



Seeds of the World Tree: A Primer on the Basics of Esoteric Runelore



The Runes are not merely alphabetical symbols, used in ancient Germanic alphabets. The history of the Runes stretches back quite a distance and while it is true that the symbols themselves likely find their origin in many cultural sources, the inner essence of the Runes is something truly arcane and Otherworldly.

The first hint to the true nature of the Runes is in the name itself- "Rune". It comes from the word "Runa", which means "Mystery". Most people are not aware of even this basic fact. The Runes are not merely letters, but manifestations of Mysteries- mysteries that deal with the foundation of the cosmos, and every force or event that occurs in or around you.

One cannot consider the inner meaning of the Runes without understanding their relationship to the great Allfather Woden, who was the Master of the Runes or Mysteries- and the teacher of their recondite wisdom to mankind.

Woden won the inner knowledge of all Mysteries or all Runes through a powerful act of sorcery, an act of self-sacrifice, a "vision quest" of types in which he hung himself from a tree for nine nights, wounded by his spear, and without touching food or drink. This very shamanic, seid-like working brought about his death, and he plunged into the dark void of Hel, the realm of the dead at the roots of the World-Tree.

There, beyond the darkness of that mysterious place, he saw what not even the wisest can see or know- the Mysteries that the World Tree itself grew from. When he was returned to life, his Godly mind was able to "crystallize" the unspeakable mysteries he had mystically come to know in that deep state, and reveal them in the form of the intelligible Runic symbols. Through these symbols, human beings (themselves endowed with Spiritual understanding from Woden) can also share in his deep mystical knowledge.

Naturally, this tale of Woden's ordeal is full of sacred metaphors- the World Tree is of course a symbol of Reality as a whole; all nine worlds rest within it, and it is the great manifest reality that all things are a part of. "hanging on the World Tree" has a deeper meaning when you consider it in this manner. Woden sacrificed himself to "Him Self", or his greater self- for indeed, his greater Self was part of all things.

Interestingly enough, the World Tree is seen as his "Steed"- He literally "rode" the body of reality from its manifest form into its deep and dark roots, penetrating all appearances and reaching the Great Runa or Mystery that it all springs from. This is why his other "steed" or Horse Sleipnir is often seen as the same as The World Tree; and interestingly, his horse has Eight legs, each representing a world, with the Rider or Woden representing the ninth or Godly world of Asgard. By this steed, be it a Tree or a Horse, he is able to access all worlds, but more than that, to access the roots of all Reality.

In many Central Asian Shamanic societies, the spirit of horses are seen as "steeds" for shamans to access other realities and worlds; this area of the world was probably near to the original homelands of the Proto-Indo Europeans, and gave rise to the common mystical traditions and themes that were found worldwide at one time.



Havamal says that Reality, symbolized by the World Tree, springs from a place that none can know - none living or dead, that is. But Woden went beyond life and death to access the Great Mysteries; he plunged consciously into the deep realm of Hel or the Dead, and remembered what he saw there, and beyond. He was able to undergo "death" consciously, and reconstitute the lore and wisdom he gained from the depths into a consciously tangible form, or the Rune symbols and the lore that accompanies them. He stands in the "Odinic Paradox" condition which interacts with the living realm and the dead realm, but also with a greater understanding that contains them both and transcends them.

Of the Runes, enough cannot be said, for they are each expressions of an infinite mystery, and each of the 24 Runic powers represents a true "seed" that reality itself springs from- all manifest forces, all appearances and phenomenon, from men to animals to giants and gods, from this world or any of the other eight worlds, and the destiny of all beings, are ruled by the forces of the Runes or the Mysteries. A wise man or woman who penetrates the mysteries of the Runes can access an inexhaustible well of knowledge just as the All-Father did, and gain a new destiny beyond life and death, just as he did.

In the so-called "beginning", only the great void of Ginnungagap existed- and this void was charged with all the latent possibilities of all that would emerge one day. It was charged with the essence of Wyrð, and the Runic powers are precisely that- the root-powers of Wyrð. The Runic powers were unexpressed, but latent in Ginnungagap. They were everywhere in the Void, but undifferentiated, and thus incomprehensible.

The Void's first two expressions were pure energy and radiating heat (itself a manifestation of the Fehu Rune mystery), and deep contraction and cold, or Fire and Ice. These were the first two worlds of Muspelheim and Niflheim, pregnant with their Giantish, unconscious forces of pure raging energy and fire and dark contracting crystalization. Because of the dualistic first manifestation of Fire and Ice, the latent 24 Runic forces become polarized as well, into the "Shining Runes" (Heidrunes) and the "Dark Runes" (Myrkrunes).

