

Elder Futhark Rune Poem

and some notes

R S C N F R T : O M I T S T R F T



Dedication

Mysteries ancient, Allfather found
Wrested from anguish, nine days fast bound
Hung from the world tree, pierced by the spear
Odin who seized them, make these staves clear

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ELDER FUTHARK RUNE POEM **and some notes**

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F : *Fehu* : Cattle / Wealth

Wealth is won and gold bestowed
But honour's due to all men owed
Gift the given and ware the lord
For thy name's worth noised abroad

Þ : *Thurisaz* : Thorn / Giant / Thor

Thorn hedge bound the foe repelled
A giant's anger by Mjólnir felled
Thor protect us, fight for troth
In anger true as Odin's wrath

R : *Raidho* : Journey / Carriage

By horse and wheel to travel far
Till journey's end a followed star
Harsh the road and sore the seat
Till journey's end and hearth-home meat

X : *Gebo* : Gift

Lovers kiss and gift the hand
Lord's men shout and pledge to band
The gift is given back and thrice
In duty bound and honour's price

U : *Uruz* : Aurochs / Wild-ox

Wild ox-blood proud, sharp hornéd might
On moorland harsh midst sprite and wight
Unconquered will and fierce in form
Through summer's sun and winter's storm

F : *Ansuz* : As / God / Odin

In mead divine and written word
In raven's call and whisper heard
Wisdom seek and wise-way act
In Mimir's well see Odin's pact

K : *Kenaz* : Fire / Torch / Sore

Hearth and hallow, forging fire
Light the path and heart inspire
Torch of flame we hold on high
Guard the hall and burn the lie

W : *Wunjo* : Pleasure / Joy

Harvest in and cattle fed
Table full and blessings said
Peace and joy in life be ours
With ease-full days and golden hours

N : *Hagalaz* : **Hail**

Storm born hail as heaven's seed
Brings us pain and direst need
But ice corn melts in Solar's light
And waters crops in place of blight

† : *Nauthiz* : **Need**

This want constrains and binds the will
Yet drives us on to conquer still
Let need-fire burn when darkness falls
And summer seek when winter calls

| : *Isa* : **Ice**

Blue its beauty and smooth the way
But yet beware lest foot betray
As Niflheim's ice meets Muspel's fire
In Ginnungagap see Midgard spire

↻ : *Jera* : **Year / Harvest**

Seasons turn and sunsets follow
As seeds once sown are reaped the morrow
So harvest seek at summer's end
And till the soul for winter's mend

↯ : *Eihwaz* : **Yew Tree**

Yew bow drawn to guard the hearth
World tree spans a nine fold path
From mystic tip where Eagle dwells
To Serpent roots, Yggdrasil's wells

✂ : *Perthro* : **Board Game / Lot Cup (?)**

From Urd's dark well is Orlog spun
Our past the path we have become
But life's womb still has choices yet
Until our doom and fate are set

Y : *Algiz* : **Elk Sedge / Protection (?)**

Hands are lifted the Gods to praise
Blessings given to guide our ways
Protected be on ancient paths
Keep homelands whole, and safe our hearths

Σ : *Sowilo* : **Sun**

Victorious shines the sky-shield wheel
By sailors watched to guide their keel
Shed healing rays and lift our souls
Give courage strong to win our goals

↑ : *Tiwaz* : **Tir**

A god's right hand for Fenrir's demand
Honour proved at the wolf's command
Tir defend us when all is lost
And teach us to give sacrificial cost

M : *Ehwaz* : **Horse**

Rider and ridden, made one from the two
Both called together to work something new
Not earth bound but flying, spirit set free
So Odin rides Sleipnir along the world tree

┌ : *Laguz* : **Leek / Lake (?)**

As leek grows from earth, bright green to behold
Wisdom and knowledge within will unfold
Water, the other world, spirit and death
A doorway to pass through, beyond human breath

⚔ : *Dagaz* : **Day**

To daylight from darkness the circles return
Seeing the hidden, the wisdom we learn
Act now and surely, trusting thy heart
True flies the arrow, straight from the start

ᚷ : *Berkanaz* : **Berkano / Birch**

Birch mother goddess bringing hopes to birth
Show us our place and all nature's worth
Mystery enfolded and teacher of life
Keeper of doorways and Allfather's wife

ᚱ : *Mannaz* : **Man / Human**

To Ask and to Embla, to make humans whole
Ve, Vili, Odin, gifted blood, sense and soul
Bound to the earth, yet filled with the other
We are joined in the life-boon, sister and brother

ᚹ : *Ingwaz* : **Hero / Ingvi Frey**

Seed sown is rooted and nurtured for birth
New life beyond sight safe deep in the earth
Joy find in joining, sharing our pleasure
harvest and ploughing, each in true measure

ᚰ : *Othala* : **Inheritance / Homestead**

The greatest of treasures, more precious than gold
The gift to the young, passed from the old
As we tend to the roots, so the tree tip will flower
And sweet to the soul, the fruit of the bower

INTRODUCTION

So, what are Runes?

At their most basic, they are an alphabet; a set of shapes that allow us to write down the spoken word. Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Cyrillic are also forms of alphabets.

There are three most commonly accepted forms of the Runic Alphabet, or Futhark. The original is the Elder Futhark with 24 characters, followed by the Younger Futhark with 16 characters (used in the Viking lands such as Norway and Iceland), and the 33 character Anglo-Saxon Futhorc (used in England and Frisia).

The Elder Futhark was probably used at least 2,000 years ago, until about 700 C.E.¹ After this time, the Vikings developed the Younger Futharc, and Anglo-Saxons and other tribes created various sets of Anglo-Saxon and other Futhorc.

You will have seen that the first two are called “Futhark”, but the third is “Futhorc”. This isn’t a spelling or typographical error. The word Futhark is actually made up of the first 6 letters of that alphabet, which in the Elder Futhark are as follows.

ƒ ŋ þ ʀ ʁ <

Fehu, Uruz, Thurisaz, Ansuz, Raidho, Kenaz

F U Th A R K

The Younger Futhark has a different shape for the final rune, while the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc uses a number of different shapes, as well as different sounds for the fourth and sixth letters.

In keeping with most books about Runes as Mysteries, however, we will only be using the Elder Futhark, which is written in full as follows²:

ƒ ŋ þ ʀ < x p : n i s j c y s : t b m l n g d o ³

F U Th A R K G W H N I J Ei P Z S T B E M L Ng D O

If you think this looks like something out of Lord of the Rings; well done. J R R Tolkein was a professor of Anglo Saxon at Oxford, and he used his knowledge of ancient scripts to create the various languages used by the different races in his books. Other references to Norse/Germanic mythology in the Lord of the Rings include Middle Earth as the English name for *Midgard*, (the world of Humanity), and Gandalf has strong similarities to Odin the Wanderer.

1 C.E. = Common Era, and B.C.E = Before Common Era. Used as a “Non Christian” alternative” to AD and BC.

2 We have very few examples of writing using this alphabet, and there is scholarly disagreement about the shapes and sounds of a number of the runes, and even over the order of some of the letters. Where possible, I have chosen an option which is generally acceptable to many, if not most, scholars.

3 This font set is available to download from:
<http://fontstruct.com/fontstructions/show/921786>

The word “Rune”, however, doesn’t just mean the letters, but can also refer to something “secret”, or a hidden message. Understanding Runes, therefore, is as much a journey into a mysterious world within ourselves, as it is learning about the letters and the people who used them.

But, before we start on that journey, I want to talk about the word “Myth”. Much of what we will be learning is based on Myths; ancient stories about the lives and deeds of the old Germanic/Norse Gods. For me, a Myth is a story, full of meaning, something important about the past, or ourselves.

Sometimes, Myths record historical events, but focusing not on the actual events themselves, but their impact. The Myth of the battles between the Aesir (the principal Germanic pantheon including Odin, Frigg, Thor, Baldr and Týr) and the Vanir (the deities of fertility and wisdom including Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja) might be about the merging of two different sets of Gods as two different populations came together. Other Myths such as how Odin earned the runes, or how Sleipnir was born, may be references to shamanic/magical work. The Myth of Tyr and Fenrir is inspirational, and is symbolic of courage and honour.

In many ways, I think that some stories on film and TV recently, like Harry Potter and Dr Who have been so powerful because of their Mythic themes. They are more than just “stories”, but also make us think about bigger issues such as responsibility, choice, justice, and loyalty and the cost of friendship.

As we study these Myths, then, let them “teach” you, and “guide” you. As they teach you the Old Ways, so the Runes themselves will start to make more sense.

