

ANDREA SHELLEY

— History and Lore —

# FUTHARK RUNES: SYMBOLS, MEANINGS AND HOW TO USE THEM



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When you think of the word rune it may bring up images of magic scrolls, Tolkein, and elven warriors. However, runes are not just the stuff of fantasy stories. They date back thousands of years – found in large numbers on ancient rock carvings in Scandinavia and around the world.

It's a common misconception that runes are just letters – an alphabet from another language. While it's true that Futhark is an old Germanic alphabet, it's so much more than that.

The meaning of rune is “secret” or “mysterium”; each symbol has a deeper meaning above and beyond the sound it makes in language. A meaning that was traditionally held as a secret holy concept, “a formless and timeless idea”.

Keep reading to learn the origin of the runes, what each rune means, and how to use them as a divination tool or in rituals.

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## WHAT ARE RUNES?

Runes are ancient alphabets. The word rune comes from an Old Norse term meaning a secret letter that was used for casting spells. Writing itself was often seen as magic by other peoples who had no writing systems of their own.

While there are many different types of runes, here I'll be focusing on Elder Futhark. 

The Elder Futhark runes are a set of 24 symbols that were used for writing in Scandinavia and other parts of Northern Europe from about 200-800 AD. The

word “Futhark” is derived from the first six letters, which are called “Fehu,” “Uruz,” “Thurisaz,” “Ansuz,” “Raidho” and “Kennaz.”

The Elder Futhark (or sometimes just “Futhorc”) is the oldest form of runic alphabet. This writing system is believed to have originated from the Old Italic scripts: a variation of the North Italic (Etruscan or Raetic alphabets), or the Latin Alphabet itself.

The first runes were carved into wood, bone, or stone and then painted with various colours to make them more visible.

These ancient Norse runes have been found as far away as Iran, Turkey, England, and India. The first recorded use was found at a Viking settlement near Tängelgård, Sweden. This runestone dates to around 400 AD but there are no written records that can tell us exactly when it was created.

## RUNES IN MAGIC & MYTHOLOGY

Norse Mythology tells us that knowledge of runes and rune magic comes from Odin.

It is said that Odin received the mystery of the runes after hanging from Yggdrasil, the world tree, for nine days and nine nights. After sacrificing of himself, he was able to extract the wisdom of the runes. He then shared this gift with the rune vitki – sorcerers and magicians who used the power of the runes for divination and spellcasting.

There are countless stories within the Norse myths that describe the runes being used for various magical workings.

The most famous of these is the story in which Odin and Loki use runes to create a magical spear that will never miss its target.

The Norse myths also tell us about how each rune has an associated deity, animal or other entity with whom it’s connected . For example: Fehu represents cattle; Uruz symbolizes strength; Thurisaz is associated with the giants and so on.

## RUNE MEANINGS



Unlike modern alphabets, runes have meanings and are tied to universal forces that change and evolve with time, making them just as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. Rune meanings are very subjective and are often

interpreted in different ways, depending on the working and past experiences of the reader.

Each rune contains three aspects:

1. the symbol itself, what the shape represents
2. the name and what the word means, along with its letter value and sound
3. the energy and spirit embodied by the rune.

The 24 runes are organized into three sets of eight runes called aettir (singular aett), meaning families. The first runes of each of the three aettir are Fehu, Hagalaz, and Tiwaz, also called the Mother Runes.

Scroll through the runes below to learn their meanings.

Fehu

Uruz

Thurisaz

Ansuz

Raidho

Kenaz

Gebo

Wunjo

Hagalaz

Naudhiz

Isa

Jera

Eihwaz

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Algiz

Sowilo

Tiwaz

Berkano

Ehwaz

Mannaz

Laguz

Ingwaz

Dagaz

Othala

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FEHU

Cattle  
Mobile Property  
Abundance  
Wealth & Material Gain




FEHU

**Phonetic Value:** F**Pronunciation:** “FAY-hoo”**Summary:** Cattle, mobile property, abundance, wealth, and material gain.

FEHU RUNE PENDANT: ABUNDANCE – STERLING SILVER

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Fehu symbolizes cattle – the foremost source of wealth for the Norse. It represents abundance, the fulfilment of your ambitions, and prosperity in all facets of life.

Fehu’s raw expansive energy attracts abundance into your life. Try wearing a fehu rune pendant to fulfil your ambitions, and amass prosperity and luck. Focus  its energies where you wish to achieve the most success in your life.

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URUZ



**Phonetic Value:** U

**Pronunciation:** “OO-rooz”



**Summary:** Aurochs (wild ox), life force, strength, and a period of good health.



URUZ RUNE PENDANT: HEALTH – STERLING SILVER

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Uruz is the mother of manifestation – a shaping power that defines the origin and destiny of all things. It represents both mental and physical health.

It can mean a challenge to your strength or the results of past actions coming to light (health-wise).

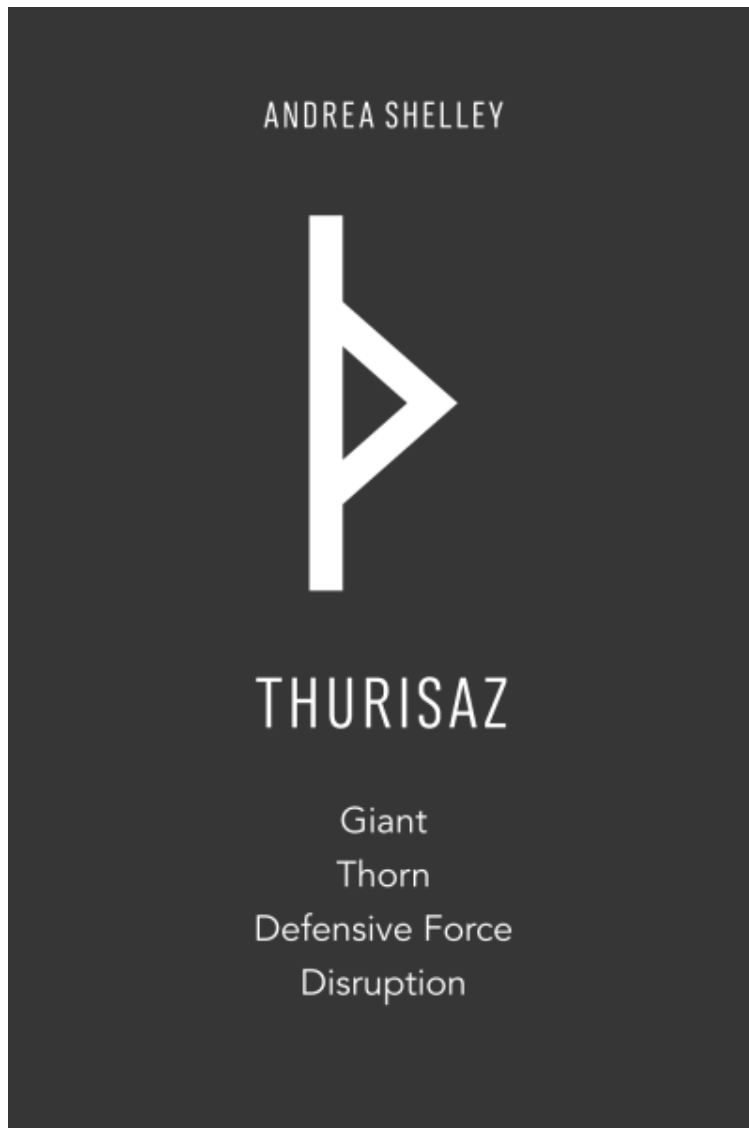
Carry Uruz rune jewelry to strengthen your mental and physical health and manifest your destiny.

