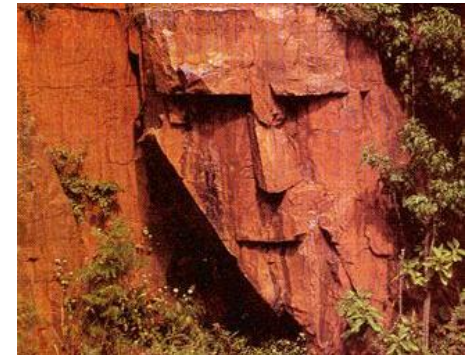


Animism, Polytheism and Monotheism

Earth-centered theologies

Animism

- ▶ **The belief that the natural world, as a whole or in parts, has a soul or spirit.**
 - ▶ As a whole = World Spirit, Mother Earth, Gaia
 - ▶ In parts = rocks, trees, springs, and animals all have individual spirits
- ▶ For several centuries, animism was critiqued as being “immature,” similar to ways children believe that inanimate objects are alive or having feelings.
- ▶ **Discussion question:** Does being childlike, unscientific, or imaginative make religious thought immature? Has humanity been *evolving religiously* since prehistoric times?



What's cool about animism?

- ▶ It's the oldest form of religious belief, emerging at the same time in history in hunter-gatherer groups all around the world.
- ▶ Since *everything* has a soul, human beings aren't seen as superior to anything in the universe.
- ▶ Sacred stories have a huge cast of characters: heroic animals, evil caves, helpful streams, and more.
- ▶ People are careful and respectful when using natural resources: for example, the rivers or forests could avenge misuse of water or wood.
- ▶ What else, in your mind, is cool about animism?



Aho Mitakuya Oyasin (To all my relatives): An animist prayer from the Lakota tradition

All my relatives, I honor you in this circle of life with me today. I am grateful for this opportunity to acknowledge you in this prayer...

To the Creator, for the ultimate gift of life, I thank you.

To the mineral nation that has built and maintained my bones and all foundations of life experience, I thank you.

To the plant nation that sustains my organs and body and gives me healing herbs for sickness, I thank you.

To the animal nation that feeds me from your own flesh and offers your loyal companionship in this walk of life, I thank you.

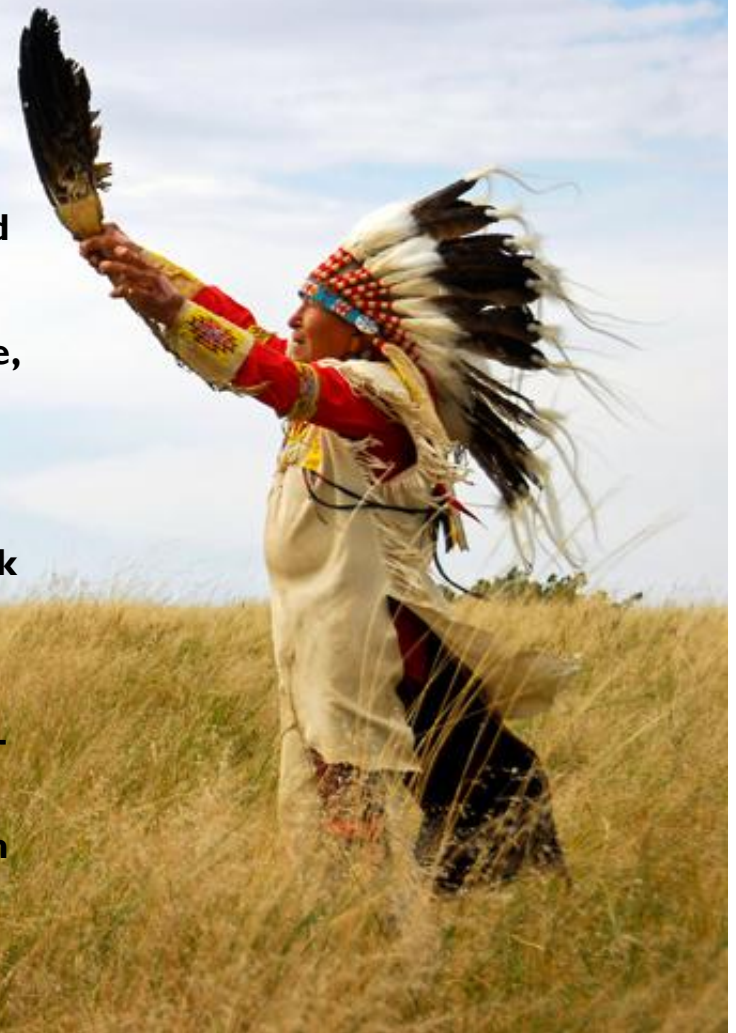
To the human nation that shares my path as a soul upon the sacred wheel of Earthly life, I thank you.

