

## Odin Does Not Drink Decaf

*An Essay On The Existence Of The Northern Gods And Goddesses In Modern Society*  
by Karl Donaldsson

I arrived at McDonald's one Sunday night, about 10:00 p.m., to have a late dinner (we hungry people do these things, you know). As I walked in, an older fellow was standing by the counter, getting a refill on his coffee. He asked for decaf, and could you possibly make that a fresh pot, please? I guess that caffeinated coffee might give the old man the screaming midnight colon blow, so I ignored his existence and proceeded to use my buy-one-get-one-free coupon for Big Macs. I paid for my burgers and found a place to sit in the generally unpopulated restaurant. I brought a can of 7UP along with me and cracked it open after sitting down to eat. While I was masticating my pan-fried cow, the old fellow got his fresh decaf and left the establishment, only to turn on his heel and walk back in, heading towards the counter. He disappeared from my field of view (the counter was around the corner). I proceeded to become oblivious to my surroundings while enjoying my lipid-booster. I had just taken a bite when the old man came back around the corner, stopping at my table. "America will be better off as soon as we win World War Three," he said. I looked up at him to determine just how annoying his next words would be, and the price he might have to pay for saying them in my general vicinity. "You know what that is, don't you?" he continued. I just looked at him, wondering what good decaf could possibly do for that brain. "It's the battle of the bulge."

For the benefit of those who don't know me personally, I am a fairly hefty fellow, tipping the scales in excess of an eighth of a ton. I stand about 6' 1" tall, so I carry it well, but this car has only one place for a spare tire. In any case, I managed to refrain from my first reaction, the gleeful pounding of his head on the red brick tile floor. I simply continued chewing, swallowed, and then took a drink from my 7UP. I continued to ignore him as he left the restaurant. It didn't matter what happened, he had already won I was thinking about what the hell he meant. Yeah, I could be called fat, but who really cares? Why would some geezer walk up to me table and tell me this? I was obviously not bothering him, nor had I ever seen him before, yet he felt compelled to tell me his views. Maybe he meant I shouldn't be patronizing fast food establishments, because of their high-fat-content food. That didn't make sense; he bought coffee there, and whether it's a burger or Folger's, Mickey-D's still made a sale. Maybe he was referring to the recurrence of a specific battle theater that will happen in all likelihood during the next world war. In any case, the next thought skipped through my mind: maybe that was Odin.

Well, it was a bit of a stretch. He was short, old, lanky, and had both eyes intact. I could interpret what he meant as being advice from one warrior to another lose weight, fat boy, and you'll be able to fight better at the Ragnarok. He

could have chosen a dozen other imperfections to pick on, in light of my discussion with Gunther Ravensgrim; Gunther purports that Odin wants you to be the best [whatever you want to be] as you can. Well, for me to be the person I am, eating a couple Big Macs on a Sunday night fits right in. The guy didn't tell me to work out, he didn't tell me to lower my cholesterol, he didn't tell me to stop smoking, he didn't tell me to use less salt, and he sure didn't warn me about how AIDS is spread. Why he chose to tell me this was beyond me.

Finally, I realized what had happened: Some old guy with a decaf wandered up to a random stranger and babbled his opinion to him. There was no further meaning. Your basic idiot with too much time on his hands, not enough personal attention, and a big mouth just decided to saunter my way and let me know what he thought, thank you very much. I suppose if more people shared their feelings in this world, the world would be a very deadly place. I didn't tell him anything, although maybe someone could inform him that euthanasia is always a choice. Besides, a spear-toting, eight-legged-horse riding, mead chugging, battle-frenzied, mental poet like Odin would never drink decaf.

The basic upshot of this little narrative raises the question of who we think the gods and goddesses are. One could claim that they are merely creations of the psyche, existing only to those who choose to perceive them, feeding off of our wants, needs, and desires. Others would purport that they are a collection of personified ideals and morals, created by a society to provide guidelines for decent and indecent behavior, social structure, and community. I think all of that is a load of malarkey. The gods and goddesses of our faith are real, tangible beings. The reason we don't see them walking down the street all the time is because we are on Midgard, doing Midgard things the Midgard way. It's the same as we are not typically seen on Asgard bumping elbows in Valhalla's ale hall with the likes of Odin, Thor, and Frigga. Sure, the gods would like to hang with us as much as we'd like to hang with them, but quite frankly, they're probably just as busy as we are. Think of them as the family you have on the other side of the continent; you don't ever visit them, but you know that they're there and they'd love you to come visit. You'll eventually go to visit someday, but you can't make time of the trip right now. They've got the same situation with you; you live too far away to visit all the time, but that doesn't mean you can't call them every now and then. And they'll call you every now and then, too.

Regardless of how you may accept or deny or ignore the gods and goddesses of our folk, they are still around, influencing everything that happens in the Web of Wyrð, just as much as anything that we do. They are points on the Web the same as we (albeit big, hefty, immortal points, but points nonetheless). I suppose they could be considered anchor points due to their longevity, and that our points move about here and there, never disappearing, just shifting, throughout all of time. Even the Ragnarok cannot destroy the Web, it just sits there in the horizon, ever behind us, ever in front of us. In any case, the gods and

goddesses influence things around us in the same fashion that we do. They could cut down our trees as much as we do, they could look for alien life forms as we do, and they can take responsibility for their actions like we can. This is not simple euhemerization. Rather than looking to a deity for example, a savior for salvation, or a spirit for forgiveness, we talk to our gods and goddesses in the same fashion that we talk to our friends for advice and fellowship. We honor our gods and goddesses with our words, deeds, and actions in the same way we honor our family, kin, and kith. They, like our friends and family, have their own free will. There are no personalizations or custom jobs. We must respect ourselves, each other, and our surroundings to make our spot on the Web of Wyrð a better place.