

What are the ethical standards of Heathenry?

Too often, the stereotype of Heathens is of an anarchic group of Viking raiders, with no ethical standards other than “might makes right.” The truth is quite different.

Heathens do not believe in “original sin.” We can and do choose to do right or wrong—but the idea that we are inherently flawed, and can only become worthy by humbly accepting divine grace that we can never truly deserve, makes no sense in a Heathen context. Our Gods don’t rule us through our guilt—they don’t need to. Instead, we have the strength and ability—and also the duty—to act wisely, take responsibility for our actions, and become worthy of our Gods and ancestors. Our ethics are ultimately founded in personal responsibility, and in reciprocal obligations to one’s community. They are not a long list of “thou shalt nots” to be followed blindly. They are intended to help us grow in strength and wisdom. No less importantly, they are meant to guide us in forming strong relationships and strong communities, in *frith* and *troth* both among ourselves and with our Gods.

What is *frith*?

Frith is an Old English word that is sometimes translated as “peace”, but *frith* does not necessarily mean the absence of conflict. It means a state of deep mutual respect and obligation among people. In *frith*, disagreement and conflict certainly happen, but they aren’t destructive; instead, they can be harnessed to make the society stronger.

What is *troth*?

Troth is an old word for “trust” or “loyalty,” related to the word “true”. It is not “faith” in the Biblical sense, “the assurance of things unseen.” Instead, it is trust, tested and verified by experience. Again, it applies both to human relationships and to our relationships with our Gods.

What is The Troth?

The Troth is one of several international organizations that promote the ancient religion of the Northlands, known as Ásatrú, Heathenry, and by other names. We are incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation in the state of Texas, and are recognized by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt religious organization.

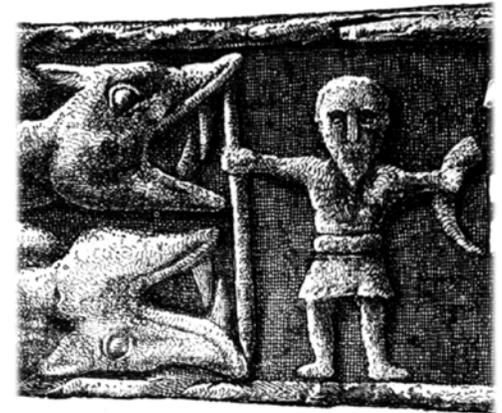
The Troth publishes a quarterly magazine, *Idunna*, along with other writings on Heathen belief and practice. We serve as a networking organization for individuals and kindreds, and we try to assist our members to form local groups to practice our religion and make it more widely available. Once a year, the Troth sponsors a major gathering at which members and interested folks conduct workshops and ceremonies, and discuss and demonstrate their many skills and practices. The Troth also conducts a certification program for clergy, incorporating training in lore, theology, ritual, and counseling.

The Troth believes that the Gods call whom they will—regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, or sexual orientation. To hear their call is a joy, an honor, and also a duty. If you hear that call, and you are willing to live by our values and honor our Gods, then we invite you to take your place among friends and kin, and bring new honor and strength to our ancient Heathen faith.

How can I find out more?

- Visit the main website of The Troth at <http://www.thetroth.org/>
- E-mail the Troth at troth-contact@thetroth.org
- The Troth has a network of local coordinators, or “Stewards”, who are happy to answer questions and provide contacts. To find your nearest Steward, go to <http://www.thetroth.org/memsvc/stewards/>
- Write to the Troth at the address on the front of this flyer.

Heathen Ethics and Values



Some Frequently Asked Questions



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What are the Nine Noble Virtues?

The Nine Noble Virtues are a modern attempt to state the highest ethical values of Heathenry, as shown in our ancient poems and sagas. They are not the “Nine Commandments,” and they’re not “all there is” to Heathenry. In fact, not all Heathens like the idea of trying to encapsulate what we stand for into nine words. Still, most Heathens would argue that these are worthy ideals. A Heathen who strives to show all of these virtues in every part of his or her own life is surely worthy of respect.

Courage or **Boldness** was, and is, certainly a warriors’ virtue. Yet even if you never lift a weapon, the courage to risk social disapproval or worse in defense of what you know is right, or to not take the “easy way out”, is no less worthy than the courage to go into combat.

