

CONSULTING THE RUNES

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“There are no more maps, no more creeds, no more philosophies. From here on in, the directions come straight from the Divine. The curriculum is being revealed millisecond by millisecond—invisibly, intuitively, spontaneously, lovingly. As one of Thomas Merton’s monks has it, ‘Go into your cell and your cell will teach you everything there is to know.’ Your cell. Yourself.”

I am here today to share with you what I am learning about Runes, ancient symbols of power and divination.

I see myself as a pretty level-headed person, not given to believing in omens and premonitions and stuff like that. Consulting the Oracle of Delphi would not have been something I would have done had I lived in Greece. More likely, I would have chosen to be the Oracle, to tell everyone else what to do. That would have been a cool job!

But, last winter I visited my half-sister, Lorien, as I do every year since I first met her three years ago. And Lorien gave me a gift—a bag of sacred Runes that she had made for me. After seeing my look of total blankness, she also gave me a book on how to consult the Runes.

Now, I don’t generally tend to learn things just because someone tells me to. In fact, it’s usually quite the opposite. Just ask Tom. But, with Lorien, it’s different. When I’m around her, it takes me back to a time in my life when everything was possible and everything was believable. I was raised in a family that listened religiously to “X Minus One” on the radio, which was all futuristic sci-fi stories. And Rod Serling’s “Twilight Zone” on TV. And every weekend my mother and I would stay up past midnight, eating grilled cheese sandwiches and watching “Tales from the Crypt” on TV. I devoured books on sci-fi and fantasy and what-if kinds of stories. Magic was everywhere.

But then I got into my late teens and realized how weird my family was and how different I was from everyone else in the world. And that’s not good when you’re in your late teens. I wanted to be normal. One of the many many reasons I found Tom so attractive was that he was so very level-

headed and normal and logical and he had such a normal level-headed logical family. I wanted to be from people like that. It's stable and secure and wonderful. So, over the course of the next 30 some years, I became stable and level-headed and logical. Well, sort of. As much as someone with my background could be.

And then I met Lorien. She is mystical and crazy and weird and magical and totally off-the-wall. She is perhaps where I would be today if I hadn't had the good sense to marry Tom. But, for the short couple of days we spend with her, I allow myself the luxury of returning to my childhood and letting anything be possible. I don't want to actually live like that, but it's sweet to visit on occasion.

Lorien took me to a bookstore to help me pick out Tarot cards for myself. We were walking down the New Age aisle and a book just popped off the shelf, totally for no good reason and fell at our feet. Lorien picked it up and bought it. Sight unseen. Now, I know that that's what you're supposed to do—there's something in that book you're meant to read. That's a basic law for what-if kind of people. But I'd never do it. It's just nonsense. But Lorien did it. She doesn't question that it's nonsense or not—she just goes with the flow. Anything's possible. She totally opens her life up to the endless possibilities of existence. It's exciting to be with her.

So, this brings me back to my bag of Runes. Lorien gave them to me. They are a tool, she says. Learn how to read them.

What if she's right? Maybe in this pile of river rocks is something magical I need to know about. Put my common sense down for a minute and just go with the flow. Maybe we can all learn to do that once in awhile. Or at the very least, learn about a tool that has been used for centuries.

Runes have indeed been around for a very long time. They are certainly older than the Old Testament. Odin, the highest of the Scandinavian gods, is said to have hung upside down from the Tree of Life for nine days and nine night. He was tormented by hunger and thirst and pain. All alone. And then, right before he fell from the suffering, he spotted the runes beneath him, and with a last tremendous effort, seized them and brought them back to humanity.

It is believed that Runes developed from a combination and a merging of the prehistoric rock carvings dating from the Second Bronze Age about 1300 BCE. The rock carvings include representations of men and animals, hands, feet, weapon motifs, sun symbols, and variations on square and circular forms. You can still see some of the ancient carvings in the British Isles and in Germany and throughout Scandinavia on standing rocks. [SHOW SYMBOLS]

They are an ancient alphabet script. Each of the letters possessed a meaningful name as well as a signifying sound. But they never evolved into a spoken language.

