

# Hávamál

## Viking Words of Wisdom

Brandr af brandi  
brinn uns brunninn er  
funi kveykisk af funa  
maðr af manni  
verðr at máli kuðr  
en til dølskr af dul



# Agenda



- Introduction
  - History
  - Caveats
  - Organization
- Content
  - Advice for men
  - Advice for leaders
  - Neil's Favourites
  - Advice for great men
- Conclusion



# Introduction: History



- Found in Poetic Edda
- Only one known manuscript
  - Codex Regius - GkS 2365 4to (1270s?)
  - Bishop of Skálholt found in 1643
  - Passed to Danish King in 1662
  - Returned to Iceland 1971 (1985?)
- Written in Old Norse
- Codex is recording not creation
- Some lines found in older manuscripts
  - 10<sup>th</sup> century at least perhaps 9th



# Introduction: Caveats



- Copy errors
- Verses from different times
- Translation Issues
  - Brand kindles from brand until it be burned, spark is kindled from spark, man unfolds him by speech with man, but grows over secret through silence.
  - Brand kindles brand till they burn out; Flame is quickened by flame; One man from another is known by his speech; The simpleton by his silence.
  - Flames from one log leap to another; fire kindles fire; a wise man learns from the minds of others; A fool prefers his own.



# Introduction: Organization



- *Gestapáttur* (verses 1-80)
  - Proverbs & Basic Wisdom
- *Malahattr* (verses 81-110)
  - Maxims for Men; Odin's Quests
- *Loddfáfnismál* (verses 111-138)
  - Additional Wisdom
- *Rúnatal* (verses 139-146)
  - Odin's rune quest
- *Ljóðatal* (verses 145-164)
  - Charms



# Introduction: Organization (cont)



- Advice for men
  - *Gestapáttur; Malahattr*
  - Simple language, social skills
- Advice for leaders
  - *Loddfáfnismál*
  - More metaphor; kindness
- Advice for Great Men
  - *Rúnatal; Ljóðatal*
  - Magic, runes, masked in code



# Content



- Idea then 1-2 verses
  - **Advice for men**
    - Basic Socialization
    - Guesting
    - Friends
    - Wisdom
    - Reputation
  - Advice for leaders
  - Neil's favourites
  - Advice for great men
- Common Sense
  - Money
  - Life
  - Death
  - Women & Love



# Advice for men: Guesting



- Make guests welcome
  - Water, too, that he may wash before eating,  
Handcloths and a hearty welcome,  
Courteous words, then courteous silence  
That he may tell his tale,
- Don't be greedy
  - A gluttonous man who guzzles away  
Brings sorrow on himself:  
At the table of the wise he is taunted often,  
Mocked for his bloated belly,





# Advice for men: Guesting (cont)



- Be polite
  - The fastest friends may fall out  
When they sit at the banquet-board:  
It is, and shall be, a shameful thing  
When guest quarrels with guest
- Moderation is good
  - Drink your mead, but in moderation,  
Speak needful words or be silent:  
No man is called discourteous who goes  
To bed at an early hour



# Advice for men: Guesting (cont)



- Watch the booze
  - Drunk I got, dead drunk,  
When Fjalar the wise was with me:  
Best is the banquet one looks back on after,  
And remembers all that happened,
  - When he meets friends, the fool gapes,  
Is shy and sheepish at first,  
Then he sips his mead and immediately  
All know what an oaf he is,



# Advice for men: Friends



- Interact often, trust
  - If you find a friend you fully trust  
And wish for his good-will,  
exchange thoughts, exchange gifts,  
Go often to his house.
- Friends are good
  - The young fir that falls and rots  
Having neither needles nor bark,  
So is the fate of the friendless man:  
Why should he live long?



# Advice for men: Friends (cont)



- Beware false friends
  - So long as life goes well,  
A man should be loyal through life to friends,  
To them and to friends of theirs,  
But never shall a man make offer  
Of friendship to his foes.
  - If you deal with another you don't trust  
But wish for his good-will,  
Be fair in speech but false in thought  
And give him lie for lie.



# Advice for men: Wisdom



- Be wise
  - Who travels widely needs his wits about him,  
The stupid should stay at home:  
The ignorant man is often laughed at  
When he sits at meat with the sage,
- But not too wise
  - It is best for man to be middle-wise,  
Not over cunning and clever:  
The fairest life is led by those  
Who are deft at all they do.



# Advice for men: Wisdom (cont)



- Conversation shows wisdom
  - To ask well, to answer rightly,  
Are the marks of a wise man:  
Men must speak of men's deeds,  
What happens may not be hidden.
- Moderation even in wisdom
  - Moderate at council should a man be,  
Not brutal and over bearing:  
Among the bold the bully will find  
Others as bold as he.