Rune Poems

Much of our understanding of the original meanings of the Runes comes from three ancient Rune poems for the Younger Futhark and Anglo-Saxon Futhorc:

Old English Rune Poem – OERP (Anglo-Saxon Futhorc)

Old Icelandic Rune Poem – OIRP (Younger Futhark)

Old Norwegian Rune Poem – ONRP (Younger Futhark)

However, we don't have any old poems for the original Elder Futhark. Thus, much of what we believe we know about the Elder Futhark has been “reconstructed” by working backwards, so to speak, trying and uncover what the original may have been.

In these notes, I will be using the Bruce Dickins translation (which I believe is in the Public Domain). The translations are sourced from “Ragweed Forge”⁴

My own Rune Poem, therefore, is my own version of this form of poem, inspired by one or more aspects of the reconstructed meanings. Sometimes the meaning will appear obvious, and at others I will refer to deeper more esoteric meanings or even point the reader to one of the elder Myths.

In some cases, especially where there is some dispute over the original meaning; I have let some other aspects of the Rune be the focus of the poem. This is not a text book for the Runes, and I am not an academic. However, I do hope I have been faithful to the Old Ways, and that these verses will inspire you to also dig deeper in the Runic Mysteries.

4 <http://www.ragweedforge.com/poems.html>

Runes as Mysteries

*Mysteries ancient, Allfather found
Wrested from anguish, nine days fast bound
Hung from the world tree, pierced by the spear
Odin who seized them, make these staves clear*

In the Poetic Edda “*Hávamál*” (“sayings of the high one” – which is one poem in the Poetic Edda, itself a collection of Old Norse poems from the Viking age), *Odin* is described as the originator of the Runes.

Stanza 38:

*Veit ek at ek hekk vindga meiði a
netr allar nío,
geiri vndaþr ok gefinn Oðni,
sialfr sialfom mer,
a þeim meiði, er mangi veit, hvers hann af rótom
renn.*

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows
For nine long nights,
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odhinn,
Offered, myself to myself
The wisest know not from whence spring
The roots of that ancient rood⁵

Stanza 39:

*Við hleifi mik seldo ne víþ hornigi,
nysta ek niþr,
nam ek vp rvnar,
opandi nam,
fell ek apr þaðan.*

No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,
downwards I peered;
I took up the runes,
screaming I took them,
then I fell back from there⁶

Odin, who also called the Allfather⁷ is shown going through great suffering in order to obtain and “grasp” the meaning of the Runes. This is the first Mystery of the Runes, that we are not studying an old dead script, but a connection with the “Other”, the hidden world beyond our sight which affects us and our lives which-ever way we turn.

If we want to understand the Runes, we have to open ourselves to being taught, to being “broken open” and being changed. *Odin* suffered greatly to obtain these Runes, and we cannot expect to engage with these mysteries without also being challenged,

As I have already said, this poem is merely the fruit of my own studies and meditations so far. As I have read other people's explorations of the Runes, and learned about the Old Ways of our ancestors; some of that knowledge has changed me. Everyone who wants to learn about the runes, and how to use their “power”, must also let the Runes change them.

I have spent time time learning the letters and their sounds; their “surface meaning”, and their deeper

5 W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

6 W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

7 Odin is credited with more than 200 names, including Rune Giver, Wanderer, Yggr (terror), Sigfodr (father of Victory), and Valföðr, "father of the slain"

esoteric meanings. I have also read about how Runes can be used in divination, for magic, in amulets for protection, and as symbols for healing and transformation.

There is no “One Way” to this, but there are ways that are better grounded and rooted in what we know of the people who first used them.

Ultimately, though, we are faced with many gaps because of what we don't know...and in those cases, we can only experiment, and step out in faith.

As you read the poem, and more importantly read my notes, feel free to pick and choose what works for you. But, as you do so, be gentle, and show respect for those who have walked this way before you.

And finally, as you learn the Runes, bear in mind we are all “Bound to the One World Tree” (*Yggdrasil*), and called to honour the Nine Virtues⁸.

What are “Aettir?”

When the runes are written out, they are very often divided in three groups of eight. Each grouping is called an “Aett” (plural Aettir). Despite the sound of this word, it actually doesn't mean “eight”, but means something like “a set”, and is derived from the Scandinavian for “Clan” or “Group”, (think of an extended family).

This form of grouping appears to be a modern invention, along with calling each of the Aettir after a Norse/Germanic divinity (*Freya's Aett*, *Heimdall's Aett* and *Tir's Aett*). Some modern writers such as Freya Aswynn and Edred Thorsson see these groups as representing “themes” in Germanic cosmology. Jonathan Jones in his Rune Poem “3 Paths Through Midgard”, divides each set into “The Path of the Magician”, “The Path of the Warrior”, and “The Path of the Yoeman”.⁹ D Jason Cooper, sees the divisions as a mirror of ancient Aryan tribal societies into nurturer, warrior, and priest/king.

Personally, I see the first Aett as representing the daily path through life, the second Aett as teaching the path through adversity, and the third Aett as wisdom in life and death.

⁸ Courage, Truth, Honour, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Self-Reliance, Industriousness, and Perseverance.

⁹ 3 Paths Through Midgard, *D Jonathan Jones*, RavensHalla Arts; 978-098451960-6

ƿ : *Fehu* : Cattle / Wealth

*Wealth is won and gold bestowed
But honour's due to all men owed
Gift the given and ware the lord
For thy name's worth noised abroad*

Feoh: *Wealth is a comfort to all men;
yet must every man bestow it freely,
if he wish to gain honour in the sight of the Lord. OERP*

Fe: *Wealth
source of discord among kinsmen
and fire of the sea
and path of the serpent. OIRP*

Fe: *Wealth is a source of discord among kinsmen;
the wolf lives in the forest. ONRP*

Hebrew, Greek, and Runic all give the same basic meaning for the first letter as cattle, and this almost certainly signifies wealth. In many cultures, cattle represents mobile wealth and value in a time before money. Kings may value gold, but ordinary people prize cattle as beasts of burden, and a source of hide, meat, bone and horn.

The letter **Fehu** is echoed in the English word “fee”, a payment for services rendered; again money for money's worth.

In the older rune poems, one can see that money, and it's effect on relationships is vital key. Money and wealth are important, but more important is what we do with it. Keeping money to yourself can lead to a reputation as a miser, and grasping at what other people have leads to fights and quarrels.

For me, **Fehu** is a warning that however far we have worked for, or “earned” that money, there is also an element of luck, good fortune, or “*hamingja*”. One of the nine virtues is self reliance; but don't justify a lack of charity by assuming that those who are suffering are merely lazy and shiftless.

In ancient societies where people in a clan or tribe knew all their friends and neighbours, a person's reputation was key; and honour is best matched with compassion.

This is a Rune about wealth, but also how we make it, and how we use it. It is about the circle of community and kin-ship; sharing good fortune and accepting help in bad. It is about looking beyond ourselves and our selfish concerns. In that sense, it can be the first step to wisdom.

As Stanza 40 of the *Hávamál* warns:

*Once he has won wealth enough,
A man should not crave for more:
What he saves for friends, foes may take;
Hopes are often liars.¹⁰*

10 W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

U : *Uruz* : Aurochs / Wild-ox

*Wild ox-blood proud, sharp hornéd might
On moorland harsh midst sprite and wight
Unconquered will and fierce in form
Through summer's sun and winter's storm*

Ur: *The aurochs is proud and has great horns;
it is a very savage beast and fights with its horns;
a great ranger of the moors, it is a creature of mettle. OERP*

Ur: *Shower
lamentation of the clouds
and ruin of the hay-harvest
and abomination of the shepherd. OIRP*

Ur: *Dross comes from bad iron;
the reindeer often races over the frozen snow. ONRP*

Compared to the comparatively tamed and domesticated cattle in **Fehu**, the wild aurochs is a totally different animal. Although now extinct, the bull could reach 6 ft in height, and had few predators. During Roman times they were apparently popular as “battle beasts” in arenas, and were recorded as fast and fearless.

For the Germanic peoples, these were a fierce and dangerous prey, and to be treated with caution. They genuinely are a force of nature.

Will-power was essential to survive in the wilds of Northern Europe. Uncertain harvests, harsh winters, disease, predators, and warring tribes were all ever present dangers. Will-power kept the farmer working through inclement weather, the mother feeding and providing clothing for families when food was short, and the fighter defending his hearth and tribe in times of danger.

