

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLÓT

By Valgard Murray

THERE HAVE BEEN some fine texts written describing the mechanics on how to conduct a blót (Old Norse: sacrifice), and it is certainly pleasing to know that sacrifices to our Gods and Goddesses are now quite common on Midgard. *Havamál* verse 144 tells us:

*know how to ask, know how to offer,
know how to supplicate, know how to sacrifice.*

Thus, the AllFather tells us not only to offer sacrifice, but to know HOW to sacrifice. I would assume from the above stanza that we should also know why to sacrifice.

It is known from the Sagas of our Folk, that sacred blót (pronounced like “boat”), has been offered and performed since the beginning of our history, thus we can assume that it has been common practice since ancient times. With this brief article, I will attempt to describe both the mechanics of offering blót, and the consequences as well.

There are some sketchy Saga accounts and other sources which describe sacrifices by both the continental Teutons and their Scandinavian kinsmen. From these sources we learn that sacrifice was made to particular deities and other holy beings, such as the land spirits and the Alfar. This practice continues today within the living Community of Asatrú.

Since no comprehensive accounts of our most sacred of rites has survived, and much of which has survived is fragmented, we don't know exactly just how a blót was conducted. What has been done by scholars of our Faith, is to use these fragmented accounts and flesh them out by following our personal instincts, and also by simple trial and error. Also bear in mind that Asatrú is not dogmatic, nor are any rituals performed by the various Kindreds carved in any holy stone. Each individual, each Kindred, is free to perform blót in any way which they deem fit. What we offer is merely the framework based on both historical texts, archaeological records, and our natural instincts.

REASONS TO CONDUCT SACRIFICE

In ancient times as well as today, there were various reasons to conduct a blót. Sacrifice was made to a particular material deity before one entered battle. It was also customary to reward the patron God of battle with spoils of war after a successful campaign. There is historical evidence that offerings of weapons and even prisoners of war were made.

The Sigblót or victory blót was offered to Odinn in the Spring in preparation for the annual Viking raids. In the month of Ostara many Kindreds still carry on this important tradition — not to bless our raids anymore, but to ask the Father of Victory for aid in our personal battles which we all still face today.

In the Spring, then as now, sacrifice was also made to the Goddesses to aid in the planting of the tribe's crops. The Vanir God Freyr also plays an important role in the Spring sacrifice for fertility of the soil, livestock, and the Folk themselves. It was also the custom to offer sacrifice to Njord for a safe journey by ship. Coins, and sometimes

miniature ships, were thrown into wells or from the ship itself as they prepared to make sail.

The Summer Solstice was always a time for great celebration and the offering of sacrifice. Baldur was honored as the God of the Sun as well as Tyr the God of justice, as the Summer Solstice was also the time of the AlThing: a time for the making of laws, and the time for settling domestic and criminal disputes. The tradition of offering blót to Tyr continues today at the opening of the Annual AlThing in Vinland.

In late Summer and at the Fall Equinox it was time to honor Freyr, Thor, and Odinn. The great tribal feasts were held and the slaughtering of animals and the offering of various foods of the harvest was made as a way of saying thanks for the bounty and sustenance to get the Folk through another long and perhaps cruel winter. I must add at this time, for the reader new to our ways, that animal sacrifice was not made in the cruel and mindless way of some religious groups. Only the best of the livestock were deemed worthy of offering to the Gods, and they were treated with the kindness and respect which one would treat such an offering. The Goði would humanely kill the animal to be offered, and the flesh was then cooked and ate at the communal Feast. The blood was sprinkled on the stalli, the assembled Folk, and offered to the earth. The flesh was then cooked, blessed and enjoyed in a sense of communion with the Gods. This was, and is, still done in the deepest of reverence and decorum.

In the late Fall it was time to sacrifice to Ullr and Skadi for a successful hunt. This is still observed today by modern Asatrúar. Late Fall is also time to sacrifice to Freya and the Disir (ancestors) for protection of the family and tribe. Sacrifice was also offered to Odinn at the Feast of the Einherjar to honor ancestors killed in battle.

At the Winter Solstice, blót was offered to Thor or Freyr which required their able protection to survive the hardships of the long winters of the northlands. This custom continues today with the Kindreds of Vinland, alternating from one year to the next whether to honor Freyr or Thor.

In late Winter, contemporary Asatrúar sacrifice to Vali to thank him in this battle against the darkness of winter and the turning of the sun which heralds the coming of Spring.

This listing of Seasonal blóts is by no means complete, but just an outline to the times of the year that blót was held, and to which deity the sacrifice was offered. I highly suggest that one purchase the Asatrú Alliance Runic Era calendar available from World Tree Publications for more information on the seasonal blóts and feast days.

