

1. Vikings

In the beginning there was a great abyss or gap so large that nobody could imagine it. On one side of the abyss was the land of Niflheim, full of cold, ice, mist and darkness. In Niflheim there was a huge spring with twelve large rivers flowing from it. As the waters flowed into the cold abyss, great blocks of ice formed and filled one side of the gap. On the opposite side of the abyss was Muspelheim, a land filled with fire, warmth and brightness and guarded by a flame giant whose sword sent great showers of sparks into the gap.

After many long years the fire of Muspelheim and the ice of Niflheim regions came together in the abyss. A mist rose from the gap and froze to create an ice giant named Ymir. An enormous cow was also created to nourish him. From a salty ice block licked by the cow, the first god, Buri emerged. Soon more and more giants and gods were born.

Eventually, there was a struggle between the giants and the gods. The struggle continued until the birth of Odin and his two brothers who were born from the god Buri and a frost giant mother. Together with their father, the three brothers killed Ymir. His blood gushed into the abyss, drowning all but two of the frost giants who escaped the deluge in a boat.

From Ymir's corpse, Odin and his brothers created the universe. First Odin fashioned the earth, Midgard from Ymir's flesh and, using his eyebrows, built a protective wall to encircle it. From Ymir's bones, they created mountains and from his teeth the rocks, boulders and stones. His blood was used to make the sea and lakes. From his skull, they created the endless expanse of the sky and supported its corners with four dwarfs (Nordi, Surdi, Austri, Westri) from whose names we get the four main points of the compass; North, South, East and West. Ymir's brains were turned into clouds and from the sparks of Muspelheim, they created the sun, moon and stars to give light to the world. The stars were fixed in one place but the sun and moon were put in golden chariots. Two riders named Day and Night were charged with guiding the sun and moon on their daily journey across the sky. They were pursued by a wolf who was intent on devouring them and this kept them running all the time so there was always day and night.

From a branch of an ash tree they created a man named Askr and from the branch of an elm tree, they created a woman named Embla . They were both placed in Midgard and from the human race grew. Because Odin cared for his human creations, future generations of their offspring were watched and protected by the gods.

2. Australian aborigines

Each group of aborigines has its own collection of stories, which are passed on orally, are very sacred and many are secret. The following stories have been taken from different groups who have allowed them to be told to outsiders.

At first there was land, but it was a bare, flat, barren plain with no sound of water, no trees or bushes, no animals running there and no birds singing. Nor was there any man or woman. Baiame, the Maker of Many Things, brought the Dreamtime ancestors from under the ground and over the seas and with them, they brought life to the barren, flat plain. Some of the Dreamtime ancestors looked like men or women. Others looked like the animals or creatures. Often the Dreamtime ancestors could change their shape, so the Swordfish ancestor could look like a swordfish or a man or woman.

As the Dreamtime ancestors wandered over the land they had many adventures. Often, when they met other ancestors they would argue and fight before setting off on their travels again. They met strange creatures and fought battles. Each time something happened the shape of the land was changed. Hills arose, plants grew. Rivers appeared where the Barramundi-fish ancestor swam. The Rainbow snake ancestor would rush in to punish wrongdoers by making bays and rivers to drown them, or swallowing them and spitting out their bones to form rocks and hills.

The sun, moon and stars were created when Emu ancestor and Eagle ancestor were fighting. Eagle took one of Emu's eggs and threw it into the air. Soaring up, it burst into flames. Baiame fed the flame with wood. So the sun was made, and is made anew each day with fresh wood. Everything that exists was made in the Dreamtime; how animals and humans should look and behave was fixed for ever. The Dreamtime ancestors taught their tribes, animal and human, how to perform secret ceremonies. Then the ancestors disappeared into caves or waterholes - to remain underground, but ever present.

But Dreamtime is not over, nor are the Dreamtime ancestors dead. For when ceremonies are performed Dreamtime comes to those who celebrate, and they learn to see this land as Dreamtime sees it - alive. Through the stories and ceremonies, through links with their own Dreamtime ancestors and sacred land, every Aborigine can learn to enter into the Dreamtime and at death they return to the Dreamtime. What may appear to outsiders as barren country is a living, exciting map of life to the Aborigine, part of him or herself, as well as he or she being part of it. Through the power of the Dreamtime, the very environment is sacred and alive.

