

Santa = Oðin?

by Karl Donaldsson (Copyright 2000 CE)

Something I've always thought of as interesting is that there are folks out there who have never really made the connection that Santa Claus is Oðin. It took me a while to think of it myself, but when I started talking to my brother about it, it began to make more and more sense.

I've always thought of Santa as being Oðin. A modern representation, as it were. This is not to be confused with the commercial, electronics-hocking fat guy in a suit, but rather, the jolly old elf you thought of when you were 3. The Wild Hunt is his sled, which is converted to "reindeer" in modern myth. He's an old guy, a traveler, and he's always seen winking to cover the fact that he only has one eye. Also, we use a wink to indicate clever deception, a reference to Oðin. The part about giving goodies to the good boys and girls would seem a more modern tool by parents to influence their children's behavior, but I can't believe the one-eyed traveler from the north on the sled ain't Oðin. To me, Santa is Oðin. I think the gift-giving is just a thing to do to keep well-traveled paths between the houses of friends well-traveled.

If you think of Santa as (to quote my friend, Lyfja) "associated with all manner of triteness, commercialism, and false sentimentality," you may not make the connection. I suppose that's because there isn't any, when you think of Santa like that. I don't think of Santa as just a Happy Fat Guy (tm), hocking presents and such around Yule. Santa is, to me, a modern physical reconstruction of our ties to Oðin. You see, the reason Santa is a wanderer from the north who shows up around Yule, etc., is because he comes to remind us of Oðin during a time of the year when the walls between Asgard and Midgard grow thinner. I can almost "sense" Oðin in the winter, when I write most of my songs and articles, when I'm compelled to write and sit in retrospective bliss. This is the "gift" that "Santa" brings, self-awareness. I also buy the traditional connection of the red-and-white getup with the fly agaric influence a la shamans and yurts, but your mileage may vary. Anyway, no matter how people choose to view Santa as this big goodie-hocking whore, I see him as the insidious representation of Odin to us. You can't expect our gods to have lain quietly by for 1000 years, can you?

I am not saying that (Lyfja) "the modern mainstream concept of Santa is historically based on a belief in Oðin (transformed over the centuries from a god to a folkloric entity/advertising logo) or ... that Oðin himself takes on the guise of Santa at Yule time (perhaps possessing fat men in red suits and fake beards at shopping malls?)." Santa is not an aspect of Oðin, Santa is not a part of Oðin, nor is Oðin necessarily a part of Santa. Santa can be way in which we see Oðin, but you have to strip away the layers of commercialism and chitz that the guy has been piled on. The Santa to which I refer, the modern one, the one created by some artist for Coca-Cola, is merely the vehicle Oðin has chosen to use as a way

to get people to remember him around Yule. Why would Oðin choose any other time? It's the time of year when people are most likely to be open to Oðin, is it not? Hel, I'm a Frey's man, and I keep close tabs on Oðin in the winter. All the parallels -- Santa rides a sleigh pulled by reindeer, Oðin has a sled with wolves/dogs, etc. -- are all just markers Oðin has "influenced" over modern perception of Santa for us to remember him by. Our modern Santa Claus (whom you could call anything, but I think Oðin had fun with the whole Sinter Klaus or whatever the name came from, because it was German) may be completely fabricated for abject commercialism, but don't think Oðin wasn't looking over all these people's shoulders, influencing their ideas.

I believe the primary observation one can make of the gods' power is their ability to have the dice come up in their favor. In this day and age, with all the lawsuits and political correctness, health and fitness, Santa is still pictured as an old, one-eyed traveler with a bit of a gut, a love of cookies and milk, a pipe, from somewhere up north and no kinda tan. If he was supposed to be the ideal McDonald's-commercial-politically-correct image, he'd be muscular, well-built, clean shaven, tanned (to hide racial alignment), non-smoking, tofu-eating, and wearing an Armani suit and driving a BMW or taking his private Lear jet wherever he went, writing checks to charities. Why don't we have that image? Because there's a Norse God who demands respect, and there are too many people out there who know they'd better give it to him. There are people out there who believe in Santa, the ones who see Santa as being a nice guy, not a commercial tool. It's just hard for me to believe that an overweight, white, one-eyed smoker could remain an American icon without some help.