

The Runes: A Human Journey

by Kari C. Tauring

edited by David de Young

The Runes: A Human Journey

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Kari Tauring

4041 43rd Ave. South

Minneapolis, MN 55406 USA

karitauring@yahoo.com

www.karitauring.com

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Photo by Karin Odell

Making Runes

Kari started making runes and stavs out of buckthorn when Minneapolis declared war on the invasive hard wood. Honoring the trees this way gives them a sacred life and puts us in touch with the process of life, death and re-birth. She also uses other woods that have fallen freely such as oak, maple, iron wood, plum and birch.

Introduction by David de Young

My first encounter with the runes was in the late 1990s, and after working with my first set for a while, I was excited to find the runes cut a deeper swathe for me than other forms of divination I had studied. They seemed to resonate with an ancient tone that contributed to a new found appreciation of archetypal values – too often forgotten in modern times – that are the bedrock of a successful human community.

Many books on runes I had read took an historical approach. Others took what struck me as an over-simplified cut, providing information without mythological context. I sought a book that could be used for divination, but which could also be read to develop a deeper understanding of the spiritual path, or “red road” in the Native American tradition, a life of truth, friendship, respect for the self and others, and community service.

My friend and fellow musician Kari Tauring had given me readings which revealed the historical, mythic and magickal meanings of the runes. Kari’s readings seemed born of an ancient understanding, yet had up-to-the-minute applicability. I asked her if she would consider writing down what she knew, and the result is the book you now have in your hands.

The approach we took to creating this book was of my own devising. Kari pulled a rune daily and wrote about it as it seemed to apply to the day it was selected. After her first series of pulls, my initial editing followed the same process: I pulled a rune and applied my focus to it on that particular day. This methodology caused this book to come alive for us long before it was complete. As I worked through issues in my life during the spring of 2006 and through the many subsequent drafts of each rune entry, I felt I was harnessing the power of all the runes at once, like a reading that ultimately included the runes of all three aetts.

When we placed the edited rune entries into the Elder Futhark order we follow in this text, I had an epiphany. Though the book had been written in seemingly random order, the runes by their very nature were still inclined to fall into their Futhark sequence. The relationships among

them became clear, and I saw how they flowed one to the next almost as if I had figured it out for myself.

In the entry for Mannaz (also called Mannheim), Kari writes: “When you draw Mannheim, look around to see who is supporting you and in what ways they are doing so. Find the community network that feeds your highest good, and see what you can contribute to it.” This book is both a product of community and, we hope, a contribution to it. If you see yourself in any of the entries that follow, it is because your stories and traditions and those of your loved ones, past and present, had a hand in its creation as well.

Minneapolis, August, 2006

Preface by Kari Tauring

Asking where the runes came from is a bit like asking in what year did Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden or if Odin hung from the World Tree. Still, they are connected questions.

As visual symbols, the Elder Futhark of Germanic Runes shares characteristics with the Hungarian rune alphabet, the Etruscan rune alphabet, and the rune alphabet of the Phoenicians, a trading culture whose influence and language ranged from the middle east to Sweden, to possibly even Ohio in the USA! The Phoenicians are credited with inventing the phonemic alphabet, the ship's keel, the oar, and indigo dye.

The similarities between these symbol systems may have been partly the result of the constraints of the materials – clay, wood, bone, metal – upon which they were inscribed. But also, the shapes tend to echo similar natural landscapes of lakes, rivers, ice, cattle, horses, and trees.

The Germanic tribes were reportedly using rune symbols as early as the 40s BC and used them well into the end of the Viking era (1060s AD). The concepts behind the runes arose from cultures that honored herds of cattle; bones and relics have been found dating to 30,000 BC and public art in France and Spain as old as 16,000 years has been discovered that illustrates these concepts. The runes were also a product of the cultures of the Northern continent which held Birch as sacred, and cultures that honor hard work and community. The concepts of the runes tell a story of unity and migration, individuation and revelation. They provide us with a roadmap that helps us to find our way back to one another. All cultures and the stories they tell are connected at the core by this psychological truth: humans are always in relationship to each other.

While the differences between cultures have been used to divide us, this book attempts to weave us back together. To this end, I am using the Elder Futhark, the 24 letters in their given order. The Elder Futhark is considered by scholars to be the earliest complete rune alphabet on written record.

The influence of Christianity on the interpretation of the runes and mythology has been profound. After the emperor Theodosius of Rome initiated a ban on pagan practices including alphabets in 389 A.D. rune knowledge had to be carried on for a time as an oral tradition. Runic script went underground, practiced only by secret societies. Those caught attempting to perpetuate rune lore in public were subject to punishment by death (or worse). Many of the oppressed fled persecution, and allegedly, the runes were even taken as far away as Minnesota in the 1300s AD. Knowledge, stories, cultural values and spiritual traditions forced underground due to persecution of their practitioners tend to become distorted and to reflect the dysfunction of oppression.

By the same token, I relate to the runes through the filter of female. Through my work in the arts, I have attempted to present balanced relationships between our male and female sides, our humanity and our divinity, and our need for community. I also relate these stories as a mother, attempting to teach this knowledge to the next generation with the distortions and dysfunctions removed.

The runes are symbols with meanings that exist deep within our ancient memory. They are programmed into our genetic code, remembered by our reptilian brains and flow in our very blood. They have always been, and will always be relevant.

Minneapolis, March 2007

Freyr or Freya's Aett

1. Fehu



Fehu, the domesticated cow. The first rune in the alphabet. The shape of Fehu begins with Isa, the straight line, Ice (the rune of slow growth and contemplation). Then come two lines looking up to the right, like a modern day F with the lines raised upwards instead of extending perpendicularly. It reminds me of cow horns looking up to the sky. Fehu is a lower chakra rune that speaks of basic needs, rootedness, and connection to the earth.

Who put the F in Futhark? Freya, Queen of the Vanir did! The first row of eight runes is often called Freya's Aett (though I have seen it as Freyr's aett in more masculine interpretations of the runes.) As Freyr and Freya are twin god/goddess pair, they can be looked at metaphorically as the left and right brains working in tandem. The Vanir were the agricultural and herding deities who came before the Aesir to the Northlands. They were matrifocal in nature and dealt with the nurturing of the people as well as the accumulation of wealth that comes with being a settled culture. In this association Fehu also means gold, a metal precious to Freya, but one which also comes at a price.

Many people think Fehu means wealth, and they write it on a pendant in hopes of accumulating money. Not so easy! Domesticated cows are a lot of work. They must be fed, watered and milked two times a day (at the same time) every day. You also need to store up hay for their winter fodder, and you have to help them birth their calves. You really have to

be on it! My Norwegian ancestors had to do all this on a 45 degree angle. If you were lucky enough to have land and fortunate enough to own cows, the daily and nightly diligence of keeping them alive and productive was more than full time work (not unlike mothering).

Keeping cows might also require the help of the fairy creatures. Freya's women were the Huldre, beautiful, alluring and magical women with cows' tails. They taught humans how to keep cows, breed them, herd them, and how to churn milk and make butter. They kept cleaner houses than human women, and human men were often attracted to them. The Huldre men and Tomte or Nisse would often live in a farmhouse barn or out building. They helped with chores and were rewarded with food the farmers would leave out for them at night.

What this means for modern times is that you should write this rune on your checkbook and savings account statements to remind yourself to keep careful track of what you are putting in, what you are taking out, and the quality of your investments. As I write this, I am putting together my tax paperwork. I am also looking at the past year trying to assess which jobs were consistently fruitful. What changes did I make from following last year's goals, and which of those were correct? What changes will I make this next year? Where will I focus my energy in order to reap the highest financial gain with the most efficiency? What new associations should I create, or what changes in relationships are occurring or need to happen?

To draw the rune Fehu means we should pay attention to the source of our nourishment. Only through careful husbandry will our wealth increase. Diligence, cleverness, and hard work are the things that create the wealth of this rune. Sometimes we are in the position of cowherd, and sometimes this rune represents our own selves as the cow. Sometimes we are helpless and look heavenward for help in meeting our needs. If this is the case, we should know that it's ok to be cared for. The cow, well-nurtured, creates an abundance of milk that can sustain the tribe even in the darkest of winters. So even as the cow, our work benefits others. Reversals of this rune simply mean that more attention and diligence should be paid to your finances. Or perhaps you are about to make a bad investment.

The Mother principle is the beginning of life. Fehu is the source of nourishment, and the beginning of the runes. The Mother is also the source of the runes because the runes come from nature and are connected with women's ways and women's blood. Odin learned of the runes from the Norns, Freya, and his wife Frigg. All the women had them in their blood but didn't need to write them down. Odin, the left brain or male side of the psyche, wrote them down.

2. Uruz



Ur, Uruz, the wild ox, aurochs. The second rune in the alphabet. Ur carries the sound for U and comes after Fehu, the domestic cow, and before Thorn, the rune which represents the Giants and the hammer of Thor. Ur is also a lower chakra rune. In the eastern system of energy where seven wheels relate to points on our spines, the lower chakras are dark, red, and fiery and connected to sexuality, willfulness, and basic needs. Ur speaks to these qualities.

Many consider Ur to be a fire rune, and it is probably one of the most ancient symbols. If you point your thumb and pointer finger towards earth they make the shape of Ur. Before domestic cows were introduced, wild ox or aurochs roamed the hills and plains of Scandinavia and were an incredible source of sustenance, just as Bison were to Native Americans. It was a group effort to take down one of these creatures, and warrior hunters often came close to death in the process. What a thrill! It required courage, commitment, passion, and a strong will, other energies of this rune. An equally important lesson is that the aurochs were hunted to extinction by modern men, as the Bison nearly were. Too much fire in the belly can be consuming. Consequences can be tragic if this energy stays too long.

If you have seen deer or horses running freely over the fields, you sense their beauty, grace, and freedom. Ur is also about those qualities. It can help artists with their creative fire. It can help lovers with their lower

chakra connections. It can help mothers understand their toddlers and teenagers. Toddlers and teenagers share the common psychological state, “push me, pull you.” They cling to the “feed me, love me, do for me” of Fehu, the domestic cow, while exploring the independence, freedom and passion of Ur, the creator ox. Where Fehu is willing, Uruz is *willful*. Fehu willingly submits to the attendance of the Mother while Uruz bucks willfully against it and may charge out of the house and slam the door. There are times in our lives when we need the fire of willfulness to draw boundaries, to make the final push to finish a project, or to create art. The balance of these energies is in Thorn.

There was a wild ox named Audhumla at the beginning of creation. Her udders dispensed the rivers of milk that fed the giant Ymir from whose sweat and body came the other giants. She licked the salty ice of the cosmos and uncovered a man, Buri, who married the giant Bestla. They had three sons, one of whom was Odin. The cow is at the center of many mythologies that came out of the Indus Valley. There is a deep and great respect for the cow, domestic or wild, in many cultures around the world. Ur takes us to the beginning of time, the formation of the Milky Way, and calls us into deep respect for the essence of creation.

Ur reversed generally indicates that one’s life is not being lived passionately and that changes need to be made. For a time, it is fine to bear down and work without passion, but eventually that can douse the fire in the belly. Humans need to love their jobs, their work, their daily lives. I find American culture preaches tolerance for oppressive, “dead end,” passionless lives. It helps marketing and sales if people are unhappy, oppressed, and dispassionate because it’s a lot harder to sell things to people who are happy and fulfilled. On a cultural level, individuals need more Ur, more passion for what they are doing in the world. In order for this to happen, Fehu must be available to all, as our basic domestic needs must be met first if we are to find the bravery for individual passions. American culture, as pictured in the advertisements, however, needs less Ur. An excess of this rune can lead to self-indulgence, narcissism, and over consumption. Ur is the rune that inspires, but not the rune that manifests or completes. It is significant that Ur is followed by Thorn, as Thorn presents the paths of discernment and careful decision making.

3. Thorn



Thorn, Thurisaz, the rune of Giants according to the rune poem, and the rune of destruction. Thorn is also the rune of Thor and his hammer Mjølfnir, the gavel that sounds after judgment is made. It carries the sound Th. As we grow through the Futhark from the docile domestic cow to the wild ox, Thorn confronts us with our first opportunity to choose. It represents the dawning of our conscience and ability to discern right from wrong. The god Thor, the hammer wielder, presided over just causes and righteous decision making. Thor was most beloved of the Scandinavians. He was the working man's god. The symbol of his hammer was found in mints alongside the new Christian cross (which turns out to be a rune too, Gifu) for centuries after the old gods had been banned in Scandinavia. The symbol is found today in jewelry shops everywhere.

Thorn's shape is Isa, the ice rune, drawn along the mouth of Kenaz reversed. This suggests that we have enough choices in front of us and it is time to strike a path, to choose one way and go. Thorn suggests that we may seek aid in making the right decisions at this time, and that we are assured of support from the gods, Thor in particular. There is a kind of poise in Thorn. The shape reminds me of stork legs, or my own legs when I rest one upon the other in a V shape like this rune. It asks us to take a moment of contemplation and evaluation, and then to strike out. The road will be clearly marked if we keep in mind what are good choices for us and what are not good choices. Thorn demands discernment.

The shape of Thorn also reminds me of an ax, a tool that benefits my life every day since my family heats our home primarily with wood. Our ancestors would have relied on this tool for their very lives. Remember, the worst injuries come from a dull blade. The sharpest ax is the best ax, and decisiveness and commitment to the cut is imperative in safety and effectiveness. This same understanding translates metaphorically to the decisions we make in our lives. Sharp, clear, simple and committed are the qualities we can evoke with the Thorn rune.

When we draw this rune, it means we face a choice. Sometimes this choice may seem blurry and confusing. One way to clarify things is to make an age-old list of pros and cons. Sometimes Thorn wants us to understand the concept of Universal Law or “Crow’s Law” in Native American tradition. In Scandinavia, Universal law is known as *orlag*, the fabric of individual destiny. The Norns take care of each person’s *orlag*, and Thor dispenses justice accordingly. The law of the Universe supersedes human law. Sometimes Universal Law and human law don’t match up. But we must always yield to Universal Law. The choices we make each day send out waves to the rest of the world, which are represented in the next rune, Ansuz.

Thorn calls up the destructive nature of the Giants in the rune poem. The first life in the Universe was the Giant Ymir. It was from Ymir’s sweat that Odin’s parents were born. And Odin and his brothers killed their grandfather, creating the nine worlds from his body. This is the sort of creation from destruction that every mythological system describes in one way or another. The Frost Giants become the doom of gods and men at Ragnarok (the Nordic Armageddon) when they come to avenge Ymir. Worlds end and collapse, the world tree burns, but new worlds are born. This too is Crow’s Law, the law of the Universe, the law of contraction and expansion, of death and rebirth. It is up to us to see where we and our choices fall in the cycle of life. Thorn helps us to make the decisions that benefit our highest path.

4. Ansuz



Ansuz, Aos, mouth or OS, as in mouth of the river, or the mouth of the god. I know this rune! It's the second letter of my name, A. You find Ansuz when you look at the trees. The shape is Isa, the straight line, then a line like half an arrow tip from the top (North), slanting to the Southeast. Then there is another line beneath. The shape is opposite Fehu (the cow's) shape. While the cow's horns are raised to the sky in expectation, Ansuz's horns are bent downwards in meditation or supplication. Ansuz has a prayerful look. But it is an active contemplation, an ever flowing and changing understanding, like a river.

The three roots of the world tree end in the three wellsprings, Urdsbrunner, Mimirsbrunner, and Hvergalmir. Hvergalmir is the headwater of the rivers. The rivers flow and empty into greater bodies of water at their mouths. Many people perceive the river as the Yang (active) aspect of water. It flows from the well of Yin (passive) and out into the Yang of the river, emptying into the Yin of the womb-like lake, sea or ocean, creating the mouth of the river.