From earliest times, these Runes took on a ritual function. They were used in casting lots, for divining, and to evoke the higher powers that could influence the lives and fortunes of the people.

Casting Runes touched every aspect of life from the most sacred to the most practical. There were Runes and their accompanying spells to influence the weather, the tides, crops, love, healing, Runes of fertility, putting on a curse, removing a curse, for birth and for death. Runes were carved on stones, on pebbles, on amulets, drinking cups, battle spears, over doorways, and onto the prows of Viking ships.

It was the shaman of the village that used the Runes to divine. They would carve the Rune onto twigs or stones since natural objects were believed to hold the sacred. Sometimes they were carved into pieces of hardwood or cut into metal or leather stained with human blood to enhance the potency of the spells. But mostly Runes were on flat smooth pebbles, with the Rune painted on one side. The shaman would shake his pouch and scatter the pebbles on the ground, those falling with glyphs upward were then interpreted.

For continuity over time and distance, Rune symbols were developed into an orderly alphabet and usually had 24 symbols. The Blank Rune, for the presence of the Divine, the Unknowable in all transactions, was later added.

Runes ceased being used in everyday life probably during the late Middle Ages—about 1500-1600 in Iceland. The original meanings are mostly lost because there was no written record made.

So, how the heck can we use them, you ask? Good point. Much of the current meanings for Runes has been developed from oral traditions and from scholars who have adapted the old meanings into modern terms. Actually, as you will see, it really isn't about a carved in stone meaning that is on the Rune, but rather on what each reader of the Rune gets out of it.

In using Runes, you aren't consulting a Ouija Board or asking an oracle for answers, or having your fortune told. It does not give you instruction on what you should do nor does it predict future events. What it does do is point your attention towards those hidden fears and motivations that will shape your future by their unfelt presence within each present moment. You act, or don't act, based on how you feel about events or people in your life. You have fears, you have hidden emotions, you have biases. These Runes help you to reflect on these things in reaching a decision or taking an action. The Runes do not absolve you of responsibility for selecting your future. They direct your attention to those inner hidden choices that may be the most important elements in determining that future.

See? The magical part is getting less and the more logical part is creeping in, isn't it? So, let's learn how to use Runes.

As you consult the Runes, first you must have a specific issue in mind. Not something that would have just a 'yes' or 'no' answer. You might be looking for advice on whether or not to make a career change, or to sell a business, or to make a big investment, or to move to a new home, or to initiate a new relationship. It's usually something you can't easily answer off the top of your head. There are several options maybe or there are pro's and con's you can't decide about.

I used the word "issue" rather than question. A question might be, "Should I accept this new job?" Instead of asking that question, say, "The issue is my work." This is a small distinction, but it is crucial. If you ask a question, and the Runes provide the answer, your role is a passive one. But, if you state it as an issue, then the Runes help you to extract your own answer and determine for yourself what is the right action.

Most of us lead fairly orderly well-thought-out lives. But perhaps something has been bothering you and you can't make up your mind. Try to find some issue in your life right now that you might consult the Runes on. If you have

several, for now just settle on one issue. If you don't have a specific issue in mind, just ask, "What do I need for my life now?"

While you are thinking about that issue, I am going to ask my lovely assistants to offer you your own personal set of Runes. You may keep them, if you like, and take them home to use on future issues. If you think this is all a bunch of silliness, stake a set to use right now, but my feelings won't be hurt if you decide to leave the Runes here. The color of the bag is only a matter of my personal choice—it has no real meaning. Some of the sets of runes are large and some are very small—pick whichever you feel comfortable with, or swap with someone else's.

When you get your Runes, open the bag, empty them out on your lap or on your song book. Turn the Rune side up so you can see what the symbols look like.

