

This creation story comes from the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Togo and Benin. In the religion of the Yoruba, the supreme being is Olorun, and assisting Olorun are a number of heavenly entities called orishas. This story was written down by David A. Anderson/ Sankofa, who learned it from his father, who learned it from his mother, and so on back through the Yoruba people and through time.

The Golden Chain

Long ago, well before there were any people, all life existed in the sky. Olorun lived in the sky, and with Olorun were many orishas. There were both male and female orishas, but Olorun transcended male and female and was the all-powerful supreme being. Olorun and the orishas lived around a young baobab tree. Around the baobab tree the orishas found everything they needed for their lives, and in fact they wore beautiful clothes and gold jewelry. Olorun told them that all the vast sky was theirs to explore. All the orishas save one, however, were content to stay near the baobab tree.

Obatala was the curious orisha who wasn't content to live blissfully by the baobab tree. Like all orishas, he had certain powers, and he wanted to put them to use. As he pondered what to do, he looked far down through the mists below the sky. As he looked and looked, he began to realize that there was a vast empty ocean below the mist. Obatala went to Olorun and asked Olorun to let him make something solid in the waters below. That way there could be beings that Obatala and the orishas could help with their powers.

Touched by Obatala's desire to do something constructive, Olorun agreed to send Obatala to the watery world below. Obatala then asked Orunmila, the orisha who knows the future, what he should do to prepare for his mission. Orunmila brought out a sacred tray and sprinkled the powder of baobab roots on it. He tossed sixteen palm kernels onto the tray and studied the marks and tracks they made on the powder. He did this eight times, each time carefully observing the patterns. Finally he told Obatala to prepare a chain of gold, and to gather sand, palm nuts, and maize. He also told Obatala to get the sacred egg carrying the personalities of all the orishas.

Obatala went to his fellow orishas to ask for their gold, and they all gave him all the gold they had. He took this to the goldsmith, who melted all the jewelry to make the links of the golden chain. When Obatala realized that the goldsmith had made all the gold into links, he had the goldsmith melt a few of them back down to make a hook for the end of the chain.

Meanwhile, as Orunmila had told him, Obatala gathered all the sand in the sky and put it in an empty snail shell, and in with it he added a little baobab powder. He put that in his pack, along with palm nuts, maize, and other seeds that he found around the baobab tree. He wrapped the egg in his shirt, close to his chest so that it would be warm during his journey.

Obatala hooked the chain into the sky, and he began to climb down the chain. For seven days he went down and down, until finally he reached the end of the chain. He hung at its end, not sure what to do, and he looked and listened for any clue. Finally he heard Orunmila, the seer, calling to him to use the sand. He took the shell from his pack and poured out the sand into the water below. The sand hit the water, and to his surprise it spread and solidified to make a vast land. Still unsure what to do, Obatala hung from the end of the chain until his heart pounded so much that the egg cracked. From it flew Sankofa, the bird bearing the sprits of all the orishas. Like a storm, they blew the sand to make dunes and hills and lowlands, giving it character just as the orishas themselves have character.



Finally Obatala let go of the chain and dropped to this new land, which he called "Ife", the place that divides the waters. Soon he began to explore this land, and as he did so he scattered the seeds from his pack, and as he walked the seeds began to grow behind him, so that the land turned green in his wake.

After walking a long time, Obatala grew thirsty and stopped at a small pond. As he bent over the water, he saw his reflection and was pleased. He took some clay from the edge of the pond and began to mold it into the shape he had seen in the reflection. He finished that one and began another, and before long he had made many of these bodies from the dark earth at the pond's side. By then he was even thirstier than before, and he took juice from the newly-grown palm trees and it fermented into palm wine. He drank this, and drank some more, and soon he was intoxicated. He returned to his work of making more forms from the edge of the pond, but now he wasn't careful and made some without eyes or some with misshapen limbs. He thought they all were beautiful, although later he realized that he had erred in drinking the wine and vowed to not do so again.

Before long, Olorun dispatched Chameleon down the golden chain to check on Obatala's progress. Chameleon reported Obatala's disappointment at making figures that had form but no life. Gathering gasses from the space beyond the sky, Olorun sparked the gasses into an explosion that he shaped into a fireball. He sent that fireball to Ife, where it dried the lands that were still wet and began to bake the clay figures that Obatala had made. The fireball even set the earth to spinning, as it still does today. Olorun then blew his breath across Ife, and Obatala's figures slowly came to life as the first people of Ife.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Summarize the myth in your own words.
2. How are the two accounts similar?
3. Can science prove the truth of the story?
4. What does this creation story tell us about the Yoruba people?
5. How might the account influence the believer's attitudes and actions?

