

Hyge-Cræft: Working with the Soul in the Northern Tradition

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In the Old Norse Rune Poem, we learn that man is an “augmentation of the dust”. Of dust, certainly, the body is made, and yet the literature of the North is full of references to that which augments it— the spiritual part or parts of a man. Not only is a belief in the supra-physical clearly demonstrated in Northern tradition, but the evidence, though fragmentary and often full of contradictions, suggests, if not the existence of a lost model of the hug, or psyche, which is of considerable sophistication, at least a traditional lore which can form the basis for such an analysis, as rich and intriguing as the doctrine of the soul in any theology.

I must emphasize that the discussion which follows should be considered speculative and exploratory. Despite the example of two thousand years worth of dogmatic Christian theology, it seems to me that when dealing with a subject as nebulous as the breath itself, to claim certainty would be a contradiction in terms. These questions will not be truly answered until we, like Gangleri, come to the High One’s hall. As heathens, we can afford to live with uncertainty. However uncertain, Hyge-cræft, or the study of the soul, is an exciting area of speculation.

According to Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, in folk tradition, the “deliberate manipulation of the hug is the basis of all magic.”(p. 41). In *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Magic*, magic involving or affecting the soul occupies the entire first section, a testament to its importance. The generic Norse term for the psyche is hug, Danish hu, Swedish håg, Anglo Saxon hyge. Usually “hyge-cræft” is translated as “knowledge, wisdom,” but it could serve as well as a term for the “craft” of working with the soul.

Hug refers to elements of the psyche such as personality, thoughts, feelings, and desires. It can therefore be used as a term for the entire non-physical component of a human being. A more sophisticated (or perhaps simply more complicated) approach is to anatomize the soul into a number of subdivisions, as did the Egyptians and certain other occult traditions.

Most people are more concerned with getting their heads together than dissecting them— an integrated personality is one which does not have to spend time worrying about its components. A theory of soul anatomy can be useful, however, when dealing with psychological problems such as multiple personality disorder or soul loss, or in preparing for spiritual practices involving changes in consciousness or voluntary, controlled dissociation. It also provides a useful framework for preparing for the experience of death and speculating on the afterlife.

In *Futhark*, Edred Thorsson begins his discussion of the soul with the external qualities of the physical body (appearance, movement and health) mentioned in the creation myth discussed below; and four spiritual entities: the hugar, hamr, hamingja, and fylgja. Gundarsson makes the same basic division between the lich(body), and the soul, which includes the hamingja, hide, fetch, valkyrja, and mind. I would like to propose a schema in which the component parts of a living person are identified as

follows: the physical body (lich); etheric or astral body (ham); personal consciousness or mind; the breath of life or spirit (önd); the higher self (goði); and divine consciousness (öðr).

To each of these aspects one of the rich complement of spirit guides and guardians from the literature can be assigned. Unlike the physical body, whose parts appear and function in the same way regardless of race or religion, the parts of the soul can be divided up in a number of ways, depending on cultural or (as in this case) personal preference. I think that the approach to analyzing the soul presented in this essay can be helpful, but obviously the value of any particular way of dividing things up depends on its meaning for the person using it.

However the divisions are made, our analysis of the soul from a Norse perspective must begin with the myth of the creation of humankind.

In “Voluspá” (17-18, Hollander’s translation) we read—

*To the coast then came, kind and mighty
from the gathered gods three great Æsir;
on the land they found, of little strength,
Ask and Embla, unfated yet.*

*Sense they possessed not, soul they had not,
being nor bearing, nor blooming hue;
soul [önd] gave Óthinn, sense [öðr] gave Hoenir,
being, Lódhur, and blooming hue [lá, læti, litr].*

In his summary of this story in the Younger Edda, Snorri interprets these gifts as: breath and life; consciousness and movement; and speech, hearing and sight. These primary components of the individual might be summarized as the breath/spirit, consciousness, and the physical body with its senses. This three-fold division of body, mind, and spirit, is a common one, but an expanded analysis is needed in order to understand how the psyche functions, especially in spiritual work or magic. According to this expanded view, the components of a human being can be described as follows.

