

# **Voluspa (The Song Of The Sybil)**

Translated by W H Auden and P B Taylor



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Heidi men call me when their homes I visit,  
A far seeing Volva, wise in talismans.  
Caster of spells, cunning in magic.  
To wicked women welcome always.  
    Arm rings and necklaces, Odhinn you gave me  
To learn my lore, to learn my magic:  
Wider and wider through all worlds I see.  
    Outside I sat by myself when you came,  
Terror of the gods, and gazed in my eyes.  
What do you ask of me? Why tempt me?  
Odhinn, I know where your eye is concealed,  
Hidden away in the well of Mimir:  
Mimir each morning his mead drinks  
From Valfather's pledge. Well would you know more?  
    Of Heimdal too and his horn I know.  
Hidden under the holy tree  
Down on it pours a precious stream from Valfather's pledge  
Well would you know more?  
    Silence I ask of the sacred folk,  
Silence of the kith and kin of Heimdal:  
At your will Valfather, I shall well relate  
The old songs of men I remember best.  
    I tell of giants from times forgotten.  
Those who fed me in former days:  
Nine worlds I can reckon, nine roots of the tree.  
The wonderful ash, way under the ground  
    When Ymir lived long ago  
Was no sand or sea, no surging waves.  
Nowhere was there earth nor heaven above.  
Bur a grinning gap and grass nowhere.  
    The sons of Bur then built up the lands.  
Moulded in magnificence middle-Earth:  
Sun stared from the south on the stones of their hall,  
From the ground there sprouted green leeks.  
    Sun turned from the south, sister of Moon,  
Her right arm rested on the rim of Heaven;  
She had no inkling where her hall was,  
Nor Moon a notion of what might he had,  
The planets knew not where their places were.  
    The high gods gathered in council  
In their hall of judgement. all the rulers:  
To Night and to Nightfall their names gave,  
The Morning they named and the Mid-Day,

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Mid–Winter, Mid–Summer, for the assigning of years.

At Ida's Field the Aesir met:

Temple and altar they timbered and raised,  
Set up a forge to smithy treasures,  
Tongs they fashioned and tools wrought;  
Played chess in the court and cheerful were;  
Gold they lacked not, the gleaming metal  
Then came three, the Thurs maidens,  
Rejoicing in their strength, from Giant–home.

The high Gods gathered in council.

In their hall of judgement: Who of the dwarves  
Should mould man by master craft  
From Brimir's blood and Blain' s limbs?

Motsognir was their mighty ruler,  
Greatest of dwarves, and Durin after him :  
The dwarves did as Durin directed,  
Many man forms made from the earth.

Nyi and Nidi, Nordri, Sudri, Austri and Vestri, Althjof, Dvalin, Bivor,  
Bavor Bombur, Nori, An and Anar, Ai, Mjodvitnir, Veignr and Gandalf,  
Vindalf, Thorin, Thrór and Thrain, Thekkur, Litur, Vitur, Nar and Nyradur,  
Fili, Kili, Fundin, Nali Hefti, Vili, Hanar, Sviur, Billing, Bruni, Bildur,  
and Buri, Frar, Hornbori Fraegur, Loni, Aurvangur, Jari, Eikinskjalldi:  
(All Durin's folk I have duly named,)

I must tell of the dwarves in Dvalin' s host;  
Like lions they were in Lofar's time:  
In Juravale's marsh they made their dwelling,  
From their Stone hall set out on journeys,

There was Draupnir and Dolgthrasir, Har, Haugspori, Hlevangur, Gloi, Dori,  
Ori, Dufur, Andvari, Skirvir, Virvir Skafidur, Ai, Alf and Yngvi,  
Eikinskjalldi, Fjalar and Frosti, Finn and Ginnar: Men will remember while  
men live

The long line of Lofar's forbears.

Then from the host three came,  
Great, merciful, from the God's home:  
Ash and Elm on earth they found,  
Faint, feeble, with no fate assigned them  
Breath they had not, nor blood nor senses,  
Nor language possessed, nor life–hue:  
Odhinn gave them breath, Haenir senses,  
Blood and life hue Lothur gave.

I know an ash tree, named Yggdrasil:  
Sparkling showers are shed on its leaves  
That drip dew, into the dales below,  
By Urd's well it waves evergreen,  
Stands over that still pool,  
Near it a bower whence now there come  
The Fate Maidens, first Urd,  
Skuld second, scorer of runes,  
Then Verdandi, third of the Norns:  
The laws that determine the lives of men  
They fixed forever and their fate sealed.

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The first war in the world I well remember,  
When Gullveig was spitted on spear-points  
And burned in the hall of the high god:  
Thrice burned, thrice reborn,  
Often laid low, she lives yet,

The gods hastened to their hall of judgement,  
Sat in council to discover who  
Had tainted all the air with corruption  
And Odhinn's maid offered to the giants,  
At the host Odhinn hurled his spear  
In the first world-battle; broken was the plankwall  
Of the gods fortress: the fierce Vanes  
Caused war to occur in the fields.

The gods hastened to their hall of judgement,  
Sat in council to discover who  
Had tainted all the air with corruption  
And Odhinn's maid offered to the giants.

One Thorr felled in his fierce rage;  
Seldom he sits when of such he hears:  
Oaths were broken, binding vows,  
Solemn agreements sworn between them.

