within your care today, what must be guarded against in yourself, and what good you can actually accomplish.

Example: "Today I control my word and my temper. I do not control the schedule or other people's choices."

4

TEND

Choose one responsibility and tend it deliberately: your word, study, family, work, temper, or refusal to do what you believe is wrong.

Example: "Today I will keep my word to _____," or "write that letter," or "stay calm when provoked."

5

REMEMBER AGAIN

At day's end, name what was tended well, what failed, and what can be repaired tomorrow. See clearly, then let the day end.

Example: "Tended well: _____. Fell short: _____. Tomorrow I will repair _____."

THE PATTERN

REMEMBER → HONOR → EXAMINE → TEND → REMEMBER AGAIN

No special object is required to begin.

WHY PRACTICE MATTERS

Practice gives form to relationship. Remembering resists isolation; honoring acknowledges holy powers beyond the self; examination tests conduct; tending turns reverence into action; returning at day's end makes room for truth, repair, gratitude, and renewed effort.

A VOICE FROM THE SAGAS

WHAT REMAINS TO YOUR GOOD FAITH

KOLSKEGG'S REFUSAL

"I will never do a base thing in this, nor in any thing else which is left to my good faith."

Njáls saga, ch. 74 • George Webbe Dasent, 1861

After a long series of conflicts and killings, Gunnar of Hlíðarendi and his brother Kolskegg were required by settlement to leave Iceland. Gunnar decided to remain. Kolskegg urged his brother not to break the settlement. When Gunnar asked Kolskegg to remain with him, **Kolskegg refused.**

The episode does not give a simple rule. Gunnar's attachment to home is understandable. Kolskegg's refusal is also understandable. Loyalty, place, honor, law, and obligation do not line up neatly.

A promise may bind when keeping it becomes inconvenient. Loyalty can also pressure a person to follow family or friends into a choice they believe is wrong. **The harder question is what loyalty requires when someone we love asks us to share a decision we cannot defend.**

Kolskegg could not decide Gunnar's choice. He could decide his own. The conduct of another person did not decide what he would do with his word.

WHEN THE PRESSURE IS CLOSE TO HOME

Inside, this question is not abstract. Someone you respect may ask you to back a story, hold something for them, or join a plan because "that is what loyalty means." Kolskegg's example suggests a test: loyalty to a person is not the same as agreement with every choice they make. You can remain decent, and even present, toward someone without sharing a decision you cannot defend. Notice, too, what refusing costs, and decide whether you can carry that cost with a clear conscience.

WRESTLE WITH THIS

When does loyalty require standing beside someone – and when does loyalty require refusing to follow?

READ WITH CARE

The sagas are literary accounts shaped by feud culture, law, honor, kinship, and later medieval authorship. Their characters can provoke reflection without making every action a present-day religious model.

PRACTICE & REFLECTION

WHAT IS WITHIN YOUR CARE?

Responsibility begins with recognizing what still belongs to you. Write here.

WHAT HAVE YOU RECEIVED?

What have I received that is worth preserving? What have I received that I should not pass forward?

WHAT HAVE YOU GIVEN?

Who has reason to depend upon my word? Is there a responsibility I have neglected? Is there something I can still do about it?

WHAT CAN YOU TEND TODAY?

Choose one thing actually within your ability to affect. Keep it simple and specific.

RELIGION WHERE YOU STAND

Without an altar, ritual object, privacy, or gathered community, a person can still revere the Gods, remember ancestors, study inherited wisdom, and keep faith with obligations.

ONE THING PRESENTLY WITHIN MY CARE IS:

AROUND THE HEARTH

HISTORY • TRADITION • LANGUAGE • LORE

VETRÆTR — WINTER NIGHTS

Old Norse sources preserve *vetrnætr*, “winter nights,” for the time at which winter began. Surviving literature also associates the season with feasts and observances. The evidence does not reveal one universal calendar followed identically throughout the Norse world.

vetr — winter

nætr — nights

Together: “winter nights.”

