Japanese Creation Myth

Long ago all the elements were mixed together with one germ of life. This germ began to mix things around and around until the heavier part sank and the lighter part rose. A muddy sea that covered the entire earth was created. From this ocean grew a green shoot. It grew and grew until it reached the clouds and there it was transformed into a god. Soon this god grew lonely and it began to create other gods. The last two gods it made, Izanagi and Izanami, were the most remarkable.

One day as they were walking along they looked down on the ocean and wondered what was beneath it. Izanagi thrust his staff into the waters and as he pulled it back up some clumps of mud fell back into the sea. They began to harden and grow until they became the islands of Japan.

The two descended to these islands and began to explore, each going in different directions. They created all kinds of plants. When they met again they decided to marry and have children to inhabit the land. The first child Izanami bore was a girl of radiant beauty. The gods decided she was too beautiful to live in Japan, so they put her up in the sky and she became the sun. Their second daughter, Tsuki-yami, became the moon and their third and unruly son, Sosano-wo, was sentenced to the sea, where he creates storms.

Later, their first child, Amaterasu, bore a son who became the emperor of Japan and all the emperors since then have claimed descent from him.

Greek Creation Myth

In the beginning there was an empty darkness. The only thing in this void was Nyx, a bird with black wings. With the wind she laid a golden egg and for ages she sat upon this egg. Finally life began to stir in the egg and out of it rose Eros, the god of love. One half of the shell rose into the air and became the sky and the other became the Earth. Eros named the sky Uranus and the Earth he named Gaia. Then Eros made them fall in love.

Uranus and Gaia had many children together and eventually they had grandchildren. Some of their children become afraid of the power of their children. Kronus, in an effort to protect himself, swallowed his children when they were still infants. However, his wife Rhea hid their youngest child. She gave him a rock wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he swallowed, thinking it was his son.

Once the child, Zeus, had reached manhood his mother instructed him on how to trick his father to give up his brothers and sisters. Once this was accomplished the children fought a mighty war against their father. After much fighting the younger generation won. With Zeus as their leader, they began to furnish Gaia with life and Uranus with stars.
Soon the Earth lacked only two things: man and animals. Zeus summoned his sons Prometheus (fore-thought) and Epimetheus (after-thought). He told them to go to Earth and create men and animals and give them each a gift.

Prometheus set to work forming men in the image of the gods and Epimetheus worked on the animals. As Epimetheus worked he gave each animal he created one of the gifts. After Epimetheus had completed his work Prometheus finally finished making men. However when he went to see what gift to give man Epimetheus shamefacedly informed him that he had foolishly used all the gifts.

Distressed, Prometheus decided he had to give man fire, even though gods were the only ones meant to have access to it. As the sun god rode out into the world the next morning Prometheus took some of the fire and brought it back to man. He taught his creation how to take care of it and then left them.

When Zeus discovered Prometheus' deed he became furious. He ordered his son to be chained to a mountain and for a vulture to peck out his liver every day till eternity. Then he began to devise a punishment for mankind. Another of his sons created a woman of great beauty, Pandora. Each of the gods gave her a gift. Zeus' present was curiosity and a box which he ordered her never to open. Then he presented her to Epimetheus as a wife.

Pandora's life with Epimetheus was happy except for her intense longing to open the box. She was convinced that because the gods and goddesses had showered so many glorious gifts upon her that this one would also be wonderful. One day when Epimetheus was gone she opened the box.

Out of the box flew all of the horrors which plague the world today - pain, sickness, envy, greed. Upon hearing Pandora's screams Epimetheus rushed home and fastened the lid shut, but all of the evils had already escaped.

Later that night they heard a voice coming from the box saying,

"Let me out. I am hope."

Pandora and Epimetheus released her and she flew out into the world to give hope to humankind.
African Bushmen Creation Myth

People did not always live on the surface of the earth. At one time people and animals lived underneath the earth with Kaang (Käng), the Great Master and Lord of All Life. In this place people and animals lived together peacefully. They understood each other. No one ever wanted for anything and it was always light even though there wasn't any sun. During this time of bliss Kaang began to plan the wonders he would put in the world above.

First Kaang created a wondrous tree, with branches stretching over the entire country. At the base of the tree he dug a hole that reached all the way down into the world where the people and animals lived. After he had finished furnishing the world as he pleased he led the first man up the hole. He sat down on the edge of the hole and soon the first woman came up out of it. Soon all the people were gathered at the foot of the tree, awed by the world they had just entered. Next, Kaang began helping the animals climb out of the hole. In their eagerness some of the animals found a way to climb up through the tree's roots and come out of the branches. They continued racing out of the world beneath until all of the animals were out.