1. The physical body (lich/lyke)

The soul, however defined or dissected, is generally associated with a body. We must therefore begin our discussion where the Elder Edda begins it, with the animation of the physical body by the gods. In the creation story, the gifts of Lódhur are, in Old Norse, lá, læti, and litr. Their meaning is problematic, but a reasonable explanation seems to be that “lá” is “appearance,” “læti” is movement, and “litr” is “health”— the “being, bearing, and blooming hue” of Hollander’s translation. Lódhur gave, therefore, those things that identify the physical body and enable it to function efficiently. He is the protector of the “lich,” or “lyke” (“likeness!”), the physical shape in which we walk the world. This is the equivalent concept to the annamaya kosa, the physical body, in Hindu theology.

The body, with its senses, is formed by cell division and multiplication. From the first joining of zygotes it develops and grows, its nature determined by the instructions carried in the genes, and environmental

influences such as health and nutrition. Its senses are those which enable an individual to interact with the physical world, and provide metaphors for all spiritual experience.

“Death,” as usually defined, occurs when this physical body ceases to function. Not only do its physical components return to the elements from which they were formed, but its spiritual parts (if any) are dispersed also. It survives as part of the earth, in which it may be transformed into flowers or trees (or the bodies of other humans, viz. Hamlet’s analysis). It also survives by passing its genetic material along to the next generation through reproduction.

As Gundarsson points out, the physical body is the vehicle which carries the others, the means through which magic is manifested in the world. It is therefore essential to take proper care of it. Unlike eastern traditions in which enlightenment is achieved through the mortification of the body or the practice of austerities, earth religions, including those of Northern Europe, value and celebrate the body. Good physical condition is a prerequisite for serious magical work. Illness, exhaustion and lack of food may contribute to visionary experience, but make it difficult and sometimes dangerous to work magic. Whether one is using one’s physical resources for physical or psychic work, it is important to replenish them.

2. The energy/astral body (ham / hide)

For the second component I choose to use the term ham, the “shape,” or “hide”.. The ham occupies a place somewhere between the physical and “spiritual”. The existence of an astral body is a tenet of a number of systems of occultism, especially those influenced by Hinduism. This “body” appears to be composed of some kind of energy interpenetrating the physical body (or, according to the spiritualists, ectoplasm). Its radiance may be what is sensed by those who see auras. It is usually perceived as a radiant double or envelope, encasing the human form. In Hinduism, this would correspond to the pranamaya kosa, the pranic sheath of vitality.

Theories of astral projection hold that this energy body can be detached from its physical twin and sent out on journeys on the “astral plane” or even in the physical world. Stories of bilocation, Out of the Body Experiences (OOBE’s), apparitions at the moment of death, etc., probably refer to this kind of separation. During the journey, the astral body remains connected to the physical vehicle by a silver cord attached at the solar plexus.

The glowing shapes recorded by Kirlian photography may be pictures of this “body”. If so, the fact that plants whose leaves have been cut off still show “spirit leaves” in such photos suggests that it may survive the destruction of the physical form, at least for a time. In many traditions, a ghost of the deceased may hang around its old home for a considerable time after death, and must be persuaded to go on to its own place by ritual. I suspect that this energy trace, being dependent on the physical form, eventually disperses as well. Thorsson defines the hamR as the personal aspect of the plastic image-forming essence in the cosmos— another way of saying it is that part of an individual which exists in and can journey through the astral plane.

