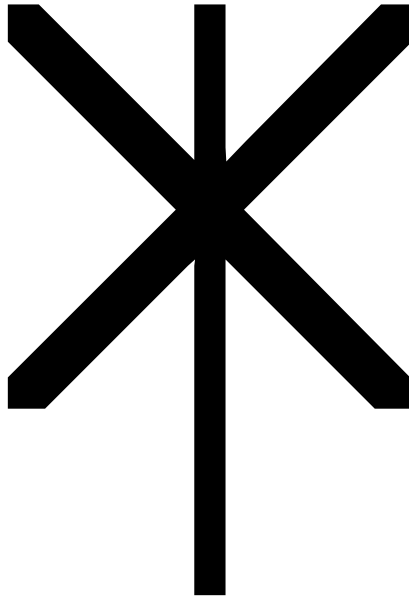


Heimdal, the Father of Stav



by Graham Butcher

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<http://www.iceandfire.org.uk>

Email: admin@iceandfire.org.uk

Background

Twenty five years ago I met Ivar Hafskjold and began my journey into Stav. At the time I was living in East Yorkshire, in a village a few miles North of Hull. I had a lifelong interest in martial arts and body/mind/spirit training. One day I picked up a martial arts magazine and read an interview with Ivar who had quite recently returned from Japan and settled not far from where I was living.

Ivar had learned a family system of training and knowledge in Norway as a young man. He had then spent fourteen years in Japan where he became highly proficient in traditional Japanese martial skills. Ivar stated in the interview that he was keen to teach anyone who was serious about training with him.

I made contact with a view to focussing on martial training. I was not disappointed and have been one of Ivar's personal students for 25 years now. The martial arts training are a key aspect of our relationship. However, I also became very interested in Ivar's family tradition of Stav. Stav literally meaning 'knowledge of the rune staves.'

This little booklet is intended as an introduction to Stav through a consideration of the Hagl rune ✖ and some of the key associations.

I am happy to admit that writing this text is an experiment. It is very hard to write a simple and concise introduction to a vast and complex subject which has been one's main focus of study and thought for twenty five years. Any feedback as to whether or

not you found this work helpful to you would be much appreciated.

Graham Butcher – August 2017

Introduction

What are runes? One way of seeing runes is as keys to enter a vast storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. Each rune opens a different door which will give you access to a different room, all rooms eventually interconnect. Which one should you enter first?

Hagl ✖ can be seen as the key to the front door. You are being invited into Stav as a guest. It is usual for welcome visitors to enter by the front door, so, in this booklet you are receiving the ✖ key. If you subsequently wish to explore further then the remaining fifteen runes will be made available to you.

A Note on Studying the Runes

We may first encounter runes as two dimensional symbols written or printed on paper or inscribed on some other medium. The symbols are a representation of the runes and the design of each will be significant in and of itself. However, runes are much more than just symbols and if you are serious about discovering the rune staves you will eventually need to learn the following associations of each rune:

- The name
- The Old Norse Rune Rhyme
- The mythological associations

- Animal association
- Tree and plant association
- The stance and galdre chants
- Traditional bindrunes

These are the traditional associations.

In modern Stav we also have:

- Staff exercise for each runic stance
- Animal exercises
- Ivar Hafskjold's staff combat drill and self-defence applications of the stances

As an introductory text I will concentrate of the ✖ rune and the associations which I believe will give you the greatest insight into the purpose of Stav. If this is all you ever read about Stav then I hope you get something useful from the experience. If you do decide to go further in making Stav part of your life then you will have laid a solid foundation to build upon.

✖ Hagl

Meaning, hail or hailstones.

Mythological association: Heimdal, son of Odin

Old Norse Rune Rhyme

'Hagl (hail) is the whitest of grains

Christ formed the world in ancient times.'

1. No one expects...

Rune counselling is a process of using runes to consider the direction of our lives. By picking three runes, the first for the past, the second for the present

and the third to indicate a possible future we may recognise a pattern in the unfolding of our wyrd (destiny). Once the subconscious mind has picked out the runes the conscious mind may then reflect on issues and attitudes which we might normally prefer to be unaware of.