The river has always been a place of worship. As the locations of ancient sacrifices to Christian baptisms, the waters of the river held power. Springing up from deep in the earth, they flow and swell until they empty into the lakes, oceans and seas of the world. Rivers are a major source for food and water essential to life, cleanliness, transportation, commerce and trade. Communities tend to emerge alongside rivers. Cleanliness of

our rivers is key to the health and survival of our whole ecosystem. I live by the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. The water is dirty and polluted, far from drinkable. What finally empties out of the mouth in the Gulf of Mexico does not contribute to the greater good and health of the planet and her creatures. But the only way to clean the river is at its source, by removing pollutants and polluters. Only then can you work your way down.

When you draw Ansuz, first ask: what is the source of the issue, question, or creative problem you face? Then ask: is what I spew out of the mouth of *my* river in alignment with its source? Sometimes our emotions are a composite of many other emotions whose source is far removed from the trigger of our current emotional state. Water is emotions, and Ansuz is a water rune like Laguz (lake), Isa (ice), and Hagal (hail.) It asks us to find the source of our being and thereby the path of our life's journey. Ansuz is the beginning of things. The rune that comes before Ansuz is Thorn, the decision maker, which represents confrontation with our source. Then comes Ansuz, the contemplation of our choice and path. Next is Rad, the wheel, the journeyman's rune. If we have moved through the order of our runes wisely, we should be ready for that long journey of our life's work.

As the mouth of god, Ansuz suggests that individual truth and wisdom lies within a greater context of Universal or Divine Truth. How do these truths align and how do they spill out into and mix with the larger body of wisdom, the sea? Knowledge of the source of things is within your understanding. Many people believe Ansuz presages some advisement by persons older or wiser, and it's always good to look around for wise people who can guide you. It also asks you to pray, even in its visual aspect. Ultimately, each of us knows why we are here on earth at this time. Each of us knows "god's highest will and purpose for our lives." If we but still our Thorn-like questioning and bend our heads to listen, we will perceive the source of our being.

In Tai Chi, they say the bubbling wells are at the bottoms of our feet, and we need to keep our feet open to receive that energy. That too is the power of Ansuz. We can walk quietly in power, drawing up energy from the bubbling wells to create a flow of chi through our bodies and out into the universe. Sometimes Ansuz reminds me to do chi work. As I move,

my mind quiets, my bodies align, my energy flows with the energy of creation and I become one with my world. Then I can touch the source of my being and find that the source of my being is one with the divine!

Ansuz also asks us to listen and take care of the words we speak. The mouth is the breath's door, and our words create reality. This rune warns us to watch what we say and how we say it. As Masaru Emoto [www.masaru-emoto.net] writes in his book about water crystals, our words effect how water crystals form and develop. Our aspirations affect reality in subtle and profound ways. The Hebrew Bible says that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. God is a word. The Hopi creation story talks about Thought Woman who thinks the world into being. Thought and word are the two things that make us human and divine at once. Humans think things into being too! Hypochondriacs create illness. Optimists create opportunities. Ansuz wants to know if your thoughts and words are clean, clear, and aligned. Are you creating a life from the source of your divinity, or are you creating a life out of projected fears?

5. Rad



Rad, Raitho, wheel, journey. Rad carries the sound R. Once we understand the source of our beings from Ansuz, the mouth of god, we must take this understanding into the world and try it out. Rad is the journeyman’s rune. To me as a musician, this rune represents the lessons learned on the road. Once we have learned our instruments, it’s time to sharpen our chops. This rune tests us. After this journey comes Kenaz, the understanding and controlled torch of our craft. This excellence can only come after we have “paid our dues” so to speak.

A rune poem says, “The journey is long and hard but the horse is swift and sure.” Like Ehwaz, the horse rune, Rad is a rune of change. But where we are bound to the horse as the primary mover in Ehwaz, Rad is the wagon wheel. We can’t make the shift completely on our own and are once removed from the source of movement. We are drawn forward by the gods, by circumstances, and by our own dedication to learning the lessons of the journey. This journey is more difficult and perhaps more cumbersome. The changes involved may also be slower to come. Rad is a rune of personal growth and movement.

The wheel is an amazing invention. We can carry more things and people across the land if we have a wagon or chariot. Yet, we are bound to using roadways where we are subject to mud, land slides, felled trees, and bandits who prey on our slow pace. And if we should break a wheel, we may find ourselves not moving at all. Rad may suggest we ask ourselves,

how prepared are we for this journey? How certain are we that we need to take it? How dedicated are we? What vehicle have we chosen to carry our life's work? Rad asks that we examine the relationship to the vehicle of movement we have chosen.

This brings us to another aspect of Rad as a rune of relationships. Our relationship to the people we travel with, the people we meet on the way, the chance encounters and the lasting friendships are all important as we struggle to find out who we are and what our life's purpose is.

Everyone we meet is a mirror for us. What do we like about other people, and what do we not? Do we have good boundaries with strangers? Do others have good boundaries with us? How does the feeling of lonely exhaustion change what we are willing to experience with others? If we feel alone on the journey, who can we turn to for comfort in a safe and healthy way? Having been on the road with my music, I can tell you that it is fraught with hardship, and the glamour is fleeting. There are many songs about how lonely and arduous road gigs can be, but what an important and necessary step to finding your true voice! There is nothing like taking your songs in front of strangers from different parts of the country. The feedback is powerful.

So what is your journey? Going off to college, starting a new job, moving to another town or country, moving in with your partner, starting a family and shifting your career focus are all beginning points of journeys. This rune asks you: How will you travel? Who will you meet and how will you treat them? In this we can learn our lessons to make our "Aha!" with, the next rune, Kenaz a very powerful thing indeed.

6. Kenaz



Kenaz, Ken, recognition, understanding, a torch that sheds light on a thing once hidden. I know this rune. It begins my name, Kari. It means “to know.”

After the R rune, Rad (the wheel) brings us through our journeyman’s time, the *ab ha!* goes off. That’s Kenaz. It’s when we recognize ourselves and become aware of our understanding. It’s the moment Psyche recognizes Cupid. Psyche is in the company of the divine. She *is* divine. Kenaz also represents the moment when Freyr recognizes Freya as Goddess, the Brisिंगamen necklace shining, when she returns triumphant from the depths of her darkest being. It is the moment Eve eats the fruit and understands herself as an individual. Ken is understanding the relationships between Self and Other and the environment surrounding us. It is not an accident that it is followed by Gifu, the gift, and the rune of relationship understanding.

Ken is a fire rune. It is a light bulb that goes off, the controlled flame of Psyche’s torch, a fire that humans can use. I relate it to Brigid’s triple fire of the hearth and healing, the smith and crafting, and the inspirational fire of the bard. The bard or skald, or clever Norsefolk would use kennings to describe things in a beautiful, poetic and compelling manner. Instead of saying, “I will sail this ship,” I might say “I will ride this wind horse.” Using Kennings cleverly and accurately says two things about you as a speaker. One, you are a good listener and observer of your

surroundings and you perceive the subtleties of other people, places, and things. Two, you are able to use language to describe the intricacies of what you are observing. These qualities are highly valued by humans all over the world.

The Ken rune looks like the lesser than or greater than symbol, or a V on its side with the gaping mouth opening to the right. It conjures up an image of opening out. Information once closed off from me is now open to me to for understanding. If I draw Ken the other direction, it suggests that my ideas are crystallizing into a discernable point.

Having ideas is one thing. Ken suggests that you are also able to manifest them, to take the fire of understanding, control it, and use it for your own means. Another lesson in Kenaz is he timing of your *ab ha*, the hatching of your plan, and knowing you now have the available resources to do what you must do. The Icelandic rune poem says that Ken is like an ulcer, or an eruption from within, that bursts forth. In Louise Hay's [www.louisehay.com] book about the emotional causes of disease, ulcers develop from fear that there is not enough time to implement our ideas. A sense of necessity and urgency comes with Ken. It compels us to action. We are not to stand in the enlightenment of knowing and do nothing with that knowledge. I often call Ken the rune of the crafters, artisans, poets, and people who share their inspiration with others. Sharing moves us to Gebo, Gifu, the gift rune which represents our impulse to share what we have learned and created from our knowing.

7. Gifu



Gifu, Gebo, gift. This rune looks like an X and carries the sound for G. The X shape is seen in the shapes of five of the 24 runes. It is one of the most common shapes in the architecture of stave churches and other buildings. In the *hällristningar* pictographs, the oldest existing rune references, dating to several thousand years B.C.E in Sweden, humans are represented in their longships by single lines, like Isa. Gifu is two straight lines of equal length, leaning into one another and bound in the middle. A sturdy structure, to be sure, and one that suggests humans in relationship. It is the seventh rune in the alphabet, coming after Kenaz, the rune of knowing and *a ha!* discoveries, and before Wunjo the rune of blissful joy. After making an *a ha* discovery, we put that knowledge to use and the result manifests itself in gifts to the community and to others. New inventions, new understanding, new songs and poems are nothing without an audience. And to give in this way produces joy.

Giving requires relationship. Though gifts can be *self to other* or *self to self*, there is always an “I and thou” in giving. Relationships are what the runes are all about. Relationships are what life on Earth is all about. We are nothing on our own. The fastest way to destroy something is to ignore it. Ignored, we die. On the other hand, the fastest way to grow something is to pay attention to it, nurture it and love it. Being in relationships with others, defining, nurturing and building those relationships is the greatest survival skill humans possess. In social anthropology this is called the biochemical feedback mechanism. The chemical reactions that occur when we nurture functional relationships

encourage us to continue those relationships. We build social systems that enhance the sense of well-being that comes from the chemicals released by these positive interactions. These systems are interconnected and interdependent. Familial, tribal, educational, religious and governmental systems work together to preserve humankind. Today's culture often separates these systems and creates structures or institutions that do not see all parts of the culture as a whole unit. These structures do not create the same chemical reactions that systems create. They tend towards isolating individuals from community groups, and hierarchies take the place of communities.

Gifu asks us to look outside ourselves and see how our relationships are doing. Are we using our gifts and talents for the benefit of the whole community, our children, our mates? What is our relationship to the others in our household, pets and plants included? The full meaning of this rune depends on the runes surrounding it in a question. If it is a yes and no question, the answer is always the positive. But Gifu asks us to evaluate our gifts and to give of ourselves, to evaluate our relationships and make certain that there is equality in giving and receiving, to be certain we are bound to one another. It is up to us to be sure these relationships are healthy and functional. This is the essence of Gifu.

8. Wunjo



Wunjo, Wynn, joy! Wunjo has the sound W or V and comes after Gifu (the gift) in the first aett. It represents joy, pure joy, the kind that comes from giving and receiving with the right balance of pride and humility, unconditionally and without ego. When we are so happy that tears come to our eyes it is because we feel thankful, because we have full awareness of the gifts bestowed upon us by others and the world. This is in contrast to thinking that source of our joy stems from our industry alone.

Wunjo is a straight line (Isa), with Kenaz reversed coming from the top to the middle. It looks like Thorn only the Kenaz is at the top rather than in the middle. With Thorn, our Ken or knowing turns in on our care and caution, creating two paths from which to choose. With Wunjo there is only one path. It is the right one, and that creates joy.

Wunjo is the last rune in Freya's aett. Joy comes from doing a good day's work. Joy is the result of knowing your path and walking it. It is the gift of the gods, and it fills our hearts so full that we may even come to tears. Joseph Campbell said, "Follow your bliss." Wunjo tells us the same. If we do not follow our bliss, our life's true path, we will remain unfulfilled. It is sad to not be in love with our lives when it is possible for all of us.

Scandinavia is a land of extremes. Total darkness in winter and total light in the summer helps create a psyche that is used to extremes. The kind of

joy Wunjo speaks of is extreme bliss. Lack of sunlight and cold temperatures create a sorrow and depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder, or S.A.D. S.A.D. causes us to mourn, sometimes to drink to excess or medicate ourselves in other ways. The depths of despair drills holes in our souls. The deeper the well of our sadness, the greater our capacity for joy. The extremes of the land create extremes in the culture. This is why Yuletide, the midwinter festival, lasts for upwards of two weeks in Scandinavia with specific rituals and foods for each day. Sun wheel-shaped breads colored with saffron, golden puddings, and honey mead are all part of the feasts in the dark days.

With so few days in the growing season and so many provisions to put up for the next long dark haul, summer is a frenzy of work. Midsummer is a time to travel when the roads and water ways are clear of ice and snow. It is a time to work hard all day and then play deep into the night. There are bonfires and picnics and parties and dances. In summertime the men go *viking*, and the women take the herds up to the summer farms. There is a joy in life, in being alive, in having made it through yet another grueling and unforgivably dark, hard winter. There is a lightness of being, a joy that is called Wunjo.

Heimdal or Hel's Aett

9. Hagal



Hagal, Hagalaz, hail, the ice that comes from the sky. It is brief. There is nothing we did to cause it. And it can be deadly. Hagal is made up of two Isa rune lines with a line connecting them. It looks like and carries the sound H, but the center line slants downwards, left to right.

Hail is caused by a strong updraft in a storm system, the same updraft that causes thunderstorms. You often find damaging winds and tornadoes along with hail. So when you pull Hagal, the best idea is to duck and take cover for the duration of the storm. Then, once it has passed, assess the damage, take stock of what has been destroyed, repair what can be repaired, and say a prayer of thanks to the gods for what has been spared.

Wouldn't you know it? The hail storm rune follows Wunjo, the joy/bliss rune. Hagal starts the second aett which, to me, represents our young adult years. Bliss has consumed us, but it's time to come down off the mountain top to experience and mix with common mortals. The hail storm is like a reality check. The "honeymoon is over," as they say.

Hagal starts the second aett, often called Heimdal's Aett. I might call it Hel's Aett if I wanted a goddess name for it. Hel rules Nifelheim, the land of the dead who are not slain in battle. Her hall is Helheim where she shares her possessions with the dead. It is a cold, but not

uncomfortable place, where the souls are numbed and still. As the daughter of Loki the trickster, one can imagine that sudden bursts of hail might be Hel's way of shifting souls along. And, as I mentioned, facing the possibility of death in a hailstorm changes the way people conduct the rest of their lives.

The god Heimdal, on the other hand, is an earth god and was born through an up-swelling of the sea. He was the silent warrior who stood guarding the Bifrost Bridge, waiting for Loki and the Giants to come and cause their destruction. Our model for how to behave during a hailstorm is to be quiet, stand still and wait. Like Heimdal, no matter how diligent we are, we still cannot stop the destruction, but we can blow the Gjallerhorn and warn others. And when the timing is right we can go out into the world to see what we can do, what lives we can save, what homes we can rebuild, what we can help recreate out of the debris.

Remember, hail happens. It's not your fault, and there's nothing you can do to prevent it. As the serenity prayer says, fix what you can, leave alone what you can't fix and be wise enough to know the difference. Hail comes unexpectedly, and the difficulty of predicting it is the cause of most of the associated deaths. Another mistake that increases hail's destructive power is thinking we are immortal. Being willful in a hailstorm is a huge danger, and when I draw this rune I always try to think about areas in which I am being boastful or over confident as that is the area the storm is most likely to hit. I also look to my community for help, since during hardship, other people can help keep us alive.

Hail can be an extremely damaging force of nature, killing crops, breaking tree limbs, crushing skulls of livestock and humans. A friend of mine once got caught in a hailstorm in the Badlands of South Dakota. His truck was demolished, and the only thing between his head and the glass from his windshield was a South Dakota map he hid under. Experiences like this change us. We become more grateful for life, aware of what is really important, and sometimes it starts us on a new path in life. What comes after Hagal in the alphabet? Nied, the need fire, the rune that makes us evaluate our real and true needs. Nothing like a near death experience to point out what is a need and what is simple desire.

