

Hávamál – Original & English

Old Norse and English – a selection – public domain

A curated selection – each with the Old Norse original (Codex Regius) and the English rendering after Henry Adams Bellows. Both texts in the public domain.

Arrival & Hospitality

*Gáttir allar, áðr gangi fram,
um skoðask skyli, um skygnast skyli;
því at óvíst er at vita,
hvar óvinir sitja á fleti fyrir.*

Within the gates ere a man shall go, full long let him look about him; for little he knows where a foe may lurk, and sit in the seats within.

Hávamál 1

*Gefendr heilir! Gestr er inn kominn,
hvar skal sitja sjá?
Mjök er bráðr, sá er á bröndum skal
síns of freista frama.*

Hail to the givers! A guest has come; where shall he sit within? In much haste is he who on the hearth would seek for warmth and weal.

Hávamál 2

*Elds er þörf, þeim inn er kominn
ok á kné kalinn;
matar ok váða er manni þörf,
þeim er hefir um fjall farit.*

Fire he needs who with frozen knees has come from the cold without; food and clothing the wanderer craves who has fared o'er the rocky fells.

Hávamál 3

*Vatns er þörf, þeim er til verðar kemr,
þerru ok þjóðlaðar,
góðs of æðis, ef sér geta mætti,
orðs ok endrþögu.*

Water and towels and welcoming speech should he find who comes to the feast; if good he can get, he shall gladly stay, with friendly words and a hearing.

Hávamál 4

*Vits er þörf, þeim er víða ratar;
dælt er heima hvat;
at augabragði verðr, sá er ekki kann
ok með snotrum sitr.*

Wits must he have who wanders wide, but all is easy at home; a laughing-stock is the fool who sits among the wise and nothing knows.

Hávamál 5

*Bú er betra, þótt lítit sé,
halr er heima hverr;
þótt tvær geitr eigi ok taugreftan sal,*

Þat er þó betra en bæn.

A house of one's own is better, though small it may be; at home a man is master. Though but two goats and a thatched roof he have, it is better far than begging.

Hávamál 36

Moderation, Mead & Meal

*Byrði betri berr-at maðr brautu at
en sé mannvit mikit;
auði betra þykkir þat í ókunnnum stað,
slíkt er válaðs vera.*

A better burden no man can bear on the way than his mother-wit; better than gold in a strange place it seems, and the refuge of the poor.

Hávamál 10

*Byrði betri berr-at maðr brautu at
en sé mannvit mikit;
vegnest verra vegr-a hann velli at
en sé ofdrykkja öls.*

A better burden no man can bear on the way than his mother-wit; and no worse provision he carries afield than too deep a draught of ale.

Hávamál 11

*Er-a svá gott, sem gott kveða,
öl alda sona,
því at færa veit, er fleira drekkir
síns til geðs gumi.*

Less good than they say for the sons of men is the drinking oft of ale; for the more he drinks, the less does man of his mind the mastery hold.

Hávamál 12

*Haldi-t maðr á keru, drekki þó at hófi mjöð,
mæli þarft eða þegi;
ókynnis þess vár þik engi maðr,
at þú gangir snemma at sofa.*

Cling not to the cup, but drink thy mead in measure; speak to good purpose or hold thy peace; for no man blames thy ill manners if early thou goest to rest.

Hávamál 19

Wisdom, Silence & the Right Word

*Ósnotr maðr, er með aldir kemr,
þat er bazt, at hann þegi;
engi þat veit, at hann ekki kann,
nema hann mæli til margt.*

The man who is foolish and comes among folk is best when in silence he bides; for none can tell that he nothing knows, unless too much he talks.

Hávamál 27

*Ærna mælis, sá er æva þegir,
staðlausu stafi;
hraðmælt tunga, nema haldendr eigi,
oft sér ógott of gelr.*

Enough he prattles who never is still with words that have no worth; the chattering tongue, if a check it lacks, oft sings itself harm.

Hávamál 29

*Brandr af brandi brenn, unz brunninn er,
funi kveikist af funa;
maðr af manni verðr at máli kuðr,
en til dælskr af dul.*

A brand from a brand is kindled and burned, and fire from fire begotten; and man by his speech is known to men, while the witless are known by their stillness.

Hávamál 57

Friendship & Loyalty

*Vin sínum skal maðr vinr vera
ok gjalda gjöf við gjöf;
hlátr við hlátri skyli hölðar taka
en lausung við lygi.*

To his friend a man should bear him as friend, and gift for gift repay; laughter with laughter men should receive, but lies with falsehood meet.

Hávamál 42

*Veiztu, ef þú vin átt, þann er þú vel trúir,
ok vill þú af honum gott geta,
geði skaltu við þann blanda ok gjöfum skipta,
fara at finna oft.*

If a friend thou hast whom thou fully wilt trust, and good from him wouldst get, thy mind with his shalt thou mingle well, and gifts exchange, and often go to him.

