

MIMIR'S HEAD AND ODIN'S EYE

In Jotunheim, the home of the giants, is Mimir's well. It bubbles up from deep in the ground, and it feeds Yggdrasil, the world-tree. Mimir, the wise one, the guardian of memory, knows many things. His well is wisdom, and when the world was young he would drink every morning from the well, by dipping the horn known as the Gjallerhorn into the water and draining it.

Long, long ago, when the worlds were young, Odin put on his long cloak and his hat, and in the guise of a wanderer he traveled through the land of the giants, risking his life to get to Mimir, to seek wisdom.

"One drink from the water of your well, Uncle Mimir," said Odin. "That is all I ask for."

Mimir shook his head. Nobody drank from the well but Mimir himself. He said nothing: seldom do those who are silent make mistakes.

"I am your nephew," said Odin. "My mother, Bestla, was your sister."

"That is not enough," said Mimir.

"One drink. With a drink from your well, Mimir, I will be wise. Name your price."

"Your eye is my price," said Mimir. "Your eye in the pool."

Odin did not ask if he was joking. The journey through giant country to get to Mimir's well had been long and dangerous. Odin

had been willing to risk his life to get there. He was willing to do more than that for the wisdom he sought.

Odin's face was set.

"Give me a knife," was all he said.

After he had done what was needful, he placed his eye carefully in the pool. It stared up at him through the water. Odin filled the Gjallerhorn with water from Mimir's pool, and he lifted it to his lips. The water was cold. He drained it down. Wisdom flooded into him. He saw farther and more clearly with his one eye than he ever had with two.

Thereafter Odin was given other names: Blindr, they called him, the blind god, and Hoarr, the one-eyed, and Baleyg, the flaming-eyed one.

Odin's eye remains in Mimir's well, preserved by the waters that feed the world ash, seeing nothing, seeing everything.

Time passed. When the war between the Aesir and the Vanir was ending and they were exchanging warriors and chiefs, Odin sent Mimir to the Vanir as an adviser to the Aesir god Hoenir, who would be the new chief of the Vanir.

Hoenir was tall and good-looking, and he looked like a king. When Mimir was with him to advise him, Hoenir also spoke like a king and made wise decisions. But when Mimir was not with him, Hoenir seemed unable to come to a decision, and the Vanir soon tired of this. They took their revenge, not on Hoenir but on Mimir: they cut off Mimir's head and sent it to Odin.

Odin was not angry. He rubbed Mimir's head with certain herbs to prevent it from rotting, and he chanted charms and incantations over it, for he did not wish Mimir's knowledge to be lost. Soon enough Mimir opened his eyes and spoke to him. Mimir's advice was good, as it was always good.

Odin took Mimir's head back to the well beneath the world-tree, and he placed it there, beside his eye, in the waters of knowledge of the future and of the past.

Odin gave the Gjallerhorn to Heimdall, watchman of the gods. On the day the Gjallerhorn is blown, it will wake the gods, no matter where they are, no matter how deeply they sleep.

Heimdall will blow the Gjallerhorn only once, at the end of all things, at Ragnarok.