This Norse story of the origin of the earth, sky, and humanity is paraphrased from Snorri Sturluson's Edda, as translated by Anthony Faulkes. Sturluson lived in Iceland from 1179 to 1241, and he apparently composed the Edda as a compilation of traditional stories and verse. Many of verses he included appear to date from the times when Norse sagas were conveyed only in spoken form by Viking bards.

Odin and Ymir

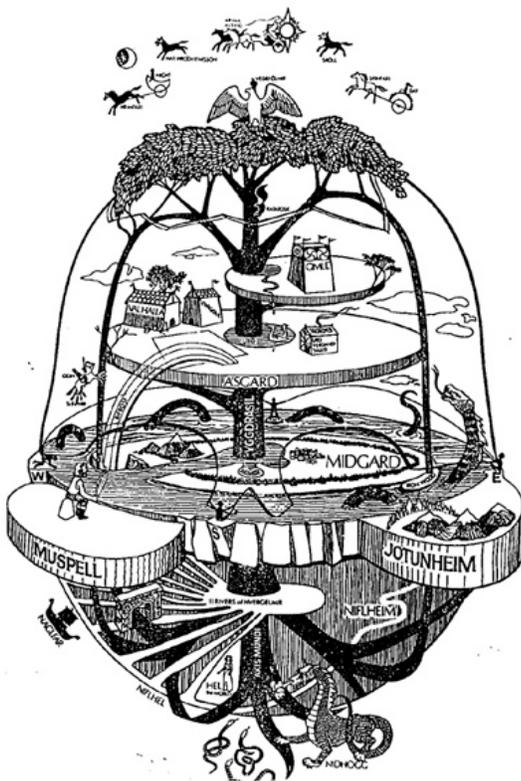
In the beginning of time, there was nothing: neither sand, nor sea, nor cool waves. Neither the heaven nor earth existed. Instead, long before the earth was made, Niflheim was made, and in it a spring gave rise to twelve rivers. To the south was Muspell, a region of heat and brightness guarded by Surt, a giant who carried a flaming sword. To the north was frigid Ginnungagap, where the rivers froze and all was ice. Where the sparks and warm winds of Muspell reached the south side of frigid Ginnungagap, the ice thawed and dripped, and from the drips thickened and formed the shape of a man. His name was Ymir, the first of and ancestor of the frost-giants.

As the ice dripped more, it formed a cow, and from her teats flowed four rivers of milk that fed Ymir. The cow fed on the salt of the rime ice, and as she licked a man's head began to emerge. By the end of the third day of her licking, the whole man had emerged, and his name was Buri. He had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, a daughter of one of the giants. Bor and Bestla had three sons, one of whom was Odin, the most powerful of the gods.

Ymir was a frost-giant, but not a god, and eventually he turned to evil. After a struggle between the giant and the young gods, Bor's three sons killed Ymir. So much blood flowed from his wounds that all the frost-giants were drowned but one, who survived only by building an ark for himself and his family. Bor's sons dragged Ymir's immense body to the center of Ginnungagap, and from him they made the earth. Ymir's blood became the sea, his bones became the rocks and crags, and his hair became the trees. Bor's sons took Ymir's skull and with it made the sky. In it they fixed sparks and molten slag from Muspell to make the stars, and other sparks they set to move in paths just below the sky. They threw Ymir's brains into the sky and made the clouds. The earth is a disk, and they set up Ymir's eyelashes to keep the giants at the edges of that disk.

On the sea shore, Bor's sons found two logs and made people out of them. One son gave them breath and life, the second son gave them consciousness and movement, and the third gave them faces, speech, hearing, and sight. From this man and woman came all humans thereafter, just as all the gods were descended from the sons of Bor.

Odin and his brothers had set up the sky and stars, but otherwise they left the heavens unlit. Long afterwards, one of the descendants of those first two people that the brothers created had two children. Those two children were so beautiful that their father named the son Moon and the daughter Sol. The gods were jealous already and, when they heard of the father's arrogance, they pulled the brother and sister up to the sky and set them to work. Sol drives the chariot that carries the sun across the skies, and she drives so fast across the skies of the northland because she is chased by a giant wolf each day. Moon likewise takes a course across the sky each night, but not so swiftly because he is not so harried.



The gods did leave one pathway from earth to heaven. That is the bridge that appears in the sky as a rainbow, and its perfect arc and brilliant colors are a sign of its origin with the gods. It nonetheless will not last for ever, because it will break when the men of Muspell try to cross it into heaven.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Summarize the myth in your own words.
2. How are the two accounts similar?
3. Can science prove the truth of the story?
4. What does this creation story tell us about the Norse people?
5. How might the account influence the believer's attitudes and actions?