In Runic terms, **Uruz** also represents the unconquered will for the mystic explorer; the drive within that sets goals, and achieves its targets. Without will-power, we are listless and without power. Will-power is needed to study and engage with the Runes...to endure the struggle to uncover their mysteries. Will-power is needed to use that understanding to use Rune power for divination and magic. And will-power is needed to build and defend our sanctuary. Treat the Runes as a game or pastime, and they will “play you” in return. Handle them with caution and a healthy respect, and they will become a source of power.

Uruz, therefore, calls on us to fight, to strive, to work, to focus, to achieve, and warns us that there are challenges ahead that will test us.

Þ : *Thurisaz* : **Thorn** / **Giant** / **Thor**

*Thorn hedge bound the foe repelled
A giant's anger by Mjolnir felled
Thor protect us, fight for troth
In anger true as Odin's wrath*

Thorn: *The thorn is exceedingly sharp,
an evil thing for any knight to touch,
uncommonly severe on all who sit among them. OERP*

Thurs: *Giant
torture of women
and cliff-dweller
and husband of a giantess. OIRP*

Thurs: *Giant causes anguish to women;
misfortune makes few men cheerful. ONRP*

Thurisaz appears to have many disparate meanings, but with with some effort, we ill see that these elements are actually connected.

The “Thorn” counsels caution, awareness of potential danger. Run into thorns, or grab them unthinkingly, and you will pay for your rashness. However, thorns are also protective. A blackthorn or hawthorn hedge will keep out wild animals and human foes.

The “*Thurs*”, or giants, however, represent another kind of foe or danger. The giants which include the *Jotuns*, are similar to the Titans of Greek mythology. However, where Zeus defeats the Titans and locks them up; the Gods of *Asgard* and *Vanaheimr* in Norse theology are constantly engaging with the *Jotuns* in *Jotunheimr*.

Sometimes it is all-out war; as will happen at *Ragnaraok* when *Surt*, the Fire Giant, will lead the giants to the great final battle between the Gods at the end of creation¹¹. At times, there are minor conflicts, where Loki tricks the giants; or Thor fights them with his hammer; *Mjolnir*. And sometimes, there is even peace, with both *Odin* and *Loki* claiming parentage of *Aesir* and Giants.

The Giants, therefore, appear to represent the uncontrolled forces of nature, but I think also the uncontrolled forces within ourselves that seem to overwhelm us. The Gods, led by Thor, balance the giants, but their victory is not always certain.

Thurisaz is defence, and caution. It is also a call to arms, but as much about facing “uncontrolled” events as our own “primal” urges. However, it is also a recognition that we do not stand alone; that we can call on higher powers to aid us.

¹¹ However, although often referred to as the “final battle”; it is only final for those Gods. After the dust has settled, the children of the Gods and some survivors start again.

ᚱ : *Ansuz* : As / God / Odin

*In mead divine and written word
In raven's call and whisper heard
Wisdom seek and wise-way act
In Mimir's well see Odin's pact*

Os: *The mouth is the source of all language,
a pillar of wisdom and a comfort to wise men,
a blessing and a joy to every knight. OERP*

Ass: *God
aged Gautr
and prince of Ásgarðr
and lord of Vallhalla. OIRP*

Oss: *Estuary is the way of most journeys;
but a scabbard is of swords. ONRP*

In this age of instant information, and online knowledge, it often seems that wisdom is a forgotten art. Knowledge may be knowing some pieces of information, but wisdom is knowing how to correctly handle that information. As the saying goes; “*Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit while Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad*”.

I wanted to learn about Runes and found much information, and over time I acquired a degree of knowledge which helped me to sift through what was helpful and what was misleading. However, to go beyond that knowledge and use it properly will take wisdom.

Odin, who is referenced in the Rune **Ansuz**, is often linked to wisdom and inspiration. **Odin** paid the price of an eye to obtain the wisdom of the **Well of Mimir**. His two ravens; **Huginn** (thought) and **Muninn** (Memory) fly throughout the earth each day, then return each night and tell **Odin** what they have seen and heard. **Odin** “discovered” the runes while hanging on the World Tree. He also brought the Mead of Inspiration to the Gods while disguised as an eagle and being chased by a giant also in the form of an eagle, (and spilling some drops onto the poets and skalds in the process).

Ansuz is wisdom, messages, learning, knowledge, and inspiration. It is the Rune of listening to the voice within that links us to the divine, and being aware of the power of pattern and “synchronicity” around us.

And the Runes, themselves, are summarised in this Stave. **Odin** “Rune Bringer”, has given us a powerful tool to understand the weft and warp that has brought us to this current place; and to sail the currents that can lead us to the most appropriate destination.

Whether you need wisdom, inspiration, guidance, or just the right words, then you probably need **Ansuz**.

R : *Raidho* : Journey / Carriage

*By horse and wheel to travel far
Till journey's end a followed star
Harsh the road and sore the seat
Till journey's end and hearth-home meat*

Rad: *Riding seems easy to every warrior while he is indoors
and very courageous to him who traverses the high-roads
on the back of a stout horse. OERP*

Reidh: *Riding
joy of the horsemen
and speedy journey
and toil of the steed. OIRP*

Reidh: *Riding is said to be the worst thing for horses;
Reginn forged the finest sword. ONRP*

All the best adventures start with a journey; and our own growth and transformation is a journey within. A journey can be going to something; or coming back home...a journey can involve following a star, or setting off into the great unknown. A journey may mean a new environment, or new people, new food, or just being shaken out of the comfort of what we are used to.

Raidho represents all travelling; literally and figuratively, and not just the journey; but the times when that journey is hard work, lonely, and we have a long way to go with an uncertain end. A journey may seem easy when it is being planned; but go any great distance; and there will be delays and difficulties, unexpected stops and misadventures.

And sometimes, that is where the growth takes place. Sometimes a journey really is about the travelling, and not so much about the final goal. If we stop growing, we slide backwards into complacency, or even fear. Stepping out on a new adventure, striking out on new paths, is about being open to our own development.

What **Raidho** teaches us is that at the end of the day, the great journey of life is not optional. However much we might want to, we can't really "stop the world and get off". What we can do is learn to embrace the change that a journey brings. As the saying goes, "*The greatest adventure starts when our comfort zone ends*".

◀ : *Kenaz* : Fire / Torch / Sore

*Hearth and hallow, forging fire
Light the path and heart inspire
Torch of flame we hold on high
Guard the hall and burn the lie*

Cen: *The torch is known to every living man by its pale, bright flame;
it always burns where princes sit within.* OERP

Kaun: *Ulcer
disease fatal to children
and painful spot
and abode of mortification.* OIRP

Kaun: *Ulcer is fatal to children;
death makes a corpse pale.* ONRP

In Norse and Germanic mythology, fire is an incredibly significant element. In the Norse creation myth, our world and everything within it starts in in the magic space, *Ginnungagap*, where the ice of *Nifflheimr*, meets the fire of *Muspellheimr* (See **Isa**. Below)

Fire brings warmth, light, protection, and cooks meat. Fire is key in forging metal, and is used to smelt the impurities from gold. Fire burns the sacrifice on the altar, and the funeral-pyre of the dead hero sent to *Valhall*.

Fire lights the path, and guides home again the lost traveller.

Fire is dedication and transformative change. It is a commitment truth, especially personal truth and honesty, and it is about applying that truth even at personal cost.

But that fire also strengthen us and empower us. It energizes and liberates us. It provides focus and helps us clear out the clutter and the dross.

For me, **Kenaz** is about choosing the “righteous” path; the best path in the long term, the path that honours the Nine Virtues. It is about committing ourselves to something larger than self interest; whether it is charitable work, campaigning for justice, or following a spiritual path.

✕ : *Gebo* : Gift

*Lovers kiss and gift the hand
Lord's men shout and pledge to band
The gift is given back and thrice
In duty bound and honour's price*

Gyfu: *Generosity brings credit and honour, which support one's dignity;
it furnishes help and subsistence
to all broken men who are devoid of aught else. OERP*

Like **Feoh**, from which we make the English word “Fee” so **Gebo** still echoes in our culture; but not as the name but as the shape and its meaning. The kisses you put at the end of a letter, and the mark an unlettered person makes are both derived from the “✕” of **Gebo**, the Gift.

What we have forgotten, however, is the ancient purpose of a gift; to bind two people together in a commitment of some kind. A gift isn't just something given, it is a recognition of a promise, whether a couple committing to each other; or a retainer prepared to serve his lord in battle.

