

HOUSE RITES



WIHÁLIGSELE

LAND SPIRITS

The spirits of the land are fickle by nature, and do not covet the attention or praise of man. Their disagreeable nature does not exclude them from regular offerings. Due to their minimal interest in mankind, it is best to make offerings as simple as possible.

Pomp and ceremony will probably annoy them and they have no compunction when it comes to making their displeasure known. If the land has an "elf-stone" *OE ælfstán*, a stone with a natural depression in it, then offerings of milk and small cakes may be made. Otherwise, simply leave a bowl with the offerings outside. If the urge to say anything becomes irresistible, then a simple "this is for you" shall suffice. Don't thank them for deeds in advance, for they may think you very presumptuous and take offense. Definitely thank them for any gifts they have really given, or you may incur their wrath.

Always remember: the spirits of the land, like all the spirits of nature, can turn on you with the slightest provocation. They are beings of the *uttangeard*, and do not necessarily share our worldview or understand our concepts of reciprocity.



WHITE MARSH PRESS

Baltimore, Maryland

Copyright © 2011. All rights reserved.

The HoH or any other petitioner than simply expresses their thanks.

The HoH then knocks three times upon the base of the house-shrine. He makes a small gesture of respect (a nod or bow), makes one step back, and then goes about his business.

If possible, leave candle or lamp to burn out on its own. If not, leave burning for at least an hour. The HoH can go back to the house-shrine and snuff out the flame while saying:

Fire I hallowed in this sacred site, and bid all men make peace.

Fyr ic vígi friðgearde, ond béode men frið fremman

ANCESTORS

The ancestors should be honored at least once a month but weekly or daily observations are not out of order, and should occur on or about the new moon on a Sunday Night (Móna's Eve) as Móna is the warden of time and tides, and by extension deeply connected with the ancestors.

After sundown, the family (or at least the head of the house, hereafter HoH) shall gather before the house-shrine with clean face and hands. The HoH lights the candle or lamp with a match (never with mechanical devices). Next the HoH lights the coal within the censer. Once the coal is bright, he sprinkles the incense over the coal and speaks the recels gealdor

The HoH then lifts the censer with both hands, and presents it to any gathered family members that they may waft the smoke over their faces and become purified. The HoH returns the censer to the house-shrine.

The HoH gently knocks three times upon the base of the house-shrine. Next, with forearms extended before the chest, palms upwards, speak something to the effect of

*þes alu, Ylfe and Idesa,
ond hira heape,
is geofferod.
Erorðmoðir, bletsiað blot
þisne lagu, þis wæter
Wyrdesburne, ðwé
clæne ure cynn*

*This ale, to Alfar and Disir,
and their troupe,
is given.
Earth Mother bless and blot
this liquid, this water of
Wyrð's well,
wash clean our clan.*

The HoH then gives the ancestors a libation. A teaspoon of ale (or mead or beer) shall suffice. If there is a specific request beyond continual well being, the HoH (or any adult member of the house hold) can now petition the shrine with a specific request of import (ie. please help me obtain gainful employment, please keep the family safe, u.s.w.) and then make a promise of a special gift (an offering of silver, spirits, amber, or gold).

house-spirit with a specific request (i.e.. please help me to find my lost keys, please keep the pets off of the furniture when I am not home) and then make a promise of a special gift (an offering of heavy whipping cream or tobacco would seem appropriate).

The HoH or any other petitioner than simply expresses their heartfelt thanks.

The HoH knocks three times upon the base of the house-shrine. He makes a small gesture of respect (a nod or bow), takes one step back, and then goes about his business.

If possible, leave the candle or lamp to burn out on its own. If this is not possible or practical, then leave it for at least an hour. The HoH can go back to the house-shrine and snuff out the flame while saying:

Rest well warden, fat and full

The offerings should be left on the house-shrine overnight. The next day, the offerings should be immolated in the fireplace, or given to the house's pet. If this is not possible or practical, they should be deposited just outside the front door of the home.

EXOTERICA

Exoteric— *External; public; suitable to be imparted to the public; hence, capable of being readily or fully comprehended; -- opposed to esoteric, or secret.*

Theodish Belief, the belief of the people, has focused on esoteric ritual for the last thirty years. Many might find the term "esoteric ritual" a redundant statement, but this is far from the truth. While there is perhaps no ritual more mysterious than the offering of blood sacrifice to the gods, not all rituals within our belief are particularly esoteric or occult. The Wiháligsele (Sacrosanct Hall) feels the time has come to revive the simpler, yet no less important, ways of the ancient pagan: the exoteric rituals.