FREYR — A HOLY POWER TO KNOW

In *Gylfaginning*, Freyr is associated with rain and sunshine, the fruits of the earth, fruitful seasons, peace, and prosperity. That does not make Freyr a historical “god of autumn.” His associations make him meaningful when considering land, provision, peace, and the turning seasons.

GUÐRÍÐR ÞORBJARNARDÓTTIR — A NAME WORTH REMEMBERING

The Vinland sagas tell of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir, an Icelandic woman whose journeys carried her across the North Atlantic from Iceland to Greenland and onward to Vinland. She later married Þorfinnr Karlsefni and took part in his Vinland expedition. According to *Grænlendinga saga*, she afterward made a pilgrimage to Rome. The two Vinland sagas tell parts of her story differently and were written down long after the events they describe, so they should be read with historical care.

MANY POWERS, RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

The Old Ways teach that the sacred world is full of many beings, and each one matters. Freyr is not Þórr, and Þórr is not Óðinn. Each God has their own story, their own strengths, and their own relationships.

The sacred world is bigger than the Gods, too. It includes our ancestors, the *landvættir* (the spirits of the land), and other beings who share the world with us.

So walking the Old Ways is about more than believing in many Gods. It is about learning how to stand rightly among powers and persons greater than ourselves. That means showing respect, giving thanks, taking responsibility for our actions, and giving back as we receive.

RESPONSIBLE STUDY REQUIRES BOTH REVERENCE AND CARE

We honor the Old Ways not by pretending every question has been answered, but by learning carefully from what has actually been preserved.

WORDS TO CARRY

WHAT OUTLIVES US

HÁVAMÁL 77

*"Cattle die, and kinsmen die,
And so one dies one's self;
But a noble name will never die,
If good renown one gets."*

Henry Adams Bellows, trans. (1923)

DO NOT ASK ONLY

What will people remember?

ASK:

What am I giving them to remember?

A good name is not the same as fame. It is the memory created by conduct repeated over time. The past cannot be undone, but while life remains, more deeds are possible. A person can keep a promise, make repair, refuse a wrong, learn, serve, and leave others something better to remember.

FROM HÁKONARÆTT PRISON MINISTRY

Hákonarætt Fellowship provides religious and educational resources for incarcerated practitioners of Ásatrú, Odinism, and related Old Norse religious traditions. The Hearth Within is part of that work. We focus on faithful religious practice, community, and lifelong learning: revering the Gods, honoring the ancestors, and respecting the landvættir—not politics, ancestry, or historical reenactment.

Questions, letters, and suggestions for future issues are welcome through hakonaraett.org, or your chaplain may pass them along.

FOR CHAPLAINS & RELIGIOUS-SERVICES STAFF

Hákonarætt Fellowship welcomes inquiries from correctional chaplains seeking religious materials for incarcerated practitioners of the Old Ways. We are willing to work with institutions concerning approved formats, quantities, distribution procedures, and facility requirements.

hakonaraett.org

A GOOD NAME

A Good Name: A Hákonarætt Study in Wisdom, Responsibility & Renewal is a twenty-study workbook prepared for prison ministry. Ask your chaplain or religious-services staff about availability and request procedures.

RELIGION AS RELATIONSHIP

Hákonarætt understands religious life as relationship with the Gods, ancestors, land and landvættir, kin, community, and those who come after us. Reverence means standing rightly within those relationships.

SOURCES. Henry Adams Bellows, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (1923), Hávamál 23 and 77. • George Webbe Dasent, trans., *The Story of Burnt Njal* (1861), ch. 74. • Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, trans., *The Prose Edda* (1916), Gylfaginning XXIV, for Freyr. • *Grænlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, in Arthur Middleton Reeves, trans., *The Finding of Wineland the Good* (1890), for Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir. • Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (1874), s.v. "vetr-nætr."