We also know that our ancestors offered blót to the Land Spirits, the Elves, deceased ancestors, and various holy beings.

One would learn from all of this that sacrifice was offered to honor and thank the Gods and Goddesses. Also, sometimes specific requests were made. It is clear that sacrifice was offered often, such was the close communion between the Holy ones and the Folk.

But there is another meaning to the word blót other than sacrifice; it is most likely meant to *strengthen the God*. Here we come to the core meaning of the blót. Our Gods and Goddesses are unique in that they differ from the all-powerful, omnipotent Gods of the universalists. One wonders why they even need humans anyway. If they are all powerful, perfect, and terrible in their strength and glory, who needs us?

Our tribal Gods and Goddesses need us, as we need them. The power of our Holy ones rests with us, for when we are strong, they are strong. It is a unique symbiotic relationship which we share with our Gods. For it is the power of the blót, the spiritual and physical energy released, which strengthens the Gods, and thus they have more power and energy to strengthen us.

THE BLÓT FORMULA

Back to *Havamál* 144: “*know how to ask, know how to offer.*” Here we will discuss the five steps in common use today by the Asatrú Community in the performance of blót. Keep in mind that this formula is written for use by the group or Kindred with someone in charge of the proceedings. This would be a Goði (priest), or Gyðja (priestess). Some Kindreds have a knowledgeable and dedicated person who fills this role, others don't, and share the responsibility amongst themselves. My particular Kindred urges all of our members to take their turn at the Seasonal blóts, so that no one who has the inclination or urge to perform public sacrifice is denied this spiritual fulfillment. So when you are the official that performs the sacrifice, for that moment in time, you are in fact a Goði or Gyðja— one who talks the Godly tongue and becomes Godlike. Now there are dedicated individuals of the Asatrú Community who have devoted their lives in service to the Gods and Folk, and are deemed worthy of the title by their personal endeavor and sacrifice. Many of these people have started their own Kindreds and work tirelessly to build and strengthen the Community.

Once a year, at the Annual AlThing (a gathering of Kindreds or tribes of Vinland), one Goði is honored to perform the Tyr blót which officially opens the Thing. He is honored with the title of Allsherjargoði for the duration of the Thing. This is not a permanent position or title, merely an honorary one, and only for the day.

To be known as a Goði or Gyðja within the Asatrú Community is something to be earned by a lifetime of selfless dedication to our cause. Thus, they should be treated with the respect due that any such person deserves. The role and duties of the Goðar, the plural form of Goði, will be discussed in detail in a future article in *Vor Tru*.

We can assume from various historical accounts, that the official at the blót used an implement, or tool if you like, to aid in the performance of the sacrifice. Most likely, this was something associated with the God or Goddess to whom the sacrifice was offered.

Odinn is associated with the spear, Freyr with stag horns, Freya with an amber necklace, etc. These aid the official in the blót, but are by no means mandatory. There are of course other implements necessary, such as the blót bowl, a mead horn, an altar, and so forth. Of course you can improvise with these items as well. For a more detailed description of ritual implements, I would suggest purchasing the *Rituals of Asatrú, Major Blóts* by Stephen McNallen available from World Tree Publications.

Okay, now you have a particular God or Goddess to sacrifice to, a Goði or Gyðja to conduct the blót, and the ritual implements necessary to complete the job. What do you do now?

You should decide just what you plan to offer to the God or Goddess. This is very important, and requires prior planning. For the most part, modern Asatrúar offer home brewed mead, made with the greatest of care, and from the purest ingredients available. The mead is made many months in advance of the blót. Every Kindred should have a

brewing specialist within its membership, and by rights, all of the Goðar should be brewers. For those new to mead brewing, I would suggest *The Mead Making Handbook* by Valgard Murray and Jace Crouch available from World Tree Publications. If you don't have access to ritually brewed mead, then the finest commercially brewed mead available will suffice. However, the official at the blót should personally bless and hammersign the offering in an attempt to cleanse it of any Christian influence — all the more reason to brew your own! Of course, home brewed beer or ale would also suffice. Pure spring water or home made fruit juice can also be substituted. Unless you really know what you're doing, and all conditions are perfect, I would not suggest animal sacrifice. However, it has been done by responsible and knowledgeable Kindreds.

So now, all of the preparations are done, and you wish to begin. What is next? Site selection is very important. Your safety and privacy must be provided for in your location. Private property with adequate screening from prying eyes would be nice. A grove of trees next to a babbling brook, natural spring, or lake would be great. However, we don't always have access to the optimum locations. So we make do. Until the whole world knows of our intentions and purpose, and we are many thousands strong, to avoid harassment or worse, be clever and wise in your site selection.

