

Sharvara

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Sharvara (Dog of Yama) is an ancient Hindu mythical dog belonging to [Yama](#). It is one of the two dogs that guard the netherworld. Sharvara is identified with the constellation [Canis Major](#), the other dog with [Canis Minor](#), together they guard the gates of the netherworld, known as [pitriloka](#) or vaivasvatiloka, which is the domain of Yama.^[1]

The word *sharvara* can mean variegated.^[2] Sharvara can be compared with the Greek [Cerberus](#), the mythological dog of the Greeks with similar characteristics. However there is no description of Cerberus having a companion, and he is usually depicted with three heads.^[3] Scholars have concluded that the three heads were a Greek addition to the underlying Indo-Aryan myth.^{[4][5]}

Sharvara can also be compared to Odin's wolves in Norse mythology.^[6] Odin (the all-father) just like Yama (the progenitor of all humans) sits on a chair guarded by two dogs.^[7] Although, Odin (Woden), the hunter, the wanderer, god of storm and winter, is more comparable to the Vedic [Rudra](#).^[8]

[Tilak](#) dates the Vedic antiquity using the assertion that the Milky Way (path of the dead) used to be guarded by Sharvara and a new year started upon the crossing of Milky Way by the sun. Using internal evidence he dated the timeframe of Vedic antiquity (taittiriya samhita) to the time when at the vernal equinox the sun rose in the [asterism](#) of Orion (Mrigashiras).^[9]

References

1. [Tilak, Bal Gangadhar \(1893\). *The Orion, or, Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas*. Pune: Mrs. Radhabai Atmaram Sagoon. p. 42.](#)
2. [Tilak 1893](#), p. 108
3. [Apolodoros](#) and others indicate that he had three heads, but [Hesiod](#) with poetical hyperbole gives him fifty. *Elton, Charles Abraham (1812). Hesiod, translated from the Greek into English verse, with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Writings, Life, and Æra of Hesiod. London: Lackington, Allen and Company. p. 267.*
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5. *Bryant, Jacob (1809). A new system: or, An analysis of antient mythology. 2 (3rd ed.). J. Walker. pp. 118–119.*
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7. [Bloomfield 1905](#), p. 27
8. [Tilak 1893](#), pp. 138–140
9. [Tilak 1893](#), pp. 41–60

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Yama

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This article is about the Asian deity generally. For other uses, see [Yama \(disambiguation\)](#).

Yama



Yama's Court and [Hell](#). The Blue figure is Yama with his consort [Yami](#) and [Chitragupta](#).

A 17th-century painting from the Government Museum in [Chennai](#)



Yama is revered in Tibet as the Lord of Death and as a guardian of spiritual practice.

Yama or **Yamarāja**, also called **Imra**,^[1] is a [god](#) of death, the south direction and the [underworld](#),^[2] belonging to an early stratum of [Rigvedic Hindu deities](#). In Sanskrit, his name can be interpreted to mean "twin".^[3] In the [Zend-Avesta](#) of [Zoroastrianism](#), he is called "Yima".^[4] According to the [Vishnu Purana](#), his parents are the sun-god [Surya](#)^[5] and Sanjna, the daughter of [Vishvakarman](#). Yama is the brother of [Sraddhadeva Manu](#) and of his older sister Yami, which [Horace Hayman Wilson](#) indicates to mean the [Yamuna](#).^[6] According to [Harivamsa Purana](#) her name is Daya.^[7] There is a temple in [Srivanchiyam](#), [Tamil Nadu](#) dedicated to Yama.^[citation needed]

In the [Vedas](#), Yama is said to have been the first mortal who died. By virtue of precedence, he became the ruler of the departed,^[8] and is called "Lord of the [Pitrs](#)".^[9]

Mentioned in the [Pāli Canon](#) of [Theravada Buddhism](#), Yama subsequently entered [Buddhist mythology](#) in [Tibetan](#) and [East Asian Buddhism](#) as a [dharmapala](#) under [various transliterations](#). He is otherwise also called as "Dharmaraja".

Hinduism

Main article: [Yama \(Hinduism\)](#)



Yama from [Tibet](#)

In [Hinduism](#),^[10] Yama is the [lokapala](#) ("Guardian of the Directions") of the south and the son of Brahma. Three hymns (10, 14, and 35) in the 10th book of the [Rig Veda](#) are addressed to him. He has two dogs with four eyes and wide nostrils guarding the road to his abode (cf. [hellhound](#)). They are said to wander about among people as his messengers.^[11]

According to Hindu mythology Yama is the son of [Surya](#) and [Saranyu](#). He is the twin brother of [Yami](#), brother of [Shradhadeva](#) [Manu](#) and the step brother of [Shani](#).^[12]

Buddhism

Main article: [Yama \(East Asia\)](#)

In [Buddhism](#), **Yama** ([Sanskrit](#): यम) is a [dharmapala](#) (wrathful god) said to judge the dead and preside over the [Narakas](#) ("Hells" or "Purgatories") and the cycle of [rebirth](#).

