

Mythological Tale: “Tenson Korin”

(The story of the sun *kami*’s grandchild, Ninigi no Mikoto, and his descent to earth)

(Overview)

According to the *Kojiki*, Japan’s oldest remaining chronicle, the sun *kami* deity Amaterasu Omikami sent her grandson, Ninigi no Mikoto, to rule the lands of Japan. He took with him three gifts, a jewel, a mirror, and a sword (which would later become the imperial regalia of Japan). It is written that Ninigi and his procession made their way through the heavens and descended at “Kushifurutake of Takachiho.” Upon arrival, Ninigi declared the land good, and so established there a grand residence. Kushifuru no Mine, the mountain believed to be the site of this descent, is where Takachiho’s Kushifuru Shrine now stands. In Japanese mythology, the first emperor of Japan is Ninigi’s great-grandson.

=====

“Ninigi no Mikoto,” the Grandson of the Sun Deity

Amaterasu, the sun *kami* and ruler of the Heavenly Realm, looked down upon the earth and saw that it was in terrible chaos. So, she sent heavenly deities below to bring order to the land. It took many years of trial and tribulation, but finally it was done. She then declared, “My child, Ameno Oshihomimi no Mikoto, shall rule this land.” However, when she approached her son and ordered him to descend from the heavens to assume his duty, Ameno Oshihomimi explained that he had now married and had children. Presenting to Amaterasu his son, Ninigi no Mikoto, he suggested that Ninigi be sent to govern the islands of Japan in his place. Amaterasu looked upon her grandson and was convinced.

“Tenson Korin,” the Descent of Ninigi

And so, Ninigi prepared to descend from the Heavenly Realm. He gathered the jewel (*Yasakani no Magatama*) and the mirror (*Yata no Kagami*) that helped lure Amaterasu from her the cave, as well as the sword (*Kusanagi no Tsurugi*) that Susanoo no Mikoto had taken from the tail of a great serpent and presented to Amaterasu, his sister. These three treasures would later become the Imperial Regalia of Japan.

Amaterasu instructed Ninigi to rule the islands of Japan in her honor, and to treat the mirror he carried reverently as an embodiment of her spirit. Preparations thus complete, Ninigi departed the Heavenly Realm with several *kami* deity accompanying him in a procession. It is written that Ninigi

led the way through the heavens, and that the procession descended to "Kushifurutake of Takachiho" in Hyuga, Tsukushi Province, an ancient province located in the northern part of modern Kyushu. Upon arrival, Ninigi declared the land good, and so built there for himself a grand palace of stout columns with a soaring roof.

Kushifuru Shrine, which venerates Ninigi, was built in 1694 upon the mountain where he and his procession are believed to have arrived. Prior to this, the mountain itself (now known as Kushifuru no Mine) was considered to be a residence of *kami* deities and was thus considered sacred. In Japanese mythology, Ninigi's great-grandson becomes the first emperor of Japan, and so the mythological heavenly origins of Japan's imperial line are traced back through him.

The Origin of Takachiho

There exists another legend in the Takachiho area about Ninigi's descent to the islands of Japan. In this legend, Ninigi and his procession met an impenetrable fog on their way to earth and lost the way forward. At that moment, two inhabitants of earth named Ōkuwa and Okuwa appeared. They urged Ninigi to take rice from the stalks he held in his hand and scatter it over the land. Upon doing so, the fog lifted and Ninigi and his entourage were able to descend safely to islands of Japan (earth). The precious (Japanese: 高 "taka") rice Ninigi scattered from many (Japanese: 千 "chi") rice stalks (Japanese: 稻穂 "ina-ho") is said to be the mythical derivation of the town name Takachiho (高千穂). A statue at the foot of "Country Gazing Hill" (Kunimigaoka) commemorates this legend.