

The Tree of Men

This document attempts to define and explain the composition of human beings in a Nordic, shamanic perspective. The two lists below detail parts, and then spirits associated with human beings, and summarizes beliefs that cannot be defined easily beyond the broad idea of a concept. Large portions of this document are also personal interpretations and perspectives of different people. Everything can vary, and one must understand that no concept is set in stone.

Parts

1. Líkr - Body

Líkr is the body or the matter that composes the physical body. It consists of everything that makes up a human being, like flesh, organs, bones, hair, and blood. Alone, it is like a hollow clay vessel. Like a clay vessel, Líkr acts as something to carry the other parts of the self beyond just being the physical body.

The Líkr also grants many things. It is the root of emotions and the vessel for our senses. It is also related to the Jøtnar (Jötnar), as the body is dependent on

consumption. Without the entirety of the Líkr, human interaction with the world would be far more limited.

2. Hámr - Skin

Hámr is the skin. It interacts with the Líkr in the form of physical skin, the kind that annoyingly gets sunburnt. Beyond that, Hámr is the energy body, which is not static. It is, therefore, associated with shamanism and shapeshifting. It is the body used during shamanic journeys and can shapeshift.

The mind, or Hugn, can also shapeshift, but how both can happen will be left for later in this document. It is also important to consider that the Hámr could be an interaction between Líkr, Megin, and Hamingja.

3. Hugn - Thought

Hugn is the mind, thoughts, and consciousness. Hugn corresponds with personality and cognition. It serves as the director of the body and over the other parts of the self.

Hugn aids in shamanism, as it is the part of the self that shapeshifts first. Generally, one learns how to shapeshift by gaining permission from a spirit and learning a dance from that spirit. Afterward, in order to shapeshift, shamans “feel” and “think”

about what they are going to change into, changing their Hugr to that form. One that is done, they perform the dance given to them by a spirit, changing their Hámr through that dance.

The problem with Hugr, or the thinking-mind, is that it feeds ego. It is challenging to define ego, as its existence is opinion-based. In this document, it will be defined as the sense of self. It is something that obstructs us and causes delusions such as confusing desires for needs. Therefore, ego causes greed. Ego cannot be avoided, but it does not have to rule or confuse us.

In order to prevent obstruction from ego, the mind must flow. Entire books are dedicated to defining what ego is and what a flowing mind is. The Hávamál offers some study of ego, and how to tame it, but there are plenty of examples from all over the world that are unrelated to heathenry (Takuan's "The Unfettered Mind," for example).

On an additional note, Hugr is represented by one of Óðinn's (Odin) ravens, who is called Huginn.

4. Minni - Memory

Minni is one's memory. It is one of the most essential parts of the self, as many parts would not function well or at all without Minni. For example, the Hugr needs the Minni, otherwise, it would not have the building blocks to think.

The absence of the Minni manifests as dementia and memory loss. This absence can be described as someone becoming hollow, as they lose who they are with the loss of their memories. Minni is also represented by one of Óðinn's ravens, Muninn, whom he feared would never return (like an old man getting dementia).

Minni can also represent ancestral memory and allows journeys to the past. For example, some people feel as if they are recalling memories rather than learning something new when a spirit teaches them something.

5. Óðr - Ecstasy

Óðr is divine ecstasy. It is the emotional state that overcomes humans during inspiration, rage, fury, madness, insanity, etc. It is used in many things, like battle, creative work, and trances. Two examples of Óðr would be the fight or flight response experienced by people in martial arts, or the creative inspiration that floods into the minds of artists and writers.

Óðr is related to two words as well. It is the root for Óðinn's name and is also in the name of the sacred "Mead of Poetry" Óðrærir. Óðr is also one of the parts given to humans by the Odinic triad. Óðr specifically was given by Hoenir.

6. Önd - Breath

Önd is divine breath. Önd is a difficult concept to define accurately and is one of the most abstract parts of the self. It is both breath and the animating aspect of life.

Önd is animating and empowering power. It is what comes inward to empower the body, and what humans express outward that gives things power. For example, Önd is used frequently in Galdr.

