

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 Benjamin Thorpe's English translation.

Havamal - The High One's Lay

1. All door-ways,
before going forward,
should be looked to;
for difficult it is to know
where foes may sit
within a dwelling.

2. Givers, hail!
A guest is come in:
where shall he sit?
In much hast is he,
who on the ways has
to try his luck.

3. Fire is needful
to him who is come in,
and whose knees are frozen;
food and raiment
a man requires,
who o'er the fell has travelled.

4. Water to him is needful
who for refection comes,
a towel and hospitable invitation,
a good reception;
if he can get it,
discourse and answer.

5. Wit is needful
to him who travels far:
at home all is easy.
A laughing-stock is he
who nothing knows,
and with the instructed sits.

6. Of his understanding
no one should be proud,
but rather in conduct cautious.
When the prudent and taciturn
come to a dwelling,
harm seldom befalls the cautious;
for a firmer friend
no man ever gets
than great sagacity.

7. A way guest
who to refection comes,
keeps a cautious silence,
(Or/Wit is needful
to him who travels far:
harm seldom befalls the wary;)

with his ears listens,
and with his eyes observes:
so explores every prudent man.

8. He is happy,
who for himself obtains
fame and kind words:
less sure is that
which a man must have
in another's breast.

9. He is happy,
who in himself possesses
fame and wit while living;
for bad counsels
have oft been received
from another's breast.

10. A better burthen
no man bears on the way
than much good sense;
that is thought better than riches
in a strange place;
such is the recourse of the indigent.

11. A worse provision
on the way he cannot carry
than too much beer-bibbing;
so good is not,
as it is said,
beer for the sons of men.

12. A worse provision
no man can take from table
than too much beer-bibbing:
for the more he drinks
the less control he has
of his own mind.

13. Oblivion's heron 'tis called
that over potations hovers,
he steals the minds of men.
With this bird's pinions
I was fettered
in Gunnlöds dwelling.

14. Drunk I was,
I was over-drunk,
at that cunning Fjalar's.
It's the best drunkenness,
when every one after it
regains his reason.

15. Taciturn and prudent,
and in war daring
should a king's children be;
joyous and liberal
every one should be
until the hour of his death.

16. A cowardly man
thinks he will ever live,
if warfare he avoids;
but old age will
give him no peace,
though spears may spare him.

17. A fool gapes
when to a house he comes,
to himself mutters or is silent;
but all at once,
if he gets drink,
then is the man's mind displayed.

18. He alone knows
who wanders wide,
and has much experienced,
by what disposition
each man is ruled,
who common sense possesses.

19. Let a man hold the cup,
yet of the mead drink moderately,
speak sensibly or be silent.
As of a fault
no man will admonish thee,
if thou goest betimes to sleep.

20. A greedy man,
if he be not moderate,
eats to his mortal sorrow.
Oftentimes his belly
draws laughter on a silly man,
who among the prudent comes.

21. Cattle know
when to go home,
and then from grazing cease;
but a foolish man
never knows
his stomach's measure.

22. A miserable man,
and ill-conditioned,
sneers at every thing;
one thing he knows not,
which he ought to know,
that he is not free from faults.

23. A foolish man
is all night awake,
pondering over everything;
he than grows tired;
and when morning comes,
all is lament as before.

24. A foolish man
thinks all who on him smile

to be his friends;
he feels it not,
although they speak ill of him,
when he sits among the clever.

25. A foolish man
thinks all who speak him fair
to be his friends;
but he will find,
if into court he comes,
that he has few advocates.

26. A foolish man
thinks he know everything
if placed in unexpected difficulty;
but he knows not
what to answer,
if to the test he is put.

27. A foolish man,
who among people comes,
had best be silent;
for no one knows
that he knows nothing,
unless he talks to much.
He who previously knew nothing
will still know nothing
talk he ever so much.

28. He thinks himself wise,
who can ask questions
and converse also;
conceal his ignorance
no one can,
because it circulates among men.

29. He utters too many
futile words
who is never silent;
a garrulous tongue,
if it be not checked,
sings often to its own harm.