For some reason rune counselling can be a popular activity at events such as the Druid camp. Over the years I have conducted many rune counselling sessions which I hope have been helpful to those people I endeavoured to interpret the runes for. The content and rune sequence of most sessions I have long forgotten. But one particular occasion does stick in my mind. I cannot remember the first two runes which came up, but the third one (representing) the possible future was ✕ and I suggested that there was uncertainty about the future. The questioner was reluctant to accept this interpretation and begged me to let her take a fourth rune for clarification. This is something I rarely do but there are occasions when it may be helpful. A fourth rune was drawn and, again, it was ✕ which meant that I could just say. 'Sorry, you will just have to wait and see what life has in store for you.'

Hail can fall from a clear summer sky without warning. One moment there is nothing to disturb a warm and calm day. Then comes a bombardment of ice balls which may cause damage to crops and even buildings, especially if there is a glass roof. It can certainly be painful to be showered with hailstones. Then, within maybe minutes the grains have melted

and the only evidence remaining is the damage that might have been done. Hagl means the unexpected change as symbolised by the arrival and disappearance of hailstones. Hagl is also the teacher with two very important lessons to teach us. First, that life is a process of change and we we have to learn to accept and adapt to new circumstances as we grow and travel along life's journey. Secondly, Hagl is the basis of structure and continuity. The universe does have order and is essentially reliable. At the same time ✕ represents random chance and structured order. The universe is not random and neither is it deterministic. Our universe is actually created to be ergodic. Ergodic is a mathematical term which means predictable unpredictability. For example, take a common word such as 'go'. If you take any book in the English language you can be certain that the word 'go' is going to be used in that text. If you number of times this word comes up in a large sample of texts you could predict the average number of times the word 'go' is likely to be used in a book. But you can't predict exactly where the word will be placed on each page, that is the choice of the author as he or she expresses their message through the text they write.

Another way of explaining ergodic is simply to say that we live in a universe which is deterministic enough to be possible and random enough to be interesting. The role of ✕ is to teach us to recognise and be able to create structure while embracing and adapting to change and growth.

2. Heimdal

To understand runes you need to know the mythology relating to the characters associated with each rune. ✖ is associated with Heimdal about whom there are some very interesting stories.

Not so long ago I spent a week at a beach resort on the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico. My favourite time of day during the stay was sunrise over the sea when I would go and do stances and train to start each day. I would also just watch the waves flood and ebb up and down the sand. As I watched the endless cycle of the restless sea I found myself reflecting on Heimdal's birth story. It is reported that Heimdal's father is Odin and he was born on nine mothers. In some versions these nine mothers were waves lapping the shore of the ocean. As I contemplated the waves washing the beach I found myself realising that we are a combination of changeable emotion and divine wisdom. As human beings we flood towards things, people and experiences we desire, we also ebb to cling to what makes us feel secure and we refuse to let go of things and behaviour which no longer serve us. Our whole lives are driven by emotion. At the same time we are capable of taking a wise overview of our lives and we can see how unimportant are the things we chase after or cling to. Desire and attachment are essential in motivating us to get the most out of life. On the other hand emotion needs to be moderated by reason and wisdom. It is

good to care so long as we accept that nothing is forever and change is good and necessary.

The grown up Heimdall becomes the guardian of the bridge Bifrost, the link between Midgard (our world) and Æsgard (home of the Æsir). Heimdall also has a trumpet, or maybe a ram's horn called Giallarhorn which can be heard in all the nine worlds. On the day of Ragnarok Heimdall will blow the Giallarhorn and call to battle all those who will fight alongside the Æsir at the last great battle.

3. Cutting and building

In the middle eastern creation myth, as found in the book of Genesis, the first man is made out of clay. In the Norse equivalent the first man and first woman are carved out of tree trunks. In the middle east clay is the primary material for building and making everyday objects. In Scandinavia (and many other parts of Northern Europe) timber is the primary material for survival. Each rune has a tree associated with it and knowing the 18 trees (Nod 𐌆 has three associated with it) provides a broad range of fuel, building materials, tools and weapons and food and medicines. The primary tool for working wood, whether it be felling a tree or shaping planks to build a ship, is traditionally the axe. When cutting wood with an axe you can chop with the grain and thus split the wood. Or you need to chop on a very specific angle to the grain. The centre line of ✕ is the line of the grain and the crossed lines are the angles which will

effectively cut wood. If cutting a branch or a sapling there is a particular line which will result in a clean slice through. The slightest variation from that angle and the wood will simply be bruised and the cut will be ineffective.

With practice and experience it becomes possible to 'see' the appropriate line and take it each time. The result is efficient use of effort and neat and tidy work. The same line is used when cutting runes so rune masters of old would consistently cut runes accurately as well as knowing how to cut down a tree or carve a tool handle.