Hávamál 44

*Ungr var ek forðum, fór ek einn saman,
þá varð ek villr vega;
auðigr þóttumk, er ek annan fann,
maðr er manns gaman.*

Young was I once, and wandered alone, and lost my way on the road; rich did I feel when another I found, for man is the joy of man.

Hávamál 47

*Hrørnar þöll, sú er stendr þorpi á,
hlýr-at henni börkr né barr;
svá er maðr, sá er manngi ann.
Hvat skal hann lengi lifa?*

On the hillside withers the lonely fir, nor bark nor needle shelters it; so is the man whom no one loves: why should his life be long?

Hávamál 50

Heart, Love & Longing

*Hugr einn þat veit, er býr hjarta nær,
einn er hann sér of sefa;
öng er sótt verri hveim snotrum manni
en sér engu at una.*

The heart alone knows what dwells near the breast, and alone it is with itself; no sickness is worse to the wise in mind than to have no joy in aught.

Hávamál 95

Life's Path, Drive & Courage

*Þagalt ok hugalt skyli þjóðans barn
ok vígdjarft vera;
glæðr ok reifr skyli gumna hverr,
unz sinn bíðr bana.*

Silent and thoughtful and bold in strife the prince's son should be; joyous and generous let each man show him until he shall suffer death.

Hávamál 15

*Ósnjallr maðr hyggsk munu ey lifa,
ef hann við víg varask;
en elli gefr honum engi frið,
þótt honum geirar gefi.*

A coward believes he will ever live if he keep him safe from strife; but old age leaves him not long in peace though spears may spare his life.

Hávamál 16

*Mildir, fræknir menn bazt lifa,
sjaldan sút ala;
en ósnjallr maðr uggir hotvetna,
sýtir æ glöggr við gjöfum.*

The brave and generous have the best of life, and seldom are they sad; but the coward is afraid of all, and the niggard grieves at gifts.

Hávamál 48

*Ár skal rísa, sá er annars vill
fé eða fjör hafa;
sjaldan liggjandi ulfr lær of getr
né sofandi maðr sigr.*

He must rise betimes who would win the wealth or the life of another man; seldom the sleeping wolf wins the ham, nor a sleeping man the fight.

Hávamál 58

*Ár skal rísa, sá er á yrkjendr fáa,
ok ganga síns verka á vit;
margt of dvelr, þann er um morgin sefr,
hálf er auðr und hvötum.*

He must rise betimes who has few to serve, and go to look to his work; much is undone by the morning-sleeper, for the swift is wealth half won.

Hávamál 59

*Haltr ríðr hrossi, hjörð rekr handar vanr,
 daufr vegr ok dugir;
 blindr er betri en brenndr séi,
 nýtr manngi nás.*

The lame can ride, the handless can herd, the deaf in the fight is brave; a blind man is better than one that is burned: no good can the dead man do.

Hávamál 71

Wealth, Transience & Renown

*Deyr fé, deyja frændr,
 deyr sjalfr it sama;
 en orðstírr deyr aldregi,
 hveim er sér góðan getr.*

Cattle die and kinsmen die, and so one dies oneself; but a noble name will never die for him who earns it well.

Hávamál 76

*Deyr fé, deyja frændr,
 deyr sjalfr it sama;
 ek veit einn, at aldrei deyr:
 dómr um dauðan hvern.*

Cattle die and kinsmen die, and so one dies oneself; one thing I know that never dies: the doom upon each one dead.

Hávamál 77

*At kveldi skal dag leyfa, konu, er brennd er,
 mæki, er reyndr er, mey, er gefin er,
 ís, er yfir kemr, öl, er drukkit er.*

Praise the day at evening, a wife on her pyre, a weapon when proven, a maid when married, ice when crossed, and ale when drunk.

Hávamál 81

Loddfáfnir's Counsel

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir, en þú ráð nemir,
 njóta mundu, ef þú nemr:
 nótt þú rísat, nema á njósn séir
 eða þú leitir þér innan út staðar.*

I rede thee, Loddfáfnir, and hear thou my rede; profit thou hast if thou takest it: rise not at night, save to spy on thy foe, or to seek the place without.

Hávamál 112

*Hvars þú böll kannt, kveð þú þér bölvi at
 ok gef-at þínum fjándum frið.*

Where wrong thou knowest, call it wrong, and give thy foes no peace.

Hávamál 127

Rúnatal – Odin's Rune Song

*Veit ek, at ek hekk vindga meiði á
nætr allar níu,
geiri undaðr ok gefinn Óðni,
sjalfr sjalfum mér,
á þeim meiði, er manngi veit,
hvers af rótum renn.*

I know that I hung on the wind-swept tree nine whole nights, wounded with a spear and given to Odin, myself to myself, on that tree which no man knows from what roots it rises.

Hávamál 138

*Við hleifi mik sældu né við hornigi,
nýsta ek niðr,
nam ek upp rúnar, æpandi nam,
fell ek aftr þaðan.*

No bread did they give me nor horn to drink, downward I peered; I took up the runes, screaming I took them, then back I fell from there.

Hávamál 139

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