In ancient tradition, the term which seems to correspond to this “body” is ham, which can be interpreted as “shape,” or “hide”. In the literature, the ham is the animal form taken by a practitioner of seidh for astral journeying. Old Norse literature is rich in stories of shapeshifting and vocabulary derived from the ham root. Some of the shapes cited in the literature include bear, wolf, swan, seal, mare and hare, but it can take almost any animal form. Perhaps the best-known story of such astral travel is that of Boðvar Bjarki, who fought in the form of a bear while his lich lay in trance (*Hrolfkrakisaga*)

In Scandinavian folklore, each person has an animal shape which follows him like a shadow and can be seen by the second-sighted (although what is seen may be the hamingja, see below). Shamans can shape-change astrally into a variety of animals to go journeying. In the *Ynglingasaga*, Snorri tells us that among the seidh skills possessed by Odin was the ability to go forth in animal form while his body lay as if sleeping. His ravens may also be projections of his consciousness. Freyja can take the form of a falcon and possibly a sow or a mare (the latter are two of her epithets).

Someone who changes form easily is hamrammR— “shapestrong”; a journey taken in another shape is hamfarir; hamask means to fall into a state of animal fury; hamslauss to be out of one’s shape; and hambleytha is the act of leaping out of one’s skin. One is reminded of the Navajo term, “skinwalker” for a witch who takes wolf form. For simplicity’s sake, I favor referring to a spirit guide who appears in animal form as the hamingja, and the shape which an experienced practitioner of seidh uses for astral travel as the hamR.

The term hamingja, translated variously as “luck, fortune,” or “a guardian spirit,” is often used interchangeably with fylgja. In “Vafthruthnismál”: 49, the hamingjur are Jotun-maidens, possibly to be identified with the Norns. The root — hamR — supports an interpretation which identifies it more closely as an aspect of the individual to whom it belongs. In the sagas, a person’s luck is sometimes transferrable— permanently from a man to his heir, or temporarily from a king to his follower.

Gundarsson, following Thorsson, defines the hamingja as a personal reserve of energy, the source of the fylgja’s power. In folklore, however, the hamingja may take the form of the individual him/herself, or it may appear in the shape of an animal. If the hamingja is defined as an entity as opposed to an energy pool, it would seem logical to identify it as the guardian of an individual’s hamR. If so, the power animal or ally who assists the practitioner of contemporary shamanism would be an example of this kind of guardian.

3. Personal consciousness or personality - Mind

Personal consciousness is the mind, the aspect of the psyche of which we are most constantly aware, the part which we identify as “I”. It is generally divided into two components, which are however defined in a variety of ways by different cultures and schools of psychotherapy. The Norse seem to have personified them in the two ravens of Odhinn. In Hinduism, they are manomaya kosa, the “instinctive-intellectual sheath,” and vijnanamaya kosa, the “Mental, or cognitive, sheath”. Other versions might be “right” versus “left” brain function, the id and the ego of Freudian psychology, or even the conscious and unconscious (linked to the collective unconscious as described by Jung). Whatever terms one chooses, there seems to be a general agreement that consciousness consists of the hug a part which does the

thinking, and knows itself with on-going, active awareness (note that Thorsson makes this a separate part, defining it as the conscious will and intellect), and a second part, (minni) which is less accessible and which includes memories.

When people discuss the possibility of individual spiritual survival, it is generally the survival of the personality to which they are referring. In a “normal” individual, personal consciousness is perceived as an integrated whole. We know, however, that personality can be fragmented. When this happens involuntarily and has a negative impact, it is considered a personality disorder.

However dissociation may be induced voluntarily in certain kinds of artistic or magical work. The actor who “becomes” a character on stage is allowing his body to become the vehicle for another personality. Writers “become” their characters while they are creating them. In some spiritual traditions, the initiate deliberately creates a “magical personality,” or allows his or her body to become the vehicle through which a spirit guide may communicate, or to be possessed by a god. The distinction between spirituality and pathology seems to depend on context, control, and results.

In multiple personality disorders, a traumatized psyche splits off personalities to deal with specific situations. The process of splitting may continue until dozens of “people” are sharing a body, each with his or her own sets of memories, speech and movement patterns, likes and dislikes, knowledge and skills. Some of them know about each other, but there is usually one which is ignorant of all the others, and who in really unpleasant situations gets left to take the rap. Therapy strives to get all these personalities to reintegrate, or to abdicate in favor of a new core personality which includes most of their abilities, or to become subject to the control of one of them.