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## THURISAZ



**Phonetic Value:** Th

**Pronunciation:** “THUR-ee-sahz”

**Summary:** Giant, thorn, defensive force, and disruption.





THURISAZ RUNE PENDANT: DEFENSE — STERLING SILVER

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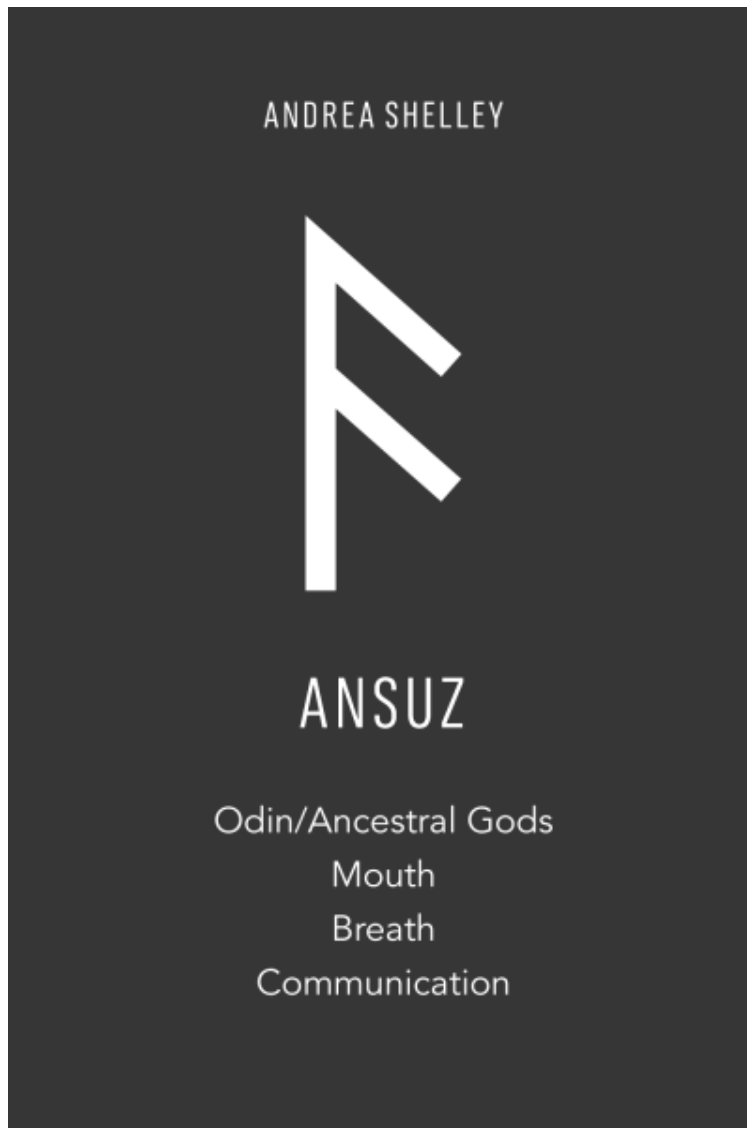
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Thurisaz represents Mjölnir, the hammer of Thor, a destructive and protective force.

It reminds us that we must break down old, restrictive barriers to make way for new beginnings.

Thurisaz lets you harness the lightning and thunder of Thor's hammer. Wear this rune to break down emotional barriers that are holding you back and make room for new beginnings.

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ANSUZ

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**Phonetic Value:** A

**Pronunciation:** “AHN-sooz”

**Summary:** Odin and the ancestral gods, mouth, breath, and communication.

Ansuz is linked to Odin and the ancestral gods. It represents two of the gifts given to primal man by the gods: önd (breath), and ódhr (mental activity).

It is the rune of communication and the spoken word. A reminder to take a deep breath before speaking and to listen as much as we talk.



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## RAIDHO



**Phonetic Value:** R

**Pronunciation:** “Rah-EED-ho”



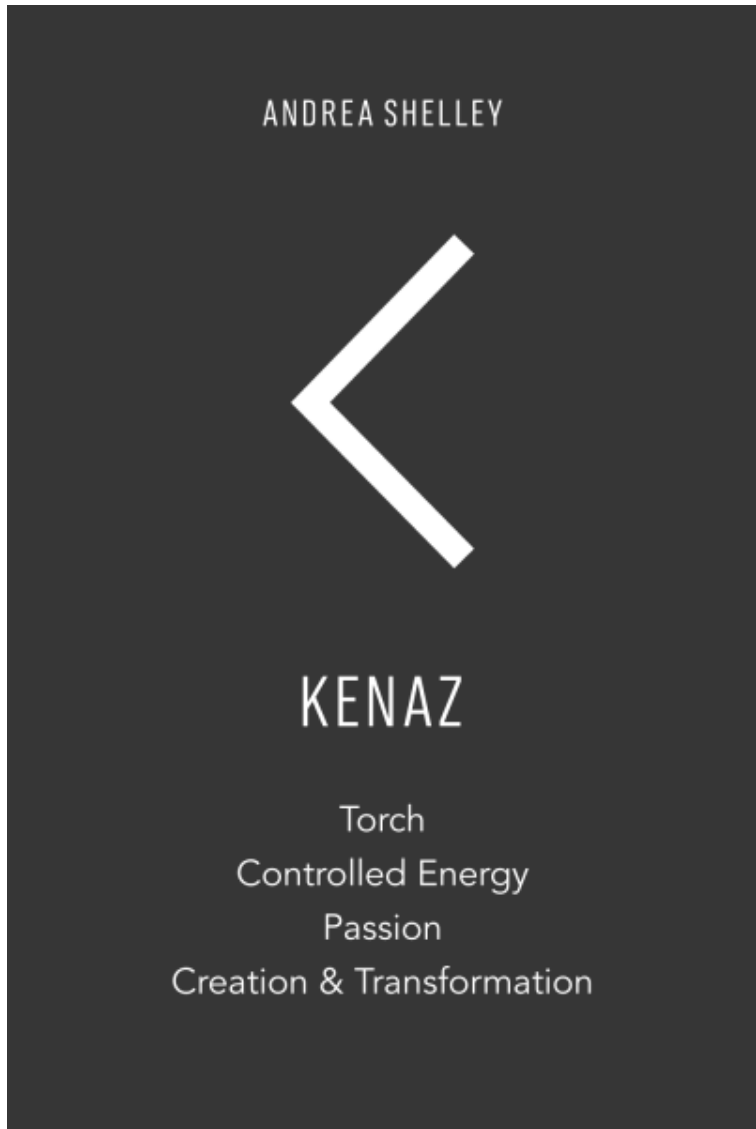
**Summary:** Wagon, travel by land, momentum, rhythm, and a journey.

