

The Hávamál (Sayings of Hár, Sayings of the high one) is one of the poems of the Poetic Edda. It sets out a set of guidelines for wise living and survival; some verses are written from the perspective of Odin (particularly towards the end, where it segues into an account of Odin's obtaining of the magical runes and the spells he learned). This is Patricia Terry's English translation, completed in 1969 and revised in 1989. Patricia Terry did not number the stanzas in her translation, but we have added numbering so comparisons could be more easily made between this translation and others.

1.

At every doorway what you have to do
is look around you
and look out;
never forget: no matter where you are
you might find a foe.

2.

Hail to hosts! A guest is in the hall,
where shall he sit down?
To please him, quickly give him a place
in front of the blazing fire.

3.

There must be a fire for the frozen knees
of all arriving guests,
food and clothing for those who come
over the hills to your hall.

4.

There must be water when guests come to a meal,
towels and a welcome to the table;
it's good manners to give them both
talk and a turn to speak.

5.

It takes sharp wits to travel in the world --
they're not so hard on you at home;
in the flicker of an eye the fool is found
who wanders among the wise.

6.

Better to be careful than to boast
how much is in your mind;
when the wise come in, keeping their counsel,
trouble seldom starts.
A man won't find a better friend
than his own head full of sense.

7.

The careful guest comes to a meal

and sits in wary silence;
with his eyes and ears wide open,
every wise man keeps watch.

8.

Happy is the man who hears of himself
well-meant words of praise;
it's hard to know what may be hidden
in another man's mind.

9.

Lucky the man who can look to himself
to provide his praise and wisdom;
evil counsel has often come
out of another man's mind.

10.

If a man takes with him a mind full of sense
he can carry nothing better;
riches like this on a stranger's road
will do more good than gold.

11.

If a man takes with him a mind full of sense
he can carry nothing better;
nothing is worse to carry on your way
than a head heavy with beer.

12.

Beer isn't such a blessing to men
as it's supposed to be;
the more you swallow, the less you stay
the master of your mind.

13.

The mind-stealing heron hovers over feasts
waiting to seize men's wits;
that bird's feathers fettered me
when I came to Gunnlod's court.

14.

I was drunk, four sheets to the wind,
at Fjalar's feast;
from the best carousing a man will come
to his senses soon again.

15.

Silent and thoughtful a king's son should be
and bold in battle;
merry and glad every man should be

until the day he dies.

16.

The foolish man thinks he'll live forever
if he stays away from war,
but old age shows him no mercy
though the spears spare him.

17.

The stupid man on a visit stares,
he mutters or he mopes;
all he has to do is take a drink
and what wit he has collapses.

18.

A man must go to many places,
travel widely in the world,
before he is wise enough to see the workings
of other men's minds.

19.

Don't cling to the cup but drink your share,
speak useful words or be silent;
no one will blame you for bad manners
if you go to bed early.

20.

A greedy man if he lets himself go
will eat until he's ill;
when such a one sits with the wise,
they make fun of his feeding.

21

The herds know when it's time to go home
and give up grazing,
but a foolish man will always forget
the size of his stomach.

22.

An evil-tempered, small-minded man
is scornful of what he sees;
he alone is unaware
that he's not free from faults.

23.

A stupid man stays awake all night
pondering his problems;
he's worn out when morning comes
and whatever was, still is.

24.

The foolish man thinks everyone his friend
who laughs when he does;
if wise men mock him behind his back,
he'll never know.

25.

The foolish man thinks everyone his friend
who laughs when he does;
then he sees that few will take his side
when his case comes to court.

26.

When the stupid man sits in his corner,
there's nothing he doesn't know;
he'll find that difficult to demonstrate
if someone tries him out.

27.

When a stupid man comes into company
he'd better be silent;
no one will notice that he knows nothing
unless he talks a lot.
(And if he talks to men of like talent
it's safe for him to speak.)

28.

A clever man will ask questions
and answer as well;
no one can hope to keep anything concealed
once it is heard in a hall.

29.

A man who speaks and is never silent
is bound to blunder;
a ready tongue, if it's not restrained,
will do you damage.

30.

Take more than a moment to judge a man
who comes on a visit;
many seem clever if they're asked no questions
and don't stay out in storms.

31.

A man is wise to be far away
when one guest goads another;
he may sit at the table in friendly talk
and then learn he laughed with foes.