The shamanic practice of soul retrieval appears to be directed towards a related kind of personality disorder, in which the fragmented parts of the personality, rather than taking over, are “lost” in the spirit world. In traditional cultures soul loss is diagnosed as the cause of certain kinds of illness, depression and the like. Coma is the ultimate soul loss, in which the entire conscious personality has withdrawn.

Observation of individuals with short or long-term memory loss shows that a recognizable personality may continue to function without the memories and knowledge that formed it. Spiritualism and other traditions which feature communication with the dead believe that personal consciousness survives the death of the body. Messages from the dead are validated by the display of recognizable personality traits and knowledge that only that individual would know.

One way to account for this is the possibility is that the personality (or personalities) remains as an imprint on the astral plane, which we may imagine to be something like an energy matrix which encompasses physical reality. This pattern can be accessed, and if energy is directed towards it can, like other thought-forms, become an active entity. This hypothesis would explain how ancestral spirits can become demi-gods.

Identifying and integrating all the various parts of the human psyche is the work of contemporary psychotherapy. But since we are approaching the problem from the perspective of Norse tradition, let us explore the traditional bi-polar division represented by Huginn and Muninn.

Muninn, usually translated as Memory, is presumably derived from the Old Norse *munR*, meaning “mind,” like the German *minni*, which carries with it connotations of feeling or preference as well as of mentation. Phrases such as “to bear in mind,” or “remind me” clarify the meaning. As such, it can be used to refer to right-brain and unconscious mental functions, including memory.

It seems most appropriate to assign the ancestral spirits as guardians for the Memory aspect of the psyche. In the sagas, which mostly focus on masculine protagonists, ancestral spirits appear in the form of the female guardians of the family line, the *disir*. Descriptions of cult-worship offered to ancestors in Sweden and Denmark suggest that the male ancestors should be referred to as the *alfar*. Since they are not described interacting with females in the sagas, it is not clear whether ancestors guard descendants of opposite genders to their own, or whether, as seems more likely, their functions are related to gender-specific social roles. My guess is that the *disir* played a role consistent with the powers ascribed to women by the culture, being concerned with birth, death, and prophecy, while the *alfar* might have had more influence over prosperity and problem solving.

Another option, suggested by Gundarsson, would be to identify the guardian of *minni* with the *kinfylgja*, repository of a family’s ancestral luck and wisdom. However defined, these figures would be the logical guardians of the collective unconscious— those cultural memories which are the spiritual equivalent of genetic material. They are the obvious spirits to call upon for help in retrieving any memories which are buried, whether personal or inherited.

If we continue to consider the mind as a bipolar entity, the second component would be represented by Huginn, usually translated as “thought,” but derived, in Old Norse, from *hugR*, which also means “mind”. Like *munR*, this word has connotations of feeling, and as we have seen above, in later Scandinavian folklore it became the catch-all term for everything relating to the soul. To assign it to the intellect and “left brain” thinking, is therefore somewhat arbitrary, but possibly useful.

The guardian whom I would assign to the thinking part of the psyche is the *fylgja*, whose English cognate is “fetch,” an Old Norse term for a personal guardian spirit. A “fetch” in the shape of human, an animal or a crescent goes before its owner, but if he is fey, it comes after him. “*Fylgja*” is cognate to a verb, meaning “to follow” (Old English *folgjan*), which is used in the sense of backing up or siding with someone, hanging around, belonging. According to Thorsson, the *fylgja* is “...a numinous being attached to every individual, which is the repository of all past actions and which accordingly affects the person’s life; the personal divinity. Visualized as a contrasexual entity, an animal, or an abstract shape” (*Well of Wyrð*, p. 119). Gundarsson defines it as an animal form which shows the soul’s inner nature and the person’s condition, visible to those with second sight.

One’s *fylgja* is always around, although it can ordinarily be seen only by those with the astral vision or in emergencies. All of the references in the sagas are to female *fylgjur* attached to men. It is not clear

whether the spirit always appears as a member of the opposite sex to its owner (like the Jungian animus or anima), or whether the fylgja is simply a personal form of the matrilineal spirit guardian.