The good news is hail doesn't last long. A blizzard can go on for days, but the world's longest reported hailstorms have generally not lasted more than 30 minutes. One, in Alberta, Canada in 1991, with 4-inch hail, caused over \$300 million dollars in damage to homes and property. Another in China in 1932 reportedly killed 200 people and injured thousands more.

Hagal is also the rune of a clean slate and can even be used intentionally this way. It gives us the opportunity to start over and learn from it. There is a certain buzz or energy that one gets in the face of nature's fury. Use this energy to rebuild your life with stronger structures and heartier crops. A clear field, a blank canvas – destruction is the first step in creation as so many of the runes remind us. Use this rune and the energy it provides to create anew from the ashes. It's exhilarating to be granted a new beginning, but we have to wait for the destruction to pass. The learning of Hagal is action to protect yourself, be patient in in-action while waiting out the storm, action in prayer, honest evaluation of what you have left to work with, and action again in the rebuilding of your life.

10. Nied



Nied, Nauthiz, need and necessity, the need fire. Nied carries the sound N and is one of three fire runes in the alphabet. Kenaz is the controlled fire of understanding. (You can't have Kenaz without Nied.) Ur is the fire of passion and creation. Finally, Nied is the fire that keeps us all alive. It comes after Hagal (the hailstorm) has cleared the way, and before Isa (the ice rune) has brought the peace of a slower pace. Sometimes Nied is referred to as a delay rune. The delay would be in the assessment of true needs versus wants. Determining the difference takes time but is imperative if you want to survive and thrive. Once needs are determined (and in the old days, that didn't take long) action is essential to meet those needs.

Think about the ancient days, or even the not-so-long ago days. My mother grew up on a farm in Wisconsin. She and her family heated and cooked by the wood stove. In the middle of the night in the middle of the winter in the middle of the North if the fire in your woodstove died, so did you. The essence of Nied is feeding the fire that keeps everyone alive. It is a full time job. Gathering wood, chopping and carrying it, and attention to the fire requires hourly diligence. You must bank the coals in the afternoon when you are all out doing chores, stoke the fire when it's time to cook, and never let the essence of the hearth go out. Nomadic people even had to learn how to carry the embers from one camp to the next and which sticks and stones make the best sparks.

Nied is shaped like a cross. The pillar is straight up and down, like Isa that follows it, telling us to stop where we are and have a look. The cross piece is written at a slant, high on the left, slanting down to the right, like the cross piece in Hagal. If it were placed on the Medicine Wheel, its vertical post would run north (the Creator and ideas) to south (the Warrior protector of the Children's Fire and of the Grandparents who sit on either side of it). The cross's crossbar runs northwest (the Tribal Chief who is responsible for the whole tribe) to southeast (Tradition, or why we do things the way we do them).

This system is the same tribal concept followed by most cultures. We must take care of our children who are our future and our elders who are our past, and the fire, our central tool of survival. To manage this, we draw a circle around them and set up a system of protection. It is our physical, social, and spiritual duty. The old rune Nied was the center of the culture and the center of the individual's drive to improve the conditions of society. It is not just a social structure, but a true system, one that recognizes all parts as integral.

What is significant about the idea of Nied - the need fire - in today's society? Our culture has made our basic survival needs so cheap and easy to obtain that we have grown dependant on the grocery store and upon oil and gas to heat our homes. This dependency exists so that we can be marketed to and told what our needs are. We are encouraged to live so far from the true need fire that we no longer know how to take care of ourselves, our children or the elderly that we are obligated to protect. We are fed soda pop, fast food, and things that cause disease. Then we are sold remedies for these diseases. Television isolates us from one another and the community. The real need fire makes us feel secure by our efforts, but also feeds our desire to know, question, laugh and invent.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Nied asks us to sit down and draw up our lists of what is truly necessary to our lives and goals. What are our wants or desires? Who determines what we really need? List the influences in your life that tell you what your essence is. Clearing out the stuff we don't really need in turn makes room for our true needs to be fulfilled.

Perhaps it is time for you to “get real.” Spend a day and night without electricity or clean hot water pumped into your bath tub. Journal by candlelight. How does that feel? Bake your own bread. See how you can meet your basic needs without relying on others. Then think of your other needs besides the physical. Emotional security, being loved and loving others, creativity and spiritual expression are all needs. How are they being met? What do you need to change in your life in order to live more closely to the need fire? How about the children in your community? Do they have fire in their bellies? What about the elders on your block? Think, evaluate, and take action based on true need.

11. Isa



Isa, the ice rune. Ice is a blessing in the sweltering summer when it keeps my food from spoiling. It is a bane in the winter when I crash to the sidewalk, slipping on the ice. Isa is a simple straight line, running north to south. It carries the sound I. The straight line is found everywhere in nature and is one of the oldest symbols. It represents humans, spines, trees, and staves. In 18 of the 24 runes, a straight vertical line plays part in the symbol's creation. These could be the 18 runes Odin received while hanging from the world tree Yggdrasil.

Ice and fire were the two primordial elements of creation in Norse mythology. The ice of Niflheim melted away as it was hit by sparks from Muspell, the world of fire. As the ice melted, it revealed the giant Ymir from whose bodily fluids the other creatures emerged. The melting frost became Audhumla, the cow of creation, from whose udders flowed the rivers of the worlds. It is interesting today that the ice of glaciers and mountain ranges hold well-preserved treasures as varied as extinct plants and remains of our human ancestors. In these ways, Isa is tied to both creation and preservation. Before refrigerators, ice helped insure that food would stay fresh. Other associations with preservation come in the use of Isa as a bindrune. A bindrune is a combination of runes put together to create specific meaning and magic. We often see the rune Fehu (associated with wealth) combined with Isa to preserve resources. Many times it is paired with Gifu to help preserve the gift of a relationship.

Some people think ice means you are stuck and unmoving. Not at all true! Even glaciers are on the move. Ice also gives us the ability to move about in the winter where we could not move before...over water. If my friend lives on the other side of the lake and I have no boat, the only time I can visit her is in the winter by crossing the bridge of ice. The Bifrost Bridge connects the world of the Aesir gods to our world. Ice connects us to places that would be unreachable without it. So Isa also has associations with bridging and helps us to reaching new places in our lives. But beware! Anyone who has crossed a frozen lake knows how dangerous it can be.

The skills Isa calls to us are patience, discipline, caution, bravery, and good listening. Good listening? Yes. The ice may look perfectly safe, but there is a specific sound that can be heard just before it breaks, a strange dull thud followed by a sharp crack. There are a few seconds between the thud and the crack which can be the seconds that save one's life. I have heard this sound. Even breathing too hard can mask it. Fortunately, I was only crossing the shallow creek at my grandmother's farm the times I took the icy plunge. But one never forgets that sound. I think there must be a memory of it hidden in our reptilian brains. It stirs such deep emotional response that it may be a genetic memory. The sound of a crack in the ice reverberates in our very marrow, the fear it can create may leave us paralyzed. But that inability to react could cost you your life!

Isa also says listen to what others are saying and discern if it is the truth or not. There is a sound that Truth makes. It's solid and unwavering, while the sound of falsehood is like a dull thud and a sharp crack. Falsehood is thin and weightless, and if you do not heed the warning sounds you may fall prey to the deceptions and lies of others. I hear these thin, weightless sounds on television a lot. They disrupt my reptilian brain so I don't watch a lot of television. Good listening must be practiced. It requires quietness and stillness in body and brain. Shut off the chatter in your head that keeps you from really hearing the subtleties of words, actions, and all the sounds of the world.

When Isa comes up, I tell people to slow down. Meditate quietly, in nature if possible. Listen to the sounds of the world, the birds, the

melting snow, the rustle of leaves or grasses, the sound of rain. Everything has a sound, a tone, a voice in creation. This rune wants you to be still and quiet enough to hear the music around you and discern what is solid and what is dangerously thin. My good friend is what is called a “Death Walker.” She helps people pass over to the other side, especially if they died in such a way that their body parts are not all in the same place. She describes the process of holding their tone for them so that they can collect all the DNA and genetic memory from all their parts. When they are ready, they unify with their tone and move off into the next world.

As a vocal teacher, I can relate to this. Everyone has a unique tone they make with their first breath. This is the birth tone that we strive to vibrate our bodies to as we sing, chant, and tone in meditation. Birth tone and death tone are the same. They are the unique sound of our own creation. Isa also has associations with Ansuz, the mouth of god and the mouth of the river, and with Laguz the lake, as well as with the frozen state of each of these. As the ice of our creation cracks we can hear our own tone. Listen for it often. Go quietly and slowly with patience and care. Then you can hear your unique tone, and the music of creation will be revealed to you.

One last thing: don’t forget that you can also skate or ski on ice, or even carve it into sculptures. Remember to have fun with the stuff of creation!

12. Jera



Jera, harvest. The shape of Jera is Kenaz (to know) opening up to Kenaz reversed, with Kenaz eating the leg of Kenaz reversed. Its shape shows movement and is a cyclical, energetic symbol often found in decorative work around the globe. It corresponds to the letters J or Y.

Jera is a rune that anyone in farm country can relate to. Even city dwellers are reminded on the nightly news of the tenuous nature of creating a livelihood from farming, a pastime essential to us all. With droughts, floods, late frosts, hail, too little snow or fast melts, the quality of the harvest depends in large part on forces outside human control. For example, my ancestors farmed at a 45 degree angle on the side of Sognfjord. Jera is a combination of skill, community support, force of will and divine help.

There is a saying, “You reap what you sow.” Think of the seeds we plant, literally and metaphorically each day. Our words are seeds. As Ansuz, (the mouth rune) teaches us, a word can start a universe. In the Futhark, Jera comes after Isa, “the ice rune,” which has already warned us to go slowly and be careful. If we have gone slowly, made good decisions about what to plant, and been diligent about growing our crops, (and if the weather gods have favored us) we are prepared to reap the incredible reward of Jera, the harvest.

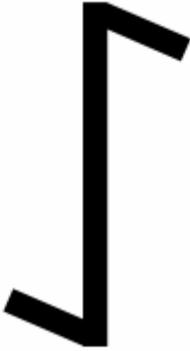
Though we harvest in the fall, Jera begins with the spring festival called Imbolc on the Celtic calendar. Here we evaluate the seeds saved from the last harvest to see which ones have dried well and are still viable. Have some molded or shriveled into death with no life left to produce plants in the year to come? Did the mice get at them? Are they hardy heirloom seeds that can reproduce again and again or are they single-use-only hybrid seeds, useless to us the following spring? What has happened to our growing space over the last year? A downed tree can mean new full sun in our gardening beds. Excessive growth may mean we need to find more shade-tolerant varieties. In terms of our lives, how have we changed and grown over the last season or two? Do we need to drop old projects and begin new ones?

Jera asks us to take a look at the sum total of our own growing year, evaluate it with honesty and plan ahead for our future. By saying yes to only the things that we truly want to grow and discarding those things that no longer work for us, our whole year balances out. Jera is one of the runes that indicates a time line. *A year and a day* is the usual time given for an initiation process. A full harvest cycle begins with blessing the seeds and setting the intention. We prepare the soil, care for and nurture the crops, and ultimately, we hope, harvest. And the extra day? That is the day of the harvest celebration.

Harvest festivals are a common cultural tradition all over the world. Humans need to look at the hard work they have done, share the benefits throughout the community, and thank the gods it all worked out. In the Celtic agricultural calendar there are three harvest festivals. The first one in August celebrates the god of the grain who has given his life that we may have bread for the winter. The second one in September blesses the god of the fruit so the apples and grapes are pressed and bottled and celebrated. The third is the harvest of the meat in October. This is the beginning of winter when the herds are culled. If there are more animals than winter fodder, the weaker ones that will not make it through the winter are killed. Autumn hunts happen at this time for deer and elk. Meat is dried and stored. Hides are tanned and made ready to be worked into new boots. The final shearing is done and the wool is carded for winter spinning and working. We feast, celebrate, and honor our four legged brothers and sisters for their selfless sacrifice.

People equate Jera with justice and legal orderliness. The adage “You reap what you sow” applies to the law of the land equally as well as the laws of karma. When the harvest is good we are said to have been blessed by or favored by the gods. This may relate to being favored by the judge in a court case. Yet ultimately, justice derives from the hard work people put into their lives. We must sometimes look at life retrospectively over the course of many seasons to fully understand the fairness of life. I often tell my children, when they say “that’s not fair” that really, life *is* quite fair. We just need to live long enough to see it play out. And it may take more than one lifetime. So Jera speaks also to the harvest of many lifetimes work. It relates to the karma and the dharma and the lessons therein.

13. Eiwaz



Eiwaz, the yew tree. This rune comes in the second aett. It corresponds to the phoneme Ei or Ae and comes after Jera (the harvest) and before Perth (the dice cup, apple, path of luck, fate and wonder). Linguistically Eiwaz has been related to the Yeoman (bowman). Unpacking from a trip recently, I received a visit from a fellow traveling artist and shaman. I started going too fast, pulled a back muscle, and needed to ask for help. I was lucky to have had a powerful yeoman at my back, literally. This rune says you do too. You just need to ask for assistance!

As the yew tree, Eiwaz is the evergreen in the runic alphabet. The only other tree represented in the Elder Futhark is Beorc, the birch tree. The yew is associated with immortality because of its longevity. There are 2,000 year old yew trees still alive today! The yew is able to reproduce itself through branches that touch the ground and take root, becoming individual trees of their own. This technique of layering to reproduce is another metaphor for partnerships. We help one another, giving of ourselves to create new complete individuals. Yews are sexed individually, one tree is male with cones that create pollen and one tree is female with flowers that are difficult to see until they ripen into bright red berries in the fall. The leaves are toxic, but decocted correctly they create a powerful drug for fighting cancer – Taxol.

Yew wood is hard, yet flexible. It was used in cabinet making, ship building (particularly masts) and can even be fashioned into nails. The

most significant invention that came from yew wood was the longbow, a technology that, when it was new, was so profound that it changed the lives of people forever. Whether in war or hunting game, the longbow gave people the power to achieve goals that previously seemed impossible, but which, by means of focus and careful aim, came within their reach. Because the longbow makes us both strong and incredibly flexible, we can take bigger risks, knowing we will not break. We can see farther and shoot straighter and longer.

The yew is also a mystery tree, planted in graveyards and sacred places. It is sometimes planted for protection and takes a long time to mature. Its wood is also excellent for divining rods as it always seeks its mark, be it water or game. Many of the most ancient yews in Europe have roots that encompass small wells or springs, associating the yew with Yggdrasil, the world tree in Norse cosmology. Yggdrasil has three roots in three realms of the universe, each root tapping into a source of water that affects the other nine worlds in the universe. The leaves of the yew grow in spirals, a visual representation of the cosmos, like the double helix of DNA and the other spirals of nature's design.

Nine kinds of wood are traditionally gathered for the Beltane fires lit to cleanse and purge on the last day of spring. The yew would have been one of those pruned at the Equinox and burned at Beltane. Ancient people used the yew in the fire to divine with numerology by the numbers of snaps and pops it gave. So, yew has both numerological and magical energy.

Eiwaz is about planting firm roots for goal setting and focusing on the target. It's about trusting that you can hit your mark even if it seems out of reach. Trust that you will bend without breaking and that your yeoman will come when you ask for help. Healing, deep magic, and the ability to use these gifts are yours through Eiwaz.

14. Perth



Perth, dice cup, luck, apple, the vulva. There are so many possible meanings for Perth, there is no definitive word to connect to it linguistically. It looks like a dice cup tipped on its side, an opening, a vessel, a cave. It corresponds to the letter P.

The Anglo Saxon rune poem talks of gambling in reference to this rune. There is evidence that gambling and gaming were commonplace in Nordic culture, perhaps because the northlands are a gamble of a place to live. The weather can turn on you in a moment, especially up on the fjords. My mother relates a story of the narrow pass between the farms on the fjord of her ancestors. It was a beautiful day, and a bridal party was passing through the gap when a sudden avalanche killed the whole lot of them. Luck can be a strange thing, and how intimately it is tied to our destiny is a thing to ponder.

