

### ***Kamiarizuki*: The “Month with Gods”**

During the tenth month of the lunar calendar, the myriad deities from across Japan are said to gather in Izumo. Over the course of a week, they consult with Izumo Grand Shrine’s main deity, Ōkuninushi no Kami, to determine things like the success or failure of harvests and the relationships that people will form in the next year. Thus, while this period is referred to as the “month *without* gods” (*kannazuki*) in most of the country, it is called the “month *with* gods” (*kamiarizuki*) in Izumo.

The origin of the annual gathering in Izumo is tied to stories recorded in Japan’s earliest written records, which date to the early eighth century but are thought to record even older oral histories. The *kuni-yuzuri* (“relinquishing the land”) myth describes how Ōkuninushi agreed to cede control of the land to the descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami in exchange for a magnificent shrine and the authority to govern the “unseen world.” This unseen world referred not only to the realm of deities, but also included matters dealing with human spirits. In this way, Ōkuninushi became a god of *en-musubi* (“tying of bonds between people”), and Izumo Grand Shrine was established as his main place of worship.

During *kamiarizuki*, the visiting deities are housed in subsidiary shrines to the east and west of the main sanctuary. They meet each day at a small shrine complex near Inasa Beach, roughly a kilometer west of Izumo Grand Shrine, and determine the fate of human relationships in the upcoming year. In the “Izumo Grand Shrine and Its Rituals” gallery (left of the central lobby), there is a woodblock *ukiyo-e* print on display that shows an artist’s vision of this lively gathering. Produced in the nineteenth century, the print shows Ōkuninushi seated in the center of a crowded room. Various deities can be seen writing the names of individuals on wooden tablets and tying these together with string. The resulting pairings are then shown to Ōkuninushi for approval, and he confirms the fate of each couple.