Snorri Sturluson 1987, Edda (trans. by Anthony Faulkes): London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 252 p. (PT 7312.E5 F380 1987) cite at <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSOdin&Ymir.html>

This Babylonian story of creation comes largely from the Enuma Elish and the Astrahasis, which appear to have been written between 1900 and 1500 BC, perhaps during the time of the Babylonian King Hammurabi. The tablets of both are broken and incomplete. At the end of the story here, the details of the creation of humans are supplemented with material from fragments of later writings. The latter may date as late as the 500's BC, but their consistency with the earlier Enuma Elish suggests that they tell the same story. The main actor in these tablets is Marduk, the most powerful of the Babylonian gods. Like most Babylonian gods, he has many names, and elsewhere he is sometimes known as Bel.

Marduk Creates the World from the Spoils of Battle

In the beginning, neither heaven nor earth had names. Apsu, the god of fresh waters, and Tiamat, the goddess of the salt oceans, and Mummu, the god of the mist that rises from both of them, were still mingled as one. There were no mountains, there was no pasture land, and not even a reed-marsh could be found to break the surface of the waters.

It was then that Apsu and Tiamat parented two gods, and then two more who outgrew the first pair. These further parented gods, until Ea, who was the god of rivers and was Tiamat and Apsu's great-grandson, was born. Ea was the cleverest of the gods, and with his magic Ea became the most powerful of the gods, ruling even his forebears.

Apsu and Tiamat's descendents became an unruly crowd. Eventually Apsu, in his frustration and inability to sleep with the clamor, went to Tiamat, and he proposed to her that he slay their noisy offspring. Tiamat was furious at his suggestion to kill their clan, but after leaving her Apsu resolved to proceed with his murderous plan. When the young gods heard of his plot against them, they were silent and fearful, but soon Ea was hatching a scheme. He cast a spell on Apsu, pulled Apsu's crown from his head, and slew him. Ea then built his palace on Apsu's waters, and it was there that, with the goddess Damkina, he fathered Marduk, the four-eared, four-eyed giant who was god of the rains and storms.



Marduk.

<http://www.stenudd.com/myth/enumaelish/images/Marduk.jpg>

The other gods, however, went to Tiamat and complained of how Ea had slain her husband. Aroused, she collected an army of dragons and monsters, and at its head she placed the god Kingu, whom she gave magical powers as well. Even Ea was at a loss how to combat such a host, until he finally called on his son Marduk. Marduk gladly agreed to take on his father's battle, on the condition that he, Marduk, would rule the gods after achieving this victory. The other gods agreed, and at a banquet they gave him his royal robes and scepter.

Marduk armed himself with a bow and arrows, a club, and lightning, and he went in search of Tiamat's monstrous army. Rolling his thunder and storms in front of him, he attacked, and Kingu's battle plan soon disintegrated. Tiamat was left alone to fight Marduk, and she howled as they closed for battle. They struggled as Marduk caught her in his nets. When she opened her mouth to devour him, he filled it with the evil wind that served him. She could not close her mouth with his gale blasting in it, and he shot an arrow down her throat. It split her heart, and she was slain.

After subduing the rest of her host, he took his club and split Tiamat's water-laden body in half like a clam shell. Half he put in the sky and made the heavens, and he posted guards there to make sure that Tiamat's salt waters could not escape. Across the heavens he made stations in the stars for the gods, and he made the moon and set it forth on its schedule across the heavens. From the other half of Tiamat's body he made the land, which he placed over Apsu's fresh waters, which now arise in wells and

springs. From her eyes he made flow the Tigris and Euphrates. Across this land he made the grains and herbs, the pastures and fields, the rains and the seeds, the cows and ewes, and the forests and the orchards.

Marduk set the vanquished gods who had supported Tiamat to a variety of tasks, including work in the fields and canals. Soon they complained of their work, however, and they rebelled by burning their spades and baskets. Marduk saw a solution to their labors, though, and proposed it to Ea. He had Kingu, Tiamat's general, brought forward from the ranks of the defeated gods, and Kingu was slain. With Kingu's blood, with clay from the earth, and with spittle from the other gods, Ea and the birth-goddess Nintu created humans. On them Ea imposed the labor previously assigned to the gods. Thus the humans were set to maintain the canals and boundary ditches, to hoe and to carry, to irrigate the land and to raise crops, to raise animals and fill the granaries, and to worship the gods at their regular festivals.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Summarize the myth in your own words.
2. How are the two accounts similar?
3. Can science prove the truth of the story?
4. What does creation story tell us about the Babylonian people?
5. How might the account influence the believer's attitudes and actions?