Valkyries I saw, coming from afar,  
Eagerly riding to aid the Goths;  
Skuld bore one shield, Skogul another  
Gunn, Hild, Gondul and Spearskogul:  
Duly have I named the daughters of Odhinn,  
The valiant riders the Valkyries.

Baldur I saw the bleeding God,  
His fate still hidden, Odhinn's Son:  
Tall on the plain a plant grew,  
A slender marvel, the mistletoe.

From that fair shrub, shot by Hodur,  
Flew the fatal dart that felled the god, .  
But Baldur's brother was born soon after:  
Though one night old, Odhinn's Son  
Took a vow to avenge that death.

His hands he washed not nor his hair combed .  
Till Baldur's bane was borne to the pyre:,  
Deadly the bow drawn by Vali,  
The strong string of stretched gut,  
But Frigga wept in Fensalir  
For the woe of Valhalla. Well, would you know more?

I see one in bonds by the boiling springs;  
Like Loki he looks, loathsome to view:  
There Sigyn sits, sad by her husband,  
In woe by her man. Well would you know more?

From the east through Venom Valley runs  
Over jagged rocks the River Gruesome.  
North, in Darkdale, stands the dwelling place  
Of Sindri's kin, covered with gold;  
A hall also in Everfrost,

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The banquet hall of Brimir the giant.

A third I see, that no sunlight reaches,  
On Dead Man's Shore: the doors face northward,  
Through its smoke vent venom drips,  
Serpent skins enskein that hall.

Men wade there tormented by the stream,  
Vile murderers, men forsworn  
And artful seducers of other mens wives:  
Nidhogg sucks blood from the bodies of the dead  
The wolf rends them. Well, would you know more?

In the east dwells a crone, in Ironwood:  
The brood of Fenris are bred there  
Wolf-monsters, one of whom  
Eventually shall devour the sun.

The giants watchman, joyful Eggthur  
Sits on his howe and harps well:  
The red cock, called All-Knower  
Boldly crows from Birdwood.

Goldencomb to the gods crows  
Who wakes the warriors in Valhalla:  
A soot red hen also calls  
From Hel's hall, deep under the ground.

Loud howls Garm before Gniphellir,  
Bursting his fetters, Fenris runs:  
Further in the future afar I behold  
The twilight of the gods who gave victory.

Brother shall strike brother and both fall,  
Sisters' sons defiled with incest;  
Evil be on earth, an age of whoredom,  
Of sharp sword-play and shields clashing,  
A wind-age, a wolf-age till the world ruins:  
No man to another shall mercy show.

The waters are troubled, the waves surge up:  
Announcing now the knell of Fate,  
Heimdall winds his horn aloft,  
On Hel's road all men tremble

Yggdrasil trembles, the towering ash  
Groans in woe; the wolf is loose:  
Odhinn speaks with the head of Mimir  
Before he is swallowed by Surt's kin.

From the east drives Hrym, lifts up his shield  
The squamous serpent squirms with rage  
The great worm with the waves contending  
The pale-beaked eagle pecks at the dead,  
Shouting for joy: the ship Naglfar

Sails out from the east, at its helm Loki  
With the children of darkness, the doom-bringers  
Offspring of monsters, allies of the wolf,  
All who Byleists's brother follow.

What of the gods? What of the elves?  
Gianthome groans the gods are in council



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The dwarves grieve before their door of stone,  
Masters of walls. Well, would you know more?

Surt with the bane of branches comes  
From the south, on his sword the sun of the Valgods,  
Craggs topple, the crone falls headlong,  
Men tread Hel's road, the Heavens split open.

A further woe falls upon Hlin  
As Odhinn comes forth to fight the wolf;  
The killer of Beli battles with Surt:  
Now shall fall Frigga's beloved.

Now valiant comes Valfather's son,  
Vidar, to vie with Valdyr in battle,  
Plunges his sword into the son of Hvedrung,  
Avenging his father with a fell thrust.

Now the son of Hlodyn and Odhinn comes  
To fight with Fenris; fiercest of warriors  
He mauls in his rage all Middle-Earth;  
Men in fear all flee their homesteads;  
Nine paces back steps Bur's son  
Retreats from the worm of taunts unafraid.

Now death is the portion of doomed men,  
Red with blood the buildings of gods,  
The sun turns black in the summer after,  
Winds whine. Well, would you know more?

Earth sinks in the sea, the sun turns black,  
Cast down from Heaven are the hot stars,  
Fumes reek, into flames burst,  
The sky itself is scorched with fire.

I see Earth rising a second time  
Out of the foam, fair and green;  
Down from the fells fish to capture,  
Wings the eagle; waters flow.

At Ida's Field the Aesir meet:  
They remember the worm of Middle-Earth,  
Ponder again the great twilight  
And the ancient runes of the high god  
Boards shall be found of a beauty to wonder at,  
Boards of gold in the grass long after,  
The chess boards they owned in the olden days,

Unsown acres shall harvests bear,  
Evil be abolished, Baldur return  
And Hropt's hall with Hod rebuild,  
Wise gods. Well, would you know more?

Haenir shall wield the wand of prophecy,  
The sons two brothers set up their dwelling  
In wide Windhome. Well, would you know more?

Fairer than sunlight, I see a hall  
A hall thatched with gold in Gimle:  
Kind Lords shall live there in delight for ever.

Now rides the Strong One to Rainbow Door,  
Powerful from heaven, the All-Ruler:

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From the depths below a drake comes flying  
The dark dragon from Darkfell,  
Bears on his opinions the bodies of men,  
Soars overhead I sink now