**Norse religion (human)**

In the Norse culture, there is nothing like an organized church. They do have a hodge-podge collection of ceremonies, superstitions, traditions, and stories, as well as sacred places and revered items. In the village of Sylmore, the humans look up to the Asgardians as protectors and role-models, not really as gods in the modern sense of the word, though they are often called gods. Humans consider themselves descended more or less from Asgardians (sometimes from Heimdall, sometimes from Odin, depending on who’s telling the story). The Asgardians are the only otherworldly force that cares for humans. All the others (Elves, Dwarves, Giants, Dark Elves, etc.) are either indifferent or openly hostile.

Norse religious ceremonies are designed to please the Asgardians and to get them to do favors for humans. They mostly commemorate the great deeds of the gods, particularly Odin and Thor, but each of the major Asgardians has something dedicated to them, usually a particular holiday.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Asgardian** | **Special Day** | **Ceremony** |
| Tyr | Third day of the week “Tyr’s Day” | Display of weapons |
| Odin/Woden | Fourth day of the week “Woden’s Day” | Sacrifice of objects; hospitality |
| Thor | Fifth day of the week “Thor’s Day” | Honorable or courageous deeds; athletics |
| Freya | Sixth day of the week “Freya’s Day” | Gifts of food; acts of charity |
| Frey Vanir-king | Summer solstice | Animal sacrifice |
| Balder | Spring equinox | Spring festival |
| Frigga | Fall equinox | Harvest festival |
| Heimdall | Winter solstice | Stand watch on longest night of year |
| Ull, the archer | Contest at midsummer | Name invoked in duels and contests |

Norse Clerics receive their power by performing certain ceremonies set forth by Odin for the benefit of humanity. They are expected to bring honor and glory to the Asgardians by their deeds and words. If they show cowardice or duplicity, they are cursed, if not killed outright.

**The Asgardians**

The Asgardians, or Aesir, are a tribe of powerful warriors who rule the highest realm of the Nine Worlds. They are primarily Odin’s kin or descendants; however, some Asgardians are “adopted,” e.g., Loki, Frey, Freya. The Asgardians are not immortal, but are incredibly long-lived. None have yet died of old age. They have interests, either as friends or foes, of all the other realms. They are allies of Vanaheim: Vanaheim’s ruler, Frey, is considered an honorary Asgardian. They are neutral with the true Elves. They engage in fruitful commerce with the Dwarves. They are locked in eternal war with the Fire Giants and Frost Giants. They are hostile to the Dark Elves, but do not often fight them.

The Asgardians look after Mid-gard, and humanity, as guardians and stewards. Humans were created by them to bring Asgardian wisdom and power to Mid-gard.

It is said that there will be a great final battle between Asgard and its enemies: Ragnarok, the death-struggle of the gods. The Nine Worlds will be consumed, and most will perish, but some of Odin’s descendants, and some of humanity, will survive to found a new order. Odin prepares for this battle by building his army at Valhalla: the best human warriors who perish in battle are brought to Valhalla and reincarnated into more powerful bodies.

There are thousands of Aesir and Vanir. The most famous and powerful are listed below. Others are generally more powerful than all but the mightiest humans. (It should be noted that some human heroes may be mightier than almost any Asgardian. Odin himself was once defeated in battle by the human hero Siegfried, although there were some odd circumstances there.)