We need to remember that luck is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It is up to us to make our luck one way or the other through attitude, work ethic, and prayer. In China they say luck is one fifth of a person's make up. Destiny, luck, feng shui, education, and philanthropy are the five pillars of life. We can create good luck for ourselves with education and knowledge of things at hand. Philanthropy creates luck because what we put out returns to us threefold. And with feng shui, we use our environment to create good energy flow. Good feng shui fosters good luck. Perhaps, when you draw this rune it is time to evaluate your destiny

and see if you have followed it, or to see if you have lived your *orlag* or fate and are able to affect your luck for good or ill.

Perth also relates to the Norns, the Wyrd Sisters, the goddesses who guard the well of fate, *Urdsbrunner*. Urd is the goddess of fate who remembers and tells us the past. Verthandi is the goddess of necessity and keeps us present in our need. And Skuld is the goddess of becoming and the future. Skuld is the runemaler, the one who casts the runes for the direction of the future. Together these goddesses keep the world tree alive by sprinkling its roots with the fate water. The Wyrd sisters dip into the well for the gods who ask and for humans who have the ability or daring to do so. The shape of Perth could be a bucket from that well pouring out your probabilities. But do you really want to know? Perhaps this rune suggests you should leave your fate to the fates! This is what the newly added “blank rune” attempts to convey. But I see no use in adding a blank rune when Perth speaks to the Norns already. Check the surrounding runes for help in deciding whether to cast your lot or leave it up to the Wyrd sisters.

When Perth comes up, it can indicate that one should take “the road less traveled.” Try a non-traditional approach to your issue! Take a gamble on a new direction or make your decision by flipping a coin. In this way Perth is another journey rune. It presents us with the option to trust our luck and travel a new path. Often Perth indicates that it is time for the questioner to explore the great unknown of occult knowledge or “the left hand path.” This phrase relates to the right brain way of knowing. The female, intuitive pathway is stressed in this rune. Many people think Perth relates to female sexual organs linguistically. It is in a different way, however, than the Laguz rune. Laguz (the lake) is about getting to know your shadow self, your womb self, your female or goddess within. Perth is less about getting to know it as it is about throwing it up to see where it lands. Where Laguz says explore the coin, Perth says flip it! This doesn’t mean throw caution to the wind, but it can suggest that too much caution has blocked your ability to see alternatives. Perth wants us to look outside the box of our normal options and take a risk on an alternative approach. It comes up in questions of medical proceedings, suggesting remedies that are out of the Western medical model. In the ten plus years I have been giving rune readings to the public this rune rarely comes up. Not many people seem drawn to pick this one.

15. Algiz



Algiz, Aelgiz, elk, the sound of Z. Linguistically many relate this rune to an early type of elk, and sometimes the eagle. It is a Y with the center pole extending beyond the V, a shape seen throughout nature in trees and other plants. I make this rune each time I wake and stretch my palms heavenward. Each time I throw my hands into the air and exclaim, “I don’t know. I give up!” Sometimes I need to give up on something in order to remove my ego and willfulness from the situation. Then I relax and become willing to look at the problem a different way. This *willingness over willfulness* is the essence of this rune in many ways. This is the message of elk.

In Native American story telling, the elk was the first of our animal kin to recognize that the humans were hairless and would die in the cold of the coming ice age. The elk sacrificed itself that we might wear its skin and eat its meat and use its every part. Elk was willing to do this for us, and we respected it deeply. We followed the elk herd.

As eagle, Algiz is the messenger of the gods in both Norse mythology and Native American stories. Eagle sits atop Yggdrasil, the world tree. It asks humans to give up on their ego-influenced ways of hearing and perceiving and to listen to the voice of Great Spirit. Eagle connects the sky and earth in a profound way. We must connect in this way too. We must ground ourselves to the Earth but still reach for the stars with arms

uplifted, and we must have faith and trust that we will hear the message of the Great Spirit. In this way, Algiz is a prayerful rune.

As with all the runes, the position of Algiz in the Futhark alphabet informs its meaning. It follows the uncertainty of Perth, the luck rune. When we give up our willfulness and take the risk or leap of faith, Algiz is the result. When we willingly follow the path, the Great Spirit whispers to us and we are rewarded by Sowulo, the next rune, the strength of the sun itself.

16. Sowulo



Sowulo, Sigel, the Sun. The sun is going down as I choose this rune. Coming after Algiz, Sowulo ends the middle string of the Futhark. The middle aett begins with Hagal (hail) and continues to need, ice, justice, flexibility, luck, sacrifice and then, at long last, the triumph of the sun. It's important to remember this order because of the hardship and change that comes before Sowulo. The shape of Sowulo is like a lightning bolt. It is the letter S sound. Think about our ancestors of the North. Weeks, even months may go by without sunshine or blue sky. It is often dark, grey, and cold. Yet everyone knows the sun is essential to life, mental and physical health. The sun is a powerful rune for energy, strength, health and life.

In the oldest days of our Northern ancestors, the sun disk was carried across the sky in a cart dedicated to Nerthus, the All Mother. Summa or Sunna was the Goddess of the Sun in the Bronze Age Norse pantheon, and Nerthus needed the sun to cross the sky at very specific solar festival times. Archeologists have found an ancient Nerthus cart in a bog. The cart was pulled by horses, or sometimes by oxen or cows. It was designed to be lifted off its wheels and carried. Many sacrifices (animal, human, and otherwise) were made to the sun goddess. In a land where the Winter Solstice saw 24 hours of darkness, the sun was that important. All the fire goddesses are enjoying resurgence in popularity these days, especially for their importance as sun goddesses. I think this is significant in human development because, since the advent of patriarchal societies, women have been associated with the “weaker” light of the moon and men with

the strong light of the sun. We balance our psychology when we realize the strength of women's fire power. Equally important is understanding the moon gods. Men's psychic and mysterious cycles must be accepted and worked with as well.

A lot of people want to know how long it will be until their situation changes or until they get what they are seeking. While the runes don't really work that way, Sigel the sun rune may advise us to watch for answers by the next Solar Holiday (equinox or solstice). Sometimes answers come more immediately. This is a time of strength to be used and enjoyed, not wasted.

When I draw Sowulo I am uplifted. Simply putting a jaundiced child in a sunny window can heal the sickness as Vitamin D produced in humans by sunlight can cure depression. Sowulo asks us to be observant of our health and strength and encourages us to use its power to gain more of the same. It may also indicate a peak time of creative energy. Think of the fire of life hiding within a single seed. All it needs to become a full plant is contained within. And the strength of the sun can hasten the most stubborn seeds to sprout. This is the power of Sigel, the impetus to flourish. Respect this power and do not let it pass unused!

Tiw or Tiwaz's Aett

17. Tyr



Tyr, Tiwaz, the god Tyr, the spear and the distaff. Tyr looks like an arrow or a spear. It's made from Isa, the straight line, with a point like Kenaz topping it off. Tyr is the first rune of the final aett, the last leg of our journey through the Futhark. It has the sound T. To some, its shape suggests the line pointing to the North Star, the compass needle, a guide for the seafaring folks of the Norselands. In that way, Tyr speaks of focus, direction, guidance and a steady course. Tyr also has associations with protection because knowing where you are and where your ship is headed can help keep you out of danger.

The shape of Tyr is like a distaff, a long stick at least three feet in length (also called a stave) with a finial or fork on the end. Distaffs were used to hold the un-spun fibers of flax or wool in drop-spindle spinning. Here again are associations with focus, control, and direction, literally as in the spinning process, but metaphorically as well.

The Norns were the great spinners of fate for humans and the gods. Spinning was a trance-inducing activity which often led women into vocalizing predictions for the future. The Eddas and Sagas (ancient Norse and Icelandic stories) described the Seidr Kona (women shamans) as carrying distaffs as they traveled from village to village doing trance work, healing, and foretelling of the future. The Seidr Kona held the fibers of the universe steady as they spun out the details of the fates of the village and its people. Some distaffs mentioned in the stories carried

magical powers. People “tapped” with a distaff might fall into deathly sickness, though the Sagas suggest such curses were done in self defense. The use of long and often heavily weighted poles in martial arts would also have played a role in the lives of these nomadic women.

Martial arts use also brings us back to Tyr as a symbol of protection in battle where it can stand for items of weaponry. In relationship to the god, Tyr, this rune can be interpreted as a spear or sword. It has associations with protection and contains the power to propel us forward in any endeavor. In this interpretation, however, it also holds the meaning of judicious sacrifice. The god Tyr was a companion to Fenrir, the wolf who played an essential role in Ragnarok, the fall of the gods and the destruction of the Earth and all the worlds at the end of time. The gods told Tyr to lock Fenrir up and keep him from causing this destruction. Tyr knew that he must sacrifice part of himself, and he lost his hand to Fenrir. But he did not lose his life. The takeaway for us is that it is important to sacrifice for the greater good, but one need not sacrifice everything. Find out exactly what is required and how much you are capable of. Be honest with yourself and feed the cause only as much as necessary to keep your thread steady while feeding the whole. If you give too much you may wind up with tangles and knots in your thread, making it unusable by anyone else.

Finally, there is a sense of balance and honesty in Tyr. Tyr asks us to focus on our place in the Universe and be guided by it as the North Star guides a ship. Tyr reminds us that the yang side of our being, the thrusting arrow, is also the yin side of the distaff that holds the stuff of our making in place as our lives spin out. Tyr says: stay the course, steady as she goes, only give as much as needed, and protect yourself and others with these virtues.

18. Beorc



Beorc, Berkana, the Birch Goddess, the birch tree. Beorc is the second of two tree names in the rune alphabet, Eiwaz, the yew being the first. Beorc looks like a B but with pointy Kenaz spikes rather than rounded ones up against the straight line of Isa. It comes in the final aett, immediately following the judicious sacrifice and focused nature of Tyr.

Beorc provides an incredible resource to us: the tree of regeneration. When the old forest is cleared of hardwoods by lumbering, fire or ice flows, the birch is the first to return. Because of its ability to give birth to a new habitat, the birch is called the Mothertree, and it is the source of all kinds of medicine. It provides everything from firewood that burns even when wet, to wood used to make bowls, buckets, toys and tools, to bark that can be used in baskets, water craft and instruments.

Beorc is another rune dear to my heart as a native Minnesotan. The ancient natives of this land used every part of the birch tree just as my ancestors in Norway did, a tradition carried on to the present day. Just the sight of a birch grove in any season is breathtakingly beautiful. In the winter, the stark white is usually accompanied by red twigs of dogwood and willow or the occasional cardinal, all against the dark green of pine. In the summer, to stand in a birch grove is to be transported to the world of Faerie. Sun streams through the light foliage in rays of glory. Beneath the birches, mossy soft ground tempts us to lie down and watch the dance of light. The slightest breeze sets the leaves to whispering all the

secrets of the universe. In the fall the leaves are golden, and like the Brisingamen (Freya's necklace) they fall, spiraling to the upturned admirer. Birch was my great grandmother's favorite tree. The smell of a birch calls up memories from the most ancient parts of my brain.

Birch bark is associated with preservation because it doesn't rot. It kindles fires even when wet. The bark peels off in layer upon layer and can be used as parchment for writing. I use birch bark in almost every ritual I do.

A birch lur is a conical wind instrument used in the Fjordlands by the women who tended the seter (upland summer farms). With the lur, they could communicate with the animals and one another, blow songs of praise or warn of danger. There are stories of young women whose seters were overcome by bandits. With the excuse of calling in the herds, the women could summon help through Huldre lokk (vocal cow calling) or by playing the lur.

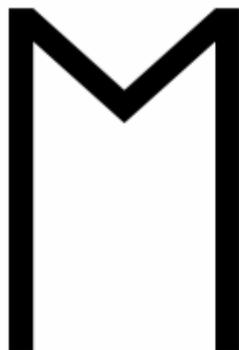
Pertcha and Berkana are two names of the birch goddess. Pertcha is one of Freya, Queen of the Vanir's women and is sometimes considered an aspect of Freya herself. Pertcha was called on to help with women's issues, labor and birthing, healing, herding, and communication with the otherworlds. A birch tree was climbed by Shaman Kona who vision quested in the cradle of the topmost branches.

Distaffs and staves were made of Birch. Beorc also has associations with death in the sense that the new-growth forest dies off to create the proper conditions for the old-growth forest to establish itself. But this death aspect is always tied to re-birth and regeneration.

Birch oil is used to stimulate circulation and as a cosmetic for skin disorders. Birch sap is collected as a spring tonic and can be used like honey as a sweetener in the kitchen. Leaves and twigs can be boiled for tea, and the soft wood can be carved into countless useful and beautiful objects.

Abundance, birth, regeneration, healing, communication through writing, music, and trance work, as well as blessings to humans from the goddess are just a few of the associations of this rune.

19. Ehwaz



Ehwaz, Eh, the horse rune, the phoneme Eh or Ay is made from Isa with Kenaz opening to the sky and then Isa again. It comes after Beorc (the birch tree) and before Mannaz (human kind).

The horse changed the face of every land and all people it came to. In the same way, Ehwaz changes things utterly. Horses gave us the ability to travel great distances, and using them in agriculture changed how much we could plow, haul and transport. The Vikings were said to trade walrus ivory for the horses that came out of Latvia (the land of my father's people). Horses also changed the face of war because they could transport warriors farther faster. Warriors fighting on horseback were elevated above the general fray of battle, and generals commanding from this height had a distinct advantage. The use of horses changed the communities of Mannheim (human home) forever. Horses were also sacred. They hauled the wagon that carried the sun disk across the sky.

Ehwaz speaks to us of the changes that occur when a new and powerful element is introduced into your life. Beorc, the birch tree, presages the coming of that something new. In many ways, towards the end of our years, we undergo a re-birth of our selves. The crone, for example, comes close to becoming the maiden again. I look forward to the time in my life when the responsibilities of motherhood are eased and the children leave my side to build their own families. Then I will become free again, like

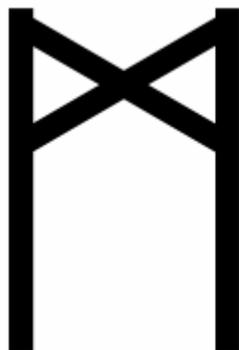
birch growing in a clearing, the last third of my life spread before me like a brand new spring.

When Ehwaz appears, total change is on the horizon. It is situated in the last aett, the aett that describes us in our late life. Sometimes when people retire, they make drastic changes. They may move to Arizona or Florida, for example, or some other warm climate. They may start doing artwork or taking classes for fun. They may take up other hobbies they were not able to do while burdened with middle life responsibilities like raising families and living out their early life decisions. Ehwaz aids us in achieving a new level of freedom. Horses have often been associated with the life of the cowboy, freedom, the open range, and possibility. Sometimes, our later years are when the wisdom of the crone or wise man begins to manifest.

The Nordic people raised their own breed of horses. Icelandic ponies and fjord horses have strong shorter legs so they can more easily calculate the steepness of their terrain. The ancient Norse looked to the horse for answers to mysterious questions or to decide on the solutions to controversial issues. In an old Icelandic movie, a woman used a horse race to decide whether or not to marry a man from another clan. And I have read about a pure white horse that was kept in the village for the sole purpose of divination. Counting snorts and stomps, the shaman would be able to make decisions for the community. Perhaps the tie to Nerthus and her solar chariot created this mysterious tie. Perhaps it is the bond that a rider and horse develop, as near to psychic as regular humans get, that inspires this view of horses.

However you look at it, Ehwaz is a harbinger of profound and unlooked for change. It forecasts travel, freedom, a greater ability to do new things and has associations with divination and inner wisdom.

