

Indo-European Mythology 2

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All questions from both standard sets are required.

Standard Set 1: Basic Myths

Question #1: Describe and compare how the cosmos is created through sacrifice in two different IE cultures. (150 words for each culture)

There are many myths concerning the creation of the cosmos in the ancient Indo-European (IE) world, but some of them share remarkable similarities. In general, a primordial being is killed or dismembered and from the pieces of his body the universe is made (Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos & Society*, 2). Sometimes, though not always, the central characters are 'Man' (**Manu*) and 'Twin' (**Yemo*), who is often referred to as a king (and sometimes an ox accompanies them). Together they decide to create the universe. The 'Man' would be a priest, and he makes a sacrifice of the other two in order to accomplish their goal. This may be the original PIE creation myth (Lincoln, *Death, War & Sacrifice*, 7).

VEDIC INDIA

In the *Rig Veda*, the book of hymns from Vedic India, there is a creation myth where Purusha (meaning "Person" according to Mahony, 112) is sacrificed and dismembered by the Gods. It can be found in Book 10, Hymn 90, verses 11-14 (Griffith, 603):

- 11 When they divided Purusha how many portions
did they make?
What do they call his mouth, his arms?
What do they call his thighs and feet?
- 12 The Brahman (Priest) was in his mouth,
of both his arms was the Rajanya (Warrior) made.
His thighs became the Vaisya (Commoners),
from his feet the Sudra (Servant) was produced.*
- 13 The Moon was gendered from his mind,
and from his eye the Sun had birth;
Indra and Agni (Fire) from his mouth were
Born, and Vayu (Wind) from his breath.
- 14 Forth from his navel came mid-air; the
sky was fashioned from his head;
Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions (directions?).
Thus they formed the worlds.

* *This is the only hymn in the Rig Veda that mentions the four castes of Vedic society (Griffith, 603, n.12).*

ANCIENT ROME

The Romans also had some similar themes in their own lore. It must be remembered that IE mythology in Rome was remembered along civic, rather than religious, lines, where the mythic themes would play out in the 'histories' of the founding of Rome, the monarchical era and even the early Republic (Puhvel, 146-7).

Two myths concerning the founding of the city (the 'cosmos' of Rome) reflect these themes – one of the killing of Twin and the other of dismemberment. In one tale, the twins Romulus and Remus were laying out the walls of the city. Romulus was plowing a furrow to mark the walls while Remus, who had just lost the right to name the new city after himself, taunted his brother by jumping over the furrowed 'wall'. In anger, Romulus killed his brother (Morford, 653-5). The sacred name of Romulus, *Quirinus*, (**Co-vir-inos*) comes from the word for 'Man', and the name 'Remus' is cognate (with initial consonantal deformation) to the word **yem-* or 'Twin' (Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos & Society*, 174n.3).

Plutarch mentions a story in wide circulation about Romulus in his *Life of Romulus*, chapter 27:

But others conjecture that the senators rose up against him and dismembered him in the temple of Hephaistos, distributing his body (among themselves), and each one putting a piece in the folds of his robes in order to carry them away.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus mentions later that his body pieces were buried by the Senators, and Walter Burkert has argued that by being placed in the earth, Romulus *became* the earth, a form of cosmological creation (Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos & Society*, 42).

Question #2: Describe the image of the Otherworld and/or afterlife in three different IE cultures. How may these images impact your understanding of your own afterlife beliefs and those of Neopagans in general? (400 words min.)

ANCIENT GREECE

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men need to consult with the ghost of Tiresias and so:

All day long her sails were full as she held her course over the sea, but when the sun went down and darkness was over all the earth, we got into the deep waters of the river Oceanus, where lie the land and city of the Cimmerians who live enshrouded in mist and darkness which the rays of the sun never pierce neither at his rising nor as he goes down again out of the heavens, but the poor wretches live in one long melancholy night."
(Butler, Book 11)

This shows us that, for Homer at least, the Underworld was at the far north, shrouded in darkness and mist, accessible by sea. In the *Illiad*, on the other hand, the Underworld is described as being "famous for colts", which would presumably require horse food, grown in meadows. But there was also an Isle of the Blessed, or Elysian Fields where heroes would go, with warm breezes instead of fog. (Puhvel, 138-9)

CELTIC GAUL

If the classical commentators are to be trusted, the Celts believed that there was life after death, and one that reflected their social statuses on earth. Of Celtic belief in an afterlife, Diodorus Siculus (5.28) writes,

