

The legend of the creation of the Universe

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Part 1: Before the Gods

In the beginning of everything, ahum, sorry ... there has been no beginning: no time was yet at hand to start anything! No space, no time, no light and obviously no Gods. This tale says how the Gods and our Universe came into existence. Well, you see that it is not an easy task to understand in which way have been created our big Universe and our tiny world, the planet we call Earth. I'll try to do my best to make it simple, listen carefully.

However, four primal forces were. One was a huge heat, called *Muspell*, Earth-harm or End-of-World, the other was a huge cold, *Niflhel*, Dark-mist. You can imagine Earth-harm is the force that destroyed the 'Universe before' and this is why it is also called End-of-World. You can imagine Dark-mist is a leftover of the 'Universe before' in which some mist still existed in such a frozen state that it was stuck inside Dark-mist. These two forces, we however cannot really imagine them, and I cannot tell you where they might have been coming from. Maybe someone else, more knowledgeable than me, will be able to tell you the tale of the birth of the primal forces, I can't. I can only tell you how space, time, light, life and Gods came into existence.



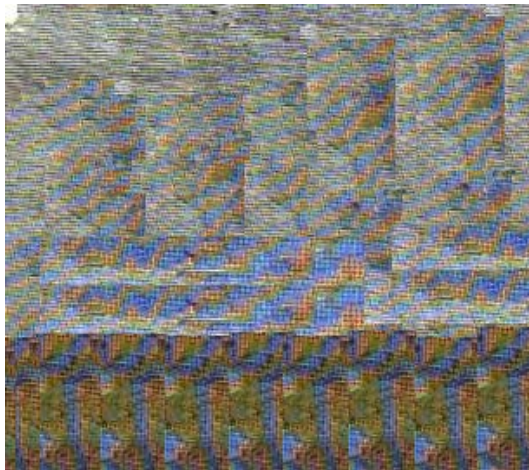
Muspell or *Earth-Harm*

and



Niflhel or *Dark-mist*

In order to speak of the third, even more mysterious primal force, we have to imagine that Earth-harm and Dark-mist were, so to say, floating inside the third primal force, namely emptiness, called *Ginnunga-gap*, Huge-gap. I have no words available to speak of its size or shape, and its content was emptiness. You can see it as being an ever ready force that is passively waiting for something to happen, and that will grab any occasion for vanishing by becoming something.



Ginnunga-gap

The fourth primordial force, we believe to understand it by naming it. We call it Fate. The fate of the universe is still more obscure than our fates. It drives all the forces, the creations and the creature on earth, including our Gods. Fate decrees that nothing can be at rest for ever and, sooner or later, everything has to change, to evolve for the best or the worse.

During more than an eternity of eternities, everything had been, was and will be has I told you. The three primal forces of our Universe that is Heat, Cold and Emptiness seemed to be happy to stay quiet in this state of the things. The fourth, Fate, seemed to be sleeping. Nothing, however, can escape Fate, including Fate itself.

This is how two highly improbable and wonderful events happened in order to start the gigantic engine we call our Universe. Both were caused by some interaction between Earth-harm and Dark-mist.

The first wonder is that water and time came into existence. Which was first, Time or Water, we do not know. When some of the frozen ice inside Dark-mist became water everything was changed, and a before and an after this major event came in existence, that is, Time was. With time, a kind of 'baby' space started to exist as well since this water was taking some place in Huge-gap. Nevertheless, this was very far from Space as we know it.

And here is how Space, our space, was built: Some of the water being nearer to Earth-harm would become normal mist outside of Dark-mist. Thus a first layer of frozen mist, that is frost, fell in Huge-gap and this first layer was the base of all space. Layer after layer of frost, built one over the other, started to stack up. After yet another eternity, the layers of frost filled up the whole of Huge-Gap and Space became similar to the way we know it now. It still had no right and left, nor up and down, though!