Raidho is a journey and the power that keeps us moving forward towards our chosen destination. According to Thorsson, Raidho is the “channeling of force according to natural laws along the right road leading to the right result.”

Raidho is the conscious decision to achieve something, and the discipline to carry it out. The rhythm found when your forward movement is in harmony with your purpose.

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**Phonetic Value:** C / K

**Pronunciation:** “KEN-ahz”

**Summary:** Torch, controlled energy, passion, creation & transformation.

Kenaz is the torch: a fire lighting the way in the darkness. It is this same controlled fire used by the artisan to create, the cook to provide food, or that we gather around for warmth. This can also represent a metaphorical torch: a passion burning within, an inner light.

Kenaz is the fire of creation and transformation. It is a guiding light to expel outside influences and keep your inner passion aflame.

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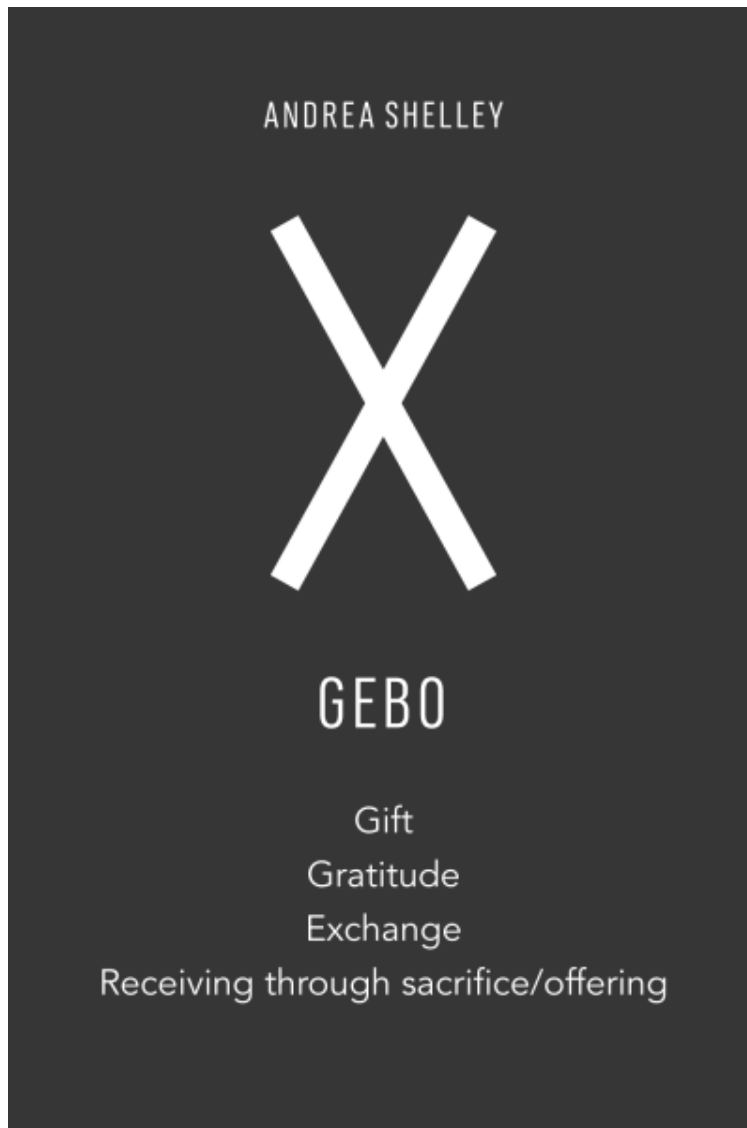
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GEBO


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**Phonetic Value:** G

**Pronunciation:** “GHEB-o”

**Summary:** Gift, gratitude, exchange, receiving through sacrifice/offering.

Gebo represents a gift or an exchange. It is “the giver, the giving, the given, and that which is given to.” (Thorrson).

Giving is an energy that joins people together. Just as fire kindles fire, the act of giving breeds gratitude, which in turn creates more giving. 

It’s a cycle, as important as it is to learn to give without expectations, so we must learn to receive graciously.

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WUNJO



**Phonetic Value:** W

**Pronunciation:** “WOON-yo”

**Summary:** Joy, fulfillment, well-being, a period of happiness.





Wunjo represents joy and harmonious action. When all aspects of our being are working together and in alignment with our goals, we will grow and prosper.

If something is out of alignment, it creates a blockage that prevents us from fulfilling our desires.

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HAGALAZ

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**Phonetic Value:** H

**Pronunciation:** “HA-ga-lahz”

**Summary:** Hail, temporary difficulties, changing of plans, delay.

Hagalaz represents hail – a temporary difficulty or delay. Disruption is a necessary part of life, it creates change and evolution.

It’s easy to get frustrated at a delay or lack of progress, but you’re better off using this time for rest and contemplation rather than to try to rush headlong through the storm.

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NAUDHIZ



**Phonetic Value:** N

**Pronunciation:** “NOWD-heez”



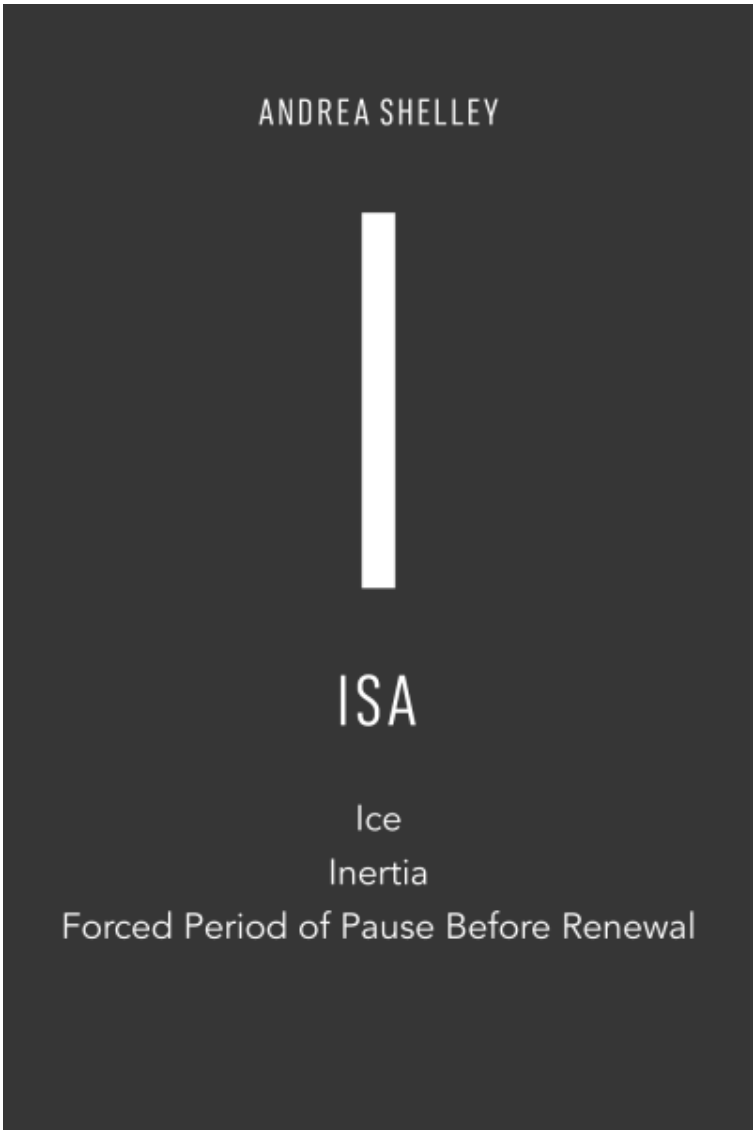
**Summary:** Need, coming through challenge, stepping forth into manifestation.