In this condition, there is conflict and attraction- and the polarity exists so that it might be rejoined and re-assimilated in a manner capable of the full manifestation in the cosmos. In the creative conflict engendered between Fire and Ice, between the great polar forces, the primordial life-material is created, the yeasty rime and slime that becomes Ymir.

Within Ymir, the great living and giantish bulk of primordial life, all of the 24 Rune forces exist, though still unexpressed. Within Ymir's body is the "salt block" or the crystal-pattern (represented by the ninth Rune) that will act as the underlying pattern of all forms to come.

The Void itself expresses Audhumla (herself an early manifestation of the Uruz Rune Mystery), through a natural and spontaneous organic act of expression- and Audhumla represents the force of cosmic nourishment and heat, of growth and sustenance. She is aptly symbolized by a Cow, with udders full of warm milk, which nourish Ymir, and her presence causes this strange primal condition to begin to change slowly, towards manifestation.

Audhumla licks the "salt block" that she finds in the primordial mass of living matter or Ymir, and as she does so, the underlying forces begin to take a new phase of manifestation. While Ymir engenders more and more giantish forces or children from his body (themselves manifestations of the Thurs Rune mystery), Audhumla gradually aids the salt-block into giving forth another form of life- a truly conscious form of life, Buri, the first being we can call a "God", for his consciousness was full and complete, not like the dim oafish unconsciousness or semi-consciousness of the Giants, nor the other violent natural forces surging through this strange proto-world condition.

Buri is described as "beautiful" compared to the giants, of course! He is a being of the light of consciousness, a first manifestation of the Ansuz Rune mystery.



But nothing is able to come to complete manifestation yet- until Buri "mates" with Giantish maidens and has a son, who likewise mates with the giants (see in this the forces of light and darkness engendering further forms, or the powers of consciousness and unconsciousness interacting) and finally, Buri's grandson, Woden, is born, a fully evolved conscious being of great power, drawn from godly and giantish roots, or from the totality of forces.

Woden appears in a trinitary form, with his two "brothers" Vili and Ve - but this trinitary form is still the singular power of the All-Father. He completes the task of primordial manifestation by slaying Ymir- sacrificing him- and then taking the 24 latent rune powers that were present in Ymir or the Body of Primal Matter, and arranging them into the World Order- creating all the Nine Worlds, and bringing forth all life-manifestation. The World Tree or the Manifest Web of Wyrð now appears in its complete expression, and now exists in the form we can experience it in our everyday lives, all after this cosmogonic sacrifice.

Woden doesn't stop there- with the other Gods who emerge, and some that he fathers, he builds his Godly "hall" in the super-conscious heights of reality, the Godly world of Asgard, and they take it upon themselves to protect the world-order that they created from the Giantish forces that survived the world-shaping- and those giantish forces still exist, and strain daily against the order established by the Gods.

Eventually, one day, they will overwhelm the world-order at Ragnarok, and all things will collapse back into the basic embers and fires of the Void (the Fehu Rune, the first rune in the rune-row, represents the Fire of the Beginning, which is also the fire which will consume all at the End of the cycle of manifestation) and all things will collapse back to the ice, all things reduced back to the basic polarity that engendered the creation to begin with. All that will remain then will be what was- the yawning Void, charged as it still will be with all the Latent powers of the Runes, and the Fire and Ice. And then, the great process will repeat, and new worlds will be born.

But back to this world- for the world of this cycle still exists. Woden found two organic lumps of matter floating on the shores of a primordial ocean, and bestowed form and spirit upon them- his Godly mind gave them shape and vitality, and breathed into them the Ond, the Spirit of the Gods, making these beings his Kin, and Kin to all the Gods. This was the first man and woman, Ask and Embla, who represent the ancestors of all humanity.

Because we humans have the gift of spirit, that deathless mystery about us, we can access the Runes or Mysteries by following Allfather Woden's lead, and following his example, in our particularly human manner, but still using the same "mind" he did- a mind in conjunction with Ond or the Godly immortal spirit. Like him, we can access great wisdom and even overcome death, in a strange, occult manner, but in a very real manner.



When Woden sacrificed and chopped apart Ymir's Body, the 24 Runes became "arranged" into the Rune Row, the sacred order that we know them in, and that order is very important, for in that order, we see the "pattern" of manifestation, and we can see what was, what is, and what will be. The Rune Row is a complete expression, in 24 symbols, of the 24 underlying mysteries that act as the unseen "blueprint" of all things that manifest, and of all the forces that flow and cause the universal cycle to start, to manifest, to die, and to re-manifest.