In some of the Eddic poems, the protecting role of the fylgja is taken by a valkyrie, who is a human or supernatural woman skilled in battle magic who becomes the protector and lover of the hero. Some of these stories share the motif of the “spirit-wife,” who can assume beast shape by putting on an animal skin. For valkyries, the most common shape is that of a swan. Such spirit-spouses are also common in the lore of Siberian shamanism, in which they can be of either sex.

The terms norn, dis, and fylgja are used interchangeably in some of the sagas. Probably their meaning varied from district to district, or from individual to individual. Definitions vary among modern writers as well. In practice it may be wise to develop relationships with different disir or fylgjur for specific kinds of work, or to simply establish contact with a “spirit guide” who will guard the integrated personality. When working in a Norse context, I prefer to refer to the spirit guide as a fylgja if it appears in human form. If you want to be gender-specific, you could use fylgju-kona for a female spirit, and fylgju-madhR for a male.

4. Breath/spirit (önd)

In the Eddas, the gift of Odhin is önd, literally “breath,” whose metaphoric meaning, as in so many languages, is “spirit” or “soul”. The concept expressed by önd seems to be equivalent to the Hebrew ruach, the Greek pneuma, and other terms of this kind. It is one of the most pervasive in religion. The winds are the breath of earth, and planetary life depends upon our atmosphere. Inspiration is the drawing of the first breath which signals the beginning of a life; expiration is the rattle of breath at its end. Re-spiration enables the body to metabolize food and oxygen in order to survive. Breathing is thus the act that animates the body, the dynamic, invisible, transforming power that signifies the transition between two states of being, the link between the physical and spiritual worlds. It is perhaps to be expected that this should be the gift of the god who walks between the worlds, and that he should be invoked as its guardian.

However if the loss of önd signals the end of physical existence, where does it go? It is no longer necessary to either the physical or the astral body, nor is it needed by the mind, in whatever form that may survive. It would seem to be relatively impersonal, not so much a part of the psyche as a process which links together all of the parts of the individual discussed so far. The önd animates body and spirit; it is the force which enables them to act in concert, but it does not appear to be personal, any more than the atoms which make up the physical body are personal. Like them, the breath (oxygen) is taken in, used, transformed, and expelled. Perhaps önd is not a thing so much as this *process* of transformation, the combustion which is the body’s equivalent of fire. In that case, when it is released, it, like the body, would return to its elements.

5. Higher Self (goði/gyðja)

The components of the psyche discussed so far can all be more or less illustrated by the ancient literature. The concept of the higher self is more problematic, and yet I believe that the existence of

such a thing can be argued. If the conscious personality with which we identify is susceptible to change or fragmentation, then what is it that lies beneath (or above) it? Even well-integrated personalities change over time. We are not the same people we were as children, although we retain their memories. But if all those people whom we have been have already lived and disappeared, how can we identify as “real” the people we are now? There is more continuity (and certainly a more demonstrable connection) between our child-selves and our mature selves and the people we become in age than there is between successive lifetimes, and yet the difference may be more one of degree than kind.

It is possible to rise above pain by saying “I am not this body,” and above the emotions that shake the soul, or the changing thoughts and opinions of the mind, in the same way. But if we are not the body, or the mind, then what are we? What is it that moves from one incarnation to another, that exists between them, that throughout all our lives we are striving to become?

Perhaps what Freud called the super-ego can be identified with this higher self, which is the part to which we send energy to use for healing, and which we are addressing when we say “thou art god”. According to the Hindus, the inmost soul body is “the blissful, ever-giving-wisdom,” *anadamaya kosa*. I would suggest that there is indeed a higher component of consciousness, still identifiable in personal terms, which we experience when we “surpass ourselves,” when we are functioning at our highest potential.

