

AMATERASU

Amaterasu Omikami, goddess of the sun and of the universe, was reigning in heaven when she sent her brother and husband, the god of the moon, down to the reed plains to serve the goddess of food. As soon as the goddess saw him, she turned toward the land and spit boiled rice from her mouth. Next she turned toward the sea and spit all kinds of fish from her mouth. Finally, she turned toward the mountains and spit a variety of fur-coated animals from her mouth. She then prepared all of these as food and placed them upon one hundred tables for the moon god to eat.

When the moon god saw what she had done, he was furious. "How dare you feed me with food that you have spit from your mouth!" he exclaimed, "You have made the food filthy and disgusting!" He drew his sword and killed the goddess. Then he returned to Amaterasu and told her of his deed.

To his surprise, Amaterasu exclaimed, "You are an evil god! I can no longer stand the sight of your face. Take yourself from my presence, and see to it that we do not meet face to face again!" So the sun and the moon lived apart from one another, separated by day and by night.

Amaterasu sent her messenger, the cloud spirit, down to the goddess of food. He found that the goddess was indeed dead. However, he also found that the ox and the horse had issued forth from her head, grain had grown from her forehead, silkworms had come forth from her eyebrows, cereal had emerged from her eyes, rice had grown from her stomach, and wheat and beans had grown from her abdomen. The cloud spirit collected all of these and returned to Amaterasu with them.

The goddess of the sun was delighted with the variety of foods. "You have given me great cause for rejoicing!" she exclaimed to her messenger. "Human beings will be able to eat these foods and survive."

Amaterasu extracted the seeds from the various grains and beans and planted them in the dry fields. She took the rice seed and planted it in the water fields. She then appointed a heavenly village chief and let him supervise the sowing of these seeds. The first harvest that autumn was a pleasure to behold. Meanwhile, Amaterasu placed the

silkworms in her mouth and collected silken thread from them. Thus, the sun goddess initiated the art of raising silkworms.

Not long thereafter, Izanagi and Izanami gave their son Susano-o-no-Mikoto the netherland to rule and banished him there. Before he took his place in the netherland, he decided to visit his shining sister. He was such a violent god that the mountains and hills groaned aloud and the sea frothed in tempestuous tumult as he made his way up to heaven.

When she saw him coming, Amaterasu thought, "Surely my wicked brother is coming to visit me with no good purpose in mind. He must want my kingdom, the plain of heaven. Yet our parents assigned a particular realm to each of us. Susano-o-no-Mikoto should be satisfied with the kingdom they have given him. I had better prepare for the worst!"

The goddess bound up her hair in knots and tied her skirts into trousers as if she were a male. She placed two quivers upon her back, one containing one thousand arrows and one containing five hundred. At her side she placed three long swords. In one hand, she carried her bow upright in shooting position, with an arrow ready on the bowstring; in her other hand, she firmly grasped one of her swords.

When the two gods came face to face, Amaterasu felt confident that her appearance would intimidate her brother. "Why have you come to me?" she calmly asked him.

"You look as if you are expecting trouble!" Susano-o-no-Mikoto replied. "Certainly you should have no fear of me. I have never had a black heart, although our parents dislike me and have condemned me to rule the netherland. I simply wanted to see you before I left the world of light. I do not intend to stay long."

Amaterasu, wishing to believe the best of her brother, put away her weapons. She welcomed him among the heavenly gods and hoped that his visit would be as brief as he had said.

But Susano-o-no-Mikoto stayed longer than he was wanted, and his behavior was very rude. He and Amaterasu each had three rice fields of their own. Whereas Amaterasu's fields thrived in spite of excessive rains or prolonged drought, Susano-o-no-Mikoto's rice fields were always barren. In times of drought, the soil was parched and

cracked; in heavy rainfall, the soil washed away. Finally Susano-o-no-Mikoto became possessed by jealous anger. When the rice seeds were sown in the spring, he removed the divisions between the fields, filled up the channels, and destroyed the troughs and pipes. Amaterasu, wishing to believe the best of her brother, remained calm and tolerant.

In the autumn, when the grain was mature, Susano-o-no-Mikoto freed the heavenly colts and caused them to lie down in the middle of the rice fields. Again Amaterasu remained calm and tolerant.

Then Susano-o-no-Mikoto spoiled the harvest feast of first-fruits by defiling the purity of the palace with disgusting filth. Again Amaterasu remained calm and tolerant.

Finally, while Amaterasu sat weaving cloth for the clothing of the gods in her sacred weaving hall, her evil brother silently removed some roof tiles in order to create a hole in the ceiling. Then he threw a colt of heaven into the room. Amaterasu was so startled that she pricked herself with her shuttle.

This time the sun goddess could not forgive Susano-o-no-Mikoto. In great rage, she left the palace and entered the rock cave of heaven. She locked the door and remained there in isolation. Now that her brilliance no longer illuminated heaven and earth, day became as black as night. The universe was forced to exist in total, continuous darkness. Without the sun, plants could not grow. People everywhere stopped their activities, watching and waiting to see how long they would have to be in darkness.

All of the gods gathered along the banks of the Peaceful River of Heaven and discussed how to placate Amaterasu's wrath. They placed a statue of the sun goddess outside the rock cave and offered prayers to it. They also made many special offerings—including fine cloth, rich jewels, combs, and a mirror—which they hung upon a sakaki tree—and goddesses danced and chanted by the door.

Amaterasu heard the music and said to herself, "I hear both beautiful prayers of supplication addressed to me and the sounds of music and dance. Why are the gods so happy when my seclusion in this rock cave has brought constant darkness to the central land of fertile reed plains?" Her curiosity overcame her anger, and she opened the door a crack to look outside.

This was just what the gods had hoped Amaterasu would do. Rejoicing in the return of the sun's brilliant rays, they took Amaterasu by the hand, had her among them, and convinced her to rejoin them.

The gods punished Susano-o-no-Mikoto by demanding from him 1,000 tables of offerings. They also plucked out his hair and the nails on his fingers and toes. Finally they said to him, "Your behavior has been intolerably rude and improper. From this time forth, you are banished from heaven and from the central reed plains as well. Go forth with all speed to the netherland. We have had enough of your wicked ways!"

So Susano-o-no-Mikoto left heaven forever and began his journey to the netherland.