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Two Origin Myths

“The Navajo Origin Legend” and “When Grizzlies Walked Upright” are both creation myths. Although these two myths are dissimilar in several ways, they do have some elements in common.

Like many cosmogonies, these two myths resemble one another. Both share the story element of the creation of humankind. “The Navajo Origin Legend” describes humans being created out of corn and eagle feathers. In “When Grizzlies Walked Upright,” the human race is the result of a cross between the daughter of a Sky Spirit and a grizzly bear. Another similarity in the two myths is the appearance of wind. Wind is important in “The Navajo Origin Legend” because in it, the corn and eagle feathers are changed into a man and a woman when the white and yellow winds blow over them. In “When Grizzlies Walked Upright,” the wind is responsible for blowing the Sky Spirit’s daughter away from her home in Mount Shasta, and as a result she is raised by grizzly bears, and eventually marries one of them.

There are, however, many variations in the two myths. To begin with, the gods in the two myths are quite different from one another. There are four gods in “The Navajo Origin Legend,” and they are all different colors. These gods do not speak, and other than their colors, are not really described in any detail. In contrast, there is only one god, the Chief of the Sky Spirits, in “When Grizzlies Walked Upright.” This god is very humanlike. He has a family, a home, he speaks, and he even gets angry. Another difference in the myths is the way they are told. “When Grizzlies Walked Upright” is very much a story. It has main characters, a setting, a conflict, and a resolution. “The Navajo Origin Legend,” on the other hand, is more of a description than a narration. It focuses on color, number, and direction. There is no conflict and none of the characters are developed.

Both myths present an interesting and intriguing picture about the possible origin of human life on earth, but each in an original, diverse way.