When the ancient Germans said their seeresses were revered “like goddesses,” perhaps it was because when they worked they were able to let this divine personality shine through. Individuals of extraordinary impact and charisma, those who become demi-gods or saints or gurus— or *alfar*— are probably those whose spiritual development has progressed to the point where the divine personality becomes the “core” personality of daily existence in that incarnation. This is the aspect of the psyche whose “vibrational level,” in channeling terms, is high enough to permit fusion with a god-form.

I suggest that this higher self must be the “immortal soul,” the connecting link between fragmented personalities or the souls of various incarnations. It has the capability to become one of the attendant spirits associated with various deities, at least until the next incarnation, to which it brings the spiritual essence of the individual, but not (usually) the personal memories of previous lifetimes.

I would follow Gundarsson in suggesting that the spiritual beings which can serve as links between this part of the soul and various deities could be called Valkyries for *Odhinn*, a *fylgjadis* for the *Vanir*, a *thrudhmaer* when approaching *Thor*, *meotodu* in relation to *Tyr*, and simply a *mær*, or *may* (maiden), for working with *Frigg* and others for whom the title of their attendants are not known.

6. Divine Consciousness (öðr)

In the literature of mysticism, a state of being is described which lies beyond even the perfected personality discussed above. It is this which Hinduism calls *atman*, the immortal soul. In sophisticated spiritual traditions, including those which are polytheistic, one finds the concept of a godhead which is not personified, an ultimate divinity which cannot be described but only experienced. In the ultimate form of spiritual union the mystic contacts this aspect of divinity, and in the process loses awareness of

selfhood. In Eastern traditions, it is this Divinity, which is not so much a Being as a state of being, with which the soul that has gone beyond the need for incarnation unites. Can we find any traces of such a concept in Germanic tradition?

In the Norse creation myth, Hoenir's gift is *öðr*, translated as consciousness, sense, and the like. However the word is the root from which we get the name *Odhinn*, usually translated as "ecstasy." This concept, like the nature of the god, is more complex than it might appear. Dr. Martin Schwartz of the University of California has traced the etymology of *öðr* and its older cognate, *wodh*, back to their Indo-European root, and demonstrated their relationship to concepts having to do with the activity of the mind.

His analysis makes it clear that for the ancient Germanic peoples, consciousness was not an intellectual process, but rather an ecstatic experience of connection and creativity. This aspect of existence is beyond all temporal relationships, and is neither born nor can it die. To me, this ultimate experience of consciousness sounds a great deal like the mystic rapture. I choose, therefore, to designate *öðr* as that capacity of the human psyche which is capable of identifying with and losing itself in the Divine.

Hoenir, the god who gave *öðr* to humankind, is the spiritual force with which it must be associated, not so much as its guardian as perhaps an expression of its nature. Hoenir is a mysterious figure in the surviving mythology. He appears a number of times in company with *Odhinn* and *Loki*, and in the Eddic account of the awakening of humankind takes the role ascribed in Snorri's version to the second of *Odhinn's* brothers (presumably *Vili*— *Will*). In the *Heimskringla*, he plays a less noble role, being one of the hostages given to the *Vanir*, unable to function (to exercise his will) except in the company of *Mimir*.

Rather than following Snorri's characterization of Hoenir as stupid, I find it more useful to characterize him as a force (or as the aspect of *Odhinn*) which is so far abstracted from ordinary human experience that only when linked to the power of memory can it manifest in the human world. The silence of Hoenir would therefore result not from any lack of intelligence, but from the difficulty involved in translating the experience he represents into human words. He is the aspect of *Odhinn* which is pure consciousness, awareness experiencing itself. It is not surprising that the *Vanir*, the deities most concerned with the divine as it is made manifest in the physical world, would find him hard to understand.

Öðr, like *ond*, may be seen not so much as a thing as a dynamic process. The act of breathing animates the body and links its physical and spiritual elements into a single being. Its appearance and disappearance bound a human lifetime. *Öðr*, on the other hand, is recognized by most people rarely and by some hardly at all. And yet it is an innate human capacity, a gift to us from the gods, the process by which we experience our connection with the divine.