Naudhiz represents need – distress and struggle but also coming through it. Thorsson describes it as the “stepping-forth-into-manifestation”

It is a prompt to face issues we may be ignoring.

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ISA



**Phonetic Value: I**

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**Pronunciation:** “EE-sa”

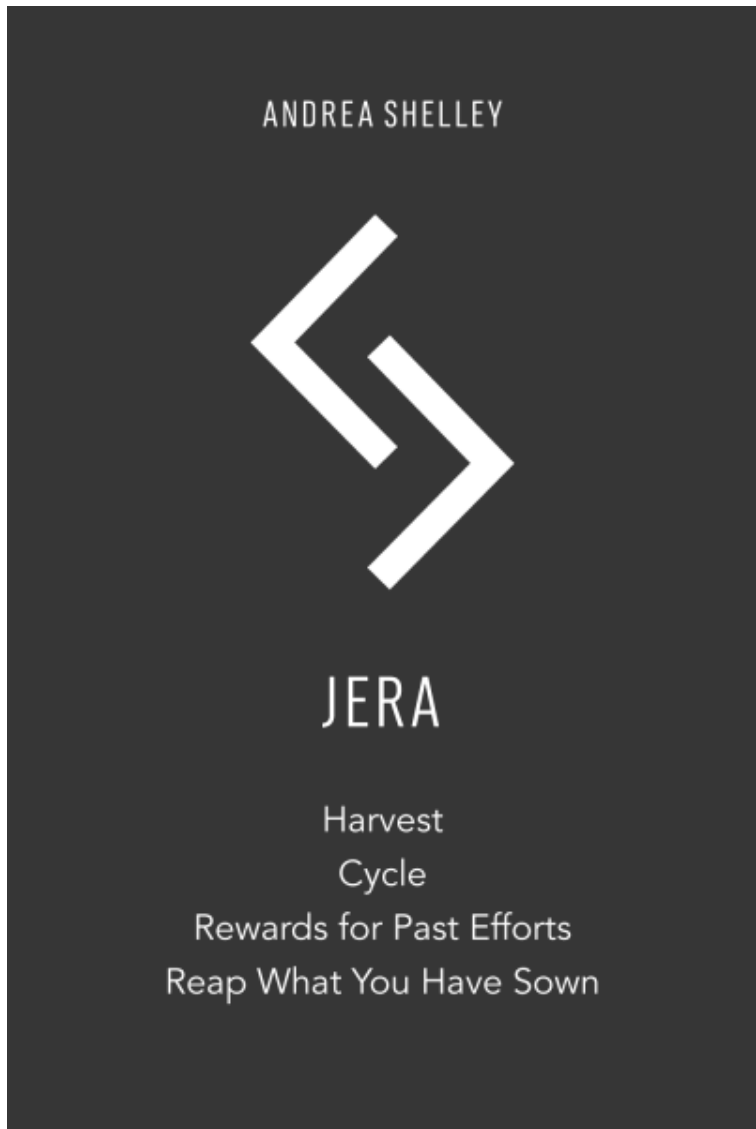
**Summary:** Ice, inertia, forced period of pause before renewal.

Isa represents ice. A frozen stillness that descends upon the world, preventing change and growth.

Isa can be both external and internal – representing our own resistance to change: our ingrained patterns and old habits running deep within.

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JERA



**Phonetic Value:** J / Y

**Pronunciation:** “YARE-a”

**Summary:** Harvest, cycle, rewards for past efforts, reap what you have sown.

Jera represents the cycle of the year, or more specifically, the turning over of a new cycle. The end of the longest night and the slow returning of the light.

A more gentle change than Dagaz (which represents the daily cycle), Jera signals a reward for past actions. It is time to reap what we have sown.

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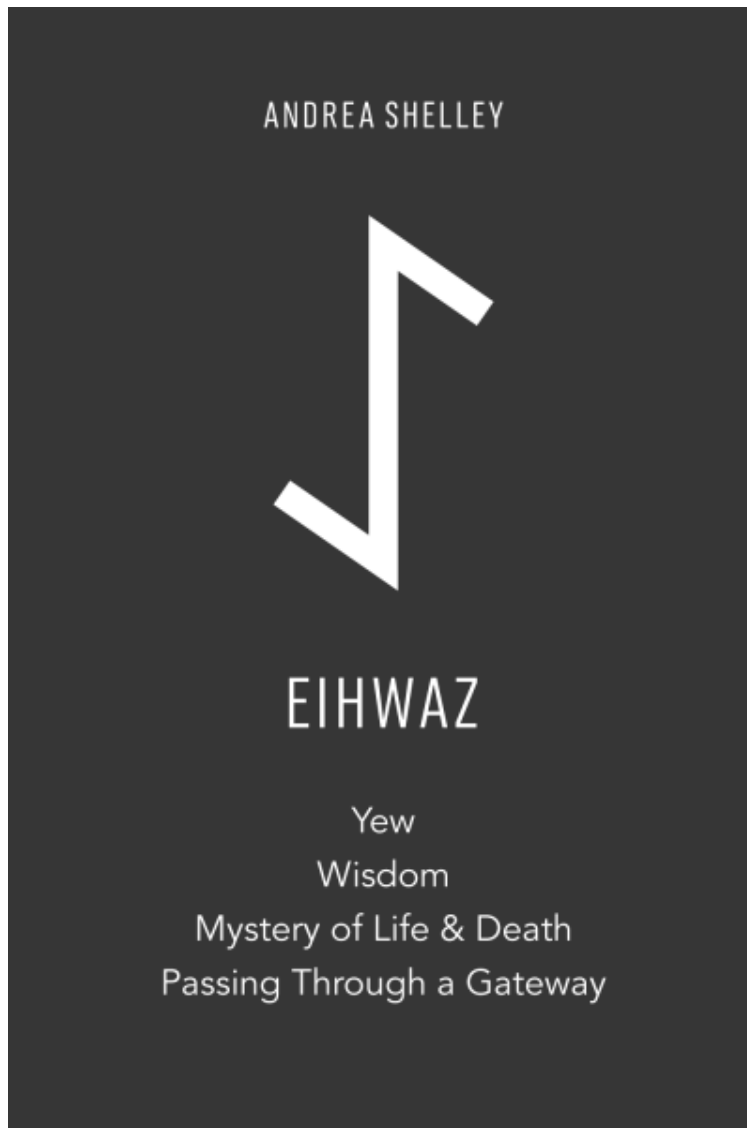


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EIHWAZ



**Phonetic Value:** E / I

**Pronunciation:** “AY-wahz”

**Summary:** Yew, wisdom, the mystery of life & death, passing through a gateway.

Eihwaz represents the yew – a tree of life and death. Yet this death is not final, it is a transition. A gateway through which we must pass to birth something new. 