As Stanza 41 of The *Hávamál* says:

*“With presents friends should please each other,
With a shield or a costly coat:
Mutual giving makes for friendship
So long as life goes well”¹²*

The person giving the gift shows their appreciation of the person receiving it; and the receiver is, in turn, “beholden” (*owing thanks or having a duty to someone in return for help or a service*). This may sound rather unromantic, but I think there is something intensely practical about it. We retain elements of it in phrases such as “calling in a favour”, and “you owe me”. Giving a gift “bonds” and “binds” loyalty and friendship.

That doesn't mean, however, that the loyalty is “bought”. The “bride” price is exchanged when a couple committed to each other. The retainer, a soldier who fights for his lord, is not paid to fight; but fights for loyalty and honour. A mercenary is paid to fight for a battle, and the soldiers of a standing army are paid a wage, but the retainer will fight his good name and in defence of his lord, his tribe, his clan, and his hearth.

Gebo, therefore, is about commitment between people, about trust, about loyalty, and about doing the right thing, and being able to trust on others to be true and loyal back; whether a loving relationship, a business partnership, or the bond between brothers and sisters in arms.

12 W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

Þ Wunjo: Pleasure / Joy

*Harvest in and cattle fed
Table full and blessings said
Peace and joy in life be ours
With ease-full days and golden hours*

Wynn: *Bliss he enjoys who knows not suffering, sorrow nor anxiety,
and has prosperity and happiness and a good enough house. OERP*

This first set of 8 runes started with wealth; which many people equate with contentment. As the saying goes “*money can't buy you happiness, but it's nice to be miserable in comfort*”.

But riches is NOT contentment, because money only buys some things, and cannot bring the happiness of friendship, peace of heart, and a feeling of purpose. Even **Fehu** advises the reader to be generous, and beware of hoarding one's wealth.

For most people, Norse and Germanic societies were not ones of plenty and riches. Most people were farmers; and with long winters and uncertain summers; several bad harvest could mean starvation. Disease, injury, tribal wars, and predators could destroy a person's ability to work; or split apart a family.

Contentment; therefore, is psychological. It's being happy with enough, and not worrying about what might be, it's about accepting that sometimes the Gods, or one's *hamingja*, result in loss and grief. But; the warrior's spirit is to accept these blows and make do with what is.

The phrase “*counting one's blessings*” is literally that; focusing on the good things one already has, and recognising that all good things are gifts, to be enjoyed wisely.

Determination, perseverance, industriousness and patience are three of the Nine Noble Virtues. In themselves they are no guarantees of **Wunjo**; but they make it more likely that **Wunjo** will be achieved.

Jera (or Year - further down), is a part of that. The harvest we reap depends on ground we have prepared, the seeds we have sowed, and how consistent we have been at weeding and tending the crops. In the same way; the small choices, the day-by-day self discipline, the attention to detail, and the ability to work for long term goals makes it more likely that we reach our targets.

Wunjo is a positive rune, as are all three runes completing each set. It can mean that good times are coming, or are in reach. It may mean finding that contentment within; and not focusing on one's worries and stresses; or it may be calling us to be someone else's **Wunjo**.

As Stanza 44 of the *Hávamál* says:

*If you find a friend you fully trust
And wish for his good-will,
exchange thoughts,
exchange gifts,
Go often to his house. ¹³*

13 W H Auden & P B Taylor Translation

N : *Hagalaz* : Hail

*Storm born hail as heaven's seed
Brings us pain and direst need
But ice corn melts in Solar's light
And waters crops in place of blight*

Haegl: *Hail is the whitest of grain;
it is whirled from the vault of heaven
and is tossed about by gusts of wind
and then it melts into water. OERP*

Hagall: *Hail
cold grain
and shower of sleet
and sickness of serpents. OIRP*

Hagall: *Hail is the coldest of grain;
Christ created the world of old. ONRP*

After the peace and contentment of **Wunjo**, the shock of **Hagalaz** is almost as brutal as the hailstones themselves. And what is more, **Hagalaz** is just the first of of what I call the “Three Runes of Warning”.

Once, the village I lived in was to hold an “Open Garden Day” during the early Summer. People worked for weeks before hand, weeding, tidying, pruning, and bringing their gardens to their peak for the big day. But the day before, a fifteen minute hail storm destroyed everything. Plants were smashed to the ground, or had leaves punched through and stripped off their stalks.

Hail is that sudden, unexpected, catastrophe that cannot be planned for. Even in summer, the cold clouds can produce freak hail stones that hammer us unsuspecting mortals.

Hagalaz is a warning, but also a reassurance. Hail storms tend to be brutally sharp, but mercifully short. And the hail melts into water, which feeds the ground. The very circumstances that upset our plans can contain the “seed” of the following benefit; even if it’s a lesson in patience and acceptance.

Sadly, the village I lived in never tried to hold another Open Garden Day. This was only the second such event; and the destruction dis-heartened everyone so much they lost their enthusiasm. Sometimes we do respond to harsh events like that; we learn caution, or even fear. We start to take things safely, and avoid risks.

But I think hail is also a lesson is pressing on, in refusing to be beaten down. Most of the plants did recover, and although there were some signs of damage for the next few months, this was almost entirely cosmetic. After all, hail is just frozen water, and like many problems when faced squarely and dealt with, it will evaporate in time.

And sometimes, the process of destruction opens the way to something new, and even better. The memory of the hail storm could have brought people together with a shared memory or adversity over come. **Hagalaz** may even be calling on us to let go of our plans and look for something more challenging, or fulfilling. Change, however it happens, contains the potential for a something better.

† : *Nauthiz* : Need

*This want constrains and binds the will
Yet drives us on to conquer still
Let need-fire burn when darkness falls
And summer seek when winter calls*

Nyd: *Trouble is oppressive to the heart;
yet often it proves a source of help and salvation
to the children of men, to everyone who heeds it betimes.* OERP

Naudh: *Constraint
grief of the bond-maid
and state of oppression
and toilsome work.* OIRP

Naudh: *Constraint gives scant choice;
a naked man is chilled by the frost.* ONRP

If **Hagalaz** represents sudden disaster; **Nauthiz** represents the fear of what might happen, or how we deal with actually being in a situation where we feel trapped and things are going wrong.

As the t-shirt says “*Shit Happens*”, and things go wrong, and we are left wondering how we are going to cope. The real test is not in avoiding these situations, but in responding to them. Courage in adversity and creativity under pressure enable us to keep searching for solutions rather than giving up or giving in.

To quote another saying, “*Necessity is the mother of invention*”. I sometimes think that **Nauthiz** is just short hand for that very sentiment. Even the OERP says that those who listen to **Nyd** (The Anglo Saxon successor to **Nauthiz**) can find it useful. Concern over winter shortages will motivate the farmer's wife to preserve and store food for the lean months ahead, and a healthy respect for the winter snows will ensure the farmer stock piles enough logs to keep his family and livestock warm.

For me, **Nauthiz** is a “head’s up” Rune, a warning that there are some tough times ahead. However, **Nauthiz** also says that courage, endurance and a focus on solving the problems that crop up will ensure that all will be well in the long term. Where **Hagalaz** is the flat tire; or the fender bender...**Nauthiz** is the low oil warning light.

And unlike **Hagalaz**, **Nauthiz** is not so much about the impending difficulties, but about how we respond to them. Are you a good person to have around in a crisis, or do you tend to “catastrophize”? When disaster strikes, do you roll up your sleeves and get motivated to change or work round the situation; or do you just feel overwhelmed and hope it goes away.

Sometimes life is tough, and there are times when we can feel we need a break. It may even be that **Nauthiz** is calling on you to look at how you deal with stress and anxiety. But whatever your approach, **Nauthiz** says that our final solution is down to us; whether we seek help, go it alone, or hide away.

| : *Isa* : Ice

*Blue its beauty and smooth the way
But yet beware lest foot betray
As Niflheim's ice meets Muspel's fire
In Ginnungagap see Midgard spire*

Is: *Ice is very cold and immeasurably slippery;
it glistens as clear as glass and most like to gems;
it is a floor wrought by the frost, fair to look upon.* OERP

Iss: *Ice
bark of rivers
and roof of the wave
and destruction of the doomed.* OIRP

Oss: *Ice we call the broad bridge;
the blind man must be led.* ONRP

Hagalaz is a warning of some painful or “destructive” event; and **Nauthiz** challenges us to prepare in advance of some difficult issues. **Isa**, though, is a warning to beware; that what looks safe and pretty is dangerous ground. Ice is also about stillness, and patience, and about waiting through the winter.

Isa, however, is, is also the opposite to **Kenaz**, the Torch or Fire, not only literally, but also mythologically.