Cutting wood is also the first stage in building and construction. The lines of cutting are also the lines which will create the most strength and stability in construction of a building or a boat or a piece of furniture. Look at an ancient cathedral or similar building which has stood for hundreds of years and you will see the lines of ✕ connecting together into the Web of Orlog. The web is the foundation of the universe and all the runes are found within the matrix of lines.

Craft skills are a very effective way of learning to see the lines through cutting and constructing. Martial arts training has great value is learning how to see and use the lines too. ✕ provides a basic manual for martial training. If you can visualise ✕ and know how to strike along each of the three lines and thrust to the centre you have the basis for martial practice. Developing a sense of being centred in your web will give your body structure and stability. Being able to

see the web in your opponent or training partner will show you where to cut and strike with a weapon and how to break balance and take control in unarmed combat.

Again ✕ reveals a paradox, destruction and creation are simply two sides of the same reality.

4. Rig the Walker

One day Heimdal found himself relieved of his duties as watchman of the bridge and given a new assignment.

‘Go to Midgard.’ Instructed Odin. ‘And create classes of men who will advance the human race and provide a breed of warriors to fight along side us at the terrible day of Ragnarok.’

‘How should I go about this task Father?’ Asked a slightly puzzled Heimdal, excited by a fresh challenge but unsure of how to complete his task.

‘You are an Æsir, you work it out.’ Said Odin a little impatiently, anxious to get back to his his seat from which he could observe all that happens throughout the nine worlds.

So, Heimdal dressed in simple travellers clothes, took a stout staff and adopted the name Rig. Then he crossed from his home to Midgard, our world and began his wanderings.

As Rig’s first day of walking came to an end an opportunity to fulfil his mission became apparent. He came upon a humble dwelling with a poor man and woman who kept pigs and grew what they could. Rig

asked for hospitality. He stayed three nights, sleeping between the man and the woman each night. He taught them many helpful things and once he had moved on the woman found herself pregnant. She named her son Trel and he was the first peasant, living by hard manual labour and keeping pigs.

As Rig continued his journey he realised that for the sake of his comfort and to fulfill his mission he needed a better class of home for his next stay. Before the next nightfall Rig came to a well built farm house. There were cattle, chickens, geese, goats and sheep in the yard and field. The man was strong and hard working, his wife well dresses, resourceful at the spinning wheel, in the dairy and in the kitchen and wore a ring on her finger. Again Rig asked for hospitality, stayed three nights, slept between the man and the woman. He again taught the couple many useful things and once again the woman found she was pregnant. She called her son Karl and he was the first freeman and a farmer. His children built barns, houses and halls, made wagons, ploughs and harnesses, built ships and traded far and wide.

Rig continued his journey feeling more confident in his sense of purpose. That evening he came to a large house. Both the man and the woman had fine features and had clothes of the highest quality. The woman was weaving fine linen cloth, the man twisting a string for an Elm bow. Rig was graciously accommodated in response to his request for hospitality. Again, he stayed three nights, slept between the man and the woman. He taught them both much that was of great

value and moved on. When the son was born he as named Jarl. He grew up to ride horses, shoot a bow, wield an axe, sword and spear, command a ship and lead brave men into battle. When Jarl was coming up too thirteen years of age Heimdal was granted another leave of absence. Once more he took on the guise of Rig the traveller, returned to Midgard and taught his son many things including knowledge of the runes. When Jarl was a little older still Rig was happy to give his blessing to the young man's marriage to a girl called Erna. Her father was Herse or warrior. Their son was to be called Kong and he became a great warrior and the first king of Denmark.

So, there you have my retelling of the story of how Rig fulfilled Odin's instructions and created the classes of mankind. On one level the story is a legendary explanation for the traditional European class/caste system. Perhaps even a justification for an unequal society but that would not be seeing the whole picture.

This story tells us something about the Norse people's relationship with the Æsir, Heimdal and thus Odin are seen as ancestors, originators of a noble race.

Also this story is really about roles that need to be fulfilled in society for a community to be really successful. Not everyone can be a leader, or a warrior. On the other hand business and commerce needs a certain degree of regulation and people and property needs to be protected.

For us there are different stages in our lives when we will fulfil different roles. We need to be aware of those roles and ready to fulfil them when the time comes.

In Stav martial training we use these five roles or principles as strategies for dealing with combat situations. These strategies are used alongside the concepts learned from ✕ as described in other sections of this booklet.