[pass out runes]

Nine of the Runes read the same regardless of how you draw them. The other 16 can be read upright or reversed. I'll tell you in a few minutes what the rightside up position is and what each means. As you read the Runes, drawing one that is reversed is not a cause for alarm. It's an indication that care and attention are needed for your conduct to be correct. Either way, it's a good idea to read **both** readings do you can see all aspects of the situation. Sometimes, you may find the Rune you select just doesn't seem to be addressing your issue at all. If that happens, consider the possibility the Runes are addressing a more significant issue, something you are avoiding or something of which you are not consciously aware.

There are many ways to read the Runes. I'm going to share with you five different methods. And you pick the one that feels right for you.

1. The ancient method of reading Runes is just shaking the bag and casting the stones on the ground. You read the ones that land Rune side up.
2. Select a single Rune from the bag for an overview of the entire situation. This is particularly helpful during a stressful situation, when you need an immediate answer now. Or use this method to honor significant events in your life—New Years, solstices, deaths, anniversaries. This one is known as Odin's Rune.

3. This is the Three-Rune Spread. With an issue clearly in mind, select three Runes, one at a time, and place them from right to left in order of selection. Place them blank side up and then turn them over. Do not attempt to place them right side up. Reading from right to left, the first Rune provides the overview of the situation, the center Rune identifies the Challenge, the left Rune indicates the Course of Action called for.
4. This is the Five-Rune Spread. Clearly formulate your issue. Then draw five stones from the bag, one at a time, and place them Rune side down. Place them one below the other. The top one is the overview of the situation. The second one is the challenge facing you. The third one is the course of action called for. The fourth one is the sacrifice you may be called upon to make in your life. The bottom one is the new situation that is evolving for you.
The sacrifice is intended as a recognition that life offers you choices, options, that are often mutually exclusive. The concept of sacrifice has, over time, come to be associated primarily with pain and loss. But here the term refers to that which has to be pulled away, shed, or discarded in order for new wholeness to emerge.
5. The last spread is called Rune Play. You use this with a number of people who all are faced with an issue or you all agree on an issue. This could be used to resolve a group issue, such as how to deal with a problem member in a group, or how to deal with the lack of growth of a group. The play here continues until such time as the issue seems adequately clarified to all players. Each player has his own bag of Runes. Each selects three Runes. Player 1 draws a Rune and interprets it as it relates to the issue. The next player turns over a Rune, gives an interpretation and has the option of relating it to the previous Rune. The third player does the same. When the round is completed, repeat the process for the 2nd and the 3rd Rounds. You could say the first Rune is You Now, the second is Your Part in the Problem, and the third Rune is Action Called For.
6. The last method I'm going to tell you about is very similar to I Ching. It's called the Rule of Right Action. Each morning, you draw a Rune and let it serve as your guidance for that day. You may even wish to examine that Rune in the evening for an evaluation of how you've conducted yourself.

[pass out meaning sheets]

Here is a condensed version of the meaning of the Runes. Draw your Rune, look at the symbol, then find the symbol on the sheet and apply the meaning to your issue right now.

Spend a few minutes trying out one or more of these methods. There's throwing all the Runes on the ground and reading the ones that are face up. Or there's picking just one Rune for an overview of the entire situation. Or the third method was picking 3 Runes and turning one over at a time and interpreting it. The Fourth method was the same thing but with five Runes spread out. The Fifth method is the group play.

Now you've had a chance to practice a little bit with your Runes. Take them home and try doing it in a quiet relaxed place. Remember, you are not depending on the Runes to solve your problems for you. Images and thoughts will come to mind, images and ideas that will provide you with the necessary clues as to what constitutes timely right action.

One value in reading your Runes is that in taking the time to acknowledge and make conscious what you are about to do will invariably enrich your experience. It introduces a ritual, and therefore the sacred, into our lives.

Remember, you cannot abandon what you do not know. To go beyond yourself, you must know yourself. Let the Runes help you.

Closing words:

Go into your cell and your cell will teach you everything there is to know. Your cell. Yourself.