The second wonder is that Light and Life came into existence when Water flowed upon and inside the frozen frost. It happened that a few sparks flew out of Earth-harm and melt the frozen surface of the frost. These drops were really warm and quickly run over the frost, and quickly slipped in the layers of frost. Light was born from the swiftly running water at the surface of the frost, and Life was born from the drops that went inside the layers of frost. In the old tongue spoken by our Gods, the root word of the word quick (*cwic* or *kvik*) means 'living' and has derivatives that mean 'something quick'. As you see, the tongue of the Gods says that life and quickness are deeply intertwined.

“You, young people who listen to me, look how much quick you are, look how slow is the old man telling this tale! This is because life is slowly running out of my body and my soul prepares itself to go back to the frozen waters it came from. In the Spring, Light comes back and you can see Life pouring out of the trees dark bark in the shape of delicately green leaves and white or pink blossoming.”

This very early light, we call it Audhumla, the primal cow. This seems funny to us who live in towns but think that Light kind of licks the surface of ice and makes it melt. We can also say that Light 'feeds upon' ice when it makes it melt. Light brings food to us. The ancient texts tell us exactly the same of Audhumla, the primal light/cow: She fed by licking the icy frost with her warm and rough tongue, and her milk was food to the very first living beings. This is why many call her Dawn, the very first light.

“When I was a young boy, I used to shoulder off cows' large bellies to give room under them to my stool and pail, and pulled out of their full teats powerful jets of warm milk. This is perhaps why I so much love the image of a primal Dawn/Light being a cow. I was used to their smell as well, which became nowadays so repulsive because they no longer live in meadows and clean cowsheds but in disgusting cow-factories.”

Anyhow, be it a cow or dawn, this light was very far from the one we are used to. It was rather similar to what we call now 'twilight' and since Stars and Sun did not exist yet, imagine it being dim as the light of the Inuit winter.

Now, what about life?

The water trickling inside the frost became colder and colder as it went and this icy water is where Life took place: One enormous being, called a Giant, and a smaller one, called the “first godly creature” were created from this dripping cold water. The first Giant was big enough to partly stay out of the frost. He stretched and went to the surface of the frost all by himself. The first godly creature was too small for that and stayed buried inside the frost. Thus, the first Giant, named Ymir, which means ‘Oldest-Giant’, came to active life before the first godly creature, and we shall speak at first of the Giants.

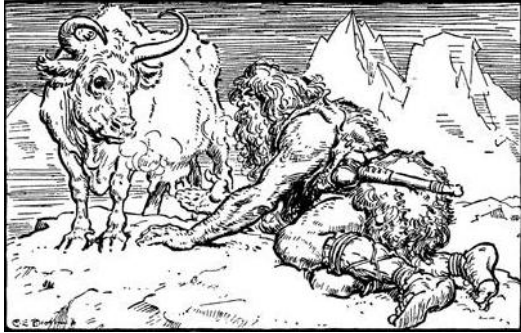


Ymir was fed with Audhumla’s milk. He gave birth by himself to the first generation of giants. It is said that,

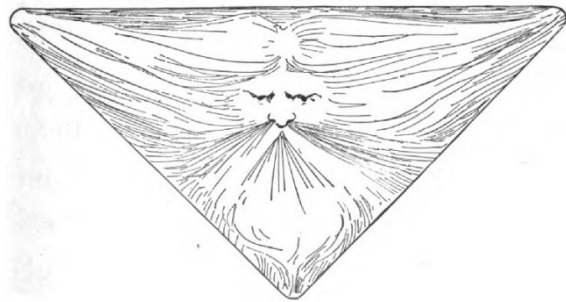
“out of the armpits of the Frost-Giant, were together born a boy and a girl.

One of his legs made a six-headed son to the other leg.”

