

ADF Cosmology and Sacrifice

In religion, cosmology is, essentially, the study of the universe – how it is structured and how the various parts interact with each other to create a cohesive whole. In ADF, we have studied the ideas and beliefs of the ancient Indo-Europeans (IE's), and have found similarities which seem to occur across many of these cultures. These common ideas can be assembled into a coherent system that reflects the ideas of the ancients while providing us with the structure needed to create our Core Order of Ritual.

While we cannot claim that all IE cultures shared all these ideas, we have found that they do fit in well in most IE Pagan cultural contexts.

Chaos and Cosmos

To the ancient Proto-Indo-Europeans, the only part of their world that they could reasonably control was their own encampment, and perhaps the fields immediately around it where they kept their cattle. But out beyond those fields were unknown steppes or forested lands populated by wild animals, ghosts and hostile tribes. This outer, terrifying land they called chaos. Cosmos, on the other hand, means order, and the cosmos of these early tribes consisted of those things they could rely on – such as their encampments, their warriors' prowess, their cattle, the seasons and the great, annual dance of the stars across the sky as they circle the Pole Star.

And chaos is not all negative, for from outside the boundaries of Order came resources, and mysteries, and some of the inspiration and wisdom of the Gods.

In looking at the world around them, the ancients saw the tension between chaos and cosmos, and the opportunities and risks it offered. They created ritual to manage the relationship between the tribe and the 'Other' (those things outside the tribe), between the village and the wildwood, and between chaos and cosmos.

The Creation of the Universe

We do not know of one, single IE myth used by the ancients to explain the creation of the Universe. As the IE's migrated across Asia and Europe, many of them were influenced by neighboring cultures, and these influences may have changed the original mythic beliefs of the Indo-Europeans. However, some diverse IE cultures share a similar creation myth that many scholars believe may reflect the original myth from Proto-Indo-European times. In these ancient IE myths, first there were two beings, Man and his Twin (sometimes accompanied by a cow). Man sacrificed or slew Twin and used the parts of his body to create the universe as we know it. In some myths, Twin colonized the Underworld and became the first God of the Dead. Thus, the cosmos was established out of chaos, and the sacred was manifested there, the work of the Gods. This first sacrifice shows that since the Worlds are all made of one being, then there must be a basic kinship between all beings, and communication must be possible between the Worlds.

The Three Worlds

In general terms, the ancients saw the universe divided up into the three Worlds that we use in ADF.

The Heavens (or Upperworld) is the place of order, where the Shining Ones dwell. The predictable dance of the stars around the Pole Star shows great order, and the bright, shining sky forever exists above the storms and clouds of the Midworld.

The Midworld is the world in which we live, the place of the Spirits of the Land and of life as we know it. And here also are the Otherworlds, the mythic/spiritual counterparts to our common

world, existing unseen all around us. These are the homes of the greater land spirits, such as the Sidhe, the Tylwyth Teg, the Wights, and the Dryads, etc.

The Underworld is the shadowy land of the Dead and of the chthonic deities. Here, below the surface of the Midworld, the dead, or at least their bones, are buried, and this is where their spirits dwell. Death is a reminder that the wonderful order of life soon ends in the chaos of dissolution. But the Underworld is also a source of wonderful fertility, and especially of the inspiration that arises from the wisdom of the Dead. In some cultures, the Underworld is also seen as being islands across the western sea.

The Sacred Center of the Worlds

In ritual, we do as the Gods did, by re-creating the creation of Cosmos and of the universe. In so doing, we also re-create the time and place of that first creation.

The Sacred Center is that place, created in ritual, where all the Worlds meet, and where a “hole” can be forged allowing communication between these cosmic planes. In this place, we can be in all Worlds at once and in all times at once. Here, anything is possible.

In ADF worship, we do not move a circle of worshippers between the Worlds, but rather open a Gate at the center of the Worlds.

The Triple Hallows

In order to re-create the sacred center of the Worlds, we need first to connect to those Worlds. In ritual, we bless the symbols of the Well, Fire and Tree (our triple hallows) in our ritual spaces to create gateways to these spiritual places. While the symbols of Well, Fire and Tree are the ones most commonly used in ADF (and Fire is required), there are some accepted cultural variations such as Pit, Fire and Portal; three Fires; etc.