The Buddhist Yama has however, developed different myths and different functions from the [Hindu](#) deity. He has also spread far more widely and is known in every country where [Buddhism](#) is practiced, including [China](#), [Korea](#), [Vietnam](#) and [Japan](#).

Abode

Naraka (Hindu) - *Main article: [Naraka \(Hinduism\)](#)*

Naraka in Hinduism serves only as a temporary [purgatory](#) where the soul is purified of sin by its suffering. In Hindu mythology, Naraka holds many hells,^[13] and Yama directs departed souls to the appropriate one. Even elevated [Mukti-yogyas](#) and [Nitya-samsarins](#) can experience Naraka for [expiation](#) of sins.

Although Yama is the lord of Naraka, he may also direct the soul to a [Swarga](#) (heaven) or return it to [Bhoomi](#) (earth). As good and bad deeds are not considered to cancel each other out, the same soul may spend time in both a hell and a heaven. The seven Swargas are: Bhuvas, Swas (governed by [Indra](#)), Tharus, Thaurus, Savithaa, Prapithaa, and [Maha](#) (governed by [Brahma](#)).

Naraka (Sikhism)



South Indian depiction of Yama

The idea of Naraka in Sikhism is like the idea of Hell. One's soul, however, is confined to 8.4 million life cycles before taking birth as a human, the point of human life being one where one attains salvation, the salvation being sach khand. The idea of khand comes in multiple levels of such heavens, the highest being merging with God as one. The idea of Hell comes in multiple levels, and hell itself can manifest within human life itself. The Sikh idea of hell is where one is apart from naama and the Guru's charana (God's lotus feet (abode)). Without naama one is damned. Naama is believed to be a direct deliverance by God to humanity in the form of Guru Nanak. A Sikh is hence required to take the [Amrit](#) (holy nectar/water) from gurubani, [panj pyare](#) (khanda da pahul) to come closer to naama. A true Sikh of the Gurus has the Guru himself manifest and takes that person into sach khand.

Naraka (Buddhist) - Main article: [Naraka \(Buddhism\)](#)

[Naraka](#) is usually translated into English as "hell" or "purgatory". A Naraka differs from the hells of western religions in two respects. First, beings are not sent to Naraka as the result of a divine judgment and punishment; second, the length of a being's stay in a Naraka is not eternal, though it is usually very long. Instead, a being is born into a Naraka as a direct result of his or her previous [karma](#) (actions of body, speech and mind), and resides there for a finite length of time until his karma has exhausted its cumulate effect.

Chinese and Japanese mythology - Main article: [Diyu and Jigoku](#)



[Azuchi-Momoyama period](#) wall-scroll depicting Enma

[Mandarin](#) Diyu, [Japanese](#) Jigoku, [Korean](#) Jiog, [Vietnamese](#) Địa ngục literally "earth prison", is the realm of the dead or "hell" in [Chinese mythology](#) and [Japanese mythology](#). It is based upon the Buddhist concept of [Naraka](#) combined with local afterlife beliefs. Incorporating ideas from [Taoism](#) and [Buddhism](#) as well as traditional religion in China, Di Yu is a kind of purgatory place which serves not only to punish but also to renew spirits ready for their next incarnation. This is interchangeable with the concept of [Naraka](#).

In Japanese mythology, Enma-O or Enma Dai-O judges souls in Meido, the kingdom of the waiting dead. Those deemed too horrible are sent to Jigoku, a land more comparable to the Christian hell. It is a land of eternal toil and punishment. Those of middle note remain in meido for a period awaiting reincarnation. Others, of high note, become honored ancestors, watching over their descendants.

Related concepts

Yama and Ymir - *Main article:* [Proto-Indo-European religion § Brothers](#)

In a disputable etymology, W. Meid (1992) has linked the names Yama (reconstructed in [Proto-Indo-European](#) as *yemos) and the name of the primeval Norse frost giant [Ymir](#), which can be reconstructed in Proto-Germanic as *umijaz or *jumijaz, in the latter case possibly deriving from PIE ymyos, from the root *yem* "twin". In his myth, however, Ymir is not a twin, and only shares with Yama the characteristics of being primeval and mortal. However, Ymir is a [hermaphrodite](#) and engenders the race of giants.