You can see, just by looking at the first five Runes in the Rune Row, what I am talking about- they are not arbitrarily arranged in that order of 24, but arranged according to an underlying cosmic pattern. The first five Runes are FEHU, URUZ, THURS, ANSUZ, and RAIDO- F... U... TH... A... R.

FEHU is the rune of the impelling Fire, transformative, and ultimately destructive. It is the Fire

of Muspel, which acts as the "active" power that starts the system. URUZ is the drizzle or rain that occurred between the primordial fire and ice, which gave rise to the primordial powerful mass of life, And the cosmic Ox/bovine Audhumla; URUZ is the mother of manifestation, the patterning, growing power. THURS represents the appearance of the primal Giantish forces, and ANSUZ the appearance of the conscious Godly forces, leading up to Woden. RAIDO is the Mystery of Universal Order, of Right Cosmic Order, which is the Order that Woden arranged the Runes in, which also is simultaneously the order he "shaped" the entire Cosmos into. FUTHAR is a Runic formula, a Rune-Row, which speaks of the entire Cosmic Creation.

All 24 Runes represent the total pattern- you could keep going from FUTHAR, into the entire row; the 24 properly arranged Runes tell the entire story of creation, starting from the shaping and formation, moving through the emergence of the Norns and expressed Fate and Time, to the rise of humans and their cultures, to the war of the world's End, and to the rebirth.

As I said before, the Runes in their pure form are unknowable mysteries. But in this world of manifestation, they manifest AS forces we experience- and they also manifest in the chain of cause and effect that led them to be symbolized by letters.

To make an example, Beorc, the Birch Rune, is a great mystery beyond words. But this mystery manifests itself as what we see as Birch Trees, in the Lady's Mantle herb, but also in the symbol Beorc itself, the form of the rune you see drawn or carved- and also in the "B" sound. It doesn't stop there- this mystery also "appears" in the color of dark green, and in the qualities of motherly fertility and giving, the earth itself, and most esoterically, in the Containment of all things in this very moment. The Goddess Freya, or Berchta, is likewise part of this Mystery- though she is NOT this mystery; she is a Goddess all on her own, but she manifests something of this Mystery, along with Hel and Nerthus or Ertha.

The human body can get into certain sacred postures- called Stodhur, which are also manifestations of the various Rune-Mysteries. Each Rune Mystery has a Galdor or a Sacred Chant associated with it's sacred Sound. If a person were to assume the Stodhur of a Rune, and chant its sacred Galdor, while seeing nothing but the symbol form of the Rune in their mind's eye, or by fixing their eyes on an actual carving or picture of it, and if that person chanted the Galdor over and over, filling the body and senses with the various manifestations of the Rune Mystery, they would become VeHailig- "Very Holy"- and wordlessly, indescribably "penetrate" into the inner essence of the Rune or the Mystery itself, of which these other things are only appearances.

This is a great key and basic of Rune Sorcery. Through penetrating the Mysteries, one can go into the direct company of the Gods, connect to them, or cause any change imaginable within the mind or body or world. By merging with the Rune power invoked through the Galdor or sounds sacred to it, one becomes "one" with the Rune Mystery, and unlocks its powers within their Body and Mindstream. By meditating on the Rune-form, and by other esoteric practices, the Rune-Sorcerer is capable of many amazing feats of mystical ability.

There is another example I am very fond of- if you wish to see the World, all manifestation, as a great "Web"- the Web of Wyrð, you must think of the Web as having 24 endpoints, and a Runic Mystery at each end-point. Each mystery would have a thread running to the center of the web. "You" and all things would be at the center of the Web, no matter where you go, you are always mysteriously at the "center", being acted upon by all the forces in the Cosmos, to a lesser or greater amount.

The 24 strands would have "cross strands" of course, horizontally-running web-strands, making a true web, and linking them all together; the Rune Forces do not only act on the "present moment", but they blend and affect each other, causing more combinations of force and reality. This is the notion behind the "bindrune" or the "rune row"- an arrangement of two or more runes or powers, mixed together to create a "formula" of power- any situation or force or phenomenon can be esoterically "described" by a mixture of two or more runes. This is an important understanding to Rune Sorcery, which is itself the craft of conscious beings utilizing the great Mysteries or Forces of the Cosmos in their manifest form, to weave new patterns of Force and bring about needed changes.

In this great Web, man, Gods, trees, worlds, and destiny all arise. At any moment, a person wise in the Lore could "see" or "come to know" the configuration of runic forces which act on any part of the web or which act directly on the present moment, on the center, and from that knowledge, come to know "what will be", as the forces make a linear "cause and effect" progression, on one level. This is the theory behind Rune divination; when you make a Rune Cast, or divine using the Runes, the Gods or your own Guiding Fylgja (personal spirit) are "revealing" to you what underlying forces (runes) exist at the present moment, "within" or underneath each situation, affecting the situation.