32.

Even friends fond of each other
will fight at table;
nothing will ever bring to an end
the strife of men at meals.

33.

A man does well to eat a hearty meal
before he visits friends,
or he sits around glumly acting starved
and finds words for very few.

34.

A bad friend lives far away
though his house lie on your road,
but it's no distance to one who is dear
though you travel many miles.

35.

Don't stay forever when you visit friends,
know when it's time to leave;
love turns to loathing if you sit too long
on someone else's bench.

36.

Though it be little, better to live
in a house you hold as your own;
with just two goats, thin thatch for your roof,
you're better off than begging.

37.

Though it be little, better to live
in a house you hold as your own;
a man's heart breaks if he has to beg
for everything he eats.

38.

Don't leave your weapons lying about
behind your back in a field;
you never know when you may need
all of a sudden your spear.

39.

I've never met a man so generous
you couldn't give him a gift,
nor one so pleased to part with his property
he didn't care what cash came in.

40.

A man should spend his hard-earned money
on whatever he may want;
saving for dear ones may serve the detested:
things often don't work out our way.

41.

Give your friends gifts -- they're as glad as you are
to wear new clothes and weapons;
frequent giving makes friendships last,
if the exchange is equal.

42.

A man should keep faith with his friends always,
returning gift for gift;
laughter should be the reward of laughter,
lying of lies.

43.

A man should be faithful to a friend
and to the friends of a friend;
it is unwise to offer friendship
to a foe's friend.

44.

If you have a friend you feel you can trust
and you want him to treat you well,
open your mind to him, give him gifts,
and go to see him often.

45.

If there's a man that you mistrust
and you want him to treat you well,
let your words be fair but false to your thought,
pay back lying with lies.

46.

Here's more advice about the man
whose intentions you don't trust:
laugh when he does, let your words dissemble,
give back gift for gift.

47.

Always as a young man I traveled alone,
and I would lose my way;
I felt I was rich if I made a friend --
no man by himself is happy.

48.

Men brave and generous live the best lives,
seldom will they sorrow;

then there are fools, afraid of everything,
who grumble instead of giving.

49.

When I saw two scarecrows in a field
I covered them with my clothes;
they looked like warriors when they were dressed --
who hails a naked hero?

50.

The pine tree withers in an open place,
neither bark nor needles save it.
How shall a man hated by everyone
live for very long?

51.

Hotter than fire friendship flames
five days among false friends;
then it dies down when the sixth day comes,
and all love is lost.

52.

You don't have to give large gifts always,
small things often suffice;
half a loaf and a lifted goblet
have found me friends.

53.

There are little shores and little seas
and men with little sense;
all are not equal in wisdom --
no lack of those lacking wit.

54.

Moderately wise a man should be --
don't wish for too much wisdom;
the men who live the fairest lives
know not too much.

55.

Moderately wise a man should be --
don't wish for too much wisdom;
a man's heart is seldom happy
if he is truly wise.

56.

Moderately wise a man should be --
don't wish for too much wisdom;
if you can't see far into the future,
you can live free from care.

57.

Flames from one log leap to another,
fire kindles fire;
a man's wit shows in his words,
stupidity is silent.

58.

Get up early if you are after
another man's life or money;
a sleeping wolf will seldom make a kill
nor a warrior win lying down.

59.

Get up early if you have few men,
and attend to your tasks yourself;
much slips by while you lie in bed --
work is half of wealth.

60.

How many roof-beams and how much bark --
a man can measure these;
and how much wood will be enough
to keep him warm all winter.

61.

Don't be hungry when you ride to the Thing,
be clean though your clothes be poor;
you will not be shamed by shoes and breeches,
nor by your horse, though he be no prize.

62.

Sniffing and searching over the sea,
the eagle watches the waves;
he's like the man who comes among many
but has few friends.

63.

A man will ask and answer questions
if he wants to be called wise;
one man can know something but two should not,
the whole world knows if three do.

64.

A clever man will take good care
how he shows his strength,
for he discovers among the daring
no man claims all the courage.

65.

Often for the words he says to others
a man receives his reward.

66.

To many houses I came too early,
to others much too late:
the beer was all gone or they hadn't brewed it --
unwelcome guests find no feasts.

67.

At some tables I was treated well --
when I did not ask for meat;
or when two hams hung in a friend's house
where I had eaten one.

