

## **AFA UPDATE**

### **A PROJECT OF THE ASATRU FOLK ASSEMBLY**

#### **Issue 29**

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### **T H A N K S G I V I N G - T O M O R R O W A N D E V E R Y D A Y**

Tomorrow is the day we gather with family and friends to give thanks in that great American holiday, Thanksgiving.

While the Pilgrims were obviously Christians, the spirit of Thanksgiving is much broader. Essentially, it is a harvest festival of the sort our ancestors have celebrated from time immemorial. Thanksgiving goes fine with Asatru, and I hope you all take the time to stop and give it honor.

I've been giving thanks a lot lately - actually, every morning upon rising and every evening upon going to bed. Given my somewhat driven personality, it is easy to forget just how wonderful life here in Midgard really is. I try to combat that forgetfulness by deliberately reminding myself just how good it is to be alive! The Buddhists teach that life is *samsara*, entanglement in sorrow. I disagree. They want to get off the wheel of incarnation, but we Asatruar like the challenges, the involvement, of existence on this plane of being. I suppose the ideal is to evolve spiritually, using Odin as our model for development, so that we can be in whatever realm we choose. I notice that the Gods themselves seem to like journeying here rather than hanging out in Asgard all the time!

Life is good. *Your* life, and *my* life, is good. The *world* is good, and we must clasp it to ourselves...

### **A QUERY ON ANCESTRY, THE MYTHS, AND MORE**

Every now and then we get an email from someone who disagrees with our contention that our religion and our ancestry logically go together. Here is one of the more thoughtful ones, along with my response.

Dear Sir,

I found your website interesting. I am a European American and I am very proud of my ethnic background. However, I wish to ask you about the recent genetic discoveries proving that all human beings originated in Africa about 60,000 years ago. According to the Genetic Anthropologist Spencer Wells all human beings on the planet can trace their heritage back to the San Bushman people of Africa... in a sense that means that we're all San Bushman... that is your tribe. All of people, under the skin, are Africans and old fashioned ideas about race are not only socially divisive - but scientifically wrong. As for religious beliefs all religions must be able to withstand the microscope of science. The religion must adapt under scientific discovery or be thrown into the trash can. In fact, the only religion which can be said to not fall apart under the eye of science is Buddhism.

We all know that the sun and the moon are not being chased by wolves. We all know that there is no such thing as a midgard serpent holding the oceans on the flat earth. We know that the aurora are not the valkyrie. And the blue dome in the sky is not Ymir's skull. Such myths maybe provide ancient wisdoms but cannot be taken literally. Also, remember that Thor is the result of an interracial marriage between the Aesir and the Jotnar.

I noticed as well, that in your claim that people of European background should recover their ancient pagan religions, you neglected the pagan religion of my ancestors - the ancient Romans. I saw a lot about Thor, and Odin, etc; but nothing about Jupiter and Juno. As an Italian American I take pride in my heritage - especially the fact that while most of the world were still rubbing sticks together to make fire we had universities, philosophers, poets, engineers, and empires.

Sincerely,

C.

Dear C.,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. Your questions are reasonable, intelligent, and well-presented. I'll try to address them in an orderly way.

### **African Origins/Race**

Whether or not *homo sapiens* originated in Africa or crossed the threshold into humanity after dispersing into other parts of the world is always a matter of contention. Many years of observation have shown me that scientific opinion on this question oscillates about every ten or fifteen years. But ultimately the question of African origin has nothing to do with your next suggestion, that race is not a valid concept. A shared African

ancestry would not take away the very real differences between the human populations we call "races." (Professor James Baker, of Oxford, suggested the word *taxon* [plural *taxa*] instead of the emotionally laden term "race.")

Neither I nor the AFA have ever suggested that European peoples are not related to the rest of humanity, only that we (like every other group) are unique and worthy of preservation. This is not about "supremacy" but rather about our birthright.

Forensic anthropologists use the concept of race on a daily basis, noting a myriad physical characteristics which, taken together, can tell with a very high probability the racial background of a bare human skeleton (demonstrating that we are not, literally, "all the same under the skin"). Likewise, modern medicine is forced to take racial differences into account when prescribing medications to patients of different backgrounds. The fact that different races have different susceptibilities to illnesses and diseases is another objective validation of the general concept of race.

