

NORSE CREATION

Ginnungagap was the great emptiness before there was a world, or any living things in it.

Far to the South of the Ginnungagap was the fiery realm of Muspell, with its long, hot rivers full of poison and vast lakes of fire. Nothing could grow in this burning realm.

To the North was the dark and cold realm of Niflheim, where icy fountains spewed forth freezing rivers. Nothing could grow here either, for the sky was always dark and the mountains were blocks of solid ice.

Slowly, over years and years and years, the fiery blasts from Muspell began to melt the icy mountains of Niflheim. Out of the melting ice, the giant Ymir emerged, the first being of the vast Ginnungagap.

Next to him there emerged a cow from the ice. The cow licked the salt from the ice mountains and Ymir drank the cow's milk. Ymir grew larger and larger.

The cow licked away entire mountains of ice. Slowly she licked the ice from two more beings, this time the god Buri and his goddess wife. They had a son named Bor, and his son was named Odin, who became the king of all the gods.

Ymir was cruel and brutal. Odin and the other gods could no longer abide by his evil acts and together the gods slew him. Ymir's huge body formed the earth. His blood became the sea, his flesh became the land, his bones the mountains and his hair the trees. Odin and the other gods formed the sky with his skull, held up by four towering pillars.

Odin gathered sparks from the fiery depths of Muspell and created the sun and moon. These he set in the sky.

As the sun and moon shone over the new world in the Ginnungagap, the ice began to melt and plants and trees began to grow.

The greatest tree of all was the Yggdrasil, which grew in the very center of the earth. Its roots penetrated into the bottom of creation and its leaves reached the very top of the sky.

Odin was satisfied with the new world, and named it Midgard, 'The Middle Land'.

But the world still needed people. On one of his walks, Odin found two fallen trees, an ash and an elm. He lifted them from the mud and formed the first man and woman from them. Odin breathed life into the beings, gave them reason and feelings, hearing and sight.

He named the man Ask and the woman Embla. From these two sprang the entire human race. The humans had the task of looking after Midgard, while the gods ascended to Asgard, their realm in heaven.

However, not everyone was pleased with Odin's work. Ymir's giant sisters were still mourning his death and were looking for a way to take their revenge on the gods who killed him.

They gathered at the foot of Yggdrasil and began carving lines into it.

Each line was a human life, filled with twists and turns, beginning with a man's birth, and ending with his death. At the end of each line they made a deep cut to ensure that humans would never be as powerful as the gods.

These spells were so powerful that not even Odin could do anything to change them. Thus Yggdrasil became known as 'The Tree of Life' and humans knew death and suffering in their world.