In Iranian mythology - *Main article:* [Jamshid](#)

A parallel character in [Iranian mythology](#) and [Zoroastrianism](#) is known as [Yima Xšaēta](#), who appears in the [Avesta](#). The pronunciation "Yima" is peculiar to the [Avestan](#) dialect; in most Iranian dialects, including [Old Persian](#), the name would have been "Yama". In the Avesta, the emphasis is on Yima's character as one of the first mortals and as a great king of men. Over time, *Yamaxšaita was transformed into Jamšēd or [Jamshid](#), celebrated as the greatest of the early [shahs](#) of the world. Both Yamas in Zoroastrian and Hindu myth guard hell with the help of two four-eyed dogs.^{[14][15]}

In Javanese culture

There is Yamadipati in Javanese culture, especially in [wayang](#). The word *adipati* means *ruler* or *commander*. When Hinduism first came to [Java](#), Yama was still the same as Yama in Hindu myth. Later, as [Islam](#) replaced Hinduism as the majority religion of Java, Yama was demystified by [Walisanga](#), who ruled at that time. So, in Javanese, Yama became a new character. He is the son of

Sanghyang Ismaya and Dewi Sanggani. In the [Wayang](#) legend, Yamadipati married Dewi Mumpuni. Unfortunately, Dewi Mumpuni fell in love with Nagatasmala, son of Hyang Anantaboga, who rules the earth. Dewi Mumpuni eventually left Yamadipati, however.

In Buddhist temples

In the Buddhism of the Far East, Yama is one of the twelve Devas, as guardian deities, who are found in or around Buddhist shrines ([Jūni-ten](#), 閻魔尊).^[17] In Japan, he has been called "Emma-ten".^[17] He joins these other eleven Devas of Buddhism, found in Japan and other parts of southeast Asia: Indra (Taishaku-ten), Agni (Ka-ten), Yama (Emma-ten), Nirrti (Rasetsu-ten), Vayu (Fu-ten), Ishana (Ishana-ten), Kubera (Tamon-ten), Varuna (Sui-ten) Brahma (Bon-ten), Prithvi (Chi-ten), Surya (Nit-ten), Chandra (Gat-ten).^{[17][18][19]}

References

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Yama The God of Death

Yama is the messenger or god of death and the judge of men. He is represented as a green coloured man, clothed in red garments and wearing a crown. He wears a flower on his head. He carries a mace in one hand, and a noose in the other for catching his victims. He is sometimes shown as having four arms and sometimes two. His mount is a black buffalo.

The twin brother of Yami, who later became the river **Yamuna**, he was the first mortal to die and having discovered the way to the other world, is the guide of those who depart this world, he has two ravenous dogs, each with four eyes and wide nostrils. They guard the road to his abode and wander amongst men summoning them to their master. In the **Puranas**, Yama is called the **judge of men** who, when they die, are brought before him amid Chitragupta (the Record Keeper) with whom their actions have been recorded. The virtuous are conveyed to heaven (Swarga) and the wicked to different regions of hell (Namaka). After death the soul takes four hours and forty minutes to reach Yama. Therefore a dead body should not be cremated before this time has elapsed.

Brahma, after creating the world, realized that a place for judgement and punishment for the wicked was wanting. He therefore requested **Vishwakarma**, the architect god, to create one. This legendary place created for Yama has a mild and salubrious climate and there is no fear of enemies or any affliction of mind or body. Each person is rewarded according to his past deeds. To the virtuous and to the sinner Yama appears in different forms. To the virtuous he appears like Vishnu, with a charming, smiling face and lotus-like eyes. To the wicked he appears to have limbs 'three hundred leagues' long, hair like gigantic reeds and eyes like deep wells. Yama is also the guardian of the South.



Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic, by W.J. Wilkins, [1900], at sacred-texts.com

[p. 78]

CHAPTER X. YAMA.



YAMA.

YAMA, the judge of men and king of the unseen world, was the son of Vivasvat (the sun) and Saranya, the daughter of Tvastri. He was born before his mother had become afraid of her glorious husband. He was twin-brother of Yami, and, in the opinion of Professor Roth, they were regarded as the primeval pair from [p. 79] whom the human family has sprung. In another verse of the Rig-Veda they are described as the offspring of the heavenly choristers, the Gandharvas. As there were no others to perpetuate the race, Yami entreated Yama to become her husband. She urged the fact that Tvastri had formed them as man and wife in the womb; and therefore it was useless for him to refuse her request, as none can act contrary to the ordinances of Tvastri. But Yama was firm, and resisted her overtures on the ground that it was monstrous for those who are preachers of righteousness to act unrighteously.¹ It is not at all easy to determine what was intended to be represented by these deities. Max-Müller understands Vivasvat to be the sky, Saranya the dawn, Yama the day, and Yami the night. Others suggest that Yama may be the hot air current caused by the rising sun, and Yami the cooler air of the night, and their antagonism would be represented by Yama repelling the advances of Yami.