According to the *Gylfaginning*, which is the first part of *Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda* after the Prologue, The universe started with a land of fire; **Múspellheim** (or **Múspellheimr**), and a land of ice, **Niflheim** (or **Niflheimr**). The magical space between was called **Ginnungagap**, and the melting ice and fiery rivers generated the whole of creation (with the active helps of the Gods).

Apart from being a powerful creation myth, people in the Northern lands also see this happen every year when the spring sun melts the winter ice, and new greenery takes its place. The time of ice is a time of waiting, of staying safe and warm, of preparing for the busy times ahead.

Isa says go carefully, but don't be full of fear. **Isa** also holds the promise of good times ahead. Winter will pass, and although we sometimes complain that good things never last; the same is also true of troubles.

For those who take care, and know what they are doing; the snow and ice are full of beauty and wonder, when we see fantastical shapes, undulating fields of pure white, and rivers apparently frozen in time.

But when the ice and snow give way under the lengthening spring days; the wary traveller will be cautious, as the rivers flood with the icy melt waters. Ice is energy stored, and when it is released, that power can be dangerous. For those with understanding and skill, **Isa** can be a Rune of focus, of condensed power, of power released when the time is right.

☞ : *Jera* : Year / Harvest

*Seasons turn and sunsets follow
As seeds once sown are reaped the morrow
So harvest seek at summer's end
And till the soul for winter's mend*

Ger: *Summer is a joy to men, when God, the holy King of Heaven,
suffers the earth to bring forth shining fruits
for rich and poor alike. OERP*

Ar: *Plenty
boon to men
and good summer
and thriving crops. OIRP*

Ar: *Plenty is a boon to men;
I say that Frothi was generous. ONRP*

Appropriately enough for a Rune that spans the seasons, Winter and Summer, Spring and Autumn; **Jera** is the first of the two “mid-way” Runes. However, although the old rune poems focus on the Summer and the harvested crops, I feel this Rune is more about waiting for the right time and a season for everything.

The “Seed Rune” **Ingwaz** (below) will sprout, and be harvested, in due time; you can't rush the growing process. Shakespeare writes, “*There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;*”, while Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament says “*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:*”.

This is the wisdom of patiently working away until plans come to fruition. Where **Ingwaz** is the seed; and **Berkanaz** is the time of birth/harvest, **Jera** is the time in between, the time when we must nurture the new growth, and provide optimal conditions.

But sometimes, this is the rune of comfort for those in distress, going through grief and loss. **Jera** doesn't tell us to suppress our pain, or try and push past our grief. **Jera** tells us that in time it will pass, and to continue working anyway. It says, literally, “*This too will pass*”.

And **Jera** is also about being in tune with the rhythms of the life, of the seasons, of the day. When was the last time you watched a sunrise, or took time to appreciate the beauty of a sunset? Do you dread birthdays and New Year celebrations, or do you use them to meditate on what is past; and plan for the adventures to come?

Life has deep cycles, and for those who are grounded and self-aware, that slow beating heart at the centre of everything tells us that we are in the right place, at the right time, and to stop fighting it and work with it.

Jera is the wisdom of growing old, letting go of our dreams, and embracing our future, of literally “*going with the flow*”.

∫ : *Eihwaz* : Yew Tree

*Yew bow drawn to guard the hearth
World tree spans a nine fold path
From mystic tip where Eagle dwells
To Serpent roots, Yggdrasil's wells*

Eoh: *The yew is a tree with rough bark,
hard and fast in the earth, supported by its roots,
a guardian of flame and a joy upon an estate. OERP*

Yr: *Yew
bent bow
and brittle iron
and giant of the arrow. OIRP*

OIRP
Yr: *Yew is the greenest of trees in winter;
it is wont to crackle when it burns. ONRP*

The yew tree has many associations with death, as it is planted in graveyards, it is almost entirely poisonous (only the flesh of the berry is safe), and its wood is used to make the battle-winning long bow.

However, there are also very good arguments for claiming that *Yggdrasil*, the Norse “World Tree” is a Yew, rather than an Ash (see this link for more on *Yggdrasil* as Yew¹⁴).

Eihwaz is the second of the two “mid-way” runes; half way along the Futhark. It is, literally, pivotal, as *Yggdrasil* together links together the nine worlds, including *Asgard* and *Vannaheim* where the *Aesir* and *Vannir* dwell; *Midgard* (or Middle Earth) where we live, and *Hel*, the underworld, (which was taken by the early Christian church to name their “Gehenna” or place of eternal fires in the New Testament.)

Under *Yggdrasil*, the serpent *Nidhogr* gnaws at the roots, and the three great wells, including *Mimir's* Well of Wisdom are found. In the top branches lives the great Eagle, whose flapping wings create the wind. There are countless other symbols associated with *Yggdrasil*, but unfortunately, it would take another book to talk about all of them and their meanings.

The poison in the Yew, however, may also have been used by Shamans to “travel” to other worlds, as sleeping under the tree can expose them to a low enough dosage of the poison to trigger a “trip”, in the same way Siberian Shamans sometimes take *Amanita muscaria*, (commonly known as the fly agaric). However, be warned, the shamans who do this are tough and work with people who watch them for signs of distress and illness. Do NOT try this yourself.

For me, **Eihwaz** is a protection Rune in its own right, but possibly also a warning that one may need to actively defend one's self, or property. However, it may also be calling on the reader to find a connection with the spiritual world, to find one's place in the world tree, to be open to the inner journey and the guidance of the Gods.

14 <http://www.ancient-yew.org/mi.php/yew-taxus/74>

✚ : *Perthro* : Board Game / Lot Cup (?)

*From Urd's dark well is Orlog spun
Our past the path we have become
But life's womb still has choices yet
Until our doom and fate are set*

Peoth: *Peorth* is a source of recreation and amusement to the great, where warriors sit blithely together in the banqueting-hall. OERP

Perthro is a “mystery” rune, in that we cannot be sure what it represents. The only real clue we have talks about it being a “source” of amusement for the warriors in the hall. Some people have suggested it is a gaming piece, others that it is music or dancing, and others again that it is something to do with gambling (like the cup that holds dice).

Playing dice go back at least 5,000 years, and apparently Tacitus records that the ancient Germans were passionately fond of dicing, so much that they would stake their personal liberty when bankrupt. Maybe people who live with war, disease and famine as close neighbours learn to court the excitement of the “random”? Not that they would have called life “random”. The closest word in their culture was “*Hamingja*”, and that describes a living being which “attaches” itself to a family. This *hamingja* is luck or good fortune personified. The same word was also used to describe the altered appearance of shape-shifters.

Personally, I see **Perthro** as a form of cup, or container, and like some other writers, associate it with the womb and also the Well of *Urd*. This well is situated amongst the roots of *Yggdrasil*, where the *Norns* live who help weave our “fate” or *Orlog*. And again, we mustn't think of *Orlog* as “pre-determined fate”, but as something we help to create.

The *Norns* are Giants (or *Jotuns*), and the name could mean “Those who twine” or “Those who communicate in secret”. The three most important *Norns* (who are similar to the Greek Fates) are *Urðr* (Wyrd), *Verðandi* and *Skuld*. *Urðr* could be translated as “that which became or happened”, while *Verðandi* is “that which is happening”. *Skuld* is either “that which should become” or “that needs to occur”.

The family we are born into, our health and genetic predispositions, and the choices that we and others have made to date, are like the threads that now exist, and which cannot be undone. Our choices are not unlimited, or totally free, but limited by where we have come from: “*Our past the path we have become*”. There are also some elements which the *Norns* dictate MUST happen, our “Doom”, the things we cannot avoid, or could even make happen by trying to avoid. The great battle of *Ragnarok* is the Doom of the Gods...they cannot avoid it, and have even helped shaped its course by their previous choices and actions.

However, that still lives plenty of room for our choices, and our decisions. The Runes, in turn, can help us trace the possible threads of “what may be”, like a sailor seeing the currents and tracking the winds that affect his ship, and so give us additional clues to plot our preferred course.

When this Rune appears, therefore, it could be saying just that; the “choice is yours”...or calling on you to look hard and seek wisdom. BUT, **Perthro** also calls us to accept that there are some choices we cannot make, and to accept and embrace our Fate in those circumstances, just as the Gods do.

Y : *Algiz* : Elk Sedge / Protection (?)

*Hands are lifted the Gods to praise
Blessings given to guide our ways
Protected be on ancient paths
Keep homelands whole, and safe our hearths*

Eolhx: *The Eolh-sedge is mostly to be found in a marsh;
it grows in the water and makes a ghastly wound,
covering with blood every warrior who touches it. OERP*

This is the second of the “mystery” runes, a mystery made more complicated in that its sound is “Z”, (the final sound of the letter), rather than the initial sound like those letters which make up the word FUThARK. Also, although some translations of the OERP use the term “Elk Sedge” to translate “Eolh-sedge”, this plant species is actually only found in western North America.

