

Odin

An extract from *Norse Mythology* by Neil Gaiman

The highest and oldest of all the gods is Odin.

Odin knows many secrets.
He gave an eye for wisdom.
More than that, for
knowledge of runes and for
power, he sacrificed himself
to himself.



He hung from the world-tree, Yggdrasil, hung there for nine nights. His side was pierced by the point of a spear, which wounded him gravely. The winds clutched at him, buffeted his body as it hung. Nothing did he eat for nine days or nine nights, nothing did he drink. He was alone there, in pain, the light of his life slowly going out.

He was cold, in agony, and on the point of death his sacrifice bore dark fruit: in the ecstasy of his agony he looked down, and the runes were revealed to him. He knew them, and understood them and their power. The rope broke then, and he fell, screaming, from the tree.

Now he understood the magic. Now the world was his to control. Odin has many names. He is the all-father, the lord of the slain, the gallows god. He is the god of cargoes and of prisoners. He is called Grimnir and Third. He has different names in every country (for he is worshipped in different forms and in many tongues, but it is always Odin they worship.)

He travels from place to place in disguise, to see the world as people see it. When he walks among us, he does so as a tall man, wearing a cloak and hat.

He has two ravens, whom he calls Huginn and Muninn, which mean “thought” and “memory”. These birds fly back and forth across the world, seeking news and bringing Odin all the knowledge of things. They perch on his shoulders and whisper into his ears.

When he sits in his high throne at Hlidskjalf, he observes all things, wherever they may be. Nothing can be hidden from him.

He brought war into the world: battles are begun by throwing a spear at a hostile army, dedicating the battle and its deaths to Odin. If you survive in battle, it is with Odin’s grace, and if you fall it is because he has betrayed you.

If you fall bravely in war the Valkyries, beautiful battle-maidens who collect the souls of the noble dead, will take you and bring you to the hall known as Valhalla. He will be waiting for you in Valhalla, and there you will drink and fight and feast and battle, with Odin as your leader.