Yama was the first of mortals who died, and, having discovered the way to the other world, is the guide of those who depart this life, and is said to conduct them to a home which is made secure for them for ever. He is a king, and dwells in celestial light in the innermost sanctuary of heaven. He grants bright homes to the pious who dwell with him.²

¹ Muir, O. S. T., v. 289.

² Ibid., v. 284.

"In the Rig-Veda, Yama is nowhere represented (as he is in the later mythology) as having anything to do with the punishment of the wicked. Nevertheless he is still to some an object of terror. He is said to have two insatiable dogs, with four eyes and wide nostrils, which guard the road to his abode, and which the departed are advised to hurry past with all possible [p. 80] speed. These dogs are said to wander about among men as messengers, no doubt for the purpose of summoning them to the presence of their master, who in another place is identified with; death, and is described as sending a bird as the herald of doom."³

"When the remains of the deceased have been placed upon the funeral pile, and the process of cremation has commenced, Agni, the god of Fire, is prayed not to scorch or consume the departed, not to tear asunder his skin or his limbs, but, after the flames have done their work, to convey to the fathers the mortal who has been presented to him as an offering. Leaving behind on earth all that is evil and imperfect, and proceeding by the paths which the fathers trod, invested with a lustre like that of the gods, it soars to the realms of eternal light in a car, or on wings, and recovers there its ancient body in a complete and glorified form; meets with the forefathers who are living in festivity with Yama; obtains from him, when recognized by him as one of his own, a delectable abode, and enters upon more perfect life, which is crowned with the fulfilment of all desires, is passed in the presence of the gods, and employed in the fulfilment of their pleasure."⁴

In this kingdom, over which Yama reigns, friends meet with their departed friends—husband with wife, children with parents—and together live in a state of blessedness, free from the evils and infirmities that belong to the present life. As the gods are described as enjoying the pleasures common to men on earth, the kingdom of Yama, the abode of the departed, is not at all less sensual than the present world; and when mortals have been privileged to enter this happy land, they become objects of veneration to their descendants [p. 81] still living, and joyfully partake of the oblations they offer to them.

In the following lines Dr. Muir⁵ has given an epitome of the teaching of the Vedas respecting Yama:—

"To great King Yama homage pay,
Who was the first of men that died,
That crossed the mighty gulf and spied
For mortals out the heavenward way.

* * * *

³ Muir, O. S. T., v. 302.

⁴ Ibid., v. 302 ff.

⁵ Muir, O. S. T., v. 327.

"By it our fathers all have passed;
And that same path we too shall trace,
And every new succeeding race,
Of mortal men, while time shall last.

"The god assembles round his throne
A growing throng, the good and wise
All those whom, scanned with searching eyes,
He recognizes as his own.

"Departed mortal, speed from earth
By those old ways thy sires have trod;
Ascend, behold the expectant god
Who calls thee to a higher birth.

* * * *

"And calmly pass without alarm
The four-eyed hounds that guard the road
Which leads to Yama's bright abode;
Their master's friends they dare not harm.

"All imperfections leave behind:
Assume thine ancient frame once more—
Each limb and sense thou hadst before,
From every earthly taint refined.

"And now with heavenly glory bright,
With life intenser, nobler, blest,
With large capacity to taste
A fuller measure of delight, [p. 82]

"Thou there once more each well-known face
Shalt see of those thou lovedst here;
Thy parents, wife, and children dear,
With rapture shalt thou soon embrace

"The father, too, shalt thou behold,
The heroes who in battle died,
The saints and sages glorified,
The pious, bounteous kings of old.

"The gods whom here in humble wise
Thou worshippedst with doubt and awe,
Shall there the impervious veil withdraw
Which hid their glory from thine eyes.

"The good which thou on earth hast wrought.
Each sacrifice, each pious deed,

Shall there receive its ample meed;
No worthy act shall be forgot.

"In those fair realms of cloudless day,
Where Yama every joy supplies,
And every longing satisfies,
Thy bliss shall never know decay."

