

Symbols and Their Meanings: From Ancient Runes to Modern Icons

Sleep Token's Runes and Symbolism

Sleep Token, a modern metal band known for its mystique, has developed its own cipher alphabet and runic imagery as part of its lore ¹. The band's geometric logo appears at first to be abstract lines and an arch, but fans discovered it hides runic letters – including the Roman numerals used as the band members' names and even the letters of "Sleep Token" itself ². According to the band, the logo is composed of **runes influenced by the entity "Sleep,"** fitting their occult aesthetic ³.

Notably, Sleep Token's community has theorized that the logo is a **bind-rune** formed from symbols in the **Elder Futhark**, the oldest Norse runic alphabet ⁴. Each rune in Elder Futhark carries a name and an inherent meaning beyond its phonetic value ⁵. Fans have identified several specific runes hidden in the design, each contributing symbolic significance: - **Dagaz (ᛏ)** – meaning "*day*" or *dawn*, an auspicious rune of awakening and positive change, heralding increased well-being and happiness ⁶. - **Tiwaz (ᛞ)** – representing the god *Tyr*, associated with *justice*, honor and self-sacrifice. It signifies setting clear goals and the courage to overcome obstacles in pursuit of one's higher mission ⁷. - **Uruz (ᚱ)** – symbolizing the wild *aurochs* (ox), associated with raw *strength* and endurance. Esoterically, Uruz embodies a powerful life force – a union of masculine and feminine energies (a yin-yang balance) that "charges" a person with vitality and drive ⁸. - **Eihwaz (ᚼ)** – symbol of the *yew tree*, signifying the balance of opposing forces and inner *transformation*. It represents the development of inner strength and wisdom over time, achieving harmony between one's visible and hidden traits ⁹.

These layered runes align with Sleep Token's themes of duality and hidden meaning. In essence, the band has taken ancient runic symbols – each revered as carriers of luck, protection, or personal growth in Norse tradition ¹⁰ – and woven them into a modern musical mythos.

Norse Elder Futhark: Letters with Power

The **Elder Futhark** is the oldest known runic alphabet, used by Germanic peoples between the 2nd–8th centuries AD. It contains 24 runes, and unlike modern alphabets, each rune was more than just a sound – it had an *individual name and symbolic meaning* ⁵ ¹⁰. Historically, these runes were carved on jewelry, amulets, weapons, and stones, and later generations imbued them with mystical significance as well ¹⁰.

Each rune's name often corresponds to a natural object or concept, hinting at its essence. For example, the first rune **Fehu (ᚼ)** means "cattle" or **livestock**, symbolizing *wealth, abundance and prosperity* (since owning cattle meant wealth) ¹¹. The second, **Uruz (ᚱ)**, means "wild ox," representing *strength, courage and untamed potential* ¹¹. Another rune, **Wunjo (ᚹ)**, means "joy," standing for *pleasure, harmony, and success* ¹².

It's clear each rune had a rich conceptual role. The rune names in Proto-Germanic were linked to gods or everyday life (e.g. **Tiwaz** named after Tyr the war-god signifies justice and victory, **Sowilo** (𐌱) meaning "sun" signifies honor and success, etc. ¹³ ¹⁴). Ancient peoples sometimes inscribed runes as **charms** – for protection, luck, or invoking the rune's essence in their lives ¹⁵ ¹⁰ . However, in their original period the primary function of runes was *writing*: they spelled out words, and using them for magical or divinatory purposes was a later development in the medieval and modern imagination ¹⁵ .

Even so, modern enthusiasts and neopagans often use Elder Futhark runes for divination, drawing on those age-old meanings. Runes can be cast like tarot; each symbol's presence (upright or reversed) is interpreted as advice or insight – a practice inspired by the rune's ancient lore (for instance, **Algiz** (Y) meaning "elk" is read as a sign of protection). In summary, the Elder Futhark runes bridge language and lore: they were letters that also carried the *conceptual power* of the word they named.

