
The YGGDRASIL as Metaphor

The Yggdrasil is the "world tree" in Norse mythology. It is also known as the "tree of knowledge," the "tree of the universe" and the "the tree of fate." There are several versions of the Norse legends concerning the tree and the Yggdrasil is represented in slightly different terms in each legend. But there is still a single image or theme that is consistent across the various legends. Within this context, the Yggdrasil makes a good symbol as well as a metaphor for the Journal of Paraphysics. In one way or another, it represents the opposing concepts of myth and knowledge, the known and unknown, mystery and reason as well as space and time.

As the "tree of the universe" and the "world tree," the Yggdrasil literally encompasses the whole of the earth and heavens. In the Norse creation legend, three God-brothers, Odin, Vili and Ve, killed the giant Ymir, which represented chaos. From the body of Ymir, the universe was created. The God-brothers created the earth from Ymir's brow. The abode of mankind was known as Midgard, the center region of the Norse universe. A great tree, the Yggdrasil, grew out of Ymir's body and became the universe. So the earth and the universe literally grew out of the initial chaos. Before this creation, everything existed as the world of death, called Niflheim. In one legend, the center of the world is beneath the tree as is the well of fate where the course of human life is decided, while in some forms of the legend the Gods convene their councils around the tree. So the Yggdrasil is central to the Norse mythologies. But in all of the legends, the tree has three roots that help to define the Yggdrasil's purpose and characteristics.

One of these roots extends to Niflheim, the underworld or world of the dead, which is a cold and barren land. Hel rules this region. This root feeds on water from the well Hvergelmir where the dragon Nithogg, representing darkness, eats at the root. Another root goes to Jotunheim, the land of the frost giants whose existence predates even Odin and the other Aesir Gods. In Jotunheim, the root ends at the well of Mimer whose waters are the source of all wisdom. It is from the waters of this well that the tree has become known as the tree of knowledge. The third root goes to Asgard, the abode of the Gods. In Asgard, the root ends at the well Urtharbrunn where the three Norns treat it with water from the well. These waters preserve the Yggdrasil from decay and give it immortality so that the tree represents the flow of time. The three Norns are the Goddesses and dispensers of fate. Urdar represents the past, Verdandi the present and Skuld represents the future. An eagle and a hawk sit high in the branches of the tree while

the squirrel Ratatosk runs up and down its trunk. Ratatosk carries messages and news from the great dragon Nithogg to the eagle and hawk. Thus the squirrel represents strife. Four stags feed on the foliage of the Yggdrasil and represent the four winds.

The tree is used to explain some physical phenomena. For example, whenever the giant Ymir tries to shake the tree off of his body, earthquakes occur. But the Yggdrasil is far more important in the overall explanation of the world. According to the common legend, Odin, the king of the Gods, wished to know more of the details regarding Ragnarok. Ragnarok will represent the twilight of the Gods, marking the doomsday or the final conflagration between good and evil during which the world would be destroyed. Asgard would be invaded by the evil god Loki, the frost giants, Fenrir the wolf and other denizens of evil. Nithogg will finally succeed in destroying the Yggdrasil and join in the battle against the Gods. Odin and the Gods will be joined those human warriors who had died in battle and thus entered Valhalla rather than the netherworld of Hel. The Ragnarok was foretold, but the details were not known so Odin went to Mimer, the keeper of the well of knowledge and wisdom and asked to drink of the waters therein. If Odin were to drink from these waters, he would gain future sight and know all the details of the end of time. Thus there was a special link between the legend of the Yggdrasil and the paranormal phenomenon of precognition.

Although Yggdrasil would be consumed or destroyed in the Ragnarok, a new tree would grow in its place and from it a new race of humankind would evolve. So the fate and welfare of humankind was closely associated with the Yggdrasil. But Mimer would not let Odin drink from the well unless Odin paid a special price. Odin plucked out his eye and threw it into the well and thus won the privilege of drinking the magical water, gaining future sight and special knowledge of the Ragnarok. Thereafter, Odin left Asgard to wander the earth among humans in the guise of a beggar until the day when he would lead the Gods and dead warriors in the battle between good and evil at the end of time.

This legend illustrates why the Yggdrasil qualifies as a metaphor and symbol for the Journal and paraphysics. Trees have always figured prominently in the legends of many human cultures, but only in the Norse legends has a tree, in this case an ash tree, reach such a prominent position. From the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden to the Bo tree under which Siddhartha Gautama reached enlightenment, the tree has represented knowledge, life, immortality and many purely religious themes. More recently, scientists have discovered that our very existence could well depend on the oxygen produced by the vast tropical forests of our world. Forests have always been associated with magic, mystery and superstition in the folk tales of many cultures. One need only look at the primeval forests in such tales as Hansel and Gretel. However, the tree also represents a logical hierarchical order, such as a family tree or even the evolutionary tree upon which the human race occupies one small twig at the end of one branch of the animal kingdom. It is upon this last tree that the human race sits in relation to all other forms of life on our planet.

The Norse legends form a very interesting part of our cultural heritage, as do the legends of other ethnic groups around the world. More about Norse mythology can be

found on the World Wide Web at other locations. An explanation of the prose Edda of [Snorri Sturluson](#), a medieval Icelandic historian, is located on the web as is a comprehensive list of sources on [Germanic Myths and Legends](#). [Nicole Cherry](#) has also published an excellent homepage, which identifies all of the various characters in Norse mythology.

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