Thus, I have chosen to follow a minority line of thought that claims that this Rune originally meant “Protection”, a translation which I think is reinforced by its shape, which looks something like a person standing and raising their hands to the Gods, (a traditional way of praying for something), or a hand with fingers splayed out.

As it is, even those who call it “Elk Sedge”, then describe this as a rune of protection, claiming that the sedge with its sharp edges will cut anyone unwary enough to try and grasp it; or that this is a “kenning” or “riddle” for a sword.

However, I think that **Algiz** as a protection Rune calling on the Gods, reminds us that we are not alone, and that we are entitled and expected to call upon the Gods, our ancestors, and the other good spirits in “other worlds”, such as the *Disir* (female spirits who sometimes are protective of Norse clans).

Where **Eihwaz** speaks to me of seeking Wisdom from the World Tree, or protection by active defence (not just the Yew Bow, but by any appropriate means), **Algiz** speaks to me of calling down protection, and actively seeking the aid of the “other world”.

But, we cannot just call on the Gods for our own ends, or expect the ancestors or spirits to respond to our pleas if we spend the rest of our lives ignoring them. **Algiz**, therefore, is also about establishing a relationship with the hidden, with the “numinous”, with the forces we cannot see.

We can do this in various ways; by respect for our ancestors, even just by talking about their lives and celebrating their achievements and gifts to us today; by creating an altar to the Gods or household spirits; by saying “Thank-You” to the living things that have died to give us food, clothing or materials, by taking part in appropriate ceremonies and celebrations. Open your awareness to the world you cannot see, and listen to what it says. Respect the world you do see, and the path that brought you here and the path you will follow onwards.

Algiz, I believe, is the Rune of actively connecting yourself to the other, and becoming a mutual partner, not just taking, but also giving, with respect and honour, each for the other.

Σ : *Sowilo* : Sun

*Victorious shines the sky-shield wheel
By sailors watched to guide their keel
Shed healing rays and lift our souls
Give courage strong to win our goals*

Sigel: *The sun is ever a joy in the hopes of seafarers
when they journey away over the fishes' bath,
until the courser of the deep bears them to land. OERP*

Sol: *sun is the cloud's shield
and a shining ray
and ice's old enemy. OIRP*

Sol: *Sun is the light of the world;
I bow to the divine decree. ONRP*

This **Aett** started with the destructiveness of **Hagalaz** (Hail), which melts in the sunlight; and here we are at the end of the **Aett**, standing in the sunlight of victory and life.

I believe there is a lesson in the **Aett** as a whole, teaching us how to respond to the three perils of Catastrophe, Need/Want, and Hidden Dangers. I believe the Aett also tells us to take a broader view; learning from the timing of the Seasons, or the ways of the “Other World”, which we can track through the Runes, and to nourish our relationship with the hidden world around us.

Learn these lessons, **Sowilo** says, and you will be guided, like the sailor who follows the sun home across a sea which has no land marks. Learn these lessons, and you will stand in the sun, and feel its healing rays, even in the middle of troubles.

The sun is life, bringing warmth, and encouraging crops to grow in the spring and summer. Our bodies need the sun, and those who don't get enough sunlight suffer from Vitamin D deficiency (leading to rickets).

At the Winter Equinox, when the days stop growing shorter, peoples in many lands hold Mid-Winter celebrations to mark the eventual return of the sun and the melting of the snow and ice, and the birth of new livestock and the sowing of crops..

Sowilo, therefore, is an immensely powerful and positive rune; reminding us that even in the darkest days of winter; the Sun is on its path back to us, and that once again, there will be warmth and new life.

But I also believe that **Sowilo** is a Rune that challenges us, calling us to be people who celebrate the 9 Virtues, to live courageously, to be positive and hopeful. **Sowilo** is the rune of eventual victory, but we must also be part of the fight if we want to celebrate that Victory.

↑ : *Tiwaz* : **Tir**

*A god's right hand for Fenrir's demand
Honour proved at the wolf's command
Tir defend us when all is lost
And teach us to give sacrificial cost*

Tir: *Tiw is a guiding star; well does it keep faith with princes;
it is ever on its course over the mists of night and never fails.* OERP

Tyr: *Týr
god with one hand
and leavings of the wolf
and prince of temples.* OIRP

Tyr: *Tyr is a one-handed god;
often has the smith to blow.* ONRP

Once upon a time, the old tales tell us, Loki had three children with the *jötunn Angrboða*:- *Hel*, the Goddess who takes the dead who have died of old age or disease, the world serpent *Jörmungandr*, and the wolf *Fenrir*.

Fenrir grew so fast and was so strong, that the Gods feared him, and only *Tyr* had the courage to feed it. So the Gods proposed a game where they tried to bind *Fenrir*, but the great wolf easily broke the first two chains called *Leyding* and *Dromi*. But then, the Gods sought the help of the *Swartalfar* (Dark Elves or Dwarves). The dwarves made a silken cord called *Gleipnir* from the sound of a cat's footfall, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the sinews of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird.

Fenrir distrusted this rope that looked so weak, and made the Gods promise that they would release him if he couldn't break it. He also called on one of the Gods to put his right hand in the wolf's jaws as a guarantee of honesty, and so *Tyr*, the God of war, put his right hand in the wolf's jaws. When *Fenrir* was tied up, and found he couldn't escape, and that the Gods wouldn't release him, he bit down, and so *Tyr* lost his sword hand.

Our day, Tuesday, is called after *Tiw*, the Anglo Saxon version of *Tir's* name. He is the god of law, and heroic valour, and may even have been the original “chief god” in an earlier period.

Tiwaz reminds us that even the Gods accept that sometimes doing the “right” thing to protect their community will demand a sacrifice. **Tiwaz** is not just about Justice for ourselves, but also acting Justly...doing the right thing even at personal cost. **Tiwaz** is also a rune of Law and the Courts. Call on *Tir* to defend you when your cause is just and right, but don't even think about seeking his help where you know you are in the wrong. **Tiwaz**, at that point, is the Rune of Conscience.

But, **Tiwaz** also calls on us to be courageous, and to keep fighting, even when all appears lost, for honour's sake.

B : *Berkanaz* : Berkano / Birch

*Birch mother goddess bringing hopes to birth
Show us our place and all nature's worth
Mystery enfolded and teacher of life
Keeper of doorways and Allfather's wife*

Beorc: *The poplar (possibly birch?) bears no fruit; yet without seed it brings forth suckers,
for it is generated from its leaves.
Splendid are its branches and gloriously adorned
its lofty crown which reaches to the skies. OERP*

Bjarkan: *Birch
leafy twig
and little tree
and fresh young shrub. OIRP*

Bjarkan: *Birch has the greenest leaves of any shrub;
Loki was fortunate in his deceit. ONRP*

The Birch tree (“Bright” or “Shining”), is associated with both Thor and Freya, but in magical terms much more with healing, protection, fertility and birth. Edred Thorsson describes Berkanoz as the Rune of the Cosmic Mother, and presiding over the 4 great Rites of Passage; Birth, Adolescence, Marriage and Death¹⁵.

Others see the breasts and swollen belly of the pregnant woman, in the outline of Berkanaz, and some claim that the Birch Goddess is both Frigg and Feyja (who may be the same goddess under different names).

Of all the Runes, therefore, this is the essential “feminine” Rune, but also the Rune of bringing to birth. Where **Ingwaz** is the planting of the seed, and **Jera** the patient work of tending the growing crops, **Berkanaz** is the harvesting, the act of creation, the bringing the project/process into reality. (Even writers sometimes talk of “birthing” a book).

This is a Rune of life changes, or life cycles. It is the Rune of our Feminine and nurturing aspects, the Rune of our place in the natural order of things as an integral part of that web. We are made from the same basic substance as the rest of creation, and are kin to the plants, the animals, the earth, and the sea...even the moon and stars.

Berkanaz, therefore, literally brings us “down to earth”, and our relationships with nature, others, and ourselves. Use **Berkanaz** to protect the Home; Hearth and Kin. Sometime, though, **Berkanaz** is calling us to “let go”, either for us to move on, or to allow another to “grow up”.

Unlike the regular cycles of the seasons, it seems to me there is a deeper and slower rhythm where we grow into a role; and then must move on. **Berkanaz**, like **Tiwaz**, is a profound Rune, telling us to think about how we live our lives as a whole, and how far we are able to let go of old things, so we can receive better.