To the Spirit nation that guides me invisibly through life and carries the torch of light through the Ages, I thank you.

To the Four Winds of Change and Growth, I thank you.

You are all my relations, my relatives, without whom I would not live. We are in the circle of life together, co-existing, co-dependent, co-creating our destiny. One, not more important than the other. One nation evolving from the other and yet each dependent upon the one above and the one below. All of us a part of the Great Mystery.

Thank you for this Life.



Audio: “Colors of the Wind”

Open “YouTube” tab and click “PLAY”



Polytheism

- ▶ Belief in more than one deity
- ▶ Seen in a variety of types:
 - ▶ Creators
 - ▶ Death/Birth/Rebirth deity
 - ▶ Water deity
 - ▶ Solar deity
 - ▶ Sky deity (celestial)
 - ▶ Trickster deity
 - ▶ Love deities
 - ▶ Political deity (such as a king or emperor)
 - ▶ Cultural heroes who get promoted to godhood
 - ▶ Gods of music, arts, science, farming or other endeavors.



Good-to-know about polytheism

- ▶ Polytheism explains things that don't seem to have a unifying explanation
- ▶ Hierarchies of gods and goddesses explain why some forces are more powerful or widespread than others
- ▶ Individuals or cultures don't necessarily worship all the gods they believe in; they often focus on one
- ▶ Polytheism didn't fall with Rome: Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Christianity show tendencies toward polytheism in modern beliefs and rituals. **What do you know about these religions and their ideas about god(s)?**



"Just one God? — But won't he be outnumbered?"

Duotheism means having two gods (for example, having a God and a Goddess or a good deity and an evil deity) and is a form of polytheism. Neopagans often identify as duotheists.

Polytheism Pop Quiz!!

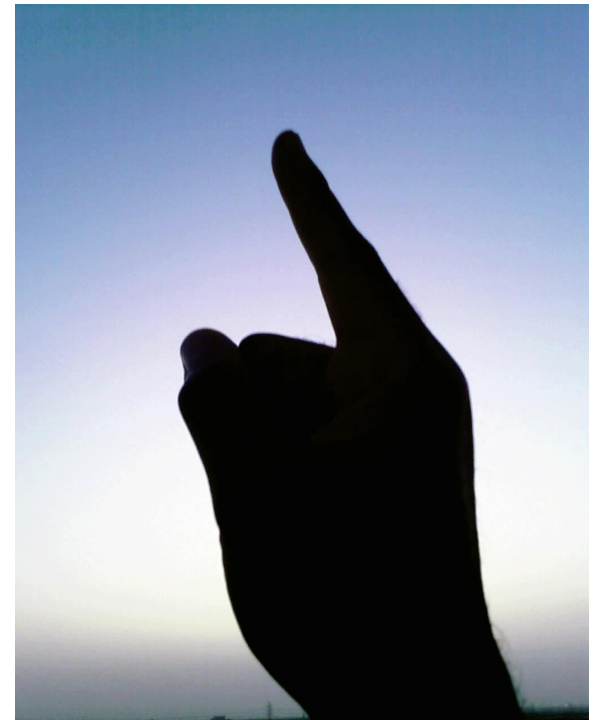
1. What is the name of the Greek god of the underworld?
2. What are some things under the control of the Roman goddess Minerva?
3. Who is the Norse god of thunder, lightning and strength?
4. What elemental metal is named after the messenger god of the Roman pantheon?
5. Which religion has a three-god pantheon consisting of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva?

- ▶ 1) Hades 2) poetry, medicine, wisdom, commerce, weaving, crafts, magic 3) Thor
4) mercury 5) Hinduism



Monotheism

- ▶ Monotheism is the belief in one god.
- ▶ Monotheism is the newest form of religious thought, appearing in the last few millennia.
- ▶ Some First Nations traditions in North America were polytheistic, but after the arrival of Christian missionaries, they leaned toward monotheism.
- ▶ Unitarians historically have been monotheists. **Are we now?**



Stage a mini-debate

- ▶ Let's *assume* that a higher power or powers do(es) in fact exist. When you contemplate the natural world, which do you think there is more evidence for?
 - ▶ Animism
 - ▶ Polytheism
 - ▶ Monotheism
 - ▶ Find the people who agree with you and form a mini-debate team. Each team will offer 2-minute argument for their cause. After listening to everyone's arguments, each team will offer a 1-minute rebuttal.
 - ▶ Focus on how NATURE reveals this particular version of deity, in your group's opinion.
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