3. Chinese creation stories

In the beginning there was only chaos which was like a mist and was full of emptiness. Suddenly, into the midst of this mist came a great colourful light and from this light all things that exist came to be. The mist shook and separated. Some of it was light and rose up to form heaven. Some was heavy and sank, became solid and formed the earth.

Now from heaven and earth came forth strong forces and these two forces combined to produce yin and yang. Picture this yang like a dragon - hot, fiery, male, and full of energy. Imagine this yin as a cloud - moist, cool, female, and drifting slowly. Each of these forces is full of great power. Left alone they would destroy the world with their might and chaos would return. Together they balance each other and keep the world in harmony.

This, then, is yin and yang and from them came forth everything. The sun is of yang and the moon, yin. The four seasons - winter, spring, summer and autumn - and the five elements - water, earth, metal, fire and wood - sprang from them, as did all kinds of living creatures.

So there was the earth, floating like a jellyfish on water. But the earth was just a ball without features. Then the forces of yin and yang created the giant figure P'an Ku, the Ancient One. P'an Ku, who never stopped growing every year of his great long life, set to work to put the earth in order. He dug the river valleys and piled up the mountains. Over many thousands of years he shaped and created the flow and folds of our earth.

But such hard work took its toll. Even mighty P'an Ku could not escape death and, worn out by his struggle, he collapsed and died. His body was so vast that when he fell to the ground his body became the five sacred mountains, his hair the plants and his blood the rivers. From his sweat came the rain and from the parasites living on his body came forth human beings.

The people at first lived in caves but soon Heavenly Emperors came to teach them how to make tools and houses. The people also learnt how to build boats, to fish, to plough and plant, and to prepare food. This is how it all began.

The belief in the balancing forces of yin and yang lies at the heart of the Chinese philosophy and influences the way the Chinese people treat their environment. They see the earth as a living being which must be cared for properly, kept in order, so that the powerful forces of yin and yang are kept in balance.

4. Christians

In the beginning, God created the universe. At first the earth was shapeless and covered in darkness, and God's spirit hovered over the waters. God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. God divided the day from the night, naming them 'day' and 'night'. This was the first day and God saw that it was good. On the second day God made the heavens to separate the water from the earth and on the third day he raised the dry land up from the waters below the heavens and commanded the earth to bring forth all plants. God then made the greater light for the day and the lesser light for the night. This was the fourth day. On the fifth day God commanded the waters to fill with living creatures and the air to fill with birds. And he was pleased with what he saw. On the sixth day God commanded the earth to bring forth all kinds of living creatures and he saw that it was good. God then said, "Let us make man in our own image". So God created man and woman in his own likeness and gave them authority over all living things. God looked at everything he had made and was very pleased. On the seventh day, God rested.

Now the first man, Adam, was created by God out of soil and given life by God's breath. Adam named all the animals and birds that God had made, But Adam had no companion of his own so God caused him to fall into a deep sleep and created a woman - Eve- from one of Adam's ribs. God told them that together they could live in the Garden of Eden eating whatever they wished except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But the most cunning animal, which God had made -the serpent -, tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. So Adam and Eve both ate and suddenly saw what they had done and that they were naked. Covering themselves with fig leaves they tried to hide from God. But God knew of their sin and called out to them. Then he cursed the serpent and Adam and Eve, and in shame they were driven from the beautiful Garden. God told Adam he would now have to toil and sweat to work the very soil from which he had been created. Then God blocked the entrance to the Garden with a great fiery sword so that no one could enter in.

5. Hindu

There are many Hindu creation stories but the one given here helps to explain one of the major Hindu beliefs - reincarnation.

This is not the first world, nor is it the first universe. There have been and will be many more worlds and universes than there are drops of water in the holy river Ganges. The universes are made by Lord Brahma the Creator, maintained by Lord Vishnu the Preserver and destroyed by Lord Shiva. Since the universes must be destroyed before they can be recreated, Lord Shiva is called the Destroyer and Re-creator. These three gods are all forms of Supreme One and part of the Supreme One. The Supreme One is behind and beyond all. After each old universe is destroyed nothing is left but a vast ocean. Floating on this ocean, resting on the great snake Ananta, is Lord Vishnu. Some say that a lotus flower sprang from his navel and from this came Lord Brahma. And it is from Lord Brahma that all creation comes.