20. Mannaz



Mannaz, Manne, human...Mannheim, human home, community. Mannaz looks like Daeg (day), the bow tie, but with the longer legs of Isa, (ice, the straight line) supporting Gifu, the X, on either side. The ice runes of caution, care and security hold the rune of human home up high. Mannaz carries the sound for M. Mannheim is the gift of human relationships in Midgard, the world made for humans by the gods.

In most creation stories, the Divine creates humans and our world. But it is left to us to create Mannheim (community). It is through community that we are able to survive, grow and discover our highest potential. Through community we evolve. And through community we express our divine nature.

Thinking about our ancestors illustrates how important relationships are to survival. Individuals cannot grow all the food and create all the housing, tools, and clothing they need. Division of labor, barter and trade, education and spirituality, all diverse and intergenerational parts taking care of each other are essential elements that create a thriving humanity. There is no more important concept than Mannheim, especially in these modern times.

I've heard many people express concern that we are losing our Mannheim because we no longer create what we need to survive through

community relationships. Meeting our basic needs outside the community can lead to isolationism. Instead of taking care of and learning from our children and elderly we are institutionalizing them. This creates a multitude of disorders in our culture, of which depression and anxiety are the most benign. Even the Internet, despite its ability to link people together around the globe, can further contribute to the fragmentation of community if people no longer look to each other for information. If they can simply “Google it” and get what they need without personal contact, the intimacy of Mannheim can be lost. Elders may not feel needed, and children may receive information without understanding the intimate traditions that connect it together, making it meaningful.

In writing this book, I have observed Mannheim working in my life. I am only writing it because I have a friend who wants to read it. Though I have learned much in the process, it is not for me. This book is for everyone. I am thankful every day that I am part of a community and family that supports me in doing my best work. And that’s the heart of this rune. When you draw Mannheim, look around to see who is supporting you and in what ways they are doing so. Find the community network that feeds your highest good, and see what you can contribute to it. This is the cycle of a healthy social system.

Mannaz comes in the middle of the third aett. After Ehwaz (the horse rune) has taken us to our later years, we find Mannaz. Sometimes it is only when something drastic or strange has happened that we really see and appreciate the support of our community. As Ehwaz predicted, we now have a new vision of who we are and what we are supposed to do with the wisdom. Bring it back to the community, become the wise elder, help others make their transitions! After that, Laguz will help us recede into the lake of self-discovery on a deeper level.

As an educator, I participated in workshops at the Science Museum of Minnesota regarding teaching the Native American population in our state. A professor from the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota explained to us that these children, from the standpoint of their own culture, do not understand the concept of cheating. They do not consider intellectual property issues or competition when it comes to finding the answers to questions. When the Great Spirit

gives an answer to one child, he or she shares it so that all have access to the knowledge.

This is what it means to live in a true community instead of in a hierarchy. In a community we gladly share our resources. Your joys are my joys, your sorrows are my sorrows, and your children are my children. No one is left alone or unsupported. No one dies in obscurity unmourned.

This is the basis of all Abrahamic traditions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Tithing (the gifting of ten percent of one's income) is just one example in those traditions of the command to support all members of the community. In Chinese philosophy, philanthropy is also one of "the five pillars," which also include destiny, luck, education, and feng shui.

It is in the love of humanity that we reach our full potential as humans.

21. Laguz



Laguz, the lake. Laguz looks like a fishing spear, an arrow with only one tip side or a fishing hook. It carries the phoneme for L. Some people have called Laguz “the broken reed” based on a rune poem that describes the danger of cutting yourself on the sharp reeds by the lake. Remember, the lake is a holy place that one should not be wandering into carelessly.

Between Mannaz (humankind) and Ing (the fertility twins) Laguz is one of my favorite runes. And coming from Minnesota, the land of 10,000 lakes, I really relate to it! When you grow up by a body of water you get to know it well. The shallows, drop offs, currents, beaches and shoreline all become special. Certain fish and other creepy crawlers, sea weeds, rocks and shells are particular to that lake. Summer’s Lake at my grandmother’s farm was famous for its shallows and sudden drop off as well as an abundance of leeches. Parts of the shoreline harbored water snakes, and wild rice grew on the Northeast side.

The lake is a metaphor for the womb, and there is a Lady of the Lake in nearly every European mythology. In Norse myth and practice, the wagon of Nerthus was driven into the lake and washed ceremonially before her festival. Archeological evidence suggests that those washing the wagon were ritually drowned in the lake. Sacrifices were often made to bodies of water like rivers, lakes and bogs. One type of Viking burial involved loading up a ship with necessary things (and people), lighting it

on fire and sending it out on the lake, fjord or ocean. Lakes are associated with death because the lake is also the womb from which life springs. The ancients understood that death and birth are two sides of the same coin and completely dependant on one another. One cannot die without being reborn, and one cannot be born without the certainty of death.

The wisdom of the mouth of the river, the mouth of god, flows into the lake and collects there as a massive body of wisdom that has multiple levels. The deeps of the lake may be inhabited by strange sea monsters or giant fish with large teeth. The shallows may hold a quick current with an undertow that can easily sweep you away. Laguz asks you to explore your womb knowledge, to discover the depths of your right brain, your feminine, intuitive and yin side. Whether male or female we must all accept that we have depth and wisdom, a knowledge that goes beyond simple reasoning into a realm of knowing through feeling and faith. We must come to terms with this if we are ever to be whole as humans. Whole, integrated self is what the next rune, Ing/Ingvine promises. But we must do the work to get there.

The lake is pictured in the west of the Medicine Wheel in some Native American traditions. It is the place of sunset and dream time, the land of the witches. Perhaps Laguz is asking you to look at your dreams. If my attention to my dream diary wanes I find my dreams become more pressing and strange. As I become more diligent in writing down my dream observations I notice they become more mundane and easier to fit into my awake time. Just as modern humans put less emphasis on dreams – many say they are meaningless ramblings altogether - so too they denigrate feelings, intuition, and extrasensory perception. But science has indeed found brain tissue along the spine in the areas of the heart and stomach or womb area. So when you say, “I just know it in my heart” or “I have a gut instinct” you are actually using your brain. Earth based cultures understand dreams as actual realities in which we are intimately involved. These realities continue on when we are awake, and part of us remains in the dream time. Since we spend one third of our lives sleeping and dreaming, it makes sense to pay attention and not waste the information we can cull from our dreams. There is an ancient tradition in every culture regarding the study, use and purpose of dreams. In fact,

some cultures spend one third of their waking time discussing, exploring, and creating art from their dreams.

Laguz is our psychic sense, but it can be tricky. You may think the surface is glassy and calm but what of the undertow? The key is to not let your fears of the unknown defeat you in your search of yourself as the lake. Don't take anything at face value. Look deeply and carefully at what you see, hear, and understand. Go cautiously into the lake, but do not allow your senses to be clouded with fear. Do not presume you can just barge your way into the female mysteries of Laguz or you may find yourself injured by the cut grass reeds protecting the borders. Laguz hints of a dangerous but necessary course of discovery.

In Minnesota, the lake was the lifeline. It's where we fished, gathered cat tails, wild rice, and other wild foods. It was where we washed our bodies and utensils. In modern times the lake is still where we sit and dream, and see the reflections of the moon and stars and the wide washes of color from sunsets and sunrises. Lakes provide irrigation and stability for agriculture and therefore, civilization. Mannaz, human kind or community comes before Laguz, suggesting that community is seeking the best place to thrive. My ancestors living on Sogn fjord counted on the deep cold waters for so much of their livelihood, and their descendents still do in terms of tourism and trade.

Laguz asks us to explore and develop our woman/womb sense and pay attention to the messages on both the surface and the depths. It suggests we look more deeply into the matter we are questioning, just as the fisherman or woman would look for the best places to fish on the lake. Laguz gives us a hook or spear to throw and the strength to pull it up again if we are not afraid. It reminds us that we are the lake, and that the monsters dwelling within are also us. Both the rewards of living lakeside and the inherent dangers present in a large body of water are ours if we integrate this rune within ourselves. Death and life, and death and rebirth are our fate. Take care, but still enjoy.

22. Ing



Ing, Ingvine. My last name ends with this rune! Ing is two X's stacked a top one another. It symbolizes completion.

Ing comes after Laguz, the lake. The lake is the mirror that reflects our other self back to us. Ing and Ingvine make up a twin god and goddess pair like Freyr and Freya. Much of the lore surrounding Ing and Ingvine has been lost, but the stories of twin gods and goddesses have similarities across the globe. And we have a great story of Freya and Freyr to illustrate the lessons in the Twin Deity story. The meaning of Ing and Ingvine as a rune is sometimes relegated to simplistic fertility notions, but this rune is so much more. It is the Tao of Norse understanding. The Tao is made up of yin and yang energies. Yin is the right brain, receptive, intuitive aspect of life. Yang is the left brain, outgoing, active side.

Each of us has a twin inside of us. In Jungian psychology a woman's male half is called the animus, a man's female half is called the anima. The story of Freya's necklace, Brisngamen, is the story of a twin psyche becoming unified. One day Freyr got a golden Boar from the Dwarves. Freya wanted something beautiful too and went into the darkness of the Dwarves' underground mines. By allowing them to lie with her, she expressed an extreme Yin. They rewarded her with a necklace that gave her power and beauty beyond all gods and mortals. She returned to the surface triumphant, with full awareness of herself as a goddess. This was outwardly apparent in her necklace of gold, amber, sun, power, raiment

such as her twin brother had never seen. When he saw her, he saw himself reflected back as a god.

As in the inhalation and exhalation of creation, Ing/Ingvine reminds us that as we combine we also separate. The dying process is also the process of creation. Are you dying like Freya in the mines? What will be the reward of such a “shaman’s death?” What is the other side of you that is manifesting and asking to be viewed as divine?

The twins are also like the two halves of the brain. The right and left hemispheres are Freya and Freyr respectively. And the Brisingamen is the Corpus Callosum, the filament that bridges the two halves of the brain and allows them to work in tandem. Ing wants each of us to explore our extreme yin and yang, to communicate between them to achieve unity and balance. Only in the balance of the Earth is fertility even possible.

Another aspect of Ing/Ingvine is its use in magical thinking and manifestation. As a twin rune, this is the rune that doubles my luck, doubles my crops, and doubles my joy.

Ing tells us to look for the duality in all things and, at the same time, to look for the unity. This rune brings things and people together to co-create. Look for the fertility of partnerships, look for the full picture that duality creates, and look at the two sides to every story.

23. Daeg



Daeg, Dag, Day. Gud dag is good day. Daeg looks like a bow tie. It is an X, the rune Gifu-Gebo (gift) with the two ends corralled by straight lines, which are the rune Isa (ice). Daeg, day, is a gift of the sun for a short time. The day comes out of the ice of darkness and gives us heat and light in which to work, play, and interact with our surroundings before the ice time of night comes again. Daeg reminds us to make the best use of this precious time. Our ancestors would have had complete darkness at the end of the day, especially in the winter. Just the hearth fire, the candle, the lantern, or the torch would light the way. In fact, it is Kenaz, ken, (<) to know, the torch rune that first wanes then waxes with the creation of the X.

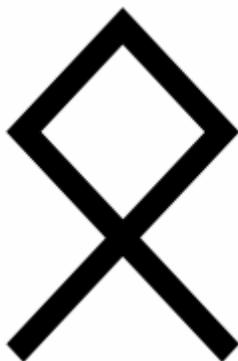
We work hard during the day because we are assured of rest time. Isa, the time of quiet, slow movement and rest is at the head and foot of Daeg. We need good rest in perhaps twice the dose of our good works. We sleep, we wake, we do, we wind down and then we sleep again. A day is a cycle beginning and ending with sleep. In today's culture of artificial environments so many people are removed from this important cycle. Our Indo-European cousins, the Hebrews, count sundown as the beginning of the day. So did the ancient Norse. Think how productive a day might be if we begin it as the sun goes down, dream fresh dreams, and then wake to fulfill them.

Daeg may indicate the importance of remembering and working with your dreams, bringing the messages of the gods received in the night into the light of the day. Dreamwork was a valued skill in the days of our Phoenician/Hebraic ancestors and our Nordic kin, and stories of famous dream interpreters abound in the literature and stories of most every culture. In fact, we spend most of our lives dreaming. The value of dreams and dream work cannot be over emphasized as modern humans are generally sleep and dream-deprived.

So many today are stuck in the darkness before the dawn. Depression keeps people from even seeing the day, let alone utilizing it. Daeg is a magic elixir against this feeling because it holds the promise of the light of day, the gift. And note that the same bowtie shape appears no matter which way you hold it. Daeg is also a forgiving rune. As Scarlet O'Hara said in *Gone With The Wind*, "After all, tomorrow is another day." Don't beat yourself up if you didn't accomplish all your tasks in a single day.

There is an ethic in the message of Daeg. We are being asked to work hard now because the light is shining on us *now*. *Carpe diem!* (Seize the day!) We can show gratitude for this gift by caring for it and using it well. Respect the gift of yet another sunrise; the promise of another day is our connection to the divine. Being certain that the sun will rise again leaves us grateful.

24. Othel



Othel, Othela, the homeland. The last rune in the Futhark alphabet, Othel ends us and begins us. It represents both death and re-birth; we reach the homeland only to start our journey all over again. Othel's shape is like Gifu, the X rune, with Kenaz on the top like a cone hat. The enlightenment of knowing (Kenaz) tops Gifu bringing us a deeper awareness of our relationships and gifts.

If there were a catch phrase for this rune it would be "Know thyself." People who have "near death" experiences often claim to have seen their entire lives pass before their eyes. It is a life changing experience. Sometimes people who "hit rock bottom" experience a death of their old selves as a transformation occurs. Exploration of who we are creates "little deaths" of our old understandings. These are often referred to as shamanic deaths and they change and transform who we are in dramatic ways. To deeply understand ourselves, we must explore our roots, our genetic inheritance, our family and tribal karma. This is the essence of Othel.

The process of Othel is questioning and review. What have I done with my life thus far? Where do my attitudes, habits, and traditions come from? Did I learn them from my parents or grandparents? Did I inherit my worldview from the culture in which I live (which, in America, can mean the television)? How are these cultural ideals different from those of my ancestors? Which traditions, habits, and ideals feel right to me and

feed who I want to become? Do I have a family history of high blood pressure, cancer, addiction? These are important questions we must ask as we make choices for our lives.

On the Medicine Wheel, questions rise in the East with the Fool (a character akin to Loki, the trickster). Our first stop on the wheel is the Southeast, the homeland of Tradition. Then we check in with the Past, not to stay stuck there, but rather to discover the roots that will keep us grounded as we traverse the wheel in search of answers that resonate with our individual path in life, frequently called the Red Road.

Though the Vikings traveled the world, when they died they often had their bones transported back to the places they were born. If this was not possible, the surviving family would sometimes carve a rune marker in the homeland in honor of the deceased. Family cemeteries are a tradition in many cultures. Ancestor worship and family altars abound in every continent. Many cultures believe that after death the soul visits all the places it visited in life. These ghostly travelers have to gather the lessons and karma of this earth walk in order to move to the next life. People often feel the presence of a deceased loved one in the places they held dear in life. This is part of the process of Othel.

So what is the next life? What is the ultimate “homeland?” In Norse mythology there were several options for humans after death. Each option depended on how this life was lived. Half of those who died in battle would be taken to Valhalla where warriors could recount the stories of their exploits forever around Odin’s banqueting table. Being invited to join one’s warrior ancestors who had died with honor on the battlefield was the greatest honor. For a warrior, dying any other way meant shame and disgrace, and the gates of Valhalla were forever closed to him. There is a tale of an old warrior who was outliving his strength. He tied his gold and treasure around his neck so that someone would try to steal it. If he could die battling, then he would join his friends in Odin’s hall of Valhalla.