Kaang gathered all the people and animals about him. He instructed them to live together peacefully. Then he turned to the men and women and warned them not to build any fires or a great evil would befall them. They gave their word and Kaang left to where he could watch his world secretly.

As evening approached the sun began to sink beneath the horizon. The people and animals stood watching this phenomenon, but when the sun disappeared fear entered the hearts of the people. They could no longer see each other as they lacked the eyes of the animals which were capable of seeing in the dark. They lacked the warm fur of the animals also and soon grew cold. In desperation one man suggested that they build a fire to keep warm. Forgetting Kaang's warning they disobeyed him. They soon grew warm and were once again able to see each other.

However the fire frightened the animals. They fled to the caves and mountains and ever since the people broke Kaang's command people have not been able to communicate with animals. Now fear has replaced the seat friendship once held between the two groups.
The Bushmen of Africa believe that not only are plants and animals alive, but also rain, thunder, the wind, spring, etc. They claim:

What we see is only the outside form or body. Inside is a living spirit that we cannot see. These spirits can fly out of one body into another. For example, a woman's spirit might sometime fly into a leopard; or a man's spirit fly into a lion's body. (Fahs and Spoerl 6)

This may be part of the reason that animals play such an important role in their myth.

**Australian Aborigine Creation Myth**

There was a time when everything was still. All the spirits of the earth were asleep - or almost all. The great Father of All Spirits was the only one awake. Gently he awoke the Sun Mother. As she opened her eyes a warm ray of light spread out towards the sleeping earth. The Father of All Spirits said to the Sun Mother,

"Mother, I have work for you. Go down to the Earth and awake the sleeping spirits. Give them forms."

The Sun Mother glided down to Earth, which was bare at the time and began to walk in all directions and everywhere she walked plants grew. After returning to the field where she had begun her work the Mother rested, well pleased with herself. The Father of All Spirits came and saw her work, but instructed her to go into the caves and wake the spirits.

This time she ventured into the dark caves on the mountainsides. The bright light that radiated from her awoke the spirits and after she left insects of all kinds flew out of the caves. The Sun Mother sat down and watched the glorious sight of her insects mingling with her flowers. However once again the Father urged her on.

The Mother ventured into a very deep cave, spreading her light around her. Her heat melted the ice and the rivers and streams of the world were created. Then she created fish and small snakes, lizards and frogs. Next she awoke the spirits of the birds and animals and they burst into the sunshine in a glorious array of colors. Seeing this the Father of All Spirits was pleased with the Sun Mother's work.

She called all her creatures to her and instructed them to enjoy the wealth of the earth and to live peacefully with one another. Then she rose into the sky and became the sun.

The living creatures watched the Sun in awe as she crept across the sky, towards the west. However when she finally sunk beneath the horizon they were panic-stricken, thinking she had deserted them. All night they stood frozen in their places, thinking that the end of time had come. After what seemed to them like a lifetime the Sun Mother peeked her head above the horizon in the East. The earth's children learned to expect her coming and going and were no longer afraid.
At first the children lived together peacefully, but eventually envy crept into their hearts. They began to argue. The Sun Mother was forced to come down from her home in the sky to mediate their bickering. She gave each creature the power to change their form to whatever they chose. However she was not pleased with the end result. The rats she had made had changed into bats; there were giant lizards and fish with blue tongues and feet. However the oddest of the new animals was an animal with a bill like a duck, teeth for chewing, a tail like a beavers and the ability to lay egg. It was called the platypus.

The Sun Mother looked down upon the Earth and thought to herself that she must create new creatures less the Father of All Spirits be angered by what she now saw. She gave birth to two children. The god was the Morning Star and the goddess was the moon. Two children were born to them and these she sent to Earth. They became our ancestors. She made them superior to the animals because they had part of her mind and would never want to change their shape.

Iroquois Creation Myth

Long before the world was created there was an island, floating in the sky, upon which the Sky People lived. They lived quietly and happily. No one ever died or was born or experienced sadness. However one day one of the Sky Women realized she was going to give birth to twins. She told her husband, who flew into a rage. In the center of the island there was a tree which gave light to the entire island since the sun hadn't been created yet. He tore up this tree, creating a huge hole in the middle of the island. Curiously, the woman peered into the hole. Far below she could see the waters that covered the earth. At that moment her husband pushed her. She fell through the hole, tumbling towards the waters below.