In the Purānas Yama is called the judge of men, and is said to rule over the many hells in which the wicked are made to suffer. Thus the "Padma Purāna" says: "Yama fulfils the office of judge of the dead, as well as sovereign of the damned; all that die appearing before him, and being confronted with Chitragupta the recorder, by whom their actions have been registered. The virtuous are then conveyed to Swarga (Indra's heaven), whilst the wicked are driven to the different regions of Naraka (hell)."⁶ In the "Vishnu Purāna" the names of the different hells are given, and it is there stated that "there are many other fearful hells which are the awful provinces of Yama, terrible with instruments of torture and fire." In the same Purāna⁷ it is said that [p. 83] "all men at the end of their existence (life) become slaves to the power of Yama, by whom they are sentenced to painful punishments." Inquiry is then made as to how men can be free from his authority. The answer is that "Yama is the lord of all men, excepting the worshippers of Madhusūdan (Vishnu). Worship him in one of his many forms, and Yama can exert no authority over you."

According to the popular ideas now prevailing, Yama is represented as a green man, clothed in red garments. He has a crown on his head, and a flower in his hair; is armed with a club, and rides upon a buffalo. He is regularly worshipped once a year; and daily a little water is poured out to him. For a whole month each year unmarried girls present offerings to him in the hope that he will provide them with a husband; and that, having granted this boon, he will not recall his gift, and leave them widows. In his presence the good and evil deeds of the departed are weighed: according to the turn of the scale, the soul goes to heaven or hell. The soul is believed to reach Yama's abode in four hours and forty minutes; consequently a dead body cannot be burned until that time has passed after death.

In the "Bhavishya Purāna" the following legend of Yama's marriage is found. He was exceedingly pleased with a girl named Vijaya, a Brāhman's daughter. When first she saw him she was greatly alarmed, alike at his appearance and on learning who he was. At length he allayed her fears; and, although her brother tried to dissuade her, she consented to become his wife. On her arrival at Yama's abode, he particularly cautioned her against going into the southern quarter of his kingdom. After a time, thinking he must have another wife there, her curiosity overpowered her, and going into the [p. 84] forbidden region, she was greatly distressed, as she saw the wicked in

⁶ "Vishnu Purāna," p. 207, note.

⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

torment: Amongst other sufferers was her own mother. Meeting Yama there, she tried to obtain her release. Yama declared that this could not be granted unless some one then living on earth would perform a certain sacrifice, and transfer the merit of the act to the poor woman then suffering. After some difficulty, one was found willing to perform this act of kindness, and Yama's mother-in-law obtained release.

Stories are told in the Purānas to show how the power of Vishnu is exercised on behalf of his worshippers in rescuing them from Yama's bonds. If a man repeat his name in teaching it to his parrot, or utter it in death without any intention of asking his help, his messengers will be sent to snatch him from the punishments of hell and conduct him to his blest abode.

It is very strange to notice how the character of Yama's rule and kingdom has entirely changed in the conceptions of the Hindus. According to the Vedas, the pure and good went with gladness to Yama's realm of light; now, as taught in the Purānas, it is the wicked who are sent to him for punishment.

In the Mahābhārata⁸ is a most interesting story, showing that sometimes Yama is propitious to prayer, and will allow those who have entered his abode to return to earth.

A princess named Savitri loved Satyavān, the son of an old hermit, but was warned by a seer to overcome her attachment, as Satyavān was a doomed man, having only one year to live. Savitri replies:

"Whether his years be few or many, be he gifted with all grace
Or graceless, him my heart hath chosen, and it chooseth not again." [p. 85]

They were married, and the bride strove to forget the prophecy; but, as the last day of the year approached, her anxiety became irrepressible. She exhausted herself in prayers and penances, hoping to stay the hand of the destroyer, yet all the while dared not reveal the fatal secret to her husband. At last the dreaded day arrived, and Satyavān set out to cut wood in the forest. His wife asked leave to accompany him, and walked behind him, smiling, but with a heavy heart. Satyavān soon made the wood resound with his hatchet, when suddenly a thrill of agony shot through his temples, and, feeling himself falling, called his wife to support him.

"Then she received her fainting husband in her arms, and sat herself
On the cold ground, and gently laid his drooping head upon her lap:
Sorrowing, she called to mind the sage's prophecy, and reckoned up
The days and hours. All in an instant she beheld an awful shape
Standing before her, dressed in blood-red garments, with a glittering crown
Upon his head; his form, though glowing like the Sun, was yet obscure,
And eyes like flames, a noose depended from his hand; and he
Was terrible to look upon, as by her husband's side he stood
And gazed upon him with a fiery glance. Shuddering she started up,
And laid her dying Satyavān upon the ground, and, with her hands

⁸ "Indian Wisdom," p. 395.