There are also strange examples of Önd. For example, the Önd of the clouds is rain, and the Önd of the sun is light. Önd is also one of the parts given to humans by the Odinic Triad. Önd specifically was given by Óðinn.

7. Megin - Might

Megin is one's will or might. There are many different kinds of Megin depending on being, such as Ásmegin, which is associated with the gods like the Æsir and the Vanir. Generally, Ásmegin is mentioned in relation to Þórr (Thor).

Megin can be defined as many things. Physically, it is strength, speed, agility, and reflexes. It is also one's mental fortitude or will, like resisting pain or one's mental ability. Megin is also one's ability to achieve goals, and one's control over the future.

In a more abstract form, Megin is one's magical potential. This magical influence helps to manipulate things like Urðr and to assert control over other people in sorcery.

Megin is also very involved in offerings. Generally, Megin is conveyed to deities and spirits through offerings. It is the energy put into offerings, either through creating what's in an offering or simply giving the offering. In return for these offerings, Megin like Ásmegin is given in return. Idols or statues serve as vessels or tools to convey Megin to certain beings. In these instances, the idols or statues are not being worshipped, but are being used as tools for worship.

8. Örlog - Primal-Law

Örlog is the influence of the past, which does not explicitly refer to individuals. It is all things that lead up to the present and how they influence the present. It is the deeds of the ancestors, one's parents, and oneself, which lead to the present that one experiences. It connects us to our ancestors and what they pass onto us, which affects our lives.

Örlog can be described as a primordial lake beneath all places, even below Hel's domain and the lower world in shamanism. This lake is where all actions of the past from every being goes. One acts, which instantly becomes the past, and then becomes part of the lake. It is also the primal law that governs how actions and interactions manifest into reactions.

The lake rises through Úrðarbrúnnr (Úrð's well) as one's own Úrð, and also fills all three wells (the other two are Mímisbrunnr, where Óðinn got his wisdom from, and Hvergelmir, which is not spoken about much beyond the fact that Niðhógggr is close to it) around Yggdrasil. The Nornir are the ones who use Úrðarbrúnnr to water Yggdrasil. The lake is also where all wisdom comes from, and where all actions and their impacts are recorded. The lake is also where all life continues.

This lake is not mentioned in the lore, and is based on interpretation of the word "Örlog," which can translate to "primal-lake." This interpretation also comes from the idea that the three wells around Yggdrasil must have a source unless each has a unique source.

9. Urðr - Fate

Urðr is the individual effect of fate. It is the manifestation of past events in the form of potentials which either limit us or can be taken advantage of by us through Megin. Urðr is the effect of Örlog and can be described as the moment Örlog takes shape. Once Urðr takes shape, the other parts of the self react to it. Without this reaction, fate would have very little effect on us. This is why a simple rock would not be greatly affected by fate.

The origin of Urðr comes from the primordial lake Örlög. On a different note, Urðr is the name of the Norn of the past, the other two being Verdandi of the present, and Skuld of the future. Skuld's name is directly translated as "should."

Their only jobs are to record fate by carving runes into logs, and watering Yggdrasil with what comes from Úrðarbrúnnr.

Regarding the future, the only thing that is fated is the time and method of our deaths. The rest of fate is more free-flowing. It is said that the Nornir "set" our deaths upon birth, but it is never said that they are the ones who decided so. It is unknown whether or not they use prophecy or if there is some being that knows how all things unfold and tells them. There is a possibility that this being is Yggdrasil, since one of Yggdrasil's name's (Mjötuðr) translates to "the measurer."

10. Læti - Voice

Læti is our voice. It is the representation of our abilities to make noise, to speak, and to have language. Læti interacts with other parts of the self to function. It interacts with our Önd in order to form, breath to form voice, and it interacts with our Hugr to be able to form language, thought to form words. Breathe to manifest, thought to achieve order.

Læti is also one of the parts given to humans by the Odinic Triad. Læti specifically was given by Lodur.

11. Lá - Consequence

Lá is a difficult concept to define and describe. It is also difficult to make it relevant. It is translated as the definition of the white line between water and the shore. With this definition, Lá could refer to our relationship with death. Water is often used as a divide between life and death in mythologies, acting as a barrier for the living.