So now you have just the right place in mind. You must now prepare the location. Clean the grounds of any trash. This ground is to be made holy in service of our Gods and Folk so prepare it with that thought in mind. Now you must erect the stalli, or altar. If this is a permanent site, you may wish to erect a stone altar. You can make it as simple or elaborate as you wish. It should be large enough to hold the ritual items — the blót bowl, mead horn, and any other items needed for the sacrifice. For a temporary altar, you can use a camp table or other simple device. You may wish to drape the table or altar with a suitable cloth. I use our Kindred banner which was designed with this use in mind. Set the altar up in the southern part of the ritual area, so that in effect when the official conducts the blót, the altar will face north.

Now that the grounds are prepared, the altar and all implements in place, you should summon the Folk. Fortunate Kindreds use a Gjallerhorn, a specially prepared ox horn with carved mouth piece. Such horns are often decorated with runes to honor Heimdall, the Aesir God who guards Bifrost Bridge. If no such horn is available, you must use your best judgment.

Now that the Folk have been summoned, you are ready to begin. The assembled should stand in a semi circle, radiating out from the altar. When all are in place, the official may begin the actual blót. He or she may have chosen an assistant to aid in the performance of the sacrifice, usually to hold the mead horn. This is optional of course, and depends on the particular set of circumstances.

The official should then call the assembled to order, and ask them to meditate upon the deity being summoned. They should prepare themselves to accept the essence and the blessing of that deity. The utmost sense of reverence should be sought by all involved. All others should stand at a respectful distance. If cameras are involved, pictures should be taken in a way as not to disturb the Folk or the official.

Now we begin. The official should meditate for a moment and summon all of his or her personal power and might. You will need it. You then ritually dedicate the ground and protect the assembled Folk, by facing North and summoning the Holy powers to erect a protective shield wall. At this time you can hold the spear, sword, or other chosen

implements in your hands, and hold it as high as you can. You can also use the Elk-rune, making it with your body, with your hands held high. Project a blazing field of energy, and proclaim: "*Holy forces of the North, erect the shield wall and protect this stead from all unholy thoughts and actions.*" You should then turn to the East, the South, and the West, and repeat the banishing with each direction. The actual wording is optional of course, and many variations are used, including the use of Old Norse. The important thing is to summon all of your personal power, and then call upon the Holy ones to aid you. This is the first step in the formula.

The second step is to then begin the invocation to the Deity. The official, facing North, with the ritual spear or other tool held high, summons the God or Goddess with all of his might. Greet the Holy one with a list of His or Her known attributes. Praise them and honor them with your invitation to them to accept your sacrifice. Your exact wording is of course optional, but I would suggest consulting *Rituals of Asatru* for ideas. The Holy one has now been summoned, and if you are sincere and worthy, they will now be with you. It is now time to actually offer the sacrifice. This is the third step.

With the Goði facing North, take the horn and fill it with the mead or other beverage. Then hold it as high as you can, and visualize the Deity pouring His or Her strength and blessing into the horn. You will feel the energy and power as it fills both you and the horn.

You then turn to the altar and pour a portion into the sacrificial bowl. You can then hand the horn to your assistant to hold while you pick up the bowl and an evergreen twig, dipping the twig into the mead and then sprinkling the assembled. While doing this, you bless the assembled in the name of the Deity being honored. This done, return the bowl to the altar. You are now ready to begin step four.

The official then takes his personal horn and the assistant pours a small amount into your horn. You then make a personal toast to the Deity being honored. The Goði then takes the sacrificial horn and in turn proceeds to pour a small amount into the horn of each of the assembled. They are free to make a personal toast, or if not, to drink of the charged mead. For those of you who can not drink mead, you can merely hold the horn and make your toast. On this occasion, the Goði can touch the mead with a finger and trace the sign of the Hammer on the head of the person. This is also useful for babies and small children in the group. By this act, you are all sharing in the blessing of the charged mead.

If you have a large group present at the blót, one bottle of mead may not be enough. The other bottles of mead should be on the altar from the start of the ritual and included in the offering from the beginning of the blót. After all the Folk have made their toast or have been Hammersigned, the official then pours all remaining mead into the bowl. At his discretion, the mead is then poured onto the earth, nurturing a plant, or pour the mead into the fire, if one is used. You are now ready for the fifth and final step.

The official returns to the altar, picks up the ritual implement, and facing North, thanks the Deity for their presence at the blót, and wishes them well on their journey back to Asgard. The wording here is of course optional. Some Goði will repeat the farewell to the other directions, or thank the Holy forces for the shield wall. Either way, the official then faces the assembled and tells them that the blót has ended. Go with the blessings of the Gods.

With this simple five step formula, you should be able to perform blót to any God or Goddess that you wish. You can make the ritual as short and powerful as you wish, or more elaborate and drawn out. I prefer short and dynamic myself. Remember, the more people present, the longer the ceremony will last, and that all who can are expected to stand as a sign of respect for the God and Goddess.