Truth or **Sooth** is simple honesty. It begins with honesty with one’s self—the choice to avoid self-delusions, no matter how comforting they may be—and extends to honesty with others.

Honor can perhaps best be summed up as “living in such a way as to have no regrets about what you have done with your life.” An honorable person keeps promises and oaths, tries to put things right if he or she wrongs someone, and does not let personal feelings get in the way of obligations.

Loyalty or **Troth** applies to our relationships with each other, with our ideals, and with the Gods. In this time when relationships are too often “disposable”, we strive to remain true to our Gods, kin, and friends—and to live up, every day, to the trust they place in us.

Discipline is first and foremost self-discipline—the willingness to be hard on one’s self when necessary, and not bend to expedience or whim, for the sake of gaining a greater good.

Hospitality or **Guest-friendliness** is the willingness to share what one has with others, in order to build a strong community. This sharing may or may not be material—at the very least, hospitality means extending basic respect to all.

Industriousness or **Busyness** is the will to work as hard and long as necessary to accomplish a higher goal. This should apply both in our religious and our “mundane” lives.

Self-reliance or **Freedom** is not anarchy or freedom from responsibility, nor does it mean the refusal to accept help from anyone. It’s taking full responsibility for one’s life and actions.

Perseverance or **Steadfastness** is just that—sticking with a goal, even in the face of setbacks, until it is accomplished.

What are the Atheling Thews?

Many Heathens specifically follow the pre-Christian ways of Anglo-Saxon England, which were similar but not identical to those of Scandinavia. Anglo-Saxon Heathens often sum up their ethical ideals as the Atheling (“nobleman”) Thews. “Thew”, in Old English, means something like “custom” or “rule of conduct.”

The Atheling Thews don’t “contradict” the Nine Noble Virtues, but they tend to emphasize different aspects of ethics and behavior. Again, the Thews are not the sole, incontrovertible guide for all of heathen life—but they sum up much of the personal ideals of Heathens. Even non-Anglo-Saxon Heathens would generally approve of the Thews; one who follows them will grow in worth.

Seven of the Thews are very similar to seven of the Nine Noble Virtues: Boldness, Sooth, Troth, Guest-friendliness, Busyness, Freedom, and Steadfastness. To these are added five more:

Givefullness or **Generosity** was highly praised in ancient times—“ring-giver” was one of the highest terms of praise for a king or lord. Exchanging gifts, whether material goods or gifts of time and effort, keeps our relationships with each other and with the Gods strong.

Wrake or **Vengeance** was considered an obligation for the kinsmen of someone murdered or harmed. This is not “blind rage”, and it doesn’t have to be outside the bounds of the law.

Evenhead is equality of the sexes under the law. In pre-conversion Norse and Germanic societies, women had a great deal of power and freedom. The same should hold true for modern Heathens.

Friendship is simply loyalty to one’s friends, which is as valued as loyalty to one’s kinsmen.

Wisdom is more than raw intelligence and factual knowledge. It includes empathy, insight, self-knowledge, and the ability to perceive hidden levels of meaning. To be wise is to be “deep-minded” or “deep-souled”, as the lore describes it.

Aren’t you just following “situational ethics”?

We do believe that the ways in which we apply our ethics have to be adapted to the situation. Hospitality is one of our highest virtues, but offering hospitality to someone whom you know is planning to rob or kill you and your family is not only wrong, it’s really stupid.

Right and wrong exist, but they aren’t mandates handed down from on high, to be followed blindly. We Heathens are expected to use our minds and our past experiences in working out right and wrong—in choosing the courses of action that will bring honor to ourselves and our Gods.

What are oaths?

An oath is a solemn promise to accomplish an important deed, sworn before the Gods and often before the Heathen community. It is extremely bad to break a sworn oath; not only does an oathbreaker lose *main* (spiritual power) and honor, but he or she loses the community’s respect and trust.

What are those emblems on the cover?

The cover shows a scene from the Gosforth Cross, a Viking-era carving from northern England. It is thought to show Heimdall, trusty watchman of the Gods and father of humanity. The Thor’s Hammer in a wreath is the emblem of the Troth, one of the largest Heathen organizations today.