15 Futhark, A Handbook of Rune Magic, Edred Thorsson, Weiss; ISBN 978-0-87728-548-9

M : Ehwaz : Horse

*Rider and ridden, made one from the two
Both called together to work something new
Not earth bound but flying, spirit set free
So Odin rides Sleipnir along the world tree*

Eh: *The horse is a joy to princes in the presence of warriors.
A steed in the pride of its hoofs,
when rich men on horseback bandy words about it;
and it is ever a source of comfort to the restless. OERP*

After the focus on Tir and the Mother Goddess (whether Frigg, Freyja or both), it seems that a Rune about the horse is rather ordinary, but in fact the horse is anything BUT ordinary in Germanic/Norse culture.

The Horse, like the Raven, is a profound spiritual symbol. Horse worship dates back at least to the Iron Age, including horse sacrifice, and appears across the whole Northern Europe and into Asia.

Horses transformed the lives of nomadic peoples, with some tribes, like the Huns, practically living in the saddle from birth to death. The horse provides transport, food, and hides. It can carry goods, or pull a carriage; be a domestic beast of burden or a weapon of war.

The rider tames a wild animal, and apparently, as if by some magic, learns to control an animal far bigger and stronger than him or her, until it willingly rides into danger, or fights to protect its owner.

In that way alone, **Ehwaz** is about a close partnership, about two combined energies achieving far more than two people working on their own can achieve. **Ehwaz** is about balance, and about our gifts and abilities taking precedence over pride and selfishness.

But, the horse is also mythologically powerful, representing the shaman's ability to "move" between worlds, carried by something "extraordinary".

Odin is often described as riding an eight legged horse, **Sleipnir**. This horse was "born" from **Loki** when he transformed himself into a mare to stop an ice giant winning a bet with the **Vanir**. The Gods had allowed the giant to use his Stallion, **Svaðilfari**, to help him complete an apparently "impossible" task, and the Giant was winning. However, transformed into a mare, **Loki** distracted the Stallion and the giant failed, but **Loki** also fell pregnant and gave birth to an eight legged foal.

Odin rides **Sleipnir** to **Hel** to seek the reason for **Baldur's** bad dreams. Some writers, therefore, see **Sleipnir** as symbolic of **Odin** as a Shaman, "riding" between the nine worlds.

I believe, therefore, that **Ehwaz** is also about being open to not just being aware of the other world, or even calling on the gods and other spirits and being in a "relationship" with them, but is also about being open to actually exploring those worlds through ritual or some other practice, (such as Shamanism, or Seidr/Seidh).

There is a profound difference between knowing about something, and knowing something by touching it, and knowing something by "being" it. Maybe **Ehwaz** is urging you to take a journey of your own across **Yggdrasil**?

ᚱ : *Mannaz* : Man / Human

*To Ask and to Embla, to make humans whole
Ve, Vili, Odin, gifted blood, sense and soul
Bound to the earth, yet filled with the other
We are joined in the life-boon, sister and brother*

Monn: *The joyous man is dear to his kinsmen;
yet every man is doomed to fail his fellow,
since the Lord by his decree will commit the vile carrion to the earth.* OERP

Madhr: *Man
delight of man
and augmentation of the earth
and adorning of ships.* OIRP

Madhr: *Man is an augmentation of the dust;
great is the claw of the hawk.* ONRP

In the Bible, Man is described as being made from mud and brought to life by the Breath of God, while Woman is made from Adam's rib, and likewise brought to life by God.

In Norse mythology, however, the three brothers, **Ve**, **Vili** and **Odin** (who may also actually be three aspects of the same God), come across two trees by the sea shore. The first gives them shape, speech, hearing and sight, the second gives movement and intelligence, and the third gives “the breath of life” (or soul).

I love the profound lessons embedded in this myth. The first is that humans were effectively already “alive” (as trees), when the Gods made them human, and they were already separate, though different. Secondly, there is no distinction as to race; ALL peoples are given the same gifts, and so no race or people is inherently superior by right.

And yet, thirdly, in common with many other such stories across the world, humans are different in some ways to the rest of creation. Even in Norse mythology, the Gods do something to the existing world to create Humans as “different”. I don't think this makes us “better”, but I do believe that it should make us more responsible. All people share the same gifts, and therefore we should treat all people with the same respect we would want.

However, looking back at **Gebo**, and the reciprocal nature of gifts and giving; this myth also tells us that we “owe” a duty to the Gods for the gifts they have given us. The Norse/Germanic creation myth tells us that the Gods made **Midgard**, and so this is their world first and foremost. This world is not ours for our selfish pleasure; but as a gift to cherish wisely, and to give back in full measure to the Gods.

Mannaz, therefore, is about being human, about our humanity, and about how we live and use the gifts we are given. It challenges our relationships, and our goals. **Mannaz** also calls us to be proud of our heritage, as “born” of the Gods, and to honour those gifts in everything we do.

But finally, it reminds us that when we die, then it is the Gods' right to take that gift from us, at a time of their choosing, and for us to live those lives to the full until then.

ǀ : *Laguz* : Leek / Lake (?)

*As leek grows from earth, bright green to behold
Wisdom and knowledge within will unfold
Water, the other world, spirit and death
A doorway to pass through, beyond human breath*

Lagu: *The ocean seems interminable to men,
if they venture on the rolling bark
and the waves of the sea terrify them
and the courser of the deep heed not its bridle. OERP*

Logr: *Water
eddying stream
and broad geyser
and land of the fish. OIRP*

Logr: *A waterfall is a River which falls from a mountain-side;
but ornaments are of gold. ONRP*

Although called **Laguz** here, some writers prefer to call this Rune “**Laukaz**” (Leek), which at first appears to be totally contradictory. However, the leek, growing green and white, is a good symbol for spiritual and inner growth. The green shoots are only part of the story, with the valuable stalk starting under ground. What you see is not the very beginning, but merely evidence of something deeper.

Water, too, is not just another element, (and one that most land dwellers fear if they ever have to go cross the sea). The sea, and water, also represent the “other world”, the barrier between life and death, and is symbolic of the soul's journey when the body itself has died.

Water, therefore, represents the unknown, and the uncontrollable, the passage that we cannot see..the journey we watch others start at death, but then we are left behind.

At its simplest, **Laguz** could be about water, whether a journey on water, or a flood. At a deeper level, though, it is talking about emotions, and our inner life, our spirit, our minds and mental health.

Laguz also challenges us to think about our death, and the deaths of those around us...and not just in terms of our loss when they die, but what happens to that person’s “soul”, the aspect that lives on.

Do we fear death, or embrace it, or do we merely see it as a doorway we will pass through when the time is right?

And do we act that way with other significant changes; whenever they may occur? It has been said that coming to terms with death is a sign of mental health, and to that extent, **Laguz** is also about our own overall mental, emotional and spiritual health.

Are our lives in balance, and able to respond healthily to day to day situations, while also keeping in sight the bigger picture?

◊ : *Ingwaz* : Hero / Ingvi Frey

*Seed sown is rooted and nurtured for birth
New life beyond sight safe deep in the earth
Joy find in joining, sharing our pleasure
harvest and ploughing, each in true measure*

Ing: *Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes,
till, followed by his chariot,
he departed eastwards over the waves.
So the Heardingas named the hero. OERP*

Ingwaz is the third (and thankfully the last) of the “mystery” runes, in that we have very little information about the Rune's original meaning.

However, many writers do link **Ingwaz** to **Freyr**, the God of Fertility, whose statue was thought to have been carried on a cart round the fields as part of the Spring ritual.

Freyr, as one of the most prominent Norse gods, (though originally one of the **Vanir**, rather than the **Aesir** like **Odin**), was also the god of kingship and virility as well as brother to the Goddess **Freyja**. In around 1080, Adam of Bremen describes a major temple in Upsalla in Sweden which he claimed was dedicated to the three Gods, Wodan (**Odin**), **Thor**, and Fricca (**Freyr**), who was apparently represented as a man with a “huge phallus”. I also think that as a “seed” rune, it is significant that **Ingwaz** is the smallest of all the Runes.

Thus, on many levels, this can be seen as the “Masculine” Rune, and symbolic of the fertility of the seed, the sowing in Spring time, and start of projects; standing in contrast to its partner Rune, **Berkanaz** which is about birth and fruiting.

Where **Laguz** is the seed sprouting to life, its green shoots poking through the earth, **Ingwaz** is about trusting that the hidden seed will be fruitful, even if we cannot see anything yet. Digging up the germinating seed can kill it, or leave it prey to birds. So, this Rune is about trusting the effect of what we do, even when we cannot see any evidence.

