

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF  
**AFRICAN  
 RELIGION**



## Ruhanga

One of the overwhelming features of African traditional religion is the belief in the Supreme Being (God). In most cases, the belief in God is closely connected with the story of the creation of the world. In this connection, various peoples of Africa have legends that tell the story of the creation of their communities and the entire universe. It is a truism that the African conception of the creation of the world often contravenes Western scientific and Christian doctrine's interpretations and findings. A point that remains indisputable is that no creation story outweighs any other—because different people have diverse belief systems and often cling to their own views about the world in which they live. A critical look at the basic concepts of the legends and creation stories indicates that, in African traditional religion, the primacy of the Supreme Being is prominent. Also, most African narratives provide insight into the significance of geography in the creation of the world. Although different versions are capable of being recorded and appreciated, the most paramount factor is reference to the Supreme Being. Individual African groups personalize the name of God, but most Africans believe that the world came into existence through God.

The name of God among the Banyankore and Haya of modern western Uganda and northwestern Tanzania, respectively, is Ruhanga. Ruhanga is the creator of both the world and human beings. He is also the God of fertility as well as disease and death. The creation story relates that Ruhanga was hitherto living on Earth and decided to relocate to Heaven. To fill the vacuum of his absence, he decided to create human beings by putting three seeds in the Earth. These three seeds germinated into a calabash within a day. Out of the first two calabashes he picked two men and a woman, and in the last calabash he took just a man. Ruhanga named these men Kairu, Kahima, and Kakama. A test was needed to determine the rulers and the subjects of the world that he was about to create. The three men were to carry a pot full of milk for a night without sleeping or allowing the milk to spill out of the pot. During the test, Kairu slept and allowed his milk to spill out of the pot, thereby causing the floor to be littered with milk. Ruhanga got angry and decreed that Kairu would have to spend the rest of his life looking for food from the ground/Earth. Later and before daybreak, Kakama, like Kairu, began to sleep and lost half of his milk. It was only Kahima who remained awake throughout the night of the test. Because Kahima was the most faithful, Ruhanga decreed that he would be the ruler, whereas the Kairu would work as an agriculturist and Kakama as a cattle keeper.

Another version of the creation story is instructive. This version, which is not too different from the one given previously, indicates that Ruhanga created the first human being from clay and was assisted by his son, who provided the breath, thereby giving life to the new lifeless creature. This genre of the creation story indicates a sort of African pneumatological model of the Christian's doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The father in this instance is Ruhanga, the son, Kazoba, and the Holy Spirit is Ntangire, which is the spirit of Ruhanga.

The Haya of Tanzania and Banyankore of western Uganda also believe that human beings hitherto had the power to live on Earth forever. Ruhanga revoked this power when a custodian of a dead dog refused to perform the required rites that normally accompany the transition from the world of the living to the world of the Dead.

As previously mentioned, different ethnicities have diverse interpretations of how the world came into existence and the relationship between human beings and the Supreme Being. Although linguistic variations provide room for people to call the Supreme Being different names, his or her function remains the same in all cultures—creator of human beings and the universe.

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## Further Readings

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