Fire – The Fire is the ancient focus of ritual. It is the transmuter and transformer, which can take something, like oil or butter, and change it into something else, something possibly more accessible to the Gods. The Fire corresponds with the Shining Ones and with order, and is our connection to the world of the Heavens. The Fire is common to all IE cultures.

Well – The Well is an ancient place of offering. The ancient Celts used to offer weapons, precious objects and even household goods to water. The Well connects with the earth power beneath us, and with the fresh, ordered waters of the earth. It corresponds with the Sacred Dead and with the chthonic deities, and is our connection to the Underworld. The Well can also be seen as a shaft, pit or chasm.

Tree – The Tree is the axis mundi or axis of the world. It is the cosmic pillar that holds up the sky and connects, through its roots, with the lands below our feet. Thus the Tree, while existing in the Midworld, connects all the Worlds above and below. It can be a tree, a mountain, an omphalos or even a pillar or boundary stone. But the Tree always stands at the center of ‘our’ world.

Liminal Gods and Psychopomps

In ADF ritual, once we have re-created the Center of the Worlds and consecrated the Hallows, we call upon a special, liminal God or Goddess to “join their magic with ours” so that we might open those gateways to the Three worlds that have taken form in our Hallows. We call these deities Gatekeepers.

Liminality is the condition of being neither one thing nor another. In the physical world, liminal objects can be boundaries of all kinds, such as walls, hedges, and sea shores or even a place like a crossroads, that is neither one road nor another, or both at once. Liminal times include

dawn and dusk (neither day nor night) or even, for the Celts at least, the hinge days of Beltane and Samhain (neither summer nor winter). The veils between the Worlds are thinnest at liminal times and places.

Certain deities are particularly known for crossing the boundaries between the Worlds. Some carry folks into Faery, while others carry the dead to the Underworld or the Isles of the Blest. These latter deities are also called psychopomps.

****ghosti***

This word, **ghosti*, is a reconstructed Proto-Indo-European word that refers to “someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality.” The English words ‘guest’ and ‘host’ both come from **ghosti*. Another way of putting this would be the saying, “I give that You may give,” and this concept underlies our entire religion. We give offerings to the Kindreds to form relationships with them, just as we would give of ourselves to our friends and family, to maintain close ties. In ancient days, folks would build friendship by the ritual exchange of gifts, and these ties could bind families for generations. And so we give to the Kindreds in expectation that They will give to us in return.

Sacrifice

In our time, the word ‘sacrifice’ has a negative connotation to some people, due to its use by the dominant religion to refer to its founder’s agonizing death by execution.

But the word comes from the Latin words *sacer* (sacred; to set apart) and *facere* (to make or to do). Thus its true meaning is “to make sacred, to set apart.” And this is just what we do when we make our offerings to the Kindreds. And when we make these offerings, we are ‘setting them apart’ from the profane world, making them appropriate for the Kindreds.

There are a number of reasons for making sacrifice:

1. **Reciprocity** – I give so that You may give. This is one of the most common forms of sacrifice in ADF. We make offerings to the Kindreds in order to receive blessings or wisdom in return.
2. **Apotropaic Offerings** - Averting evil or bad luck. Here, the sacrificer makes an offering to say, in effect, “Take this and go”, rather than to form a relationship with that Power. The removal of any ritual pollution would also come under this heading.
3. **The Shared Meal** – Here we take food and eat some while giving the rest to the Kindreds. This act enhances the unity of the People through celebration, and allows communion with the Kindreds.
4. **Maintaining the Cosmic Order** – When we give offerings that the unity of the people be enhanced, or the earth may be healed and strengthened, we are re-affirming the cosmic order.
5. **Chaos Mitigates Cosmos** – Too much order can cause brittleness. Think of a tree that cannot bend in the wind, and therefore breaks. In our rites, we have Praise Offerings, which cannot be totally controlled. Spontaneity in prayers, actions and praise can keep a ritual from becoming too lifeless.