The other half of the warriors who died in battle would go to Sessrúmnir, Freya’s hall. Some shamans of the Vanir, Freya’s kind, would be invited to feast in Vanneheim, sometimes referred to as the Summerland. This

honor was bestowed on many famous Seidr Kona, in the service of Freya. Good farmers or herders were welcomed here to tend the flocks, gardens and fields of Freya and Freyr's world. Humans who had married Huldre, the fairy creatures of Vanir living in Mannheim, might be brought to Sessrumnir with their immortal lovers. Our afterlife home is so connected to our lives here on Earth that even the Danish national anthem calls Denmark Freya's Hall! Othel allows us to align other worlds to this one as we search for our true homeland. Used magically, this rune can safely bring us out of trance, spirit journey, or astral projection back into the world our bodies occupy.

Those who died of disease or by accident, without distinction, could be found in Eljudnir, the hall of the goddess Hel in Niffleheim. It was a place of feasting as well, cold but not uncomfortable and with access to the other worlds in case one was sent to run an errand. Such errands could be directives from Hel or other deities of the nine worlds. They could be important visits to a shaman or Seidr Kona, or to a family member in order to warn or instruct. The family altars kept people in touch with their deceased relations and provided doorways for such visits. Such options were reserved for the most deserving and diligent of human kind.

The Nordic people believed in reincarnation. If a baby died they would often call the next baby by the same name with the belief that the first had returned. This is the basis for a traditional first name that runs through the generations. The importance of family roots is intense. Every way you look at it, creating a good life is the same thing as creating a good death since death is the sum total of life.

The Futhark is set up to lead us to the homeland in the best possible way. If we follow the lessons of the runes from beginning to end we have done the process of Othel. The 23 preceding runes shape us, jolt us, and make us who we are. The tapestry of our lives begins with the warp and weft of our ancestor's stories. From this we spin our unique strands, changing the patterns and adding new colors. But the weave has no end; it moves seamlessly into the tales of our children, nieces and nephews, the children of our cousins, and all our relations. Our stories and those of our ancestors must be shared before we pass into the land of the dead because that is the process of Othel. That is how we find our homeland.

Runes in Divination

I am frequently asked to teach the use of runes in divination. Divination is a form of prayer for me. It is about centering the body, clearing the mind, and breathing with intention. I think about an issue and formulate a question about it. Often I simply need to know what kind of energy is passing through my life. Sometimes the question is: What is this issue really about?

Runes are consulted when a decision needs to be made and help from our higher being is desired. Relax. Ground your energy into the earth. Get clear in your head and heart. Balance. Draw the rune that attracts you by feeling. Usually by the time people are clear about their issue, they intuit the answers immediately. Then drawing a rune simply serves to verify what they have already guessed. I never ask a rune client to tell me the question. My method is to guide clients into meditation, have them mix the runes and silently summon what they need to know. My job is simply to tell them what the runes they have chosen mean, stories about how that energy works in our lives, how it worked in the lives of our ancestors, and what lessons that rune holds.

How many runes to draw? Sometimes one rune is enough. Sometimes I want to know how I got to the question, where I am at with it, and where I am headed, so I draw three. You can use the runes in traditional Tarot spread fashion. Or you can make up your own method.

If you do not have a rune set, don't worry. The following method of divination gets easier as you memorize and internalize the shapes, sounds, names and meanings of the runes. Go outside and close your eyes, allowing your question to formulate. Open your eyes and read the runes in your environment. As I tell my students, every rune can be found in a single tree, in sidewalk cracks, and in the way your silverware spills into the sink for washing. I can't imagine a woman on the setter fumbling for a bag of runes to ask for help finding her stray cow. The runes exist everywhere in our environment, and if we are present in our environment they will surface like familiar faces to encourage us, warn us, or to set us straight on our journey here on Earth.

Glossary

Aesir – The name of a clan of deities in Scandinavian Mythology. The birth of the Aesir is the birth of Odin (see Odin) who was the son of Bor and Bestla the giant. Bor was the son of Buri, the first “hero” licked free of the ice at the beginning of creation by Audhumla, the cosmic cow. Bor’s mother goes unnamed. As the Aesir began wandering the worlds, they came upon the Vanir who, as tales tell, used to freak them out. The Vanir made a game of creeping around their campfires; they were notorious shape shifters. An envoy of the Vanir, Gulvieg, came into their camp. She was a Seidr magician who bragged about her love of gold. They burned her three times, and three times she lived. The Vanir could not take this insult, so they began a war to prove how evenly matched the two deity systems were. To end this un-winnable war they exchanged hostages who were to live as guests each other’s halls. The Aesir had strict taboos against sibling marriage and placed the greatest value on the manly qualities of battle, much like the Homosapiens who eventually snuffed out the Neanderthal did. Njord, Freya and Freyr were sent to live with the Aesir. Freyr becomes a mighty god and Njord lived out his days in the sea. Nerthus was banished from memory and Freya’s ways were referred to as vanity and narcissism among the Aesir, and she was even called a whore.

Aett – 1. The Scandinavian clan or aett was a social group based on common descent or the formal acceptance into the group at a Ting, the Scandinavian version of a pow wow. 2. An aett is also a set of eight runes that make up a family of runes relating to one another. Freya’s Aett is the first eight runes in the Futhark, Heimdal’s, or Hel’s Aett, is the second eight, and Tyr or Tiw’s Aett is the final eight.

Audhumla – This is the name Scandinavian mythology gave to the cow that wandered the plains in the earliest moments of creation. Ymir, the giant, drank Audhumla’s milk, and Audhumla’s licked free the first man of the Aesir, Buri, who was trapped in the ice. The concept of the sacred cow traveled with the Indo-European migration, starting with Aditi in East Indian traditions, Hathor in Egyptian myth and elsewhere in Africa, where the cow is also revered in Tanzanian culture. It is from the udders

of the cosmic cow that our galaxy, the Milky Way, poured forth into creation.

Brigid – Celtic goddess of the triple fire: hearth, smith craft, and poetic inspiration whose altar flame was guarded by 13 priestesses. She relates to the rune Ken and to Nied, the need fire. Sainted by the Catholic Church, 13 nuns guard her sanctuary in Ireland today.

Brisingamen – The magical necklace of gold and amber belonging to Freya. When she saw that the Dwarves had made presents for Freyr and some of the other gods, Freya went to land of the dark elves to request a present for herself. The price she paid for the work of four dwarves was to spend one night with each of them. (There are also four dwarves who hold up the four corners of the world who are named after the four directions.) There are several wonderful re-tellings of this story on the internet and elsewhere. It is a classic tale of innocent female energy moving into the dark or shadow side and coming out more powerful as a result of the journey. The necklace represents Freya's ability to transcend darkness and ordeal to take her rightful place as the daughter of Nerthus, queen of the Earth.

Joseph Campbell – researched and wrote about the similarities in mythologies around the world. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was his most popular work. Check out the Bill Moyer's interviews with Joseph Campbell. They are very inspiring.

Celtic Calendar – Sometimes called the “old agricultural calendar” the Celtic calendar follows the astronomical events of the Equinoxes, Solstices, and the points in between. From the beginning of time, humans have pondered and celebrated these times of the year. Ancient astronomy and astrology has monuments to the significance of these points in the year. The Pyramids of Egypt, the Granges and Henges of Europe, and the Pyramids of Teotihuacan near Mexico City are just a few examples. The 8 spokes of seasonal change have been important to agrarian societies from the Neanderthal to the *Old Farmers Almanac!* (taken from my web site)

Chakra – Means “wheel” in Sanskrit. The human body is like a battery with negative and positive energy flows. At certain points along the spine and joints, the energy rotates. There are seven chakras along the spine in the “Kundalini” energy system beginning at the base of the spine and moving to the crown of the head. Each chakra point carries the colors of the spectrum as follows (base to crown) Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The base chakra is red, the wheel turns slowly, and it releases energy related to survival, instinct, and Earth based needs. As the energy travels up the spine, each wheel turns slightly faster giving off a different color and relating to issues less material until the crown chakra, as violet, relating to enlightenment and healing energy.

I include this in the book for several reasons. First, our Nordic ancestors would have had some understanding of these concepts as our common Indo-European heritage contains many similarities between Vedic or Hindu gods, concepts, and artistic representations. Second, the concepts of the spine as the trunk of the world tree and the chakras as worlds circling this tree are ancient and used in shamanic practice throughout the world. Third, in describing how the order of the Futhark flows as a life path and a road map to enlightenment, I see the similarities to the lessons of the chakras and how different runes relate to the chakras. Lastly, our global community is becoming so unified that finding the “Truths” of all systems and sharing this information seems imperative for the advancement of our human condition.

Crone – There are three aspects of the female being. The **maiden** is youthful, innocent and free flowing. Her first menstrual cycle and burgeoning sexuality create the melting snows of spring time. Budding, flowering, and dancing, she is the epitome of care free. The **mother** aspect is the educated, understanding, and disciplined aspect of the female psyche. She uses her menstrual blood to grow other beings. Her time is summer and autumn, when growth is ripe and nourishing. We picture her seated with a cornucopia on her lap, flowing out to the people. She is the epitome of responsibility. The **crone** is the aspect of the feminine that is done with things of the Earth. Her menses have stopped and she “keeps her wise blood to herself.” Winter is her time, the dream time and the introversion. She is free of the responsibilities of motherhood like the maiden but not care free. Wise and without

restrictions she can travel safely between the worlds. She is the epitome of freedom.

Crow's Law – In Jamie Sam's book *Animal Medicine*, Crow knows and understands the laws of the universe. The phrase, "as the crow flies" regards the actual distance and direction from point A to point B. For a human walking this distance there may be rivers and mountains in the path causing the distance and direction to shift. But for crow, there is a bigger picture. And the bigger picture overrides the individual concept of reality. Crow's law is **orthug** or **orlag** in ancient Norse understanding. It is the natural law that says, despite our efforts to command, we must in the end obey. In many interpretations, the **Norns** are responsible for creating a person's *orlag*, which includes our karma, our destiny, our quantity of luck, and fits us into the environment at our birth (see Feng Shui).

Eastern Medicine – Homeopathic-based medical treatments. The assumption in Eastern or Chinese medicine is that symptoms occur to alert us to a root cause. By treating sinus inflammation with more of the same, the symptom is pushed into running its course more quickly, thereby revealing the underlying cause. Eastern medicine treats the human body as a whole, organic organism whose parts are intimately connected. Each organ, for example, has a relationship to pressure points in the feet, hands and head and is connected to emotional states and the environment (including seasons and times of day).

Masaru Emoto – Japanese researcher whose studies about how thought and emotion affect water became a global sensation. His book *The Hidden Messages in Water* shows photos of frozen water that has been subjected to different environments. Water that had been exposed to messages of hate and water exposed to messages of love was then frozen and observed under a microscope. The water exposed to hate messages barely formed crystals while the water that had been loved had exquisite crystal structures. [Note: a piece I wrote, *The Journey*, about Mimir's well – the well of a Norse god known for his wisdom – was performed as the opening ceremony for a conference in which Emoto was a key note speaker.]

Eve and Adam – The primary story of Adam and Eve comes from the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible (see Hebrew Bible). The book tells two creation stories. In one, God creates man and woman from dust. (The myth of Lilith, Adam’s first wife, is part of this version of the story (see Lilith). The second creation story tells us that God put Adam into a deep sleep and took a rib from his chest to create the female, making woman a “second generation” creation and subject to man. This is the Eve whose name means Mother of Life.

Adam and Eve’s original residence, the Garden of Eden, was a land of plenty, but one without much going on. Challenging Eve’s concept of truth, a “serpent” tells her that if she eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she won’t die as God had told her she would. Tempted, she eats and receives the understanding of good and evil, by which she procures free will for humanity. She gives the fruit to Adam, and both are expelled from the garden into the world where their free will is to be forever tested and their choice-making is to be wholly their own. This story represents the transition from being fed all we need from above to needing to create what we need through human relationships. It is the beginning of **Mannaz**, which brings us closer to divine nature (as the angels in the garden feared would happen) as it makes us creative rather than simply receptive beings.

Feng Shui – Meaning literally wind and water, Feng Shui is the practice of observing and manipulating the environment to better serve the flow of chi or energy through a room, a garden, or even a person. Coming originally from China, Feng Shui astrology is linked to the I Ching, a system of divination and numerology. In Chinese philosophy Feng Shui is one fifth of what creates the total human ordeal. Destiny, luck, Feng Shui, education and philanthropy are the five points that humans must understand and pursue in order to gain completion and enlightenment. (See my website [www.karitauring.com] for more.)

Fenrir – The wolf, son of Loki and Angrboda, Fenrir will aid in the destruction of the world. He is bound by a magical chain that the gods slipped on him through trickery. The god Tyr agreed to hold his hand in Fenrir’s mouth as a trust measure while the gods bound the wolf. Tyr lost his hand in the bargain.

Fire Rune – Many people try to relate each rune with an associated color, tree, element, deity etc. While they all come from the natural world and relate to the elements of nature, some runes lend themselves to more obvious associations. Runes such as Nied, Ken, and sometimes Ur, have associations with fire. Runes such as Isa, Hagal, Laguz, and Ansuz relate to the element of water. The wood runes are the trees, Beorc and Ehwaz and may also be called earth runes along with Othelo, and perhaps Algiz, other earth-bound runes. There is only intuition when it comes to making these associations and one should feel free to relate any rune to any element they deem appropriate to the work at hand. Strict rules of association should be held as highly suspect.

Freya and Freyr – The twin deities of the Vanir whose names mean Lady and Lord respectively. Ing and Ingvine are another set of twin deities who may indeed be the true names of Freya and Freyr. As in other cultures, the concept of the female and male twin gods is common in Scandinavian myth, especially when it comes to the Vanir. Many scholars see Nerthus (the Bronze Age Earth Mother) and Njord (the god of the sea) as the brother/sister twin parents of Freya and Freyr. This kind of mythology relates to human psychology and brain development. Each human has a male and female side, the left and right brain, the yin and yang, the positive and negative charge of our energy flow. By destroying this concept in mythology, humans have allowed one side to dominate, the masculine side. This shows up in all sorts of dysfunctions as subtle as punishing left handed children (the right or female side of the brain controls the left side of the body), creating entire educational systems that teach only to left-brain linear thinking, or dysfunctions as obvious as the oppression of women. [Freya and the Vanir have been linked back to the earliest migration out of the Indus Valley through stories of the Huldre (fairy women connected with Freya) being the children of Lilith, the first wife of Adam who left the Garden of Eden when she refused to submit to the male. This is part of Norwegian folklore even up into the early 1900s.]

Frigg – The wife of Odin, Frigg is adept at women's magical arts and the runes. Some authorities think of her as an aspect of Freya but it seems clear that she was associated with the Aesir before the wars with the Vanir. I think the close association between Frigg and Freya has more to

do with women's spiritual practice. They both used a cape of feathers to shape shift and fly from world to world. They were both associated with fertility and other women's issues. Also, Odin was notorious for his extra-marital affairs and had Freya on his "to do" list. This might have caused early Christian scholars to associate the two goddesses as the same female deity.

The Elder Futhark – (or **Older Futhark, Old Futhark**) is the oldest form of the runic alphabet used by Germanic tribes for Proto-Norse and other Germanic dialects of the 2nd to 7th centuries A.D. for inscriptions on artifacts (jewelry, amulets, tools, weapons) and for use in divination. The Elder Futhark contains 24 runes, each having individual sounds and meanings. The Younger Futhark contains 16 rune shapes. Anglo Saxon runes and other variants were devised in the 1300's. Outlawed as pagan and replaced by the Roman letter alphabet, much of the meaning and lore of the runes was hidden in secret societies and folklore. In the 1600's, rune masters suffered the fate of witches and were burned and tortured. (Many had their tongues cut out.)

