**The Norse Creation Myth**

abstracted from *The Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson

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**Muspell**

The first world to exist was Muspell, a place of light and heat whose flames are so hot that those who

are not native to that land cannot endure it.

Surt sits at Muspell's border, guarding the land with a flaming sword. At the end of the world he will

vanquish all the gods and burn the whole world with fire.

 **Ginnungagap and Niflheim**

Beyond Muspell lay the great and yawning void named Ginnungagap, and beyond Ginnungagap lay

the dark, cold realm of Niflheim.

Ice, frost, wind, rain and heavy cold emanated from Niflheim, meeting in Ginnungagap the soft air,

heat, light, and soft air from Muspell.

 **Ymir**

Where heat and cold met appeared thawing drops, and this running fluid grew into a giant frost ogre

named Ymir.

 **Frost ogres**

Ymir slept, falling into a sweat. Under his left arm there grew a man and a woman. And one of his

legs begot a son with the other. This was the beginning of the frost ogres.

 **Audhumla**

Thawing frost then became a cow called Audhumla. Four rivers of milk ran from her teats, and she

fed Ymir.

 **Buri, Bor, and Bestla**

The cow licked salty ice blocks. After one day of licking, she freed a man's hair from the ice. After

two days, his head appeared. On the third day the whole man was there. His name was Buri, and he

was tall, strong, and handsome.

Buri begot a son named Bor, and Bor married Bestla, the daughter of a giant.

 **Odin, Vili, and Vé**

Bor and Bestla had three sons: Odin was the first, Vili the second, and Vé the third.

It is believed that Odin, in association with his brothers, is the ruler of heaven and earth. He is the

greatest and most famous of all men.

 **The death of Ymir**

Odin, Vili, and Vé killed the giant Ymir.

When Ymir fell, there issued from his wounds such a flood of blood, that all the frost ogres were

drowned, except for the giant Bergelmir who escaped with his wife by climbing onto a *lur* [a

hollowed-out tree trunk that could serve either as a boat or a coffin]. From them spring the families of

frost ogres.

 **Earth, trees, and mountains**

The sons of Bor then carried Ymir to the middle of Ginnungagap and made the world from him. From

his blood they made the sea and the lakes; from his flesh the earth; from his hair the trees; and from

his bones the mountains. They made rocks and pebbles from his teeth and jaws and those bones that

were broken.

 **Dwarfs**

Maggots appeared in Ymir's flesh and came to life. By the decree of the gods they acquired human

understanding and the appearance of men, although they lived in the earth and in rocks.

 **Sky, clouds, and stars**

From Ymir's skull the sons of Bor made the sky and set it over the earth with its four sides. Under

each corner they put a dwarf, whose names are East, West, North, and South.

The sons of Bor flung Ymir's brains into the air, and they became the clouds.

Then they took the sparks and burning embers that were flying about after they had been blown out of

Muspell, and placed them in the midst of Ginnungagap to give light to heaven above and earth

beneath. To the stars they gave appointed places and paths.

The earth was surrounded by a deep sea. The sons of Bor gave lands near the sea to the families of

giants for their settlements.

 **Midgard**

To protect themselves from the hostile giants, the sons of Bor built for themselves an inland

stonghold, using Ymir's eyebrows. This stonghold they named Midgard.

 **Ask and Embla**

While walking along the sea shore the sons of Bor found two trees, and from them they created a man

and a woman.

Odin gave the man and the woman spirit and life. Vili gave them understanding and the power of

movement. Vé gave them clothing and names. The man was named Ask [Ash] and the woman Embla

[Elm]. From Ask and Embla have sprung the races of men who lived in Midgard.

 **Asgard**

In the middle of the world the sons of Bor built for themselves a stronghold named Asgard, called

Troy by later generations. The gods and their kindred lived in Asgard, and many memorable events

have happened there.

In Asgard was a great hall named Hlidskjálf. Odin sat there on a high seat. From there he could look

out over the whole world and see what everyone was doing. He understood everything that he saw.

 **Odin, Frigg, and the Æsir**

Odin married Frigg, the daughter of Fjörgvin. From this family has come all the kindred that inhabited

ancient Asgard and those kingdoms that belonged to it. Members of this family are called the Æsir,

and they are all divinities. This must be the reason why Odin is called All-Father. He is the father of

all the gods and men and of everything that he and his power created.

 **Thor**

The earth was Odin's daughter and his wife as well. By her he had his first son, Thor. Might and

strength were Thor's characteristics. By these he dominates every living creature.

 **Bifröst**

As all informed people know, the gods built a bridge from earth to heaven called Bifröst. Some call it

the rainbow. It has three colors and is very strong, made with more skill and cunning than other

structures. But strong as it is, it will break when the sons of Muspell ride out over it. The gods are not

to blame that this structure will then break. Bifröst is a good bridge, but there is nothing in this world

that can be relied on when the sons of Muspell are on the warpath.

 **Yggdrasil**

The chief sanctuary of the gods is by the ash tree Yggdrasil. There they hold their daily court.

Yggdrasil is the best and greatest of all trees. Its branches spread out over the whole world and reach

up over heaven.

From *The Prose Edda*: Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, translated from the

Icelandic by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916).

Return to D. L. Ashliman's **folktexts**, a library of folktales, folklore, fairy tales, and

mythology.

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The Norse Creation Myth http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/creation.html