30. For a gazing-stock
no man shall have another,
although he come a stranger to his house.
Many a one thinks himself wise,
if he is not questioned,
and can sit in a dry habit.

31. Clever thinks himself
the guest who jeers a guest,
if he takes to flight.
Knows it not certainly
he who prates at meat,
whether he babbles among foes.

32. Many men
are mutually well-disposed,

yet at table will torment each other.
That strife will ever be;
guest will guest irritate.

33. Early meals
a man should often take,
unless to a friend's house he goes;
else he will sit and mope,
will seem half-famished,
and can of few things inquire.

34. Long is and indirect the way
to a bad friend's,
though by the road he dwell;
but to a good friend's
the paths lie direct,
though he be far away.

35. A guest should depart,
not always stay
in one place.
The welcome becomes unwelcome,
if he too long continues
in another's house.

36. One's own house is best,
small though it be;
at home is every one his own master.
Though he but two goats possess,
and a straw-thatched cot,
even that is better than begging.

37. One's own house is best,
small though it be,
at home is every one his own master.
Bleeding at heart is he,
who has to ask
for food at every meal-tide.

38. Leaving in the field his arms,
let no man go
a foot's length forward;
for it is hard to know
when on the way
a man may need his weapon.

39. I have never found a
man so bountiful,
or so hospitable
that he refused a present;
of his property
so liberal
that he scorned a recompense.

40. Of the property
which he has gained
no man should suffer need;
for the hated oft is spared
what for the dear was destined.

Much goes worse than is expected.

41. With arms and vestments
friends should each other gladden,
those which are in themselves most sightly.
Givers and requiters
are longest friends,
if all (else) goes well.

42. To his friend
a man should be a friend,
and gifts with gifts requite.
Laughter with laughter
men should receive,
but leasing with lying.

43. To his friend
a man should be a friend,
to him and to his friend;
but of his foe
no man shall
the friend's friend be.

44. Know, if thou has a friend
whom thou fully trustest,
and from whom thou wouldst good derive,
thou shouldst blend thy mind with his,
and gifts exchange,
and often go to see him.

45. If thou hast another,
whom thou little trustest,
yet wouldst good from him derive,
thou shouldst speak him fair,
but think craftily,
and leasing pay with lying.

46. But of him yet further,
whom thou little trustest,
and thou suspectest his affection;
before him thou shouldst laugh,
and contrary to thy thoughts speak:
requital should the gift resemble.

47. I was once young,
I was journeying alone,
and lost my way;
rich I thought myself,
when I met another.
Man is the joy of man.

48. Liberal and brave men live best,
they seldom cherish sorrow;
but a base-minded man
dreads everything;
the niggardly is uneasy even at gifts.

49. My garments in a field
I gave away

to two wooden men:
heroes they seemed to be,
when they got cloaks:
exposed to insult is a naked man.

50. A tree withers
that on a hill-top stands;
protects it neither bark nor leaves:
such is the man
whom no one favours:
why should he live long?

51. Hotter than fire
love for five days burns
between false friends;
but is quenched
when the sixth day comes,
and friendship is all impaired.

52. Something great
is not (always) to be given,
praise is often for a trifle bought.
With half a loaf
and a tilted vessel
I got myself a comrade.

53. Little are the sandgrains,
little the wits,
little the minds of (some) men;
for all men
are not wise alike:
men are everywhere by halves.

54. Moderately wise
should each one be,
but never over-wise:
of those men
the lives are fairest,
who know much well.

55. Moderately wise
should each one be,
but never over-wise;
for a wise man's heart
is seldom glad,
if he is all-wise who owns it.

56. Moderately wise
should each one be,
but never over-wise.
His destiny let know
no man beforehand;
his mind will be freest from care.

57. Brand burns from brand
until it is burnt out;
fire is from fire quickened.
Man to man
becomes known by speech,

but a fool by his bashful silence.

58. He should early rise,
who another's property or life
desires to have.
Seldom a sluggish wolf
gets prey,
or a sleeping man victory.

59. Early should rise
he who has few workers,
and go his work to see to;
greatly is he retarded
who sleeps the morn away.
Wealth half depends on energy.