"...the human spirit is immortal, and will enter a new body after a fixed number of years. For this reason some will cast letters to their relatives on funeral pyres, believing that the dead will be able to read them." (Koch, 12)

Strabo (*Geography* 4.4.4) writes that, 'Both these men [the druids] and others aver that men's souls and the universe are imperishable, although both fire and water will at some times prevail over them.' (Koch, 18) In writing of the druids, Pomponius Mela (*De Situ Orbis* 3.2.18) says they claim that, 'the spirit is eternal and another life awaits the spirits of the dead.' He goes on to show that this belief must have been strongly held,

For this reason also, in past times, they would defer business and payment of debts to the next life. There were some who would even throw themselves willingly onto the funeral pyres of their relatives so that they might live with them still. (Koch, 18)

Caesar (6.15) complained that the Druids taught this doctrine of life after death because it would incite Celtic warriors to greater acts of bravery and ferocity, since they had no fear of dying. (Koch, 22)

VEDIC INDIA

The land of the dead in Vedic India also seems to have involved a field. In the *Rig Veda*, Yama (the first to be sacrificed so that his body could be used to create the cosmos – the same as the Parusha above in question #1) (Griffith, Note 1, 538), the Lord of the Dead, has shown the way to the land of the dead for those who follow after. This land appears to be in the heavens (10.14.1):

1. Honor the King with thine oblations,
Yama, Vivasvan's Son, who gathers
men together,
Who travelled to the lofty heights above
us, who searches out and shows the
path to many.

In the next verse, we see that this land also has a pasture in it (or the entire place is pasture):

2. Yama first found for us a place to dwell
in : this pasture never can be taken from
us.
Men, born on earth tread their own paths
that lead them whither our ancient
Fathers have departed. (Griffith, 538)

Thus we see that the dead abide in a place that has pastures and horses, with fog and, perhaps, warm breezes, and for the Celts, at least, a chance to live their lives among the dead as they had among the living.

Many modern Neopagans, including myself, have been influenced by the idea of reincarnation. The idea that we will go to a somewhat pleasant place after death, for a rest, is an appealing one. Then, after a lifetime in these Elysian Fields, the soul may reincarnate back here on earth.

This brings up what some folks might see as a problem with this scenario – the idea that we can worship and have relationships with the Dead. Well, as long as they are in the Otherworld, contact is no problem. And at the Sacred Center of the Worlds, time is all time just as that place is all places, so since time isn't linear anyway, there should be no problem speaking with the Dead at the time that they are accessible (before reincarnation here).

Question #3: Describe the raiding of cattle by warriors (or divine reflexes of this action) in two cultures. How does this theme reflect the culture of the ancient Indo-European peoples, and is this theme relevant to modern Pagans? (300 words min.)

CELTIC IRELAND

In the great epic tale, *Táin Bó Cuailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cuailnge)*, the longest tale in the Ulster Cycle, the king and queen of Connacht, Ailill and Medb, attempt to carry off the great Brown Bull of Cuailnge from Ulster, where they are opposed by the great hero Cu Chulainn and his men. Medb wanted the Brown Bull to match with her husband's White Bull. In the end, Medb's army was defeated by Cu Chulainn and in a match-up between the two bulls, the Brown Bull defeated the White Bull. This war over a bull lasted for years and saw the deaths of many men. (Kinsella, 52-238)

VEDIC INDIA

The first warrior, Triton (Third), conducted the first cattle raid. A monstrous, three-headed serpent, Trisiras, who had lived in the area before the coming of the Vedics, had stolen their cattle and imprisoned them. It fell to Triton to recover them. Triton offered an intoxicating liquor to the God Indra, gaining his assistance, and then fortified with the same drink, Triton defeated the serpent and managed to drive off the imprisoned cattle. When Indra tried to kill the serpent and came to blows with it, the serpent managed to defeat the God, who called out for aid to the other Gods. The Goddess Inara prepared a festival with vats of liquor, and invited the serpent and its children to drink. Once they were drunk and unable to defend themselves, Indra slew them all. (Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice*, 10-11).

DISCUSSION

In both of these cases, greed drives the activities. Medb's greed to own the Brown Bull, and the serpent's greed to own the people's cattle, cause all the problems. Lincoln (*Death*, 12) asserts that Triton stands for all warriors, charged with killing all 'foreign' enemies and taking their wealth, enabling the expansion of the Indo-Europeans.

