

# Divination Practices—Runes, Part Two

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## Spiritism

We have noted in other places that occult techniques usually seem to originate from spiritistic revelation; this may be true for runes as well, if we are to believe the mythology. Michael Howard points out that the origin of the runes may indeed be spiritistic, but he prefers the view that the Norse god Odin might have been a prehistoric shaman who discovered the rune system and was later deified. Regardless, given the dependence of shamans on the spirit world for occult power and knowledge, it would remain possible that runic divination originated from contact with the spirit world:

**Mythologically, the invention of the runes is credited to the Nordic god Odin. His name is said to be derived from the Old Norse word *Od*, meaning wind or spirit.... The physical description of Odin indicates his sinister reputation.... The gaping eye socket is hidden by a brimmed hat and he leans on a blackthorn staff, accompanied by a raven and a wolf. Odin has the power to raise the dead and divine the future or, like the spirits, to change shape at will; he is also known by the name *Grim*. Travellers would allegedly often “meet the god ... in human form.”**<sup>1</sup>

Howard also describes methods used by shamans for attaining occult knowledge; in one case, the supernatural revelation of the magical rune alphabet and the opening of the chakras or alleged psychic centers of the body.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is the spirits who are held to be the true source of the runes' power. Thus, “... the elemental spirits associated with the runes... were regarded as the major source of their mysterious power. In some cases these entities are the gods and goddesses of the Old Norse religion.”<sup>3</sup> “In pagan Europe people visited the local rune magician who by casting the runes divined the future.... It is also an integral part of the shamanistic tradition which we have examined throughout this book as a thread running through runecraft. As we have seen the ability to look into the future was regarded as a gift from the gods to the shaman who passes it on to the tribe.”<sup>4</sup>

Not unexpectedly, runework, like the tarot, I Ching, and others, also helps develop people's alleged psychic abilities:

**In my experience, the Runes are excellent developers and intensifiers of intuition. They have the power to free the psychic faculties from the restrictive bondage of temporal thought patterns.... Generally, students developing intuition experience either clairvoyance, clairaudience or clairsentience—the psychic or astral equivalents of the physical senses of sight, hearing and touch.**<sup>5</sup>

Because rune work constitutes a magical system, it is not surprising to discover the actual invocation of gods or spirits prior to beginning rune divination. And the use of ritual magic may also play a role, as in the following account:

**In occult workings the runes can be used, as any magical alphabets are, to add extra power to the ritual or spell. Before using the runes you should invoke Odin who represents the power inherent in the runic characters. A suggested invocation is given below [:]**

### **Ruler of the Underworld and the crossroads**

**I [insert your name] invoke and call upon thee to aid me in the Great Work. At the time I seek [state your intention] with your help and through the wisdom of the magical runes which are under thy protection.**

**During this invocation visualize the god standing in front of you.... As the paper burns the magician may visualize a ray of blue light emanating from the forehead just above the bridge of the nose, which is the site of the psychic Third Eye and the physical pineal gland, towards the magical image of Odin which has been materialized earlier in the ritual. When this has been achieved, the magician thanks Odin and Baldur for their help. Again a suggested wording is given below:**

**I [insert own name] thank thee Odin grim lord of the dead and guardian of the runes. <sup>6</sup>**

Other rune practitioners discuss the occult mechanics involved in rune work. Willis mentions the importance of consecration to the spirits, noting their ability to manipulate the mystical energy that is utilized in rune work. In the extended citation following, we see significant parallels to the Kabbalistic Master Ritual discussed in David Conway's *Magic: An Occult Primer* (see p. 345, 584-85). This indicates the magical nature of rune work, its dependence on the spirits, and the likely spirit possession of the serious rune worker:

**Occult philosophy maintains that energy in its most subtle form can be passed from one object to another.... [I]t is also possible to pass energy from an animate object to inanimate object In the case of consecration, the animate object would be the runic magician and the inanimate object the slip of paper or piece of wood or metal bearing the runescript or bindrune petition.... Consecration also implies a "setting apart."... If you assume this stance, after a few minutes you will begin to feel a tingling sensation building up in the palms of your hands which will then move slowly down your arms and accumulate in the area of your solar plexus. This is the old Teutonic way of drawing energy from the atmosphere, which is itself impregnated with the Life Force. This Life Force is in the safe-keeping of the gods.... Allow this energy to build up for two or three minutes. ... Now, the energy that has built up around your solar plexus will be felt to pass down your arms and out through the palms of your hands into the runescript or bindrune talisman. You may not in the initial stages feel the energy passing out through your palms but you will certainly feel it disperse from the chest area and move down your arms.... [S]ince these subtle energies are manipulated by mind-power, or *intention*, what is more natural than that the energy has relocated itself as the place where you intended it to go? It is a good idea, when standing in the invoking posture, to state your reasons for wanting to accumulate the energy, and to call upon the appropriate god-force, either from the Nordic/Teutonic pantheon or from some other pantheon with which you are familiar, as this helps to ensure that the energies built up are of a sympathetic vibration to the type of talisman you are working on. When the energy has dissipated, thank the gods (or Universal Forces) for their cooperation. Though the gods are not human beings, they are sentient and in many ways respond just like humans to appeals, slights, praise, or being taken for granted. <sup>7</sup>**