How does Lord Brahma create? Some tell of how he grows lonely and splits himself in two to create male and female. Then he becomes one again and human beings are created. In the same way he creates all the other living things, from the great animals to the tiniest insects. Others say that everything comes from different parts of Lord Brahma's body. All the different animals and all the people come from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. Everything comes from one - Lord Brahma, who is part of the Supreme One - so everything is part of the Supreme One. For this universe, this world and this Lord Brahma, like all those before and all those to come, will be destroyed by Lord Shiva.

How long is the life of a universe? Its length is beyond imagination. One day to Lord Brahma is longer than four thousand million of the years that we know. Every night when Lord Brahma sleeps the world is destroyed. Every morning when he awakes it is created again. When the Lord Brahma of this universe has lived a lifetime of such days the universe is completely destroyed by Lord Shiva.

Everything disappears into the Supreme One. For an unimaginable period of time chaos and water alone exist. Then once again Lord Vishnu appears, floating on the vast ocean. From Lord Vishnu comes forth Lord Brahma of the new universe and the cycle continues for ever.

6. Jewish

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God said, "Let there be light". And there was light. And God saw that it was good, God divided the light from the darkness, naming them 'day' and 'night'. Evening and morning came - the first day. God said, "Let the waters be divided". And God made the arch of the sky to hold back the waters from the earth. He placed some above the arch and some below. Some tell of the waters arguing about this division, and thus disagreement entered the universe. Of this day God did not say, "It is good". Evening and morning came- the second day. God said, "Let the waters under heaven come together, and dry land appear". Thus the earth arose, and plants and trees grew, and God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came - the third day. God said, "Let the great light and the small light appear in heaven to govern day and night. God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came - the fourth day. God said. "Let the waters fill with creatures and the sky with birds". God saw that it was good, and blessed them. Evening came and morning came - the fifth day.

God said "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature". God saw that it was good. Then, last of all when the earth was ready God said. "Let us take dust and create man, Adam, to be master over all creatures". So Adam was created in God's own image.

God saw that Adam needed a friend - woman. Some say that the earth was worried and asked. "How shall I feed all her children?" God replied, "Fear not, together we shall find food". So Lilith was made from the dust, also in God's image. But Lilith would not live with Adam and went her own way. So God made a woman before Adam's eyes, but Adam turned from her. Finally, putting Adam in a deep sleep, God took one of Adam's ribs and made Eve, and placed the couple in Paradise.

On the seventh day, God finished his work and rested. And Paradise was blissful, until Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden them to do. God punished them, and cast our parents out of Paradise to struggle in this earthly life.

Islam

In the time before time, God was. And when God wants to create something, all he needs to say is "Be", and it becomes. So it was that God created the world and the heavens. He made all the creatures which walk, swim, crawl and fly on the face of the earth. He made the angels, and the sun, moon and the stars to dwell in the universe. And consider, as the Qur'an says, how God poured down the rain in torrents, and broke up the soil to bring forth the corn, the grapes and other vegetation; the olive and the palm, the fruit trees and the grass.

Then it was that God ordered the angels to go to the earth, and to bring seven handfuls of soil, all of different colours, from which he could model man. God took the seven kinds of earth and moulded them into a model of a man. He breathed life and power into it, and it immediately sprang to life. And this first man was called Adam. God took Adam to live in Paradise. In Paradise, God created Eve, the first woman, from out of Adam's side. God taught Adam the names of all the creatures, and then commanded the angel to bow down before Adam. But Iblis, one amongst the angels, refused to do this, and thus began to disobey God's will.

God place the couple in a beautiful garden in Paradise, telling them that they could eat whatever they wanted except the fruit of on forbidden tree. The evil one tempted them to disobey God, and eat the fruit. When God knew that Adam and Eve had disobeyed him, he cast them out of Paradise and sent them to earth. But God is merciful. The earth was created to give food, drink and shelter to the human race. The sun, moon and stars give light. It is a good world, where everything has been created to serve people. And people, the Qur'an teaches, should serve God and obey his will. For those who submit to the will of God will be saved, and taken to live for ever in Paradise.

Based on a resource found

at http://www.innovationslearning.co.uk/subjects/re/information/creation/creation_home.htm