I also believe, however, that this is the Rune of sexual pleasure, for all parties, (not just the males). In spring time, after the long winter, nature seems to celebrate fertility and sexual activity. We humans have the greatest capacity to enjoy the sexual act, and I believe that **Ingwaz** is symbolic of that. **Ingwaz** is about enjoying life to the full, though not for purely selfish ends. What we do matters, and has an impact, but neither does that mean we should be celibate, or be afraid of pleasure for its own sake, whatever the form that takes.

We are of the earth, though gifted by the gods as well. On a personal note, I also believe that the Gods do not give us permission to be exclusive, or prejudiced against those who express their gender or sexuality in a different way to us. The Gods are so varied, and I believe we are should celebrate the diversity of human expression where it seeks the good, and is not abusive.

I believe, therefore, that **Ingwaz** calls us to let go, and to live our lives and support others in theirs. **Ingwaz**, also celebrates the the potential in all our acts, the birth that can result from even the smallest seed act of kindness, or mercy.

M : *Dagaz* : Day

*To daylight from darkness the circles return
Seeing the hidden, the wisdom we learn
Act now and surely, trusting thy heart
True flies the arrow, straight from the start*

Daeg: *Day, the glorious light of the Creator, is sent by the Lord;
it is beloved of men, a source of hope and happiness to rich and poor,
and of service to all. OERP*

Dagaz and **Othala**, the last two Runes in the Elder Futhark are sometimes reversed, and there are arguments in favour of both presentations. **Dagaz**, as Day does have similarities with **Sowilo**, the Sun, and makes another really positive and upbeat ending to the *Aett*. However, I also think ending with **Othala**, which represents roots and inheritance, brings the wheel full circle after starting with **Fehu** as wealth.

Where **Sowilo** is about the Sun for victory, and a clear sign to follow, I think **Dagaz** is more about seeing clearly, about enlightenment and inner perception. The light of Daytime brings opportunity for work, and the longer days of summer are warmer and more welcoming than the short cold days of winter.

But Day is, again, also about cycles; about trusting that after darkness and sorrow, there will be light and joy again. It's about understanding the deeper truths with the heart as well as the head, and being able to gain comfort from them.

However, I also believe that **Dagaz** is also about being sure, and acting with confidence when the right time has come. Sometimes we have all the information we need or are going to get; and then the day comes to act on it, and to be firm and decisive.

In the symbol for **Dagaz**, we not only have the two halves that could be interpreted as Day and Night; but also a symbol that can be interpreted as the need for focus, for concentration. Successful warriors, whether using the sword, the bow, or any other weapon, learn the same lesson; that one's ability to win depends firstly upon the ability to be totally focused, and not distracted by fear, or anxiety.

As far as I am aware, this interpretation for **Dagaz** is unique to me; but knowing something of the Germanic/Norse culture and their celebration of the warrior and the skilled fighter; I don't imagine this concept is wholly alien. With Daylight and clarity comes the time to act; but action itself must be focused and controlled to be effective.

 : *Othala* : Inheritance / Homestead

*The greatest of treasures, more precious than gold
The gift to the young, passed from the old
As we tend to the roots, so the tree tip will flower
And sweet to the soul, the fruit of the bower*

Ethel: *An estate is very dear to every man,
if he can enjoy there in his house
whatever is right and proper in constant prosperity.* OERP

In many ways, **Othala** has a lot of similarities with **Wunjo** (Joy), as the OERP both talk about having some financial security; or a “*good enough house*”, or being able to “... *enjoy there in his house whatever is right and proper in constant prosperity.*”

However, where **Wunjo** focuses on the individual and his or her own prosperity and how they view their property, I believe that **Othala** goes a lot deeper, and calls on us to be embedded in our roots, and to think of the generations that will come afterwards.

In stanza 76 of the *Hávamál*, the author says:

*"Cattle die, kindred die,
everyman is mortal:
but the good name never dies
of one who has done well."*¹⁶

The inheritance we receive is the sum of all the actions of our ancestors, and encompasses not only the physical property we may inherit, but also our name, our place in our society, as well as our spiritual and cultural roots. In ancient times, people believed that when someone died, they didn't just disappear. Part of their soul remained where they had died, and part of their soul remained for a while to help guide their family, their clan and tribe. Remembering and celebrating one's ancestors is a way of respecting them, and also ensuring that their advice is beneficial. Disrespect the ancestors, and when you need their help, they may decide to punish you, or trick you out of spite.

And in turn, our inheritance is everything we leave behind, including our good name, and our actions. We are not just individuals, but organic parts of a larger community stretching back in time and space..and which will carry on long after our deaths, affected by our choices.

The greatest joy, sometimes, comes from seeing our real place in the world, our connectedness. It is seeing that our real worth isn't measured in the goods we leave behind, but in the words and deeds that other people remember us by, and that this future is available to everyone, rich or poor, throughout our lives.

Othala, therefore, calls on us to remember our roots, and to consider the impact of our words and actions in the future. **Othala** also challenges us to put aside our own selfish concerns, and to consider the needs of the greater community.

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Some Notes on using the Runes for Divination

Because there is very little written evidence from the earliest period of the runes, we cannot be sure that the earliest “Runes” were even used for divination purposes, let alone HOW they were used. There is some evidence that Runes were added as “charms” to pieces of jewellery and weapons, but very little hard evidence beyond that.

However, there are some tantalizing clues that the Germanic peoples used a system of “drawing” or “casting” lots, though without describing what was written on the “sticks”, “staves” or “twigs”.

However, it would appear that traditionally, the system looked more like a form of I-Ching with the pattern of all the sticks being as important as the individual sticks; rather than something which seems to be more based on Tarot cards.

In Tarot, each card has a constellation of meanings, and when the card is dealt, its meaning can vary according to whether it is reversed. Personally, I tend to feel that this is only possible with a set of “Runes” which are largely uniform and regular in size and shape, in the same way a deck of cards is uniform and regular.

However, if you lay down a white cloth, (say about 24 inches by 24 inches), and then “cast” your runes onto the cloth; one can read not only individual runes, but see how they relate to each other.

Again, I think that in those circumstances, one can reasonably exclude those runes which fall face down, or where the Rune itself is obscured.

However, and more importantly, our ability to “read” the Runes is NOT governed by doing it the “Right” way; but being consistent, and by being clear before you start what the question is, and how you will “discern” the answer..whether you choose to “cast” the runes, or lay them out in some pre-determined pattern.

There-after, the skilled Rune Reader allows themselves to become “attuned” to the Runes, and to the patterns and messages they wish to convey. Most importantly, the Runes, and our minds and spirits, are part of a larger “communication” process through which the questioner starts to understand the warp and weft of their **Orlog**.

Some Thoughts on Rune Magick

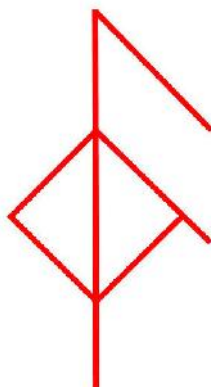
I believe, however, that the real power of Runes isn't in their individual characteristics, although time spent learning those is never wasted.

Their real power comes through learning to combine them. Some Rune Magick can take the form of “words” and “phrases” using combinations of letters, with spells using certain rhythms and meters. The most powerful requires the writer to be able to speak some Norse, and then write the phrase or word in the original characters. However, there is still plenty of power where the writer “transcribes” their native language using the phonetic value of the Runes.

Runes can also be combined as “Bind-Runes”, where individual Runes are “over-laid” to produce a symbol incorporating the power of two or more separate runes.

The symbol on the front cover is a Bind-Rune made up of 9 Runes, though I jave “cheated” slightly by using a later version of **Hagalaz** which looks like a star with six arms.

This simpler Bind-Rune below uses **Thurisaz**, (for *Thor*), **Ansuz** (for *Odin*), and **Inwaz** (for *Ing-Freyr*), as follows:



I use this as a Bind-Rune for protection and power.

Some people, since the publication of Ralph Blum's “*The Book of Runes: A Handbook for the Use of an Ancient Oracle*” (first published in 1982), encourage the use of a “Blank Rune”. Apart from the lack of any “Blank” letters in any known alphabet, (apart from Scrabble), I would argue that a Blank Rune would be impossible in any Rune Magick. How would you create a Bind-Rune, or write a Magical phrase?

Thus, if you buy a Rune set, and it contains a Blank Rune; set to one side in case you lose one of the other Runes. In addition, be very cautious when reading a book which advocates using a Blank Rune.