Warhammer Eldar Runes as Living Concepts

In the Warhammer 40,000 universe, the alien **Eldar (Aeldari)** use a writing system of runes and glyphs that exemplifies symbols as *pure concepts*. Each Eldar rune is **not a single letter as in human alphabets, but a whole idea or phrase** in visual form ¹⁶ . The Aeldari language is highly psychic and context-dependent – symbols can convey different nuances in writing, in divination, or in heraldry ¹⁷ . This means an Eldar rune on a craftworld banner, the same rune used in a Farseer's vision, and another used in a piece of text might all carry related but subtly shifted meanings, based on context and intent ¹⁷ .

Over decades of Warhammer lore, Games Workshop has published many Eldar runes representing everything from military units to philosophical concepts. For example, each **Craftworld** (the spacefaring nations of the Eldar) has its own unique rune. These are often given poetic interpretations: the rune of *Craftworld Biel-Tan* is described as **"The Reborn" or "Rebirth of Ancient Days,"** reflecting that faction's cultural theme of restoring a lost glory ¹⁸ . Likewise, there are runes for warrior aspects (e.g. the Dire Avengers Aspect rune), for Eldar deities (a rune for *Cegorach*, the Laughing God), for numerals, and more ¹⁹ ²⁰ .

Eldar **seer councils** use carved spirit-runestones marked with such runes to focus their psychic powers – essentially casting runes to tell the future. In-game lore notes that Eldar Farseers toss inscribed stones and read the resulting pattern to discern fate's threads ¹⁹ ²¹ . Because each rune encapsulates a concept (like "betrayal" or "healing" or a specific mythic reference), interpreting their alignment is an art. For instance, a rune meaning "path" might warn an Eldar seer of a journey or decision ahead.

It's interesting that Warhammer's creators intentionally made Eldar runes **aesthetic and esoteric**. They are inspired partly by real-world runic and hieroglyphic writing but are fictional and complex by design (so much that even human scholars in the lore struggle to comprehend them). This enriches the world-building: human characters describe Eldar script as an elegant flow of ideas more than a straightforward alphabet ²² ¹⁶ . In short, the Eldar system shows an invented example where symbols truly *are* language – each rune a holistic unit of meaning, deeply tied to the psyche and culture of its users.

Druidic Ogham: The Celtic Tree Alphabet

Moving from fiction back to history, the **Ogham** script (often called the Celtic or Druidic Tree Alphabet) is an early medieval writing system used in Ireland and Britain around the 4th–6th centuries AD ²³. Ogham is intriguing because of its form and the lore around it. It consists of **20 letters** (later expanded to 25), usually carved as strokes along the edge of a stone or piece of wood. Each character is composed of a vertical line (the “stem”) with a combination of notches or short lines (“twigs”) branching off at different angles. An Ogham inscription is read vertically from bottom to top (as if a tree trunk growing upwards) ²⁴.

Crucially, each Ogham letter is traditionally associated with the name of a **tree or plant**, hence the nickname “tree alphabet.” In Irish tradition and druidic teaching, these letters were not arbitrary: they formed a kind of mnemonic linked to nature. For example, the first letter **Beith** (letter *B*) means “birch” ²⁵. The next, **Luis** (*L*), is often linked to “rowan” or “flame” (depending on interpretation) ²⁶. Others include **Dair** (*D*) for “oak,” **Coll** (*C*) for “hazel,” **Tinne** (*T*) for “holly,” and so on ²⁴ ²⁵. This suggests the Ogham was used as a secret knowledge system by the learned class (filid or druids) – each letter could carry *symbolic druidic meanings* through its tree association (birch for new beginnings, oak for strength, etc., according to later folklore).

Historically, however, most surviving Ogham inscriptions are simple: names carved on gravestones or boundary markers (e.g. “X son of Y”). We have over 400 Ogham stones recorded in Ireland and western Britain ²³. The **Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids** notes that in myth the alphabet was created by Ogma, a Celtic god of eloquence, as a secret script ²⁷. Scholarly theories propose Ogham may have been invented by early Christian era scholars or druids to encode the Irish language in a way not easily understood by Roman or other outsiders.