Seen in this unflattering light, the idea of the cattle raid becomes less desirable for modern Neopagans and ADF Druids. Seen from Cu Chulainn's standpoint, however, the defense of private property could be seen as a positive thing. Even Triton was trying to recover that which the serpent had stolen. Self-defense is a necessary thing. Stealing the things of others is reprehensible. A clear distinction must be made in the telling of these tales.

Question #4: Describe instances of "freeing" or "winning" the waters in two different IE cultures. How can this theme be used to reinforce our current practices and cosmology? (300 words min.)

There are two ways of looking at this question. One is the conflation of 'the waters' with 'cattle'. In the Vedic Indian tradition, the story of Indra and Vrtra refers to the cattle imprisoned in the mountain where Vrtra hides. In the Rig Veda (1.32.1 & 2) we see,

1. Now I shall proclaim the heroic feats of Indra, which the holder of the thunderbolt performed first: he slew the serpent, bored after the waters, split open the flanks of the mountains.
2. He slew the serpent reclining on the mountain. Tvastr fashioned for him the resounding thunderbolt. Running like lowing cows, the waters went quickly down to the sea. (Maurer, 42)

There are also many myths of a hero, associated with water, killing a triple-headed monster that parallel this one (such as the Roman Hercules/Cacus story, the Irish Cu Chulainn/three sons of Nechta Scéne story and the Italic Semo Sancus/three-headed, three-mouthed, six-eyed monster story. (Woodard, 189-219)

But there's also another way of looking at "winning the waters" which could resonate better with ADF ritual. And that is through the concept of "fire in water".

AVESTAN

The Avestan God Apam Napat ('Offspring or nephew of the Waters' and similar to the Vedic God of the Rig Veda who is a fiery deity immersed in water) has a story about the *xvarenah*, the luminous and fiery part of the true king, which withdrew from a struggle over it and retired to Lake Vourukasa where Apam Napat took it and hid it in the lake waters. The God Ahura Mazda declared that anyone who could take it could have it (and presumably be king) and the first to try was a man from a neighboring tribe who dove three times for it. But because he wasn't of the People, the *xvarenah* fled from his grasp, and this movement caused water to be released and flow from the lake, which in turn caused rivers to be formed. (Puhvel, 278)

ROMAN

The name of the Roman god of waters, Neptunus, is etymologically similar to 'Napat' (offspring or nephew), and there's a story that takes place on 23 July, the festival of Neptunalia in the Roman calendar. In the tenth year of a war with the Etruscan city of Veii, a crater lake fed only by underground springs suddenly filled to the top during the dry season. The Romans consulted oracles that warned them that should the lake overflow and the waters flow freely down to the sea, then Veii would never be conquered. To counter this, the Romans diverted the waters to irrigate the countryside, away from the sea, and thereby won the war. Here, the Romans were the interlopers since the lake was on Etruscan territory. (Puhvel, 280)

IRISH CELTIC

Nechtan (a name also cognate with 'Napat') had a secret well that only he (and three of his cupbearers) could approach safely, due to some source of heat or light that could burst forth in a dangerous fashion from the well. His wife, Boand, who should have known better, came to the well to purify herself from her liaison with the Dagda, and circled it counterclockwise three times. The waters rose up from the well and attacked her, chasing her (and creating a river in the process) to the sea where she drowned. (Puhvel, 279)

In all three cases, water is released due to the efforts of an outsider. Ritually speaking, the Waters of Life in ADF are the property, or the essence, of the Kindreds, and only given to us in return for our sacrifices. In a sense, we are the outsiders as far as the Waters are concerned, since we don't 'own' them. And it is through our efforts and our sacrifices that the Kindreds give us, or 'release' to us, these Waters. And alcohol, a common form of the Waters of Life in ADF ritual, can be described as 'fire in water' due to the way it 'burns' the throat when drunk, which reinforces this interpretation.