# Advice for men: Wisdom (cont)



- Keep secrets close
  - It is safe to tell a secret to one,  
Risky to tell it to two,  
To tell it to three is thoughtless folly,  
Everyone else will know.
- Love makes fools of us all
  - Never reproach the plight of another,  
For it happens to many men:  
Strong desire may stupefy heroes,  
Dull the wits of the wise



# Advice for men: Wisdom (cont)



- Travel can bring wisdom
  - He who has seen and suffered much,  
And knows the ways of the world,  
Who has travelled, can tell what spirit  
Governs the men he meets,





# Advice for men: Reputation



- Generosity

- The generous and bold have the best lives,  
Are seldom beset by cares,  
But the base man sees bogies everywhere  
And the miser pines for presents

- Proper behaviour

- Silence becomes the Son of a prince,  
To be silent but brave in battle:  
It befits a man to be merry and glad  
Until the day of his death,



# Advice for men: Money



- Don't be greedy
  - Once he has won wealth enough,  
A man should not crave for more:  
What he saves for friends, foes may take;  
Hopes are often liars.
- Early bird gets the worm
  - Early shall he rise who rules few servants,  
And set to work at once:  
Much is lost by the late sleeper,  
Wealth is won by the swift



# Advice for men: Money (cont)



- Rich is not smart
  - The half wit does not know that gold  
Makes apes of many men:  
One is rich, one is poor  
There is no blame in that.
- Rich is better
  - A small hut of one's own is better,  
A man is his master at home:  
His heart bleeds in the beggar who must  
Ask at each meal for meat.



# Advice for men: Life



- Be prepared
  - A wayfarer should not walk unarmed,  
But have his weapons to hand:  
He knows not when he may need a spear,  
Or what menace meet on the road.
  - A man should know how many logs  
And strips of bark from the birch  
To stock in autumn, that he may have enough  
Wood for his winter fires.



# Advice for men: Death



- Living is better than dying
  - The halt can manage a horse,  
the handless a flock,  
The deaf be a doughty fighter,  
To be blind is better than to burn on a pyre:  
There is nothing the dead can do.  
It is always better to be alive,  
The living can keep a cow.  
Fire, I saw, warming a wealthy man,  
With a cold corpse at his door.



# Advice for men: Women & Love



- Don't trust women
  - No man should trust a maiden's words,  
Nor what a woman speaks:  
Spun on a wheel were women's hearts,  
In their breasts was implanted caprice,
- Men have issues too
  - Naked I may speak now for I know both:  
Men are treacherous too  
Fairest we speak when falsest we think:  
many a maid is deceived.



# Content



- Advice for men
- Advice for leaders
  - Guesting
  - Friends
  - Money
  - Wisdom
  - Proper Behaviour
  - War
  - Women
- Neil's favourites
- Advice for great men



# Advice for leaders: Guesting



- Welcome and look deeper
  - The sitters in the hall seldom know  
The kin of the new-comer:  
The best man is marred by faults,  
The worst is not without worth.
- Be polite
  - Mock not the traveler met on the road,  
Nor maliciously laugh at the guest:  
Scoff not at guests nor to the gate chase them,  
But relieve the lonely and wretched,





# Advice for leaders: Friends



- Interact often
  - If you know a friend you can fully trust,  
Go often to his house  
Grass and brambles grow quickly  
Upon the untrodden track.
- Trust and Friendship
  - Affection is mutual when men can open  
All their heart to each other:  
He whose words are always fair  
Is untrue and not to be trusted.



# Advice for leaders: Money



- Plan ahead
  - If you must journey to mountains and firths,  
Take food and fodder with you.
- Money
  - Never share in the shamefully gotten,  
But allow yourself what is lawful.



# Advice for leaders: Wisdom



- Fight the wicked
  - If aware that another is wicked, say so:  
Make no truce or treaty with foes.
- Conversation shows wisdom
  - With a good man it is good to talk,  
Make him your fast friend:  
But waste no words on a witless oaf,  
Nor sit with a senseless ape.



# Advice for leaders: Behaviour



- Sharing

- Be not a cobbler nor a carver of shafts,  
Except it be for yourself:  
If a shoe fit ill or a shaft be crooked  
The maker gets curses and kicks.

- Drink

- Be not over wary, but wary enough,  
First, of the foaming ale,  
Second, of a woman wed to another,  
Third, of the tricks of thieves.