Water animals already existed on the earth, so far below the floating island two birds saw the Sky Woman fall. Just before she reached the waters they caught her on their backs and brought her to the other animals. Determined to help the woman they dove into the water to get mud from the bottom of the seas. One after another the animals tried and failed. Finally, Little Toad tried and when he reappeared his mouth was full of mud. The animals took it and spread it on the back of Big Turtle. The mud began to grow and grow and grow until it became the size of North America.

Then the woman stepped onto the land. She sprinkled dust into the air and created stars. Then she created the moon and sun.

The Sky Woman gave birth to twin sons. She named one Sapling. He grew to be kind and gentle. She named the other Flint and his heart was as cold as his name. They grew quickly and began filling the earth with their creations.

Sapling created what is good. He made animals that are useful to humans. He made rivers that went two ways and into these he put fish without bones. He made plants that people could eat easily. If he was able to do all the work himself there would be no suffering.
Flint destroyed much of Sapling's work and created all that is bad. He made the rivers flow only in one direction. He put bones in fish and thorns on berry bushes. He created winter, but Sapling gave it life so that it could move to give way to Spring. He created monsters which his brother drove beneath the Earth.

Eventually Sapling and Flint decided to fight till one conquered the other. Neither was able to win at first, but finally Flint was beaten. Because he was a god Flint could not die, so he was forced to live on Big Turtle's back. Occasionally his anger is felt in the form of a volcano.

The Iroquois people hold a great respect for all animals. This is mirrored in their creation myth by the role the animals play. Without the animals' help the Sky Woman may have sunk to the bottom of the sea and earth may not have been created.

The beginning

Norse myth

According to Norse myth, the beginning of life was fire and ice, with the existence of only two worlds: Muspelheim and Niflheim. When the warm air of Muspelheim hit the cold ice of Niflheim, the giant Ymir and the icy cow Audhumbla were created. Ymir's foot bred a son and a man and a woman emerged from his armpits, making Ymir the progenitor of the Jotun, or giants. Whilst Ymir slept, the intense heat from Muspelheim made him sweat, and he sweated out Surtr, a giant of fire. Later Ymir woke and drank Audhumbla's milk. Whilst he drank, the cow Audhumbla licked on a salt stone. On the first day after this a man's hair appeared on the stone, on the second day a head and on the third day an entire man emerged from the stone. His name was Búri and with an unknown giantess he fathered Bor, the father of the three gods Odin, Vili and Ve.

When the gods felt strong enough they killed Ymir. His blood flooded the world and drowned all of the giants, except two. But giants grew again in numbers and soon there were as many as before Ymir's death. Then the gods created seven more worlds using Ymir's flesh for dirt, his blood for the Oceans, rivers and lakes, his bones for stone, his brain as the clouds, his skull for the heaven. Sparks from Muspelheim flew up and became stars.

One day when the gods were walking they found two tree trunks. They transformed them into the shape of humans. Odin gave them life, Vili gave them mind and Ve gave them the ability to hear, see, and speak. The gods named them Ask and Embla and built the kingdom of Middle-earth for them and to keep the giants out the gods placed a gigantic fence made of Ymir's eyelashes around Middle-earth.

The sybil goes on to describe Yggdrasil and the three Norns (female symbols of inexorable fate; their names - Urðr (Urd), Verðandi (Verdandi), and Skuld - indicate the past, present, and future), who spin the threads of fate beneath it. She then describes the war between the Æsir and Vanir and the murder of Baldr, Odin's handsome son whom everyone but Loki loved. (The story
is that everything in existence promised not to hurt him except mistletoe. Taking advantage of this weakness, Loki made a mistletoe spear and tricked Höðr, Odin's blind son and Baldr's brother, into using it to kill Baldr. Hel said she would revive him if everyone in the nine worlds wept. A giantess - Thokk, who may have been Loki in shape-shifted form - did not weep. After that she turns her attention to the future.
Top Ten Creation Myths

10 Hammer of the Gods: Norse Mythology

With its bounty of brawny, barrel-chested gods and buxom goddesses, the ancient Norse religion of the Scandinavian and Germanic countries is truly the creation myth for fans of both pro wrestling and heavy metal music. According to Norse lore, before there was Earth (Midgard), there was Muspell, a fiery land guarded by the fire sword-wielding Surt; Ginnungagap, a great void, and Niflheim, a frozen ice-covered land. When the cold of Niflheim touched the fires of Muspell, the giant Ymir and a behemoth cow, Auehumla, emerged from the thaw. Then, the cow licked the god Bor and his wife into being. The couple gave birth to Buri, who fathered three sons, Odin, Vili, and Ve. The sons rose up and killed Ymir and from his corpse created from his flesh, the Earth; the mountains from his bones, trees with his hair and rivers, and the seas and lakes with his blood. Within Ymires hollowed-out skull, the gods created the starry heavens. What can we say: Pure metal magic!!