Question #5: Show two examples in one IE culture of a deity engaging in actions that are unethical or unvirtuous, and speculate on why the deities sometimes engage in this type of behavior. (min. 100 words per example)

INDRA (Vedic India)

In the tales of the Vedic storm and warrior God Indra, the one most folks know about is his killing of the great serpent Vrtra. However, as mentioned in question #3 above, he also helped Triton free the people's cows through killing the serpent Trisiras (Three-headed, a possible version of Vrtra) by striking the serpent and cutting off his three heads. But Trisiras was Indra's half brother as they shared a father, Tvastar, who sired Indra on a Goddess and Trisiras on a demoness. So if Trisiras was Indra's half brother, then Indra had breached the moral law against killing one's relations. Interestingly enough, in later traditions, it was hinted that Indra also killed his father Tvastar. (Puhvel, 53)

Later, Indra also committed the crime of breaking a contractual agreement. He had formed a pact with the demon Námuci- to not fight one another, which made them officially 'friends' of a sort. Námuci- provoked Indra at one point by feeding him alcohol instead of soma, which incapacitated him, and in revenge, Indra used subterfuge to find a way of killing the demon. (Puhvel, 54) Indra had promised not to harm Námuci- by day nor night, or with weapons dry or wet. So at twilight, Indra cut off the head of Námuci- with foam. Thus not only is Indra a kin killer but also a contract breaker. (Strutynski, 270)

These sins of Indra's (and there are more) may be why his cult declined at the end of the Vedic era, through the contempt of the Brahmins, until it existed no more.

Warriors, by their very nature, are outside society. They may present a danger to society while at the same time protecting it. Often, a warrior may decide that the ends justify the means, that their needs and passions are more important than right action. Certainly, the passion of the moment can lead folks astray, and great discipline is required to keep that from happening. The Gods who occasionally behave this way are merely mirroring human life (or are humans mirroring Immortals?). As Udo Strutynski puts it (284), "In the final analysis, sin is to the warrior what the warrior is to society: a metaphor for the imperfections of the world and of the disease inherent in all human undertakings."

Question #6: Explain the monomyth (aka "hero cycle") and show how it applies to a single hero from the IE culture of your choice. (150 words min.)

The *monomyth* is a concept put forward by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, which explains many hero/warrior myths in terms of the immortal struggle that carries the human spirit forward in myth and ritual. These rites of passage tend to follow the basic formula of Separation – Initiation (penetration to a source of power) – and Return. (Campbell, 30) This formula may be broken down into many pieces or subgroups, though it appears to be a rare hero who undergoes all of them.

Usually the adventure begins with a **blunder** or a chance happening, and the hero hears a **call** to act. The hero's first encounter often brings a protective, **supernatural figure that offers aid** to the hero for use later in the adventure. At the first threshold of the adventure, the hero must **confront a guardian** at this entrance of magnified power, beyond which is darkness or a place outside of normal reality. At the next threshold (which Campbell calls "the belly of the whale", the hero does not confront a guardian but is instead **sucked inward** in a form of self-annihilation. Here the hero moves through a '**dream landscape**' where **s/he must survive a succession of trials (the initiation)** where the hero becomes somehow purified. This is followed by a **mystical marriage to a queen or 'goddess of the world'**. Here the hero gains the '**boon**' that is then brought forth back into the world for the benefit of all mankind. (Campbell, 51-193)

While many heroes don't necessarily take all these steps, some come close. I am going to use Pwyll, Pen Annwfn, from the First Branch of the Mabinogi as my example. (Ford, 37-56)

The Blunder

At the opening of the story, Pwyll is out hunting with his hounds when he spies a great stag, and gives chase. When he and his hounds catch the stag he sees that another set of hounds already has the stag cornered. One would think that the owner of this second hound pack would be near. Instead of retiring from the fray, however, Pwyll impetuously sets his own hounds on the stag and takes the prize. It is then Arawn, a king of the Underworld (Annwfn) and of higher rank, and owner of the 2nd pack of hounds, arrives and confronts Pwyll.

The Call, Supernatural Aid

Realizing his blunder, Pwyll offers to make amends. Arawn agrees, telling Pwyll that he will change places with him for a year – trading appearances and homes, and that at the end of that year Pwyll must fight and defeat Arawn’s enemy Hafgan. Arawn also tells Pwyll that he must only strike one blow against Hafgan, no matter how much he may feel inclined to strike again. Only by striking one blow can Hafgan be defeated. This advice from the supernatural being allows Pwyll to succeed in the Underworld and return to Dyfed.

Second Threshold – Sucked Inward – Dream Landscape

Having defeated Hafgan, Pwyll is officially a ‘friend’ of Arawn and they switch places once again. But Pwyll has become used to wonders, and wants more. He sits on the Mound of Arberth where “any noble who sits upon it shall not leave it without the one of two things: either he will be mortally wounded or suffer an injury, or he will see a marvel.” (Ford, 42) There he spies the Lady on the White Horse and he falls in love. He sends his horsemen after her, and later even goes himself, but no horseman can catch the walking mare of the Lady, no matter how fast they ride. In this unreal landscape he calls to her and begs her to wait, which she does. Her name is Rhiannon and they agree to marry the following year.