# Advice for leaders: War



- Stay Focused
  - Never lift your eyes and look up in battle,  
Lest the heroes enchant you,  
who can change warriors  
Suddenly into hogs,
- You can't always talk it out
  - Bandy no speech with a bad man:  
Often the better is beaten  
In a word fight by the worse.



# Advice for leaders: Women



- Watch who you sleep with
  - Shun a woman, wise in magic,  
Her bed and her embraces:  
If she cast a spell, you will care no longer
  - Never seduce another's wife,  
Never make her your mistress.
- Be honourable
  - With a good woman, if you wish to enjoy  
Her words and her good will,  
Pledge her fairly and be faithful to it:  
Enjoy the good you are given,



# Content



- Advice for men
- Advice for leaders
- Neil's favourites
- Advice for great men



# Neil's Favourites:



- Don't Worry

- Foolish is he who frets at night  
And lies awake to worry  
A weary man when morning comes  
He finds all as bad as before

- Clothes make the man

- Two wooden stakes stood upon the plain  
On them I hung my clothes  
Draped in linen they looked well born  
But, naked, I was a nobody





# Neil's Favourites: Friendships



- Long is the round to a false friend leading,  
e'en if he dwell on the way:  
but though far off fared, to a faithful friend  
straight are the roads and short.



# Neil's Favourites: Fatalism



- Praise day at evening, a wife when dead,  
weapon when blooded, maid when married,  
ice when crossed, and ale when drunk.
- Cattle die, kindred die,  
Every man is mortal:  
But I know one thing that never dies,  
The glory of the great dead



# Neil's Favourites: Enjoy Life



- The coward believes he will live forever  
If he holds back in the battle,  
But in old age he shall have no peace  
Though spears have spared his limbs
- Drink ale by the fire, but slide on the ice;  
buy a steed when 'tis lanky, a sword when  
'tis rusty; feed thy horse neath a roof,  
and thy hound in the yard.



# Content



- Advice for men
- Advice for leaders
- Neil's favourites
- Advice for great men



# Advice for great men



- Focus of religion
  - Encourage morality (first 2 sections)
  - Explain unknown (not this document)
  - Path of enlightenment (sage)
- Who are the great men?
  - Not Thrall/Karl/Jarl
  - Focus on mystery and religion
  - Those who pursue enlightenment
- Analysis will be complex
  - Their beliefs or ours?



# Advice for great men



- Fasting/Meditation

- I trow I hung on that windy Tree  
nine whole days and nights,  
stabbed with a spear, offered to Odin,  
myself to mine own self given,  
high on that Tree of which none hath heard  
from what roots it rises to heaven.
- None refreshed me ever with food or drink,  
I peered right down in the deep;  
crying aloud I lifted the Runes  
then back I fell from thence.



# Advice for great men: Runes



- Quest for Runes
  - Many interpretations here
  - Perhaps power of each rune...
    - F=1, U=2, ....
  - 18 runes, usually 16 Norse
    - Perhaps Icelandic magic runes
  - Perhaps hidden meanings
  - Translation Issues
  - Mystery/spirituality



# Advice for great men: Runes



- Quest for Runes
  - The songs I know  
that king's wives know not,  
Nor men that are sons of men;  
The first is called help,  
and help it can bring thee  
In sorrow and pain and sickness.





# Advice for great men: Cures



- Curative Magic

- Medicines exist against many evils:

Earth against drunkenness, heather against worms

Oak against costiveness, corn against sorcery,

Spurred rye against rupture, runes against bales

The moon against feuds, fire against sickness,

Earth makes harmless the floods.

- Lust's herbology text disagrees
- Perhaps metaphore (kenning?)
- Perhaps another mystery



# Advice for great men: Wisdom



- Don't over promise
  - Better not to ask than to over-pledge  
As a gift that demands a gift
- Translation issues again
  - Better not to pray than to sacrifice to excess, gift always tend to return
- Religious?
  - Do it yourself; don't attract attention?
- Social?
  - Don't give so much it causes resentment



# Conclusion



The wise One has spoken words in the Hall,  
Needful for men to know

Unneedful for trolls to know

Hail to the Speaker, hail to the Knower

Joy to him who has understood

Delight to those who have listened



# Resources



- ON Version

- <http://www.beyondweird.com/high-one.html>
- <http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/H%C3%A1vam%C3%A1l>

- English Versions

- <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/havamal.html> (Bray)
- <http://www.northvegr.org> (Thorpe, Bellows)
  - Under “The eddas”

- Fun Version

- Havamal for New Yawkas
  - <http://odins-gift.com/poth/R-T/thehavamalfornewyawkas.htm>



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