So you see that Ymir is not really a ‘he’ as we know it. ‘He’ contained the future of both sexes. Ymir’s kin, the Frostgiants, since then have always been of three sorts: monsters of both sexes, often called Trolls and she-Trolls, very large males of human appearance and high intelligence, and strong and beautiful Giant maiden. Let me tell you a bit ahead of time that these beautiful Giantesses attracted a lot of attention from the Gods to come. Even though they obviously were of different ‘races’, our Gods are not racist, that is, they certainly treated the Giant maiden with admiration and lust but also with a deep respect.



Ymir and Audhumla



Ymir

Meanwhile, Audhumla went on licking the frost, in other words, the Light went on melting it. After some time, she had licked enough of it to reach the most ancient godly creature. He is so ancient that we are not even sure of his exact name. He can be named Buri thus called ‘Chief’ or ‘Holder’, he can also be named Búri thus be called ‘Dweller’ or ‘Ready-Doer’. Another possibility is that his name simply means ‘Burr’s father’ since he got a son named Burr, Son or Tree, with one of the Ymir born giantesses. Likewise, Burr married a Giantess named Bestla and from their couple comes the kin of the Gods who are thus the grand-children of the first primitive living beings. The name of Bestla, ‘Bast-er’, means “inner-bark giver,” that is, the region where the life-giving sap flows. Together with Burr they are the only ones of the primitive beings to hold a name that alludes to a tree, and her name says that she sustains the life of a ‘Burr’.



The ancients did not tell us what happened to Burr and Bestla. I’ll soon tell you how their children, the very first of our Gods, will give shape and structure to our world. Putting all that together, I say that Bestla and Burr became our world-tree, a gigantic yew-tree called “askr Yggdrasill ,” ash-tree Dread-Horse. It has also another name, Irminsúl, Gigantic-Stake. You may think that calling ‘ash-tree’ a yew-tree is absurd. It is not so, the ancients did not like to call important beings by their everyday name because doing so would scatter the deference due to these beings. It looks now funny, but they would call a famous ship ‘the horse of the sea’ and a famous horse, ‘the ship of the ground’. When we speak of our God Ódhinn, we nowadays say: “Odin,” which would have been looked upon as very relaxed in the ancient times, and this is why Odin has got so many names, but this is another story. Let me come back to Yggdrasill . This huge tree had thus grown up in the time of Burr and Bestla. Growing, it generated the axis of the Universe and the Giants and the Gods knew what was up and down. Thus, they became aware of their weight. In other words, Yggdrasill ’s growth created what we call now gravity. Now that the Universe had an axis, it is easy to understand why South is the place where Earth-harm is standing and North, where Dark-mist. In this way, East and West came also in existence. And the four horizons and the two directions, Zenith and Nadir, were. Thus Space finished to take its shape, exactly as we know it today.

In this adult Space, our Gods could come to existence. And this is the second part of our tale.

Commentaries of part 1

At first, I wish to oppose the feeling you may have that I “put in modern words” the ancient knowledge. No, it is exactly the reverse: I tried to show how much our ancient myths can stand in front of modern knowledge. In particular, it is implicitly contained in these myths that time and space are relative concepts that can be built. Let me tell you also that I followed word for word the texts in Old Norse that describe the Northern cosmogony, with two exceptions.

The first one is an under-statement. Snorri Sturluson describes nine rivers flowing out of the center of Niflhel, while I speak of “water” without giving a specific shape or flow to it. I simply believe that the word ‘river’ is here a way of speaking of this water held by time, in a still badly defined space.

The second one is more serious, it is an addition. You notice that we know what happened to the primitive Giant Ymir, and we know nothing of Burr, Buri and Bestla. She has a very strange name – a very technical one, by the way, who knows what ‘bast’ is, in spite of its importance? - for someone living in a universe of light and melting frost. It happens that we also do not know wherefrom comes our tree Yggdrasill or the continental Germanic stake Irminsúl. I agree that adding two ‘ignorances’ to make one knowledge out of them is a bit audacious. At least, my hypothesis is not completely absurd.