68.

For human beings the best things are fire,
and the sight of the sun,
and to be granted good health
and to live a blameless life.

69.

If a man's health fails he may still be happy:
some can rejoice in their sons,
some in their friends or sufficient money,
some in work well done.

70.

Better to live than to be lifeless:
the living can hope for a cow.
While the wealthy man sat warm by his fire,
a dead man lay outside the door.

71.

The lame ride horseback, the handless drive herds,
the deaf may be dauntless in battle;
better to be blind than burned on a pyre,
dead men do no deeds.

72.

Though he be born when you are buried,
it's better to have a son;
you don't see many memorial stones
except those set by kinsmen.

73.

Two things cause trouble: the tongue is the bane of the head,
a man's fur coat hides his hands.

74.

Night is friendly if you have enough food.
A ship has small cabins.
Don't trust the autumn night.
The weather seldom stays five days the same,
but it changes more in a month.

75.

He who knows nothing doesn't know this:
money makes monkeys of men;
one man is wealthy, another is in want --
has that one no cause for complaint?

76.

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
one day you die yourself;
but the words of praise will not perish
when a man wins fair fame.

77.

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
one day you die yourself;
I know one thing that never dies --
the dead man's reputation.

78.

I saw the full-stocked fields of Fitjung's sons
who now bear beggars' staves.
Don't trust wealth -- in the twinkling of an eye
it can prove a fickle friend.

79.

When a man is not wise, he has only to win
cattle or a woman's caress,
and his self-esteem waxes, unlike his wits,
he's all puffed up with pride.

80.

He who would read the sacred runes
given by the gods,
that Odin set down
and the sage stained with color,
is well advised to waste no words.

81.

Praise the day at nightfall, a woman when she's dead,
a sword proven, a maiden married,
ice you've crossed, ale you've drunk.

82.

Cut trees when the wind blows, sail in fair weather;
talk with maidens in the dark -- the day has many eyes.
Ask speed of a ship, protection from a shield,
keenness from a sword, from a maiden kisses.

83.

Drink ale by the fireside, skate on the ice,
buy lean steeds and bloodstained swords,
fatten horses in the stable, a dog in your home.

84.

Never trust what a maiden tells you
nor count any woman constant;
their hearts are turned on a potter's wheel,
their minds are made to change.

85.

A creaking bow, a burning flame,
a yawning wolf, a crow crying,
squealing swine, a rootless tree,
billows rising, a kettle boiling,

86.

a dart flying, falling seas,
new ice, a serpent coiled,
a bride's bed-talk, a broken sword,
a bear at play or a king's boy,

87.

a sick calf, a willful slave,
sweet words from witches, the newly slain,

88.

your brother's murderer, though met on the road,
a half-burned house or a horse too swift
(if he breaks his leg you've lost your mount) --
a man's too trusting who takes a chance on these.

89.

Never trust a field sown early
or a son too soon;
weather rules crops, sons need wisdom,
you run a risk both ways.

90.

Thus you'll find the love of a faithless woman
: like a smooth-shod horse on slippery ice --
a sprightly two-year-old not yet trained,

or sailing with no rudder in a frantic storm
or a lame man on an icy hill running after reindeer.

91.

Believe what I say -- I know them both --
men don't keep faith with women;
we speak fair words when we think most falsely
to bewilder the wits of the wise.

92.

Speak pleasing words and offer presents
to win a woman's love,
flatter a lady about her looks:
praise will have the prize.

93.

Let no man ever mock another,
laughing at his love;
the stupid may be safe where the wise give way
to a fair folly.

94.

Let no man ever mock another
for what so many suffer:
out of wise men fools are made
by the lures of love.

95.

Only you can know what lives near your heart,
see clearly into yourself;
for the wise man, no sickness is worse
than nothing left to love.

96.

I realized as I sat among the reeds
waiting for that fair woman,
that I loved her beyond soul and body,
yet I had not my desire.

97.

I saw Billing's daughter in her bed,
a sun-bright maiden sleeping;
then all the earth seemed empty of delight
unless I could lie beside her.

98.

"You must wait, Odin; when it grows dark,
come back if you want to woo me.
It would be unlucky if other eyes
witnessed my weakness."

99.

So I returned, thinking to receive
delight for my desire,
sure that at last all I longed for
she'd gladly grant.

