



# Runas

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It has been nearly 2,000 years since inscriptions of the runic alphabet symbols have been discovered across the wood, bark, pebbles, and stones of Europe. The twig-like symbols lack a concrete place of origin due to possible shared communication between the Germanic tribes, Etruscans, and Roman Empire. This alphabet is referred to as either the Elder Futhark or Younger Futhark, the Younger Futhark omitting 8 characters. Dependent on culture, the groupings, sounds, meanings, and names of the runas have evolved over time.

The new-age pouches where we find runas ("secrets" or "whispers") today hold the traditional 24 characters from the Elder Futhark. They offer stable and present attention to an issue. When one blindly selects from the pouch or creates intuitive spreads, symbols for ideas such as "Breakthrough," "Strength," or "Journey" are chosen and consulted by the subconscious mind. The conscious mind reflects upon the offered guidance.

If the guidance is understood and seems appropriate, the participant must be willing to bring action to the issue by putting the right mental energy to work with the universe. This energy can only stem from a place of self-care. And as it turns out, working with runas can support self-care.

## Learning from Roots

Just as we learn about caring from leaders in our families, we can also learn it from Odin, the All-Father and principal god of Norse Mythology. Odin hung from the Yggdrasil ("The World Tree") for 9 nights until discovering the messages of the runas. These messages moved him toward a great transformation after sacrificing himself to life's vulnerabilities. His story teaches us to care enough to challenge ourselves with runas in order to learn and grow. Don't simply accept an answer with passivity. Question it. Question yourself as Odin questioned his reflection. Knowing and respecting the values that are instilled in us sustains momentum through issues.

## Routine vs. Ritual

A routine of playing with runas may be fun, but anything considered a routine is at risk of becoming perfunctory whereas a ritual holds meaning behind it, inviting us to constantly be present. When casting runas we witness the messages while detaching from judgement and ego, yet we need to attach our heart in order to respond to the guide. According to therapist Allan G. Hunter, a ritual needs emotion in order for courage and spirituality to fill us. Without using our hearts we do not have the ability for self-care.

## The Opportunity for Neurobics

Setting the scene for this self-care ritual can include getting creative with more than one of our senses to introduce neurobics, mental exercises that increase brain flexibility. For instance, interpret each stone's meaning out loud, and do so while casting runas with a nondominant hand. When speaking out loud, the cerebellum and motor cortex on both sides of the brain become activated. Using the nondominant hand expands circuits in the cortex where tactile processing takes place. Reawakening the brain in ways such as these reminds us to stay away from that first "R" word —routine and keep participating in ritual. Maintaining mental strength is the way in which we hang from our own Yggdrasil.

To work with runas is to work with a leader's courage, if we let ourselves.