

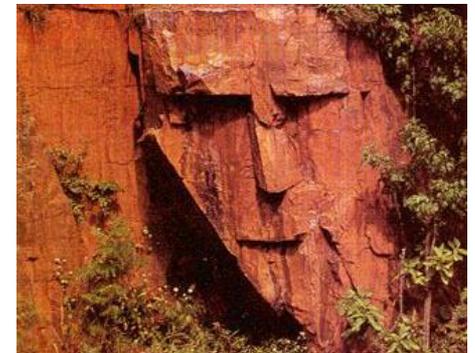
# Animism, Polytheism and Monotheism

Earth-Centered Theologies

# Animism

(5 minutes)

- ▶ **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 *religiously evolving/ devolving/ static* since prehistoric times?



# What's cool about animism?

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(5 minutes)

- ▶ It's the oldest form of religious belief, emerging approximately at the same historical moment 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 might be cool about animism?**
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# (Read Aloud) *Aho Mitakuya Oyasin* “To all my relatives”: An animist prayer from the Lakota tradition

(2 minutes)

**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”

(4 minutes)

Click and listen along with lyric handouts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9MvdMqKvpU>



# Polytheism

(2 minutes)

- ▶ 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

(5 minutes)

- ▶ Polytheism explains things that don't seem to have a unifying explanation.
- ▶ Hierarchies of gods/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 just focus on one while not denying the existence of others (a form of *henotheism*).
- ▶ 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!!

(guess, then click for each answer)

(5 minutes)

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

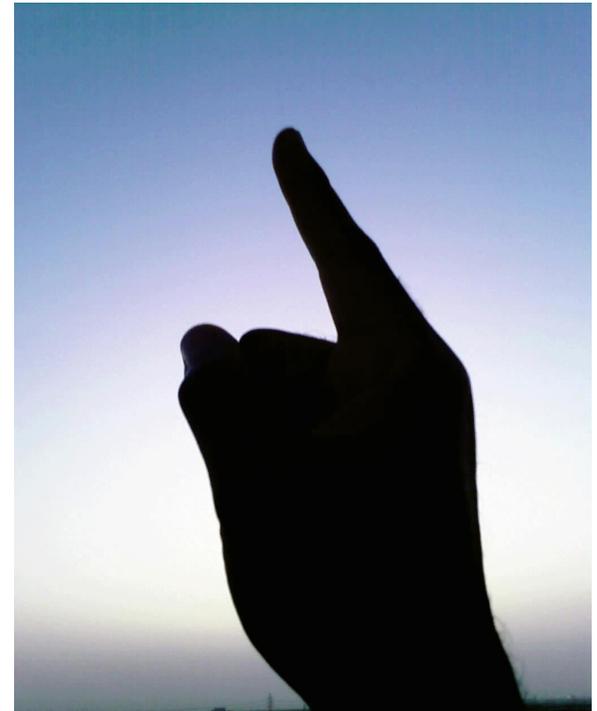


# Monotheism

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(3 minutes)

- ▶ Monotheism is the belief there is only one God (capital “G”).
- ▶ 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

(15 minutes)

- ▶ 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 people who agree with you and form a mini-debate team; ideally three teams to cover each belief system.
- ▶ Teams take 5 minutes to prepare, then each team offers 2-minute argument for their cause. After listening to everyone's arguments, each team will offer a 1-minute rebuttal.
- ▶ Remember: **focus on how NATURE reveals** (and even makes a case for) your particular belief system.