100.

All for nothing: that night she had
warriors barring the way;
they held burning torches and brandished stakes --
she had led me a merry chase.

101.

When the sun rose and I returned,
not a soul was stirring;
I saw only the bitch that sweet woman
had bound to the bed.

102.

Make no mistake -- there are many maidens
fickle and false;
I learned this truth that time I tried
to lure one to love --
she made me suffer every shame
and denied me all delight.

103.

Be happy at home and gay with guests,
but a man must have a mind.
Remembering much and talking readily,
he will be known as wise;
a nincompoop never says anything
because he's not very bright.

104.

I sought the old giant, and when I saw him,
little I learned keeping still:
much I received for the many words
I spoke in Suttung's hall.

105.

With a drill's teeth I cut my trail,
I gnawed right through the rock;
over and under me wound the giants' ways --
a perilous path I traveled.

106.

From her gilded chair Gunnlod gave me
a cup of costly mead;

an ill reward she had in return
for her quick kindness,
for her heavy heart.

107.

From that good bargain I gained a lot,
now I've no lack of wisdom;
the magic drink, the mead of poetry,
left with the Æsir's lord.

108.

I don't believe I could have come back
from the giant's court
were it not for Gunnlod, that good woman
who lay in my arms for love.

109.

The next day the frost-giants found
the High One in his hall;
they asked if Odin were with the Æsir
or if Suttung had slain him.

110.

Odin didn't honor his oath on the ring --
what good is any pledge he gives?
He stole the mead from Suttung's feast,
and Gunnlod grieves.

111.

I will sing from the sage's chair
by the Norns' sacred spring;
I watched and listened, I looked and thought
about the words of the wise
when they talked of runes and what they reveal
at the High One's hall, in the High One's hall --
here is what I heard:

112.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't get up at night except to guard the house,
go out only to relieve yourself.

113.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
never lie with a witch for love,
locking your limbs to hers;

114.

she'll cast a spell so you won't care
to be among men any more;
spurning meat and every sport,
you'll seek your bed in sorrow.

115.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
never lure another man's wife
to lie with you for love.

116.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
if you want to travel over fjord or mountain,
don't forget food.

117.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
never tell a man you can't trust
that you've lost your luck;
you'll be ill rewarded if you think well
of a malicious man.

118.

I saw a man stabbed so deeply
by a wicked woman's words
her deceitful tongue was death to him,
yet all she said was a lie.

119.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
if you have faith in a friend of yours,
go to find him often;
brushwood and grass will soon grow high
on a road no travelers take.

120.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
rejoice in talk with a man you respect
and learn healing spells all your life.

121.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
always be faithful, never be the first
to fail a friendship;
grief consumes the heart that must take care
to keep itself concealed.

122.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
if you are wise you'll exchange no words
with fools you find on your way.

123.

If a man's no good he will never give you
your rightful reward;
a worthy man will help you to win
favor and fame.

124.

True bonds are formed where men keep faith
and don't hide their hearts.
Anything is better than a breach of friendship --
a real friend will say what you'd rather not hear.

125.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't offer three words to a man unworthy;
good men come to grief
when the worse make war.

126.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't make shoes and don't make spear-shafts
except the ones you use yourself;
a badly-fitted shoe or a crooked shaft
leads to bad luck.

127.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
when evil strikes you, don't keep silent
or let your foes find peace.

128.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't rejoice in evil deeds;
be glad to do good.

129.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
never look up when you're locked in battle --
where many men go mad with fear --
an evil spell may strike you.

130.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
if you want to win a woman's friendship
and be in her good graces,
make fair promises and fulfill them --
who tires of treasure if he gets it?

131.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
I bid you be careful, but don't overdo it;
watch out for ale or another man's wife,
and don't let thieves play you tricks.

132.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't mock a guest, and never make fun
of a man you meet on the road!

133.

Those already arrived are often unable
to tell a newcomer's kin;
you'll never find a man without a fault
or one so evil he's no use at all.

134.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
never laugh at long-bearded sages!

You may learn a lot listening to the old,
and find wise words in shriveled skins:
among the hides hanging,
among the pelts dangling,
with rennets swinging to and fro.

135.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
don't scoff at a guest or urge him toward the gate;
be good to beggars!

136.

That door must close with a mighty cross-beam
which opens for all arrivals;
lock it with a ring or you'll receive
rage as your reward.

