





# A Nine-day Quest for Odin

by Hugh Mune

BEFORE the rising of the Sun, while it was yet dark, I took myself to the peak of a nearby mountain, where I had found a private shallow cave that looked towards the east, but would not be seen by casual passers-by, unless they found the bush-hidden path that led to it.



Removing my clothes, except for a pair of shorts, I squatted down and smoothed a place perhaps half a metre square on the soft earth.

Over it, I placed a piece of cow-hide with the hair-side uppermost. I had a lantern with me, which I lit and placed on my left to remind me of the fiery heat of the Sun. On my right, I placed the flask of honey-wine that I had brought to stay me through my quest. I reflected that in my home land I would have had them otherwise, but in this new home, icy Niflheim lay to the South and burning Muspellsheim to the north.

From my sack, I then took the bread and cheese I had wrapped for a later meal. I placed it beside the flask and to the West of it. I put a shallow pottery bowl at the eastern edge of the hide; and in it a square of charcoal, heated to glowing at the lantern flame. This took longer than I had thought it would, and I began to hasten as I felt the rising of the Sun draw near. Gently from a leathern pouch, I shook onto the glowing

charcoal the incense which I had prepared on the previous Wednesday from freshly plucked herbs, lavender [for Odin], thyme and marjoram [for the rising of the Sun].

I laid a Fivefold Cord of Nine Knots in a spiral, which overlapped the edge of the hide, immediately before me, and placed within its inner circle a wooden bowl on which were traced certain runes and signs. Over it, I held a final item from my sack, my pouch of runestones.

Pursing my lips and expelling my breath, I poured them into the bowl, and waited the rising of the sun. I was just in time, no more than a few silent minutes passed, as I squatted and watched the horizon brighten. The light that was growing, soft, pink and yellow in the east, sent forth a spear of burning, golden fire. I plunged my hand into the bowl and grasped what stones I could. I cried aloud my chant:

*In the face of the Sun,  
In the eye of its light,  
Pouring its brilliant rays upon me,  
I call on Odin Runelord:  
Grant me wisdom,  
Open my eyes that I may see!*

As I chanted I cast the runes on to the hide, and let myself fall backwards on to the earth.

I lay on the earth, stretched out. My left foot pointed to the rising Sun, my right knee was bent, my right foot was



pointed to the north, crossed beneath my left leg. My hands pressed on the earth; my right arm by my side, left arm bent.

While I lay gazing upwards, I could still see the after-image of the burning sun,

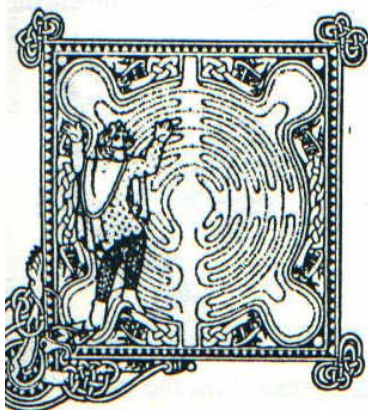


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moving to and fro across the clear zenith of the sky, I closed my eyes and still it glowed on my eyelids. For an instant, the thought passed by me, "Have I damaged the retina? Would I, like Odin, be half-blind after this?"

I thought not; I had but glimpsed the direct light of the sun for a second or two. I already lay stretched out even as I was calling on Odin Runelord to grant me wisdom. The thought passed, as other images tumbled through my mind; the Sun rune in whose posture I had squatted; the Yew rune whose shape my stretched-out posture now resembled. Then, a foreign image, from far Italy, the Hanging Man.

I drew in my breath and felt it run to my lungs from the Sun through my outstretched left foot. Slowly, I released my breath and thought it ran to the North from my right foot. As my breathing lengthened, slowed and became quieter, I felt my pounding heart begin to gentle. With my slower breathing and my quieter heart, my mind began to settle down. Images and memories passed through my mind, gradually becoming softer. Moments came and went when all seemed at rest. I seemed to sink into darkness; I stood in a rocky, vaulted cavern.



I strode down a narrow ledge and and by way of steep paths which always seemed to turn back on themselves. At last, I came to a flat place where three women sat, beside a stream.

I looked and saw where it bubbled from the solid rock before it flowed across the cave..

As I watched, one of them rose and took up a drinking-horn. Dipping it in the

stream, she poured it over tree-roots which emerged from the cavern-wall for a few feet before disappearing again.

Another took the horn from her, filled it from the stream and held it out to me. I reached out my hand, but she pulled the brimming horn back.

"Have you no word for me?"

I was dumb. I lowered my hand and turned away. They watched as I trudged back up the steep and stony, winding path.

Suddenly, it seemed light and the walls of the caverns dissolved and faded. I raised my head and saw that a cloud had just passed across the Sun which now was shining full on my face. Shaking my head, I struggled to my feet and stretched my muscles. No more than an hour must have passed.

I squatted and looked down at the runestones cast across the hide. I reached out and carefully turned each blank so that the rune was uppermost. I breathed a sigh of relief the blank stone was among them. The cast was for me. Carefully, I studied the lie of the stones.