As with any new life, it requires sacrifice. The leaving behind of something old to make space for what is to come.

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## PERTHRO



**Phonetic Value:** P

**Pronunciation:** “PER-thro”



**Summary:** Divination, casting of lots, quest for self-knowledge, fate.

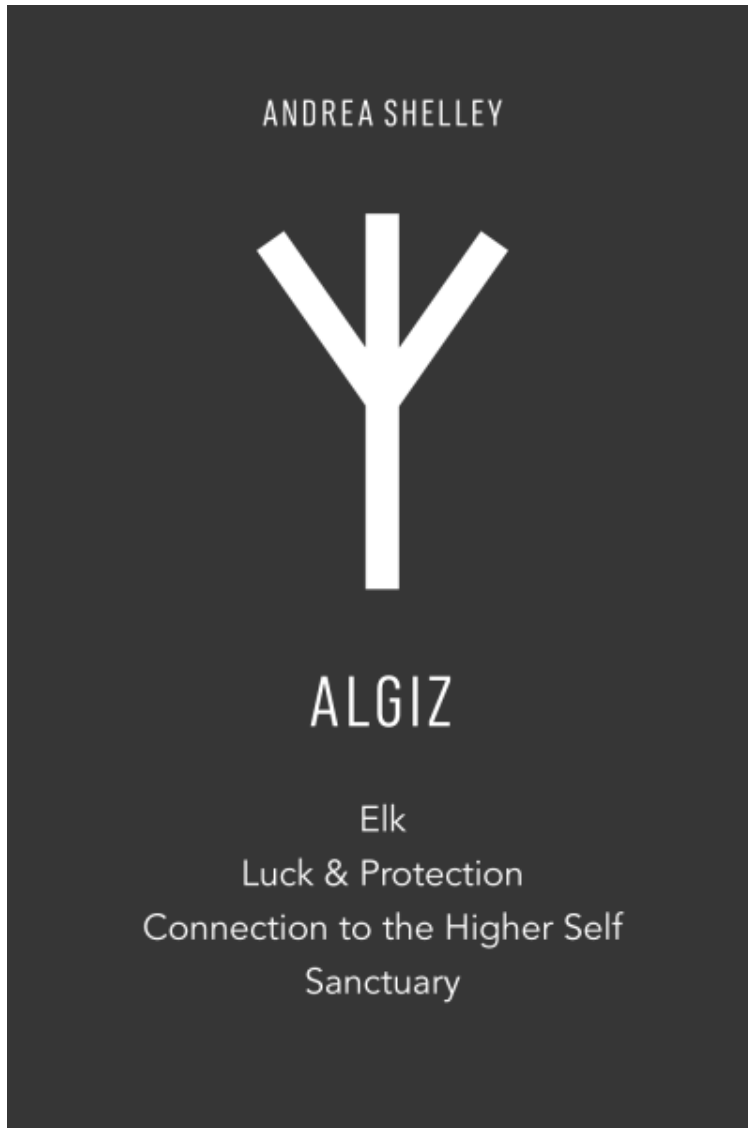


Perthro represents fate – but not in the modern sense of predetermination. The Norse idea of fate is more akin to what you’d think of as Karma. The sum of our past actions has created our current situation.

Perthro reminds us that where we are is a direct result of the choices we have made, which means that where we go from here is also in our own hands.

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ALGIZ



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**Phonetic Value:** Z

**Pronunciation:** “AL-geez”

**Summary:** Elk, luck & protection, connection to the higher self, sanctuary.



ALGIZ RUNE PENDANT: LUCK – STERLING SILVER

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Algiz is a protective and guardian force – but also a warning of something against which you should be guarded. It can be a call to seek sanctuary and raise your higher consciousness to be aware of any threats that may be on the horizon.

While Algiz is a call to action, it is also an omen of luck. Allow it to heighten your awareness and keep you safe from harm.

Algiz brings luck to those who need guidance around life’s pitfalls. Wear Algiz rune jewelry as a protective spirit that helps sway you toward your true path – strengthening your hamingja (power and luck) and life force.



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SOWILO



**Phonetic Value:** S

**Pronunciation:** “So-WEE-lo”

**Summary:** Sun, spiritual power & enlightenment, success, personal growth.

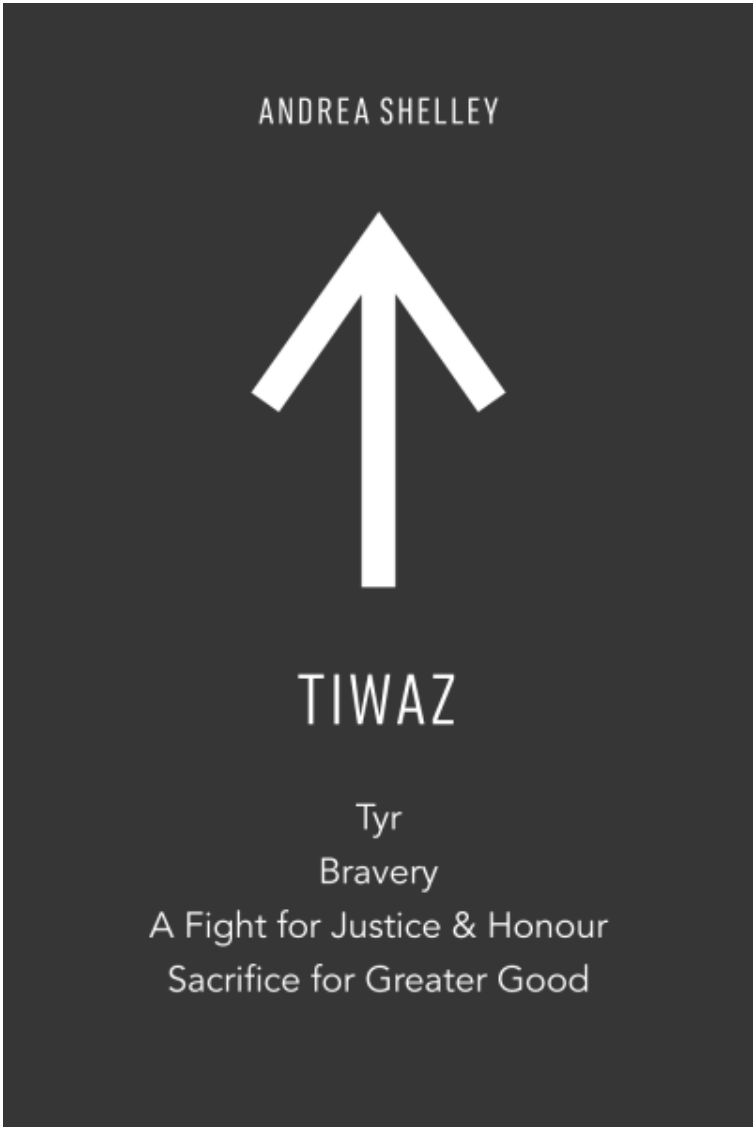


Sowilo is the sun. An illuminating force that breaks through darkness and doubt, creating growth and expansion.

