

Norse Creation Myth

At the beginning of time, nothing existed. The earth, the gentle oceans lapping up against its shores, man and animal had not yet been created. Only a great yawning abyss was present in the void of nothingness. Out of the abyss, a land of eternal mist, darkness and terrible cold was formed to the North; to all beings, this land was known as Niflheim. In the midst of the Dark Land surged a fountain known as Hvergelmir, from which spread the freezing glacial waters of twelve rivers throughout the void. To the South lay the land of Fire, Muspellsheim; an infernal region of unbearable, unsatiable heat and flames. From there poured rivers of fire whose waters contained a bitter poison which, little by little, gathered and became a solid mass. From the ice flowing from the North, this mass of venom was covered in a thick layer of frost. With the heat blowing from the lands of Fire, the frost began to melt, and the giant Ymir was born from poison and ice.

Ymir became the father of all giants. On the night of his creation, he fell asleep near the lands of the South and became completely bathed in sweat: from under his left arm were born man and woman, both giants like him. At the same time, the block of ice from which he was born gave forth the great cow Audumla, the wet-nurse of the giants. Ymir refreshed himself from her udders at the beginning of every day, which flowed with life-giving milk. Audumla began to lick the salt from the ice to nourish herself, and the heat of her tongue and breath yielded first the hair, then the head, and finally the entire body of a being whose name was Buri. Buri had a son whose name was Bor, who went on to marry Ymir's daughter, Bestla. With her, he fathered the three gods Odin, Vili and Ve.

The three sons of the Giants' race at once began to rebel against their creators, which ended in the annihilation of the Giants. They first killed the aged Ymir. So much blood flowed from his shattered body that the abyss was filled with it. All of the other Giants drowned in the blood, save Beregelmir and his wife, who managed to launch a small boat and escape; it is from them that a new race of giants issued.

After the death of Ymir, the sons of Bor raised his body from the depths of the sea of blood and created earth with it, which became known as Midgard or the 'Middle Abode', for it was situated halfway between Niflheim and Muspellsheim. The flesh of Ymir became the land on which we live, and his blood became the boundless ocean. From his bones, the gods created the mountains; from his hair, they created the trees. They took the skull of Ymir and raised it up on four pillars of bone and made it into the Vault of the Heavens, in which they kept the sparks of fire that escaped from Muspellsheim. These sparks became the sun, moon and the countless stars in the night sky, their course throughout the sky was regulated and kept constant, creating night and day; summer and winter. With the sun in the sky, it threw its golden rays across the barren earth, and the first blades of green grass appeared.

Soon other gods came to join Odin, Vili and Ve. They seemed to appear out of the abyss, having no father or mother. Together the gods created their dwelling place, which became known as Asgard 'The Dwelling of the Aesir', in which each of them have a grand mansion. This land was created above Midgard, so that the gods could keep watch over the world that they were creating. To get back and forth between Midgard and Asgard they created the great Rainbow Bridge known as Bifröst, which was guarded by Heimdall, the god of Bifröst.

As the gods gathered, they deliberated on the manner in which the earth might best be peopled. In the rotting corpse of Ymir, grubs were beginning to form. The gods changed all of the grubs into the dwarves, giving them human form and imbuing them with reason. Because the dwarves were born from the flesh of Ymir, the gods decided that they shall continue to live as they had since their birth, hidden from the light of the sun in the flesh of their creator. Soon the light of the sun became deadly to them, turning them into stone at the slightest exposure. There were no women among the dwarves; hence they were not able to have children. Therefore, the gods gave the dwarves two princes, who had the ability to mould new dwarves out of the stones of the earth. Thus the race of dwarves endlessly continued.

Men were created from the vegetable world by the gods Odin, Hoenir and Lodur. One day the three gods were travelling across the barren earth and came across two trees with life-less twisted trunks. Odin shaped each of the trees into a man and a woman, and gave each of them breath. Hoenir gave them a soul and the ability to reason. Lodur gave them warmth and the fresh colours of life. The man was called Ask and his wife was Embla, and they proceeded to create the race of man.

The land of Niflheim (or Niflhel) became the land where the dead would go after their time on earth had elapsed. It was known as a land of eternal sleet and frost. The goddess Hel became the ruler of this domain, and her faithful hound, Garm, guarded the entrance to prevent the dead from ever leaving and the living from entering.

Out of the chaos of the abyss rose the three Norns, goddesses of Fate. Their names were Urd (Past), Verdandi (Present), and Skuld (Future). Urd appeared in the form of a shrivelled old hag, while Verdandi was a woman in her prime. Skuld was a beautiful young maiden. Together the three Norns cared for the Life-Tree, Yggdrasil until the day of Ragnarok when it is destined to die.

After the creation of the different level, or planes of existence, the great ash tree Yggdrasil began to grow and connect all of the levels. Its first root form in the land of Niflheim, from this root bubbled the spring of Hvergelmir, the source of the primitive rivers. The second root of the great tree extended into the land of the giants, covered with frost and ice. This is where the fountain Mimir flowed. This spring was a source of great wisdom from which Odin desired to drink, however the price demanded for a few draughts was the loss of one of his eyes. The third root extended all the way up into the heavens, and issued the spring Urd. This is where the Norns resided, drawing water from this well at the beginning of each day and sprinkling it on the roots of Yggdrasil so that it would not wither away.

In the highest branches of the tree sat a golden cock, which kept a constant vigilance of the horizon to warn the gods whenever their ancient enemies, the Giants, were preparing to attack them. Under Yggdrasil, the horn of the god Heimdall was hidden, whose sound would announce the final battle of the Aesir against all whom wished to cause their downfall. Near the trunk of the tree was a place of eternal peace, where the god would meet daily to render justice. In its branches the goat Heidrun browsed; she gave Odin's warriors the milk with which they were nourished.

There existed demons that would constantly strive to destroy Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life. A cunning monster, the serpent Nidhög, sat at the base of the third root and gnawed at it ceaselessly. Four stags wandered at the base of the tree and would nibble off all of the young green shoots, preventing further growth of the tree. Thankfully, due to the careful attention given by the Norns, the tree was able to flourish.

At the time of the creation of the world, it was foretold that it would not be eternal. In the Day of the End, Ragnarok, the earth would be torn asunder in a mighty battle between the gods of the Aesir and the Giants. Great battles of might and magic would be fought, reducing all life to ashes. Yggdrasil would fall, sending the layers of the world crashing down. The hound Garm, guarding the entrance to Niflheim would flee in terror, and the dead will escape, rising again to the earth as plagues and disease to fight along side the gods. In the end of the battle, everything would be destroyed; the gods, giants, men and animals would cease to exist.