Alexander Heidel, 1952, *The Babylonian Genesis* (2nd edn.): Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 153 p. (BS1236.H4 1963). Tikva Fryer-Kensky, (trans), *Astrahasis*, in O'Brien, Joan, and Major, Wilfred, 1982, *In the Beginning: Creation Myths from Ancient Mesopotamia, Israel, and Greece*: Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 211 p. (BL226.O27 1982) cited at <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSMarduk.html>

This, the second of our two Hebrew creation stories, is from Genesis 1:1 to 2:3. It thus appears first in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis, but it is actually the younger of the two stories presented there. A considerable body of scholarship over the last two or three centuries has concluded that this story was written in about the sixth century B.C.. That was after Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and at a time when the Hebrews were faced with exile in Babylon.

The author of this later story is known to scholars as "P", because he or she wrote from a much more "priestly" perspective than J, the author of the chronologically earlier story that appears in Genesis 2:4 to 3:24 (see "Yahweh", above). P's story is one of creation ex nihilo (from nothing), and the creation is a much more stately process than that in J's story. Because of the timing of its writing and the grandeur of its language, P's story has been interpreted by scholars "as an origin story created for the benefit of a lost nation in the need of encouragement and affirmation" (Leeming and Leeming 1994, p. 113). In fact, some scholars have suggested that P's story was actually written in Babylon.

P used the name "Elohim" for the creator, and that usage is continued in the paraphrase below. "Elohim" (, pronounced "e lo HEEM") is actually a plural word perhaps best translated as "the powerful ones". P also used plural phrasing in the Elohim's creation of humankind "after our own likeness". Scholars have suggested that the use of the plural "Elohim" rather than the singular "Eloha" may harken back to polytheistic roots of Middle Eastern religions and was a way to emphasize the magnitude of the deity in question. P's first people have no names at all, in keeping with the story's focus on the grandeur of the creator rather than on the created.

The Elohim

In the beginning the Elohim made the sky and the earth, but the earth was shapeless and everything was dark. The Elohim said "Let there be light," and there was the light that made day different from night. And that was the first day.

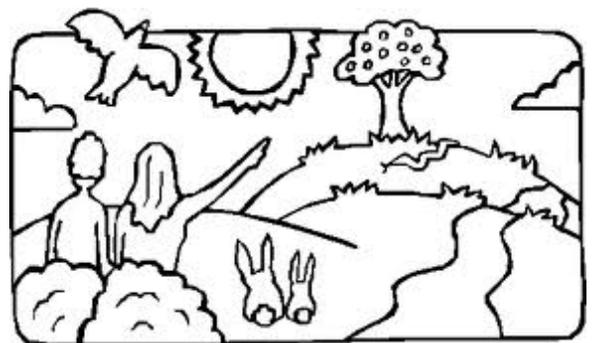
The Elohim said, "Let there be a dome to separate the heavens from the waters below," and there were the heavens. And that was the second day.

The Elohim said, "Let the waters of the earth gather so that there are seas and there is dry land," and so it was. The Elohim said, "Let there be vegetation on the land, with plants to yield seeds and fruits," and so it was. And that was the third day.

The Elohim said, "Let there be light in the heavens, and let them change with the seasons," and so there were stars. Then the Elohim made a sun and a moon to rule over the day and to rule over the night. And that was the fourth day.

The Elohim said, "Let there be creatures in the waters, and let there be birds in the skies," and so there were sea monsters and sea creatures and birds. The Elohim blessed them, saying "Be fruitful and multiply". And that was the fifth day.

The Elohim said, "Let the earth have animals of various kinds", and so it was. Then the Elohim said, "Let us make humans after our own likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle and creeping things of the land, and over all the earth." The Elohim said to these humans, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, ruling over the fish and the birds and the animals of the land. We have given you every plant and tree yielding seed. To every beast and bird of the Earth we have given every green plant for food." And that was the sixth day.



And on the seventh day the making of the heavens and earth was finished, and the Elohim rested.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Summarize the myth in your own words.
2. How are the two accounts similar?
3. Can science prove the truth of the story?
4. What does creation story tell us about the Hebrew people?
5. How might the account influence the believer's attitudes and actions?

Norman C. Habel, 1971, *Literary Criticism of the Bible*: Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 86 p. (BS 1225.2 .H3) David Adams Leeming and Margaret Adams Leeming, 1994, *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths*: Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 330 p. (BL 325.C7 L44 1994) John Lawrence MacKenzie, 1966, "Pentateuch" and "Adam and Eve" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*: Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. Herbert G. May, editor, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*: New York, Oxford University Press, 1564 p. Dagobert D. Runes, 1959, *Concise Dictionary of Judaism*: New York, Philosophical Library Inc., 237 p. (BM 50.R941c) A.M. Silbermann, translator, 5745 [1985], *Chumash, with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth, and Rashi's Commentary, Vol. 1*: Jerusalem, The Silbermann Family, 281 + 29 p. (BS 1221 1985 v.1) Julius Wellhausen, 1899, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bucher des Alten Testaments*: Berlin, G. Reimer, 373 p. (BS 1215.W4 1899) cited at <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSEIohim.html>