Today, Ogham enjoys revival as a cultural symbol. Each Ogham character is still taught with its *tree-name*, and people use them decoratively (for instance, engraving names or words in Ogham on jewelry) to celebrate Irish heritage. Though no longer used in daily life, the **mystique of Ogham** endures – as an alphabet that literally grew out of trees and lore, blending a straightforward writing system with layers of Celtic symbolism.

Tolkien’s Elvish Scripts: Tengwar and Cirth

J.R.R. Tolkien, a linguist at heart, created several **Elvish writing systems** for his Middle-earth stories. The two most prominent are **Tengwar** and **Cirth**:

- **Tengwar** – This is the elegant script of curved lines and dots often seen in *The Lord of the Rings* (for example, the inscription on the One Ring or in the book’s appendices). *Tengwar* is a **featural alphabet** invented by the elf Fëanor within the fiction (and by Tolkien in reality) ²⁸. The word “Tengwar” literally means “letters” in the Quenya tongue ²⁹. Its letters correspond to sounds, and the system is flexible: Tolkien devised different *modes* of Tengwar to write different languages (Quenya, Sindarin, etc.) by altering how the characters map to sounds ³⁰. In quenya mode, for instance, vowels are indicated by diacritic marks (called *tehtar*) above the consonant letters, whereas in the Sindarin mode used in Beleriand, vowels were given full letters.

The key point is that Tengwar is **phonetic, not ideographic**. Unlike runes or Ogham, a Tengwar character usually doesn’t carry a specific meaning on its own – it’s more like our alphabet. However, the script has its

own beauty and logic: similar shapes denote related sounds (e.g. one basic shape might signify a T-type sound, and by adding a curl it becomes a D-sound, etc.) ³¹. Within Tolkien's world, this writing system became "the most prominent writing system of Arda, used by a variety of races through the Ages" ²⁸. Elves, Men, and others all adopted Tengwar because of its adaptability and visual appeal. Fans who learn it can write English in Tengwar quite readily – it's a functional alphabet.

- **Cirth** – In Tolkien's lore, the Cirth are **runic letters** originally devised by the Grey Elves (Sindar) and later used by Dwarves. "Cirth" (Sindarin *cirith*, plural of *certh*) literally means "runes" ³². Tolkien intentionally based Cirth on real runes: they look angular and were designed for carving on wood or stone. The *Angerthas Moria* and *Angerthas Erebor* are variations of Cirth used by Dwarves to write their Khuzdul language (as seen for example on Balin's tomb in *Moria*, which is inscribed in Cirth runes).

The Cirth, like actual runic alphabets, have letters corresponding to sounds (for example, ✎ might represent *D*, ✎, etc., in one mode) ³³. In-universe, Tolkien explains that Cirth were developed first for Elvish, then expanded by the loremaster Daeron and later by Dwarves to accommodate other languages' sounds ³³. While not every **certh** carries an inherent meaning (they're primarily phonetic), some names are given: e.g. the rune *run* is called "G" (Gimel) in the *legendarium*. Importantly, Cirth was largely superseded by Tengwar among Elves, but Dwarves held onto it out of tradition – it suited their carving craft and secretive nature ³⁴. Thus, by the Third Age in Middle-earth, one mostly sees Cirth on Dwarven relics or old inscriptions (like Thrór's Map in *The Hobbit* uses Cirth to spell English words).

In summary, Tolkien's **Elvish scripts** show two sides of constructed writing: **Tengwar**, a graceful, curvilinear script operating as a full-fledged and flexible alphabet; and **Cirth**, a runic system with a more limited, historic role. Neither script assigns meanings to symbols the way real occult runes or hieroglyphs do – their primary purpose is to depict language. However, because Tolkien created entire languages and histories behind them, these alphabets have a cultural aura. For instance, writing something in Tengwar can evoke the "Elven elegance" and wisdom, while writing in Cirth feels "ancient and secret." The *appearance* of the letters complements the lore of the peoples who use them, which is a testament to Tolkien's depth of world-building.