Since the reawakening of the pagan religions, few individuals or sects have given an appropriate amount of attention to the house rites and the entities associated with them. The focus has often been on the resurrection of blót, the ritual that strings the ties between men and gods, or symble, the ritual that ties the bonds between men. These great (and often very esoteric) rituals were certainly important to the elder pagan, but when one considers their probable frequency (perhaps a few times a year at most) they do not paint an accurate picture of pagan folk religion. When we couple this with the inherent elitism of these rituals, for commoners often did not participate in such rites, the picture becomes even less accurate and ever more romanticized. This begs the question "What was pagan religion like for the average man?" Since the concern of the average man revolved around the family and homestead, we must look to these realms to get a better picture of pagan folk religion. We must look to the regular rites of the household.

Some may question the importance or need (nyd) for the house rites, even going so far as to dismiss them as "childish superstition". This may be so, but in the innocence of childish behavior we awaken something within ourselves and gain access to the numinous; perhaps Roald Dahl summed it up best when he wrote "a little nonsense now and then is cherished by the wisest men". Nonsense is in the eye of the beholder, and these derisive attitudes towards the house rites stem from a deficient understanding towards the concepts of religion, hap/luck, and sacrifice.

In the Theodish weltanschauung, ritual becomes an exercise in basic economics. Some may find this objectionable, but it doesn't change this

basic principle. We make offerings to various deities and entities because we want something from them. These “wants” run the gambit from material goods to something similar to the recognition children seek from their parents. Most pagans delude themselves by saying “Oh, I do this just to honor the gods, ghosts, wights (insert other entity)”. The gods and ghosts are able to look past our piety, feigned or genuine, and see the true need (nyd) that lies in our hearts. Pagans forget that Wóden tells us “a gift looks for a gain” just after his queries on the techniques of sacrifice; they know us better than we know ourselves. If we accept this reason as the motive behind our machinations, then we must also accept another essential basic of economics: invest your energies where they will produce yield.

Theodsmen understand that it is normally not their place to beseech the ginn-holy gods in a direct manner or for specific needs. We relegate these duties to religious specialist, folk trained to ask in the appropriate manner for the appropriate boon, either the priest or sacral-lord. As Theodsmen we acknowledge that the paramount sacral-lord, the man who stands at the center of an oath-net acts as the fore-speaker of the tribe when it must beseech the ginn-holy gods. This is his primary function and similar to the role of the king in ancient times (though due to their sacral mains kings received greater boons for their efforts). The King or “scion of the kin” is a greater reflection of the head of the household, but instead of a single kin, he is the figurehead of the tribe in its entirety. While such “stately” activities are reserved for the elect or the initiated (esoteric) this does not eliminate the need for the house rites (exoteric). In fact, it makes them all the more important by providing another stream of hap/luck.

Too often Theodish Belief has focused on the notion of hap being a “downward only” process, but it is in fact a multi-streamed mystery. The greatest source of a tribe’s luck comes from the gods, and is measured out to the folk through the person of the sacral-lord. However, luck can also come from the spirits of the land, the ancestral dead, and the lesser spirits of the homestead. These entities, more so than the ginn-holy gods, have a vested interest in the well being of the common man. The house spirit assists the household because its members acknowledge his efforts in providing safety, fecundity, and general well being. As a result the house spirit’s mains increase, and the process becomes a feedback loop. Over generations of devotion these spirits can become very powerful allies, friends, and protectors. It is in the interest of the household to show it all appropriate devotions, because it can only benefit the family. The same can

HOUSE-GODS OFFERING

These rituals are deliberately “skeletal” and adaptable as circumstance requires or permits.

After the evening meal, the family (or at least the HoH) shall gather before the house-shrine with clean face and hands. The HoH lights the candle or lamp with a match (never with mechanical devices). The HoH then proceeds to light the coal within the censer. Once the coal is bright, he sprinkles the incense over the coal and speaks

New English

*Spark, spark smoke and
fumigate
embers become bright,
burn, burn kindle and blow
Torch becomes fire
fire, fire drive away evil,
Bring frith and comfort.*

Old English

*Sperca, sperca, sméoc on
smic
gléde weorð glæm,
bærn, bærn, blaest onblaw
brand weorð blæle,
fýre, fýre, fýs fácnu
bringe frið ond frofre.*

The HoH then lifts the censer with both hands, and presents it to any gathered family members that they may waft the smoke over their faces and become purified. The HoH returns the censer to the shrine.

The HoH gently knocks three times upon the base of the shrine. Then, with forearms extended before the chest, palms upwards, the HoH speaks something to the effect of:

*Warden of the house,
we bring you your
share of the yield
We give you thanks.*

*Wærdmann séo hús, gielden
þone gifu wé.
Ic sæcge eow þancas.*

The HoH then gives the house-god his portion of the family meal. A scant teaspoon of food shall suffice. If there is a specific request beyond continual well being, the HoH (or any member of the household) can now petition the

The house-gods are the spirits of the house structure (Genii Loci), and see the home as theirs by right. They are the wardens of the home and its inhabitants, so it is best that any food offerings made consist of meals shared by the family in the home. It is unwise to make a meal exclusively for the house-gods as this may arouse unwanted suspicion, and since the house-gods' interests are exclusive to the domestic realm, doggie bags from restaurants are not appropriate. Once you begin to make offerings they must take place on a regular interval or the house-gods may take offense and any number of minor catastrophes may befall the negligent home owner.