Only one stone lay to the west of the Blankstone; it was Ur or Uruz, the wild Ox. One stone lay very close beside the Blankstone, a little to the south, on the right. I counted the rest of the runestones. Seven of them, forming a ragged line which seemed to point not directly at the Sun but slightly north of it.

Runelore passed before my mind.; west is the past; close is the present; east is the future, which here leads towards to the Sun. Most of the Runes fell to the east, so the magic being raised was concerned with the future rather than the past.

The westernmost Rune was Uruz. Here, it was a word from the past. Uruz is the symbol of Audumla, the Great Cow whose milk fed the primordial Giants and Gods.



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The second Rune was Wyn. It was a word for the present. Wyn means a Gift that I would perhaps receive. This seemed a good omen for my present quest.

Of the rest, the rune closest to the Blankstone, that is, closest to me, was Sigil, a Rune-word with which to begin the future. Sigil is the Sun who shines above me and provided the Light and Energy for my Quest. The rest of the Runes would lead me towards the goal of my Quest, but perhaps not directly. I was close to the Path, but not yet on it.

I sat back on my haunches and began my vigil. Occasionally, I stood to ease my aching muscles and squatted again or sat on my heels. The Sun passed its peak and the shadow of the mountain behind me moved steadily over the hide and the runes scattered across it. I reached out and quenched my thirst, stayed my hunger. Again I sat in silent vigil. Meditating? Thinking? Dozing and dreaming?

More hours passed. I watched the shadow of the mountain rush across the fields and houses spread out before my sight. A chill fell on the air. I gathered my things together, put them into my sack, slung it over my shoulder, picked up the now dead lantern and slowly walked to my home, a couple of miles from the mountain. I had eaten and drunk a little during my vigil. I would fast now. I read awhile in my books of Rune lore, but soon began to nod and went early to bed.

\* \* \*

My sleep that night was disturbed and broken, but my alarm woke me a couple of hours before dawn. I got up, washed and dressed, thought of food, and resolutely kept my fast. I replenished the supplies in my sack, refilled the lantern, trimmed its wick and set off for the mountain for the second

day of my nine-day vigil. I was dispirited. I felt I had been turned away the day before. What a way to spend my summer holiday!



Carefully, I laid things out as they had been the day before. I was quicker this second day, and just as well. As I held my hand over the bowl of stones ready to cast again. I saw a gull flying towards me from the east. As it passed overhead, I heard it shrieking. Its cries took shape in my mind. "Why throw again? The gods have spoken."

Hastily, I picked through the stones and laid them out, as best I could remember, as they had been the day before.

Thank the gods that I had spent weary hours with my mentor at Kim's Game, looking at objects on a tray, then, an hour later, desperately trying to remember them for my mentor.

How many? where did they lie? describe each one! all the while the old man was jeering at my inability to look at a dozen different objects for fully 20 seconds and remember them all in detail an hour later.

I gazed at the stones where they lay. I raised my eyes. Sunrise was upon me. Again, the spear of light burned through my brain. Again, I cried the chant. Again I fell back and once again I entered the caverns beneath Yggdrasil.

Once more, the woman stood before me and held out the drinking-horn of cave-river water. She sternly spoke, "What word do you have for me?"

"Uruz," I replied confidently.

She grinned a toothless grin and turned away, "Close, but not close enough."



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"Wait," I challenged, "Every riddler allows the player three guesses. Will you deny me my right to speak again."

The crone looked back over her shoulder. "Three wrong guesses might harm you more than one. Still, since you demand it, speak again."

"Wyn."

"Wrong again, and farther from it," she laughed and not with kindly sound.

I beat my brain. No answer came. I turned and began to trudge up the path.

She called me back, "You have demanded three chances. You now must speak a third time and meet your fate, as you have done before."

Her words and face began to give me clues. A crone. I have done it before. These were the Norns. She was, the Norn of the Past, Urd, whose name began with the letter Uruz.

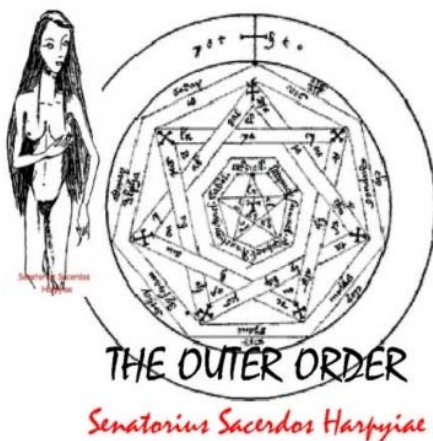
"My word for you," I said, "is Urd."

"Well said." She handed me the horn, "Drink deep."

I took the bowl in both my hands and quaffed the icy liquid of the gods, which was more like my honey-wine in its sparkling freshness than any natural water. I must not speak of the song of the past I learned that day from Urd, nor what songs I learned and sang when I gave their names as their words to Verdande, Norn of the present, and Skald, Norn of the future.

Day after day, until nine days had come and gone I returned to the mount and resumed my vigil-quest. Day after day, I came closer to where Odin sat in his Gladhome Hall. During the ninth dawn vigil on the mountain, I entered One-eyed Odin's hall and heard from him the final words that ennobled me and granted me the wisdom that I sought.

Thus, in nine days of vigil was my Odin Quest fulfilled.



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