The Succession of Trials

At the wedding feast, Pwyll foolishly grants a boon to Gwawl who demands Rhiannon’s hand in marriage. With Rhiannon’s help, the marriage is put off for another year and they manage to trick Gwawl into agreeing to release Pwyll from his promise.

Here the order appears not to follow the monomyth, since more trials will take place after the marriage.

Marriage to the Goddess

With Gwawl out of the way, Rhiannon and Pwyll are married. But she does not bear a child immediately, and Pwyll is forced by his ministers to promise to find another wife if she does not produce a child by the end of the year. She does, however, but during the night after the birth the baby disappears, and Rhiannon is accused of eating her own child. Pwyll is forced to punish Rhiannon against his will. The child turns up elsewhere in Wales, in exchange for a colt and through the agency of a monstrous claw, and later is reunited with his parents.

The Boon

With the child returned we may say that the ‘marriage to the goddess’ has finally been completed. She brings sovereignty to Pwyll and an heir, and Pwyll has finally learned the value of sober judgment rather than impetuosity, living up to his name (Pwyll means ‘wisdom, caution’). (Davies, 228)

Therefore, he brings peace and prosperity to the land.

Standard Set 2: Applications

Question #1: Using your answer to question 1 above (cosmos creation), create a piece for us in ritual that describes the process of cosmos creation through sacrifice. (no min. word count)

This is a piece for the ‘(Re)Creation of the Cosmos’ section of the Core Order of Ritual.

HYMN TO TWIN

People Chant:

*Sacrificing Sacrificer,
Cosmos made and made again,
Great to small and small to great,
This sacrificial wheel.*

Priest says:

*Two there were when time began,
When man and twin appeared.
Twin gave himself into man's hand
That Order might be made
Within the heart of chaos dark.*

People Chant:

*Sacrificing Sacrificer,
Cosmos made and made again,
Great to small and small to great,
This sacrificial wheel.*

Priest says:

*Your skull did form the shining sky,
Your eye did make the sun.
Your breath the wind, your blood the sea,
Your flesh our fertile land,
Your very life the air we breathe.*

People Chant:

*Sacrificing Sacrificer,
Cosmos made and made again,
Great to small and small to great,
This sacrificial wheel.*

Priest says:

*We stand upon you at our fire,
We sing upon your wind.
Our blood flows like your raging sea
Beneath your starry sky,
And every breath reminds us now
What we must give to you.*

People Chant:

*Sacrificing Sacrificer,
Cosmos made and made again,
Great to small and small to great,
This sacrificial wheel.*

Question #2: Using your answer to question 4 above (winning the waters), create a piece for use in ritual that describes winning the waters. (no min. word count)

THE BLESSINGS

The Calling

Priest says:

Kindreds of our People! Ancient, Noble and Shining Ones!
Our sacrifices have been made to you, O Great Ones,
And we have heard your true Omens.

We have purified ourselves with Fire and Water,
And we have come before you clean and pure of heart.
We crave the bounty of Your blessings.

But Your Light, the Fire of Heaven, eludes our grasp!
That great illumination of our hearts and souls,
That only You can bestow, flees from us!

We are Your people, O Kindreds! No strangers are we!
See us here in worship and honor -
Grant that we may be filled with the power of Your blessings!

Priest raises the cup to be blessed and says:

We raise the Cup of Blessing, O Kindreds,
We raise it up to You!

Fill this Cup with Illumination for our souls,
Fill these Waters with the Light of Heaven,
Blend Your Fire with the Waters of the Earth!

O Great Ones, we pray, give us the Waters of Life!

The People say:

Give us the Waters of Life!

The Hallowing

Priest holds out Cup and says:

With Love we give; with Love You shall respond.
With Trust we give; with Trust the Bond is made.
Your Power fills our Cup with Blessings true,
The stuff of Gods and Spirits let us drink.

(pause)

The Affirmation

Children of Earth, shall we accept these gifts of the Kindreds?

The People say:

We shall!

The Priest lowers the Cup and quietly says:

Then behold, the Waters of Life.

Drink of these Waters that we may be filled with Their great blessings!

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