Lá could also be stretched to interact with fate. It could mean that actions have consequences, and it could refer to blame. This is a stretch, however. Another view is that Lá is our relationship with death, and how our actions have consequences in our lives and after we pass.

Regardless, nothing can be for certain about Lá.

Spirits

1. Hamingja - Luck

Hamingja is the spirit of “luck.” It is generally interpreted in two ways at the same time. The first way is as luck, which is not like our modern idea of luck. Rather than a favorable coincidence, it is a product of reputation and megin. In this perspective, it is the ability to make things go in our favor, and at the same time, it is acting on the future. Essentially, the megin and reputation arrive in time before we do.

The second interpretation of Hamingja is in the form of a wight (spirit). In this view, it acts as a guardian spirit which is separated from the present. It is never explained what this spirit exactly is beyond that. It is believed that it works alongside its owner, though how it does this is not explained either.

Ancestors can also pass Hamingja down ancestral lines, which results in different people having different Hamingjas. Objects can also be seen as having Hamingja in them, like an ancestral heirloom sword that was used successfully in combat. When it comes to the inherited, it is likely the limited luck one gets through inherited fate. In the myths, an example of this can be found in relation to Óðinn. When Óðinn first came to

the Volsung family, he gave them a sword. It came with luck in combat, and towards the end of the saga Óðinn broke the sword, and the luck in battle ended for the Volsungs

Hamingja can also relate somewhat to Fylgjur, but this isn't for certain.

2. Fylgja - Follower

The Fylgjur are guardian spirits. In this document, the Fylgja will be loosely summarized since there is a lot of information around this kind of spirit that would be better put into a separate document.

The Fylgja is a sort of “spirit animal,” which generally appears in dreams and trances. To see the Fylgjur of other people, one needs the ability of second-sight, except during a shamanic journey. Generally, they chose the form of the opposite gender, though they often appear as females. They can also appear as animals. In animal form, they generally retain a human element, especially their eyes.

There are two main types of Fylgjur. One is a family Fylgja, like a family animal totem. This kind can be passed down through ancestral lines, and generally watches over a whole family. There are also Fylgjur that attach themselves to individuals. These are usually independent beings which can reject people they do not favor and can move on after a person's death. Generally, a Fylgja that has bonded with someone suffers greatly if that person dies, and can also possibly die as well.

It is possible to interact with one's own Fylgja and build a relationship with it, which is commonly seen in shamanism.

3. Dís - Sister

The Dísir are conduits of fate. Though Dís is a general term for any female divine being, the ones related to the self are also related to fate and the Nornir. Every person gets a Dís at birth that follows them through their life.

Their role is somewhat also like a guardian spirit, and they are like minor Nornir. They likely are the ones who take the Urðr from Úrðarbrúnnr, taking fate and putting it into action.

The next two spirits are not really part of the self, but rather spirits that work with sorcerers that summon them and have a close connection to their beings. More information on how to summon them and how they are used will be given in a document about spirits.

4. Vörðr

The Vörðr is a helping or guarding spirit summoned to the sorcerer. It is generally associated with a staff called the Völr. The primary purpose of the Vörðr is for prophecy, but it can also defend an area from magical attacks. The Vörðr is also associated with the phallus and the god Völsi.

The Vörðr is likely the spirit summoned in the Varðlókkur songs.

5. Gandr

The Gandr is similar to the Vörðr and is simply a spirit. The Gandr is created by the sorcerer and associated with a staff called a Göndull. The primary purpose of a Gandr is for prophecy, but it can also be sent out to do tasks. Generally, the Gandr takes an animal form. This form is usually, but not always, the form of a wolf. A Gandr can also be “ridden” by a sorcerer in a trance. The Gandr, like the Vörðr, is associated with phalluses.

On a side note, there was a Göndull found in Bergen that was meant to prevent males from having sexual relations with women.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. All the information above comes from my mentor and friend, Ryan Nelson, known by many as Hrafnbjörn. Without him, I would be quite lost in the complexities of Norse history and religion.

E.T. Gunnarsson