Joined reverently, she thus with beating heart addressed the shape:
Surely thou art a god; such form as thine must more than mortal be!
Tell me, thou god-like being, who thou art, and wherefore art thou here?"

The figure replied that he was Yama, king of the dead; that her husband's time was come, and that he must bind and take his spirit.

"Then from her husband's body forced he out, and firmly with his cord
Bound and detained the spirit, clothed in form no larger than a thumb.
Forthwith the body, reft of vital being and deprived of breath,
Lost all its grace and beauty, and became ghastly and motionless." [p. 86]

After binding the spirit, Yama proceeds with it towards the quarter of which he is guardian—the south.

The faithful wife follows him closely. Yama bids her go home and perform the funeral rites; but she persists in following, till Yama, pleased with her devotion, grants her any boon she pleases, except the life of her husband. She chooses that her husband's father, who is now blind, may recover his sight. Yama consents, and bids her now return home. Still she persists in following. Two other boons are granted in the same way, and still Savitri follows closely on the heels of the king of death. At last, overcome by her constancy, Yama grants a boon without exception. The delighted Savitri exclaims:

"Nought, mighty king, this time hast thou excepted: let my husband live;
Without him I desire not happiness, nor even heaven itself;
Without him I must die.' 'So be it, faithful wife,' replied the king of death:
Thus I release him;' and with that he loosed the cord that bound his soul."

Amongst the many names by which Yama is known, the following are the most common:—

Dharmarāja, "King of righteousness."

Pitripati, "Lord of the fathers."

Samavurti, "He who judges impartially."

Kritānta, "The finisher."

Samana, "The leveller."

Kāla, "Time."

Dandadhara, "He who carries the rod."

Srāddhadeva, "The god of funeral ceremonies."

Vaivasvata, "The son of Vivasvata."

Antaka, "He who puts an end to life."

About the Yama and the dogs thing

In Hindu mythology, there are in fact two dogs belonging to Yama, god of death. They are described as having “four eyes and wide nostrils” and sometimes wander the earth as his messengers. They are, literally, hellhounds. They’re identified with the constellations Canis Major and Canis Minor.



In Sanskrit, one of them is called *śarvarā* (शर्वरा), which means “striped.” The word is comparable to the Greek *Kerberos*, which means “spotted.” So yeah, the Greek and Indic hellhounds are basically named

“Spot” and “Stripy.” The two words might trace back to a common Indo-European **kerberos*, meaning “variegated” (i.e. either spotted or striped). The Sanskrit reflex requires a /w/ to turn into /v/, so its original form might have been **kerweros*, which looks more typically Indo-European, but /b/ is suspected to have been rare and notoriously unstable in PIE, so maybe the form with /b/ was the earlier one and /w/ showed up in pre-Indo-Iranian dialects later.

For what it’s worth, in Norse mythology, Odin’s throne Hliðskjálf is also guarded by two wolves, although Odin isn’t really a god of the underworld.

As for Yama himself, he only got to be god of death because he was the first mortal to die. Basically he ended up in the Otherworld and no one else was there so he just stuck around and started running the place.



Certain scholars link Yama with Ymir, the first mortal (in this case, a frost giant) to die in Norse mythology. The purported link comes via Proto-Indo-European **yemos*, meaning “twin” (Yama being the twin of Manu, the first man, whose name simply means “man”). Ymir was never attested as twin, though some argue for references as a “two-fold” being, or one possessing both sets of sexual characteristics.



Comparative mythologists put forth a mytheme of primordial twins in IE mythology, including Romulus and Remus (speculated to be a deformation of *iemus* < **yemos*). Jaan Puhvel plants whole forests of [Epileptic Trees](#) on this topic in *Comparative Mythology*. (Here's one more: Romulus and Remus were suckled by a she-wolf and actually raised as a pair of wolf twins.)

So, yeah, basically Kukur Tihar, the Nepali dog festival, has deep mythological roots going back thousands of years with potential connections across two continents, involving twins, wolves, hellhounds, and the birth of humankind. It is a lot more than just celebrating dogs for friendship. Still, you should definitely be nice to your dog, because otherwise they might report you to the king of hell.

Geri and Freki

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



The god Odin enthroned and flanked by the wolves Geri and Freki and the ravens Huginn and Muninn as illustrated (1882) by [Carl Emil Doepler](#).

In [Norse mythology](#), **Geri** and **Freki** ([Old Norse](#), both meaning "the ravenous" or "greedy one") are two wolves which are said to accompany the god [Odin](#). They are attested in the [Poetic Edda](#), a collection of epic poetry compiled in the 13th century from earlier traditional sources, in the [Prose Edda](#), written in the 13th century by [Snorri Sturluson](#), and in the poetry of [skalds](#). The pair has been compared to similar figures found in [Greek](#), [Roman](#) and [Vedic mythology](#), and may also be connected to beliefs surrounding the [Germanic](#) "wolf-warrior bands", the [Úlfhéðnar](#).

