

## Shugendō Mountain Worship

Shugendō is an endemic Japanese religion that developed during the seventh century as a blend of Shinto, Daoism, Buddhism, and the worship of mountains as the dwelling places of deities, spirits, and the dead. Much like Shinto, Shugendō is rooted in a strong sense of reverence for nature, and mountain worship is believed to have been practiced in Japan long before the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century.

Each year on the first day of the seventh month, Shugendō practitioners (*yamabushi*) climbed to Okinomimi, the northern peak of Mt. Tanigawadake, to worship at the inner shrine of Fuji Sengen Jinja. It is believed that when pilgrims threw offerings into the valley below, they imagined the coins reaching the opposite ravine, which they named Zeni-ire-sawa, or “money pouch ravine.” Coins dating back to the Edo period (1603–1867) can be still found today in the ravine below Mt. Tanigawadake.

After the introduction of Buddhism from the Korean peninsula, the two peaks of Mt. Tanigawadake, also called the “two ears,” came to be known as the homes of two deities: Yakushi Nyorai, the Medicine Buddha, and a syncretic fusion of Buddhist and Shinto deities called Sengen Daibosatsu. A secondary shrine (*satomiya*) was established nearer to the base of the mountain, which still exists today as Fuji Sengen Jinja. Inside the shrine are polished mirrors that have been carved with images of the resident deities.

According to shrine records, the main shrine on the northern peak was first built in 1380, and the *satomiya* was built near the base of the mountain in the mid-seventeenth century. Legend has it that a light emanating from Mt. Fuji illuminated Mt. Tanigawadake. At the same time, Sengen Daibosatsu appeared to a sleeping villager to bless the village. The next day, villagers climbed the mountain to find a single cherry tree in full bloom with a mirror hanging from its branches. They built a shrine there to house the mirror.

Another variation of the legend tells of a shining lady called Konohanasakuya-hime, or the “cherry tree blooming princess.” Both the shrine built at the mountain’s peak and at its base are dedicated to this Shinto deity. It was believed that if people with eye problems bathed their eyes in the water that sprang from a grotto on Mt. Yakushi (now called Tomanomimi), they would be healed. A Buddhist temple dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai, the medicine Buddha, can also be found near the source springs in the local hot spring villages.