9 Zoroastrianism, the Religion of Ancient Persia

The Bundahishn of the Middle Persian era tells of the world created by the deity Ahura Mazda. The great mountain, Alburz, grew for 800 years until it touched the sky. From that point, rain fell, forming the Vourukasha sea and two great rivers. The first animal, the white bull, lived on the bank of the river Veh Rod. However, the evil spirit, Angra Mainyu, killed it. Its seed was carried to the moon and purified, creating many animals and plants. Across the river lived the first man, Gayomard, bright as the sun. Angra Mainyu also killed him. Ouch! The sun purified his seed for forty years, which then sprouted a rhubarb plant. This plant grew into Mashya and Mashyanag, the first mortals. Instead of killing them, Angra Mainyu deceived them into worshipping him. After 50 years they bore twins, but they ate the twins, owing to their sin. After a very long time, two more twins were born, and from them came all humans (but specifically Persians).

8 By the Rivers of Babylon

The Babylonian creation myth, the Enuma Elish, begins with the gods of water, Apsu (fresh), and Tiamat (salt), spawning several generations of gods, leading to Ea and his many brothers. However, these younger gods made so much noise that Apsu and Tiamat could not sleep (a complaint still common today amongst apartment-dwellers). Apsu plotted to kill them, but Ea killed him first. Tiamat vowed revenge and created many monsters, including the Mad Dog and Scorpion Man. Ea and the goddess Damkina created Marduk, a giant god with four eyes and four ears, as their protector. In tangling with Tiamat, Marduk, bearing the winds as weapons, hurled an evil wind down her gullet, incapacitating her, and then killed her with a single arrow to her heart. He then split her body in half and used it to create the heavens and the earth. Later he created man to do the drudge work that the gods refused to do, like farming, telemarketing and accounting. (Marduk currently appears on Cartoon Network’s Sealab 2020!)
7 Spirits of Ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptians had several creation myths. All begin with the swirling, chaotic waters of Nu (or Nun). Atum willed himself into being, and then created a hill, otherwise there'd be no place for him to stand. Atum was genderless and possessed an all-seeing eye. He/she spat out a son, Shu, god of the air. Atum then vomited up a daughter, Tefnut, goddess of moisture. These two were charged with the task of creating order out of chaos. Shu and Tefnut generated Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky. First they were entwined, but Geb lifted Nut above him. Gradually the world's order formed, but Shu and Tefnut became lost in the remaining darkness. Atum removed his/her all-seeing eye and sent it in search of them. (Just how all-seeing it was, and what did Atum do without, remains a mystery.) When Shu and Tefnut returned, thanks to the eye, Atum wept with joy. (Presumably he/she re-inserted the eye first.) Where the tears struck the earth, men sprang up.

6 South of the Border, Down Mexico Way: The Aztecs

The earth mother of the Aztecs, Coatlicue ("skirt of snakes," is depicted in a fearsome way, wearing a necklace of human hearts and hands, and a skirt of snakes as her name suggests. The story goes that Coatlicue was impregnated by an obsidian knife and gave birth to Coyolxauhqui, goddess of the moon, and to 400 sons, who became the stars of the southern sky. Later, a ball of feathers fell from the sky which, upon Coatlicue finding it and placing it in her waistband, caused her to become pregnant again. Coyolxauhqui and her brothers turned against their mother, whose unusual pregnancy shocked and outraged them, the origin being unknown. However, the child inside Coatlique, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war and the sun god, sprang from his mother's womb, fully-grown and armored (talk about a C-section!). He attacked Coyolxauhqui, killing her with the aid of a fire serpent. Cutting off her head, he flung it into the sky, where it became the moon. That was supposed to comfort Coatlicue, his mother--some comfort!