60. Of dry planks
and roof-shingles
a man knows the measure;
of the fire-wood
that may suffice,
both measure and time.

61. Washed and refected
let a man ride to the Thing,
although his garments be not too good;
of his shoes and breeches
let no one be ashamed,
nor of his horse,
although he have not a good one.

62. Inquire and impart
should every man of sense,
who will be accounted sage.
Let one only know,
a second may not;
if three, all the world knows.

63. Gasps and gapes,
when to the sea he comes,
the eagles over old ocean;
so is a man,
who among many comes,
and has few advocates.

64. His power should
every sagacious man
use with discretion;
for he will find,
when among the bold he comes,
that no one alone is the doughtiest.

65. Circumspect and reserved
every man should be,
and wary in trusting friends.
Of the words
that a man says to another
he often pays the penalty.

66. Much too early
I came to many places,
but too late to others;
the beer was drunk,
or not ready:
the disliked seldom hits the moment.

67. Here and there I should
have been invited,
if I a meal had needed;
or two hams had hung,
at that true friend's,
where of one I had eaten.

68. Fire is best
among the sons of men,
and the sight of the sun,
if his health
a man can have,
with a life free from vice.

69. No man lacks everything,
although his health be bad:
one in his sons is happy,
one in abundant wealth,
one in his good works.

70. It is better to live,
even to live miserably;
a living man can always get a cow.
I saw fire consume
the rich man's property,
and death stood without his door.

71. The halt can ride on horseback,
the one-handed drive cattle;
the deaf fight and be useful:
to be blind is better
than to be burnt:
no ones gets good from a corpse.

72. A son is better,
even if born late,
after his father's departure.
Gravestones seldom
stand by the way-side
unless raised by a kinsman to a kinsman.

73. Two are adversaries:
the tongue is the bane of the head:
under every cloak
I expect a hand.

74. At night is joyful
he who is sure of travelling enjoyment.
(A ship's yards are short.)

Variable is an autumn night.
Many are the weather's changes
in five days,
but more in a month.

75. He (only) knows not
who knows nothing,
that many a one apes another.
One man is rich,
another poor:
let him not be thought blameworthy.

76. Cattle die,
kindred die,
we ourselves also die;
but the fair fame
never dies
of him who has earned it.

77. Cattle die,
kindred die,
we ourselves also die;
but I know one thing
that never dies, -
judgement on each one dead.

78. Full storehouses I saw
at Dives' sons':
now bear they the beggar's staff.
Such are riches;
as is the twinkling of an eye:
of friends they are most fickle.

79. A foolish man,
if he acquires
wealth or a woman's love,
pride grows within him,
but wisdom never:
he goes on more and more arrogant.

80. Then 'tis made manifest,
if of runes thou questionest him,
those to the high ones known,
which the great powers invented,
and the great talker painted,
that he had best hold silence.

81. At eve the day is to be praised,
a woman after she is burnt,
a sword after it is proved,
a maid after she is married,
ice after it has passed away,
beer after it is drunk.

82. In the wind one should hew wood,
in a breeze row out to sea,
in the dark talk with a lass:
many are the eyes of day.
In a ship voyages are to be made,

but a shield is for protection,
a sword for striking,
but a damsel for a kiss.

83. By the fire one should drink beer,
on the ice slide;
but a horse that is lean,
a sword that is rusty;
feed a horse at home,
but a dog at the farm.

84. In a maiden's words
no one should place faith,
nor in what a woman says;
for on a turning wheel
have their hearts been formed,
and guile in their breasts been laid;

85. in a creaking bow,
a burning flame,
a yawning wolf,
a chattering crow,
a grunting swine,
a rootless tree,
a waxing wave,
a boiling kettle,

86. a flying dart,
a falling billow,
a one night's ice,
a coiled serpent,
a woman's bed-talk,
or a broken sword,
a bear's play,
or a royal child,

87. a sick calf,
a self-willed thrall,
a flattering prophetess,
a corpse newly slain,
(a serene sky,
a laughing lord,
a barking dog,
and a harlot's grief);

88. an early sown field
let no one trust,
nor prematurely in a son:
weather rules the field,
and wit the son,
each of which is doubtful;

89. a brother's murderer,
though on the high road met,
a half-burnt house,
an over-swift horse,
(a horse is useless,
if a leg be broken),
no man is so confiding

as to trust any of these.