Indeed, an entire host of gods and goddesses can be invoked in rune magic, with each god helping the occultist to obtain different goals, e.g., "Freyja" for psychic powers, "Thor" for wealth, "Baldur" for psychic healing. <sup>8</sup>

Runes also have a variety of other purposes, e.g., they may be "engraved on amulets or talismans." <sup>9</sup> Willis shows how runes may be integrated with other magical systems, such

as kabalism. Combining rune work, visualization, and kabalism, he shows how to enter “imaginary” astral realms and encounter personal spirit guides,<sup>10</sup> or what may be termed “Norns.” These spirits may be male, female, or as in shamanism, power animals.

Two final illustrations of the spiritistic aspect of rune work include spirit guides and psychological dynamics. First, spirit guides are important, and, characteristically, they have a far different set of ethics than Christians do:

**Where possible, allow yourself to be shown around by a Guide. This is not always an option open to you, but where it is, I urge you to take it. However, not all figures who present themselves as Guides are friendly.... The denizens of the Astral Light constitute another order of being with a different set of ethics, values and priorities from those that humankind are used to.**<sup>11</sup>

The psychological dynamics involved in the encounter with spirits are also important:

**The first Pathworking, The Way to the Norns [i.e., spirit guides], is intended to reawaken any Teutonic, Norse or early Anglo-Saxon memories lying dormant in the personal unconscious and should be performed by any serious runic shaman before moving on to the more Qabalistic type of Pathworking.**<sup>12</sup>

Finally, after more warnings, the rune worker is given details of the spirits who will contact him or her:

**Once you have made this journey... you will usually find one or other of the Three Norns waiting for you. Sometimes all three will be present though generally only one of them will assume the role of Guide at any one time. If none of the sisters are waiting, DO NOT GO ON until one of them comes for you. If they do not appear, go back.... Some of the animals, too, will act as Guides if you can induce them to take human form. In animal form they are not to be trusted....**<sup>13</sup>

Not surprisingly, in rune work personal historical research into pagan gods and cultures is encouraged as a means to improve one’s knowledge of the gods and spirits (cf. Dungeons and Dragons). In conclusion, the neophyte rune-shaman is encouraged to accept the companionship of the gods and spirits as their blessing.<sup>14</sup>

## **Dangers**

Rune work, like all occultism, is not without serious risks.<sup>15</sup> This is one reason Howard warns against the marketing techniques employed by those who sell runes as a form of popular entertainment: “Rune magic like all practical occult techniques, can be dangerous. Great caution is required and the runes should never be treated as an amusing parlour game, an entertainment or a means of making quick money.”<sup>16</sup>

The attendant ritualistic hazards found in other forms of magic are also warned of in rune work:

**Incorrect use of a rune could spell deadly danger for the magician or witch. The old Rune Masters believed that every rune was associated with an elemental spirit or force which had to be carefully evoked and once conjured into physical form had to be very carefully controlled.... Some of the spirits evoked by the shamans were believed by them to be succubi and incubi. These were lustful earth spirits who delighted in sexual relations with humans in the shape of beautiful women or handsome young boys. Their carnal appetites were insatiable and any person who became possessed by them could be literally fornicated to death.**<sup>17</sup>

There was also the real danger that people who had not received the proper occult

training in runecraft could dabble with them and both hurt themselves and others. For instance, the use of a cursing rune when a healing one was required would have dire results for both the patient and the would-be rune master who would have to face the vengeance of the victim's relatives.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the many problems associated with spirit possession in shamanism may also be relevant to rune work: "Sometimes the shaman spoke in strange languages or unknown dialects. Often he would become possessed by spirits and some of these would try to bring harm to the shaman and those gathered around his entranced body."<sup>19</sup>

If rune work is finally related to shamanism, as the evidence suggests, then rune work magic is dangerous indeed.

#### Notes:

1. Michael Howard, *The Magic of the Runes: Their Origins and Occult Power*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: The Aquarian Press, 1986, p. 8.
2. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
3. Ibid., p. 37.
4. Ibid., p. 71.
5. Tony Willis, *The Runic Workbook: Understanding and Using the Power of Runes*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: Aquarian Press, 1986, pp. 34-35.
6. Howard, *The Magic of Runes*, p. 62, 64; cf. Willis, *The Runic Workbook*, p. 30.
7. Willis, *The Runic Workbook*, pp. 154-56; cf. p. 130.
8. Howard, *The Magic of Runes*, p. 65.
9. Ibid., p. 67.
10. Willis, *The Runic Workbook*, p. 169.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 170.
13. Ibid., pp. 173-74.
14. Ibid., pp. 179-80.
15. See John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.
16. Howard, *The Magic of Runes*, p. 61.
17. Ibid., p. 61; cf. Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Coming Darkness*, pp. 196-99, 336.
18. Howard, *The Magic of Runes*, p. 35.
19. Ibid., p. 32.