HOUSE-SHRINE

The following items are recommended furnishings for the house-shrine:

Censer *OE recelfæt* - A small fire proof container used to contain burning *recels*. A small ceramic or stone bowl filled with sand or coarse salt will suffice. There are no surviving examples of ancient censers from the Northern reaches, but they were probably very simple affairs.

Incense *OE recels* - Any sort of aromatic resin or fragrant herb. Dried thyme is particularly appropriate, as are juniper, and rosemary.

Dish *OE læfel* - A small bowl to contain any offerings.

Light *OE candel or léohfæt* - A candle or small terracotta oil lamp.

Idol *OE godgielid* - A small anthropomorphic figure to represent the house-spirit.

House *OE smælhús* - A small, vaguely house-shaped enclosure. The construction of a smælhús is fairly simple. The easiest way is to purchase a small wooden birdhouse, and to enlarge its opening into a "doorway" shape. This can then be carved with more elaborate decorations, or trim and molding can be added, and then perhaps a nice coat of paint. A thatched roof can be made with raffia, broom, or other materials and a little effort.

be said of the land wights to a lesser extent (their need for acknowledgement being far less) but essentially for the same reasons.

The ancestral dead, perhaps more than any other entities, have a vested interest in their descendants. When you really think about it, they existed in the middengeard solely that their descendants may exist. The power they received by passing into the underworld stands at the ready of any man or woman who is willing to honor them, and most importantly, keep their name alive. In an age where so few honor the dead, there is a veritable treasure trove of knowledge, wealth, and well being available to the few who remember that the dead are still a very much a "living" part of the world. How many of your living relatives speak to the dead? Who honors them with gifts and attention? Who speaks their name as though they are still a current of might fueling the living? The ancestral dead are obligated to assist those who make the appropriate gifts, and with so few recipients to bestow these gifts upon, we are perhaps more fortunate than our pagan ancestors (where everybody honored them, and their attention was more strained). It is in the interest of the household to show the dead all appropriate devotions, because it can only benefit the family.

By focusing devotions upon the beings who take an active part in the lives of the worshippers, the house hold builds its individual luck and might. This in turn increases the "reserves" of the tribe's hap/luck and might, making the tribe a bright beacon to the ginn-holy gods, who in turn will further grant us their boons and weal. This is because the tribe is living and acting according to ancient thew (which placed greater emphasis on the lesser spirits). The performance of the house rites is as much an exercise in "tribal patriotism" as it is an act of individualism in a social structure that usually concerns itself with the greater good.

This is why the focus of every individual family from the center of the oath-net to its periphery should practice the house rites. So, dust off a shelf next to the fireplace, and welcome the spirits into your house and your hearts.

-Brian Smith, Alderman

HOUSE-GODS

"[Contra] de casulis, id est fanis" -Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum, Synod of Listines 743 C.E.

Every household within the theod should craft (or purchase) a small wooden house-shrine. The shrine shall be dedicated to the house-gods *OE cofgodas*, and to the Ancestors *OE ieldr*. This shrine is the spiritual "heart of the home", and should be established near the hearth (the modern day fireplace mantle), or in the kitchen near the stove or oven. If the home lacks these, or if said locations prove impractical, the Northeastern corner of the home should suffice. The space should be dedicated exclusively to the shrine, and kept clean and tidy at all times.

The shrine can take any form the home owner sees fit, but a cabinet-style shrine is perhaps the easiest to acquire and maintain (doubtless the house-gods will let you know if they do not like their home) and a cabinet with two shelves can facilitate worship of both the House-gods and the Ancestors without conflating the different entities. The shrine should be placed at mid-chest level to facilitate worship and to restrict access to pets.

An anthropomorphic figure to represent the house-god, made of clay, wood, or wax is especially appropriate and in keeping with custom. Tradition states that you should never offer a new set of clothes to these figures, for the house-gods will mysteriously take leave, never to return. Vaguely male and/or female figures are appropriate for the Ancestors, as are any ancestral objects, as well as symbols of lineage. It is best to wash these figures once a year during the February purification rites *OE Eweméoluc* when the hearth fires (or pilot lights) are ritually extinguished in the home. These washings should be done in clean water and with all due reverence.

The house-gods should be honored at least once a week, but daily observations are not out of order. Thursday after sundown (Friday-eve) is recommended, as Fríge, mistress of the domestic sphere, counts all things involving the home sacred. The head-of-the-household (hereafter **HoH**) should perform the rituals, with the rest of the household standing behind him and observing, or perhaps assisting on specific occasions by an appropriate member of the household (i.e., wife near Mother's Day, son in the military for Veterans Day).