

## Myths of Ōkuninushi

This film presents several episodes from the life of Ōkuninushi no Kami, a deity associated with nation building and *en-musubi* (“tying of bonds between people”). The concept of *en-musubi* comprises not only the relationships between couples, neighbors, and coworkers, but also the success of farmer’s harvests and other positive outcomes in people’s daily lives. Ōkuninushi is the main deity worshipped at Izumo Grand Shrine.

The *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 712 CE) contains the earliest stories featuring Ōkuninushi, who as a youth was called Ōnamuchi. The film begins with him traveling to Inaba (now eastern Tottori Prefecture) with his many brothers to compete for the hand of a maiden named Yakami-hime. Along the road, the group passes a rabbit writhing in agony after its skin has been flayed. Ōnamuchi is the only one of the brothers to stop and instruct the rabbit in the proper way to treat its wounds. This act of kindness wins him the heart of Yakami-hime, who rejects the proposals of his brothers. Angered by Yakami-hime’s rejection, Ōnamuchi’s brothers begin plotting to kill him. They succeed in crushing and incinerating him with a red-hot boulder, but two goddesses of healing descend from heaven and apply a magical balm that restores Ōnamuchi to life. He then escapes to the land of Ki (now Wakayama Prefecture) and from there to Nenokuni to seek assistance from his ancestor, Susanoo no Mikoto.

On the way, Ōnamuchi meets Susanoo’s daughter, Suseri-hime, and the pair quickly fall in love. However, Susanoo is reluctant to help Ōnamuchi and subjects him to a series of four arduous trials. With Suseri-hime’s help, he completes them all. Then, when Susanoo falls asleep, Ōnamuchi elopes with Suseri-hime. Susanoo wakes, but is unable to catch up to them, and gives the couple his blessing. He shouts at their retreating backs, giving Ōnamuchi the name of Ōkuninushi (“Great Lord of the Land”), and tells him to rule well.

Returning to Izumo, Ōkuninushi forces his brothers to submit to him, then works to build a prosperous nation. The sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, observing the state of the terrestrial realm, sends a series of messengers to convince Ōkuninushi to cede control to her descendants. After consultations with his sons, Ōkuninushi agrees on the condition that a magnificent shrine be built in his honor. This is said to be the origin of Izumo Grand Shrine.