

COMMON ELEMENTS IN CREATION MYTHS: **A CHALLENGE TO THE 'ABSOLUTE TRUTH' CLAIMS OF RELIGION**

It is in the nature of humans to wonder about the unknown and search for answers. At the foundation of nearly every culture is a creation myth that explains how the wonders of the earth came to be. **These myths have an immense influence on people's frame of reference; they influence the way people think about the world and their place in relation to their surroundings.**

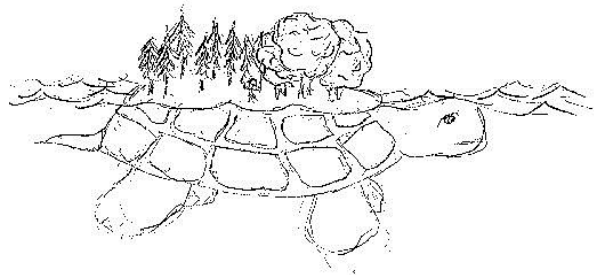
Despite being separated by numerous geographical barriers many cultures have developed creation myths with the **same basic elements.**

Many creation myths often begin with the **theme of birth.** A **supreme being** appears in almost every myth. He or she is what triggers the train of events that create the world. Sometimes there are **two beings, a passive and active creator.**

Not all cultures imagine life starting on earth. Some believe that it originated either **above or below where we live now.** Still other myths claim the earth was once covered with water and the earth was brought to the surface. These are called diver-myths.

According to some cultures **humans and animals once lived together peacefully.** However because of a sin caused by the humans they are split up. This sin is often brought on by darkness and is represented as fire. Other times the innocence of humans is taken away by a god.

We continue to wonder. Even now, in the 21st century, we continue to make theories on how earth was created. They are our new creation myths. We base our ideas on scientific evidence. However the creation myths were based on what people saw - their observations.



Examples of Common Elements in Creation Myths:

An Instruction, a Sin and the Consequence

Many creation myths consisted of at least one of **three elements**; an order or instruction from the creator to the creations, a sin and a consequence which must be faced. The consequence is often what causes pain, hunger, disease and all the other evils that plague the earth.

In the **Greek myth**, when Pandora was brought to Epimetheus she was given a box which Zeus orders her not to open. Not only did Zeus give her the box, but also curiosity, which became her temptation to sin. Overcome by the curiosity of her nature, Pandora took a peak inside the box and all of the troubles of the earth flew out of the box. For her sin the whole human race had to suffer. This was the consequence humans were forced to face for accepting Prometheus' gift of fire.

The **African Bushmen** were instructed not to build a fire. They disobeyed this command and for that sin their peaceful relationship with animals was destroyed.

The **Australian Aborigines** believed that the Sun Mother told the animals she had created to live together peacefully. Instead envy crept into their hearts and they began to quarrel. She returned to earth and in order to make them happy gave them the power to change their shape into what they wanted it to be for eternity. The result was an odd assortment of creatures. The Sun Mother decided to create two humans who would be superior to the animals. Because the animals disobeyed the Sun Mother's instruction their superiority was taken away.

Genesis 2:4-3:24 of the Bible tells the story of how suffering entered the world. God gave Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden to live in, with the order never to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. They disobeyed him and the price of this sin was banishment from the garden into the outside world with all its troubles.

Supreme Beings

Nearly all ancient creation myths included some kind of supreme being. This being was not always in a clear form, but it was almost always present. In Greek and Japanese mythology there were many gods and goddesses; the Iroquois myth told of a Sky Woman and her sons; Aborigines placed their faith in the Father of All Spirits; the Bushmen placed theirs in Kaang and Christians and Jews in God.

The supreme being used different methods to create the Earth. Some such as the God in the Bible and Torah merely ordered that his will be carried out and it was done. Others moulded each creation by hand. Still more gods had a less powerful god to do the work for them. The supreme beings in creation myths came in many different forms and acted very differently, but they all shared in the creation of the world.

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.