Etymology

The names *Geri* and *Freki* have been interpreted as meaning either "the greedy one" or "the ravenous one".^[1] The name *Geri* can be traced back to the [Proto-Germanic](#) adjective **geraz*, attested in [Burgundian](#) *girs*, [Old Norse](#) *gerr* and [Old High German](#) *ger* or *giri*, all of which mean "greedy".^[2] The name *Freki* can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic adjective **freakaz*, attested in [Gothic](#) *faihu-friks* "covetous, avaricious", Old Norse *frekr* "greedy", [Old English](#) *frec* "desirous, greedy, gluttonous, audacious" and Old High German *freh* "greedy".^[3] [John Lindow](#) interprets both Old Norse names as nominalized adjectives.^[4] [Bruce Lincoln](#) further traces *Geri* back to a [Proto-Indo-European](#) stem **gher-*, which is the same as that found in [Garmr](#), a name referring to the hound closely associated with the events of [Ragnarök](#).^[5]

Attestations

In the *Poetic Edda* poem [Grímnismál](#), the god [Odin](#) (disguised as [Grímnir](#)) provides the young [Agnarr](#) with information about Odin's companions. Agnarr is told that Odin feeds Geri and Freki while the god himself consumes only wine:

[Benjamin Thorpe](#) translation:

Geri and Freki the war-wont sates,
the triumphant sire of hosts;

[Henry Adams Bellows](#) translation:

Freki and Geri does Heerfather feed,
The far-famed fighter of old:

but on wine only the famed in arms,
Odin, ever lives.^[6]

But on wine alone does the weapon-decked god,
Othin, forever live.^[7]

The pair is also alluded to via the [kenning](#) "[Viðrir's](#) (Odin's) hounds" in [Helgakviða Hundingsbana I](#), verse 13, where it is related that they roam the field "greedy for the corpses of those who have fallen in battle".^[8]

[Benjamin Thorpe](#) translation:

The warriors went to the trysting place of
swords,
which they had appointed at Logafiöll.
Broken was Frodi's peace between the foes:
Vidrir's hounds went about the isle slaughter-
greedy.^[9]

[Henry Adams Bellows](#) translation:

The warriors forth to the battle went,
The field they chose at Logafjoll;
Frothi's peace midst foes they broke,
Through the isle went hungrily Vithrir's
hounds.^[10]

In the *Prose Edda* book [Gylfaginning](#) (chapter 38), the enthroned figure of [High](#) explains that Odin gives all of the food on his table to his wolves Geri and Freki and that Odin requires no food, for wine is to him both meat and drink. High then quotes the above-mentioned stanza from the poem *Grímnismál* in support.^[11] In chapter 75 of the *Prose Edda* book [Skáldskaparmál](#) a list of names for [wargs](#) and [wolves](#) is provided that includes both Geri and Freki.^[12]

In [skaldic](#) poetry *Geri* and *Freki* are used as common nouns for "wolf" in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál* (quoted in works by the [skalds Þjóðólfr of Hvinir](#) and [Egill Skallagrímsson](#)) and *Geri* is again used as a common noun for "wolf" in chapter 64 of the *Prose Edda* book [Háttatal](#).^[13] *Geri* is referenced in [kennings](#) for "blood" in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál* ("Geri's ales" in a work by the skald [Þórðr Sjáreksson](#)) and in for "carrion" in chapter 60 ("Geri's morsel" in a work by the skald [Einarr Skúlason](#)).^[14] *Freki* is also used in a kenning for "carrion" ("Freki's meal") in a work by Þórðr Sjáreksson in chapter 58 of *Skáldskaparmál*.^[15]

Archaeological record

If the rider on horseback on the image on the [Böksta Runestone](#) has been correctly identified as Odin, then Geri and Freki are shown taking part in hunting an elk or moose.^[16]

Theories



A [Vendel era](#) bronze plate found on [Öland, Sweden](#) depicting a wolf-pelt warrior drawing a sword beside a dancing figure.

