[](https://content.artofmanliness.com/uploads/2016/01/vik.jpg)

***Viking Aphorisms!***

The 80 Wisdom Sayings of the Vikings

*Editor’s note: Over 1,000 years old, the Hávamál (“Sayings of the High One”) is a series of Old Norse poems from the Viking age. Stanzas 1-80 include a collection of proverbs and wisdom sayings that are attributed to*[*the god Odin*](http://www.artofmanliness.com/2015/02/23/viking-mythology-odin/)*. The maxims deal with the rules of being a guest and showing hospitality — behaviors that for the Vikings were more than a matter of etiquette, but of honor. They also concern general counsels for how we should conduct ourselves and live worthily.*

**For each of three that you have, tell us:**

**1- What does this mean?**

**2- Why did they value this saying?**

**3- Give us an example of this saying in**

**today’s world.**

**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 haste 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,  
wheo’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 wary guest  
who to refection comes,  
keeps a cautious silence,  
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 burden  
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 indignant.**

**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 then 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 knows 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 too 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 woulds’t 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 sand-grains,  
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 one 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, –  
judgment 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.**