The Greek Alphabet: From Ox's Head to Omega

The **Greek alphabet** is one of the world's oldest still in use, and it illustrates how symbols evolve from literal pictures to abstract letters. It was derived from the Phoenician alphabet around the 8th century BC. The Phoenician letters were originally stylized drawings with names that were actual words in their language. The Greeks borrowed these, adapting the shapes and names to their own sounds. In doing so, they created the first true alphabet (with vowels). Many letter names in Greek have *no meaning in Greek itself* but come from those old Semitic names – which do have meanings.

For example, **Alpha (A, α)** comes from Phoenician **aleph**, which meant "ox" and was drawn as an ox's head in ancient pictographic scripts ³⁵. **Beta (B, β)** comes from **beth**, meaning "house" ³⁶. In Phoenician, aleph and beth were the first two letters (giving us the word "alphabet"), and their shapes originally resembled an ox's head and a house floorplan respectively. As the symbols passed into Greek and were rotated or simplified, they lost their pictographic form, but kept the names (Aleph > Alpha, Beth > Beta) ³⁵ ³⁶. Over time, the meanings of the names faded, and the letters were simply letters.

The Greek alphabet has 24 main letters (Alpha to Omega). In classical times it also had a few extra characters that dropped out of use but survived as **Greek numerals**. For instance, the letter **Digamma (Ϝ)**, originally representing a “w” sound, was not used in later classical Greek writing but continued to be used as the numeral for 6 (often written as Ϛ, called *stigma* in that context) ³⁷. Likewise **Koppa (Ϟ)** was an obsolete letter used as the numeral for 90, and **Sampi (Ϸ)** for 900 ³⁷. Thus, even within the Greek symbol set, we see characters doubling as both phonetic signs and symbols for concepts (numbers). The fact that **Alpha and Omega** are the first and last letters led to their use in a metaphoric sense of “the beginning and the end” (famously in the New Testament phrase “I am the Alpha and the Omega”).

Practical uses: The Greek letters have been reused for many purposes in the real world. They are ubiquitous in mathematics, science, and engineering to denote constants, variables, and units. For example, **π (pi)** represents the ratio 3.14159... ³⁸, **Ω (omega)** is used as the unit of electrical resistance (ohm), and **α, β, γ** often denote angles or coefficients. Fraternities and sororities use Greek letters as organizational names (e.g. Alpha Beta Gamma). In all these cases, the letters are chosen for their traditional order or associations (alpha = 1, beta = 2, etc.), not for any inherent meaning of “ox” or “house” – those ancient meanings are mostly forgotten except by historians. Still, the legacy is visible in the very shapes and sequences of our alphabets today: the Latin alphabet we use is a direct descendant of Greek (via Etruscan and Roman), so when we write **A, B, C...** we’re essentially writing evolved versions of aleph, beth, gimel – the ox, the house, the camel, and so on, transformed by millennia into abstract symbols of sound.

Modern Symbols and Punctuation: Everyday Meaning in Signs

Beyond alphabets and runes, our written communication relies on **numerous symbols** that carry specific meanings. The user provided a list of many such symbols, ranging from currency signs to mathematical and typographical marks. Let’s unpack a few:

- **Currency Symbols:** Many currencies are represented by unique symbols that often derive from historic scribal abbreviations. For example, ₹ is the rupee sign for India, incorporating the Devanagari “ra” character with a horizontal bar. ₤ was the symbol for the European Currency Unit (ECU), a precursor to the euro. ₰ is the **German penny** (Pfennig) sign, used in old German accounting. These symbols concisely denote monetary units. More familiar ones include \$ for dollars (originating from a stylized “P^S” for Spanish peso or the figure 8 for pieces-of-eight), € for euros (a stylized E), £ for pounds (an old script “L” from Latin *libra*), and ¥ for yen or yuan. Each currency symbol becomes a kind of shorthand for economic value, recognized globally.
- **Punctuation and Typographic Marks:** Our texts are sprinkled with non-letter symbols that guide meaning and expression. For instance, the **interrobang (‽)** is an inventive punctuation mark that combines a **question mark** and an **exclamation point** into one symbol. It is used to convey a shocked or rhetorical question (e.g. “You did what?”). While not standard in formal writing, it captures a tone that is both querying and exclaiming in a single glyph. Similarly, “?!” is a less common paired punctuation mark (essentially “?!” in one character) also meant to express disbelief or urgency in a question.