Human variation is much more than skin deep. The work of Dr. Daniel Freedman reveals consistently different reactions in newborn infants of different heritage (One could accuse Freedman of racism - but this is unlikely to be true, since he is Caucasian and his wife is from China). Moreover, the heritability of psychological traits and behavioral dispositions has been demonstrated in a myriad of studies conducted by Dr. Philippe Rushton (*Race, Evolution, and Behavior*) and others.

*My position is that differences between human groups are real, that they are significant, and that they are to be honored and celebrated rather than ignored. It would be a dull world if we were all the same.*

### **Literalism in the Myths/Thor's Parentage**

You are of course right - the myths are not to be taken literally. Hence, we need not believe Thor to be the product of an interracial marriage just because the Eddas describe him as the offspring of Odin and a giantess. If we are not to believe that the Sun and the Moon are chased by two wolves, or that the sky is really Ymir's skull, then we certainly are not obliged to accept that Thor is the literal offspring of Odin and a giantess. The Shining Ones are not likely to be bound by our biological paradigms.

I have never been advocated a literal reading of the myths. Mythology is "that which never happened, but is always true." Taking mythology as history limits it to the mundane world of space and time, when it is so much more than that!

### **Native Roman Religion**

I absolutely encourage you to seek out the religion of your Roman ancestors! Certainly they built a proud heritage and you could only gain by a study of that rich inheritance.

The indigenous religion of Rome shares common roots with Celtic, Germanic, and Vedic Indian belief - all tracing back to our common Indo-European origins. I suggest the writing of Georges Dumézil on comparative religion for more information on this.

Again, thank you for your questions.

Hail the Holy Ones!

Stephen A. McNallen

### **THIS YULETIDE, BOYCOTT CHINA!**

What does boycotting China have to do with Asatru? Simple - China is repressing (indeed, destroying) the cultures and peoples of Tibet, East Turkestan, and Mongolia. The AFA has sided with indigenous peoples everywhere in their desire to remain free and to work out their own destiny. This principle is written into our Declaration of Purpose and has been a part of our program from the very beginning.

When you do your seasonal shopping, please take a moment to look at the label. If it says "Made in China," put it back on the shelf.

Purchasing Chinese merchandise supports the modernization of that country's military machine. Some Chinese goods are made under slave-labor conditions in the *laogai*, Beijing's equivalent to the old Soviet gulag. Other items are produced in factories directly owned by the military. Please don't support tyranny!

Good alternatives to common Chinese products include books (like the one on Odin we reviewed in the last AFA Update?) or European imported cultural items. American manufacturers, of course, can always use your support in their struggle to survive in the face of the "rush to the bottom" that is globalization.

For more information, please visit <http://www.boycottmadeinchina.org> , <http://www.rangzen.net> , <http://www.rangzen.org>, and <http://www.buyamerican.com> !

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

December 9 - Day of Remembrance for Egil Skallagrímsson. Warrior, poet, and devout follower of Odin, Egil's complex character is mirrored by the paradoxical nature of his patron among the Gods. Read excerpts from Egil's saga on this day, or better yet, write a poem or do something bold!

December 20 - Winter Night. Coming just before the winter solstice, Mother Night is when the new year is born. The traditional twelve days of Yule begin now. This is a

season for honoring the family line and rejoicing in the sun's renewal. Celebrate Yule with all the ancient trimmings, such as wreaths of evergreen, a Yule tree, and good cheer. Visit kin. Tell your children family stories and show them photos of their ancestors. Drink a toast to the God Frey, and to the reborn sun.

December 31 - Twelfth Night. As Mother Night is the beginning of Yuletide, Twelfth Night is its culmination. Meditate on the past year - what you did, what you wish you had done. Take stock and set a course for the future. Making New Year's resolutions is an old Germanic custom that goes back at least to the Viking Age, and perhaps much earlier. In the old days, these oaths were sworn on a boar sacred to Frey, the God of fertility and prosperity.

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Next update December 17<sup>th</sup>!

Hail the Holy Powers!

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