It is both the goal and the active willed action towards it – our purpose and inner self.

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TIWAZ



**Phonetic Value:** T

**Pronunciation:** “TEE-wahz”



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**Summary:** Tyr, bravery, a fight for justice & honour, sacrifice for greater good.

Tiwaz represents the god Tyr who sacrificed his hand to the great wolf Fenrir in order to save the Aesir.

The story teaches us that “opposition must be faced squarely and with courage” (Mountfort).

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BERKANO



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**Phonetic Value:** B

**Pronunciation:** “BER-kah-no”

**Summary:** Birch, rebirth, a new phase, relationship, or project.

Berkano is the birch goddess, reigning over life’s important transitions: birth, adolescence, marriage, and death. Each of these phases is unique and brings its own challenges and celebrations.

Berkano is a reminder that every ending brings a new beginning. New growth must be nurtured so that it will grow strong.

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EHWAZ

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**Phonetic Value:** E

**Pronunciation:** “EH-wahz”

**Summary:** Horse, partnership and cooperation, forward progress.

Ehwaz represents two horses, or a horse and rider: multiple forces working in partnership to create movement and forward progress.

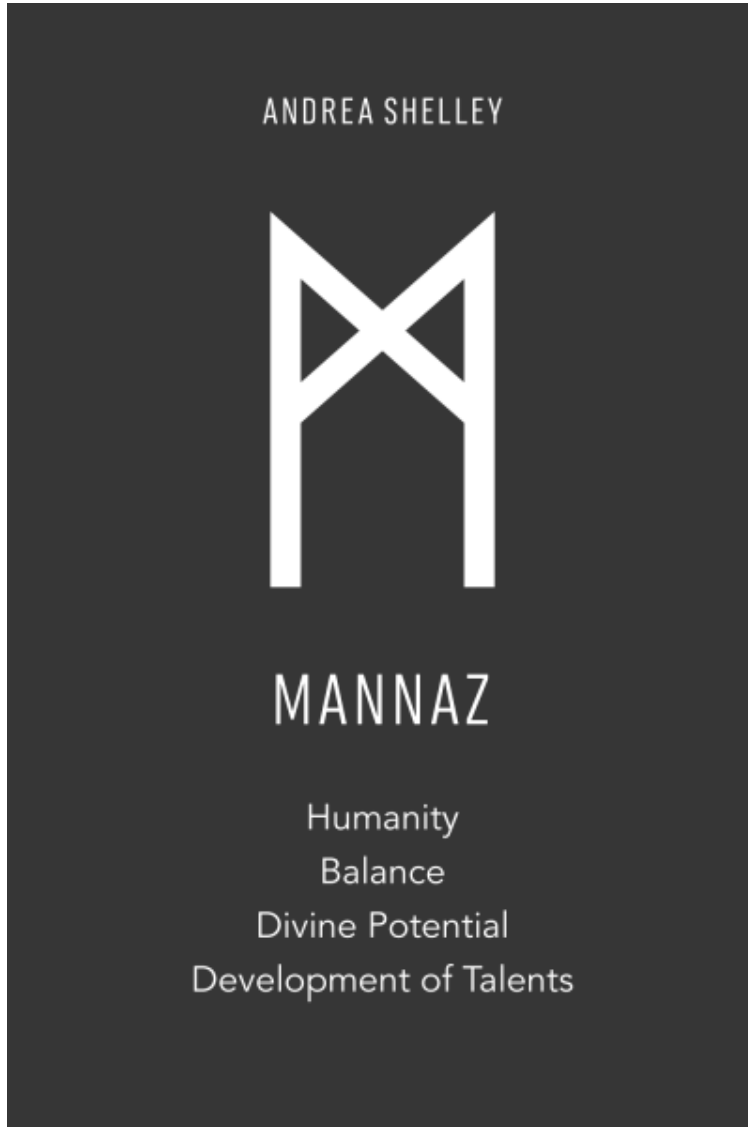
There must be trust and loyalty between two partners – or two parts of oneself – in order to succeed.



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MANNAZ



**Phonetic Value:** M

**Pronunciation:** “MAN-naz”



**Summary:** Humanity, balance, divine potential, development of talents.





MANNAZ RUNE PENDANT: BALANCE – STERLING SILVER

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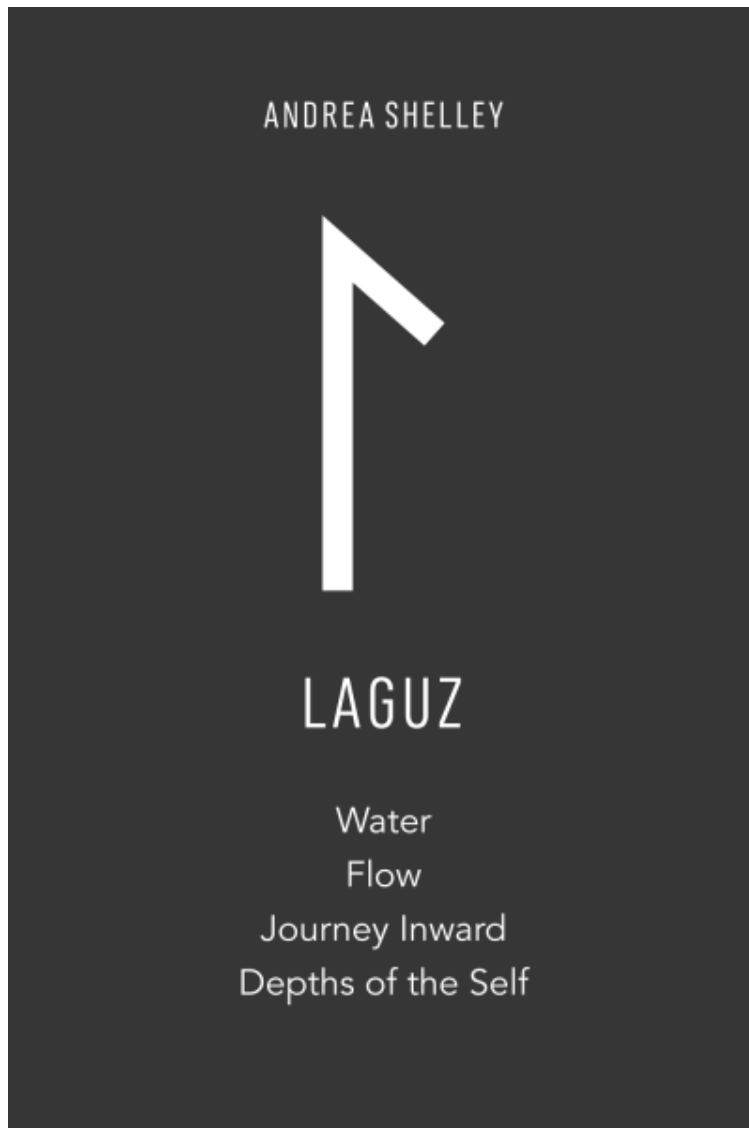
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Mannaz represents mankind in its most perfect form: a descendant of the gods inextricably linked with the divine.