Another archaic mark is the **Tironian et (7)** – this symbol, which looks like a seven-shaped squiggle, was a shorthand for the Latin word “et” meaning “and”. In medieval Irish and Latin manuscripts, 7 was used much like & (the ampersand) is today. Speaking of the **ampersand (&)**, it originated as a merged ligature of the letters “E” and “t” from Latin *et*. The **reference mark (⌘)** is another interesting one: it appears in some Asian

texts and older typography to indicate a footnote or reference, much like an asterisk (*) or dagger does. It resembles a cross-shaped cluster of small black wedges.

We encounter **daggers (†)** and **double-daggers (‡)** as well, usually to indicate footnotes or obelisms. The dagger symbol † in texts often denotes a footnote (after the asterisk has been used) or can indicate † next to a person's name that they have passed away. The **double vertical line (||)** can mean a variety of things: in math or physics it denotes parallel lines or norms, in writing it might indicate a line break or a pause stronger than a comma. The **musical eighth note (♪)** is a universally recognized sign for music or song.

- **Arrows and Technical Symbols:** Unicode contains a vast array of arrow symbols beyond the basic ← ↑ → ↓. These arrows convey precise directions or relationships. For example, ↔ is a left-right arrow with a stroke through it, meaning “not connected” or “not equivalent” (often used to denote negation of ↔ or ≡ in math). ⇔ is a bidirectional double arrow meaning “if and only if” or logical equivalence in logic. There are curly arrows (↻, ↺) indicating rotation or cyclicity – e.g. ↺ is an anticlockwise open-circle arrow (often used for “undo” icons or to indicate rotation counterclockwise). ↪ is a rightwards arrow with a loop, which might imply a redirect or “jump to” some reference. We also have **harpoons** like ⇌ or ⇐ used in chemical equations to show reversible reactions, and fancy squiggly arrows like ↪ which might show a specific kind of implication or just serve as a flourish in diagrams.

In the provided list, there were some specific arrows: ↵ (downwards arrow with corner leftwards) usually signifies a *carriage return* or newline (it looks like an arrow making an L-shape). ↗ and ↖ (upwards arrows with a right or left turn) indicate merging lines or entering lines. These are often used in diagrams to show something like “go up and then right” or vice versa. ← and → are arrows pointing to a vertical bar, meaning “tab” or “indent” (leftwards or rightwards to bar) – essentially indicating alignment to margins. There’s even ↗ (upwards white arrow on pedestal with vertical bar) which is an obscure symbol that might indicate an *arrow with a stand*, possibly used in some technical contexts like old typesetting or traffic signage standards. The variety is enormous, but each arrow variant was created to remove ambiguity in technical writing, so one can exactly denote the direction or action required.

- **Geometric Shapes and Miscellanea:** The user’s list also showed some square symbols like ◻, ◼, ▤. These are part of the geometric shapes block. ◻ is a white square (in some fonts with rounded corners) often used to depict an unchecked checkbox or as a placeholder square. ◼ is a white square containing a smaller black square – it can be seen as a *checked* checkbox or simply a decorative symbol for a stop button, etc.. ▤ is a square with a vertical fill pattern. Such symbols might be used in questionnaires, legends, or just as generic icons. A filled black square ◼ is commonly used to indicate a solid stop or to visually punctuate the end of a section (in older books, a ◼ at the end of an article signified “the end”).

Additionally, certain **editorial marks** appeared: ∪ called “close up”, which is a proofreading symbol instructing to close a gap (it’s like an upward conciliation mark). The **undertie (͡)** is used in phonetics to tie two letters together into a diphthong or liaison. And the **per ten thousand sign (‰)** is a specialist symbol used in finance to denote parts per ten thousand, i.e. one basis point = 0.01% = 1‰.