Freki is also a name applied to the monstrous wolf [Fenrir](#) in the *Poetic Edda* poem [Völuspá](#). Folklorist [John Lindow](#) sees irony in the fact that Odin feeds one *Freki* at his dinner table and another — Fenrir — with his flesh during the events of [Ragnarök](#).^[17]

Historian Michael Spiedel connects *Geri* and *Freki* with archaeological finds depicting figures wearing wolf-pelts and frequently found wolf-related names among the [Germanic peoples](#), including *Wulfhroc* ("Wolf-Frock"), *Wolfhetan* ("Wolf-Hide"), *Isangrim* ("Grey-Mask"), *Scrutolf* ("Garb-Wolf") and *Wolfgang* ("Wolf-Gait"), *Wolfdregil* ("Wolf-Runner"), and *Vulfolaic* ("Wolf-Dancer") and myths regarding wolf warriors from Norse mythology (such as the [Úlfhéðnar](#)). Spiegel believes this to point to the pan-Germanic wolf-warrior band cult centered on Odin that waned away after [Christianization](#).^[18]

Scholars have also noted [Indo-European](#) parallels to the wolves *Geri* and *Freki* as companions of a divinity. 19th century scholar [Jacob Grimm](#) observed a connection between this aspect of Odin's character and the Greek [Apollo](#), to whom both the wolf and the raven are sacred.^[19] Philologist [Maurice Bloomfield](#) further connected the pair with the two dogs of [Yama](#) in Vedic mythology, and saw them as a Germanic counterpart to a more general and widespread Indo-European "[Cerberus](#)"-theme.^[20] Michael Speidel finds similar parallels in the [Vedic Rudra](#) and the [Roman Mars](#). Elaborating on the connection between wolves and figures of great power, he writes: "This is why *Geri* and *Freki*, the wolves at Woden's side, also glowered on the throne of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Wolf-warriors, like *Geri* and *Freki*, were not mere animals but mythical beings: as Woden's followers they bodied forth his might, and so did wolf-warriors."^[18]

[Bernd Heinrich](#) theorizes that *Geri* and *Freki*, along with Odin and his ravens [Huginn and Muninn](#), reflect a [symbiosis](#) observed in the natural world among ravens, wolves, and humans on the hunt:

In a biological symbiosis one organism typically shores up some weakness or deficiency of the other(s). As in such a symbiosis, Odin the father of all humans and gods, though in human form was imperfect by himself. As a separate entity he lacked depth perception (being one-eyed) and he was apparently also uninformed and forgetful. But his weaknesses were compensated by his ravens, *Hugin* (mind) and *Munin* (memory) who were part of him. They perched on his shoulders and reconnoitered to the ends of the earth each day to return in the evening and tell him the news. He also had two wolves at his side, and the man/god-raven-wolf association was like one single organism in which the ravens were the eyes, mind, and memory, and the wolves the providers of meat and nourishment. As god, Odin was the ethereal part—he only drank wine and spoke only in poetry. I wondered if the Odin myth was a metaphor that playfully and poetically encapsulates ancient knowledge of our prehistoric past as hunters in association with two allies to produce a powerful hunting alliance. It would reflect a past that we have long forgotten and whose meaning has been obscured and badly frayed as we abandoned our hunting cultures to become herders and agriculturists, to whom ravens act as competitors.^[21]

Notes

1. Simek (2007:90; 106); Lindow (2001:120; 139).
2. Orel (2003:132).
3. Orel (2003:113).
4. Lindow (2001:120 and 139).
5. Lincoln (1991:99).
6. Thorpe (1907:21).
7. Bellows (1923:92).

8. Lincoln views this activity as the reason behind their epithet "ravenous" or "greedy". See Lincoln (1991:99).
9. Thorpe (1907:138).
10. Bellows (1936:295-296).
11. Faulkes (1995:33).
12. Faulkes (1995:64).
13. Faulkes (1995:135 and 204).
14. Faulkes (1995:136 and 138).
15. Faulkes (1995:136).
16. Silén (1993:88—91).
17. Lindow (2001:120).
18. Spiedel (2004:24—28).
19. Grimm (1882:147).
20. Bloomfield also mentions another Nordic pair in this connection: *Ger* "Greedy" and *Gifr* "Violent" are two dogs which guard the maiden Menglöð in the *Fjölsvinnsmál*. See Bloomfield (1908:316-318).
21. Heinrich (2006 [1999]: 355). For discussion of wolf and raven symbiosis, see for example Heinrich (2006 [1999]: 226-235). For discussion of wolf and human symbiosis, see for example Heinrich (2006 [1999]: 236-244).

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The god Odin enthroned and flanked by the wolves Geri and Freki and the ravens Huginn and Muninn as illustrated (1882) by [Carl Emil Doepler](#).

Carl Emil Doepler (1824-1905) - Wägner, Wilhelm. 1882. *Nordisch-germanische Götter und Helden*. Otto Spamer, Leipzig & Berlin. Page 7.