With knowledge and experience the Goði or Gyðja will customize the ritual to suit the purpose of the Kindred. Remember, this text is just a guideline to aid you in performing our most important sacrament.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BLÓT

Now that we have discussed both the history, and the method for performing blót, what comes next? What did we accomplish?

There is a direct benefit enjoyed by all who partake in ritual sacrifice. The exchange of energies raised, makes not only the Aesir and Vanir stronger, but ourselves as well. This symbiotic relationship is indeed unique to our people and our tribal Gods: but what about you on a more personal level?

For the most part, this article has dealt with public blót, such as a Kindred gathering. At most such group sacrifices, specific requests on a more personal level are not asked of the Gods. It is a request for a blessing of the entire group, but sometimes the individual feels the need to perform blót to his or her patron God, and ask for a very personal favor, or something to that effect.

Now, we are not beggars, nor do we pester our Gods with stupid or trifling requests. But there are times in our lives, when we feel that we need the aid of the Gods on a one on one basis: a problem or obstacle so large that no amount of human effort could surmount it — a medical situation for example.

When the need is serious enough, it is entirely proper to ask the Gods for help. In most cases, one would call on his or her patron deity. This isn't always the case. Again, it depends on the situation and your personal needs.

What is important though is that you have a genuine need that no amount of personal effort can resolve. I wouldn't dare pester the Gods with some petty matter, but on the other hand don't hesitate when the need is real. What do you do now?

Keep in mind that the Gods DO listen, and they do care about their Folk and Kindred, but they aren't in business to care for a pack of whiners or weaklings. They are here to help the self-reliant and bold.

Always think out any specific requests which you make to the Holy Ones long and hard, for your request may just be granted. A year or two from now, you may come to regret your actions. Again, think long and hard on just what you are asking for.

Also, keep in mind that sometimes the actions of the Gods are immediate and sometimes more subtle. It may take some time to notice the consequences of your personal blót.

~~Always look upon any such request as a bargain, one which is binding here on~~ Midgard as well as in Asgard. This is serious business. If you offer sacrifice to Odinn in return for a personal victory, you damn well better remember to keep up your end of the bargain. Any time that you ask the Gods for help, you should offer something in return. It may be something tangible that has great value to you, or maybe you offer your personal effort in some type of personal improvement, or service to your Kindred or Folk.

Whatever you do offer, it should be worthy of what is being asked. A word to the wise — if you make a promise you had better follow through.

Just recently, my oldest daughter who is expecting her second child, called and told me that the ultrasound test had discovered a tumor in the abdominal area, of her yet to be born child. No one knew just how serious the growth was. One thing was certain, surgery would be required shortly after birth — a nightmare for any mother to have to endure. My daughter lives in another state, but was planning to visit shortly.

My daughter's visit coincided with a planned Kindred gathering. So I made a mental note to bottle up my best mead and offer it to the AllMother Frigga in exchange for Her aid in healing my grandchild, as yet unborn. With the best intentions, I bottled up the mead for the sumbel and the special bottle for Frigga, and went to the Kindred gathering. My daughter and her husband and son attended the gathering of the Kindred, and I performed a small healing ritual at that time. But in the hectic pace for someone like myself at a gathering, I forgot one little detail.

All too soon the gathering had ended, and my daughter and her family left for their home in another state. However, after exactly a week, almost to the minute of the healing ritual, while sitting in the backyard talking with a friend, my garage was rocked by an explosion. Expecting something like an RPG attack by the local Viet Cong, I rushed to the garage, while my wife and kids piled out of the house. After taking a head count, and finding that everyone was safe and sound, I entered the garage to find a site of utter desolation. It appears that a one quarter bottle of mead which I had promised Frigga, but delayed in giving, had exploded. Now, this bottle had a safety cork in the neck, which with enough pressure will pop and release the pressure. But what had happened is that I had put the bottle in the middle of a table where I kept many one gallon bottles of mead in various stages of fermentation and aging, and that when this bottle exploded, it took four gallons of my best mead with it — spraying the inside of the garage with glass and mead. I was at the time too shocked to put two and two together.

The next day my daughter called me from the State University medical center, the finest prenatal facility in the state. She reported that the baby had just had another ultrasound test, and that the tumor had completely disappeared. The attending doctor called it a miracle. While holding back tears, I assured her that I had expected good news today, for we had a visit the previous day from none other than Frigga Herself, who came to take Her sacrifice.

I of course have many such stories to tell, but let this last one be a lesson to all. Don't forget to keep your end of the bargain. Frigga certainly didn't.

So, in conclusion, be worthy and wise in all requests made of the Gods. Honor the Gods and Goddesses often, and above all: "*know how to ask, know how to offer.*"