90. Such is the love of women,
who falsehood meditate,
as if one drove not rough-shod,
on slippery ice,
a spirited two-years old
and unbroken horse;
or as in a raging storm
a helmless ship is beaten;
or as if the halt were set to catch
a reindeer in the thawing fell.

91. Openly I now speak,
because I both sexes know:
unstable are men's minds towards women;
'tis then we speak most fair
when we most falsely think:
that deceives even the cautious.

92. Fair shall speak,
and money offer,
who would obtain a woman's love.
Praise the form
of a fair damsel;
he gets who courts her.

93. At love should no one
ever wonder
in another:
a beauteous countenance
oft captivates the wise,
which captivates not the foolish.

94. Let no one wonder at
another's folly,
it is the lot of many.
All-powerful desire
makes of the sons of men
fools even of the wise.

95. The mind only knows
what lies near the heart,
that alone is conscious of our affections.
No disease is worse
to a sensible man
than not to be content with himself.

96. That I experienced,
when in the reeds I sat,
awaiting my delight.
Body and soul to me
was that discreet maiden:
nevertheless I possess her not.

97. Billing's lass
on her couch I found,
sun-bright, sleeping.
A prince's joy

to me seemed naught,
if not with that form to live.

98. "Yet nearer eve
must thou, Odin, come,
if thou wilt talk the maiden over;
all will be disastrous,
unless we alone
are privy to such misdeed."

99. I returned,
thinking to love,
at her wise desire.
I thought
I should obtain
her whole heart and love.

100. When next I came
the bold warriors were
all awake,
with lights burning,
and bearing torches:
thus was the way to pleasure closed.

101. But at the approach of morn,
when again I came,
the household all was sleeping;
the good damsel's dog
alone I found
tied to the bed.

102. Many a fair maiden,
when rightly known,
towards men is fickle:
that I experienced,
when that discreet maiden I
strove to seduce:
contumely of every kind
that wily girl
heaped upon me;
nor of that damsel gained I aught.

103. At home let a man be cheerful,
and towards a guest liberal;
of wise conduct he should be,
of good memory and ready speech;
if much knowledge he desires,
he must often talk on good.

104. Fimbulfambi he is called
who little has to say:
such is the nature of the simple.

105. The old Jötun I sought;
now I am come back:
little got I there by silence;
in many words

I spoke to my advantage
in Suttung's halls.

106. Gunnlöd gave me,
on her golden seat,
a draught of the precious mead;
a bad recompense
I afterwards made her,
for her whole soul,
her fervent love.

107. Rati's mouth I caused
to make a space,
and to gnaw the rock;
over and under me
were the Jötun's ways:
thus I my head did peril.

108. Of a well-assumed form
I made good use:
few things fail the wise;
for Odhrærir
is now come up
to men's earthly dwellings.

109. 'Tis to me doubtful
that I could have come
from the Jötun's courts,
had not Gunnlöd aided me,
that good damsel,
over whom I laid my arm.

110. On the day following
came the Hrim-thursar,
to learn something of the High One,
in the High One's hall:
after Bölverk they inquired,
whether he with the gods were come,
or Suttung had destroyed him?

111. Odin, I believe,
a ring-oath gave.
Who in his faith will trust?
Suttung defrauded,
of his drink bereft,
and Gunnlöd made to weep!

112. Time 'tis to discourse
from the preacher's chair. -
By the well of Urd
I silent sat,
I saw and meditated,
I listened to men's words.

113. Of runes I heard discourse,
and of things divine,
nor of gravings were they silent,

nor of sage counsels,
at the High One's hall.
In the High One's hall.
I thus heard say:

114. I counsel thee, Loddfafnir,
to take advise:
thou wilt profit if thou takest it.
Rise not a night,
unless to explore,
or art compelled to go out.