5. Earth Mother, Sky Father

When I lived in Somerset there was a hill above the town and from the top you could see all the way to Glastonbury about eighteen miles to the north. The hill was known as the Beeches on account of the many mature trees of that species which grew there. In summer I would often go to the highest point as soon as possible after sunrise to do the stances there. The Beeches are a very popular place to walk dogs. But at sunrise in summer the dogs and owners would still be asleep so it would be, what I liked to call, rabbit time. There was a significant population of these timid creatures living on the hill but they were rarely seen during the day as rabbits prefer to avoid dogs for obvious reasons. So, in the company of the rabbits I could do stances, a long shadow cast by the newly risen sun and watching the morning mist before it was burned away by the heat of the sun. I would know North, East and thus West and South by the position of the rising sun. I would also have a profound sense of the vast earth beneath my feet and the warmth of the sun from eight million miles away. Earth mother beneath my feet, sky father high above my head and

me practising runes given to mankind by Heimdal many generations ago.

6. Points of chaos, moments of opportunity

If you have travelled on a motorway, as driver or passenger you will have had the experience of missing your exit. When Venetia and I make this mistake it is usually because we are deep in conversation about something, the driver is on auto pilot and we simply fail to notice the signs. Once you have missed your slip road the only option is to leave at the next junction. Then you can either retrace your journey to the junction you originally planned to leave at, or attempt to find an alternative route that will eventually lead to your destination from the second choice of exit. Either way, one realises that there are moments when changing direction is relatively easy and the situation appropriate to taking a new direction. At other times changing direction may not be impossible but it will be immensely harder. You can leave a motorway between junctions but you would probably have to abandon your vehicle on the hard shoulder and walk across fields. Not the ideal way to continue your journey.

I use this example to illustrate that on the web of life there are lines in time and space where simply continuing on a particular course is the most sensible thing to do. Then come points when change and new opportunities are not just possible but unavoidable. These are the points on the web lines have met and ✕

represents a chaos point where change can happen. Of course it is often easiest just to carry on in the direction you are already travelling. Just as on a motorway passing junctions is easier than taking the slip road and choosing a new direction. Continuing on a present course and not being deflected by outside influences is fine when you are genuinely proceeding in the direction you really want to travel in. If, however, you know you need to change direction in any way then the secret to finding a new course in life is not forcing yourself to be different but looking for the chaos point when change is most appropriate and taking action at that moment in time and space.

This principle is particularly essential in martial training. You have probably heard of the idea of using someone's strength against them. There is some truth in this statement. A better way of seeing it might be to say that there are chaos points where a line of movement ends and a new movement begins. At that point of change there is no actual strength and an opponent can be redirected and manipulated. The martial arts expert can intuitively exploit such chaos points which makes defeating an opponent look easy but the development of intuitive awareness will have taken a lifetime of training and practice.

This principle applies to every aspect of life. The secret of making a sale in business is to ask for the deal at the moment the customer is ready to buy. If developing a relationship we need to see the moment a person is ready for a new friendship or more. The real secret of success is not trying to make things happen

but be aware of possibilities and grasp the moment when the thing you want is going to happen.

Conclusion

This is a very brief introduction to six concepts associated with one rune. There is much more to say about ✖ as I hope became clear as you read this far. I have not really explained and described the stance, especially in its *galdre* forms. There are more stories about Heimdal, particularly his fate at the last battle. I have not yet touched on the animal, plant and tree associations. Concepts such as the five principles described in section four and the nature of the web of Orlog have infinite scope for exploration and discussion.

✖ may well be the best point to begin a study of the runes. However, each rune has a similar range of lessons to teach us. So, you will see that once you begin a serious study of the rune staves you will never reach the end of it. In Stanza 141 of the *Havamal* we may find a clue as to the purpose of learning runes and practising them in your everyday life.

‘Then I began to quicken and be wise,
and to grow and to prosper;
one word found another word for me,
one deed found another deed for me.’

What next?

Where to go from here depends upon how you have responded to this little text. If you were simply curious about some of the key concepts in Stav and where they are derived from then I may have satisfied your curiosity. If so, then thank you for your interest.

If you want to go further with a genuine study of Stav then you might be interested studying further through our nine module foundation programme or attending courses or classes depending upon your ability to travel. Please see the back cover for contact details and website.

At the least you might like to join my email list and discover more about the runes by visiting:

<http://www.16runes.com>

and completing the optin box. Not only will you receive 24 messages telling you more about the runes and key concepts in Stav but you will receive updates about Stav training and resources.