The Runic Cosmology is the finest and most subtle, penetrating cosmology to ever manifest through the minds of Gods or Human beings. The Runes, the Mysteries, the Seed-Mysteries of Creation, are not conscious entities; they are forces that conscious entities can discover, and which the greatest of Conscious entities- the Allfather Woden- had to "use" or "arrange" or act upon to bring forth the manifestation of the Cosmos. The World Tree Grows from 24 seeds; 24 hidden forces underly all of the manifestation of Reality. The Rune-Forces can be accessed and used by Conscious human beings as well, and manipulated, and this is the work of the Erulian or the Rune-Sorcerer.

The Two Great "houses" of Germanic esoteric sorcery or mysticism are found in Rune Sorcery, and Seid. Seid is a more intuitive form of sorcerous art, a shamanic form of dealing with the powers of the natural world in a direct, intuitive manner; instead of dealing with the underlying Runes, the Seid-worker deals with the manifestations, such as animals, trees, and the like; by doing so, in strange, intuitive ways, they ARE manipulating the same forces represented by the Runes.

This art, Seid, deals with the biological realities of life, and the human body, and vital sexual forces, as well as natural forces in their expressed form. Freya, the Mistress of Seid, was the great Mistress of this Art and its mysteries; they are more feminine mysteries, requiring men to become mentally, physically, and spiritually receptive and passive in a manner that was considered shameful or unmanly by the mainstream of Germanic societies. The sorcerous methods of Seid also included underhanded methods of manipulating other beings, another thing that would be seen as "unmanly". But it is still a powerful art.

Rune Sorcery, on the other hand, is ruled by Woden, and is a more intellectual craft, dealing with the direct underlying realities that we see all around us expressed as nature and the mind and body. It is a more "masculine" craft, say some, and it forms a perfect harmonious polarity with the more biological, intuitive arts of Seid. Woden and Freya became lovers, and she initiated him into the mysteries of Seid, teaching him that Art. This union of the masculine and feminine, the intellectual and intuitive approach to the Mysteries, teaches us much.

The final mystery of the Story of Woden's death on the tree is curious indeed- you may have noticed that the story of Woden's vision-death on the World Tree has a strange catch; if Woden was the Rune-Master that shaped all the worlds and gave rise to expressed reality symbolized by the World Tree, why did he need to then hang from it and die to come to gain knowledge of the Runes? This is not hard to answer; the story of Woden's hanging sacrifice is not only a story about a God; it is the story of a human sorcerer and wisdom-seeker hanging himself to achieve wisdom. This human myth is no doubt based on a historical event or a very ancient historical practice of ordeal by which sorcerers or shamanic practitioners hoped to achieve wisdom through mystical self-sacrifice.

Woden's spirit or Ond is within all people; when a mystic hangs himself on a tree and undergoes an ego-death, to consciously plunge into the depths of Hel, Woden undergoes this experience as well, in a manner of speaking. The God's myth-story sets a universal pattern of initiation, and thus we can see that Woden's "hanging" speaks to a timeless, otherworldly ordeal-sacrifice which becomes actualized in the time/space "historical" sense through the mystery of his spirit in manifestation and in mankind.

Woden's own realization, his own archetypal "sacrifice on the Tree", took place in a "time before time", in the timeless space before the advent of Nornic Laws and the gifting of mankind with Ond or Spirit. In some way, the "birth" of Woden and his own Sacrifice/Realization occurred simultaneously.

The story of the Man/God hanging from the World Tree is an expression of the bond or two-way relationship between humans and the All-Father. Without mortal men and women (beings who share the consciousness of the Gods) to gain knowledge of the Runes, the manifestation and creation of the World would not be complete; human consciousness is not complete until it comes to directly understand its source in the Runes or mysteries.

The story of the hanging sacrifice is therefore a story of the completion of the world through a human mind and body, the completion and exaltation of consciousness, the great realization of the Mysteries that unites the Godly and the Human. It is Woden's great mind that undergoes

this realization as much as a human mind, and he 'undergoes' it every time a human successfully comes to the great realization of the Runes.

In the mystical understandings of Northern Heathenism, we must never forget that the Gods and human beings need one another; they interact and affect one another, in the great Web of Wyrð. The mythologies are not merely stories of the Gods; they are stories of Wyrð-relationship. All worlds affect each other, and what happens in this world does have an affect in the others. The seen and the Unseen are related because they are both manifestations of Wyrð. An understanding of the Myth of the Tree-Hanging Sacrifice cannot be found if you make a hard division between temporal human realizations and the timeless realizations of the Allfather.

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