This is all very interesting— even perhaps— inspiring, but what is it good for? As I indicated earlier, a model of the anatomy of the *hugR* may have certain implications for spiritual work, especially that involving trance or voluntary dissociation. In work of this kind, one must be able to relax the body and focus the mind so that the spirit can fly free. A systematic approach to this process of relaxation and release allows this to be done with more precision and control over what is happening. When working

with any specific religious system, it is of course essential to become thoroughly familiar with its deities and their characteristics, major symbols, cosmological map, and so forth. In the present context, this would mean steeping oneself in the Eddas, reading discussions of the mythology by writers such as Ellis-Davidson and Turville-Petre, etc. A procedure which has worked for me follows.

The first step is to become familiar with the anatomy of the soul as described above, and with the names and functions of the guardians. One should then spend some time learning to sense each “body” and develop a trigger associated with it, such as an image or a rune. Spend 3-7 days on each one, with exercises like those given below:

1. Relaxation

a. Accept and learn to love each aspect of the lyke in turn, including the appearance and personal style of your body and its style of movement. Evaluate your health, let your body tell you what it needs. It may help to formally put your body under the protection of Lódhurr as you do this.

b. Learn the boundaries of your aura, practice moving internal energy, practice moving hamr outside of the lyke (astral projection), visualize looking at the lyke from another part of the room. Invoke the help of your hamingja, even if you have not yet identified a specific being to fill this role.

c. Observe your own emotional states and learn what triggers them; identify memories (minni) that move you; identify elements of family and cultural inheritance that provoke an emotional response. Spend some time considering how inherited factors have shaped you into the person you are now. Call upon your ancestral spirits to help you.

d. Observe your own mental monologue, identify habits of thought that are characteristic (hugr). How do you plan things, solve problems? What aspects of your personality owe the least to outside influences— what is the essence of your individuality? When you are comfortable with your own thought-processes, try to turn them off and exist for a short time in a state of “No-mind” in which you simply exist without thinking about it. Invoke the protection of your fylgja.

e. Practice breathing. Focus on ond with each breath. Note the effects of breathing at different speeds and rhythms. Learn to hold the breath for increasing lengths of time. As you do so, invoke the power of Odhinn for protection.

When you are comfortable with these aspects of the self and able to focus on each of them at will, condition yourself to relax and release each one in response to whatever “triggers” you have been working with. When you have achieved this state of relaxation, you will be in a condition of light trance in which you can do other work, such as trance journeying.

Some may find it helpful to memorize the following induction. First, assume a comfortable position. Then, aloud or to yourself, say:

My (*"Your," etc. if guiding another person) body's likeness now I leave,
The lovely lyke that Lódhurr gave*

*Lá and læti and litr also
I give to be guarded by the holy gods.*

Draw a bindrune of Elhaz and Othalaz on your forehead and take whatever time you need to relax each part of the body. Then say:

*My holy hide I will not hold,
hail, hamingja, help me journey
as hamr spirit shape I shed,
guard it all ye holy gods.*

Draw a bindrune of Elhaz and Uruz, and let all awareness of your physical body fall away. If your purpose is astral journeying, wait until you have completed the next two steps, then visualize your body of light, either in your own shape or in that of the animal whose form you will be taking.

Focus your mind as follows:

*Huginn and Muninn now I summon
to master mind and memory;
emotion's energy is ended,
thoughts, I thank and thrust away.
Dis and fylgja shall preserve them,
guard me all ye holy gods.*

Guard the minni with the runes Elhaz and Berkano, and the hugR with Elhaz and Tyr. Clear your consciousness of all thoughts and emotions, and float in calm clarity. Finally, regularize your breathing by invoking as follows:

*The ond that Odhinn gave flows out,
breath I bid bear spirit skyward
While lyke and hide & hugr & minne
are guarded by the holy gods.*

Protect yourself with Elhaz and Ansuz, and set your breathing to remain deep and regular by counting and holding breaths. Feel the power of the god moving through you with each breath. From this state you can do many kinds of spiritual work. Practice moving into it and then bringing yourself out again by reversing the steps until it comes easily.