Giants – Before the Aesir gods were "born", there were giants in the world. The giant Ymir was sleeping in the ice between two worlds (see Yggdrasil). Ymir was a hermaphrodite, able to create from his/her self. Stories describe him as slow and sleepy, like a giant baby. Sucking from the world cow (see Audhumla) he slept and sweated other beings, other giants. Giants could shape shift, had magic, and could mate with other species. Odin's mother was the giant, Bestla and Ymir would have been Odin's maternal grandfather/grandmother. Odin's father was Bor, son of Buri who was licked out of the ice by Audhumla. Some stories say Ymir was jealous of Buri's good looks and noble bearing and so started a war against him and his clan. Other stories say that Ymir was so unintelligent that the three sons of Bor, Odin, Vili, and Ve began to fight with him. Another possible cause for war with Ymir may even be his hermaphroditism. Odin's clan is notoriously patriarchal, anti-feminist, and intolerant of marriage with close relations. It is ironic as Odin finds that to achieve his goal of complete awareness, he must learn women's mysteries (see Odin), a full karmic cycle.

The battle with the Giants ended in the killing of Ymir whose blood flooded the worlds and drowned the majority of the Giants. It almost put

out the fires of Muspell! In a bit of a panic, Odin and the others began carving up the body of Ymir to create worlds in which to live. The clouds are Ymir's brains, his bones are mountains. During the flood, a frost giant named Bergalmir saved as many of his people as he could. They washed up in a tree trunk on the back of Ymir, now called Jotunheim, the new land of the giants. In circular fashion, Ymir creates, is destroyed, is created from, and so on.

The Aesir are victorious against the giants and the Vanir (see Vanir) gods. But, alas, their karma will come full circle when Surt the Black, leader of the fire giants, avenges Ymir at the end of the world. He will call the other giants together, slaying the Aesir and the Vanir, as all the worlds of Yggdrasil (see Yggdrasil) end in flame. This time is called Ragnarok (see Ragnarok). Of course, out of the ashes of the old will come the new as the prophesy of the Seidr Kona (see Seidr) predicts.

The Hebrew Bible – the Torah or Pentateuch, first five books of this Bible. In these stories, Abraham and his descendants form the basis of the three major “Abrahamic” religious traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three share features such as patriarchal monotheism, legalism, and strong traditions of community and social service.

Hopi – The Hopi are indigenous to the southwest of the United States of America. One creation story tells about how a thought became a thread for the spider to begin weaving the world. Thought Woman and Spider Woman are sometimes different entities, sometimes interchangeable. I recommend the book *Being and Vibration* by Joseph Rael to more fully understand Hopi spirituality and especially the relationship of sound to creation.

Heimdal – one of the Vanir sent to humans with the gifts of culture. He went first to the house of the lowly Thralls, peasants and slaves, and infused them with his divine nature by co-fathering children among his hosts. He repeated his “grace” by visiting the Karls, the free men and women, and finally the Jarls, the gentry. Like the figure of Jesus, Heimdal gives the gift of divinity to all of humanity. While some use this tale to support the three class system (upper, middle, lower), I see Heimdal imparting his unconditional love and gifts of the gods to all people.

Heimdall is also the guardian of the Bifrost bridge that connects Asgard to Midgard. When the Giant Surt comes to make war at Ragnarok, Heimdall will blow his Gjallerhorn (now being used as a drinking horn by Mimir at the wellspring Mimirsbrunner). This horn will alert the rest of the gods and men that the war is coming (see Ragnarok).

Hel – One of Loki’s children by Angrboda, a giantess. Hel is half maiden half crone, ruler of the underworld where souls lost by accident or dishonor are bound to go. This is the basis of the Christian idea of Hell. (The Hebrew Bible does not contain an equivalent concept.) The land of the dead in the Old Testament is simply “Sheol” where everyone ends up. There are several halls in which humans may spend eternity. Valhalla (Odin’s hall), Sessrumnir (Freya’s hall) and Eljudnir (Hel’s hall.) Baldur (the beloved son of Odin) ends up in Eljudnir as he died through Loki’s trickery.

Huldre – In Scandinavian mythology there are many sorts of creatures that are not quite human. They are referred to as the “unseen folk”, the “little people” or sometimes collectively referred to as “tusse-folk” even today. Other kinds of “folk” were Tomte, Nisse, Naren, and Trolls, to name but a few. The Huldre were women with cow’s tails credited with teaching human women how to herd, churn butter, keep clean houses, and sometimes to spin and weave. In “The origin of the Huldre Folk: The Huldre Minister” Collected by J. Skar in *Gamalt fra Setesdal* (1903), all the tusse-folk are described as the offspring of Lilith, Adam’s first wife and his equal in every way. They left the Garden of Eden freely and are therefore without sin. This is why, in Skar’s book, the Huldre tell the minister that none of the tusse-folk need the New Testament (see Lilith).

Indus Valley – The flood plain region of northern India to the “fertile crescent” between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern day Iraq to the Anatolian peninsula. The Indo-European language family is tied together by common origination in this area, home to one of the first known “sedentary” cultures. It is here that the story of the Garden of Eden was originated. Weather changes causing flooding and drought and population expansion caused a clash between Aryan-Iranian nomadic culture and the settled agricultural communities of the Indus Valley resulting in the Indo-European migrations.

Journeyman – One who goes “on the road” with one’s craft, especially in regard to bards or musicians. This is a person in mid-career who must go through the trials of creating fame for him or herself in the wide world.

Carl Jung – A student of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung advanced the theories of dream analysis. Jung promoted the idea of individual human psychological make up and dream characters as archetypes found within mythology. These archetypes live within the collective unconscious minds of individuals, cultures, and all of humanity. Jung used active visualization to create interactions between the dream characters and the ego of the dreamer in hopes that the characters would integrate with the dreamer, creating a healthier, more whole individual.

Karma and Dharma – Karma is the law of cause and effect stating that the actions you do return to you. A deep part of Hindu and Vedic teachings, most every culture has some related concept to Karma. Even in physics we say that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Karma is the accumulated return of actions from myriad lifetimes whereas Dharma is related to the destiny of this particular incarnation. As we work to maintain a balanced life devoid of emotional attachment, Karma and Dharma become neutralized and enlightenment is attained.

Lady of the Lake – Female deities have always been related to bodies of water. The Ganges River, the most sacred in India, is the name of Ganga, mother goddess. In Greek and Roman mythology, the water nymphs and spirits often provide magical weapons to heroes. In Celtic lands, Nimue or Vivian are the names of the lake goddess. In Bronze Age Scandinavia, the cart of Nerthus the Earth Mother was driven into a lake to be ceremonially bathed. Those who assisted the goddess were often drowned in the same lake after bathing. Water is yin, or female, receptive and absorbing, dark and slow. The lake is the womb of woman, the center of life. The river is the flow of menstrual blood, the essence of creation.

Lilith – In Hebrew and Babylonian folk mythology Lilith was described as Adam’s first wife (correlating to the vague first creation story in Genesis – see Eve and Adam). They were both created from the dust at

the same time and Lilith considered herself equal to Adam in every way. She refused to be submissive (most tales relate this to sexuality) which frustrated Adam. Adam complained to God, and Lilith left the Garden of Eden in a huff. God sent angels to retrieve her but she refused to come back. This clash between Lilith and Adam mirrors the split of the Indo-European Language groups. Lilith's group formed the Babylonian and Greek line of matrifocal, agricultural, goddess-oriented language and stories. Adam and Eve mirror the nomadic, patriarchal, legalistic and monotheistic language and belief system. As the tales develop Lilith is called a screech owl and a demon that preys on children and men in their sleep. Descriptions of her, conjure up associations with Athena with her winged cap and owl totem as well as with Freya who dons a feather cape and is free with her sexuality. Lilith is further linked to Freya through Norwegian folktales of the Huldre (see Huldre).

Loki – Loki is one of the most complex characters in Norse Mythology. He was of the race of giants who became Odin's foster brother. He represents everything about human sexuality that the Aesir despise. As a shapeshifter he took the form of a female animal and birthed Odin's eight legged horse, Sleipner. He had liaisons with many creatures most notably Angrboda, the giantess. From this union come Fenris (or Fenrir), the wolf who will slay Odin at Ragnarok, Jörmungandr the sea serpent who will aid in the destruction of the world, and Hel, who rules the underworld that keeps the hero Baldur from re-joining his kin in Asgard. To me, Loki is the personification of the dysfunction that happens when male and female aspects are split and female deities and traits are suppressed. The gods get off balance and Loki is the one who keeps them that way. A local shamanic teacher pointed out to me that Loki represents the strife out of which the gods attain a higher state of being.

Medicine Wheel – From The Wheel of Law, adapted from the work of Joan Halifax by Robin Van Doren, 1988. My teacher encouraged us to learn the directional characters of the wheel while honoring similar characters from our own cultural heritage. I have found these positions on the wheel to relate to brain physiology as well. These are the basic descriptions as they were given to me along with my notes relating these characters to Celtic and Nordic archetypes as well as the Celtic (agricultural) calendar.

We enter the circle through the North East - The Pattern Keepers - Male then Female in energy. I think of them as I do the Spider Woman of Hopi traditions. The Pattern Keepers' job is to keep the integrity of the circle throughout the ritual. They see the *gestalt* – the whole. They are the web weavers, the fates, Spider Woman, the ones whose permission is needed and whose final word is law. These people are intuitive, can sense energy shifts, have an eye and ear for Truth and worthiness. If the questioner is allowed to enter the circle, he or she proceeds to the East.

1. East - The Fools - Two Male Energies

Other names for this character are Coyote, Loki (in Nordic tradition), the adversary. The quick wit of the rising sun, the mirror back on ourselves. The Maiden. Idea hatcher, lover of jolly good fun, the new moon. Causes friction so we can learn something. Spring Equinox.

2. South East - Tradition - Female then Male Energy

Tradition sits next to the Fool. This is the character within us that holds knowledge of the way things have always been done. Tradition answers the seeker's Fool's question from the standpoint of history. This position gives us the framework, the boundaries, the reference points and the lessons learned from the past. May Eve or Beltane on the wheel of the year.

3. South - The Warriors - Female then Male Energies

The attributes of the South are personified in the warrior. The heat of passion, the heart center, the noontime sun, Summer. The full Moon. The Warrior is the character of action and has the special function of protecting the children's fire in the center of the circle. The Mother protecting her children no thought hesitation only feeling. The Warrior will answer the question from this place of the heart and with the sacred duties in heart. Summer Solstice. **Center** – While the questioner does not go to the center it is important to know that the Grandparents (who are the past) sit on either side of the children (who are the future) at the fire in the center of the circle. The children's fire must never be allowed to die or be threatened in any way. This way we protect the past and the future.

4. **South West - The Shaman** - Female then Male Energies

Facing the Pattern Keeper, a shaman is nothing without a community to serve. The shamans are the healers, the interpreters of dreams, the keepers of the faith. They rely on the Pattern Keepers for balance and grounding when they are in their states of ecstasy. They will answer the questioner with psychic insight mixed with the health of the community and the individual in their thoughts. Lughnasadh, the first harvest.

5. **West - The Witches** - Two Female Energies

The Crone, the waning moon, wise woman, she doesn't care about community per se. Like the Fool opposite her, she is only interested in her own knowledge. She is in control of the Magick, the dreamtime, the setting sun, the autumn time. She will sacrifice the grain god with no remorse. She is sexuality and operates out of the sensual where the Fool operates out of the intellectual. Fall Equinox.

6. **North West - The Tribal Chiefs** - Male then Female Energies

Sitting across from Tradition, the Tribal Chiefs weigh the information and give answers/make decisions for the general workings of the Tribe. Where we will hunt in the fall? When we will travel in the spring? Will we make war or peace? The tribal chiefs are the diplomats in this great circle of opposites and strong personalities! They are gathering information, listening hard. While the Shaman is concerned with the individual as part of the whole and the pattern keeper is concerned with the whole as part of the universal, the Tribal Chief sits opposite Tradition who has knowledge of the history of the whole and makes decisions about what the whole might be. Samhain, Halloween, the sacrifice of the King.

7. **North - The Creators** - Male then Female Energies

The first Thought Woman, the Logos, the sun when it has set, no moon, winter and the dark secret knowledge of creation, the void womb before conception. The Creator answers questions from the logical and scientific. The Creator can answer the why's of things because she creates everything. The Creator sits opposite the Warrior, whose passion and heat are like the woman giving birth. North is the conception. Winter Solstice.

8. North East - the Pattern Keeper - Male then Female Energies
Addressed at the end of the ritual, the Pattern Keeper decides whether the participants were truly speaking from their archetypal character or answering out of personal opinion. If the integrity of the wheel has been upheld, the seeker is free to depart and ponder the answers given by the archetypes. Imbolc, the blessing of the seeds to start the process again.

Moon Gods – the following are some examples: **Mani** in Norse myth, **Khons** and later **Toth** in Egypt, **Sin and Nanna** (twin lovers) in Summerian myth, **Soma** in Hindu tradition, **Tsuki-Yomi** in Japan, **Tezcatlipoca** in Aztec culture and even **Allah** in the pre-Islamic Arab world was a moon god with three powerful daughters, one of whom was his equal, named **Allat**.

Mjolnir – the name of Thor’s hammer. Accurate and final in its blow, it acts like a boomerang and comes back to him each time he throws it (see Thor).

The Nine Worlds – In the beginning was the void. In Scandinavian Myth it is called **Ginungagap**, the giant gap. **Niflheim**, the world of ice and frost comes into contact with **Muspellheim**, the world of fire. These polarities combine to create the field of salt and brine on which we find Ymir the giant and Audhumla the cow. There appears to have been a land of Giants already in existence called **Jormungrund**, ruled by Surt the Black, a giant who will lead the others into battle against the Aesir. Perhaps Ymir and Audhumla came from that world and got caught in an ice flow, landing in a new world circling the tree. The first root of the world tree anchors these old worlds. The wellspring at the end of the root is Hvergalmir, the boiling cauldron. **Jotenheim** was created out of Ymir and is home to other giants. The second root runs through Jotenheim ending at the wellspring of Mimir (name of a giant and related to the name of a goddess.) **Vanaheim** is the world of the Vanir (see Vanir) and is more ancient than the worlds built by Odin and his brothers, Vili and Ve. The world the Aesir built for themselves is called **Asgard**, very close to Vanaheim and across the river from Jotenheim. The third root of Yggdrasil runs close to Asgard and ends in the wellspring Urdbrunner. The Aesir create a world for humans called **Midgard** and set a rainbow bridge called “Bifrost” between Midgard and Asgard. Other worlds the Aesir take credit for creating are the world of

the dwarves, **Svartalfheim**, the world of the light elves, **Ljosalfheim**. There are other worlds mentioned as well as an entire company of beings who live on the actual tree itself.

Here is an excerpt of my own chant ritual through the world tree:

“The Journey” – Tauring, 2004

Eagle, hawk and cock I see
perched up in the branches three
4 winds, journey deer, move across the crown
(Astri Vestri Sudri Nordri)
Ratatosk, journey squirrel, I am moving down
(chick chick chick chick chreeeee)
Nine worlds three wells the journey has begun
Nine worlds three wells breathe as we go down

1st Stage – Level One

Alfheim – Vannehiem – ancient elves and gods
Worlds, I see them, two of 9 across
Alfheim – Vannehiem – Freyja bless my passing
Skirt the river Ifling

Midgard human home another of the 9

Asgard Odin’s land bless me as I ride
Urdarbrunner first well, guarded by the Norns
Urdarbrunner well of fate Urd Verdhandi Skuld
(Urði Skuldi Verdandi, Wyrd sisters of Fate, Being and Necessity)

Ride away, ride away, North we go and all

(Rida Rida Rida Riii Nordri alle com mit mir)

2nd Stage – Level 3

Down and down and deeper still, to the Northern land we ride
Muspellheim the seeds of all, primordial the fiery tide
Niffelhiem and Hel's domain, water raging Hvergalmir

Worlds collide sparks and steam, the source of rivers flowing clean
Who guards the wellspring of creation? Nidgahogg the Water Dragon!
(Nidgahogg Ginnungagap – Astri Astri Rida vi, Astri Astri com mit mir)

3rd Stage – Level 2

East the path that Odin took, riding through the worlds again
To the world of Nidavelier, through the world of Svartalfheim
In Svartahiem the dark elves dwell but Jotunheim contains the well
Cross the river deadly cold, river Ifling never froze
(cross the Ifling deadly cold, river Ifling never froze)

Jotunheim the giant's land, rock and frost the bane of man
Down and down the root we go beneath the world the sacred well
Mimir guards the water there, Water Etin primordial!