137.

Heed my words, Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel;
you'll be better off if you believe me,
follow my advice, and you'll fare well:
the earth's might can help you if you're drinking mead.
Earth fights ale, fire fights sickness;
acorns if you're constipated, corn against witchcraft,
elder for household strife -- the moon soothes hatred --
alum for cattle-sickness, runes for misfortune,
floods will end in the earth.

138.

Odin said:
I know that I hung on a high windy tree
for nine long nights;
pierced by a spear -- Odin's pledge --
given myself to myself.
No one can tell about that tree,
from what deep roots it rises.

139.

They brought me no bread, no horn to drink from,
I gazed toward the ground.
Crying aloud, I caught up runes;
finally I fell.

140.

Nine mighty songs I learned from the son
of Bolthorn, Bestla's father,
and I came to drink of that costly mead
the holy vessel held.

141.

Thus I learned the secret lore,
prospered and waxed in wisdom;
I won words from the words I sought,
verses multiplied where I sought verse.

142.

You will find runes and read staves rightly,
the strong magic,
the mighty spells
that the sage set down,
that the great gods made,
wisdom of Odin.

143.

Odin for the Æsir, Dain for the elves,
Dvalin for the dwarfs,
Asvid for the giants,
I made some myself.

144.

Do you know how to write? Do you know how to read?
Do you know how to paint? Do you know how to prove?
Do you know how to wish? Do you know how to worship?
Do you know how to summon? Do you know how to sacrifice?

145.

Better no prayers than too many presents,
gift ever looks for gift;
rather be forgotten than fed too much.
Thus wrote Odin before the world began,
where he rose up when he returned.

146.

I know spells no king's wife can say
and no man has mastered;
one is called "Help" because it can comfort
the sick and careworn, relieve all sorrows.

147.

I know another which all men need
who hope to be healers.

148.

I know a third if I should need
to fetter any foe;
it blunts the edge of my enemy's sword,
neither wiles nor weapons work.

149.

I know a fourth: if I should find myself
fettered hand and foot,
I shout the spell that sets me free,
bonds break from my feet,
nothing holds my hands.

150.

I know a fifth: in battle's fury
if someone flings a spear,
it speeds not so fast but that I can stop it --
I have only to see it.

151.

I know a sixth: if someone would harm me
by writing runes on a tree root,
the man who wished I would come to woe
will meet misfortune, not I.

152.

I know a seventh: if I see flames
high around a hall,
no matter how far the fire has spread
my spell can stop it.

153.

I know an eighth which no one on earth
could fail to find useful:
when hatred waxes among warriors
the spell will soothe them.

154.

I know a ninth: if I ever need
to save my ship in a storm,
it will quiet the wind and calm the waves,
soothing the sea.

155.

I know a tenth: any time I see
witches sailing the sky
the spell I sing sends them off their course;
when they lose their skins
they fail to find their homes.

156.

I know an eleventh: if I lead to war
good and faithful friends,
under a shield I shout the spell that speeds them --
well they fare in the fight,
well they fare from the fight,
wherever they go they fare well.

157.

I know a twelfth: if up in a tree I see a corpse hanging high, the mighty runes I write and color make the man come down to talk with me.

158.

I know a thirteenth: if I pour water over a youth, he will not fall in any fight, swords will not slay him.

159.

I know a fourteenth, as men will find when I tell them tales of the gods: I know all about the elves and the Æsir -- few fools can say as much.

160.

I know a fifteenth that the dwarf Thjodrorir chanted at Delling's door: power to the Æsir, triumph to the elves, understanding to Odin.

161.

I know a sixteenth: if I say that spell any girl soon grants my desires; I win the heart of the white-armed maiden, turn her thoughts where I will.

162.

I know a seventeenth, and with that spell no maiden will forsake me.

163.

But all this lore you, Loddfafnir, will long be lacking -- though it would help you to have it, do you good to get it, be needed if you knew it.

164.

I know an eighteenth which I never tell a maiden or any man's wife -- the best of charms if you can chant it; this is the last of my lay -- unless to a lady who lies in my arms, or I'll sing it to my sister.

165.

The sayings of the High One heard in his hall

are helpful to sons of men,
harmful to giants.
Hail to the speaker, hail the one he taught!
They're lucky who have the lore,
happy if they heed it!