* **Odin**, son of Buri, son of Bor. Brother of Vili and Ve. Lord of the Aesir. Called Glad-of-War, the Gallows-God, All-Father, Wolf-Foe, Land-Giver, Host-God, Raven-Ruler, and many other names. Odin is the unquestioned ruler of the Aesir. He founded Asgard as a fortress against the forces of chaos and evil. He has one eye: the other was sacrificed to gain a vision of Ragnarok, the final battle. Everything Odin does is to prepare for the future he saw. He is fond of humans (and many sages hold that humans are in fact descended from Odin somehow), and sometimes travels in disguise on Mid-gard. His Valkyries select the best of humanity’s fallen warriors to join his army at Valhalla. His ravens scout the universe, bringing tidings back to Odin. His spear is an unstoppable weapon. There is a dark side to Odin: he is not above using trickery and deceit against his enemies, and has often partnered with Loki on one wild scheme or another. [It’s difficult to nail Odin down to a particular alignment. He seems to go between Lawful Good and Chaotic Good. Therefore, I’ll compromise and label Odin **Neutral Good**.]
* **Thor** is the favored son of Odin, and called Thunder God for his mastery of storms. He is a relentless crusader against giants, and uses his enchanted hammer, Mjollnir, to beat their heads in. Many sagas and stories are told of Thor’s fights against the giants. Humans call upon Thor for courage and strength. *Never* call upon Thor for good weather. He *likes* storms. [Alignment: **Lawful Good**]
* **Frey** isnumbered among the Asgardians, but he is actually the lord of Vanaheim. He is the sworn ally of Odin, and has stood with him in countless battles. The Vanir of Vanaheim are a race of half-elves: tall and warlike, but also magical. They are like a mixture of Asgardian and true Elf. Frey is a powerful sorcerer, almost the equal of Odin himself, but Frey specializes in nature and the elements. To humans, he is a god of fertility, and is called upon by hunters, fishers, and farmers. [Alignment: **Chaotic Good**]
* **Tyr** is, to humans, a god of war. When humans craft weapons, practice fighting, assemble war parties, or go into battle, they call upon Tyr. He is also a law-giver and oath-binder: Tyr embodies the sense of honor and duty that separates lawful killing from evil murder. [Alignment: **Lawful Neutral**]
* **Balder** is unique in that he is the only one to have died and then come back from Hel. He thus embodies the renewal of the earth every Spring, after the ‘death’ of Winter. [Since natural growth is wild and chaotic, I’ll call Balder **Chaotic Neutral**.]
* **Heimdall** is the watchman of Asgard, ever alert for the next attack of the Giants. It is also said that he is the father of the three races of humans: jarls (nobles); karls (freemen); and thralls (serfs, or commoners). [Alignment: **Lawful Good**]
* **Frigga** is the wife of Odin, and a mighty wielder of magic in her own right. Humans call upon her for healing, wealth, and good fortune. [Alignment: **Neutral Good**]
* **Freya** is the twin sister of Frey, and is Queen of the Vanir. To humans, she is the goddess of love, beauty, and desire. She is invoked by humans who really, really want something, particularly when it is impossible. [Alignment: **Neutral**]
* **Ull** is renowned for his prowess with the bow and the shield (though even he can’t use both at the same time). Contests are held in his name. [Alignment: **Neutral Good**]
* **Loki** has a bad reputation, and it is deserved, but Odin keeps him around for good reason. No one is craftier or sneakier than Loki. He knows some arcane magics that even Odin doesn’t, and he is an unparalleled shape-shifter, runner, and master of flame. Like fire itself, he is useful, but a dangerous tool, often burning the hand that holds him. Loki is invoked by humans who are trying to start a fire, tell a lie, escape from trouble, or gather secret information. Loki is actually descended from giants, though his blood-brother bond with Odin makes him an honorary Aesir. Loki and Thor really despise each other. [Alignment: **Chaotic Evil**]

**The Vanir**

The Vanir of Vanaheim once fought a war with the Aesir, before Asgard was built. Eventually, hostages were exchanged and peace was made. Two of the hostages, **Frey** and **Freya** (see above), learned so much knowledge from Odin that they became the rulers of Vanaheim, in permanent alliance with Asgard. The Vanir will stand with the Aesir at the Final Battle. The main difference between the two tribes is that the Asgardians are rather human in psychology and general motivations, while the Vanir are much more Elf-like. (A good comparison would be to the Elves in the *Lord of the Rings* movies, especially Elrond, Legolas, and Haldir.) Humans number Frey and Freya among the Asgardians, and do not know much about the Vanir otherwise. For their part, the Vanir do not concern themselves much with Mid-gard. Just as the Aesir continually fight the Giants, the Vanir are in perpetual war with the Dark Elves.

**The Elves**

The so-called True Elves of Alfheim (or Elvenhome, or a dozen other names) keep to themselves for the most part, though they somewhat resent the ascendance of the Vanir, the so-called Half-Elves. They and the Dark Elves generally leave each other alone: they are mirror images of one another, and cannot bear each other’s realms. The Elves have a King (called Auberon, or the Green Man, or many other names), and Queen (Titania, Meave, Morwen, the Fairie Queen, and many other names), but they are a chaotic folk and do whatever they want for the most part.

Some humans, particularly those who follow the old ways from before the rise of the Asgardians, still derive power from Elvish magics. These are the Druids. Many rural folk still tell tales of the elves and “fairies” who play tricks and weave enchantments. (Most activities of gnomes and Halflings get explained in this manner.)