115. I counsel thee, Loddfafnir,
to take advice,
thou wilt profit if thou takest it.
In an enchantress's embrace
thou mayest not sleep,
so that in her arms she clasp thee.

116. She will be the cause
that thou carest not
for Thing or prince's words;
food thou wilt shun
and human joys;
sorrowful wilt thou go to sleep.

117. I counsel thee, etc.
Another's wife
entice thou never
to secret converse.

118. I counsel thee, etc.
By fell or firth
if thou have to travel,
provide thee well with food.

119. I counsel thee, etc.
A bad man
let thou never
know thy misfortunes;
for from a bad man
thou never wilt obtain
a return for thy good will.

120. I saw mortally
wound a man
a wicked woman's words;
a false tongue
caused his death,
and most unrighteously.

121. I counsel thee, etc.
If thou knowest thou has a friend,
whom thou well canst trust,
go oft to visit him;
for with brushwood overgrown,
and with high grass,
is the way that no one treads.

122. I counsel thee, etc. -
A good man attract to thee
in pleasant converse;
and salutary speech learn while thou livest.

123. I counsel thee, etc.
With thy friend
be thou never
first to quarrel.
Care gnaws the heart,
if thou to no one canst
thy whole mind disclose.

124. I counsel thee, etc.
Words thou never
shouldst exchange
with a witless fool;

125. for from an ill-conditioned man
thou wilt never get
a return for good;
but a good man will
bring thee favour
by his praise.

126. There is a mingling of affection,
where one can tell
another all his mind.
Everything is better
than being with the deceitful.
He is not another's friend
who ever says as he says.

127. I counsel thee, etc.
Even in three words
quarrel not with a worse man:
often the better yields,
when the worse strikes.

128. I counsel thee, etc.
Be not a shoemaker,
nor a shaftmaker,
unless for thyself it be;
for a shoe if ill made,
or a shaft if crooked,
will call down evil on thee.

129. I counsel thee, etc.
Wherever of injury thou knowest,
regard that injury as thy own;
and give to thy foes no peace.

130. I counsel thee, etc.
Rejoiced at evil
be thou never;
but let good give thee pleasure.

131. I counsel thee, etc.
In a battle

look not up,
(like swine
the sons of men become)
that men may not fascinate thee.

132. If thou wilt induce a good woman
to pleasant converse,
thou must promise fair,
and hold to it;
no one turns from good if it can be got.

133. I enjoin thee to be wary,
but not over wary;
at drinking be thou most wary,
and with another's wife;
and thirdly,
that thieves delude thee not.

134. With insult or derision
treat thou never
a guest or wayfarer,
they often little know,
who sit within,
or what race they are who come.

135. Vices and virtues
the sons of mortals bear
in their breasts mingled;
no one is so good
that no failing attends him,
nor so bad as to be good for nothing.

136. At a hoary speaker
laugh thou never;
often is good that which the aged utter,
oft from a shriveled hide
discreet words issue;
from those whose skin is pendent
and decked with scars,
and who go tottering among the vile.

137. I counsel thee, etc.
Rail not at a guest,
nor from thy gate thrust him;
treat well the indigent;
they will speak well of thee.

138. Strong is the bar
that must be raised
to admit all.
Do thou give a penny,
or they will call down on thee
every ill in thy limbs.

139. I counsel thee, etc.
Wherever thou beer drinkest,
invoke to thee the power of earth;
for earth is good against drink,
fire for distempers,

the oak for constipation,
a corn-ear for sorcery
a hall for domestic strife.
In bitter hates invoke the moon;
the biter for bite-injuries is good;
but runes against calamity;
fluid let earth absorb.

Runatalsþátttr Óðins.

Odin's Rune-song.

140. I know that I hung,
on a wind-rocked tree,
nine whole nights,
with a spear wounded,
and to Odin offered,
myself to myself;
on that tree,
of which no one knows
from what root it springs.

141. Bread no one gave me,
nor a horn of drink,
downward I peered,
to runes applied myself,
wailing learnt them,
then fell down thence.