Norns – The collective name for the three sisters, Urd, Skuld, and Verthandi whose individual names mean fate, being, and necessity respectively. They represent “Wyrd” which is a concept similar to fate. Their names have been simplified to mean past, present, and future and they are often referred to as “the three fates.” Again, this trilogy of deities can be found in myths from around the globe and can even be related to the maiden, mother and crone aspects of the unified Goddess. They are older than the Aesir, older than the Vanir. They live by the well-spring of

the second root of the world tree called Yggdrasil. Pouring water from the spring named Urdsbrunner onto the root, they keep the tree alive. The cosmic tree is the cosmos and the three sisters are the rune users who keep the cosmic balance in alignment. It is through the three Norns that we really start to understand the astrological, cosmological, and scientific nature of what the runes are all about.

Odin – There are three aspects of Odin. First, he is the eldest brother of the sons of Buri, son of Bor. The sons of Buri (Odin, Vili and Ve) fought and killed the giant Ymir and created worlds from his body. Odin became the renowned warrior god and chief of the Aesir. Next he became a creator god by using the body of his slain enemy to create worlds. Odin in his final aspect is driven by the desire to be the All Father, seeking all manner of wisdom he gave his eye for a drink out of the well of wisdom. He emasculated himself, learning women's magic from Freya of the Vanir and his wife Frigg. He even caused himself to bleed as males must do, in order to understand the nature of the runes. Women bleed freely each month and gain wisdom through the womb's blood. There are countless heroes and gods who must hang on the tree of life, pierced in the side, and bleed freely in order to achieve the enlightenment of their female half. So Odin becomes the All Father god. Interestingly, however, Thor is the god whose popularity lingers long into the Christian era. Perhaps Odin sacrificed too much for a warrior people.

Psyche and Cupid – from the Greek Myths, Psyche was a human woman with whom Cupid, the god of love, fell in love. Cupid asked Psyche to stay blindfolded and remain in the dark about what he looked like because he wanted her to love him purely and didn't want his godly visage to affect her. She agreed and was quite happy until her sisters convinced her that he might be a monster. She broke the vow, took off her blindfold and lit a torch. Seeing the god of love next to her, she caused such a start that he woke up. The vow broken, Cupid fled, but his mother, Venus, wanted the couple to be happy so she raised the status of Psyche to demigoddess and she lived with Cupid from then on. This myth has been the subject of much feminist critique. It echoes the story of Adam and Eve, a fall by female curiosity and a rise in status as a result. It echoes the story of Freya who goes into the underworld to seek the Brisingamen necklace from the Dwarves, endures their will, and rises up more powerful than ever. It is the story of moving from blissful

ignorance to the tragedy of discovery, then to the evolution of consciousness that allows us to come closer to our divine nature.

Poetic Edda – From a medieval manuscript called the Codex Regius, the Poetic Edda are collection of poems written in Icelandic around the 1270's A.D. They were not discovered until the 1600's.

Prose Edda – A collection of Icelandic poetry, called the Younger Edda by its author, Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241).

Ragnarok - The war to end the world. Ragnarok will be preceded by a three year Ice Age, heralded by three cock crows and the blowing of the Gjallerhorn (see giants and wellsprings). The war is foretold by the Seidr Kona (see Seidr) named Sybil in the Voluspa Edda (see Voluspa). Ragnarok is brought down upon Odin to avenge the death of so many giants by the Aesir. The final war that destroys the worlds of the Aesir (see Aesir) crushes the Bifrost Bridge and burns the world tree (see Yggdrasil). The world as everyone knows it comes to an end. But as with all endings in mythology, and indeed in things scientific as well, endings are merely beginnings of a new thing. Sybil foretells that those who survive Ragnarok will begin a new age. The cycle of life and death and re-birth will begin again.

Reincarnation – The concept of ancestor spirits coming back among the living by being re-born into the family, literally to reincarnate or “come back into the flesh” after dying. In Norway, the practice of naming a new baby after one who had recently died was related to reincarnation.

Rune Poems – There are four central rune poems that preserve and even somewhat obscure the meanings of the runes. Since rune magic was outlawed by Christianity at the time the Rune Poems were written the authors would have been writing through the filters of Christian ethic complete with all the cultural baggage it brought with it. Modern readers may pull meaning from these texts through our own experience with the concepts presented. The four main rune poems are the **Icelandic Rune Poem**, the **Anglo Saxon Rune Poem**, the **Norwegian Rune Poem**,

and the **Abecedarium Nordmannicum**.

www.northvegr.org/lore/main.php#indo is an excellent resource for reading all source material on runes and Norse mythology

Sabbats

1. Midpoint - (around October 30) called Samhain, Halloween, the beginning of Winter, the start of the Celtic New Year, the time of the harvest of the meat, Herne's night, the Day of the Dead (*dia de los muertos*), All Saint's Eve, the beginning of the Wild Hunt.

2. Winter Solstice - (around December 20) when the night lasts longest and the sun is weakest. The birth of the Sun/son, called Yule in Scandinavia, mid-winter, Hanukkah in Jewish traditions, Diwali in Hindu tradition, Christmas, and Kwanza in African-American tradition. It is the time of Frau Holda, the patron goddess of spinners, who comes to check everyone's work.

3. Midpoint - (around Feb 2) called Imbolc, Groundhog's Day, purification of Mary, seed sorting time, the original end date of winter

4. Vernal Equinox - (around March 20) called Eostre, Ostara, Easter

5. Midpoint - (around May 1) called Beltane, Walburga in Germanic tradition, May Day, workers' holiday, assumption of Mary, enlightenment of Buddha and the beginning of Summer, chickens lose their winter feathers (great for hats)

6. Summer Solstice - (around June 20) The longest day, Midsummersdag, Litha, journey time, a fire ritual holy day, the height of the Sun's power.

7. Midpoint - (around August 2) called Lughnasaad, the first harvest of the grain, John Barleycorn's Day and the last of summer

8. Autumnal Equinox - (around September 20) called Lammas, the fruit harvest, Bacchus' Festival, Fall Cleaning

Sami – The Sami are the indigenous population of Scandinavia who were pushed into the extreme north by the cultures who came to dominate the region. It's another classic tale of the clash between sedentary agricultural people and ranging hunter/gathering society. The Sami still range with the herds of reindeer as much as possible, and new laws are making their way of life a little more supported. Once referred to as "Laplanders" the Sami influenced the culture and spirituality of the new settlers. The description of the traveling seidr kona in Erik the Red's Saga closely resembles Siberian shamanism. As Christianity gained influence over Scandinavia, the traditions of the Sami were outlawed, drums were burned and shamans were persecuted just as the paganism of the Vikings had been.

Seasonal Affective Disorder – S.A.D. As sunlight decreases in the winter time, most people feel the physical affects such as increased appetite, sluggishness, isolationism and irritation. These affects are countered by full spectrum light bulbs, increased intake of B complex and C vitamins, and healthy, supportive interaction with community. Most of this can be accomplished through winter holiday traditions that have been handed down. Yet if these traditions go unobserved, have been distorted through commercialism, or if a person has a natural tendency towards depression or suicide, more drastic measures should be taken to combat this natural phenomenon.

Serenity Prayer – "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Used in the Alcoholics Anonymous tradition to release dysfunctional, controlling behavior.

Seidr – Seidr relates to a branch of Scandinavian women's spiritual practice and has connections to Freya. Other related concepts are spae or spa with kona, wife, or volva, which indicates a female practitioner of Seidr. Central to Seidr was chant and trance during which the shaman's mouth would spring open and she would speak of past, present, and future events. Practice of Seidr often included the use of a distaff with

magical powers, potion making, talismans, and the use of runes. Some famous Seidr were Gullveig, who survived the fire of the Aesir, and Sibyl who prophesied Ragnarok. Both are referenced in the Voluspa.

Thorbjord (while Gudrud sang for her, it is not clear whether Gudrud herself is a seer) from Erik the Red's Saga has an elaborate description of her clothing and the rituals she performed.

Sessrumnir – The hall of Freya in the Folkvanger, the home set up for her in Asgard according to the hostage agreement arranged between the Aesir and the Vanir. Half of those slain in battle go to Valhalla and half go to Sessrumnir. One source says that Freya gets to choose her half first.

Sun Goddesses – the following are some examples: **Sunna** – Sometimes Summa, this is the Bronze Age Scandinavian sun goddess who is associated with Nerthus. **Saule** – Sun goddess of Latvia and Lithuania.

Sekhmet – The Egyptian sun goddess, Sekhmet represents the sun's more destructive side. She is called the eye of Ra. Ra is a less destructive sun god. **Cautha** – Etruscan sun goddess (circa. 5th Century BCE).

Kultepe – Anatolia sun goddess (circa 7th Century BCE). **Amatersu** – Japanese sun goddess who hides in a cave and comes out at Winter Solstice. **Walu** – Australian aboriginal sun goddess. **Igaehindvo** – Cherokee sun goddess.

Thor – the son (or possibly step-son) of Odin, wielder of Mjolnir, the hammer of justice. He became the most favorite god among pagans even into Christian times. Thor represented the working man and the legal system. He deals out justice at the base of the world tree. The Hammer symbol was found in jewelry molds alongside the cross. (In Norway the cross was depicted as Gifu, with lines of equal lengths).

Tiw and Tyr – Two names for the same deity in the Norse pantheon. Tyr means “god”. The Prose Edda claims Tyr is the son of Odin, the Poetic Edda says he is the son of Hymr, a giant. His most important feat in the stories is having sacrificed his hand to calm the chaotic energy of Fenrir the wolf (see Fenrir). Tacitus mentions a Germanic tribe that worships the dual god and goddess pair Tiwaz and “Isis” or Ziza. There is some evidence that Tiwaz, Tyr, Tiw, was a sky god worshipped before Odin and later became a lesser god.

Valhalla – (see Asgard) The hall of feasting for warriors who died in battle. The winged shield maidens, Valkyries, select half of the slain for Odin’s hall, the other half belong to Freya.

Vanir – This set of deities were already in the Northlands before the birth of Odin and his brothers, and some of them were integrated into the more patriarchal deity system of the Aesir. The system of the Vanir was matrifocal, dualistic, sedentary and agricultural. These attributes are characteristic of Bronze Age Scandinavia (2,000 B.C.E.), early Indo-European culture (4,000 – 2,000 B.C.E.) as well as the Neanderthal communities that survived the longest throughout Scandinavia (30,000 B.C.E.). The Vanir were creative and pro-creative with no taboos on sexuality. By the time the Eddas were written, their central deity was Njord, the father of Freya and Freyr. There is mounting evidence that he was the brother/consort of Nerthus, the Earth Mother worshiped in during the Bronze Age. Their children were also twin goddess and god pairings who mate freely, Freya and Freyr (meaning lady and lord, therefore titles rather than names per se). Their popularity was carried on into the Viking era (700’s A.D.). Other twin lover pairings referenced are Ullir and Ulli, Ing and Ingvine, with the male deity remembered into the Viking era and the female deity diminished or forgotten altogether. Ing, Ying, and its derivations created the divine lineage of kings in Sweden (Yingling Saga).

Viking – to go a Viking is to wander from home. It names the era during which the lands of Scandinavia could not sustain the burgeoning population. The younger sons who would not inherit land took their great ships abroad to “raid, trade, or settle” the lands and populations they came across (from the early 700’s to the mid 1000’s AD.)

Wellsprings

1. There are three in Norse Mythology (see Nine Worlds). Hvergalmir, the bubbling cauldron, the source of 11 rivers that flow through the nine worlds is located in the gap between Niffleheim and Muspellheim. A great dragon, Nidgahog, guards this well. Mimirbrunner or Mimir’s well, is situated at the root of Yggdrasil running through Jotunheim, home of the giants, is guarded by Mimir whose name means ponder, seeing, gaze

and sometimes memory. The well water contains memory, knowledge, and wisdom. Odin is one of a few who dared to ride into Jotenheim and challenge Mimir for a drink of the well. Odin's eye still stares out of the bottom of that well. Such was the price for a drink. The third wellspring is Urdbrunner named for the first of three fates, goddesses, witches (see Norns).

2. In relationship to Tai Chi Chuan (martial arts coming from China) and Chinese medicine, each foot at the kidney chi point is a bubbling spring that connects to the earth body. Some argue that the tailbone is the third root of the spine as tree. Water is a central component in the Chinese system of Feng Shui (literally wind and water), the practice of arranging the environment to direct chi (energy) that flows through it (see Feng Shui).

Western Medical Model – Based on Allopathic medicine, the idea that treating symptoms by creating an opposite reaction has been the basis of Western medicine since medieval times. For example, one would treat inflamed and moist sinuses by shrinking and drying them out. Western treatments are meant to treat and relieve symptoms rather than the causes of disease. It looks at the human organism as separate parts rather than an organic whole which sometimes results in a treatment for one symptom causing difficulties in some other aspect of the system. For example, a pain reliever for arthritis may cause stress on the heart.

Yggdrasil – Volumes might be written about Yggdrasil, the cosmic world tree. The world tree concept, the tree of life, and reference to the human spine as a tree can be found in mythology around the globe. Yggdrasil is a kenning for the tree of life rather than the name itself. It translates as “Odin’s horse” or “the terrible one’s steed” with Ygg being a name for Odin. This kenning comes from the story about how Odin got the runes. It was on this tree he hung himself for nine days, bleeding from his self-made wound in order to perceive and understand the runes. There are said to be nine worlds circling around and held together by the cosmic tree. It seems reasonable to think he would have to hang one day for each of the nine worlds. While Odin has been given credit for creating these worlds, we know that worlds and beings existed at least two generations prior to the Aesir’s appearance in the northlands. In any case, the world tree has been the central metaphor for astral travel and

shamanic practice and takes the forms of broomsticks, distaffs, the “Hobby Horse”, the Shamanic pole, and the cross bar of the drum.

Yin and Yang – In Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang are the polar aspects of all creation. Yin represents these things: the dark, receptive, negative charge of the battery; it is female, the gestalt, and is right brained. Yang represents light, activity, positive charge, and things male, linear and left brained. The balance of these dynamic forces is seen in what is called the Tao. Yin and Yang is a universal concept in human understanding that opposite energies interact to create an altogether new dynamic. In Norse myth we can view the Vanir as Yin and the Aesir as Yang. The pledge of peace between the two created Kvasir, the wisest creature known. He didn’t last long. We can see Muspellheim with its fire and sparks as Yang, and Niffleheim with its ice and mist as Yin. The combined effort here was the Void, Ginungagap and from there, the creation of new worlds.

Ymir – The hermaphrodite giant who fed from Audhumla’s udders. The father/mother of other races, and possibly the progenitor on the female side of the Aesir (see Giants).



Photo by Jack Bartholomew

Singing the Runes

Kari sings and chants the runes while staving their rhythm. This is a powerful way to resonate with their meaning and magic, connecting us to the world tree through which the runes manifest.

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I am indebted to these authors for their contributions to enlightenment. Reading and research is important. Yet, there is no substitute for living with the runes and recording our own traditions as we use them in our daily lives.

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I also recommend the authors, Jenny Blain and Diana Paxon. Their work in Norse Shamanic practice is well known, well researched and well worth studying!