

Rune for *improvement*

They may look pretty, but can runes actually tell us anything about ourselves? Curious to explore their potential, Jini Reddy spent a day romancing the stones

Ann (left) helps Jini read the runes



On the train to Hove on the East Sussex coast, I prepare for a day dedicated to unravelling the mysterious symbols known as runes. How much can these centuries-old marks really tell us about ourselves? Arriving at Revitalise – the natural therapy centre, health cafe and shop where the workshop is being held – I'm about to find out.

Our tutor for the day is Ann O'Keife, a calm and inspirational woman who has been reading the runes for 15 years. 'They're an ancient mystical alphabet, which has been used for centuries for divination – and much more,' she stresses, as we settle in.

The group is a small one. There's Kate, a reiki practitioner, Bob, a burly animal healer, Gay, who's retired, and Mike, a musician. Bob has brought his own set of runes. 'I felt inspired to make them a couple of years ago, but I'm not sure why,' he says cryptically. The others have varying degrees of knowledge of the subject, and I suspect I'm the only runes rookie.

To kick off the workshop, Ann passes each of us a large velvet pouch filled with rune stones. This is a personal set for us to keep, she explains, because the more you handle the stones the more you imbue them with your own energy. Handmade from clay by her husband, Symon, they're painted a shimmery gold

colour and feel like jewels. By the end of the day she says we'll be giving each other rune readings. Looking at the bewildering symbols, this seems like a daunting prospect.

The runes – which have names that sound like the alien cast of *Star Wars* – each correspond to ancient letters, a natural element such as fire or water, a personal quality like nurturing, and a particular gemstone. For fun, Ann suggests we translate our names to explore the energy they hold. I painstakingly work out that mine corresponds to the runes Jera, Isa and Nauthiz, the qualities of patience, stillness and need, and the elements earth, water and fire. There's not a

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trace of air, which apparently means I have difficulty standing back to objectively weigh up a situation. I can relate to that.

Ann asks us to randomly pull a rune out of our bag to crystallise our intent for the day. I choose Ansuz, which corresponds to communication. It seems fitting, since I'm here as a journalist.

We learn that casting runes has traditionally been used for guidance, healing, magic, meditation and visualisation, and the characters have also been used as protective talismans.

The origin of the runes is hotly debated. One mythical tale tells how the Norse god Odin underwent a gruelling shamanic initiation, at the end of which he was given the

runes. The symbols date back at least 2,000 years, and many linguistic scholars believe they originated much earlier than this in the Middle East before being introduced to Germanic tribes in Europe in the first or second centuries AD.

Ann leads us through a relaxing guided meditation, and as we wind up, we're asked to invite a wise being to offer us healing gifts. Suddenly, a vision of a ruby pops into my head. Later, Ann tells me that the gem is linked to Sowelu, a rune stone associated with wholeness. My life has felt more balanced recently, so this makes sense.

Finally, it's time for those rune readings. First, we power up our own set of stones by holding the bag and asking that the runes guide us to growth and wisdom. Then we form pairs

and choose three runes for our partner to interpret. The idea is to piece the meanings together and interpret the whole.

'The first rune talks about what has gone on before, the second what is happening now, and the third what will be,' says Ann, who suggests I direct a question to my partner to enable him to focus.

There's much panic and nervous laughter, but we muddle along somehow. 'Will my writing

flow?' I ask Bob. 'Patience', 'protection' and 'need' are what the stones I've chosen represent. Bob gamely interprets them with his own twist of insight. 'You're working too hard,' he says. 'You have to chill out.'

I've found the day a fascinating introduction to a world of mystical symbolism, one that I can see requires serious practice and dedication to fully grasp. Being the impatient sort that I am, it's probably not best suited to me as a divination tool. But the funny thing is, when I get home, I idly draw out a rune from the velvet pouch – and what you do know, it's Sowelu, the symbol of wholeness linked to the ruby gem, just as it appeared in my meditation. Are the runes trying to tell me something? I wonder... SPIRIT & DESTINY

• Ann O'Keife charges around £25 for a 30-minute reading, £35 for 40 minutes and £25 for an interpretation of your name. Workshops are £40. For details of upcoming workshops, call 01273-871524 or visit www.livinglifefully.net