As we can see, each of these modern symbols, though less steeped in mysticism than ancient runes, has a clear *purpose or meaning* in context. They are the traffic signs and shorthand of written communication, guiding us or giving us information at a glance. While one wouldn’t normally list them all out, being

confronted with a big block of them (as the user did) highlights just how rich and varied our symbolic vocabulary is.

Conclusion

From the secretive runes of Sleep Token's lore to the conceptual hieroglyphs of Warhammer's Eldar, from the sacred trees of the Ogham to the crafted scripts of Tolkien's elves, and finally to the utilitarian symbols on our keyboards – humanity (and our imaginations) have continually invented **symbols to represent meaning**. Some systems, like runes and Ogham, began as alphabets and accrued mystical meanings over time. Others, like music notes or mathematical symbols, were devised to encapsulate ideas that words struggle to capture concisely. Even our everyday alphabet letters carry echoes of ancient meanings (an "A" was once an ox!).

Every symbol has a story: a cultural or practical reason it looks the way it does. By studying them, we glimpse how people think and what they value – whether it's an offering to a deity encoded in a bind-rune, or simply the need to ask an excited question ("P") in a single character. Symbols are humanity's shorthand for complex concepts, and their power lies in being **understood at a glance**, often across language barriers. From Sleep Token to Eldar, from druidic sigils to Elvish scripts, from Earth's oldest writings to modern signs, these symbols form a rich tapestry of meaning that transcends time and spoken language.

Sources:

- Sleep Token lore and logo analysis 2 3 6 8
- Elder Futhark rune names and meanings 11 12 10
- Aeldari (Eldar) runes and language description 16 18
- Ogham usage and association with trees 23 25
- Tengwar and Cirth (Tolkien's scripts) background 28 32
- Phoenician origins of Greek letters 35 36
- Greek numerals (digamma, koppa, sampi) 37
- Unicode names of various punctuation and symbols

1 2 3 Sleep Token Logo and symbol, meaning, history, PNG, brand

<https://1000logos.net/sleep-token-logo/>

4 5 15 The logo and the myths behind it — Lore of Sleep Token

<https://loreofsleeptoken.com/logo>

6 7 8 9 10 Sleep Token's main symbol has blown my mind. : r/SleepToken

https://www.reddit.com/r/SleepToken/comments/qfdq2q/sleep_tokens_main_symbol_has_blowed_my_mind/

11 12 13 14 The Elder Futhark Runes And Their Meanings — SHIELDMAIDEN'S SANCTUM

<http://www.shieldmaidenssanctum.com/blog/2019/3/12/the-elder-futhark-runes-and-their-meanings>

16 17 22 Aeldari Lexicon | Warhammer 40k Wiki | Fandom

https://warhammer40k.fandom.com/wiki/Aeldari_Lexicon

18 The Eldar Language: Runes & Symbols

<http://theeldarlanguageamelannar.blogspot.com/p/runes-symbols.html>

19 20 21 **eldar.arhicks.co.uk: Eldar Runes & Symbols**

https://eldar.arhicks.co.uk/miscellaneous/eldar_runes.php

23 24 25 27 **Ogham, The Ancient Irish "Tree" Alphabet**

https://www.myirishjeweler.com/blog/ogham-the-ancient-irish-tree-alphabet/?srsltid=AfmBOoqSYGdPYJnp-u7xuE-brE1qR_U8ak_WiWYri8CAEN9xfHe3Syc8

26 **Ogham - Wikipedia**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogham>

28 29 30 31 **Tengwar - Tolkien Gateway**

<https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Tengwar>

32 33 34 **Cirth - Wikipedia**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cirth>

35 36 **Phoenician alphabet - Wikipedia**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenician_alphabet

37 **Greek Numerals -- from Wolfram MathWorld**

<https://mathworld.wolfram.com/GreekNumerals.html>

38 **Greek letters used in mathematics, science, and engineering**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_letters_used_in_mathematics,_science,_and_engineering