

The Question of Creation

By Kirsten Swanson

George Wald, a world-renowned scientist, once stated, “Science goes from question to question; big questions, and little, tentative answers” (Wald). Humankind was born with the ability to question: how did we get to this point, how can we better prepare ourselves for tomorrow, and even, how and when will we die? Little can be done to quench the thirst for understanding that is provoked by these questions. However, many civilizations and religions have attempted to satiate this hunger by developing creation stories built upon their direct environmental exposures.

Based solely upon current scientific theory, the Earth was little more than particles floating around in space prior to the Big Bang. Upon the introduction of the Big Bang, the particles clumped together and eventually formed planets. Even though Earth was formed, life had not yet arrived. It was still millions, possibly billions, of years before the first single celled organisms appeared (McLamb). Following this presumption, it would be impossible for humans to be present at the dawning of the world. Therefore, civilizations, and even some religions, felt obligated to determine the source of their existence, mainly based on their everyday experiences and immediate surroundings.

The Penobscot tribe of current-day Maine prided themselves on their corn produce. Therefore, it was only logical for them to develop their creation and eventual survival around this staple crop. According to their creation story entitled “Corn Mother,” the tribe was failing because the Penobscot population was growing faster than they could find game to hunt. The children came to the motherly figure in the story, logically named First Mother, and complained

about the lack of food. Unable to watch her tribe wither away before her eyes, First Mother insisted on having herself killed in order to ensure a future for the tribe. As a by-product of her death, corn and tobacco rose from the ground and would continue to grow there for as long as the tribe would need it ("Corn Mother," 13). The Penobscot tribe also recognized the importance of crop renewal, as "they did not eat all, but put many kernels back into the earth" (13). The Penobscot people placed great importance on the corn crop; therefore it appeared most logical to them that their survival story be centered on this important food.

Japanese culture varies greatly from that of the American Indians, as the Japanese incorporate the mystical aspect of their history as well as the history of their noble families. Therefore, "The Origin of Japan and her People" addressed both of these pressing issues through the utilization of mythical deities and the resulting consequences. Two individuals, Izanagi and Izanami, were selected to perform the delicate task of creating the islands of Japan and the deities which would inhabit them. After giving birth to the eight islands of Japan, six smaller ones, and a variety of gods, the fire deity killed Izanami due to the burns she sustained while in childbirth. Izanagi was so distraught by the experience that he went to the underworld to search for Izanami. Izanagi disobeyed Izanami's direct orders, thus forcing her to shout "that she would each day strangle one thousand people of Japan. He responded that if she did so, he would each day cause fifteen hundred Japanese people to be born" (Philippi). The creation story continues to describe how a king's poor judgment caused the Japanese nation to become mortal. Although relatively short, the Japanese creation story afforded the Japanese people great insight as to why their world had evolved into its current form. The short paragraph within the creation story about Izanagi's lack of cooperation explained concisely to the Japanese people why a certain number of individuals died each day on the islands of Japan. The Japanese were led to believe that they

had the opportunity to live forever; however, one calamitous decision ruined the fate for an endless number of generations to come.

The Christian Bible took yet another approach on creation. According to the Bible, God created the heavens and the earth before introducing humans on Earth. He created Adam and Eve and gave them a home in the Garden of Eden where they were allowed to live until the end of time. However, a snake strategically placed within the Garden, tempted Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. In taking the apple from the snake, Eve sentenced all human beings from that point forward to be banished from the perfection of the Garden of Eden. Humans would no longer be able to walk and converse with God directly; rather they would be required to maintain their faith through the teachings of prophets and the Bible. In some respects, the Christian Bible is similar to the Japanese creation story, as it also provides rationale as to how the evolution of human life on earth has been influenced by seemingly minor decisions made thousands of years ago. From the outset of Genesis, the Bible states how women were created from men. "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman. . ." (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, Gen. 2:21-22). Hardships appear to have run rampant throughout the ancient world. Therefore, it was ideal to be in a situation where everything would be provided for the individual, without a care in the world. Since a world as described within the Garden of Eden did not exist when written word was possible, it was ideological to create such a haven and a reasonable explanation as to why it no longer existed.

A secondary argument can be made about each of the three explored creation stories, involving the validity of the creation stories as they stand today. For example, the Penobscot

tribe is well known to have inhabited what is the current-day New England area prior to 1600 ("Historical Background"). However, the footnote of "Corn Mother" states, "Retold from three nineteenth-century sources." This suggests that there may be variations in the creation story between its first conception and when it was translated to written word. The same argument can be made for "The Origin of Japan and her People." The preface states "The Kojiki was compiled in the 500s to 700s A.D., at the direction of various emperors intent on standardizing and preserving Japan's mythic history" (Philippi). This statement suggests that the emperors may have had a hand in the preservation, perhaps by altering the creation story to fit their own specifications. The editors of the *Harper Collins Study Bible* also question the validity of the source of the written word. "According to the Jewish and Christian tradition, the book of Genesis was dictated by God to Moses . . . commentators have long noted that several points in Genesis indicate the narrator lived well after Moses . . . Modern archaeological and historical discoveries confirm this general picture . . ." (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 3). Another complication involves the translation from language to language. Many languages have words that are exclusive to their language, therefore they can not be decoded, and the true meaning of the word may be lost in the translation process. Over time, words can take on different definitions and new societal meanings. Time often changes the world's perception of history, and it appears that creation stories have not been able to escape this fate either.

Although one can now travel around the world with relative ease, travel has not always been as accessible or logical. Thus, many individuals have only experienced their immediate surroundings. It was this environmental influence that inspired several civilizations and religions to depict how the world began. Each had its own relevance to the civilization to which it was created. Therefore, each creation story is deemed to be an important truth to its people.

Works Cited

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