Mannaz is the power of intelligence, rational thought, and tradition. It is the quest of self-development towards a perfectly balanced life.

Wear a Mannaz rune pendant to achieve balance, increase your emotional perception, and unlock your hugauga – the “mind’s eye”.

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LAGUZ



**Phonetic Value:** L

**Pronunciation:** “LAH-gooz”

**Summary:** Water, flow, journey inward, depths of the self.





LAGUZ RUNE PENDANT: FLOW – STERLING SILVER

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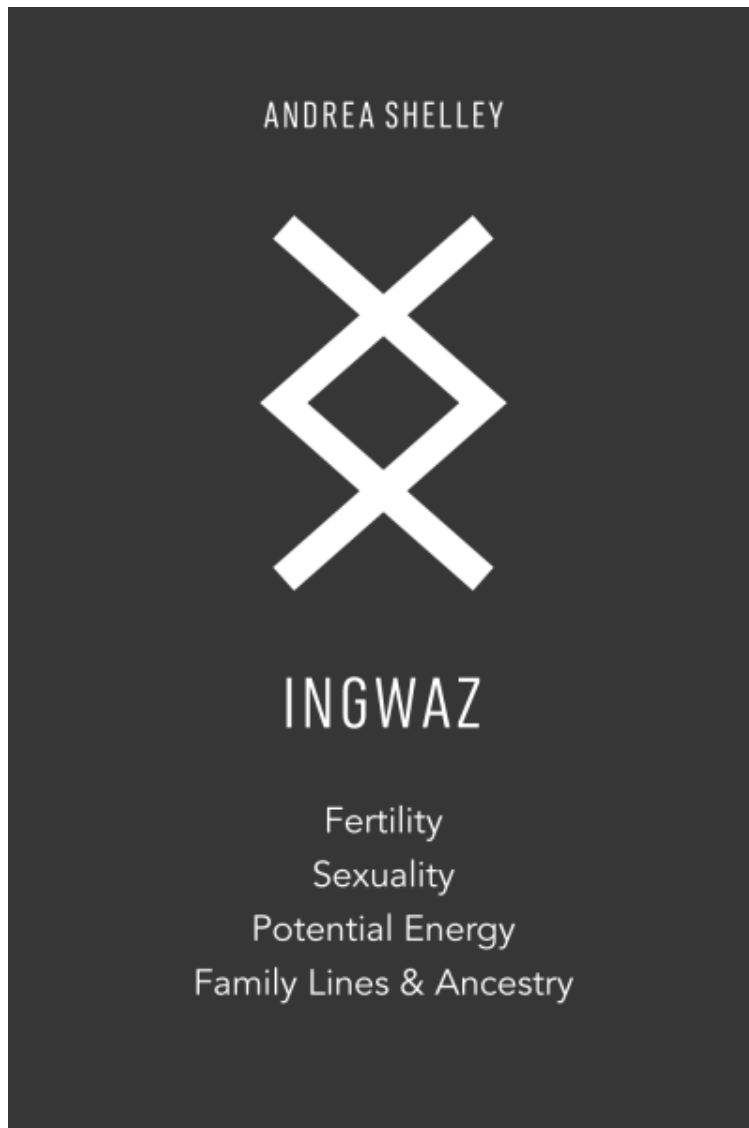
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Laguz represents water and the source of all life. Water flows through the earth as it flows through each living creature.

It is linked to emotions, flow, and a journey inward to the depths of the self.

Wear Laguz rune jewelry to remain open to its guiding current through difficult growth and flow through transitional life events with ease.

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INGWAZ



**Phonetic Value:** Ng

**Pronunciation:** “ING-wahz”

**Summary:** Fertility, sexuality, potential energy, family lines, and ancestry.





INGWAZ RUNE PENDANT: FERTILITY – STERLING SILVER

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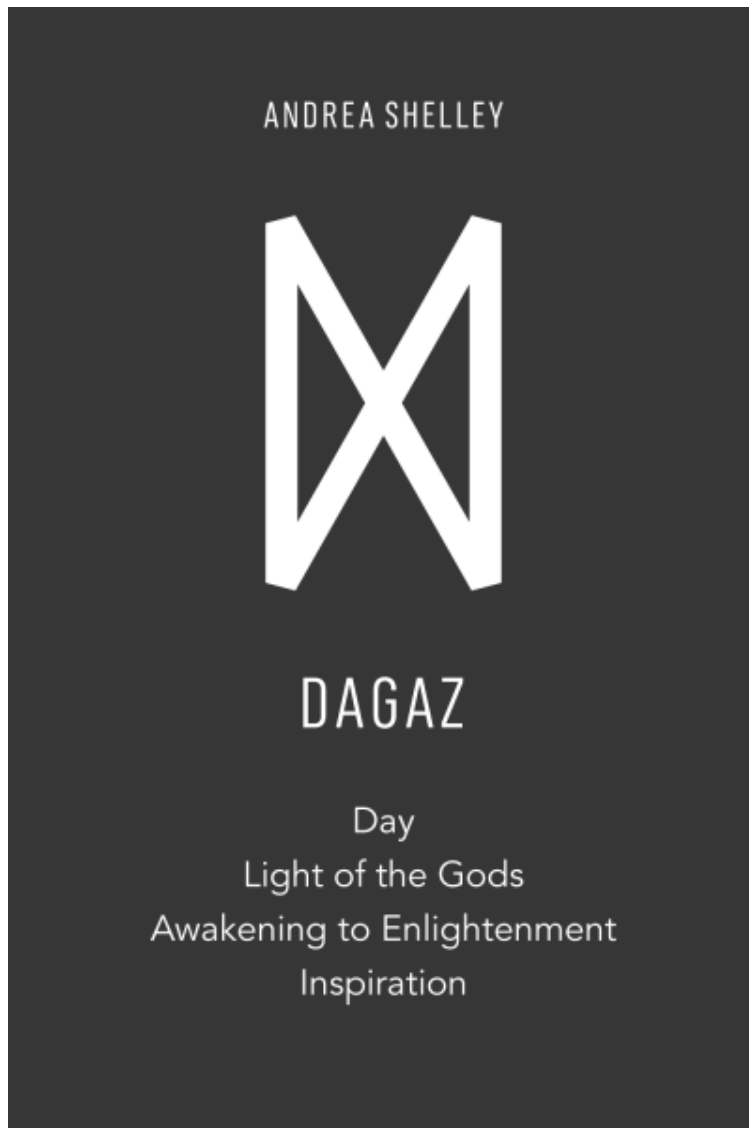
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Ingwaz represents potential energy. A seed tucked away in fertile soil, waiting for the right time to sprout.

It is a reminder that some things take longer than others and growth can't be forced.

Wear an Ingwaz rune pendant to build strength and patience – helping you to gather energy so it can be transformed through you. Its fertile powers are used literally, as in childbirth, or to support you in the realization of your creative endeavours.

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DAGAZ



**Phonetic Value:** D

**Pronunciation:** “DAH-gahz”

**Summary:** Day, light of the gods, awakening to enlightenment, inspiration.





DAGAZ RUNE PENDANT: INSPIRATION – STERLING SILVER

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Dagaz is the day, specifically the cataclysmic change that occurs at dawn and twilight. When two extremes (the darkness and the light) become one.