Cultural Variations

There are many different ways that the various hearth cultures of ADF interpret the Three Worlds and the Triple Hallows. While this essay will only cover three of them, other information may be found on the pages or e-mail lists of the various Kins in ADF.

Celtic (Irish)

Uisnech was the cosmological center of Ireland. Here the Druid Mide built the first fire in Ireland that burned for seven years, and from which all hearth fires in the land were lit. There was also a pillar stone at Uisnech which had five sides, representing the five provinces of Ireland. The twelve chief rivers were also said to have come from Uisnech, either caused by a storm or flowing from the white-rimmed well there. Other Irish wells are said to be the sources of various rivers, and the one at the source of the river Boyne had hazel trees that dropped their nuts into the pool, where they were eaten by the salmon of knowledge.

Instead of the Three Worlds of Heaven, Midworld and Underworld, the Irish thought of the cosmos as the Three Realms of Sky, Land and Sea. The sea was equated with the Underworld because the Dead would journey to the distant islands of the West beyond the mists of the sea, where the sky and ocean touched. Most Irish Celtic Groves in ADF use the Well, Fire, and Tree for the Hallows.

Germanic/Norse

Instead of three Worlds, the Norse have nine. While Asgardhr and Vanaheim, Midgardhr, and Helheim may correspond well with Heaven, Midworld and Underworld, respectively, the other five worlds are more problematical.

Ljossalfheimr (Alfheimr), the land of the Light Alfs, might fit in well with the Heavens, while Svartalfheimr, land of the dwarves (whose names translate into things like "dead one" and "corpse"), and Niflheim, the world of ice, may be part of the Underworld (Helheim may even be within Niflheim).

Svartalfheimr may also be in the Midworld, as the caves and tunnels of the dwarves are directly below the earth. The other two worlds (Jotunheimer, land of Giants, and Muspellheim, realm of the Fire Giants) may also fit into the Midworld part of the ADF cosmos.

Yggdrasill, the great World Tree, is at the center of the Worlds and connects them all. Odin, from his seat, could see all the Worlds at once, suggesting that it may have been on Yggdrasill. At the World Tree's base are three Wells, Mimir's Well (connected with knowledge), Wyrð's Well (connected with the court of the Aesir) and Hvergelmir, where the serpent Nidhogg would chew at the root of Yggdrasill. Mimir's Well could be a connection to the Ancestors, as a source of knowledge and wisdom. And Fire, the great transmuter and transformer, takes sacrifices to the Spirits.

Hellenic

In Hellenic religion, a mountain (and possibly Mt. Olympos, home of the 12 main Gods), might best correspond with the Heavens. The world of men and of the land and tree spirits, such as centaurs and dryads, would be the Midworld, and Hades, the land of the Dead, fits in well with the Underworld.

The Triple Hallows of Well, Fire and Tree in Hellenic religion could be conceived of as Pit, Fire and Mountain. A Mountain (again, possibly Olympos itself) could be the connection with the Heavens (though an Omphalos might work as well) and a Pit or chasm could be the connection to the Underworld (also, libations to the dead were often poured into holes specially made in the roofs of tombs, for the dead were ever thirsty). The Fire, seen as the Goddess Hestia, is that central point here in the Midworld where everything comes together, and where transformation is possible.

Summary

Regardless of our various hearth cultures, the cosmology of ADF works to bring us together in ritual and as a religion. Our Core Order of Ritual is based on this cosmology and the ideas from which it springs. We all re-create the cosmos to establish the Sacred Center, allowing communication with the three Worlds or Realms. We make sacrifices to the Kindreds, ask for Their blessings in return, and wind down the rite, disestablishing the Sacred Center in the process. You can see the article on ritual elsewhere in this booklet for a more complete explanation of our Core Order.

ADF's cosmology was created for us – the people of today. We have not attempted to re-create ancient religions because we are not ancient peoples. Rather, we are modern people worshipping ancient Gods and Goddesses in modern times. Seen in this light, all of our hearth cultures can function well within ADF, bringing us all together as one Folk.