

The Creation of the Cosmos

The Norse creation myth or *cosmogony* (a view on the origins of the cosmos) is perhaps one of the richest of such accounts in all of world literature. Not only is it an exceptionally colorful and entertaining story – it’s also bursting with subtle meanings. Some of these meanings will be discussed below. First, here’s the tale itself:

The Origin of the Cosmos

Before there was soil, or sky, or any green thing, there was only the gaping abyss of [Ginnungagap](#). This chaos of perfect silence and darkness lay between the homeland of elemental fire, [Muspelheim](#), and the homeland of elemental ice, [Niflheim](#).

Frost from Niflheim and billowing flames from Muspelheim crept toward each other until they met in Ginnungagap. Amid the hissing and sputtering, the fire melted the ice, and the drops formed themselves into [Ymir](#), the first of the godlike [giants](#). Ymir was a hermaphrodite and could reproduce asexually; when he sweated, more giants were born.

As the frost continued to melt, a cow, Audhumbla, emerged from it. She nourished Ymir with her milk, and she, in turn, was nourished by salt-licks in the ice. Her licks slowly uncovered Buri, the first of the [Aesir](#) tribe of gods. Buri had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, the daughter of the giant Bolthorn. The half-god, half-giant children of Bor and Bestla were [Odin](#), who became the chief of the Aesir gods, and his two brothers, Vili and Ve. These three brothers should surely be understood to be different aspects of Odin himself rather than three absolutely distinct beings. Vili and Ve are never mentioned apart from Odin in [Old Norse literature](#), and their names (“Will” and “Sanctity,” respectively) are common and powerful attributes of Odin.

Odin and his brothers slew Ymir and set about constructing the world from his corpse. They fashioned the oceans from his blood, the soil from his skin and muscles, vegetation from his hair, clouds from his brains, and the sky from his skull. Four [dwarves](#), corresponding to the four cardinal points, held Ymir’s skull aloft above the earth.

The gods eventually formed the first man and woman, [Ask and Embla](#), from two tree trunks, and built a fence around their dwelling-place, [Midgard](#), to protect them from the giants.^{[1][2][3][4]}