142. Potent songs nine
from the famed son I learned
of Bölthorn, Bestla's sire,
and a draught obtained
of the precious mead,
drawn from Odhrærir.

143. Then I began to bear fruit,
and to know many things,
to grow and well thrive:
word by word
I sought out words,
fact by fact
I sought out facts.

144. Runes thou wilt find,
and explained characters,
very large characters,
very potent characters,
which the great speaker depicted,
and the high powers formed,
and the powers' prince graved:

145. Odin among the Æsir,
but among the Alfar, Dáin,

and Dvalin for the dwarfs,
Ásvid for the Jötuns:
some I myself graved.

146. Knowest thou how to grave them?
knowest thou how to expound them?
knowest thou how to depict them?
knowest thou how to prove them?
knowest thou how to pray?
knowest thou how to offer?
knowest thou how to send?
knowest thou how to consume?

147. 'Tis better not to pray
than too much offer;
a gift ever looks to a return.
'Tis better not to send
than too much consume.
So Thund graved
before the origin of men,
where he ascended,
to whence he afterwards came.

148. Those songs I know
which the king's wife knows not
nor son of man.
Help the first is called,
for that will help thee
against strifes and cares.

149. For the second I know,
what the sons of men require,
who will as leeches live.

150. For the third I know,
if I have great need
to restrain my foes,
the weapons' edge I deaden:
of my adversaries
nor arms nor wiles harm aught.

151. For the forth I know,
if men place
bonds on my limbs,
I so sing
that I can walk;
the fetter starts from my feet,
and the manacle from my hands.

152. For the fifth I know,
I see a shot from a hostile hand,
a shaft flying amid the host,
so swift it cannot fly
that I cannot arrest it,
if only I get sight of it.

153. For the sixth I know,
if one wounds me
with a green tree's roots;
also if a man
declares hatred to me,
harm shall consume them sooner than me.

154. For the seventh I know,
if a lofty house I see
blaze o'er its inmates,
so furiously it shall not burn
that I cannot save it.
That song I can sing.

155. For the eighth I know,
what to all is
useful to learn:
where hatred grows
among the sons of men -
that I can quickly assuage.

156. For the ninth I know,
if I stand in need
my bark on the water to save,
I can the wind
on the waves allay,
and the sea lull.

157. For the tenth I know,
if I see troll-wives
sporting in air,
I can so operate
that they will forsake
their own forms,
and their own minds.

158. For the eleventh I know,
if I have to lead
my ancient friends to battle,
under their shields I sing,
and with power they go
safe to the fight,
safe from the fight;
safe on every side they go.

159. For the twelfth I know,
if on a tree I see
a corpse swinging from a halter,
I can so grave
and in runes depict,
that the man shall walk,
and with me converse.

160. For the thirteenth I know,
if on a young man
I sprinkle water,
he shall not fall,
though he into battle come:

that man shall not sink before swords.

161. For the fourteenth I know,
if in the society of men
I have to enumerate the gods,
Æsir and Alfar,
I know the distinctions of all.
This few unskilled can do.

162. For the fifteenth I know
what the dwarf Thiodreyrir sang
before Delling's doors.
Strength he sang to the Æsir,
and to the Alfar prosperity,
wisdom to Hroptatýr.

163. For the sixteenth I know,
if a modest maiden's favour and affection
I desire to possess,
the soul I change
of the white-armed damsel,
and wholly turn her mind.

164. For the seventeenth I know,
that that young maiden will
reluctantly avoid me.
These songs, Loddfafnir!
thou wilt long have lacked;
yet it may be good if thou understandest them,
profitable if thou learnest them.

165. For the eighteenth I know
that which I never teach
to maid or wife of man,
(all is better
what one only knows.
This is the closing of the songs)
save her alone
who clasps me in her arms,
or is my sister.

166. Now are sung the
High-one's songs,
in the High-one's hall,
to the sons of men all-useful,
but useless to the Jötun's sons.
Hail to him who has sung them!

Hail to him who knows them!
May he profit who has learnt them!
Hail to those who have listened to them!