5 China, the Middle Kingdom

A cosmic egg floated within the timeless void, containing the opposing forces of yin and yang. After eons of incubation, the first being, Pan-gu emerged. The heavy parts (yin) of the egg drifted downwards, forming the earth. The lighter parts (yang) rose to form the sky. Pan-gu, fearing the parts might re-form, stood upon the earth and held up the sky. He grew 10 feet per day for 18,000 years, until the sky was 30,000 miles high. His work completed, he died. His parts transformed into elements of the universe, whether animals, weather phenomena, or celestial bodies. Some say the fleas on him became humans, but there is another explanation. The goddess Nuwa was lonely, so she fashioned men out of mud from the Yellow River. These first humans delighted her, but took long to make, so she flung muddy droplets over the earth, each one becoming a new person. These hastily-made people became the commoners, with the earlier ones being the nobles the first example of mass-production!

4 Japan, this Island Earth

The gods created two divine siblings, brother Izanagi and sister Izanami, who stood upon a floating bridge above the primordial ocean. Using the jeweled spear of the gods, they churned up the first island, Onogoro. Upon the island, Izanagi and Izanami married, and gave forth progeny that were malformed. The gods blamed it upon a breach of protocol. During the marriage ritual, Izanami, the woman, had spoken first. Correctly reprising their marriage ritual, the two coupled and produced the islands of Japan and more deities. However, in birthing Kagutsuchi-no-Kami, the fire god, Izanami died. Traumatized, Izanagi followed her to Yomi, the land of the dead. Izanami, having eaten the food of Yomi, could not return. When Izanagi suddenly saw Izanami's decomposing body, he was terrified and fled. Izanami, enraged, pursued him, accompanied by hideous women. Izanagi hurled personal items at them, which transformed into diversions. Escaping the cavern entrance of Yomi, he blocked it with a boulder, thus permanently separating life from death. (Rather like Persephone in Hades, isn't it?)
3 Hindu Cosmology's Rendezvous with Brahma

The Hindu cosmology contains many myths of creation, and the principal players have risen and fallen in importance over the centuries. The earliest Vedic text, the Rig Veda, tells of a gigantic being, Purusha, possessing a thousand heads, eyes, and feet. He enveloped the earth, extending beyond it by the space of ten fingers. When the gods sacrificed Purusha, his body produced clarified butter, which engendered the birds and animals. His body parts transformed into the world's elements, and the gods Agni, Vayu, and Indra. Also, the four castes of Hindu society were created from his body: the priests, warriors, general populace, and the servants. Historically later, the trinity of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer) gained prominence. Brahma appears in a lotus sprouting from the navel of the sleeping Vishnu. Brahma creates the universe, which lasts for one of his days, or 4.32 billion years. Then Shiva destroys the universe and the cycle restarts. Relax everybody, the current cycle has a couple billion years left.

2 The Greeks and the Titans

The early Greek poets posited various cosmogonies. The best-preserved is Hesiod's Theogony. In this hymn, out of the primordial chaos came the earliest divinities, including Gaia (mother earth). Gaia created Uranus, the sky, to cover herself. They spawned a bizarre menagerie of gods and monsters, including the Hecatonchires, monsters with 50 heads and a hundred hands, and the Cyclopes, the "wheel-eyed," later forgers of Zeus's thunderbolts. Next came the gods known as the Titans, 6 sons and 6 daughters. Uranus, despising his monstrous children, imprisoned them in Tartarus, the earth's bowels. Enraged, Gaia made an enormous sickle and gave it to her youngest son, Cronus, with instructions. When next Uranus appeared to copulate with Gaia, Cronus sprang out and hacked off his father's genitals! Where Uranus's blood and naughty bits fell, there sprang forth more monsters, the Giants and Furies. From the sea foam churned up by the holy testicles came the goddess Aphrodite. Later, Cronus fathered the next generation of gods, Zeus and the Olympians. And, boy, were they dysfunctional!

1 The Genesis of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic Faiths

Genesis, the first book of the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, contains two origin stories, both of which are accepted as the creation of the world by today's Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths. In the first, God says, "Let there be light," and light appears. In six days, he creates the sky, the land, plants, the sun and moon, animals, and all creatures, including humans. To all he says, "Be fruitful and multiply," which they do. On the seventh day God rests, contemplates his handiwork, and gives himself a good evaluation. In the second story, God creates the first man, Adam, from the earth. He makes a garden in Eden for Adam, but forbids him to eat fruit from the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." Adam names the animals but remains lonely. God anesthetizes Adam and makes one of his ribs into the first woman, Eve. A talking serpent persuades her to eat the forbidden fruit, and she convinces Adam to do likewise. When God finds out, he drives them from the garden and makes man mortal. They should have stuck with apricots!