2. Mind Control:

Practice contemplating a physical object, repeatedly clearing your mind of all extraneous thoughts and feelings. Memorize the item— its appearance, its weight, texture, etc. Close your eyes and see how clearly you can bring it into awareness, then open them and check your accuracy. You might begin with a stone, and the next day work with a plant, a piece of jewelry, etc.

When you have some control over the contemplation of physical objects, try thinking about a concept, exploring its ramifications and meanings and rejecting all thoughts that are not relevant. Chant its name. Possibilities to work with might include an adjective - viz. "Green"; an abstract noun - viz. "Truth"; a rune.

Finally, contemplate a mandala or the image of a deity, focusing on its physical details, considering the meaning of the symbols that surround it. When you can hold the picture in your mind with ease, animate it— view it from different angles, visualize it moving, etc.

3. Journeying

Decide on a place and purpose, in a safe place, enter the relaxed trance state, and put yourself under the protection of your hamingja. Visualize a point of entry, such as a location you know well and find a path leading out of it, then travel to the place you have identified and perform the task (e.g. explore Vanaheim). Write up your results when you return. Another way to practice is to read pathworkings like those in Gundarsson's *Teutonic Magic* onto a tape, and listen to them while in trance. You can also visualize runes, expand them into doorways, and go into their worlds in order to learn more about their meanings.

When such journeying can be performed easily, learn to narrate what is going on while remaining in trance. Make the journey as usual, but this time, report on what you see and are doing aloud to a partner or a tape recorder.

Once you have the technique of journeying, you should acquire one or more allies to help you with further work. A journey to the Underworld or to the internal plain of Midgard should put you in a place where you can find a hamingja — an ally in animal form. For further information on just how to do this, try Michael Harner's book, *The Way of the Shaman*, which gives full directions. You may also travel to a generic upper world, or to whichever of the Nine Worlds is most appropriate for your purposes, to find a guide or ally in human form. You might, for instance, seek an alf or dis in the ancestor mound on the plain of Midgard, and look for a fylgja in Ljossalfheim.

When you meet your helper, find out its name and whether it will assist you, in achieving your purposes, ask what it needs from you, and what it will give you. Like any other friendship, maintaining this relationship requires regular communication. Visit your ally regularly for communication and teaching, and together, explore the Otherworld. Call upon your ally even when you are not in trance, learn to sense its presence.

The skills described above are required for success in any kind of trance work. Most people can successfully complete a journey (or pathworking) led by someone who is competent in manipulating symbolism and sensing energy. Others may have a natural talent for this and need no more than this rather summary description. There are also many in our community who have learned these skills already. However if you have never worked in this way, or doubt your ability to do so, the practices and exercises described above will enable you to learn if done regularly over a period of time. Even if you find such work comes easily, doing the exercises in a systematic way will improve your precision and

control. The ability to relax the body and focus and control what the mind is doing are essential for successful shamanic journeying, exploring the nine worlds, soul retrieval, and spæ work.

In the above discussion I have suggested ways in which one can work with the more accessible and accepted “parts” of the body/mind/spirit. To become comfortable and competent in these skills may take years, but each step of the way is rewarding. Work with more esoteric states of consciousness which involve the god-soul and ecstatic union should not be attempted until one is securely in control of the other techniques. Possessory work, especially, should wait until one is fully trained in contemplation and journeying, and should be attempted only with the help of supportive partners.

Human beings are concerned not only with physical survival but with spiritual fulfillment. Just as we should care for our bodies and through diet and exercise enable them to fulfill their potential for activity and enjoyment, we need to exercise and develop our spiritual components in order to appreciate the full range of gifts given us by the gods. We are made of matter, be it wood or “dust”. But each physical form has been augmented by an energy body, a mind that by thinking and remembering expresses the personality, and the breath of life that animates them. In addition we may deduce the existence of an eternal soul, and still another element which has the capacity for union with the Divine.

Such an anatomy, while purely theoretical, may serve as a useful model for hyge-cræft — working with aspects of the soul.

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