This represents the end of an era and the beginning of the next cycle.

Dagaz represents the light of the gods and divine inspiration. Wear Dagaz rune jewelry to fill your life with warmth and illumination. Flashes of insight will appear as you learn to enjoy the simple beauty of existence.

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## OTHALA



**Phonetic Value:** O

**Pronunciation:** “OH-tha-la”

**Summary:** Ancestral property, wisdom, inherent talent, homecoming.

Othala is our birthright. It represents all the material and spiritual goods that we were each born into. These are the building blocks that we have to work with in life.



Othala is also a connection to the past, an inheritance. Our home, sense of belonging, and community.



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## HOW TO USE RUNES

There are many ways to use the runes. Runes are powerful tools for divination and ritual but you can also use them as talismans or amulets. Really there are so many ways that the runes can enrich your life.

### USING RUNES FOR DIVINATION AND GUIDANCE

Reading the runes is similar to doing tarot reading. You lay out the runes and interpret them based on their meanings and position in the spread.

Learn how to rune cast.

The most common tools for rune divination are rune stones: small rocks or pieces of wood or bone – inscribed with the rune symbols. You can make a set of rune stones yourself or buy them if you prefer.

These stones are placed in a bag, shaken up to mix them, and then drawn out one at a time and placed in a rune spread.

You can also get a set of runes in the form of a rune card deck – which may be easier to carry around since they're lighter and stack neatly together. You would shuffle these cards and lay them out one by one just as you would the rune stones.



## USING RUNES IN RITUAL

Runes are powerful additions to rituals and meditations. Select one or several runes that encompass the intention of your ritual and use them alongside your other ritual tools.

Here are some suggestions for using runes in ritual:

- Hold a rune stone in your hand during meditation
- Place one or several runes on your altar before a ritual working.
- Wear a rune pendant during ritual or meditation.
- Draw a rune symbol in a glass of water then focus on the intent of the rune as you drink it

These are just a few of the many ways to use runes to enhance your rituals and meditations.

## USING RUNES AS A TALISMAN OR AMULET

Runes don't have to be limited to ritual use, you can benefit from their energy every single day.

By carrying a rune as a talisman or amulet, you can feel the energy of the symbol and be reminded of your intentions all day long.

Choose a rune that really speaks to your aspirations and inner purpose. You can also wear more than one to make an even more powerful combination.

You can tuck a rune stone in your pocket or place it on your desk as a constant reminder of your intentions, or wear a rune pendant so you can carry the power of the runes with you everywhere you go.

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Carry the magic of the runes with you every day.

SHOP RUNES



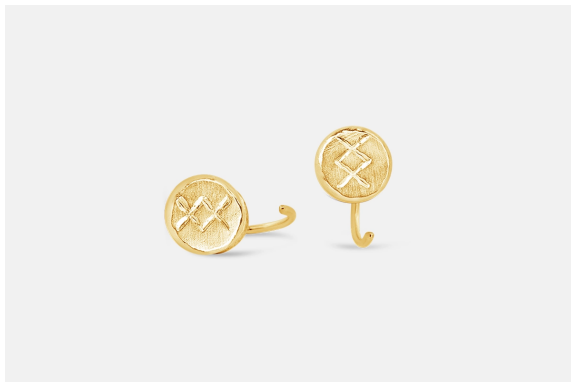
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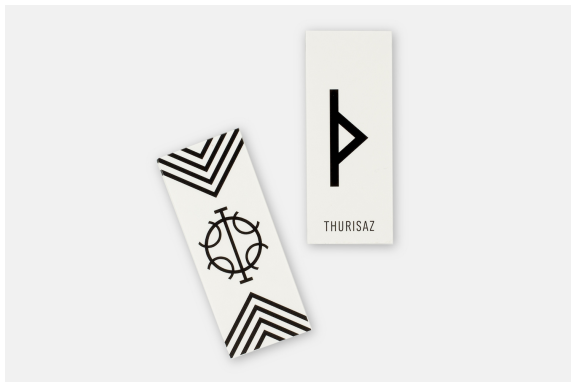
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## ANDREA SHELLEY

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## 18 COMMENTS

ALEX

REPLY

September 18, 2023

Hi. Can I use a combination of the runes Wunjo and Gebo for self-love?

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

September 19, 2023

Gebo and Wunjo would complement each other nicely. You'll need to charge it with your specific intentions. I've written some instructions on that in my post about bindrunes



TOLUNGOO

REPLY

September 13, 2023

Hello how do I use isa and uruz together?

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

September 13, 2023

There are many ways to use runes together, depending on your intent. You can use them in a grouping or even make a bindrune that includes those two runes.

AMOS SUOMELA

REPLY

March 31, 2023

Saved as a favorite, I really like your blog!

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

March 31, 2023

Thank you, Amos!

PENNY

REPLY

March 1, 2023

Heya Miss Andrea,

I wanted to say thank you for creating this lovely website. It's like finding a charming garden off the beaten path!

Much peace and flow to you 🌻

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

March 31, 2023

Thank you, Penny!



PAMELA

REPLY

February 4, 2023

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I have one double faced rune.

F

+

the tail of the f joins the top line of the cross. The other side has >< but over lap in the middle.. I can't find an example.

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ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

February 4, 2023

That could be a bindrune – a combination of multiple runes together. My best guess for the front would be Fehu and Naudhiz and the back could be Ingwaz depending on how much overlap. However, this is a wild guess based on the little information I have. They could be runes from another alphabet entirely, stylized runes, or made-up symbols.

DAWN

REPLY

September 14, 2022

What runes would you carry to be lucky when gambling

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

September 16, 2022

Well, you could carry Fehu for Abundance, Algiz for Luck, and Sowilo for Success.

JULIE

REPLY

June 28, 2022

Hello Andrea, a wonderful description of the Old Norse Runes. I am interested in a plaque to place above the door of my home. I desire Peace, Love, Joy, Protection, Gratitude to my beloved parents who have left me this home, it is truly my sanctuary. Please, what would you suggest?  
Thank you, Julianne.



ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

June 28, 2022

Hi Julianne. There are a number of ways you could do this. You could translate a meaningful word into runes and place those symbols on the plaque or choose runes whose meanings represent what you'd like to embody in your home. My suggestions would be Othala (representing the ancestral home, inheritance and a sense of belonging), Gebo (for gratitude), and Wunjo (for joy and fulfilment). These runes could either be traced out in a row or combined together into a single symbol (a bindrune). Best of luck!

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SPYKO

REPLY

May 20, 2022

Hello, I'd love to know the source for the secondary meanings of the runes, is it you own interpretation ?  
thanks in advance !

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

May 21, 2022

Yes, the meanings written under each rune are my own interpretation based on my research and experience. As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, rune meanings are very subjective so I encourage you to do more reading, work with the runes, and see how each one speaks to you before finding the interpretation that feels right to you.

©

CHRISTINE MUSTOW

REPLY

November 4, 2019

please what is x

ANDREA SHELLEY

REPLY

November 7, 2019

The Futhark symbol that looks like an X is called Gebo.



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Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

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October Birthstone: Pink Tourmaline



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